

Survivor's Notebook

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HOW DO YOU COPE?

OFTEN IN LIFE we find ourselves confronted by an unexpected medical condition—maybe in our own body; maybe in that of a close family member. In either case there is immediate cause for concern and sometimes we face not only the problem, but an attack of panic that serves to make the problem worse. How does one cope with stress which attends such crises? How is anyone capable of functioning smoothly through all the stages of an emergency?

Whatever the nature of a pending disaster, we are always strengthened by those who love us—even by those who may not be close to us, but who respect us. We are able to draw courage, commitment, and acceptance from these people who constitute a sort of power base for us. And as we would offer support to those dear to us, we should willingly accept the support of those same people when our own lives are disrupted by some adversity.

There are few situations that offer the same level of emotional satisfaction as when a friend who has just learned of your problem comes immediately to you with assurances of his support, and who then is quick to actually do whatever he can for you.

Unless we personally experience the possibility or probability of our own imminent death, we cannot know what facing such a situation will do to us. Day to day life simply does not prepare us for this. I suspect that the degree of imminence profoundly affects our reaction. If, for instance, a diagnosis of an incurable but slowly progressing disease is what we face, then there is the immediate relief of knowing that we have some time left to deal with it, as opposed to the necessity of immediately undergoing surgery that may prove fatal. In either case, we are forced to confront conditions not of our choosing, which we must endure.

Even more shattering to us may be a threat to the life of one close to us, such as a parent, spouse, or a child. The thoughts of what our life will be like after we have lost close kin or a close friend leads to more despair. How do we cope?

Many of us turn to our religious beliefs, certain that a benevolent God will give us the strength to get through any ordeal. Others, perhaps less certain will happily pass the responsibility for both the crisis and the outcome on to God, who is ultimately the cause of everything that we experience anyway. This approach removes any stigma from us and puts us in the position of victims of an unkind fate. Some people expect that God will always give them whatever they ask for, and when a great personal loss happens to them, they disavow God entirely.

Among us, there are those who seem to rise above any misfortune. These people exhibit a tranquility of mind and heart that inspires us. What is the source of such indomitable will in the face of such devastating loss? It is my belief that we will not be able to understand such people or their capabilities until we become one of them. These are the true and undeniable survivors. #



What is really important in Man is the part of him that we do not yet understand.

--George Bernard Shaw

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of Mankind is Man.

--Alexander Pope

The strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.

--Rudyard Kipling