Shoe Leaves

May 16, 2015

 The **image** is so **powerful** that your eyes are immediately drawn to it.

On an isolated road winding towards an isolated town, sits a lonely tree off to the side. If you Google Images for the term "shoes on tree", you will see many different versions of this same picture. A dying/dead tree, who has leaves made of shoes.

Though the trees and shoes may be different at each location, the meaning is clear and understood across ALL cultures, languages, ages and (walks) of life.

"I was here! I mattered!", the people are saying from their personal soles/souls dangling from the tree.

 From a distance, the normal view of crowding appears. A mesh of colors, parts greet your eyes. The mind quickly sees that a group statement is being made. A shared expression/message that cannot only be understood without explaining, but, one that you could join in and add to if you wish.

Then, as with all gatherings of people and their contributions, the closer you get to the core of the image, the more you start to recognize the individuality within the masses.

"Look at those Red shoes!", a child points and tells his parents with excitement.

"Check out that raggidy old pair to the left, they sure have seen some miles", a young man tells his future wife.

"**You think we should?**", an elderly gentleman whispers to his longtime partner/wife/best friend. She in turn, looks into his eyes and does the usual approving smile.
Up goes another (old) pair of shoes to the tree's limbs. Mixing with the others, making another statement, adding to the collective.

In each of the pairs, from the $200 designer high heels, to the thrift store 5-time hand me down cowboy boots, the act is not only giving up part of their inventory, but, sharing part of their heart and soul. How far did they toss it? How much energy was used behind the throw? Were they happy, angry, in love, when they were tossed. How had their lives changed when they returned to see if the shoes were still there years later.

Behind the Tree Of Soles/Souls' image is one of the most basic human needs. The desire to understand why we are here, who we are among the flock, and does all of the turmoil, effort, energy at succeeding in life really matter to anyone. Do WE make a difference?

What a lot of people seem to miss when searching for these answers is that there is no one act, effort or result which can answer them.

 It is true, there are high profile things that people do that receive major attention/recognition. Mother Teresa dedicating her life to the betterment of others comes to mind. Benjamin Franklin discovering electricity (well, actually the Greeks already did in the form of static electricity around 600 BC, but, that is another story). A Korean music artist creating a video and getting the most views on YouTube since 'everyone' felt the need to see what everyone was talking about.

All of these and the large list of others, I am sure you can rattle off, are what would seem to give the people doing them enough satisfaction to feel wanted, know who they are, and justified for their hard work.

Then why, when someone creates a moment/thing that would record a place for them in history, do they keep trying to matter? A painter created the Mona Lisa, but, then many other paintings later. A programmer creates software that gets used by 90%+ of the world's computers, but, then comes out with many new Versions, including 95, 98, 7, 8/8.1 (*ewwww*), 10, ...
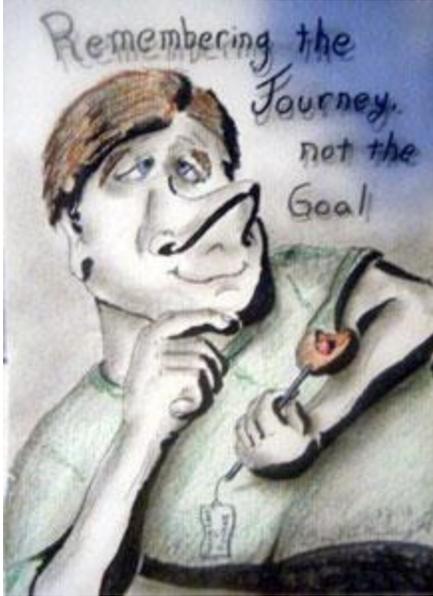
The news is full of top-of-their-game professionals coming out with daily attempts to prove to themselves that they matter. Read about the singer who just won a Grammy, but, later that night shaved their head and posed for the press to show off the new look? Come across a story about 'that' actor having a current blockbuster at the movie theaters, at the same time they are helping starving kids in another country?

Beyond these high profile contributions, the need for self-justification is a thirst that requires the waters of daily life and cannot be satisfied with one (or more) large gulps. Even drinking a bathtub full of water has no benefit to your needs for a dry throat the next day. Trying to find 'that' drink that will make us stay satisfied is a goal that has no end.

The secret behind the need for self-worth is not looking for what to put into ourselves, but, what we can put into others.

Many times, they have done polls on what are the happiest careers to be in. In these polls, one of the highest, if not #1, are the Barber/Hair Stylist/Cook. Not the million/billionaire? Not the Super Model, Superstar, gold counter at the mint? Why isn't popularity, riches, physical image not a factor?
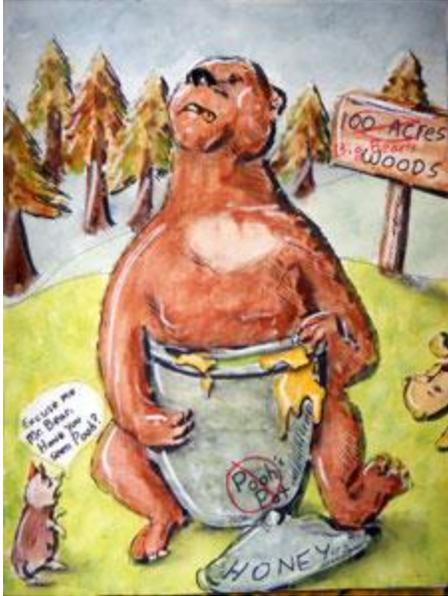
It comes down to what these jobs and those who do them, do for others. When you are cutting/styling someone's hair, or preparing a dish for them, you are giving your attention to them and what would make them happy/satisfied. When the hair stylist finishes, turns the chair around, and sees the smile on the customer, the cutter smiles as well. When a cook sends out the $1 burger, or the $200 Filet Mignon, they can walk by the tables and see the eaters smiling/enjoying themselves, and so the cook smiles as well.

These same workers carry on their happiness to the rest of their day/outside of work. They feel good about themselves, feel they matter and receive daily cupfuls of 'I matter" liquid for their thirst. Like the tree full of shoes, they are tossing their own virtual pairs on others, and often get to see/feel them later.

When you are opening a door for someone entering a building, take a drink, since at that moment YOU mattered to the person walking in. Bought a cup of coffee at the local Espresso shop? Well take two types of drink. First enjoy your caffeinated hot drink, then feel the other liquid water your soul. During that moment, you supported a business, their landlord, a worker, those producing the cup, coffee beans, door makers, and the like. Did you leave a tip as well? Well, take another drink, you deserve it!

At any moment during your day, you have opportunities to support others, and in turn, support/satisfy yourself. Though most of these times, we are tunnel-visioned in our actions, as we do them daily and feel that they are only for our needs. Feel spoiled by getting yourself that new 'gizmo'? In it, you are supporting all those that made the purchase possible.

 If these small drinks do not seem to quench your thirst, it is probably because their size is too small to feel. When you are thirsty, using a couple drops on the tongue has little or no effect on your needs. But, you have the power to take a few drops and make it an entire glass.

When going about your day and getting the things you need, or getting to the places you must be, take moments you are already interacting with others, and turn them into full glasses of refreshing 'I matter' drinks. Don't just tell the co-worker what you need, notice them and provide a positive comment.

"Bob, I do need those reports by tomorrow morning by 9 AM. And, if I don't see you again today, I hope you get some time to relax tonight."

I have found that keeping my eyes open to those around me and looking for opportunities to brighten/support their days, almost always comes back to me with evidence of my worth to them.

A real-world example is in my department. For years now (since I started), I made it a conscious effort to say good night/bye to each person by name as I left. In the beginning, most would just wave or give the generic "bye". But, as the years went on, the responses become better/more personal and have now gotten to the point where if I miss one (like they are around a corner or wall), they will hear me leaving and exclaim...

"What about me Dave?"

And at that moment, I see my virtual shoes hanging on their shoulders. I respond...

"Sorry Matt, I missed you. I hope you enjoy the sun on your way home."

 I take a large swallow from my now filled cup. Looking for the opportunity to fill it up again soon with another person.

Cheers to you!, and the cups you will fill each day.
- David Mielcarek, May 16, 2015