

# Finding Solace and Strength in the Small Things

State of Mind – July 2008

Standing on the porch at a longtime friend's house, my heart broke as his wife cried. A non-curable cancer has been taking her husband's life.

"It's so not fair," she sobbed. "He's never done anything wrong to anyone. I never expected to be a widow at my age." This moment will remain etched in my soul forever.

This man is one of the truly good people — a husband, father, businessman and friend to many. He has been there for everyone in his strong, kind, gentle and always positive manner. He has asked for nothing, even through his illness. His wife is right: IT IS NOT FAIR!

This is not the first friend who has faced an early departure from this world. Why them? Why are such good men and women dealt such bad hands? Their situations make most of our daily complaints seem trivial but also create within us a sense of urgency that we look at life, the fleeting nature of our existence and the limited time we have to do right. Such episodes and events implore us to make our marks ... to leave things a bit better because we have been here.

Years ago, one of my supervisors looked at me with disdain as he pushed me to gain a needed perspective about my values and desires. I had been moaning about the rigors of graduate school and the seeming lack of reward for the endless hours put into studies and internship.

He asked a simple question: "How many \$10.00 bills have you found on the street?" "None," I replied. He quickly countered, "How many pennies have you stepped over?" My response was "countless." No sooner had I spoken than he commenced with a lesson. He talked to me at length about relishing the small things and the importance of doing so on a daily basis. As the lesson ended, he gave me an assignment. It was simply to begin picking up small change in life every day.

This simple yet powerful lesson helped shape a personal viewpoint that has become one of the building blocks of my clinical work. When others seem to be overwhelmed by the bad things, I give them a penny wrapped in masking tape. I

advise them to carry it as a reminder. As is now my habit, I ask them to begin to search for pennies...simple things easily overlooked or taken for granted. They learn that pennies — one by one — lead to dollars more quickly than does hoping for the single, big payoff. This is why doing the small things for (and with) others means so much.

For those of you who may have friends who are not doing well, do not abandon or avoid them. Their plight may be an illness, a failed business or problematic relationship. They may act as if they do not want anyone around, and this might actually be the case. However, it is amazing when you hear from people going through various forms of loss. They often comment about small kindnesses, the support and concern shown by others ... the pennies and even nickels of compassion. Whatever form it may take, be it a phone call, e-mail, card, flowers or a visit, the sincere, heartfelt gesture means so much. If you muster up the courage to seek the friend out and visit, you do not have to have bright and witty things to say. No platitudes are necessary. You do not have to do anything to make it better. Your act says: I care. What is important is to demonstrate in some way that they matter and that they are something special.

So back to my friend, whom I hope stays longer. If being positive means anything, he will keep on going. He took care of another of us who has been gone for 10 years. He and I (along with a few others) laughed as young men, thinking we would change the world.

When we founded the Kanawha Valley Business Forum, we were convinced that our impact would reverberate throughout the state. Funny, we had to be less than 40 years old back then. Now most of us are or are approaching 60. We are the "they" whom we used to complain about. We thought the old guys were stuck in their ways and failing to see what could be done to make the world of business better.

A generation later, here we stand. Maybe we did not fix the business world, but we did something better: We forged FRIENDSHIPS. We have given each other support and continued to believe we can make things better.

Brent, you have done this for me and countless others. You are one of the truly special ones God has given us. I know you will continue to squeeze as much life out of the time you have left. Then, you can join Loren and watch over us. I can only hope that I will do justice to our friendship as I continue to give the lecture I

created for your professional group. As I have written before (my father's exhortation), I will endeavor "To live today. Not Wait. Be grateful." It's the least I can do to let you and Loren know you meant (and still mean) so much.