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A PORTRAIT OF LOVE, STRENGTH, COURAGE AND COMPASSION

She was only nine years old when the bombs fell in her small rural town of Kent, just outside of London, England, but unaware of her maturity beyond her years. She and others like her were responsible for the care of the younger children as they ran to their brick, windowless bomb shelters when the sirens sounded for protection against a cruel enemy. They were undaunted, however, with respect to the potential devastation that the bombs could bring as they sang, chattering, told stories and recited their times tables in order to drown out the noisy din of the bomb loaded planes overhead. This was WWII and this story was told by a close friend who, when asked about the war commented “It was something that was there...that you lived with”. As their mothers exemplified whether looking after their homes and children or working in the munitions factories, they didn’t show their fear in order not to induce fear in the young..

I’ve known her for about three years and have always enjoyed her company and her crisp British accent. While at dinner one evening, she began talking about her experiences during the war leading to our making a date for an interview. She explained that while the men were away fighting the war or doing civil duty (her father was a fireman), it was the women who held the families together with the universally structured discipline that wartime brings. Her school lunch hall had been bombed out and mobile units took its place. A treat would be having milk to drink since all foods, clothes and petrol were rationed and subject to the use of coupons. Upon returning from school, they reported home otherwise someone would come checking on them to insure their safety. After doing chores they went to play in the woods and fields. Christmas allowed one toy and fruit in their stockings.

Her description of life during those times suggested that everyone went about their business of “living in the moment”. I had the sense that the sirens sounding provided an inconvenient break in their day or night when most of the bombing occurred, necessitating everyone’s taking shelter. Everyone old enough to know how to use a gas mask was issued one and the very young were placed in incubator-like units to protect them from potential gas attacks. Sometimes, they could see the “Spitfires” (planes) taking off to intercept the German bombers which meant that an attack was imminent. They

were especially aware of the “doodlebugs” which were flying bombs. When the noise they made stopped, that meant they would drop and destroy what lay below.

If someone’s home was bombed out, they went to live with relatives or strangers with the government finding places for those needing shelter. Without telephones, the only warning they could depend upon was their radio to determine where bombings were taking place placing them in proximate danger. There was little time for depression, anxiety or fear as community bonded to help one another providing security and allowing everyone to take things in stride.

I asked how her experiences affected her adult life in a negative fashion. She could think of none. Instead she spoke of having developed a sense of consideration and compassion for the needs of others as well as a strength that has allowed her to deal with adversity in her life as well as an awareness that all misfortune could be overcome and would pass with time. It also provided her with a strong sense of appreciation for whatever she has had in her life. My friend is truly a remarkable woman and person.

And now, here are some questions for you:

- What in your life has helped you to develop a sense of character?
- Do you require immediate gratification or can you postpone it?
- Do your family and community experience closeness and support?
- Do you have a true appreciation for what you have vs. focusing on getting more?
- What traumatic event in your life left you stronger and more confident?

A Brief Biographical Sketch

After an over 40 year career as a professional psychotherapist and Director of The Sports Stress Clinic in Amherst, NY, Charles Bonasera came to Florida and decided to use the benefits of his previous professional experiences in his new roles of Consultant in Life Management and Business Coaching as well as his expertise as a Motivational Speaker. He once again became involved with athletes in different sports training them with his techniques to help them develop and maintain focus as well as staying in their zone. Much of his training methods are derived from the CD collection he developed under the heading of WIN-WIN SECRETS as the President of Personal Identity Controls. This collection consists of thirty-six programs dealing with vital issues in the management of stress.

Another role that he adopted to add to his professional career was that of Author. Early in the 1980’s he wrote Guide to a Life Management Process which he has re-written as a workbook to successfully help people manage their stress which includes his own Working Model. As a result in his interest in golf and realizing that it was essentially a “mind game”, he wrote The Mental Side of Golf which can benefit the beginner as well as professionals playing the game of golf.

He then compiled over five-hundred sayings that he had developed in the course of his professional career as stimuli to help people change patterns in their lives entitled How to Stay Well and Live Life to the Fullest. This was followed by a book documenting case studies around disruptive life patterns including ways to change them under the name of How in the Hell Did This Happen to Me? Both his personal involvement in sports as a participant, coach, manager and in his role in officiating, inspired him to write a primer for parents and coaches entitled The Legend of Little League.

Charles invites you to view his website at www.charlesmbonasera.com as well as to write with your comments and questions to his e-mail address (charles@charlesmbonasera.com). He would also be very happy to communicate with his readers by telephone should they desire. His professional motto is “seeking alternative methods to happiness” and wishes those touched by his words to practice the three secrets to a happy life: “enjoy life and enjoy it thoroughly ... develop and maintain a sense of humor ... bring as much love into your life as possible.