

Resilience (vs. Hopelessness)

Recovering from Adversity.

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The Wounded Oyster

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I love pearls. It all started in high school when I read the quote below from Ralph Waldo Emerson in the newspaper. I don't recall the article it was in but I tore out just the quote and carried it in my wallet for decades until it disintegrated. I credit that quote with getting me through some rough times.

I was reminded of that quote several years ago on retreat, when I participated in an exercise used to explain Resilience. The speaker told us a story about a young girl and the difficulties she had faced in her young life. Here is a paraphrase of the story.

A birth defect caused her to speak with a slight lisp. At the age of 6, she had been involved in a car accident that severely injured her right leg. While she recovered enough to be able to walk, it left her with a noticeable limp and excluded her from most sports. The following year she struggled in school and was diagnosed with dyslexia. Two years later, she lost her hair due to treatments for an auto-immune disease. The treatment was successful and her hair grew back.

Our assignment was to choose which of these adversities to take away from her. In small groups, we discussed our choices. There was not much consensus in our small group as to which choice to make. When we came back together, we were told of the answer her father gave. Here is a paraphrase of his answer.

While I wouldn't have wished for any of these things to happen to my daughter, I wouldn't take any of them away. As a result, she has learned to persevere; she has learned sensitivity for the underdog; she has learned compassion from those who have helped her along the way. She has learned to be flexible and creative in order to accomplish things. She has learned that she is strong, that she is loved and that even with her struggles, she knows she has a lot she can contribute. Her struggles have given her strengths and skills that I don't think I could have taught her. Anything I would take away would also take away what she learned and that would change who she is.

That's resilience. It was a WOW moment for me and I immediately recalled my wounded oyster. I loved the imagery of the pearl in the oyster but this story sticks in your heart. I often think of this story when I start to feel defeated or hopeless and look for the silver lining in my troubles.

This month, dig deep for your resilience and aim high when you plan your bounce back from adversity.

How to Practice Punctuality:

- Learn from my mistakes and then let them go.
- Not compare my situation to others
- Not let a failure in one area affect attitude in other areas.
- Ask for help when I need it
- Look for reasons to have hope

“And thus, like the wounded oyster, he mends his shell with pearl.”

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

“When life puts you in tough situations, don't say ‘Why me?’ say, ‘Try me!’”

~Unknown