

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

Tish Peterson, ADC

This article stemmed from an introduction to an activities inservice, where I presented a Resident Trivia Contest to the staff, with 50 residents' names and 50 interesting facts. The object being to match the right name with the fact. The object of the contest was to promote interaction with residents and families, to help staff view residents in a new light, and to help us as staff see the real value of our work.

Winner of the contest got the original crumpled dollar, framed.

The nursing home all-staff inservice was scheduled for the first Thursday of the month, and the topic to be covered was activities. As Activity Director, I'd been preparing for this address to the staff for over a month. I was armed and ready with facts, figures, and examples illustrating the multitude of therapeutic benefits nursing home residents receive from activity involvement. I had the monthly activity calendar showing the wide variety of social, spiritual, physical, cognitive, and emotionally-supportive programs. I had everything I needed. And I had a case of the jitters.

The truth is, I am not much of a public speaker. In fact, I am a much better interrupter. If someone else starts to speak, I can think of lots of things to interject, but left on my own with a microphone, I often draw a blank. And in front of my co-workers---a jury of my peers---I'm even worse.

As the clock ticked closer to the appointed hour, workers from all departments headed for the inservice. The topic had been posted for a week, and all who read it would have to know that they were going to be seeing and hearing ME. My heart beat in my throat as it occurred to me that all of those people were coming to see ME. More and more staff members entered the building and headed to the meeting...to see ME. People in street clothes were coming in (on their day off!)..to see ME. The room was getting crowded. There was hardly an empty seat left. Attendance was overwhelming, and the reason everyone was there was...ME.

I began to dig through my purse for a comb and some beauty cream. The reason everybody was there was to see ME, after all. I thought I may as well try to look my best.

At the bottom of my purse, I didn't find the comb or the cream, but I did come across a badly crumpled, faded, folded, half-torn dollar bill. Though it wasn't really what I had been looking for, I was happy to find it. That particular Thursday was payday, actually, and by the time payday rolls around, there are usually too few dollars left in my purse, even the folded, crumpled ones.

And then it struck me. The real reason the attendance at the inservice that day was so high wasn't ME at all. It was because it was payday. The real reason everyone was there was right in my hand.

As I looked at the dollar bill, I noticed it was in pretty rough shape. The ink had faded, the paper it was printed on had worn thin, one corner was missing, and it had a rip running almost completely through it. But still, in spite of the wear and tear and the haggard appearance, the bill in my hand was just as valuable to me as it had been on the day it was fresh from the mint.

As a matter of fact, if I had seen the dollar lying on the street, even in its crumpled, worn-out shape, I would surely have reached down to pick it up. I would have celebrated my good fortune in finding it, and even counted it as a lucky day that my footsteps had led me to cross that particular path.

I looked at the dollar, the almighty dollar, the "real reason" that everybody came to work, and was struck by the similarities between it and the nursing home residents.

Old, with the colors faded. Badly wrinkled. Frayed around the edges. A piece completely gone. One section nearly torn in two. Not necessarily pretty to look at or hold on to, until you could recognize it for what it was worth and see the value of what you had.

In the dollar I held, I saw the symbol of the real reason for working at the nursing home.

I've worked at lots of different jobs, and my job in the nursing home---like finding (the dollar in my purse---wasn't really what I was looking for in the first place. I get paid for doing my job, and I look forward to payday, but I also have the opportunity every day to collect and disburse a very different and more substantial kind of legal tender.

The value and the worth of my work is the value and the worth of the residents. For who they once were and for who they are now, I celebrate my good fortune and count it as a very lucky day when my footsteps let my path cross theirs.

In God we trust.

Currently, Tish is an Activity Director at Renville Health Center in Renville, MN. She has worked in the activity profession for over 18 years.