

There, I Cared.

The man reflected on how easy it used to be for him to make friends and acquaintances. Almost everyone qualified, and those who did not were either openly hostile, condescending, or mentally ill. He found he could gloss over the other aspects of the person to make the friendship work. He could care about others, and the cost was negligible, yet he profited immensely.

A generational shift happened as he aged, and his children and all the children of that generation grew up and began flexing their influence. As the man aged and the generation behind the generation behind him also flexed their influence, the society he had known became rigidly divided.

The man, at first, tried to fit into all four sides, but that didn't work for him. He didn't completely agree with any side yet disagreed with parts of all sides. As the consensus of opinions coalesced into the two main political groups, those groups underwent drastic changes. While trying to talk with members of these groups, he was often shunned, demeaned, or, though it was rarely severe, humiliated.

The man never cared about the minute details of others' lives, and the big picture that they were relatively content, happy, and safe sufficed. The man was conservative in that he believed in traditional values and that what worked should remain working. Still, he believed injustice, discrimination, and racism should be educated out of people. He was able to enjoy political flexibility openly because society had not yet become rigid and unwelcoming along party lines, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation, to name but a few. The man had been able to openly traverse the different political parties by not being adverse to any party, and he voted for the person he thought was best, without caring which party they were with.

Traversing society became harder as political coalescing continued, and he stopped trying when being simply unwelcomed turned to scorn, hate, and sometimes violence or the threat of it.

The man told people, "I don't want to talk about politics." Later, he told people, "I don't watch the news, so I don't know what's going on in the world, and I don't want you to inform me. The news should be the news. Your opinion of the news is not the news." Sometime later, he would tell people, "There are three basic types of people: people who talk about other people, people who talk about events, and finally, people who talk about ideas. I'm a person who, yes, talks about all three things, but I prefer the latter. I could live only talking about ideas."

The man finally stopped caring about others and dropped out of society. He dropped out for many reasons. He found navigating people and the assertiveness of their ideas, often gleaned from unqualified, opinionated talking-heads, boring and too tedious to continue doing. He also found that discussing topics that neither he nor anyone could change was futile because it wasted time.

His ability to hike or sit alone for hours, enjoying the quiet of the forest or beside the lake nestled in the mountains where he lived, was one of his many gifts.

The man found he liked living with himself better than anything else. When he was alone, he was content. Occasionally, he would hook up with a woman, and he liked the company and the intimacy of occasionally having her around.

Finally, the man stopped socializing except with a few people, and even those he rarely saw. The man would say to himself, *Oh, I think I'll phone so-and-so, but then he would stop because he didn't feel he had anything of substance to offer, so he wouldn't phone.* He believed he was bankrupt as far as caring for people was concerned.

In his world, he was rich with property, happiness, optimism, creativity, health, caring, and curiosity, but in society, he felt poor, unhappy, lonely, and homeless.

As his life continued, as he did his daily walks, and as he and maybe even society softened, he was, once again, able to converse with neighbors and people he had been saying hi to for nearly a decade. He fought his unease that the past might reappear, and when it didn't, he relaxed and began to enjoy the camaraderie of the neighbors.

After many months, he once again became unsettled. He felt he was talking too much and also that he was listening too much. The minutiae of detail people thought was important and that he should be made aware of about their daily life was too much.

He got to a point where he had had enough and decided to stop it.

As he shifted back to his life alone, he said to himself, "*There, I cared.*"

Written by Peter Skeels © 1-9-2025