

## What We Stand For

Shock. Disbelief. Profound sadness. All these feelings swept over me as I stood looking at the Coroner's board and suddenly realized that I recognized a name. I had been deployed to Chatsworth High School as a Red Cross disaster mental health volunteer to assist families and others in the aftermath of the Metrolink tragedy. All of a sudden I was dealing with my own grief. How do we cope when our world is suddenly, violently changed? How do we go on when we know that our time may be so limited? Throughout each crisis that we face, we ask ourselves the same questions. For awhile, we may rise to become our better selves, as we did after 9-11, but all too soon the frustrations of life begin to take over and we forget the lessons.

As I thought about the person that I knew I remembered that he had lived his life by principle and faith. It comforted me to know that he knew exactly where he was going, both in this life and the next. At the end of his life he was working for the good of others. Surely this was a well-lived life. What about the rest of us, the ones who are left? Can we say the same about our lives? Do we live by principle? Do we know where we are going? None of us know when our time will come. However, we can ask ourselves some important questions each day that we wake up.

What can I do for someone else today? Perhaps there is someone who needs your help and you are in a unique position to assist them. There is nothing that helps us to forget our own difficulties more than to be aware of difficulties in the lives of others and try to make a difference. If one of our principles is "it is better to give than to receive", then there are a myriad of opportunities available. Check in with a friend, neighbor, church, temple or community organization.

Another question might be, "do I have any unfinished business with anyone?" This begins with family. How did I treat my husband or wife or child yesterday? Have unkind words been spoken? Has someone betrayed you or hurt you? Begin to work on the process of forgiveness. Frederic Luskin, Ph.D., who lost a son tragically, writes on the importance of forgiveness in a life that is well-lived. It involves an active process in which we need to examine our construction of the world and others in it: after suffering hurt must come less expectancy or "requirements" that other live up to our expectations of them. We can accept that others may not choose to give us what we want. It is more important to refocus on what does give satisfaction or happiness in a relationship and let the rest go. Luskin calls us

to “forgive the distance between what you wanted and what you got” which he terms “the distance of suffering”.

Finally, we can ask ourselves about our personal principles. Are we in conformance with what we believe to be the best in ourselves? Have we sufficiently examined ourselves and our intentions and lived our lives accordingly each day? If we are called to make a hasty exit from this life, can we go in peace knowing that we have left a legacy of some worth? I am privileged to counsel a woman who was abruptly left by her husband for another woman. She has two small children, no job skills and has had to beg him for the child support needed to keep them in a secure home and school environment. He has used every opportunity to belittle her and even blame her for his decision to leave. I have watched her suffer but slowly cope and grow stronger and I was awed when she recently told me that she did not want to treat him the way he had treated her. This is another example of someone living by her principles, no matter what others around her were doing.

In the midst of tragedy are life lessons. As we pull ourselves from the emotional wreckage that comes from terrible loss, we have to ask the important questions, **and keep asking them**. Maybe there aren’t enough answers yet but each one of us will eventually have to come terms with what our lives stand for. Each day that we have can be one with gratitude and hope or cynicism and selfishness. It may be a journey but it begins with a choice.

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