

Being Imperfect Together – 01-29-15

Acceptance: A Great Place to Start

by Art Maines, LCSW

Today would have been my father's (Art Sr.) 106th birthday. He was born on this day in 1909 into a world I can scarcely imagine. The youngest of 9 children of a homemaker and a ferry boat captain on the rugged coast of Maine, he lost his mother in the great flu pandemic of 1918 when he was only 9. I believe this was his first great "life wound."

He was 52 when I came along, and his life had not been easy to that point. He had worked long, hard hours at a variety of jobs, including running cranes in the shipyard at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, building the merchant ships that helped the Allies win World War II. A failed marriage, late nights playing drums in dance bands on the East coast, and finally a broken back in a workplace accident had all taken their toll on him. When I came along he was older than his years, depressed, and addicted to alcohol and pain medications. His marriage to my mother failed as a result.

As I grew into my teen years and their natural and important rebelliousness, I actively rejected him and his old-fashioned ideas, not to mention the alcohol and drug problems. He was covertly (and sometimes very overtly) racist and homophobic. Rejection became a lifestyle for me, until frustration with life and my family led me to seek counseling at the tender age of 22.

Therapy was a lifesaver for me. I learned tremendous amounts in those early sessions, and nothing was more important than the thing I struggled most with:

Acceptance.

What I've found since then, both in my personal life and in my work with clients, is that acceptance of myself, other people, situations, and events sets people free. You don't have to agree with or condone whatever it is, but so often simply accepting people and their travails opens up new avenues for understanding, empathy, connection, and even influence. When you're not sure where to start, accepting yourself and the other person as they are is a great place to start.

Like it did for me and my Dad. Before he died (when I was 26), we had had numerous difficult and very frank talks, the kind that led both of us to greater depth and real acceptance of each other as radically different people who loved each other anyway. We found peace in acceptance despite our differences.

May you find peace with those you struggle to accept. If I could do it, you can, too.

Happy Birthday, Dad.

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