



Do we judge others from what we see on the outside? Are we afraid of reaching out to someone unless *they* make the first attempt? Do we believe that *others* have it all figured out and we don't?

Chances are that we do.

This past weekend I was in line at Starbucks for my latte. I spotted this petite, blond, fresh-looking woman ahead of me and recognized her from the gym. In my mind, someone who looked like her-manicured hands, shoes-matching bag and a stylish outfit-HAD to be a happy-go-lucky woman with a beautiful house, three kids, a Labrador and a doting husband who brought her flowers every week. Little did I know how mistaken I was.

As we proceeded to pay for our drinks, she turned her head and we began to chat. In no time she told me that she was a single mom with two young kids, a non-supportive ex, and that she was struggling to find work to pay the bills.

My heart skipped a beat. *How could I have been so wrong?* I asked myself in dismay.

I walked out with a twinge of excitement for the connection made, but also startled by the experience. I was reminded of what Nancy Mairs said, *"The outside never provides a good vantage point for life study."*

I thought of how I had made this heart-to-heart connection and how the gift of meeting her could have never come through had I stayed stuck in my head with my ideas about who she was and kept quiet.

I recently watched the movie *"Made in India,"* an account of how the women laborers of India have come under S.E.W.A (Self employed Women Association), an organization aimed at guaranteeing strong economic returns for the labor provided by the poorest class of women in India. SEWA was founded in 1972 when 89% of the labor class was unorganized and subject to the arbitrary prices set by the buyer. By 1998, when the movie

### *Made in India*

was released, 92% of these women had come together under the SEWA umbrella and created policies to help them earn a just amount of money, formed banks to lend loans and earn interest, instituted insurance policies against natural disasters and illnesses, and developed training programs for the newcomers and for their leaders.

I was astounded at the ingeniousness and the strength portrayed by these women and wondered how we could recreate that kind of unity in our white-bread culture in which &quot;things&quot; keep us separate and give us the illusion that we are different from one another. These women had NOTHING in terms of material possessions but they were very happy. They had each other, a sense of belonging, and the ability to achieve something special together.

In our society we tend to judge others by the outer symbols presented to us-a big house, an expensive car, an important job-and forget that behind these things there is the same &quot;humanness&quot; that resides in each and everyone of us.

As we buy into the myth that owning material goods and status further defines us as successful individuals (successful by whose definition as yet to be determined) we become even more separated from one another by virtue of our &quot;objects' possession&quot; and miss connecting at a deeper level to other human beings. Fear, instead of acceptance and love, begin to drive our actions.

We are brilliant, caring women leading fragmented and isolated lives (compounded by the extended families residing far away). We need to support one another more than ever, so why NOT take a chance and reach out when we have an opportunity? Why not erase from our minds our stereotypical chitchats and trust in our heart that our gesture(s) will be welcome and may even prevent someone from losing hope?

Not long ago I heard of a wealthy woman who committed suicide because, as the story goes, she felt she no longer had a role in her life. With three grown up children and a busy husband, she felt she was not useful anymore, thus she killed herself. For the longest time I kept thinking that, if this woman had made a connection with other women in the same predicament-as many of us find ourselves to be as our children grow up and leave-that perhaps this tragedy could have been averted.

I host this blog posting to provide a forum where women can come together and share their stories. Please feel free to comment on this topic. Your reply is very much appreciated and it will be kept confidential.

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