

# Positive Snippets



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**DISABILITIES  
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## Making A Difference In The Life Of A Child

Note: The summer of 1997 I served as a camp counselor. It was a great experience. This story is about my return for a week the following summer.

*"A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in or the kind of car I drove... but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."*

Sometimes I think our priorities are out of whack. We put so much emphasis on material possessions and on our own achievements. Our calendars are so full of activities, we forget the simple things. Children know the simple joys of life.

I went back to camp for a week in 1998. The minute I moved into the cabin, I felt exactly the way I felt last summer: contentment. There is a calming effect of camping in nature. When the kids came in I had new sensations: counselor, adult, parent, role model, brother and friend.

Until someone actually tells you, it's hard to tell what type of effect you have on others. You can put your

best effort forward, but not sure what the outcome will be. One camper came in with his mother. I remember Joe from last year, because he was in my cabin then too.

"Hi Bill," they both say.

Then Joe's mother spoke up, "He was having second thoughts of coming back to camp this year, until he saw your name as his counselor again this year."

Joe has been coming to Pilgrim Center for many years. The most I could come up with to say was, "Cool! We're going to have a lot of fun again this year."

I had a cabin of nine boys, some I happen to know from last year, some new. All the boys got along well with one another almost from the get go. This made my job easier.

Talking with the kids and sharing a little of me was pleasurable. Listening to them share of themselves willingly was pure delight. Each of us brought different experiences and viewpoints into the woods.

Trust from a child isn't easily gained. But this group trusted each other early on. Two cabins formed a family group and together we did different activities.

One of these activities was to form a tight circle with one person in the center. Everyone put out their hands, while the person in the center stood straight up with their feet together. As soon as everyone was ready, the person in the center would fall back on the hands in the circle. The group would then pass the person around the group.

I took my turn in the center of the circle, because I trusted them and knew this would be a great way to show them. When everyone in the group works together as a team, trust is gained.

I went back to camp as a volunteer. Instead of being at work or on a vacation somewhere, I went where I could make a difference. Yes, I got questions about my disability. Yes, I talked about my disability, but also made a point about talking about my abilities.

A person gains the most knowledge and experiences when they are young. Many adults made a difference in my life as I grew up. Now I want to make a difference. Where will you find me for a week next summer? Sharing my experiences and time with the next generation.

"I'm glad you were my counselor," a camper said as he gave me a hug good bye.

# Sticks And Stones



We are what other people think of us. If we're nominated by our peers as the best in the business, then we feel proud of who we are. If people in town hear rumors and decide we're unfit parents, then we feel we must be. Why do we take to heart what others think?

Here are just a few things said about people with disabilities: "Welfare moochers"; "Not fit to live"; "Taking up space"; "Can't work"; "Non-human". You know what just one of those statements made in front of a person with a disability can do to their self-esteem?

You probably heard this when you were growing up, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me". I can still see myself standing in the street, shouting this at some bully that would give me a hard time. I would also quickly move indoors.

Since childhood, I haven't let many things people have said get to me. That would be a negative attitude. I never wanted to just sit around and let life pass me by. I was told early on that I probably wouldn't walk. I told myself I will walk. So now I do

walk. The difference between probably and will is in my self-esteem.

I could easily live solely off the government and let others take care of me. I didn't have to learn to dress myself, feed myself, get an education or even get a job. I spent years doing things I didn't have to, but I wouldn't be a contributing member of the community today if I hadn't.

In the words of Stephen R. Covey, "Being proactive is taking responsibility and initiative for one's self." We can make ourselves better by first believing in ourselves. Polio never stopped Franklin D. Roosevelt from being president. Dyslexia never stopped Whoopi Goldberg from reading scripts and starring in many movies.

While we were growing up, we put a lot of emphasis on what our parents or adults in our lives thought of us. We had a high self esteem when we were complimented on a good deed. We felt like we wanted to crawl into a hole when we did something wrong. It made us strong, right?

Each day I try to find the positive in a negative. Why cry over spilt milk? Each challenge is a way of strengthening my self-esteem. I could go on blaming God for giving me a disability or I could thank Him for giving me a unique perspective on life.

We are all given the power to choose. There is right and wrong, just like there is trial and error. We are bound to make mistakes. We learn from those mistakes. Adults in our lives have gone down the road and know where some of the pot holes are. Let's not fall into the same holes.

Have you ever said to someone, "You can't do it that way"? Instead of verbally pushing someone down, what about this: "Is there a better way to do that?" In the second phrase we put the challenge to them, instead of demeaning them.

Taking responsibility is a challenge. Many like to blame or poke fun of others. If each of us takes responsibility of ourselves and help others through challenges, we can feel better about ourselves and others. What others think of us will mean so much more if it is said in a positive way. Look around you and see all the positive things in your life.



# The Outsider

I'm handicapped and wheelchair bound  
Expected to sit and not make a sound  
Just to smile and let the World go by  
With Sainly patience and never sigh.

Inside my head thoughts come and go  
Ideas are born which long to flow  
Flow from my lips and link me with others  
But my words sound strange so no one bothers.

My tongue and lips do not as I ask  
I cannot perform the simplest task  
But I have a mind and I'm still there  
Don't lock me out in your ignorance there.

Talk, though I seem not to understand  
Touch me, include me, and hold my hand  
I am alive and I have time to give  
Let me share in the life I was given to live.

Author Unknown

# Being Positive In A Not So Positive World



You'll never amount to anything. Can't you do anything right? Dream all you want, you won't get there from here. What can you do, you're a cripple? You're just taking up space.

When we open our mouths, the most intelligent stuff doesn't always come out of it. I've heard all of the sentences above directed at me. I've also heard others use some of those sentences to make others feel as small as a dust ball.

I'm about to quote my mom, your mom might have said the same thing, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Thanks mom.

It's hard just living. It's more challenging living with a disability. Add on verbal abuse, and you probably wonder why I can still keep a positive attitude. Actually, some days I ask myself the same question. Here's some more food for thought.

Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor for lack of ideas. He also went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland.

Abraham Lincoln ran for public office seven times and was defeated every time before becoming president of the United States.

Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team.

When Lucille Ball began studying to become an actress in 1927, she was told by the head instructor of the John Murray Anderson Drama School, "Try another profession. Any other."

We can listen to others and let them dictate what we do in life, or we can excel. Only you know your own potential. When you're at school or at work, do you just do what's required or do you go beyond?

I think one of the saddest things that happens in households across the world is when a parent tells their own children that they are worthless. Can't believe this? I've heard parents tell this to their kids in front of me.

My only thought is that their parents must have said this to them. We need to break this cycle of put downs.

Helen Keller once said, "Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it."

If you think you got it bad, someone else has it worse, guaranteed! It's not my disability that defines who I am, it's my personality and perseverance that help me live my life.

So you still don't feel very positive? First off, there is one person that needs convincing first: yourself. If you don't think you can achieve something, then you can't. If you don't think yourself worthy, than your not. If you can't love yourself, than why should others?

It's those individuals who don't love themselves that are the first to pick on others. They think if their life isn't that good, why should someone else's life be better.

Well, let me be the first to say, "You can do it!" I have confidence in you.

"To thine own self be true." - William Shakespeare

A friend has earned your love, appreciation and respect by being just who they are. Something greater is to know that we deserve these things from the people in our lives.

This is the first step on the road to being a positive, loving person. Someone your own kids can look up

to. This is also the hardest. Are you up to loving yourself?

Paul Harvey has said, "You can tell when you are on the road to success. It's uphill all the way."



## **Skydiving With A Dog**

After a fun weekend Jim, who is blind, was having coffee with his co-workers and sharing the details of his weekend. While standing around sipping coffee Jim's co-workers each shared the details of what they had done for fun over the weekend. When the co-workers came to Jim they asked what he had done for fun.

"Oh...this weekend, he said, "I went skydiving. It was a total blast!"

His co-workers nodded with approval and continued to sip their coffee. One of Jim's co-workers asked, "Say Jim. Being blind and all, how do you know when to bend your knees and prepare for landing?"

Jim said, "Oh. Landing, thats no problem. When the leash on the guide dog goes slack, that's when I know its time to bend my knees."

Humor taken in the right way can have you rolling around the floor for hours. I honestly love to rip on myself before anyone else has the chance. Although, friends also get their fair share of jokes at my expense. I don't mind. I tease them right back.

Here's a one-liner from a friend that had only one arm and one leg. He used it whenever someone wanted to know what happened. "My ex-wife's lawyer wanted an arm and a leg...we settled."

Here's an interesting response from a woman who had an artificial arm. She was asked to help, "I'll give you a hand, but only one and you have to give it back!"

The form of humor I love the best is the stuff that comes out of the mouths of children. They can be so sincere when talking, but what comes out can be down right funny sometimes. I end up laughing with them, not at them.

This one was told to me by a mother of two. My 4 year old has epilepsy, he was walking around with this halo type toy on his head. His older brother, who is 8, looked at me and said, "Look Mom, Ted is Julius Seizure!"

Sometimes true stories have their own humor as well. Although, something that happens to one

person can help another. Maybe this true story will help you.

An elderly couple are driving on vacation one night. They stop at a hotel to get a room for the night. The husband gets the key and gives to his wife and signs to her, "I need to get some medicine from the store, so you go to the room and I will be back." The wife goes to the room, gets ready for bed and turns out the lights.

Meanwhile, the husband returns back to the hotel and realizes that he did not get the room number before he left. So, thinking of how to find his room, he quickly rushes to his car, opens the driver side door and then honks the horn. Soon every light in the hotel turns on with the exception of one, his wives'.

Someone once asked me why I have such a positive outlook on life. Well...there is not one answer can give to that, but humor plays a huge roll. If you take life too seriously, life can and will be a drag. If you take it in stride, then life can be a Banana Boat Sunday.