

## Patrick's Ponderance: Me First, Please!

Hello friends and thank you for joining me here today. As I take you on a journey for the next few minutes I would like to stress that what follows in this article and in any of my articles, is simply my observation of the human animal. I can't say what follows is right or wrong but I can say that it resonates with the feeling of what is true for me. I'll let you decide how you feel about what I'm about to present

Recently I had the opportunity to view a quite large art display in the lobby of a company which sells their products through the home party method. This company was based on Christian principles and that is the theme that carries through to this day. To date it retains tens of thousands of consultants who sell the products to the public. By most accounts it is a great company to be associated with and the consultants are very energetic about being a part of a wonderful organization.

Over the past year or so thousands of these consultants have visited the home office and were asked to contribute to this art display by penning a few words about what matters to them most and why they have decided to join with the company. As I read through these messages I made a mental note of the words written. There appeared to be a common thread developing as one person after another noted that what mattered most to them and why they were in this business was for their family, to serve God, so their children would be proud of them, taking the grandkids to Disney World, to show the husband they could be successful, and for the wife. Now these are all noble causes in their own right by pious and humble people but I still wasn't seeing the one I really hoped would be there. Then after reading perhaps four hundred or so statements there it was. The one I was looking for, shining like a beacon on the bay. Only three words with an exclamation point at the end and it said, "My own happiness!" Since I had plenty of time to kill I read on. After a couple of hundred more I saw "Myself", and then "Being the very best me". Hundreds later there was "Believing I'm worth it" and "Finding myself".

Now this was a very interesting moment for me and I set my mind to pondering. It confirmed for me something I pretty much knew anyway and that is that most of us are accustomed to putting ourselves last or at best third or fourth in our lives. By why is this? To my reckoning we are all born with our own individual life that is precious and sacred to ourselves. When and how did we ever get the idea that our life and happiness was less important than our parents, or the boss, or our husband or kids? How can I possibly get the most out of my journey here if I'm always putting someone else first? If the kids have soccer practice every night and the husband doesn't like to cook when is it my time to take care of me?

As I look back on the past half-century of my life I often ponder deeply on why, so many times, I've not put myself first. What made me into the certain personality I am today? There were times when I felt so bad about myself that I was willing to accept a certain amount of abuse from others. I felt I had to. I spent many years in the workplace over achieving so people would tell me how great I was. I got a big high and an inflated ego because I was the go-to guy when problems needed solved. There were many times I allowed myself to be dragged to the in-laws when I would rather be elsewhere, and if I was invited out to dinner with friends I felt guilty if I wanted to say no so I would give an excuse that wasn't true. Considering the above examples one may be inclined to conclude that such a person has low self-esteem or low self-worth, and I would have to agree. One may also figure that this is how life must be because we learned in Bible school that to serve others is the greatest reward, to this I'll have

to sit on the fence about. After all, if I'm worried about taking care of everyone else who in the hell is taking care of me! I digress...

As I work backwards in time to the root of the problem I think I've figured out an important piece of it.

We were born as a perfect soul, pure and innocent in every way. We had no conceived notions of low self-esteem or inflated ego. But immediately the judgement started and the assault began. The doctor judged you on the color of your skin and the nurse counted your fingers and toes to see if you meet the standards of quality. Shortly after settling into your new home Grandma wanted to know why you haven't rolled over yet and when were you finally going to learn how to walk because your brother learned to walk one month younger than you. And it continued unabated when you started school. The kindergarten teacher said you couldn't lay quietly on your little rug and you seemed to be a silly-heart and a daydreamer. As you progressed you were judged because your grades were B's and not A's and you couldn't color inside the lines. Then you entered high school. Dear god, how did any of us survive the judgements there? My high school had a winning football team but I was not a jock so I always felt like a second class citizen. The institution itself promoted the worth of the star athletes and the honor roll students. No mention was given to the C-student who has kind, loving and conformant. The latter felt they had no value. Most of my readers are holding down a full time job and I'm sure you can relate to the judgement and control there. No matter how hard you work they will meet with you once a year and say, "Well, you made the company ten million dollars in the past year but could you please limit your break time to fifteen minutes instead of twenty"? Geez, are you shittin'me!

So let me get back to the subject. Let me just say that I do believe that service to others is a wonderful way to live but should it be carried out to the detriment of ourselves time and time again? Can we really build ourselves up if we are constantly giving out all these little pieces of ourselves? I think not. I sorta know what I'm talking about here and I'll tell you why. Several years ago my then wife and I decided it would be best if we went our separate ways. And we did. I knew I had to go within myself to find a new way to live in peace and love. I spent many evening sitting quietly in my living room. Just me, a dog, and sometimes a little glass of bourbon and just pondered deeply on my own inner being, staring out the window as the sun went down. I pulled away from family and friends because being with them was too much of a distraction from doing the inner work. As the months and the next year and a half unfolded I put myself first and found a beautiful soul inside that I never knew existed. I slowly realized that I was not a bad person but a person who has made mistakes and learned to move forward. I learned to forgive others and release years of guilt that no longer served me. Regrets became a worthless waste of energy and a new love of self and others unfolded. When it came time to bring friends and family back into my life they noticed that I had changed. They could see a new sense of calmness and peace had taken over. It was at the end of this year and a half journey of me-time that I drew to myself the love of my life, my beautiful wife Lisa.

I'll never be the same person I was years ago. A mind and spirit, once expanded, will never return to its previous form. This transformation could have never taken place if I hadn't put myself first even on those dark and lonely nights. It was tough to keep moving but I was seeing results and feeling better every day. My life in a sense had completely fallen apart but I never panicked because I knew I could put the pieces back together just the way I wanted, and I did. And here's an interesting point I'd like to make about my journey, once I started it didn't take long for the subtle changes to take place. These small

shifts begat larger shifts and greater realizations. It was like a tiny snow ball at the top of the hill. It grew larger in size once it got rolling and picked up speed along the way.

I now say that every person's life needs to fall apart at least once so they can build something new that better serves the soul. At times we need a shake-up so we may look at ourselves and say "Who am I and what am I doing here". What served us in thought during our younger years is often inadequate to support an older life but we may never know if we don't stop and say "This time is for me. Time for me to figure out who I am and what makes me happy". A mom does not have to be a micro-manager and a dad doesn't have to be over-bearing to run a successful household. If a kid's soccer practice adds too much chaos to the family life then maybe they could spend that time playing outside like we did in the old days. I guess what I would really like to say is, put yourself first, make yourself happy, and relieve yourself of guilt and regrets. Find peace from within and love of self first. If you do these things I promise that everything else you draw into your life will be easier and more beautiful. Trust me, I've been there and I've done that. I have a hope and desire that you will too.

Peace Out, Patrick  
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