

When You're an Introvert, You Sometimes Need to Stand (and Move) for Peace

The other night, I graciously and selflessly accepted a last-minute parental appeal to take my niece, Autumn, to her recreational gymnastics class. At 7:45 p.m. On a Wednesday. Clear across town. In bad winter weather, with little regard for my own personal safety.

Aw, it was nothing. I'm all about noble sacrifice in times of need.

Come to think of it, though-and this is mere conjecture on my part, you understand-there's the ever so slight possibility that I was also drooling with glee over the idea.

OK, I was drooling with glee over the idea. Why? Because it was the exhausted introvert's equivalent of finding a \$20 bill on the ground. It would give me the unexpected chance to (with apologies to Timothy Leary) turn off, tune out, and drop out. Minus the drugs.

Autumn's gymnastics class, you see, would be the last of the night, and we were in the beginnings of a pretty substantial snowstorm around here at the time. So by simply saying yes to her parents' request-three little letters strung together and enunciated properly-I could help out my sister- and brother-in-law **and** secure an hour's worth of warm, toasty peace **BY MYSELF** as richly deserved compensation.

Not that that would give me extra motivation.

I did end up helping my sister- and brother-in-law all right. Alli got to go to the concert she'd been invited to earlier in the day, and Chad didn't have to miss his bowling league match. Mission accomplished.

But peace? Peace in my time? Well, peace had no chance.

Until I stood up for it-and learned that any of us introverts has the power to do the same.

Face the Music

Things were looking-sounding-good as Autumn's session got under way. The usually bustling gymnastics facility was practically empty, and I'd grabbed a chair in a quiet corner of the balcony so I could read and stare into space, stare into space and read. You know: introvert ping-pong.

Autumn and the other girls had already started their usual warmup activities. On my lap was a stack of articles on, ironically enough, introverts and introversion. (Hey, it's what I do.) So I settled in and settled down, cup of tea and trusty highlighter in hand, promising myself I'd glance up once in a while and actually pay attention to what Autumn was doing.

Ahhh. Blissful, heavenly quiet. Now I can ...

RACKET RACKET RACKET THUMP BLARE BLARE BLARE THUMP RACKET
BLARE RACKET BLARE!

(Why, yes, that **is** the grating sound of the 2006 "Hannah Montana" soundtrack album. How did you know?)

For some reason, Autumn's coaches decided to blast, um, music through the PA system. The preteen girls stretching out on the mats below undoubtedly viewed it as a welcome change from the typical warmup routine. I, on the other hand, viewed it like a normal person would: as a felony, assault with a deadly weapon. So I did what lots of people do during a crime in progress.

I prayed:

Dear God,

Dear God, God!

What did I do?!

What did I not do?!

I'm sorry, God. I don't mean to yell. I'm just wiped out, and I was expecting something else here tonight. Craving it, actually.

Something relaxing and soothing. Remember that \$20 bill bit?

Let's be reasonable about this, God. Everything is on the table.

I'll do whatever you ask, whenever you ask, for whomever you ask, if you will simply do me the teensy, tiniest favor-right now-of sending a mammoth power surge through that outlet down there and ... well, I know this is asking a lot, God, but can you please make the CD player burst into flames?

Safely, of course. There are kids down there, God, as you know. And coaches. Insane coaches, but coaches nonetheless.

Thank you for your time and consideration, God.

Amen.

P.S. I realize that you receive many prayers each day, most of them far more pressing than this one. But I think you'd have to agree that the fact we're talking about Miley Cyrus should move my request up on your priority list. Thanks again!

Oh, the Noise, Noise, Noise!

God must not have heard me over all the commotion, because the first song on the album played all the way through and then the second one began.

But then, to my amazement ... the CD player burst into flames!

No, it didn't. Though it did in my mind, introvert that I am.

The music did stop. Eventually. Mercifully. Miley and her accomplices had gotten away with their actions, but at least it was quiet again.

So I settled in and settled down, cup of tea and trusty highlighter in hand, promising myself I'd glance up once in a while and actually pay attention to what Autumn was doing.

Ahhh. Blissful, heavenly quiet. (Am I having déjà vu?) Now I can ...

BLAB BLAB BLAB BLAB BLAB BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAB BLAB BLAH BLAB BLAH.

Forty feet of near-empty balcony space where we can watch the kids, and 60 feet more just a few steps in the other direction, yet some woman on her phone strolls up and has to plunk herself down in the chair right next to me.

Um, God ... I silently begin.

But it's no use.

As auditory flashbacks of Charlie Brown's teacher flood what's left of my mind, I hear (BLAB BLAB BLAB) all about how the woman's relatives are coming in from out of town, and how she never (BLAH BLAH BLAH) sees her sister anymore, and how, oh, she's going to try (BLAB BLAB BLAB) a new recipe while everyone's here! And she hopes (BLAH BLAH BLAH) everyone likes it. She's so wiped out, though (BLAB BLAB BLAB), because she's been working 12-hour days for (BLAH BLAH BLAH) seven days straight and (BLAB BLAB BLAH) she's getting tired of it. And, oh my gosh, now she's so nervous, because her daughter on the mat below can't (BLAB BLAB BLAB) keep her legs together on one of the tumbling tricks, so the coach (BLAH BLAH BLAH) is having her put a little strap around her ankles to keep her legs together. What if (BLAB BLAB BLAB) she falls (the daughter, I presume, not the coach)?

Sigh.

Enough with the prayers; God helps those who help themselves, I think to myself. Only to remember a split-second later that this phrase never actually appears in the Bible.

Still, it sounds like a good strategy. But what can I do, really? I can't just grab my stuff and walk away from this woman. She'll know what's going on, and she'll see what I'm doing and be offended or hurt or both. Especially since there's no one else here to provide cover.

Besides: She's not really doing anything wrong to begin with. It's annoying to me, but it's her world too. We can't always expect the quiet to come sit by us.

No. But as introverts, we can surely go and sit by the quiet. Whenever we want to. And especially whenever we need to.

So that's what I did. I somehow overruled the incessant voices in my head (desperation is an excellent motivator), gathered my things, walked to the other side of the balcony, and sat down for an extra re-energizing game of introvert ping-pong.

The woman never even saw me; she's probably still sitting there talking. But I got the peace I so craved.

How? By simply standing up for myself, and out of my chair and walking away. Without explanation. Without justification. And from now on, without reservation or hesitation.