



This article appeared in the December 12th edition of the North Port Sun Herald

HANDICAPS AND THE HUMAN MIND

It wasn't that long ago that my beloved sister, Jo, died. When she was eight years of age, she was stricken with the dreaded polio virus for which, at that time, there was no cure. The first third of her life was spent walking with the aid of braces, then for a short period was able to walk without them and finally was relegated to a wheelchair until she died. This article is not about her or her handicap. However it is about how her mind dealt with her handicap. I use her as an example for the countless numbers of people who have handicaps and/or who are developmentally challenged and who have used their minds to help them adapt to their life's circumstances.

If you watch a child watching other children at play there is an unmistakable sense about them in their need to mimic those to whom they look up. Their attitude is one of "I can do that!" And with the will of the ages and several failed attempts, they usually are able to accomplish whatever it is that they choose to experience. If you could consider that child's inability to do something previous to this process a "handicap" as being that of achieving success, that is the very same mind set of those who may experience a physical or mental handicap. There is a thrust of energy and willpower that allows them to go beyond their limitations and focus on the accomplishment.

To the untrained observer, their attempts at accomplishing their goal appears excruciating but to that person, there is a "rush" that allows them to withstand whatever difficulties they might experience in their efforts. An observer might be prone to step in and help or accomplish whatever the goal is for the individual. In effect, that robs them of the satisfaction of being able to say that they did it themselves. There is nothing more satisfying to

someone with a handicap than the sense of independence that they experience upon completion of their task.

A handicapped person's mind has a remarkable ability to break tasks down into small steps in order to accomplish them with the least amount of energy or steps possible. My sister would watch me intensely while I was performing a task and then make very simple and amazingly practical suggestions as to how I might be able to save time and energy following her short cuts. So too was her ability to teach children how to play a game. She had a remarkable ability to relate to children who flocked to her because of the fun they would have with her and despite her inability to perform any of the tasks necessary to play a game, her sense of sequencing and her ability to instruct them allowed them to gain a great deal of satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. It would not be her instruction that would be emphasized but rather the child's ability to accomplish the goals themselves while having fun.

While touring The Florida Center a while ago, I closely watched developmentally challenged children performing certain play tasks repeatedly with glee until they had mastered them. Their sense of patience and will to accomplish was noteworthy. Once mastered, they moved onto the next phase of whatever the sequence called for in order to move up on the plane of accomplishment. The look on their faces was one of intensity and a sense of purpose. Essentially, they were oblivious to those around them in their total preoccupation with performing their tasks and the fun they were experiencing. The applause that their teachers gave them served as an incentive to go onto other, more complicated tasks and so the learning took place. It was a marvelous experience that I would invite everyone to experience for themselves by touring that facility either in Sarasota or Venice.

The human mind knows how to compensate and go beyond the limitations that an individual might be experiencing. It transcends those limitations with an eye for DOING...for accomplishment...for a sense of purpose that fuels the emotional soul and disallows it from become stagnant and useless. Our purpose on this planet is to learn and grow as people. That is not limited to those of us who may be fortunate enough not to have a handicap. If we want to look at the source of mental health and how the human mind promotes it, these examples exemplify what true mental health is all about.

I define mental health as our need to find alternative methods to gain happiness. I believe this to be true universally. Probably the most inspiring, yet drastic example of this is the return of the war veterans whose need to function despite the loss of limbs pushes them into excruciatingly painful rehabilitation. Their sense of enduring the pain in order to accomplish their goal may not be comprehensive to those of us who have not experienced their plight. Watch the look in their eyes and on their faces. There is nothing that is going to stand in the way of their success.

Here are some points that might be worth contemplating and remembering:

- When you experience a problem or handicap, how capable are you to make an adaptation and adjustment instead of “cursing the darkness”?
- How important do you feel facing an adversity in your life is in terms of helping you to develop a sense of character and helping you to become stronger as a result?
- Remember that feeling sorry for someone with a handicap doesn't help them at all but admiring them for their sense of purpose and ability to function despite that handicap might be time well spent instead.

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.