

Character Community



E-News



A Town of Richmond Hill initiative.

A Town of Richmond Hill Character Community monthly e-letter

August is Compassion

I will do whatever is necessary to heal the hurts of others. I will strive to understand and be sensitive to their feelings.

August 2006

The Boy Under The Tree

By: David Coleman and Kevin Randall, Source Unknown

In the summer recess between freshman and sophomore years in college, I was invited to be an instructor at a high school leadership camp hosted by a college in Michigan. I was already highly involved in most campus activities, and I jumped at the opportunity.

About an hour into the first day of camp, amid the frenzy of icebreakers and forced interactions, I first noticed the boy under the tree. He was small and skinny, and his obvious discomfort and shyness made him appear frail and fragile. Only 50 feet away, 200 eager campers were bumping bodies, playing, joking and meeting each other, but the boy under the tree seemed to want to be anywhere other than where he was. The desperate



loneliness he radiated almost stopped me from approaching him, but I remembered the instructions from the senior staff to stay alert for campers who might feel left out.

As I walked toward him I said, "Hi, my name is Kevin and I'm one of the counselors. It's nice to meet you. How are you?" In a shaky, sheepish voice he reluctantly answered, "Okay, I guess" I calmly asked him if he wanted to join the activities and meet some new people. He quietly replied, "No, this is not really my thing."

I could sense that he was in a new world, that this whole experience was foreign to him. But I somehow knew it wouldn't be right to push him, either. He didn't need a pep talk, he needed a friend. After several silent moments, my

first interaction with the boy under the tree was over. At lunch the next day, I found myself leading camp songs at the top of my lungs for 200 of my new friends. The campers were eagerly participated. My gaze wandered over the mass of noise and movement and was caught

by the image of the boy from under the tree, sitting alone, staring out the window. I nearly forgot the words to the song I was supposed to be leading. At my first opportunity, I tried again, with the same questions as before: "How are you doing? Are you okay?" To which he again replied, "Yeah, I'm alright. I just don't really get into this stuff." As I left the cafeteria, I too realized this was going to take more time and effort than

I had thought -- if it was even possible to get through to him at all.

That evening at our nightly staff meeting, I made my concerns about him known. I explained to my fellow staff members my impression of him and asked them to pay special attention and spend time with him when they could. The days I spend at camp each year fly by faster than any others I have known. Thus, before I knew it, mid-week had dissolved into the final night of camp and I was chaperoning the "last dance." The students were doing all they could to savor every last moment with their new "best friends" -- friends they would probably never see again.

As I watched the campers share

continued on page 2...

Town of Richmond Hill Character Community Organizations

Arts Richmond Hill Inc.

The Curtain Club

Girl Guides of Canada York South Division

Helpmate Community Information

Hills House Hospice

Ja'fari Islamic Housing

Learning Disabilities Association of York Region

Lions Club of Richmond Hill

Music For Young Children

My Canada! Integration Settlement Services

Optimist Club of Richmond Hill

Richmond Hill Aquatic Club

Richmond Hill Canoe Club

Richmond Hill Chamber of Commerce

Richmond Hill Community Food Bank

Richmond Hill Social & Bocce Club

Richmond Hill Training Centre

Richmond Hill Winter Carnival

Royal Canadian Legion Branch #375

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahai's of Richmond Hill

Stroke Recovery Network The Amici Centre

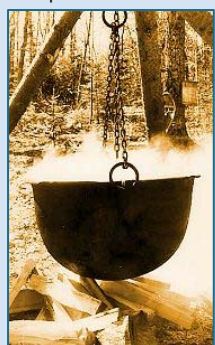
Wilderness Lifeskills of Youth Inc.

The Stone Soup Story

By: Author Unknown, Source Unknown

Many years ago three soldiers, hungry and weary of battle, came upon a small village. The villagers, suffering a meager harvest and the many years of war, quickly hid what little they had to eat and met the three at the village square, wringing their hands and bemoaning the lack of anything to eat.

The soldiers spoke quietly among themselves and the first soldier then turned to the village elders. "Your tired fields have left you nothing to share, so we will share what little we have: the secret of how to make soup from stones."



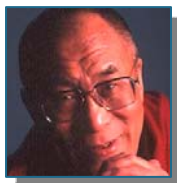
Naturally the villagers were intrigued and soon a fire was put to the town's greatest kettle as the soldiers dropped in three smooth stones. "Now this will be a fine soup", said the second soldier; "but a pinch of salt and some parsley would make it wonderful!" Up jumped a villager, crying "What luck! I've just remembered where some's been left!" And off she ran, returning with an apronful of parsley and a turnip.

As the kettle boiled on, the memory of the village improved: soon barley, carrots, beef and cream had found their way into the great pot, and a cask of wine was rolled into the square as all sat down to feast.

They ate and danced and sang well into the night, refreshed by the feast and their new-found friends. In the morning the three soldiers awoke to find the entire village standing before them. At their feet lay a satchel of the village's best breads and cheese. "You have given us the greatest of gifts: the secret of how to make soup from stones", said an elder, "and we shall never forget." The third soldier turned to the crowd, and said: "There is no secret, but this is certain: it is only by sharing that we may make a feast". And off the soldiers wandered, down the road.

Source: <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/5/555.html>

Compassion "Quotes"



"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."
-The Dalai Lama

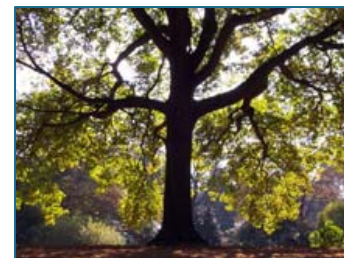


"Compassion is the basis of mortality."
-Arnold Schopenhauer (early 19th century philosopher)

Next Month's Attribute:
September is Courage

...continued from page 1

their parting moments, I suddenly saw what would be one of the most vivid memories of my life. The boy from under the tree, who stared blankly out the kitchen window, was now a shirtless dancing wonder. He owned the dance floor as he and two girls proceeded to cut up a rug.



I watched as he shared meaningful, intimate time with people at whom he couldn't even look just days earlier. I couldn't believe it was him. In October of my sophomore year, a late-night phone call pulled me away from my chemistry book. A soft-spoken, unfamiliar voice asked politely, "Is Kevin there?"

"You're talking to him. Who's this?"

"This is Tom Johnson's mom. Do you remember Tommy from leadership camp?"

The boy under the tree. How could I not remember? "Yes, I do," I said. "He's a very nice young man. How is he?"

An abnormally long pause followed, then Mrs. Johnson said, "My Tommy was walking home from school this week when he was hit by a car and killed." Shocked, I offered my condolences.

"I just wanted to call you," she said, "because Tommy mentioned you so many times. I wanted you to know that he went back to school this fall with confidence. He made new friends. His grades went up. And he even went out on a few dates. I just wanted to thank you for making a difference for Tom. The last few months were the best few months of his life."

In that instant, I realized how easy it is to give a bit of yourself every day. You may never know how much each gesture may mean to someone else. I tell this story as often as I can, and when I do, I urge others to look out for their own "boy under the tree."

Source: <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/7/761.html>



Earlier this summer, the Town of Richmond Hill and Town of East Gwillimbury Character Community Committees met up at the East Gwillimbury Civic Centre for networking lunch to share information. Both expressed that it was great to hear what is going on in other parts of York Region for the Character Community initiative.

Character Community E-News is a monthly e-mail newsletter to share information about upcoming events within our organization and beyond. If you would like to contribute upcoming Character Community event information, story ideas or photos, please forward it to the Editor, Michelle Lipkus, at mlipkus@richmondhill.ca.