



Some Stories about Change

On the tram

Steve tells of an experience he had on a tram one Sunday morning. He says that people were sitting quietly. Some were reading newspapers, some were dozing, others were simply contemplating with their eyes closed. It was a rather peaceful, calm scene. At one stop a man and his children entered the car. The children were soon yelling back and forth, throwing things, even grabbing people's newspapers. It was all very disturbing and yet the father just sat there next to him and did nothing. It was not difficult to feel irritated. Steve could not believe the man could be so insensitive as to let his children run wild and do nothing about it. It was easy to see that everyone else in the car was annoyed as well. So finally, with what he thought was admirable restraint and patience, Steve said to the man, "Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little bit more?" The man lifted his gaze as if coming into consciousness for the first time and said, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think and I guess they don't know how to handle it either."

Steve says, "Can you imagine what I felt at that moment? Suddenly I *saw* things differently. Because I saw differently, I *felt* differently. I *behaved* differently. My irritation vanished. I didn't have to worry about controlling my attitude or my behavior. My heart was filled with this man's pain. Feelings of compassion and sympathy flowed freely. Your wife just died? Oh, I'm so sorry! Can you tell me about it? What can I do to help?"

Nothing changed in that tram car. All was the same: the same people, the same irritation, the same kids. What *did* change was a way of seeing it all and, with the seeing, a change of behavior.

The baseball player

Once when a famous baseball player was asked why he was such a great ballplayer, he mentioned that his father used to spend hours and hours playing with him and his brothers outside on their little farm in Idaho.

He said, "I remember one incident." He said one day his mother came out to protest that all of his base running and all of his chasing grounders was mining the grass.

And he said, "I'll never forget my father's reply. He turned to my mother and he said, 'Mary, we're not raising grass here. We're raising boys.'"

And he said, "Just that insight, just that homely little insight made me think that when I grew up I would not just have a house that nobody could touch; and furniture that nobody could sit on; and clothes that had to be perfect; and things that would be great artifacts for 'my castle.' But I would have a home for my children, and things would never get in the way of people."

Just that little incident helped him to see life in a different way.

Is that You, Jake?

Former Massachusetts congressman Tip O'Neill tells a story of a man named "Honest Jake." Honest Jake became well known in the Boston area because of his assistance to three generations of immigrant families. He owned a little variety store and would extend credit to the poor immigrants to help them get started in their new land. As Honest Jake neared his sixtieth birthday, a group of people he had helped decided to give him a party and a generous gift of money.

Jake received the money gratefully and began to use it for his own makeover. He had his teeth capped. He bought a hairpiece. He invested in a diet and exercise program and lost a lot of weight. He purchased a whole new wardrobe. Then he boarded a plane and a few hours later the new Honest Jake hit the beach at Miami. He met a beautiful young woman, asked her for a date, and she accepted. But before they could go out on the date, a thunderstorm came up, and Jake was struck by a lightning bolt and died instantly.

In heaven, he said to God, "After all those years of hard work, I was just trying to enjoy myself a little. Why? Why me?" And God said to him, "Oh, is that you, Jake? I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you."

IF YOU WANT
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The Teacher Who Wanted to Quit

Nothing seemed to be going right for a certain teacher in a Texas panhandle school. She tells it this way:

Last night I attended an incredibly long PTA meeting. My thirty first-graders seemed to squirm restlessly all day long today. The reading classes were hopelessly bogged down; in fact, they were obviously moving backward. At noon, the principal called me into his office; I had forgotten to turn in an important report.... The two playground periods were hot, windy, and gritty with panhandle dust. The final straw fell when I snagged my last good nylons just after the last bell rang. At that precise moment, Mrs. Jones burst into the classroom, weeping because her Mary was no longer in the top reading group.

At four o'clock I yearned to go home to a relaxing tub, but today there was a special meeting after school. A distinguished out-of-town educator was to be our speaker. She talked until after five o'clock about the new era that was coming in education. To be prepared for it, she said, we must ever be professional-minded. The longer she talked, the less professional I felt. She seemed to know all my secret sins as a teacher.

The schoolteacher's lament doesn't end there. But suffice to say that later, on her weekly fifty-mile journey to the university where she was working toward her master's degree, an idea struck her which she found irresistible. "I will stop teaching," she said. "There is more to life than this. I mean to find it. I'll write a book. I'll grow a garden, but I won't teach school." When she arrived at the university, she collapsed into her seat and did not even try to listen to her teacher. After all, what was the use? She wouldn't be coming back.

But she was wrong. Again, in her own words....

The friendly woman who sat next to me leaned over and said, "I saw an admirer of yours the other day." I sat up straight and politely murmured, "Oh?" I listened with growing interest as she continued: "I was in the bus station last week, waiting for my son, when I noticed a Mexican woman and her little girl. The mother didn't speak English, but I talked with the little girl. She told me that she and her mother were on their way to Colorado to join her father. She said that she was now in the second grade, and she told me her teacher's name. Then she took a worn billfold from her pocket and pulled out a photograph. 'This is the teacher I really love,' she said.

"I was astonished to recognize your picture, faded, ragged, and almost worn out. When I said I knew you, she told her mother. They beamed with joy and acted as if they wanted to kiss me." My university friend paused, waiting for my reply. I was trying to remember the Latin Americans in last year's class. Finally I asked, "Was the little girl's name Julia? No? Then was it Adelina? It was Adelina!"

The schoolteacher went home that night and did some deep thinking and some heavy praying about that conversation and about herself. She pictured little Adelina pointing to her photograph and saying, "This is the teacher I really love." And then, she renewed her decision to change-but not her profession-her attitude. "The thought of Adelina's small face as she innocently showed my picture to a stranger in a bus station will never cease to warm my heart," she said. "Stop teaching school? Why, what would I do?"

[All stories from the writings of Walter Bausch.]

