

James Holt

Dr. Reichert

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Looking Back

I turned sixteen my sophomore year in high school and was given my dad's old Bronco as a birthday present. With the joy and excitement of driving also came the responsibility of oil changes, gas, and annual insurance premiums. To me it was immediately obvious that I needed a part time job.

I had a friend that worked at Sparkles Roller Skating Rink. He said it was the easiest job I would ever have. I thought that this sounded like a job that could be fun and would put a little money in my pocket at the same time. My first day on the job I was put in the concession area with Tommy. He showed me how to prepare the food, and the different pricings. I remember Tommy telling me the most important thing to remember was,

"Don't rush yourself, it doesn't matter how long the line gets, you still have to be here all day.

During the remainder of my week I came to learn just how relaxed working at a skating rink really was.

I arrived at the rink the following week and began training for the front window. I walked into the main lobby where the tickets were issued and looked around. I saw the machine that issued tickets, the cash register, and the credit card

scanner. I knew that the basics of the job were taking admission from the customers and giving them their tickets.

I was told that I would have a helper the first day that would show me the procedures and how to operate the credit card scanner and ticket machine. It was this week that I met what was to become my life's torment, the one factor that stood between me and my ideals of the perfect job; Elaine.

Elaine was an emaciated, harsh featured, sarcastic, tyrant. She was pure evil in every sense of the word. There was not one ounce of kindness to be found inside of her. Nothing anyone did was correct in her eyes. Elaine always thought someone was out to get her. Those that dared speak to her were immediately accused of trying to cheat or trick her into doing something she didn't want to do. It was as if she thought the entire world had secretly gotten together and devised a diabolical scheme to bring about her demise.

I remember one day while we were cleaning up after one of our day sessions, a few of the other guys started talking about cars and car magazines. We were joking around about how in some car magazines it was more fun to look at the girls laying on the car than the car itself. While we were talking (and cleaning at the same time) Elaine walked by and overheard us. In her usual smartallick tone she asked,

"Are you guys on the clock? Sparkles doesn't pay you to talk about girls, they pay you to work."

I looked at Tommy and he responded,

"Don't pay any attention to her, she's just mad because a house fell on her sister." At first everyone looked at Tommy confused, but when we all realized he was referring to the Wizard of Oz, all the guys went hysterical. Elaine announced that she was going to inform the manager about our poor work ethics.

Elaine seemed so up tight to me. I didn't understand why she always saw the bad side of an issue or why she always had an attitude toward every one, and most of all why she was just a generally mean and hateful individual.

One day, after listening to Elaine complains all day I began talking to Tannen, one of my co-workers. I explained to her that I generally got along with everyone and if there was someone that I didn't get along with I usually was able to put up with them or simply ignore them. However Elaine was a different story. I told Tannen that I had never met anyone that always seemed to be in a bad mood. I explained how I had been trying for the first month to see a good side of her, but so far had failed. I told Tannen I had no idea why Elaine always was so unpleasant to be around. Tannen looked at me and then away again, like there was something she wanted to say but knew she shouldn't.

"What" I asked.

"Nothing"

"Come on Tannen was there something you were going to say?"

"Well, I'm not supposed to know this, but I used to feel about Elaine exactly the same way you do, that is until I found out that...."

"That what, Tannen?"

"This stays between you and me, ok?"

"Ok," I responded.

"Well like I said I used to feel the same way about Elaine. I couldn't stand her attitude and her overall bad outlook on the world. But one day, while I was working, I accidentally knocked her purse off the counter. When I picked it up I noticed an opened doctors bill in her purse. I read it. James, she has cancer."

I was shocked. I had never even stopped to think about why Elaine was always so hateful; I just assumed that was her personality. The first thing I felt was regret. Regret for all the mean things I had said about her, and regret for the way I had always believed that she was such an awful person. I had never really tried to talk to Elaine or ask her why she did the things she did, I just made up my mind that she was an awful person. I saw that I really didn't know anything about Elaine. I felt ashamed that I had been so quick to form an opinion about her. Maybe if I had taken the time to talk to her, instead of automatically deciding she was pure evil, that I might have found a good side to her.

After that day I saw Elaine in a different light. I no longer felt resentment toward her, but rather pity. I never talked badly about her again. When she said hateful things to me I just remembered what all she was going through, and how if I were in the same position as her I probably act similarly.

As weeks passed I came to see that Elaine wasn't the horrible person that I had once thought her to be. Elaine lived her life very depressed and little things that normally wouldn't bother someone were major catastrophes to her. In a way I think getting angry and yelling allowed her to blow off some stress. She chose to

yell, instead of crying. By understanding the situation that she was in, I became much more tolerant towards her.

When she just snapped and started yelling I smiled at her and gave her a compliment, usually on her clothes. I could see her attitude change before my eyes.

I found that not only could Elaine be a pleasure to be around but she also appreciated simple things more than anyone I have ever known. I think her life was so depressing, that when someone did something nice for her it brightened her whole day. One day I was working in the concession area and I needed to go to the pro-shop to get some free Coke passes for my drawer. As I went to the Pro-shop I brought Elaine a drink from concession. From her reaction when I gave it to her you would have thought I had bought her a car. She must have thanked me three or four times throughout the day.

I never let Elaine know that I knew about her cancer. I thought it would just make things awkward for her. I came to see that sometimes in order to understand a person you have to see the world through their eyes. Also a little extra effort to get along with someone can go a long way.