



DEVONHARRIS

KEEP ON PUSHING



An Attitude of Gratitude Devon Harris

It was a typical Christmas day in Jamaica back in those days. The loud intermittent bursts of firecrackers accompanied by the joyous shouts of "CHRIS'MUS" disturbed the otherwise serene evening. "Chris'mus is in the air!" "Well mek we grab it and tek it back to da groun' so we all can enjoy it" came the sly remark as laughter once again filled the skies and tall glasses filled with ice and sorrel heavily laced with white rum clink together to celebrate the joyous season.

Dominoes were banging everywhere. "Yu double six dead bwai. Get up from roun' da table. Next patient same treatment." A new pair sits at the table in an attempt to dethrone the domino champions while the losers fix themselves another round of white rum and milk. Teenage boys sip their beers slowly, willing it to last as long as the night. The last presents had long been opened and all the other formalities dispensed with.

The material of the day was calico, and women were draping themselves in their newly made calico dress. The men, the epitome of GQ, were stylishly clad in their black suits with a white or red handkerchief protruding from their left breast pocket. The black felt hat tilted to one side of the head and the cane or black umbrella swinging from the right hand as they walked gaily down the street, their patent leather shoes reflecting the evening sun. They were headed to stage shows, dance halls, downtown to the Ward theatre to watch the pantomime, or to Cross Roads to tek in a picture show. Children still dressed in their Sunday best, lips and tongues reddened by the strawberry syrup from snow cones they bought at the fair earlier that day, were blowing fifis and horns; and the lucky ones showing off their newest toys or bragging about the nice shoes or pretty dress they got for Christmas. All were dancing and prancing around imitating the John Canoe dancers they had been watching.

My mother had just finished her dinner. It was her favorite dish – a large helping of rice and beans, fricassee chicken, fried plantain with lettuce and tomatoes and a tall glass of sour sop juice. She was getting ready for a stage show when she felt some feign cramps in her stomach. The baby wasn't ready to come, she thought to herself. Plus, she was looking forward to the stage show and nothing was going to keep her away. She was about to find out, however, that this time around there was something different about these feign cramps that had been teasing her for a week. Before long the cramps became more forceful and frequent. An alarm was raised, neighbors summoned. Miss Hall, Miss Madlyn, Miss Vie, and Auntie Emily, all older more experienced women, rushed to her aid. A cab was hailed and shortly thereafter I was delivered at the Victoria Jubilee Hospital. The celebrations could no longer continue without me.

That was forty years ago this Christmas. Oftentimes when people would say, "Oh, you're a Christmas Baby" I would jokingly reply "Yes, all my life I've been deprived. I only get one present every year." That's one way to look at my birth. I could also take the point of view that I was the best Christmas present my mother ever got or that life was the best Christmas present I ever got. The truth is that there are far worse things that could have happened to me than being born on Christmas day.

The lesson here for all of us is that throughout our lives many unwelcome, unfavorable things will happen to us. We will face challenges and circumstances that are very difficult. But we need to be truly thankful. Now I am not suggesting that we walk around grinning from ear to ear like a Cheshire Cat, happy that we have problems. That would make no sense at all. But no matter what problems we face, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of good things that are happening or have happened in our lives and it would be foolhardy to allow this one thing, as difficult as it may be, to suck the joy from the rest of our life.

Focus on what you want

Yes, I know that I am beginning to sound like a broken record, but it's true. Since we tend to move in the direction of our dominant thoughts, lo and behold, they create more of the very things they want to get rid of. Stop focusing so much on the 10% of your life that isn't working. Work on resolving the issues but never lose sight of the 90% that IS working.

What good can come of this?

Growing up in Jamaica I always heard the adage "The donkey says the world is level." If I could translate it a second time in plain old English you'd have "life isn't fair." From my experience life has never been, nor will it ever be, fair. Somebody else will always have a nicer house, better clothes, have more fulfilled relationships, take better vacations...the list goes on. I didn't think it was fair when from time to time I had to attend elementary school barefooted. It wasn't fair that in high school I started my athletic career barefooted. But I am certainly thankful that I had an opportunity to get a good education and those bare feet, bow legged and all, had the opportunity to run on ice at the Olympic Games. Someone once said that every adversity has the seed of an equivalent or greater benefit. For me, life's early uneven handedness made me more focused and determined to succeed.

Adopt a positive attitude

As Richard Paul Evans said "It is in the darkest night that the brightest stars are seen." Adopt a positive attitude and you will see your setbacks as opportunities, your stumbling blocks as stepping stones, and your challenges as wings with which to soar. Over Thanksgiving my family and I went to Jamaica for a vacation. With so many people trying to escape the North American cold to enjoy the languid waves and the white sands of Negril we had a few challenges booking our hotel rooms. I had legitimate reasons to gripe and moan, but I know that would have made everybody miserable, so I chose to adopt a positive attitude and we ended up having a wonderful time.

An attitude of gratitude doesn't suggest that we ignore reality and our problems, but rather that we take charge of our emotions, subdue our frustrations, resolve the issues and avoid

the vicious circle of whining and complaining. So, for the next forty years, whenever someone says "Oh you're a Christmas Baby" I'll say "Yes, and that first Christmas, I got the best present of all...life."

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