



SIEBENQUELL

The Card



SOURCE: ANNIE SPRATT © UNSPLASH

Many years ago, the theological college at which I worked hired a new secretary and receptionist. The fine young woman who began her work was industrious, polite, friendly and very helpful to students, staff and visitors. You could always count on a cheery »good morning« and a warm smile.

Several months after she started working for us, there was a notable change in her mood. She was as professional, helpful and polite as always, but she seemed wrapped in melancholy. Every morning when I went to retrieve my mail, she would greet me, but the cheeriness of her voice had given way to a heavy, leaden sadness. She was going through a very rough time in her personal life, and while it never affected her work, it was obvious for all to see.

The staff and the students were very concerned about her. They took the time to pop in and urged her to cheer up. The remark I heard most often was the encouragement to »smile!«. The young woman would force her face into a thin, somewhat awkward smile, but it never reached her eyes.

One Friday morning, I stopped in the reception to pick up my mail and saw the sad and weary look on her face. As I was about to ask her how things were going, a colleague came in. He took one look at our receptionist's sad face and said to her, »Come on, just smile a little. It will make you feel better.«

I left without comment, but that encounter troubled me deeply. For the rest of the morning, my thoughts kept returning to that sad face trying to force itself into a rigid smile. During the lunch break, I left the college and walked to a florist in the nearby town. I bought a bouquet of flowers and returned to the reception. There I handed the flowers to our receptionist and immediately her face was wreathed in a warm and gracious smile. She got up, hugged me and thanked me repeatedly.

Late that afternoon, her father appeared in the doorway of my office. He had come to pick up his daughter from work, and she had told him about the flowers. He, in turn, had come to thank me. In his hand, he held the small card I had written for his daughter. He looked at me and said, »Thank you, Father, for doing this for my daughter. I am so worried about her and I loved seeing her smile again. Then she told me about the flowers and handed me the card you wrote. I just had to come up and thank you after that. And I asked her, if I could take the card as a reminder to myself.« He paused, tapping his index finger against the card. »What you wrote is so true, Father. Where did you learn this lesson?« I grinned up at him and said: »The stories of God taught me that.«

I tell you this story, because this man died recently. His daughter sent me the obituary and a short letter. In the letter she wrote me: »After dad died, we were cleaning up his place and I was going through his wallet. And I found the card you wrote me 27 years ago tucked into it. He kept it with him all these years. I just wanted you to know.«

On that card I simply wrote: »It is one thing to ask a person to smile. It is altogether another thing to give them a reason to smile.«

Erik Riechers SAC

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