

From an Agnostic Christian

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I love quotations...from books, from speeches, from my husband, from wherever. Sometimes I will type something someone said/wrote into a list I keep on my computer called "Spice Quotes". It's called 'Spice Quotes' because I use the list to print out quotes that I tape to the spice jars lining my pantry door. It's fun, and certainly more inspiring, to pick up a jar of bay leaves and, instead of the typical label, read:

"Among the Haida Indians of the Pacific Northwest, the verb for "making poetry" is the same as the verb "to breathe". ~ Tom Robbins"

I have even recorded quotes from myself -- thoughts that pop into my head and that, for some reason, I feel the need to write down and think again later. Sometimes I find post-it notes that I wrote a year (or years) ago with some such thought on it. Recently, I found the following:

"The more critical I am of other people, the more critical I am of myself." And...

"Get over it!
Life Is Not Fair--
Not in the past,
And not now.

Those few who beat the odds, however marginally, are points of light in the darkness created by those who, usually unknowingly, succumb to their unfair fates." And...

"Just because you can do it doesn't mean you should do it."

Wow, I thought, stroking my ego as well as my conscience. Those are good reminders. And they lead me, as things occasionally do, to think of my 10th grade Algebra teacher, Ms. Featherston.

We students loved her name because she was quite overweight. In fact, her name is why most of us could remember the definition of an oxymoron.

Ms. Featherston was a caring person. Her good intentions literally illuminated her sweaty, flushed cheeks. Every week, in the upper corner of her black board, she wrote a new quote for us to consider (or not). The one I remember, repeatedly, since that year is:

"We are all born with an equal opportunity to become unequal."

It is so easy to look outside ourselves when we are faced with adversity - to see only the circumstances (which we had no control over) that caused our adversity and to blame them for our misfortunes.

What is hard is to look within - to see that, regardless of the situation, only you can define who you are and in what direction you will go.

You'd think this were downright impossible if not for famous people like John Adams, Harriet Tubman, Nelson Mandela, Ted Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Amy Elizabeth Biehl (she's worth looking up on the Internet), it's actually a long list. I know there are thousands more whose names we don't know, and a few personal friends whose names we do. But this doesn't change the fact that it is more human to fight the forces that bind you than to circumvent them (or, indeed, walk right through them) with integrity.

What would Jesus do? That's the million-dollar question. And, though I am not a 'practicing' Christian, and my views may be more agnostic than anything approaching Christianity, I ask myself that question regularly. Most the time, I find it hard to accept the answer.

When I sit at an intersection and am approached by a nearly toothless, orange-jacketed beggar with a sign saying "Living In Woods, Please Help. God Bless You," I ask myself, 'What would Jesus do?'

Well, from what I understand (and I was raised a traditional Catholic), Jesus would open his car door and invite that man to his home or, at least, the nearest restaurant. Then, Jesus would sit down with this lost soul over a warm meal, listen to the guy's story and help him find physical and spiritual peace.

Of course, if any of us did this, everyone would think we were crazy. If this kind of behavior were to become a habit, as it certainly was with Jesus, we wouldn't be expected to live very long. Indeed, half the people listed above died young and at the hands of other people. Jesus certainly did.

If presented with the situation, I like to think I'd run into a burning building to save a stranger. But would I willingly and repeatedly seek out situations that I know could endanger me? Could I do that, even if I didn't have a family to consider?

Then I remember that, throughout history, the people who have done just that are *special* people, and I cut myself some slack.

I recognize that half the people mentioned above also lived long lives that were, no doubt, difficult but also truly fulfilling. Harriet Tubman lived to be 94 years old; John Adams lived to be 90; and Nelson Mandela is currently 94. There are many more.

Seems to me it's worth taking the risk...but that's not to say I have the guts to do it.