

RECENT RAMBLINGS

One Mile at a Time

Once upon a time (4 days ago), the whole world came crashing down on my son. You may recall the feeling... The future large and looming in front of you like a black hole, getting closer and closer and sucking up all potential, hope, friends, talent, strengths, self-esteem and what brain cells almost-12-year-olds have left. He's growing and his feet hurt. He doesn't eat as well as he should. He's tough, but has the softest heart...

It's August. After placing 2nd during Little League season in June, winning All-Stars at the District level in July, and falling (again) to McKinleyville in All-Stars Section Championship game in late July, Trajan's travelling baseball team just lost a hard game in Reno. As pitcher, he took the brunt of a vindictive ump who didn't appreciate being wrong when it was pointed out (infield fly). ...To the point where the other team's coach told his boys not to swing at all- at anything.

After we got back home, his dad tried to work with him. Dad has coached him all year, and it's both a blessing and a curse. The other kids get to leave practice and go home. Our son goes home for more practice. Dad does try to relate everything in baseball to life, which is to his credit, but much to the chagrin of our son.

By now it's dark enough out that the outside lights are on and I'm hearing the familiar *ting!* of a metal bat hitting a baseball out of frustration or anger, I couldn't tell which. I came down the stairs and saw Dad in the chair. Feet flat on the floor, slouched, glaring at- but not seeing- the TV.

Uh-oh.

I casually went out the side door and meandered to the opposite side of the house and between *tings* heard the murmurings of a tearful rant.

"Heyyy... What's up?" I bravely walked right up to him, blocking his swing path and he hung his head.

"What if I can't fix my swing?! What will I DO? What if I can't fix my swing and I can't become a professional baseball player?? I'll have to work at McDonalds! I'm not good enough at baseball to play if I can't fix my swing! Will Dad still love me?"

"Oh, dude. I know when he's being your COACH, your dad SEEMS like he only loves you when you do well. But I can tell you that's not the case. The reasons you play baseball shouldn't be to please your dad. The reasons need to come from **here**." I put my hand on his heart.

"But I'm not good! I'm not smart! I can't figure out what's wrong with my swing!"

"That's not true. You ARE VERY smart! You will have your pick of jobs someday. And I can tell you that **this** probably isn't helping." Large arm sweep to include the bat, tee, net, and him... "Beating yourself up when you're tired, haven't eaten any dinner, ...you smell pretty great, too, by-the-way... and you had a hard loss today that wasn't entirely your fault."

“But it WAS my fault! I couldn’t pitch a strike!”

“Now you know that isn’t true. That ump was biased to the other team. I asked Cookie (All-Stars head coach whose son is also on Trajan’s team) if I was seeing things and he agreed that you were throwing lots of strikes that weren’t getting called. Under the circumstances, you pitched great! You got your team out of the innings without exceeding your pitch limit.”

“But what if I can’t fix my swing? I won’t be able to play professional ball!”

“Trajan there are professional ball players that struggle with their swings, but they have million-dollar coaches to nurse them through every swing of their slumps! What I know is you could stand to get more sleep and eat better because you would be amazed at how that affects your mood, your perspective, your positivity, and those around you. Why do you think I eat healthy all the time? It AIN’T ‘cause I want to! I have to or I can’t sleep at night. And, oh-by-the-way, you’re growing.”

It took some doing, but I managed to persuade him to come in and eat, shower, and go to bed. ...after 35 more swings.

Fast-forward 45 minutes. I was snuggled deep in the covers reading my mystery novel when I heard the bedroom door open. Trajan turned on the light and sat next to me on the bed. I sat up and hugged him, keeping my arm around his shoulder. He leaned into it and put his head on my shoulder. He hasn’t done that since Papa Brent passed away, so I figured he needed to talk some more. I settled in and waited.

“What am I going to do if I can’t play professional baseball?”

“Who says you have to?” I countered.

“It’s the only thing I’m good at!”

“Oh, Trajan; no it isn’t! You’re smart! You’re really good at math and science...”

“But I don’t like math!”

“You don’t have to like math! There are plenty of things in this world to do that don’t involve math on a daily basis. But you’re good at it. And you understand it. And you’re a kind person...”

“Nobody cares if you’re a kind person!”

“I care. And I guarantee that everyone you’re friends with cares. And everyone you talk to cares that you’re nice. There are entire careers that have been built upon being nice to people!”

“No there hasn’t!”

“Wanna bet? What about PR people?” He gave me a quizzical look and I realized I had to translate. “PR is Public Relations. These are the people who represent the companies to the public so their company is

perceived in the most positive light. Trust me; being nice is important. ...and honest, helpful, compassionate..."

"I'm worried I'm going to end up working at McDonald's!"

"Traj, did you know they make almost as much as I do? I just have better benefits."

"But that's where I'm going to end up! In a dead-end job because I can't get any other because I don't know anything!"

"Trajan, if you choose to work in fast food, then you can use it as a steppingstone to something bigger and better. I worked as a server and dish washer for a lot of years when I was in school. There's nothing wrong with that. Learning how to work with people and communicate and serve others is not a bad thing. And you know lots of stuff. Are you going to quit school?"

"No."

"Well then. You don't **have** to know everything right now. You can be a learner for a bit longer. You can't take all 2,000 miles of a journey at once. It's impossible. No matter how much money you have, no one can do it. You have to take it one mile at a time. One day at a time."

"How did you know what you wanted to be?" (It's right here that I'm glad I take memory supplements. Being able to reach back in the archives to find applicable stories and details and feelings to better relate to my kids is important to me.)

"Well, that's just it, Traj, I didn't. I remember being in middle school. (Fifth through eighth grade.) We had this one Friday a year called 'Super Day.' And during 'Super Day', they would have a bunch of locals come in to discuss their jobs, how to get a job like theirs (what education is needed), and the best parts about it. You were supposed to focus the jobs you learned about to something you were interested in actually doing in the future. I remember being SO UPSET because I had no idea what I wanted to be at 14, much less 18."

"So, how did you end up out here?"

"Well, that's a funny story. There was this song. I think it came out in, like, 1997 or something. The song was called 'Sunscreen.'* It had a bunch of advice in it about how to live. There's a line in that song that says, 'Live in northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft. Live in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard.' Well, I was giving the 'northern California' part a try when I got my job, and on my first day I met your dad."

"How did you know you were supposed to go to college? How did you choose what school you went to?"

"It was expected that I would go to college. I wanted to just go to a technical school and learn a trade, but that wasn't an option in our house. And as for which one, I picked the same one my parents both went to! When I graduated, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I figured they wouldn't complain about my lack of focus if I went

where they went. And it helped that 2 of my best friends were going there as well. I'd been going there for about a month, coming home on weekends. Then one weekend in September or early October I was working out at the scout cabin. It had just been built and we were working on landscaping around it. I was having a blast raking, moving rocks, cutting trees, moving dirt and as I was raking near the end of the day, I got to thinking about how much I enjoyed it. I love being outside, running equipment, making things look better with trees, shrubs, rocks, borders... I thought maybe I could become a landscaper. Implement my own designs, maybe offer maintenance and upkeep as part of a package deal... It was like being struck by a bolt of lightning, Traj. All of the sudden ***I had a plan***. I finished the year at that college, my friend helped me transfer my credits over to a well-known Forestry school that happened to be the same distance away from home, and it turned out I had friends at that school as well. It all panned out so smoothly. Meant to be. That's why I'm harping on you about listening to your heart. God will help guide you to what He needs you to be and do. If you're playing baseball just to please your dad, #1-it's the wrong reason and #2-if what you're doing doesn't come from ***here*** (hand once again on his heart), then you'll never be happy. You have to be at peace with your decisions in life. And you never will be unless they come from you. You or God."

"But how do you know it's from God?"

"You'll just know." I watched his eyes roll so hard I'm amazed he didn't fall off the bed. "Ok; I know that's not helpful. Let's see... It'll be clear and it will excite you and feel ***right***. And you'll know how to do it. You'll have most of the steps in mind or they'll come to you. People will help you. You may not get the things that you ***WANT***, and things probably won't happen how you think they should. ***BUT*** you will get the things that you need, whether or not you recognize them in the moment. It won't be easy; travelling out here by myself at 22 and taking a job where I didn't know a soul scared the daylights out of me. But I knew I had to do it. I didn't know why; I just knew that I did. And I couldn't take the whole journey at once by worrying about it. I had to literally take it one mile, one day at a time. Things all fell into place. I met great people who helped me. I met your dad. And look; I got you and your sister out of the deal. How cool is that?" He shrugged.

"You will be fine."

"How do you know I'll be fine?"

"Because you're half me. And half your dad. And because we pray about it every night. Let's pray and then you get to bed. Everything always looks better after a good sleep. I promise." We prayed and he trudged down the stairs.

I recalled again my own tearful rants down at The Bridge between me and God. I ranted, He listened, and I knew even then that all I could do was wait. Wait to see how things would go.

"PATIENCE IS A FORM OF WISDOM. IT DEMONSTRATES THAT WE UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THE FACT THAT SOMETIMES THINGS MUST UNFOLD IN THEIR OWN TIME."

~JON KABAT-ZINN

Honestly, even if I had the answers any sooner, I wouldn't have believed any of them, or I'd have missed out on the present in my anticipation of the future. Once again I thought, "It's a good thing that we don't know what's coming. And that time only moves forward. And that everything changes."

*The "song" I reference here is called "Everybody's Free." Came out in 1999. Lyrics are credited to Baz Luhrmann. Great advice. Google it.

FOLLOW UP: Trajan managed to hammer out the kinks in his swing. 3 weeks after our chat, his team traveled to Oregon for a tournament. After winning both games against a team from Bend on the first day, the boys squared off for a Home Run Derby for a chance to win a new Mizuno Bamboo Elite bat. (The words "Home Run" are used loosely here. In this competition, a "home run" consists of a fly ball hit hard enough to reach the grass.) After 10 pitches to each kid, Trajan and a boy from the Bend team were tied at 6 each. They each got 5 more pitches for a tiebreaker; the other boy hit 1 and Trajan hit 2!

