

Showing Respect

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Those of you who have followed my writings know that my formative years were spent in environments that did not offer much respect for personal boundaries. Accordingly, I spent the rest of my life learning and practicing respect for others. In time, being respectful became a new and unconscious way of life.

I was driving on a highway in southern Pennsylvania one summer morning. I noticed an auction in progress. Most of those present were Amish and Old Order Mennonites. I like auctions and greatly respect the Mennonite communities that I've been close to for the last fifteen years. The combination of attractions led me to stop and approach a woman to ask about participating in the sale.



She left to go get her brother. When he returned, we introduced ourselves. Then he asked whom I knew in other church communities. I rattled off several names that I knew he would recognize. Family is of great importance to their traditions and they know their relatives wherever they reside.

He nodded approval and then agreed that I could pay with a check. I began to walk about reviewing what had been put out for sale. I picked three things for which I intended to bid. I just love the country auction on a warm summer day.

The auctioneer began to call out and people moved around less and focused more on who was bidding and what item was being held up to view. In time, the first item I wanted to purchase came up for bidding. I had no way of knowing how many others had their eye on the same item.

At a point in the bids, I realized that the price had gone beyond what this item would normally bring at auction. I had not seen any apparent dealers bidding. I had a flash that some member of the family may be the bidder with whom I was competing. Sometimes when several family members want an item from an estate they simply put it up for sale so each has an equal chance.

I called out to the auctioneer, “Am I bidding against family?” “This is a public auction,” he responded. “That’s not what I asked,” I retorted. Again I asked, “Am I bidding against family?” “I think so,” he said.



There was an instant sucking noise, like when a group of people catches their breath in collective surprise. There was an open amazement that someone would stand aside in respect for a family member on the chance that there was special significance to the item being offered.

I had an intuitive feeling and spontaneously spoke out. I stopped bidding. The other person got the mounted grey fox. The audience buzzed about the interaction. I’ve learned to trust my “sensing” or “knowing,” my intuition. I’ve become more spontaneous and child like.

A half hour later, the second item that I wanted came up for bid. I moved closer so I’d be seen. He asked for a bid. I placed an opening offer. There were no other bids. The auctioneer scratched his head. Then he smiled and moved to the next item.

It happened so fast, that for a moment, I did not realize what had transpired. I had shown such respectful consideration for the family member who bid against me earlier, that they showed me the same. I smiled and went to pay for my crock.

Since nothing could top this serendipitous moment, I chose to continue on my trip savoring the memory of the moment.

“You’ve come a long way, Thomas,” I thought to myself. Maybe I was finally getting what it takes to be aware of others and to naturally express my sensitivity.

What a beautiful summer day.