

## SILENT SATURDAYS

BY HONEY JUDITH RUBIN

For two straight years I was totally silent on Saturdays. What a great discipline that was! I got to “hear” what I would have said without actually handling the consequences of having opened my mouth. Two powerful events happened which precipitated these “Silent Saturdays.”

The first was a challenge offered to me during the family communications training my then teenaged son and I attended. For an entire day, I evaluated every comment I made according to four categories — positive, neutral, instructive or negative. Each time I spoke, I made a counting mark under the appropriate category. The tally showed me that 90% of my interactions with my son were negative or instructive (complaints, demands, corrections, or requests) and only 10% were positive or neutral — about as backwards as it could get. I knew I needed to change, but how?

The second incident occurred several months later, while I was still a righteous self-proclaimed expert on food. Mostly what I did was criticize other people’s food choices. Of course, I called it being helpful.

After this startling experience, in which I caught a glimpse of how people really experienced me, I admitted that my mouth was out of control. I had obviously believed the point of communication was to leave no survivors, and I rarely did. Finally, I turned my unmanageable mouth over to a “higher power” and surrendered!

I had entered the supermarket with a small list and very little money. In those days, my cash flow was pretty meager. I had gotten everything I wanted except butter. Wheeling the cart toward the dairy case, I arrived just in time to hear the dairy manager tell a customer that Kefir (a naturally cultured yogurt-type drink) was made by injecting chemicals into milk and that he had a lot of suspicions about it. Swooping down on them with superior facts, I ranted and raved at the manager.

By the time I ran out of steam, he was purple with upset and the lady stood in wide-eyed horror.

Having worked myself into such frenzy, I needed to stand for a few moments to calm down. While I paused, a clerk came to refill a cheese display case. The manager, still in turmoil from my assault, sideswiped the clerk with some trumped up criticism about her sloppy display case. My anger melted into sadness as I realized that the clerk had just felt the fallout from my attack on the manager. As the clerk turned to leave, I approached the manager to apologize. My apology was heartfelt, but only marginally effective — I knew he wished I would just disappear.

As I walked away, I had a thought that the manager trouncing on the clerk was a ripple that I had started. That realization had barely flipped through my mind when I looked up to see the clerk, with her face painfully contorted, scurrying over to pounce on the bakery girl. Panic set in — WHERE would this all end?

As I watched in horror, the bakery girl punctured the deli girl who rapidly turned and torpedoed the day manager who immediately shredded the gal in the express check out lane. Barely breathing, I stood in shock and watched this gal all but lose it. I had seven items in my cart.

Struggling to regain control, I “remembered” more things I just HAD to buy. But, knowing that I really needed nothing and had no extra money anyway, I decided to bide my time until some other folks had gone through her lane first. No one came. Then I thought to avoid it all by just going through a regular lane. But every one of those lanes had LOTS of people with FULL carts. There was no way I would wait! Paranoia set in. I began looking for TV cameras, convinced that Allen Funt was hiding somewhere to record the day when a rude and angry shopper faced her karma! Not finding any cameras, and knowing it was really my mess to clean up, I decided to just go on through.

I had seen this gal for years. Always enjoyable, she tended to be genuine, competent and cheerful. Now, with her face and eyes hard and jaw jutting, she

almost had steam coming out of her ears. I was sure the steam would start any minute. Without making my usual eye contact, I gingerly approached the lane and began unloading.

“Hi,” I ventured, “ready for some business?”

“Just come on through and give me a hard time,” she said tightly, “everything else is going wrong today.”

Feeling her pain helped me drop my own armor. I stood, just breathing, and wondered what to. She was near tears.

“Hey!” I said, my voice soft and light. “You know how in the movies when they don’t like how a scene is going, they just start all over again. You know? Take two? Fresh? Let’s you and I do that. I’ll put everything back in the cart and then come through again, and we can make it be the way we want it. What do you say?”

Connecting with my hope and courage, she braved a smile and said, “Oh God, you’re wild!”

We were grinning as I popped the food back in the cart, took two steps back and paraded forward again with pomp. Three other customers suddenly got in line in behind me. I nearly lost my courage. But I did it as planned.

“Hey! How yew?” I drawled and flipped the food onto the counter with great exaggeration.

“Fie-yun. How yew?” she drawled back with a chortle.

“Jes wunnerful!” I declared triumphantly.

We finished our transaction with teasing and glee.

“You’ve always been a little strange,” she said gratefully, her face all soft and beautiful again.

“Thanks for playing,” I replied.

Our eyes locked and twinkled. For just that moment, I realized that we are all one. I left the store knowing I’d find the way to make my life about kindness and caring — I would become a new person.

Remembering that periodic brief fasting often helps people create new eating habits, I decided to fast from talking one day each week. Silent Saturdays gave me the space I needed to observe, just observe what would have come out of my mouth, and then reaffirm my new decision. Slowly, patiently, I laid the groundwork for the habits and beliefs that would serve me better.

It took a few Saturdays to get over trying to control my son by writing one complaining note after another. In the final mean note, I groused about all this writing I was “having” to do. He exploded in anger. He told me that my choosing to be silent on Saturdays now meant that he had to repeatedly stop what he was doing. Before, he could ignore my nagging. Now he said, “I have to read all these \*&#%\$@ notes!”

During the second month, I began going out in public, doing normal things such as shopping. As I expanded my personal classroom, I realized that many people needed support to help them feel more at ease with my being silent. Some people, who didn’t know me, assumed I was a deaf-mute and made gestures or yelled to communicate. Others, who were used to my usual battleground style, thought I was just being rude or weird, although one guy thought I had laryngitis every Saturday!

In learning that I could not cause other people’s reactions to me — I also learned that no one could cause how I choose to behave. My choosing to be kind, and having the intention to be loving, eased the way for most people to be gracious about my silence.

To further ease the process, I began carrying 3 x 5 cards that said, "Dear One, Thank you for wanting to talk to me. Today I am being silent. Please, let's talk another day." Offering these notes made a big difference.

Sometimes, while reflecting on that day in the market when those powerful lessons on sowing and reaping came so fast and furious that I HAD to pay attention, I marvel at the gift. I always give thanks. Allen Funt indeed!

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