

Oh wow, am I ever a lucky man! May 14, 2009 is a day I will not soon forget. On this date, the Mental Health Association presented me its Mildred Mitchell Bateman Tribute Award. This is really special. After 35 years of commitment to trying to decrease the stigma that has plagued people with both acute and chronic psychological problems and to foster acceptance of seeking help, I have been given this unexpected honor. This RECOGNITION has prompted a series of reflections and insights, which were just as surprising to me as the award.

First, at this point in my career and in my life the voice of mental health has made a public declaration of the worth of some of the things I have done. Thank you! It is an affirmation about actively advocating for certain values and beliefs so no one has to wonder where I stand. While some people affect change in a calm and diplomatic manner, that has not been my style. My more direct, outspoken approach has not always made me well-liked. Taking the lead from one of my life heroes, I have remained committed to battling for what I believe is right, not giving up and adhering to the spirit of my late major professor's major lesson in effectiveness. Dr. Steven Goldstein said, "People should love you, hate you or not know you. Be sure you are true to your philosophy and leave no doubt with others. Just never give up."

Next came the driving need to thank everyone who has been an influence in my life. This includes those who have given me inspiration, guidance and support, as well as those who have disagreed with me. This latter group has been a major source of motivation and perspective. They might not know it, but they have always been felt and heard. For all those who have trusted me to provide guidance as a psychotherapist and to render opinions in the court system, I am forever grateful. You have allowed me to have a glorious career that fulfills my wish to live by the values and beliefs instilled in me since childhood. This will be my way until I can no longer assert myself.

The response from others to this moment in my career has been gratifying, but resting on my laurels is not an option. With recognition comes the renewal of a sense of responsibility. This tribute tells me that this is not a time to give up, but to recommit to sustaining the highest level of service; to try to improve on my foibles; to give of my time, energy and knowledge and to take nothing for granted. It means that I must care for my family, friends, co-workers and our community in ways that fit my skills, talents and resources.

Most surprising has been the sense of renewal. Since learning that I would be given this moment in the spotlight, I have become more excited about what I do and about the place where I live. I feel enlivened and emboldened. I am determined that I will not just take up space—but that I will leave my mark and do so with good intentions with an eye on ongoing improvement. Hopefully, I will build on my strengths and seek to minimize the not-so-helpful impact of my weaknesses.

Finally, in a more global sense it comes down to how we in West Virginia use formal and informal means of recognition to enhance our lives. We have programs all over the state

that publicly acknowledge all sorts of contributions made by many, many people. More quietly, we extol the virtues of the way we come to the aid of those less fortunate than us, especially in times of disaster. We see the joy on the faces of people who give and the gratitude from those who receive. Sometimes the payoff is not immediately obvious, but I can tell you it is grand looking back and knowing that you have had a role in making other people's lives better. It doesn't take much to give. Think how good it feels when someone lets you in line in traffic, holds an elevator, offers to help carry a package or just remembers your birthday. It takes even less to say thanks (e.g., a smile, a wave, a note) and to recognize the good others have done and continue to do. If you take the time to thank them or to acknowledge their contributions, they will be excited (and maybe a bit embarrassed), but the spirit will spread.

As I prepared to write this column, I tearily sat in front of my TV watching ABC's *Good Morning America* when famous Chef Emeril Lagasse surprised Susan Bratt of Charleston, West Virginia, as the "Mother of the Year." She has taken the tragedy of the death of her 23-year-old son and turned it into inspiration that has directly touched hundreds and will reach out to thousands. Even Chris Cuomo and Diane Sawyer cried as they heard her story and celebrated in recognizing Susan's specialness. It has been told to me that she was invigorated in her quest to spread the word about the dangers of testicular cancer and to continue to be the strength to her family and friends as well. Around this same time, I received an e-mail from Delegate Carrie Webster, seeking community support for a family that needed funds to bury their recently deceased child. This was truly the action of a public servant. The list of people deserving recognition is endless, as is the opportunity to make sure they know they are appreciated.

So to all those who organize fundraisers, walk for causes, build homes, clean up after natural disasters, give of themselves, donate money, take care of those less fortunate and just do good things: THANK YOU! Our world is better because of you. Others may not always agree with you, but stand up...argue...compromise...act...celebrate...be excited and joyful. But most of all, give recognition to others so they will be moved to carry on.