

Little By Little

By Justin J. Agoglia
Sitting by a warm fireplace, NY
2/12/05

One of the nice things about being back in NY is experiencing the cold winters, large snow storms, warm fires, and homemade soups. I know it sounds a little crazy, but I do enjoy the cold weather. This past year we've had a month of very cold air and it has left us with plenty of snow.

A few weeks ago, we had a snow storm which left about a foot and a half of snow on the ground but, with the snow drifts, it measured about two feet in height. Like clock-work, Kole and I went outside and began shoveling the driveway. Well, I shoveled the driveway while Kole leaped through the snow. No matter how cold or how deep the snow is, he's always by my side and I enjoy his companionship just as much, if not more.

Our driveway isn't the typical one you see which houses two cars. Our home rests on two hills, and our driveway is one of them. Thus, when it comes to shoveling the driveway - depending on the amount and the density of moisture - it can take about 2-4 hours to remove all the snow.

On this day, the snow was light but still quite high. As I was pushing the snow to the left and right of the driveway, I was reminded of the challenges I faced with removing the snow as a young child. Dad would shovel most of the snow, but I still helped out as best as I could (which really wasn't much). As a teenager, when my body was in better shape and more equipped for such physical challenges, I was more suited to help my father and could remove larger amounts of snow. But in spite of my being in shape, I still found it to be a challenge.

As I thought about this, I vividly remembered that we had an efficient system for removing the snow. It wasn't a detailed plan or something we gleaned from a book. It was something we did out of necessity. Our solution: we removed the snow in increments. For the first 10 minutes we worked hard at pushing the snow to either sides of the driveway. Finally, we would stop for a few minutes to rest. With our hearts racing and our breathing rates high, we would pause and lean our bodies against the handles of our shovels.

During these times of respite, we would look at each other and share memories of the past. Sometimes I heard stories about my father's childhood. Those breaks were so meaningful because they allowed us to literally stop everything - from the "busyness" of our lives, our hectic schedules, the demands of the world - and just listen to one another. As I see it, those two-minute pauses were more than just breaks; they were sacred times. It was a teacher with his student, a master with his apprentice, and most of all - a caring father with his son. Without my being aware, I was developing into a young man. And this was made possible because of a major snowstorm, an apparent inconvenience.

Even when the snow was taller than me, we always found a way to remove it. The solution to our dilemma was to attack the problem little-by-little. Plowing through was never the answer (no pun intended). Sure it took us longer with each break, but in the larger scheme of things, we were much more efficient and conserved our energy. In fact our recovery time was much quicker.

This was the key to our snow dilemma. But as I've recently come to realize, this would also be part of our solution for dealing with the recent passing of my father.

Thought:

Life is filled with many curves and challenges. It's never linear in its course. It has its highs and its lows. Sometimes we find ourselves returning to familiar starting points but, hopefully, with a clearer perspective and proper attitude, we're better equipped to face these challenges.

The recent snowstorm was a wonderful reminder of how best to process the loss of my dad: little-by-little. Upon losing someone close to you, it is natural to find something or someone to help you get through the pain of losing someone. Some immerse themselves in their work, hoping to be distracted from the hurt. This will work, but only for a short time. Others will seek out relationships. We undoubtedly need people to come along our side, but they cannot remove the pain nor can they be expected to replace the loss. In actuality, it is a battle only you can face.

I feel at this point in my life, I'm slowly gaining insights with all of this. No matter how challenging this is, I am committed to learning and maturing from this. Realize, you can't grow simply by "plowing through" life.

Whether it be the loss of a loved one or simply everyday life situations, I encourage you to take mini-vacations from your active schedule. This may simply be taking off 1-4 hours per month or maybe an entire day. Finding such time seems impossible. But do you really believe you're worthy of such time? Unfortunately, I don't believe many feel they are of value and, therefore, could never see significance of such an exercise. From all of my research, every great leader intentionally took time to reflect on his/her life. It was an essential component to their personal growth and ongoing development. Even Christ modeled this type style of leadership.

So why not start now? Instead of seeing life's curves as challenges, try to see them as opportunities for growth. See what principles you can come away with. You might be surprised how much you've learned about yourself.

When I was in high school, I remember taking time to write and reflect. It may have seemed meaningless and perhaps, many of my entries were superficial. But I believe they were the tools for how I would face my current challenges.

Principle: When you stop to give time for you, you slowly move from doing to becoming.