

Worthiness.

He sat in a room in a brothel. The room smelled faintly of perfumes and alcohol, and music played softly in the background. He declined the waitress's invitation for an alcoholic beverage. Looking around, six women were sitting in the room, each hoping he would pick them. He sat looking at each one; some were prettier than others, some had voluptuous breasts, but all had inviting smiles and were flirtatious. Each woman was pickable and would be fine for what he wanted, but being in this small crowd and the center of attention suddenly made him feel inadequate and unworthy.

As he sat in the large, over-stuffed chair with a half-naked woman perched on each side arm, the decision on whom to pick overwhelmed him. Overcoming his dread of extra unwanted attention, he stood and walked out of the room without a word.

As he sat in his Mercedes, he remembered a time when he was six, playing with the son of his father and his new wife, a boy who was his half-brother and who was not quite one year old. His stepmom came into the room and said to him, "No one likes you. No one wants you. No one wants to play with you. Even your mother didn't want you. I didn't want you either, but your father wouldn't marry me unless I agreed to take you."

Her words knifed into his heart, hurting him deeply because no one had ever told him his mother had abandoned him. He walked away, stifling the agony he felt hearing his mother hadn't wanted him. Reaching the safety of outside, his tears of utter sadness and overwhelming shame broke through, and he cried as only an abused and abandoned child can. The weight of worthlessness, shame, and her damning words that had poured into him finally breached the dam that had isolated his shame and emptiness and kept it at bay. The dam had also held the little self-

worth he had managed to salvage in his still-young life, and that tenuous hold on being worth something, anything, was now destroyed.

Those words annihilated him fifty years before; he still felt the same worthlessness today. He believed even a prostitute, willing and wanting to spend time pleasing him sexually for money, would find him an imposter.

Sitting in his pit of shame, while feeling he was unworthy to be with a prostitute, he started his car and drove away.

Several times, he had married or had passion-filled relationships that lasted for years and, on one occasion, a decade. He always felt that he was performing, and his performances hid his absence of any self-worth. He believed that if he stopped performing, people would see him as the empty shell of the person he pretended not to be. Finally, tired and without resources to hide his shame and lack of worth, he would quit performing, implode, and leave.

Though mainly from habit, he would still engage people for potential friendships, but he was only prepared to go so far. When people knocked on his door, he would say to himself that he had nothing left to sell, and he would close the door feeling embarrassed and even more shamed.

He knew the reasons for feeling worthless and his deep, overwhelming shame: he wanted to be good enough that his mother would not abandon him. He could never figure out how to undo the fact he wasn't good enough for her.

He always knew the past was what it was- all the good and bad things that had already happened. There was no changing what had happened in the past.

Finally, he realized there was a way to change the effects his past was having, and that was to accept himself as he was. He was happy with himself, and it was only when people found flaws in him that things went awry. Being content with himself allowed him to see himself without flaws.

Growing up, he had learned a couple of traits from the adults around him, which included severe corporal punishment for non-adherence. One was to mind his own business, and the other was to respect others, regardless of their education, color, race, politics, religion, sexual orientation, or social status. However, the mindset of many people he met today mostly seemed absent of those qualities.

Because of that and the herd mentality that had overtaken his country, he had stopped wanting to be included in people's lives, including his children and others he had been close to more than a decade before. He didn't tell people he was leaving; he just left.

He kept a few friends because he liked them, and he and they overlooked, forgave, and laughed about the things that could harm their friendship.

He had always lived outside the mainstream of life. Now, he drifted further into an even more solitary life where his responsibilities were simple: himself and doing the next right thing.

Written by Peter Skeels © 12-11-2024