

Post-Polio Thoughts

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RACKING UP SUCCESS

A few years ago Hubby's dentist gave him a scruffily pathetic Christmas cactus that wasn't doing well under her tutelage. He brought it home, put in on his desk under the desk lamp, in front of an east window, next to the room's heating duct, and here it is kept throughout the year.

"Wrong, wrong, wrong!" shriek the experts. "These are tropical plants. No artificial light at night. . . keep them strictly at in a 50 degree temperature half the year. . . water them way less in fall and winter or they'll never bloom. . . stay away from heat ducts. . . place in total darkness 12 to 14 hours each day. . . ." On and on they go with their endless, impossible rules.

But Hubby has a special gift. As a librarian, he may know nothing about growing the Christmas cactus, but he and this plant understand each other. At various times throughout the year, lush green foliage bursts forth with voluminous and gloriously red blossoms. Simple as that.

Who knows. Maybe the plant recognizes Hubby's sincere desire for it to do well, and not wanting to disappoint such an ardent admirer, it does. Whatever it is, Hubby's Christmas cactus cannot be surpassed.

So, experts can be wrong. The road to success may not always be paved with what we've been led to expect.

Each of us can say what we believe it takes to be a success. *We* decide. Intelligence? Relentless pursuit, inventiveness? Good luck? Maybe always getting the job done well signifies success, or coming in at the top of the heap. Does being the chief of staff, the CEO, the hall-of-fame inductee do it?

Maybe genuine success is more complicated; maybe we should also mix in a heavy dose of an often elusive and somewhat mystical element. Let's add possessing the ability to leave others feeling better for having been in their presence.

I think of my Warm Springs doctor, Robert Bennett, M.D., and much later my Rancho Los Amigos doctor, Jacquelin Perry, M.D. Top of their professions, no question, but these are not simply doctors who knew what they were talking about. Beyond that they exhibited a certain touch of humanity that others didn't seem to have. In their hands,

patients felt valued, appreciated, unique. With doctors like this, the *patient* comes out feeling like a success.

There are those who believe that having great wealth and power spell success. Others say nobody can be a bona fide success without being kind, caring. Do we have to like ourselves? See the worth in others?

Maybe we should examine how success looks through the eyes of eight-year-olds. Where do they rank the elderly neighbor whose sweet smile always says to them, "I'm glad you're here"? She, who fills the neighborhood with the aroma of her scrumptious chocolate chip cookies every morning, beckoning enthusiastic cookie-lovers to her door. She, who teaches us all to treat others the way we want to be treated.

How about you and me? Who among us is a success? I wonder what the requirements would be.

Perhaps all it truly takes to be a success is a loving man with an uncommon talent for helping a Christmas cactus thrive.

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