

Alberta Doctors' Digest

What I am Is What You Are

If I am abnormal,
are you normal?

If I am special,
are you ordinary?

If I am different,
are you all the same?

If I am shamed,
do you feel proud?

If I am alienated,
do you feel included?

If I seem inferior,
do you feel superior?

Is pity kindness?

Where I am tolerated, you are often accepted.

Where it is my privilege, it is often your right.

So maybe...

when I am told to conform,

something needs to change;

when I have abilities,

I can support your disabilities;

when I try to be like you,

it doesn't make us stronger.

Maybe the things I have to give, you could receive.

Maybe kindness is ordinary, not heroic.

Maybe we are not opposites...

You and I both embody a part and a love.

You and I each have a story.

Our stories contain...

normal and abnormal,

special and ordinary,

difference and similarity.

With feelings of ...

shame and pride,

alienation and inclusion,

inferiority and superiority.

And times of ...

conformity and change,

ability and disability,

giving and receiving.

Our stories have moments of ...

tolerance and acceptance,

pity and kindness,

privilege and right.

Our stories are all ordinary.

Our stories are all heroic.

If we come together,

we can share our stories.

We can use words that are softened and gracious.

We can be open and present.

Together we can be new kinds of normal.

And you will discover that

what I am is what you are.

The End

Glossary

Ability: Having a skill to do something

Abnormal: Unusual in a way that causes problems

Accept: To allow one to belong

Alienate: To make someone feel that they are different and not part of a group

Change: To be or do differently

Conform: To do what most other people do

Different: Not the same as others

Disability: An attribute (physical, cognitive, mental, sensory) of a person, that due to barriers created by various interactions, restricts full participation*

Embody: To be a symbol or example of something

Give: To provide someone with something wanted or needed

Gracious: To behave with respect and kindness

Hero: Courageous or self-sacrificing behaviour

Include: To make someone a part of something

Inferior: Attitude that one has less importance or value

Kind: Wanting to do good things and to bring happiness to others

Normal: Usual or ordinary

Open: Being honest and willing to listen and consider another point of view

Ordinary: Having no special or distinctive features

Pity: Sadness caused by the suffering and misfortunes of others

Present: Paying attention in the moment with another person**

Privilege: A benefit enjoyed by certain people but not others

Proud: Very happy and pleased because of something you have done

Receive: To be given and accept something

Right: Something a person should be allowed to have or do and not be taken away

Same: Exactly like someone else

Shame: To make someone feel unworthy of honour and respect

Soften: To become less harsh or extreme

Special: Better or greater than the usual person

Story: A description of important events in someone's life

Superior: Attitude that one is better or more important than other people

Tolerate: To allow one to exist

Definitions adapted from Miriam-Webster's Learner's, Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries.

* Adapted from ongoing research

** Adapted from mindfulness literature

Note from Dr. Klassen:

"I wrote it in response to tensions I have felt as I raise my children with disabilities. It invites reflection about the polarized positions we take in relation to others, specifically those with disabilities. While it offers no clear answers, "What I Am Is What You Are" suggests that cultural strength is found in both the fertility of difference and the appreciation of similarities; that it is our stories, when shared with love and openness, that have the power to connect us."

Banner image credit: Gisela Merkuur, Pixabay.com

A banner with a dark blue background and a yellow curved bottom edge. On the left, a large, light blue stylized figure of a person with arms outstretched. In the center, the text "We are here with you and for you." is written in yellow and white. On the right, the text "Call AMA's Physician and Family Support Program" is in white, followed by the phone number "1.877.767.4637" in yellow and "24 hours a day" in white. At the bottom right, there is a white logo of a stylized tree with three human figures and the letters "pfsp" in blue.

Call us 24/7