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Guilty or Not?

You may be prejudiced and not even know it

by Geraldine Moran

WHEN THAT new little girl moved into your neighborhood, remember how long it was before she became one of your gang?

Later, when you became best of friends, you discovered that she had plenty of new games and ideas to offer that your gang could have enjoyed from the first minute she moved into your neighborhood. That was your first taste of prejudice.

Perhaps you believe it was different then. You figure you were too young to realize the hurt that little girl felt. But is it so different now? Are you one of the thousands who say, "I'm not prejudiced, but . . ."?

If you are, then you're missing the same enjoyment you did when you were a child. Only now it's on a larger scale.

Analyze Prejudice

Prejudice is hard to talk about. Perhaps it's because we've become practiced in the art of doing the deed and avoiding the word. Let's take the word prejudice and analyze it. Prejudice is a judgment or opinion formed without due examination—a hasty or unfair judgment grounded in feeling, fancy or associations.

That's what the dictionary says, and that's the way it works. Study that definition, break it down and you get one word—ignorance. And the way to destroy ignorance is with knowledge. That knowledge is gained through curiosity—curiosity about other kinds of people.

Now comes the hard part. Where does one start in this search to understand other people and their ways of worship and custom? For one thing, consider every human being separately and cut out of your life the habit of group judging. No one nationality, class or religion holds a monopoly on right or wrong ways. Each of these groups has good and bad members just as your group is made up of people who are not like you in many ways. If there is a certain group of people whom you consider cut-outs in your way of life, get to know a few of them. Ask questions and answer any they might put to you. Discuss your differences and accept them as differences and not wrongs. In that way you may destroy a prejudice in the person to whom you are speaking as well as in yourself.

Another way to develop a strong feeling of tolerance within yourself is to analyze the reasons for your prejudice. Ask yourself when you first began to feel your dislike, what you are doing and what others are doing to further this feeling. You will be surprised to find that actual experience plays a minor role. Most of your feelings have come from stories told about the group; from the accepted views of parents or friends; or from propaganda printed or passed on by persons who make their living tearing at the lives of innocent people. Count how many people you really know in your dislike group, and how many of them you believe to be wrong. When you have done that, compare the individuals in your dislike group with those in your own crowd. You may find that some of your friends have many of the faults you have been isolating as belonging particularly to the dislike group.

As an example, remember that you are a member of a minority group. Because of an accident of birth you were born a girl child. If it hasn't inconvenienced you yet it may when you enter the business world.

Face Problems

You will find that you get less pay for the same job a man does because you are woman. You'll find that there are less opportunities for advancement because you are thought of as an unpredictable problem. There will be smaller and less frequent raises for you, and although you may be the boss's right arm, you may not ever get to be boss.

So you see, becoming prejudiced against prejudice helps your minority group and yourself. In the old fable curiosity killed the cat. With your help, it may kill the prejudice that is standing in the way of your chances to become an intelligent, unbiased woman.

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