

MY World

written by Holly

May 12, 2006

By Holly Lisle

Have you noticed how popular the word “my” is lately? It first hit a nerve for me when I noticed that Florida license plates had changed from the simple “Florida” at the top to “MyFlorida.com.” Individuals are laying claim to the whole state? Really? How disgusting.

Then there was the “My Life, My Card” campaign where Robert DeNiro says something that always sounds to me like “My East Side. My West Side. My privates hide.” The ad aims at emotional tear-jerk territory, but the upshot is that you’re expected to want to have your very own life-affirming credit card with which to obtain life-affirming stuff.

How about the current “My Stanley Cup” campaign. (It’s about hockey, for those of you who are not fans.) In voice-over, Dennis Leary does this grim-voiced schtick about how he, representing individual stars from various teams in contention for the cup, fought hard to get where he is, and if someone knocks him down, that someone will “face the wrath of hell” because it is, by God, “MY Stanley cup.” There is no individual player who has ever won the Stanley cup, because hockey is a sport that requires—demands—teamwork to get through the grueling semifinals and finals. If the whole team does not contribute constantly and at a high level, that team falls by the wayside to a team that does.

MYspace.com. Another goodie. It’s a site that just begs for the Monty Python tag line “We’re ALL individuals!” ... “Well, I’m not.”

Oh. And not quite a “MY” campaign, but still in the same vein. The “Be an Army of One” campaign. I heard that, and told Matt,

“Old Army-of-One there is going to get his ass kicked by an army of two. And God help him with an army of ten thousand.”

There are more of these MY ads and MY campaigns and MY sites. There are so very many more, and as far as I can tell, every single one of them is designed to appeal to the selfish, greedy, stupid, shortsighted, my-way-or-no-way worst side of human nature. What’s worse, if this approach was not effective, all of these things would go away. Instead, they’re proliferating like syphilis.

There are many aspects of life today that give me great hope for the future, but these ads and campaigns and the spirit they represent are not among them. The finest things humanity has done, it has done not for itself, but for each other. Individual effort is critical, from the military to business to community service to the arts. To matter as human beings, we have to sacrifice our time, our effort, our imagination, and sometimes even our lives to the pursuit of our goals and dreams. But if we do these sacrifices only for our own benefit, we are worthless.

Individual effort that matters is not done for the benefit of the individual, but for his fellow human beings. The soldier who does not stand with his brothers in arms but fights only for himself; the doctor who treats patients not because he cares about their lives and deaths but about his own income; the writer who writes books not to offer what he has found in life that is worth doing and worth knowing, but because he can get rich—all of these are piss-poor examples of humanity.

What we have we cannot keep—everything you own you will lose, whether you’re the richest soul on the planet or the poorest. Everyone you love, you will lose. Look at the people who mean everything to you and realize that someday every one of them will be gone, or you will. Everything you cherish, you will lose. You’re born with nothing, you’ll die with nothing, and in space between those two points, you can either leave a

legacy to make the lives of your fellow human being better, or you can leave... nothing. The pursuit of "MY stuff, MY space, MY card, MY life, MY prize"—this is the pursuit of nothing. It is living a life without meaning or worth.

I pursued stuff for a while. Wanted the big house and the great car and the hot body. I was married to a man with whom that future was pretty much assured. He was a greedy, grasping, soulless shit, though, and when it came down to what mattered, I walked away from him and everything I owned to get rid of him. It was worth losing the beach house, the big house in town, the country club membership, the prestige, and all the rest of the ephemera. It was worth living in a little apartment furnished with cardboard boxes, and starting over clean. Walking away from him and all the stuff I thought I needed, I found myself again. I remembered what mattered. Not me. Not what I had. But the people who counted on me.

You want the secret of happiness? It's been out there forever, and it works like a charm, but people don't believe it because it's so easy.

Here it is. Forget about making yourself happy. Help others. Find a few causes that you can devote yourself to, and involve yourself in them with everything you have. Live your life not for MY, but for THEIR.

My causes are few. I live to take care of my family. I live to reach out to to other writers. I live to tell stories that matter and that offer entertainment, and perhaps hope, to the people who read them.

That's it. That's my whole life. That's MY world. I no longer desire weath. It would be nice if it happened, but it isn't something I'm going to climb over anyone else to get to. My needs are simple. I want to be able to provide for my family, but I don't expect to give them everything. Food, shelter, and direction. Ambition. A moral compass—a set of values that can

carry them through life. They're on their own for the rest.

I no longer desire fame. Look at the people who are truly famous. They are in almost every case living horrible, sad lives. I've discovered that I want to help other people reach their dreams. I've reached mine and I'm living them, and happiness has found me without riches or fame—I'd like to be able to pass what I've learned on.

The stories? I do my best to tell exciting, entertaining stories, and to put what I've learned by the kicks and thumps and occasional bat-beatings that life has dealt me into the tales, and I hope that what I've learned will prove useful to others.

My missions, such as they are, are small. But if my life doesn't matter to the whole world, that's fine. It matters to more people than just me. My world may not be the whole world, but some of it—the part of it that matters—will survive me through the lives of others. The kids, friends, a few readers and writers. I can't take anything with me when I die, but I'll be satisfied to know I left something behind.

How about you?

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