

Heritage Letter Project
Iowa City-Johnson County Senior Center

March 2007

Dear Reader,

Ideals are formed by example from others and refined through experience. My mom's example taught me that a person is to be unselfish in relationships, to identify myself with the society and to step forward when rights are violated. However, my experience has introduced reforming caveats for this ideal.

Early refinement of my version of stepping help to others happened when I was in fifth grade. Big Larry, a sixth grader at our school, had spent most of the spring pounding on each of the fifth grade boys. His routine was to herd us together and berate us as softies and no fun because we didn't fight back. Then he would pick out the most scared looking guy and provide a "treatment". In truth we had, as individuals, originally fought back and been sorely and quickly overwhelmed.

One day when mom's edict about no fighting was a bit quiet in my conscience, Larry approached and I impulsively said something like, "Larry, you would be afraid too if you had to fight us all at once instead of picking on us one at a time." Larry looked me in the eye and then stared at the other 5th grade boys and said that he would meet all of us in the alley after school. The other 5th graders made remarks about making things worse than ever. Big Larry walked away and was on the other side of the playground before my buddies agreed that since we were getting beat up most days anyway there was nothing to lose by meeting Larry's challenge. The righteous moved to confront the evil one. Peace would return to the playground.

There next occurred the strange quietest classroom afternoon ever. All the fifth grade boys kept losing place in the lessons. They were watching me. Even when teacher left the room there was no chatter. Finally the bell rang and the school day closed.

We were on our way to meet the adversary. The other guys insisted that I go first. About half the school kids were waiting to watch the struggle. I had trouble making my way through them to where Larry stood. My chest was filled with a hard pounding. I looked up at Larry. He seemed even taller and more ominous than ever. I told Larry we could overwhelm with our numbers. I looked around. Larry laughed. There were no classmates there to back me up. The crowd of kids surrounding us went silent. I envisioned being totally destroyed. Mom would easily know that I let her down and was in a fight. Larry asked me where my brave buddies were. I prayed for guidance but said something to the effect, "I don't know and that doesn't make a difference because I am here." My fate was sealed. Larry caught my right shoulder and gave a tight squeeze. Then he asked why he should fight me. He let go of my shoulder and said that if anyone fought with me they would have to answer to him. I thought I was hallucinating. I thanked my guardian angel. I didn't understand but I didn't question.

Through this experience I became more aware that:

- 1) There may be fatal flaws in assuming to speak for others. When agreeing to lead check to be certain there are followers.
- 2) Remember the Little Big Horn. Use common sense in assuming when, where and how to step out and make a stand. Measure the opposition.
- 3) Even in a bad situation there are some who see the current situation as OK given the pain that might be part of change.
- 4) Even though a plan may not go the way you anticipate things may turn out OK once you get the events started.

There have been many learning experiences. The event related here is the most distant in my memory.

Chuck Felling

Charles R. Felling---

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