

Road to acceptance

Hope for future maintained in company of shadows



KASEY KERBER is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

I found something in high school once.

To most people, it was a few tattered pieces of paper destined for a gust of wind or a wastepaper basket.

But to me it was the epitome of what was, what is, and what continues to be, my life.

It's a single sentence, scratched onto a piece of notebook paper. It says, simply: "You will find a way."

I don't know who wrote it or even where I found it. Yet I've held onto that scrap of paper for years, never willing to let go of the phrase until its meaning became clear.

As time went by, I left my home state of Florida to come to Nebraska, leaving everything I knew for what I could never expect. Still the phrase followed me, baiting me with its words.

When I left Florida, I left a shadow, a shadow of someone else. I didn't like what I had become in the 18 years of life — a guy who never had the friends, the grades or the breaks. My only date was for the prom, and my only reputation was one of silence.

Yet, I was the guy everyone — you — came to talk to. The guy who listened to your problems no matter how bad they seemed. I was reserved and, therefore, I must have been a good listener. It seemed that a nod or smile from me was all you needed to feel better.

Then I came to Nebraska, hoping for a different life. One in which my voice would

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finally become my guide. And for a while, it was. I became a columnist as a freshman, and began a steady relationship that same year.

But as a friend once told me, “disaster strikes quickly.” After nearly two years, I lost the regular columnist slot, and my girlfriend left me. Once again I found the shadow — if not that, the shadow found me.

The questions returned: “What have you become? And what has it accomplished?”

I've answered those questions, slowly.

I changed only slightly from high school, never compromising my silence entirely. I became more vocal, but I never lost sight of the ability to listen when it really mattered.

I remained what most people call the stereotypical “nice guy.” I'm still a little quiet, still a tad bit intellectual, still a hard worker, and still creative enough to be misunderstood.

And I held onto these attributes without a second thought, even as I watched my columnist position and my 18-month relationship end.

As a writer, I pushed the limits of hard work — tackling big issues no one expected me to complete. Whether it was sexuality, or banning cigarette sales in the union, it didn't matter to me. I soon learned that people didn't want the big issues, the intellectual spin or the controversy. They wanted me to crack jokes again. And when I didn't — they lost faith in me.

And in my relationship, I tried too hard to be creative and devoted. There were dozens of poems, thousands of sweet words

and promises about the future. I did everything girls want a guy to do — everything the other guys never seemed to do. Yet in the end I was there with my shadow, finding little comfort when my ex said I did nothing wrong.

I tried too hard, I told myself. I was too nice, and I just tried too hard.

But was it possible to try too hard? Or to be too nice?

These are the questions I must ask you, the reader, for I am not alone. There are others like me trying their hardest, yet living in the shadows of their own defeat. There are others who are not given the time of day for the way they look, the place in which they live, or the people they know.

They are nice guys and girls who haven't been given a chance. They're often like me, blaming themselves when life hands them salt, all the while shrugging off sugar like it is merely a few grains falling through a temporary hourglass of happiness.

Others should give them the chance — whether it be the chance to love, participate or just share.

I'm tired of living in a shadow. I've never done anything wrong to be in it.

Yet, like the scrap of paper tacked to my wall, I know I'll “find the way.”

Until then I hold onto my personality, intellect and creativity. One day, there will be a girl who will love me and the way I use my talents to show her I love her. One day my writing will carry me beyond others' doubts.

One day will surely come.

... And then I shall find my way.

Heartfelt prayers

Principal, mentor once gave, now receives love



GREGG MADSEN is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

I've known him for 15 of my 22 years of life, and to his face, I've never called Randy Pierce by his first name.

In my mind, he's been “Mr. Pierce” since I first met him. He was my high school principal — as well as my track and basketball coach. Through each athletic season and each school year, I gained more respect for Mr. Pierce. He was strict, always watching for a student who might be screwing around, or as he called it, “dummying up.” He was kind, never failing to praise a student for a good grade or any other accomplishment. Mr. Pierce demanded the best from every student in his school and every athlete he coached.

But my relationship with Mr. Pierce goes deeper than school and sports. One of my best friends, Ryan, is his son, so Mr. Pierce and I go way back — all the way back to sleepovers in sixth grade and little league baseball when I was 7.

In high school, Ryan and I went through four years of track with his dad — Mr. Pierce — constantly pushing and prodding us to run, jump and practice our way to the state track meet. The coming of each spring meant fresh air, birds singing, new leaves

on the trees ... and an unmistakable desire to physically harm Mr. Pierce for his grueling afternoon workouts. He was as strict a coach as he was a principal, but he loved his athletes just as he loved his students.

All those years, he was Mr. Pierce to me. When I graduated from high school, I suppose I received an unwritten permission slip to call him by his first name, but for some reason it just didn't seem right. Maybe I don't want to let go of high school. Maybe I just have too much respect for him.

Now, four short years after he last told me to pick up the pace in an 800 meter run, Mr. Pierce is in his house on the west end of Maxwell, fighting a life-threatening brain tumor in his forehead. A definite prognosis cannot be made until doctors determine the effectiveness of a new drug treatment program, but it's safe to say Mr. Pierce needs a miracle.

Several questions come into my mind: What can I do? How can I help? What should my response be to this heartbreaking situation?

My concerns seem trivial when I consider what Ryan and his brother, T.J., are going through as they watch their father battle the effects of the tumor and the medication trying to eliminate it. The walls of their lives are crumbling around them, their only hope lying in the power of the doctors' new treatment program.

I'll venture to say we've all been in similar situations. We've all had a situation in our lives that seems unsolvable, unbearable or impossible. In these times that are so hard to explain and that seem so unfair, what can we do? What response can we as human beings have when things are so dark we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel?

Our list of possible responses is as long

as the list of possible causes of distress. We try therapy, denial, escapism and so many other ways to ease life-altering situations. What can I do about Mr. Pierce? How should I react?

I'm praying.

That's right. I'm praying. Scoff all you like, but that is my charted course of action. I'm not going to go into a theological dissertation of prayer or try to force any viewpoints on you. I'm just passing on insight on how to deal with life when every ounce of hope is gone, and for that matter, in every situation.

All through Mr. Pierce's battle with this tumor, I've been praying for him. I've been praying for Ryan and for T.J. I know that my prayers are being — and will be — heard. That doesn't necessarily mean the answer will be the one I'm looking for, but I know I have laid all my concerns at the throne of one mightier than any other force — definitely stronger than any tumor — in this world.

All through my life, Mr. Pierce taught me to fight through the most adverse circumstances. All through my life, my respect for Mr. Pierce has overshadowed my love for him. I've never been able to call him by his first name because I thought it would show a lack of respect.

By praying for him, I feel like I've grown closer to Mr. Pierce than I ever was in high school. I have realized through prayer that my respect for Mr. Pierce is still very much alive. But now, it's clear to me that the respect that drove me to call him Mr. Pierce for all these years has been deeply rooted in another feeling: love.

Randy, I love you and I respect you. Don't you dare lose hope. I'm praying for you.

Racial myths

Stats show facts



MIKE DONLEY is a junior philosophy major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

We've all seen about a million movies featuring African American actors seemingly preaching, questioning, “Why is the white man targeting the young black male, trying to keep us down?”

A lot of these angry remarks seemed to be in reference to drug enforcement activities. So, secure with the knowledge that white America could not be committing these heinous crimes, I packed a pen and some paper, jumped on my motorcycle and headed down to the university library for a little research.

Surprise, surprise! Guess what I found.

Contrary to popular opinion, I found that people who argue current drug enforcement activities result in racial discrimination have a strong point.

Most whites would not be surprised to hear that blacks are more likely to use drugs than whites. But in reality, the opposite is true. The percentage of white people who use drugs is higher than the corresponding statistic for blacks.

Now ask yourself: Why is it that blacks are four times as likely to be arrested for a drug offense? Keep in mind that in predominantly white areas (such as the Midwest) the ratio doubles to 8-to-1. How could this be?

A large measure of this inequality can be seen in the case of crack cocaine. More white people than minorities use crack; however, over 95 percent of defendants in federal court cases involving crack cocaine are not white. This doesn't seem logical, does it?

The charges themselves are not the only problem. Picture yourself in front of a federal judge on a cocaine charge. Would you rather have been caught with \$200 worth of powdered cocaine or \$30 worth of crack? Unless you like the thought of a federal prison in your near future, you would much prefer the charge for powdered cocaine.

A cheap drug (or so-called ghetto drug) like crack carries with it a penalty that is, on average, 10 times harsher than a more expensive version of the exact same drug, powdered cocaine.

We may say that this is not necessarily racial discrimination. Though minorities are more likely to be poor, the charge would be the same for a white person as it would be for a minority.

Maybe white America is not discriminating after all. Unfortunately, one more statistic is worthy of mention. Picture yourself, once again, in front of that federal judge. If you are white, you are more likely to be sent to mandatory rehabilitation. If you are a minority, jail is more likely.

It seems if we look at the evidence impartially, there is a problem with racial discrimination in drug enforcement activities. Part of the blame must fall on law enforcement. The stereotypes our society holds regarding African Americans and other minorities as criminals cannot work toward a minority's advantage when he or she comes in contact with a law enforcement officer.

Police, on average, are not well trained in psychology and social theory (no offense to our superb criminal justice department), so average officers probably would not even notice when their personal prejudices were effecting their judgment. The same goes for judges, social workers, and the average citizen.

So, what can be done? Of course we all know we can try our hardest to treat each new person we meet equally, that's common sense. Law enforcement can have “sensitivity training,” which I'm sure they would enjoy.

But, in the end, the minority community needs a change of reputation. Gangster rap and bad movies called “booty call” do not help. A college education and a family that sticks together do.