RE-SPECT

The third word in the C.A.R.E. acronym of Vancouver Island Health Authority’s “Living our Values” campaign is respect. The word respect literally means to look back, or to look again. (Re - “back” + specare “to look”). This interesting bit of etymology reveals that respecting people is more than just being nice to them. Rather, it means taking a second look at them and seeing them in a deeper way than our initial assessment.

We all have our initial assessments of people. Our initial sense of what they are like is often based upon their appearance, occupation or even the cause of their disease. I once met with a patient suffering from lung cancer. She shared with me how she would often lie about the kind of cancer she had because people would assume she was a smoker even though she had never smoked a day in her life. She would lie because people would rarely take the time to understand her condition.

Respecting a person, that is taking a second look at them, does not take that much additional time. It requires a question here and a brief time of

"I prefer painting people’s eyes to cathedrals for there is something in the eyes that is not in the cathedral, however solemn and imposing the latter may be — a human soul, be it that of a poor beggar or of a street walker, is more interesting to me."

Vincent Van Gogh

and realize that her disease was not caused by an addiction to smoking. It is not surprising to know that she often felt disrespected, not seen for who she was. Simply taking a closer look, a second look at her, would have made this clear and would have made her feel understood and respected.

Respecting a person, that is taking a second look at them, does not take that much additional time. It requires a question here and a brief time of
SEE ME

What do you see nurse, what do you see?
Are you thinking, when you look at me –
A crabby old woman, not very wise,
Uncertain of habit, with far-away eyes,
Who dribbles her food and makes no reply,
When you say in a loud voice – “I do wish you'd try.”

Who seems not to notice the things that you do,
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe,
Who unresisting or not, lets you do as you will,
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill.

Is that what you’re thinking, is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse, you’re looking at ME...
I’ll tell you who I am, as I sit here so still;
A young girl of sixteen with wings on her feet.
Dreaming that soon now a lover she’ll meet;
A bride soon at twenty – my heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep;
At twenty-five now I have young of my own,
Who need me to build a secure, happy home;
A woman of thirty, my young now grow fast,
Bound to each other with ties that should last;
At forty, my young sons have grown and are gone,
But my man's beside me to see I don’t mourn;
At fifty once more babies play 'round my knee,
Again we know children, my loved one and me.

Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead,
I look at the future, I shudder with dread,
For my young are all rearing young of their own,
And I think of the years and the love that I've known;
I'm an old woman now and nature is cruel –
'Tis her jest to make old age look like a fool.

The body is crumbled, grace and vigor depart,
Here is now a stone where once I had a heart,
But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,
And now and again my battered heart swells.

I remember the joys, I remember the pain,
And I'm loving and living life over again,
I think of the years, all too few – gone too fast,
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last –
So open your eyes, open and see,
Not a crabby old woman, look closer -- see ME!

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