

THE LANDMARK Finding Guidance

2011

As I stepped outside for my daily morning walk, thick fog engulfed me and everything else on its path. My entire neighborhood had totally disappeared behind its veil. I couldn't see past a six foot radius but I was resolute to go on with my walk, and settled for the pavement unrolling under my feet as the best view I could get.

It wasn't long before the fog totally vanished which allowed me to see a silhouette of a man at a distance. He wore a navy blue t-shirt, beige shorts and white sneakers. His snowy white hair tied back in a ponytail and a red scarf wrapped around his head attracted my attention. Hands in his pockets, he walked at a steady slow pace.

I finally caught up with him and adjusted my step to his. Without preamble, I said: "Surely you're one of those brave souls who didn't let fog stop them from going out this morning!"

I noticed by his reaction that I had startled him. He then looked up at me and replied with a firm but gentle tone in his voice: "Well, young lady, I can see that you're one of them too! We wouldn't get very far in life if we'd let little grievances stop us from doing what we want to accomplish, wouldn't you agree?"

His rather unassuming and non-threatening demeanor reassured me that I was in good company, so I decided to tag along a little longer.

"You have a point." I replied. "This reminds me of a little trip my husband and I took years ago... We were on a highway heading to our friends' house. They just had a baby boy and I was going to spend a week there to help them out. And as we were driving along beautiful farmlands, thick fog unexpectedly appeared right in front of us and as we began driving through it, the visibility became almost nil... The white line painted on the side of the road was about the only landmark we could see... What a scary feeling that was!.. My husband is quite a good driver, so he gradually slowed down without applying the brakes, put his four-way signals and kept his speed at about ten miles per hour... He just kept focusing on that little white line and as far as he could see in front of our car to make sure we didn't bump into another vehicle... After a mile or so, we finally got out of the fog... Fortunately, no accident happened and we arrived at destination safe and sound."

As I ended my story, I took a quick glance at him. He seemed wrapped in thought for a moment and then said: "I guess we all hit a patch of thick fog at some time or another in our lives, don't we?..."

I could tell he was leading me to a deeper and more meaningful conversation about life or whatever he had in mind... I was willing to follow him and asked him to elaborate on his comments.

"Well, don't we all want to reach personal fulfillment in life and set goals to achieve it thinking that nobody or nothing will come our way to stop us?... Everything goes smoothly for a while but when we least expect it, some kind of a 'thick fog' shows up right in front of us to mess up all our great plans?... Let me just say, dear lady, that's when the tire really meets the road!..."

"I learned in my many years on this earth that our reaction to a dire situation is what makes the difference between success or failure, and even life or death... If I take your experience for example, fear was your first impulse. Should your husband have responded to it and swiftly applied the brakes, an accident could have happened. But instead, he reduced his speed, kept on driving while looking in front of his vehicle and at the only landmark available at the time. And you finally got to your destination safely. Maybe later than expected..., but you got there in one piece. It's important in life to have some sort of a landmark to guide us safely to our destination, wouldn't you agree?"

"I'm not really sure what you mean by that... Could you elaborate a bit?"

"Well, I'd be glad to but I have to warn you, I'm a rambler! So, if you're not in a hurry to head back home..." he said, looking at me with anticipation.

"Oh, I'm in no rush." I replied, anxious to hear what he had to say.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that!.. But I'll try to spare you all the details... You see, I was raised by parents that loved God above all else. Their lives were a true testimony of it and I firmly believe he brought them together for a purpose. They lived in a small village where everybody knew everybody, so they met through mutual acquaintances. It was love at first sight!.. They got married and the following year they had their first child.

"Growing up, I never witnessed my parents fight over anything. I'm sure they had their disagreements, like any other couple has, but it was never in front of us kids... My father was a very good handyman. I remember him working in his shop in his spare time building either something useful or decorative for his 'dear wife', as he used to call her. He was always attentive to her needs and wishes which would always give him the idea for his next piece... *"You see son, when you truly love someone, you always try to find ways to show it...not only in words but also in doing kindly deeds for that person,"* he said to me one day when he needed my help in the shop... I was raised in this kind of environment and their beliefs were passed on to me. I never questioned them and the reason I'm still traveling with God... He's my landmark... He truly is."

He probably noticed how dumbfounded I was for he promptly added: "Oh, I know. Most people are shocked by my boldness... I've just met you and here I am sharing about my parents and my spiritual beliefs as if there were no tomorrow!.. But, you see, at my age I don't have a minute to spare!.. To think that I could hurt someone's feelings by my comments or be politically correct is not an option for me. So, if you'll indulge me, I'll even go further... You see, spirituality is a big part of who we are. Whether it's Buddha, Mohamed, God or any other god we make for ourselves, we all need to believe in someone or in something. When I hear people say: "I don't believe in God. I don't believe in an afterlife. I believe there's *nothing* after we die". I reply: "Wait a minute! You believe in *nothing*. That's a 'god' you believe in!" But enough of this nonsense! All I want to say here is that I would be lost without God's presence in my life... I truly would be..."

He was probably anticipating a rebuttal on my part, but I was left speechless... He had just shared his most intimate thoughts with me, a perfect stranger. I was astonished by his boldness and overwhelmed by his candor and as I glanced at him, I saw tears slowly rolling down his cheeks.

I finally broke the silence and said with excitement: "You'll probably be surprised to hear this, but I do understand what you mean since God is also, as you describe him, my landmark! This is great, isn't it?.."

A warm smile then lightened up his face and he hesitantly replied: "It may be too soon to call each other friends but I would think we're on the right path, wouldn't you say so young lady?"

"Yes, we are!" I replied enthusiastically with the strange feeling that God must have put this old man on my path for a reason this morning...

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