

Scarlet Letter V

Written by Susan Murphy

Sunday, 26 July 2015 10:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 29 July 2015 09:59



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Dear Aunt Bossy,

I know you are always going on about how bad it is to consider yourself a victim. I was recently accused of “playing the victim,” so now I am interested in finding out exactly what that means. I don’t think it sounds like me.

Hester

Dear Hester,

Just the fact that you would consider the accusation and investigate it pretty much assures me that you do not cling to victimhood. If you did, you would have reacted by attacking the person who called you a victim and wail and say how unfair it all is and that they don’t understand, etc, whine, etc, moan.

If being a victim is your profession – and it is for many people, often showcased in the media these days - you would call in the feds, or at least call a lawyer. Asking for a definition, as you have, shows humility and grit. Those who treasure their victim status rarely have those qualities.

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So, here is my take on it: When I discourage “victimhood” I am discouraging people from clinging to the thorns that life – especially when other people are involved – puts in our path. I firmly believe that one has to ignore or treat the scratches acquired in life’s briar patch, keep moving, and head right for the good stuff that awaits us all if we keep our eyes on the goal and keep taking action to get closer to it.

I don’t recommend acquiescing to bad treatment or becoming a doormat. I do recommend avoiding a state of hate and resentment, taking positive action, and getting the hell out of the way of the circumstance if you possibly can.

To avoid being a victim, you may have to change your approach to people, life or yourself. You may have to move, change your route, leave some wonderful things behind. I didn’t say this was going to be easy.

A true victim revels in poor treatment, and burrows in, demanding that others take care of the situation. That transfers the power over the victim’s life to another. This is never a good idea.

Really accomplished victims are not satisfied just to be victims themselves. They put all their energy into convincing others to feel like the helpless victims of the lucky few and convince them that they should be miserable until those who have what they want give it up. It does get to be a full time job.

I fully admit there are people who get a very bad deal from nature, fate, family and friends. Many people have to deal with horrifying circumstances. However, it isn’t what happens to them or us that determines victim status, it is how the one affected handles it.

What we are really talking about here is a “glass half empty” or “glass half full” comparison. Those who view life as moving toward fullness are naturally more successful and happier. Those who view themselves as the main source of their success tend to be happier and more successful. (Do I have to remind you that Aunt Bossy does not define success by money?)

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Much of our success and happiness depends upon our relationships. People like to help and love those who are full of joy and determination, or at least pleasantness and timeliness. No one who is mentally and emotionally healthy can bear to help a person with a poor pitiful me attitude for any length of time. That kind of negativity is just too draining.

There are many, many examples in public life of people who have overcome tremendous obstacles and moved on to be happy and successful. Look for them. However, you don't even have to go that far outside of your own world. Check out your friends, family, co-workers and you will begin to see first hand the power of positivity, the damaging effects of negativity, and the struggle to keep moving toward the light.

I would also suggest that you take a look at the person who accused you of clinging to victimhood. It just may very well be that that person has an agenda that is not in your best interest or based on the truth. If that is the case, move away from that one, or develop the ability to wrap yourself in a cape of positivity that will protect you from being seriously injured by their own unhappiness.

You can even view the situation as a spiritual exercise and practice listening and focusing on that person without getting your knickers in a twist. That could turn things around, or, at least, give you the mental and emotional distance you need to develop some joy.

One last thing: never forget that, if you choose, you can devote your life to finding injustices, slights, unfair treatments, unequal gifts, and perpetual obstacles. They are abundant.

On the other hand you can also choose to treat everyone as you would like to be treated, reach out to everyone, especially those whose circumstances are more difficult than yours, join a community of people who share your values, and get the focus off of yourself and on to serving others. That always smites victimhood, real or imagined.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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