

## Outside vs. Inside.

The man lived in a world he had created all of his life. Now that his hair and beard were white and gray, he was what people identified as an old man. He found he had pulled as far away from society as he could, and he was enjoying the distance and the quiet.

His mind backtracked to a time when he was but a young boy. In those memories, he saw himself usually playing alone. His escapades, sometimes acts of foolish, daredevil ignorance, like careening down mountains without touching the brakes on his bicycle because of a random thought he had that he ignorantly refused to question, were undoubtedly done to bring a modicum of intense excitement into a life of his otherwise dull existence.

Even at five years old, and as he grew older, the boy increasingly found his stepmother to be stupid. He found her rules and how she lived her life, in general, to be without meaning, except for the caring of her one and only recently born child. So, time spent away from her and her need to berate him for even the tiniest incursion into her otherwise spotless house was a restful time. He could let his guard down and, for the time he was alone, not worry about anything. So he spent every available minute that he could out of the house and on his own. He did well for a young, ignorant boy, learning all he could without a mentor or a friend. Crashing his bike and knocking himself out taught him not that he shouldn't careen down steep hills but that he needed to get better at it. Coming home cut and scraped from severe crashes on his bike taught him not to tell his stepmother because she poured mercurochrome on his cuts and abrasions, and that was more painful than the initial injuries. So he withdrew as far as he could from her world. The more he withdrew, the happier he became.

His father worked nights, so the boy rarely saw him on weekdays, and even on weekends, the boy preferred fishing at Lake Merced or anything outdoors over staying inside at home. Despite the often cold, often foggy, and the norm of not catching fish, he preferred that and being alone. He would often annoy the old men sitting on fold-out chairs and smoking cigars by accidentally casting over their lines. Still, after their mumbled castigations and head-shaking, they taught him how to cast accurately. So he sometimes met people he liked as he sought his freedom from home and school rules, which he felt wrapped him so tightly it was difficult for him to breathe.

The man smiled as he recalled his youth, and his head nodded in agreement. He reflected on the path he had only veered from while he raised his two children as a single parent for fifteen years. Once his children had entered the mainstream of their lives, and as soon as he remembered that he once had a happier, healthier path, he decided to return to it. The aloneness and quiet he so loved he now shared with his dog and the two of them were content.

Thirteen-plus years of friendship went by until his little buddy passed away, and while friends and acquaintances pressed him to get another dog, the man didn't. He decided that he was done with love and responsibility of that magnitude.

As the man now had more time, he was curious about the society he had ignored as much as possible for the past decade-plus. To say he was shocked at what he found would be to belie his anger and astonishment. The ignorance and the lack of curiosity in the herd mentality that he discovered he was living in the midst of genuinely shocked and annoyed him. The man found it almost impossible, except for a few friends, to meet people who possessed freedom from the herd.

The man delved into his wants, needs, and desires to see if there was any way he could possibly thrive within a herd or even a tribe, and he uttered a resolute no, out loud, to that question.

One person who had reentered his life recently posed a potential problem in his ability to distance himself further from society. However, and only after carefully considering how to proceed, he felt he could do whatever he wanted without creating insurmountable problems for himself or others close to him.

The man's world was primarily within himself yet included just a few people who cared enough to remain independent and free from the incursions into our private lives that our government strives to incase our society in. Politicians reminded the man of his stepmother.

The man's independence, while still maintaining friends, seemed to require only that he and they be responsible for nurturing each other while being kind and caring.

Written by Peter Skeels © 1-6-2025