

## BETWEEN THE LINES/Cynthia Rush

# Compassion, understanding can help conquer fear

I know the fear that sneaks down my spine like polio until suddenly my legs belong to somebody else and I don't know where they're going to carry me.

Last week, I investigated somebody else's case for fear and got to thinking about some of my own.

Two-hundred fifty employees of Top Value Company will be losing their jobs due to the merger with Sprerry Hutchinson Inc.

**FIRST, THEY** found out they were going to lose their jobs.

Next, they were questioned by reporter after reporter from the various local news sources.

Nobody wanted to talk to me. This was my very first story in my new full-time position at Times Publications and I was so afraid I'd make a poor impression with this, my first

assignment.

**AS I APPROACHED** the desk of a reluctant interviewee, I heard someone tell her, "You don't have to be afraid."

"Are you scared?" I nearly wailed, as if she were a long lost sister. "That's good because I'm scared, too. I'm a new reporter."

I'm certain she believed I was merely being polite. Perhaps she thought I'd announced that I was a news reporter. She didn't appear to recognize my statement as a confession, that in truth, I am a coward.

Her words, soft and soothing as she shared with me her fears, put my own fears to rest.

**I USED TO BE** afraid of wasps. If ever a wasp buzzed within sight of where I happened to be, I went and

found somebody to kill it for me.

I hid.

On rare occasions when I could not locate a wasp executioner, I killed the things myself with long range wasp spray that kills 'em dead from 20 feet away. I think my hope was to rid the world of the entire wasp population, exterminating them all myself, almost single handedly if one does not tally up my various henchmen.

**ONE DAY** as I stood alone in my kitchen, I heard the familiar buzz flip buzz of a wasp bouncing off of hard surfaces. I knew one was somewhere in the room.

I'd had some kind of wasp dream the night before, which was not unusual for me except that, in this dream, the wasp wasn't trying to dive bomb me, we were simply in the same place at the same time, each one

mind her (and his) own business.

Awake in my kitchen, I saw this black wasp hurling itself against my white kitchen walls. It couldn't hide.

**QUICKLY** I reached for an empty jar, then carefully clapped the jar over the insect and slipped a heavy envelope over the opening.

Without harming it, I'd captured the wasp.

All at once I knew how frightening it would be to find yourself trapped in somebody else's environment with no escape.

I used my elbow to twist open the doorknob so I could set the wasp loose outdoors. As soon as I set down the jar, it flew away.

I suddenly knew that none of those wasps I'd mutilated over the years had had any intention of bothering me. All they wanted to do was get back to

their own business.

**WHAT MAKES** fear sometimes conquer me — while other times I seduce it, cleverly persuading the turmoil pressing up against the sides of my rib cage to surrender?

I haven't completely figured out that part; but, I think it has something to do with compassion. If you can help someone else with their fear, you have less to fear from them.

Perhaps my extreme cowardliness makes my life harder for me than someone else's life might be for them, like one of those athletes who trains for an event by wearing weights on her (or his) feet.

But, if that's true, I am probably becoming even more adept than other people at locating my courage.

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