

Repel the Dagger of Insults

I had just finished my little speech at the women's banquet and was trying to catch my breath before manning the book table at the back of the room. A well-dressed lady whose lips were smiling but whose eyes were not approached me, gushed a bit about how much she'd enjoyed the presentation, and then grabbed my arm like you would an old friend.

"Oh, Debbie," she said in an everybody-listen-to-me-now voice, "I thought what you said about losing 40 pounds was amazing. What do you plan to do to make the skin shrink back up?"

Gulp.

There's always one in every crowd. Someone who just can't find it within themselves to encourage rather than discourage. Someone who thinks their candle will shine brighter by blowing out yours.

I hope graciousness isn't becoming a relic. I value good manners and sincerely hope that a genteel countenance isn't just a cultural trait. Having been raised in the South, I have wonderful memories of two lovely white-haired ladies in floral dresses sipping mint iced tea while gracing me with their undivided attention in a room full of adults—a true gift when one feels invisible and unworthy. They were blessed with the talent of making a person feel good about herself—even a shy, chubby 10-year-old with nothing much yet to offer.

Since I've circulated more among strangers as a speaker during the last two years, I've been insulted intentionally and unintentionally many times. Thankfully, early on I learned the value of Proverbs 10:19: "Where there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

A simple smile in response goes a long way toward learning not

to take yourself so seriously. It really doesn't hurt a bit, and nobody's the better when bitterness is exchanged. Surprisingly enough, I've actually made inroads into lasting friendships when a foot-in-mouth comment or two were overlooked.

So, next time someone decides to point out that I'm a human river of wrinkles, I think I'll throw my arms up in the air and let my underarm Dumbo flaps speak for themselves.

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