

“When things go wrong in your life, start searching for the reason by looking in the mirror.”

Steve Ettien

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The Memphis Gentleman and the Young Marine, Part I

I like people. I enjoy their company and love to listen to their stories of life. I find older people have the best stories and pearls of wisdom gathered over years of living.

I was stationed at Naval Air Station Millington, Tennessee in the mid 1980's and had agreed to pick up some furniture for a fellow Marine in downtown Memphis at a warehouse on the Mississippi River. I was sitting on the loading dock in July and it was very hot. An older black man was waiting for some furniture also and I struck up a conversation. We ended up talking about Memphis and his life. This Memphis Gentleman regaled me with stories of being a "mule skinner" in the early 1900's. He described a life of hard work pulling boats in the canal with his mule for five cents a boat. He and his mule pulled the barges for five miles and then at the end hooked up to another barge and walked the five miles back. Ten miles for ten cents, now that is impressive especially since at the time of this work the man was ten years old.

After listening and talking for almost thirty minutes, I asked the man if he had a good life. He paused for a moment then looked at me and said yes he's had a good life. I asked him why and he said that in his life he learned that problems always arise and the trick to living a good life was to learn to cope with problems and solve them. He also said that even though people may be of different races he had noticed that we all basically wanted the same thing. A chance to live our lives free of fear, have a good family, and enjoy the company of friends. I owe a debt of gratitude to this Memphis Gentleman I can never repay because he gave me several pearls of wisdom that hot July day in Memphis on a loading dock when I was a young Marine of twenty-five.

Since that day I've added twenty-two years of living and everything the Memphis Gentleman told me has proved to be true. No one that I have ever met was without problems; they are a part of life and once one problem is solved it seems life sends another one our way. Problems are common to us all whether you are rich, poor or somewhere in between those two extremes. I have noticed that successful people are not people without problems they are simply people who have learned to solve their problems. For me, problems are challenges to be solved and nothing more than that. By taking this attitude I do not give the problems any power over me.

Since that day in Memphis I have learned a few other things along the way. I've learned that problems cause stress and worry which are never good for my health or family. Worrying about problems, while natural is actually a waste of time and energy. I have also noticed that people seem to worry a lot. From my reading and research here is a reliable estimate on the general things people worry about:

- Things that never happen: 40%
- Things that happened in the past and cannot be changed: 30%
- Needless worries about health: 12%
- Petty miscellaneous worries: 10%
- Real legitimate worries: 8%

Ninety-two percent of what people worry about never happens, cannot be changed, or are needless petty worries. That's a lot of worry about absolutely nothing and is a great waste of time as well as bad for your health. Now of the eight percent of the real legitimate worry this can be broken down into two types of problems. Those problems that can be solved and those that can not be solved. In general, 95% of the real problems we have can be solved.

Now what can we do with this information and how can we use it to change our lives?

In part two we'll talk about what we can do with this information to improve our lives.

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