

Traveling Companion: Behind closed doors

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On Saturday morning, just after 6 a.m., I drove into the office. It was dark, except for the odd street light that shed some light on the street. There was no noise, not even the noise of a train chugging along in the distance as it warned me of its impending arrival. Then, I noticed her.

She was sitting on the roadside beside an overturned garbage can. Facing onto the street, I could see her round-faced gaze into the darkened sky. Wearing a light blue nightgown and a white cardigan to protect her from the morning chill, she sat in a lotus position. Behind her, the home was dark.

During the rest of my drive, I wondered about this unusual sight on the roadside. My mind tried to rationalize possible scenarios. Her face, with its blank stare into the night sky, continued to haunt me.

Instantly, my mind focused on another experience some days earlier. I was riding my bike down the walking/bike trail in Waveland at 4:30 a.m.. The moon was full. The sound of waves from the Gulf lapping against the sand provided its own rhythm. There was no traffic to distract me. Then, it happened. I heard voices in the distance being carried toward me in the night air. They were coming from a FEMA trailer area just off the beach. I could pick up snippets of conversation. Then a car door banged as if in defiance. Finally, a woman's voice pierced my ears as I heard her say, "I'm going back to bed."

I wondered why the two incidents caught my attention now. Were they related in some strange way? Maybe so! In the latter case, an obvious argument had ensued between two people, living in a FEMA trailer, possibly a husband and a wife. In the former case, I asked myself why a woman would be sitting on the side of the road just after 6 a.m. on a Saturday morning. Obviously, she was not out star gazing as there were no stars in the night sky. I also noted that people usually like to sleep in later on Saturday mornings seeing that, in most cases, it is not regarded as part of the regular work week. Sadly, I concluded that something must have happened behind the doors of the home behind her to drive her onto the street.

I began to realize that so much of life is veiled from us. Sometimes, it is cloaked in privacy. Other times, it is driven by the old saying, "Never wash your dirty linens in public." Still other times, it is settled by the reminder that, "we will settle this when we get home."

So often, we are good at projecting an "all is well" appearance, when, deep inside, we are falling apart. The English adopt a "stiff upper lip." We adopt a façade to cover our pain, hurt, fear, and loneliness.

On the surface, people may ask us, "How are you doing?" Usually, we answer "fine," even though we may be falling apart on the insides. So often, our question, "How are you doing," is merely a conversation starter. Many times, we are not willing nor have the time to invest in listening to the real truthful answer.

Can anyone of us imagine a conversation like this: "How are you doing? "Well, I just got back from the doctor. I have cancer. It is in the final stages. I have got six weeks to live," responds the other person. "That's great. Glad to know everything is going well with you."

Maybe, one of the main reasons we hide our pain is, from experience, we realize people are not willing to invest the time to really listen to how we are doing. Consequently, most of people's pain is dealt with behind closed countenances and closed doors.