

Working As Catharsis

By Louis P. Solomon

It is the last day of the year. In my other lives I commercially work for different people, doing different jobs. I enjoy all of them. They each demand similar but different skills that I have mastered (or at least have learned to some degree of proficiency) and they all pay me in money and satisfaction. Due to the nature of the contracts, at the end of the year I have several days of vacation where I stay home and think, write, and do other things that are ostensibly part of a small vacation. As a very old friend of mine once put it so succinctly: "No pay, no work." Since there is no more money in the contracts for this year, I stay home and don't work on their business related problems.



These last few days have required some little organization. I did the usual things. I cleaned up and re-arranged my office. I finished a few little chores around the house, and after a day or so, finally sat down at my desk and realized that I had no required duties left to perform. I was rather surprised, and immediately decided to have a snack: cake and coffee. This is a bad sign for eventual retirement; if I eat every time I get a little bored, I will gain weight rapidly and without limit.

After musing for a few hours, working with my music CD collection, cleaning my office (again), I decided to return to the formulation and serious contemplation of my two new books (novels). I wrote a while, and then sat back with satisfaction in my chair. Finally, I began to think about the last few days and their implication.

Work is what makes us (or at least me) active. I realize that the preceding sentence is self evident: activity is work, or at least could be. But what is the significance of working? Do we work just because we need to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow, or muscles? I think not. I think that we work because it fulfills our inherent need for accomplishment in our own eyes. Consider the people you know who are most content with their lives. They start each day (or almost) with a series of things to do. At the end of the day they measure their contribution by the amount of progress they have made in reaching their goals.

I believe that the concept of a person who is indolent and self indulgent and happy is a myth. Look at the young people around you (and some of the older ones, too). Many of them say that all they want to do is listen to their Ipods, look at music videos, and hang out with their friends. But, have you noticed the ennui and idleness, lack of direction and even sense of despair? The happier ones seem to find some focus for themselves and work at it. I have personally met and spoken to many teenagers who have been introduced to the concept of service, and grow to like it. They develop a sense of responsibility and pride of accomplishment that only struggle provides.

Let me add that it is the struggle which is important; it is not the successful winning of the goal. Nor is it for money. As the old saying goes, money is a nice way to measure your progress, but it is not mandatory that you be paid in the coin of the realm to measure your success.

Of course money is a nice thing to have when you have to pay the rent. But, the accumulation of money is just one means of keeping score. There are many other ways to measure your success. The genuine gratitude of the people you help is tangible but not measurable in a quantitative way. You are the judge and no one else.

I had a friend who eventually retired for the third time. He and I were talking about what he would be doing with his available time. He looked at me with some surprise and told me that he had no time at all for ease. He was deeply involved in building doll houses for children. He works at that about 4-5 hours a day, building works of art in classic Greek, federal, and modern styles of architecture with furniture, pictures on the walls, etc. He gives them away to children who apparently play with them incessantly. He works, and

feels great satisfaction with his efforts.

As a man of advancing years, my physical abilities are not those that I enjoyed when I was younger. But, I exercise and force myself to remain physically active. In addition, I use my mental faculties as much as possible, and apply myself to projects that I either make up for myself or partner with others to accomplish goals to support individuals or organizations that are part of my community. It is my belief that this work keeps me looking forward to each day, and keeps me in close contact with my fellow human beings.

I will begin commercial work again in the New Year with my continuing efforts, but I will also continue to work on those issues that allow me to feel alive and vital. Work does it, and idleness does not.