

The Beauty of Never Giving Up

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He was one of the most infamous young characters with whom I had ever worked. Legends surround him, and as we all know, some legends are based in truth. He was seemingly fearless, skateboarding off roofs with unbelievable vertical drops, setting his own fractured hand bones and continuing to skate, resisting anyone's attempts to "control" him. The guy was a natural climber. He could scale just about any scalable object in the time it takes a normal human to stir condiments into their morning coffee. He was well-known by all the local police departments, and one legend holds that it once took 30-plus law enforcement officials to persuade him to come down from a rooftop where he had climbed to take a breather. Now, I am definitely not one to condone illegal activities. But the dormant socially disobedient rebel in me had to respect the "fight" in this young man. He had not had an easy go of things in life, and he had decided he was finally going to do things on his own terms. Adults in his past had repeatedly proven untrustworthy, and he wasn't about to give his trust freely again. It had to be earned.

I remember that day crystal clear. It was approximately two-and-a-half years ago, when it was determined the rebel-dude would go back to mainstream regular high school. The meeting was full of well-meaning concerned adults, most of whom spent some time trying to talk him out of returning to a "normal" high school from an alternative setting. Being a man of few words, he kept repeating simply, "I can do it." And who was anyone to disagree? We well-meaning adults spend so much time attempting to take the word "can't" out of our kids' vocabulary. But sometimes, out of fear, we're the first ones to use it. He KNEW he could do it, and the power of that knowing might as well have been a class 5 tornado.

The handsome, apparently confident, smiling kid who appeared at my office two weeks ago was vaguely familiar to me. I asked him to wait a minute before he told me his name, and I ended up not needing the full minute. It was rebel-tornado-dude!!!! He was clean and had cut his hair; his face was visible, making it the first time I had ever seen that face in all the years I had known him. Practically unrecognizable, he still had the same unapologetic presence about him. He couldn't contain the news he had come to share for very long.

“I’m graduating from high school at the end of May.”, he said. I was overcome with pride and happiness for his achievement. We talked about future plans and reminisced about the good ol’ days. Eventually, he went on his way with the same spring in his step that had always been there.

At least two other young men that I know join this dude as he graduates from high school this year. One of them could barely sit still for five minutes in one place, but was an improvisational comedy genius. The other was in a lock-down facility for more than half of his high school career. The three of them, in turn, join millions of other amazing young men and women who graduate this year all across the nation.

At the risk of being cliché, they are truly our future. And in the midst of all the well-meaning adult advice these high school graduates are being bombarded with, in the midst of a depressing economy and an unsure future, I have just one thing to say: No one in the entire world, aside from yourself, has the power or the ability to give up on you. It is a power only held by you. Treat it with respect and take it very, very seriously. I am SO proud of you. Your community is SO proud of you. Congratulations, class of 2009! Skate on, dudes!

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