

Front Porch Attitude



Lessons Learned From A Lifetime!

By Chris W. Sutton

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The years go by so fast, don't they? If you are over 40 years old, you will know what I mean when I say that! As you get older, time seems to just race by and the days come and go so fast that you can barely keep up with them.

If you are under 40 years old, you may think I'm crazy. Isn't it funny how, when you are under 20 years old, you want time to hurry up. You can't wait to get out of high school. You can't wait to get out of college. You can't wait to get married. Then, once you get older, you just wish time would slow down!

It doesn't matter how old we are; somehow, we are just never satisfied. That is what this eBook is about! Learning to be satisfied. Learning to be happy no matter what your age or circumstances. Learning to take life one day at a time. Learning to live life like it was meant to be lived!

Life is meant to be so much more than we allow it to be. I hope you will enjoy these stories and I hope you will apply the principles. I hope you will make changes in your life for the better. I hope you will learn to appreciate every single second you are here on this earth. I hope to will learn to have *Front Porch Attitude!*

Chris W. Sutton

What is Front Porch Attitude?

Well, it's not an easy thing to explain, but I'll see if I can try to explain it by telling you a story.

Before my wife and I moved from Texas to Oregon, we owned a beautiful house that was built in the early 1900s. As was common in those early days, our house had a large L-shaped front porch. The sides of this porch came up about 3 feet and it had screening up to the roof. It had beautiful banisters and it was totally enclosed.

During the evening, my wife would work at the local Waldenbooks until 10 p.m., and I would stay at home with our four year old daughter, Jessica. Most nights, Jessica and I would sit out on that front porch in my large rocking chair waiting for her mom to come home as I rocked her to sleep. The chirping of the crickets and the croaking of the frogs was usually relaxing enough to help Jessica fall asleep before Mom ever got home.

However, on quite a few occasions, we would get to experience a good old Texas thunderstorm as we rocked away the hours till mom came home. Now, if you have ever experienced a Texas thunderstorm, you'll know what I'm talking about when I say they WERE an experience. Lots of thunder! Lots of lightning! Lots of rain! Lots of wind! Basically, not something you would normally sleep through.

At first, Jessica didn't really like those thunderstorms! I imagine they can be pretty frightening for a little four year old girl; however, she would sit on dad's lap and snuggle deeper into her blanket. She eventually got used to those thunderstorms. In fact, she even started to like them. To this day, she loves thunder and lightning; although, we don't get a lot of that here in Oregon. Today, Jessica is 23 years old and she has very fond memories of those times that we sat in that rocking chair on that front porch.

So what is front porch attitude? It's calm in the midst of a storm! It's knowing that no matter what your circumstances, life is good! It's not being afraid! It's seeing things with a positive mental attitude! Front porch attitude is, basically, living life as it was meant to be lived!

The Devil Made Me Do It!

Chris W. Sutton

Are you old enough to remember Flip Wilson? He was a comedian back in the 1960s and he was a regular on the Laugh-in variety show. He also had his own television for a little while. One of his characters was someone who kept doing things they shouldn't and they always justified it by saying, "The devil made me do it!" That line was always good for a laugh on the Flip Wilson Comedy Hour but it's not so funny in real life.

Choices! We make hundreds of them every, single day! Why, we even make a lot of them automatically, without even thinking about it. THAT is our problem!

Stop and think about this for a minute... ***we are who we are and we are where we are, today, because of the choices we have made in our lives!*** Don't you think something that important would require a little contemplation rather than a snap decision?

How much trouble would we have spared ourselves, and others, if we had just thought about our choices before we made them? How much better would our circumstances be today if we had just done something different? How much money would we have today if we had thought about it before we made those impulse purchases?

The fact is, you should never waste your time regretting the past. Learn from it and use it to make it better in your present. Instead of regretting those choices, start thinking about your decisions BEFORE you make them.

Here are 5 steps to help you make better decisions...

1. **Look at each choice in terms of its positives and negatives.** What will be the consequences of either decision? What are the pros and the cons?
2. **List your choices.** What are your options?
3. **Base each choice on FACT, not myth.** What are the actual facts? Don't make up things that won't happen.
4. **Look at the choices from different perspectives.** Put yourself in someone else's shoes. Ask for input from someone else, if needed. You could very well have a biased point-of-view.
5. **Never, never, never make a choice based on emotion.** One of the main things that have led people to make bad choices was when they made the choice while they were emotional. Choices should be made rationally!

Learn to give some thought to every choice you make! Live life proactively instead of reactively. Think about what you are doing and quit blaming the devil!

Memories Are Made of This!

Chris W. Sutton

Catching Lightning Bugs in a jar on a late summer evening at dusk! The earthy smell of the country during a late evening drive! The first kiss with that special someone you just knew was THE one! The first time you held that new-born baby! Memories...they can make us sigh. They can make us laugh. They can make us cry. We cherish those memories and we hold them dear.

BUT, what about those memories that aren't so happy? Far too many people have memories they would like to forget. Let me tell you a story to illustrate my point...

Once there were two brothers and they grew up together in a family that was very harsh and critical. They were physically abused and slaps in the face were a common occurrence. Their father was an adulterer and an alcoholic. Their mother was an emotional wreck and she was a very angry person. She would, sometimes, pull a large knife out of a drawer and she would threaten to kill one of them if they didn't stop acting up.

These boys grew up being told how sorry they were and how they would never amount to anything. If they cried for any reason, they would get backhanded across the face and told they were sissies. Any sign of a tear was ridiculed and made-fun-of! They were not allowed to cry.

When they were punished, it would be with a belt, or razor strap, and they would be beaten until they had bloody stripes across their backs and legs. When they went to school, their parents wrote them excuses to get them out of P.E. so no one would see the evidence of their abuse.

The fights between their mother and father were quite terrible. They would hide in

the hall closet and listen to the raging and cursing coming from the violent fights. Both parents had violent tempers and they would explode without any reason.

You see, we can't choose the kind of environment in which we are raised. We can't choose the kind of parents we have. We can't avoid a lot of the things which happen to us in life. BUT, we CAN choose how we react to those things!

You DO NOT have to be an angry person! You DO NOT have to be so critical of everything! You DO NOT have to hold a grudge against anyone! You DO NOT have to be a bad parent! You DO NOT have to be a bad spouse! If you are any of those things, YOU have chosen to do that! But, you can choose not to do those things any longer! Let me give you five things to help you overcome stumbling blocks that have crippled you emotionally in your life...

1. **Learn Forgiveness!** You are not responsible for the things that have been done to you but you ARE responsible for how you choose to react to those things. Learn to forgive those who have wronged you. An unforgiving heart only hurts you, not the one who wronged you. Most of the time, they don't even KNOW you are mad and angry. You will, truly, be surprised how good life can be after you set that grudge down and never pick it up again!
2. **Learn to Like Yourself!** People who experience unwholesome things in their life always suffer from low self-esteem. Somehow, it is THEIR fault. Somehow, THEY were the cause of it! They believe all the cruel things that were said about them. Learning to overcome low self-esteem is a whole book in itself and we will get to writing more about it some time, but for now, just remember, you ARE NOT who other people say you are. You are who YOU choose to be and you should choose to be the person who always takes the higher road. You ARE a good person!

3. **Learn to Speak Only the Truth!** "Man, am I stupid!" "I'll never be a success!" "I'll never be as pretty as her!" Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! That is low self-esteem talking and you need to stop that right now! We bring into action those things which we speak out loud so you should only say positive things. Did you know your mind believes what it is told over and over again? That is where your low self-esteem comes from. You were told things over and over until you started believing them. Well, you can make HUGE changes in your life by what you tell yourself now! Pay attention to what you say and make changes where necessary. This will make a huge difference in your life.

4. **Learn to Stop Being Critical!** YOU don't like having low self-esteem so why are you giving it to your kids, spouse or anyone else? Think of the impact you are having on other people's lives. Words are a VERY powerful thing so you should use them wisely. Just like everything else, what you say to people is a choice YOU make. Choose to be uplifting. Choose to be complimentary. Choose to speak words of caring and love. Remember what I said about bringing into action those things which we speak out loud? It is VERY important that you choose your words carefully. Get into the habit of thinking about what you are going to say instead of just blurting out something reactively.

5. **Learn to Walk a Mile in Someone Else's Shoes!** Now stop that! You know it's just an expression! Seriously, try to see things from the other person's perspective. You will be well on your way to enjoying life when you can look at things from another person's point-of-view. You will find yourself becoming less angry. You will find yourself becoming less judgmental. You will find yourself viewing life with a freshness you have never known before. Actually, you will find yourself!

You see, it's not the environment we are raised in that determines who we are. It's not what our parents are like that determines who we are. It's certainly not what people say about us that determines who we are! We are who we CHOOSE to be. Some people live their whole lives blaming their present on their past. What a sad and wasted life that must be! Instead of blaming your parents, forgive them! Instead of blaming your poverty, learn from it! Instead of blaming your physical disabilities, overcome them!

Oh, I almost forgot about those two boys in the story. Whatever happened to them you ask? One of them went to college, got his doctorate degree and he is now a Chaplain at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. The other one just wrote this article!

Larry and the Full Moon!

Chris W. Sutton

The bright, full moon rises above the treetops and Lawrence Talbot is drawn by its magnetic pull. Each month, as the full moon rises, he is transformed from a normal man into a raging beast. He becomes The Wolf Man. Hair starts to grow all over his body. His teeth become long, sharp fangs. A deep, horrible growl rises up from his throat as he changes...AAAAAHHHHH! You're right, **change** is scary! Okay, maybe I am being a little facetious, but some people fear change like Lawrence Talbot fears the full moon.

Change is a good thing and we should always look for ways to improve ourselves. The problem is that we get so complacent in our lives that we just start living our lives on autopilot. I know what you are thinking...*Uh oh, here he goes again on that autopilot and living proactively stuff!* You are absolutely right!

If I could convince you to change just one thing in your life, just **one** thing, it would be to start living your life proactively. Become aware of everything that is going on around you. Start **hearing** the sounds that are all around you. Start **seeing** the sights that are all around you. Start **smelling** the smells that are all around you. Start **touching** the things that are close to you. Start **tasting** your food when you eat it. You see, that is the difference in **experiencing** life and just existing. An existence is just taking breaths! An experience is life changing. It's a whole new awareness. Every day is different. Every moment is appreciated.

All of these things are extremely important and they should never be taken for granted. What if your sight were taken from you? There are a lot of blind people who would **never** take their sight for granted if they could just see again! There are so many people who would **love** to be able to just get up and walk somewhere. I think you get the picture!

All of these things that we so lightly take for granted are precious! We often forget that until we lose some of those things. Each day this week, I want you to focus on one particular gift (yes, gift!) that you have been taking for granted.

Take one day and focus on **seeing** the things around you. Notice them! Notice the color. Notice the size. Notice the shape. Think about what you see. I am looking out my window as I write this and I see a beautiful, fluffy cloud floating lazily across the blue sky. As I sit and look at that cloud, it brings to my mind just how precious each day really is.

Take one day and focus on **hearing** the sounds around you. Listen to the sounds. Listen to the birds. Listen to the music. Listen to the wind blowing through the trees. Think about what you are hearing.

Take one day and focus on the different **smells**. Smell the grass when it is cut. Smell the fresh earthy smell after a rain shower. Smell the fresh air. Think about what you smell.

Take one day and focus on **taste**. Taste the food you put into your mouth. Take the time to savor each bite. Take the time to taste the toothpaste when you brush your teeth. Taste the cinnamon flavor of the chewing gum you put into your mouth. Think about what you taste.

Take one day and go for a **walk**. Notice how your legs move and take you where you want to go. Notice the feel of the ground under your feet. Think about how healthy you are becoming from the exercise of walking.

Take one day and **feel** things with your hands. Feel the soft texture of the grass. Feel the different textures of the things you come in contact with throughout the day. Feel the warmth of that nice, relaxing bath just before bedtime. Think about how those things feel.

On the seventh day, I want you to think about how it would feel not to be able to do those things you did for the past six days. I want you to take this one day and be thankful for those things you are capable of doing. I want you to take every single day of the rest of your life and be aware of the happiness those things bring to your life. If some of those things don't bring happiness to your life...then, ***I want you to change!***

Lawrence Talbot was a tortured soul who dreaded the change that would come with every full moon. The change scared him. He fought the change. Are you afraid of change? Sometimes I just wonder if there is a little Lawrence Talbot in us all.

Do You Miss Mayberry?

Chris W. Sutton

Do you miss Mayberry? I do! For those who may not know, Mayberry was a fictional town where Andy Taylor, Opie and Aunt Bea lived in the Andy Griffith show. It debuted on television in 1960. It took us back to the way life used to be!

Lookie there, it's Sheriff Andy Taylor sitting on the front porch with Opie and Aunt Bea. He's playing his six-string guitar and singing old gospel songs. I do believe that's Deputy Barney Fife up there with them and it looks like he's making some home-made ice cream. Why, he's so skinny that I'm amazed that he can even turn that hand-crank on the ice cream bucket. Yes sir, those were the good ole' days, weren't they?

Well, guess what? These are the good ole' days, too! Sometimes, we get so caught up in remembering yesterday that we forget to enjoy today. Today! Right now! This moment! That is all you have available to you. You can remember yesterday, you can think about tomorrow, but RIGHT NOW is all there is available to you to use as you want.

I think back to the early 80s. My oldest daughter was a little girl and we lived in Cleburne, Texas. We lived in a house that had a large, L-shaped, screened-in front porch. My wife didn't get home from work until a little after 10:00 pm at night and I would sit out on that front porch and rock Jessica to sleep while we waited for mom. You know what? That was her Mayberry! That is what she remembers as the good ole' days.

The point I am trying to make is this...enjoy your days **NOW!** Make the most of today. Have fun. Laugh. Enjoy life. Sure, maybe things could be better in your life. But, then again, they could be worse. Sure, maybe you're a little short of money right now. But, then again, you could be flat broke. Sure, maybe things

are looking pretty dark right now. But, you're still breathing, aren't you. As long as you are taking a breath, there is hope! As long as you reach out to someone else, there is love! As long as you believe, there is faith!

I want to give you five things that will help you move into Mayberry right now...

1. ***Look at the good things happening in your life!*** Don't focus on the bad stuff. Don't keep thinking negative thoughts. Start thinking positive thoughts. Write down positive affirmations. Put them in places you will see them each day. Read them out loud. Start believing them.
2. ***Never, and I mean NEVER, give up!*** Do you have a terminal illness? Do you know the definition of "terminal?" Let me tell you... *Causing, ending in, or approaching death. Well guess what, we are all terminal!* From the moment we are born, we are approaching death. But NOTHING is fatal until you take that last breath. You may have some disease. Things may be pretty bad right now. You may feel like just giving up. **DON'T YOU EVER GIVE UP!!!**
3. ***Learn to forgive others!*** Were you abused as a child? Were you abandoned? Have you gone through a bitter divorce? Did you lose someone through the fault of someone else? **Forgive them!** *Wait a minute, Chris; you just don't know what you're asking!* **Forgive them!** *Do you have any idea how they ruined my life?* **Forgive them!** *My daughter was only 15 years old when she was killed!* **Forgive them!** It's hard, believe me I know. **I know!** That unforgiving heart is beating in YOUR body. You're not having any effect on the one who wronged you. It is you who is suffering, not them. An unforgiving heart is a poison that is spreading through your body and it will destroy you unless you take the remedy. What is the remedy? **Forgive them!**

- 4. *Learn to forgive yourself!*** We've all done things we regret! Some are worse than others but they all have one thing in common. They are all in the past! If there is nothing you can do about it now, let it go. Learn from your mistakes but let them go. Do you know what happens when you grab a live electrical wire? It sends shocks through your body and you can't let it go until the circuit is broken. If someone else touches you, they will be stuck on the wire with you. That's the way your past mistakes are when you don't forget them. You can't let go and the people around you are affected by them too! You both suffer until you are able to let go.
- 5. *Do acts of kindness!*** Not random acts of kindness...do a kind act every chance you get! When you do something good, it not only makes other people feel good, it makes YOU feel good! Don't do good things and then go tell everyone about it. Do good things and keep it to yourself. If you have to tell everybody, you are not doing them for the right reason. Keep them to yourself. Cherish them. Think about them. You will be amazed at the change it brings about in yourself.

Can you smell the jasmine in the air? Listen to the soft creaking of the old rocking chair as you gently rock. The sun is slowly sinking into the horizon as another day comes slowly to an end. Here comes Andy, Opie, Aunt Bea and Barney up the drive to join you for some homemade ice cream. BUT, you know what? It's not 1960...it's 2006. The time is now. The moment is now. Welcome to Mayberry!

What Does It Take?

Chris W. Sutton

What does it take to solve the things that are wrong with our world today? Is there an answer? So often, we are just too busy to worry about what is going on around us. We go through our day oblivious to the suffering in the world. Maybe, if we just ignore it, it will go away. Well, just for today...just for the time it takes to read this article, I'm not going to allow that to happen...

Abortion - You may be Pro Life or you may be Pro Choice...whatever your stand, I think we all agree that NO ONE is in favor of abortion. Nobody thinks, "*Gee, I think I will get pregnant so I can have an abortion!*" The problem is unwanted pregnancies. It is far more difficult to find an answer after a problem is created than it is to prevent the problem in the first place. Is there something that will reduce unwanted pregnancies? Yes!

Divorce - We live in a throwaway society. If we don't like something, we just get rid of it. The divorce rate is estimated between 43% and 50%, depending on which statistics you read. Just about half of all people who get married will get divorced. If you don't like something your spouse does, just get a new one! If your spouse doesn't look as good as they used to, just find a better looking one! Is there anything that could possibly reduce the amount of divorces in the world? Yes!

Abuse - There is so much anger in this country today. Spousal abuse, child abuse, emotional abuse! Where does it all come from? Angry parents are raising angry children who become angry parents who raise angry children and the cycle goes on and on! Where did all this anger come from? Are we destined to just keep perpetuating this vicious cycle? Is there any way to stop it? Yes! Electronic Garbage - Are you aware of what is being shown on television? Do you know the words to the songs that have been released on CDs? Have you checked out the latest video games? GARBAGE! Our minds, and the minds of our young people,

are being filled with trash that has a profound effect on them. There is a little saying in the computer world that goes like this, "GIGO - Garbage In, Garbage Out!" The negative things you put into your mind are going to come out in a negative way. It is just a fact of life! It has become such a natural part of our lives that we don't even notice the junk we watch, listen to and play anymore. Is there some way to take back our minds? Yes!

Elderly Neglect - The elderly in our society have become expendable! There's no use for them anymore! They breathe our air, they eat our food, they use up our resources. Folks, what is wrong with us? Many societies treat their elderly with reverence, respect and adoration. How did we get so twisted in our priorities? Is there any way to turn the tide of this thoughtless thinking? Yes!

Minnie May was born in 1928 and she came from a dirt poor family of farmers. Her father was an alcoholic and he was extremely strict. Many were the times he would leave bloody streaks on his kids from the beatings he dealt with a switch or razor strap. There was no such thing as indoor plumbing in their house and they lived by the barest of means.

Minnie May went to high school in Blum, Texas where she was made-fun-of by her peers for being so poor. Her self esteem was practically non-existent and she grew up thinking her self worth was just about zero. After she graduated from high school, she went to work as a telephone operator for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in Cleburne, Texas.

Allan was born in 1927 to a large family and he had 6 sisters. His dad was an alcoholic and his dad was killed in a car wreck when Allan was about 7 years old. He took on the responsibility of caring for his family and he quit school in the 8th grade. He lied about his age and enlisted in the Army when he was 16 years old. It was the only way he could support his family!

After Allan was honorably discharged from the army he went to work for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. He started out working on the track

crew and worked his way up to Conductor. He was an alcoholic and a womanizer and he was drunk very much of the time.

Minnie May and Allan were married in May, 1950. Theirs was a very tumultuous marriage and Minnie May was a very abusive person. She absolutely HATED drinking and she would physically assault Allan when he came home drinking. He never retaliated physically but he was very emotionally abusive. Their fights were very loud and angry. Minnie May would grab a shotgun from the hall closet and threaten to kill herself until someone took the gun away. That was usually one of her two young sons.

February, 2001 - Allan had retired from the Santa Fe Railroad approximately 15 years earlier. He had quit drinking approximately 20 years earlier. He had given up a smoking habit of over 40 years one day by just laying down his cigarettes and never picking them up again. He had given up his womanizing years ago and he was very faithful to Minnie May. He had become a good husband to Minnie May and he had become a good father to his two sons.

Allan was in and out of the hospitals with Congestive Heart Failure and Diabetes. He was scared to death of being put into a nursing home. Minnie May promised him she would take care of him and she would not put him in a nursing home. He had lost part of his feet to Diabetes and he wasn't able to get around very much. Many times Minnie May had to clean him up when he couldn't make it to the bathroom but she took care of him and made him as comfortable as possible.

Allan died in his bedroom at his home in Cleburne, Texas on February 6, 2001. Minnie May had kept her promise and he never went to a nursing home.

April, 2003 - Minnie May had overcome her abusive ways many years ago. She had become a devoted wife and a loving mother to her two sons. She loved her grandchildren with a passion and she spoiled them shamelessly. She was very outgoing and she made it her mission to visit sick people in the nursing homes and hospitals. She would get in her car and go find the mailman to take him cool

drinks on those hot, Texas summers. Less than one year after Allan died, Minnie May found out she had terminal cancer.

Minnie May lay in a hospital room at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. Her sons had promised her that she would never have to go into a nursing home. She didn't like nursing homes and she was scared-to-death she would have to go to one. She had gotten to the point where she couldn't live by herself anymore. When she was able to leave the hospital, she would have to live somewhere that people could take care of her. Her youngest son told her she could come live with him and his family in Oregon.

Minnie May died at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, Texas on April 19, 2003. She never did get to come live with me and my family here in Oregon.

So, what does it take to reduce unwanted pregnancies? What does it take to reduce the divorce rate? What does it take to stop abuse? What does it take back our minds and the minds of our children? What does it take to have more respect for the elderly? What does it take?

It takes **responsibility** and it takes **commitment!** It takes men and women...I said MEN and women, to stand up and say, *"I am not having sex with this person unless I am willing to commit to them!"*

It takes **responsibility** and it takes **commitment!** When you enter into a marriage contract, it is your responsibility to remain faithful and you are making a commitment to your spouse. Living with another person is not easy and you must give up your selfishness if the marriage is to last. LOVE is not a noun; it is a verb. LOVE takes action! It is NOT some squishy-wishy feeling that comes and goes. If you LOVE someone, you will do what it takes to make that person feel special. You NEVER fall out of love with someone. You just quit trying!

It takes **responsibility** and it takes **commitment!** When you are a responsible and you are committed to someone, you never do anything to hurt them. You

don't physically abuse them. You don't sexually abuse them. You don't emotionally abuse them. You do whatever is necessary to protect them and you make them feel safe.

It takes **responsibility** and it takes **commitment!** Sure, maybe **“Lost”** is one of your favorite programs. Maybe **“Blind Date”** is a show you just can't miss. Maybe you just watch **“WWE Wrestling”** for the matches and not the scantily clothed girls. The problem is that what you are putting into your mind. What kinds of programs do you let your kids watch? What kinds of video games do they play? You ARE responsible for what you put into your mind. You ARE responsible for what you let your kids play. You SHOULD commit yourself to censoring what you and your children put into your brains. *Whoa, just one dang minute! You're not suggesting censorship are you?* Absolutely, positively and certainly I am! A little censorship in your life might be just what the doctor ordered to change the way you view the world.

It takes **responsibility** and it takes **commitment!** Have you visited a nursing home lately? There are a lot of elderly people who have been dropped off and forgotten. There are elderly people who have to sell everything they own just to buy their medications. There are elderly people who eat dog food because their pensions aren't enough to make ends meet! There are BILLIONS of dollars poured into little pet projects by our government yet a lot of our elderly people go without. We need to be committed to our elderly relatives. It is our responsibility to take care of them.

Okay, okay...I know I have been on a soap box and I will climb down now! There's no telling how many subscribers we will lose because of this article. You see, some people don't like to be reminded that they have to be responsible. They don't want to think about the fact that they are committed and obligated to think of other people. Let someone else feed the poor. Let someone else visit the nursing homes. Let someone else turn off the television. Let someone else worry about unwanted children.

Next time you have a spare minute, take a quick trip down to your local nursing home. You don't have to stay long. Run inside and take a look around the room. You see those wrinkled faces looking back at you? Now, picture your own face on those people looking back at you and see yourself sitting there. Guess what? It could happen!

Do I think you can change the world by yourself? Nah, that's not possible but you can change the world of one or two people!

Minnie May and Allan Sutton were far from perfect. They were flawed and they were lost. They did the best they knew how and they lived the only way they knew how. They were weak in some aspects and they were strong in other aspects. In May, 2000, they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at Baylor Medical Hospital in Dallas, Texas. My dad was having tests done and the chaplains, doctors and nurses brought them a cake and sang songs to them to celebrate.

At some point, my parents had quit putting themselves first and started putting each other first. At some point, their lives changed from being a living hell to one of love and support. At some point, they started reaching out to other people. At some point, they became extremely well loved and well respected in their community. At some point, my parents had become responsible and they had commitment.

Lessons from a Graveyard

Chris Sutton

I want you to know that I really struggled with this article today. I didn't have trouble writing it because I have NEVER been at a loss for words. Just ask my wife, she will tell you! No, I struggled because it is on a subject that many would consider dark, depressing or just plain gloomy. It's about dying! Okay, for those of you who are still with me, I just want to say that dying is a natural part of life. It happens to the best of us but it is not something we need to worry over needlessly. In fact, we can use the lesson set by those who have gone on before us to learn to live our lives to the fullest. Okay, on with the article...

I went for a drive through a graveyard today! I know, I know...why would anyone want to drive through a graveyard? Do you know a better place to find peace and tranquility? It's not that I PURPOSELY set out to drive through a graveyard but, as I passed by, I was drawn to it. And I am glad that I was!

Actually, you can learn a lot about living from people who have gone on before us. As I was driving down the small, paved road, my eye caught a tombstone and I stopped to read it...

John Millsap, b.1845 d.1923

I don't know ANYTHING about John Millsap but the marker told me that John had lived to be 78 years old. That's a pretty long life even by today's standards but, back in those days, that was probably considered an extremely long life. The thing that really struck me, though, was how quickly his life had come and gone. He lived 78 years and he has been deceased for 82 years. You've probably heard that old saying, "Here today and gone tomorrow," haven't you? That is what our lives are like and it is VERY important that we enjoy whatever time we are allotted on this earth.

200 years after I am gone, there will, probably, be no one around who remembers anything about me. What about all those things I worried about? Gone! What about all those fears I had? Gone! What about all that money I tried to make? Gone! What about all that family I overlooked just to get ahead? Gone!

You see, the point I'm trying to make is we need to make the most of our time here on this earth. Enjoy life! We never know when it might come to an end. We live like there will always be a tomorrow but, trust me, those tomorrows come to an end for all of us at some point! Here is an important question we need to ask ourselves TODAY, not tomorrow, but TODAY...

Are you putting off things that you know you shouldn't?

- Is there someone you haven't told you love them and you need to?
- Is there someone you need to forgive but you haven't?
- Is the last thing you said to someone something you might regret?
- Are you holding a grudge that should have been settled a long time ago?
- Do you have a relationship that needs mending?
- If you were to die today, what is the one thing that you wish you had settled before you went?

We put a lot of these things off because we think we will take care of them later. What if there is no later? Live like you were dying! Love like you have never loved! Forgive like you were never wronged! Give of yourself those things which you have been afraid to give! Every single day you live is a gift and there is no guarantee that there will be a tomorrow. You need to live every single day like it might be your last. It just might be!

I went for a drive through a graveyard today! I know, I know...why would anyone want to drive through a graveyard? Do you know a better place to find peace and tranquility? It's not that I PURPOSELY set out to drive through a graveyard but, as I passed by, I was drawn to it. And I am glad that I was!

Actually, you can learn a lot about living from people who have gone on before us. As I was driving down the small, paved road, my eye caught a tombstone and I stopped to read it...

Chris W. Sutton b.1954 d.20..

Stand By Me

Chris W. Sutton

Gordie, Chris, Teddy and Vern were four young friends who set out on an adventure. They went looking for the body of a missing, local teenage boy that had been found by a gang of older boys. The story is what happens along the way.

That is the premise of the 1986 movie titled, "Stand by Me." The setting for the movie was Castle Rock, Oregon and the year was 1959. The movie follows the boys as they go in search of the body of a missing boy but, along the way, they have to face their own fears. They find out that things which are faced together are much easier than things which are faced alone. At the end of the movie, they finally reach the body of the missing boy.

My wife and I watched that movie together and it brought back many memories of my own childhood. After the movie was over, I turned to my wife, Susan, and asked softly, *"Wasn't that one of the best movies you have ever seen?"* She smiled at me tenderly and replied, *"That was one of the STUPIDEST movies I have EVER had the privilege of watching!"* She has never been too shy when it comes to expressing her opinion!

All through the movie she was waiting for the young boys to get to the body. As the movie went on and on, she became more and more frustrated! *WHEN WERE THOSE STUPID BOYS GOING TO GET TO THAT STUPID BODY?* She likes the entertaining movies and not the deep, thought-provoking movies. Deep movies have never been her cup-of-tea!

The point I am trying to make here is that a lot of us live our lives that way. Our focus is on what will happen when we get to the "body" instead of what takes place during the journey.

"WHEN the kids are grown and move out, THEN we will have fun!"

"WHEN I get that mortgage paid off, THEN I will be able to work fewer hours!"

"WHEN we get the bills caught up, THEN I will be able to spend more time with the kids!"

"WHEN I have more money, THEN I will be happy!"

WHEN will you stop putting things off until some future event has happened? Pleasure in life does not come from some event that will take place in the future, but it comes from the journey along the way! The time to have fun is NOW! The time to work fewer hours is NOW! The time to spend more time with the kids is NOW! The time to be happy is NOW!

Guess what? The life you are living is not a practice run. This is NOT a dress rehearsal. There are no retakes. When the Director yells "**CUT**" at the end of your movie, the movie is over! You had best enjoy your role while you are playing it because that's all there is! THE FUTURE IS NOW!

Okay, I am off the soapbox now and I am going to give you four things to help you start enjoying your life a little better...

Enjoy each day as if it were your last day on earth! It could be, you know. We never know when that last breath we took will actually be, well, the last breath we took. Every second you live is a precious gift and you need to treat it as such.

Slow down! Some people rush through their day as if they can't wait to get it over. What is your hurry? Every day gone is just that...it's gone! Walk a little slower. Talk a little slower. Eat a little slower. Drive a little slower. SLOW DOWN!

Become aware! Have you noticed how as you get older, the days just fly by faster and faster? When you were a kid, the days seemed to be long and they seemed to last forever, didn't they? You thought Christmas would just NEVER get here! The reason is, when we were kids, we were aware of everything that

was happening around us. Every day was a day of discovery. As we get older, we just put everything on autopilot and zoom through life.

Take time for the good things! Take your shoes off and walk through the grass. Take a stroll through a park. Lay down under a blue, Fall sky and watch the clouds float lazily along overhead. Go out at night, look up at the stars and ponder the vastness and the majesty of the universe.

The most important thing in life is what is happening RIGHT NOW. The most important person in your life is who you are with RIGHT NOW. The most important thing you will say in your life is that you are saying RIGHT NOW. The things you have done are in the past and the things you will do are in the future. RIGHT NOW is all you have in the world. Stop looking for the "body" and start enjoying the journey, RIGHT NOW!

That One Person!

Chris W. Sutton

There's the story of a young man who was sitting on the beach one day, relaxing and enjoying the warmth of the sun. He was just watching people as they strolled up and down the shore when something caught his attention. He looked up and he saw an old man walking slowly up the beach. The old man would walk a few steps, pick up a starfish that had just washed up on the beach and throw it back into the ocean. The young man watched him do this for several minutes wondering what good it would do since there were, literally, hundreds of starfish washing up on the beach. Finally, his curiosity getting the best of him, the young man got up and walked over to the old man. The young man said, "Excuse me, sir, but I was watching you and I can't help but wonder why you are throwing those starfish back into the ocean. Don't you see all the starfish that have washed up on the beach? Do you think that what you are doing is going to make a difference?" The old man slowly bent over, picked up another starfish, threw it back into the ocean and said, "It does to that one!"

How many times have you passed up an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life? I often wonder how many suicides each year could have been prevented by a last, caring word from someone? I wonder how many divorces could have been prevented if there had been better communication from each partner. I wonder how much sorrow would never have been felt if we had not spoken those last uncaring words.

A few words can soothe someone's pain. A gentle hug can ease someone's grief. One caring person could save someone's life. **One person!** One person can make a HUGE difference! What does it take to make a difference in this world? It takes one person deciding that they WANT to make a difference! It takes one person taking action! It takes one person who cares!

I was watching a show called *Most Amazing Videos* on television today. It showed a video of a helicopter that crashed at an air show. The helicopter came spinning down into the ground, turned over and the blades tore off and went flying out into a pasture. After a few seconds, a man crawled out of the side of the helicopter and fell to the ground next to the full fuel tank. He lay next to the fuel tank, obviously in great pain, for what seemed like an eternity. All of a sudden, a man came running out of the crowd to where the hurt man lay. He struggled to help him up but he was having trouble getting him away from the helicopter. A few more people arrived. Suddenly, there was a crowd and they pulled the man to safety before the tanks exploded.

What if no one had helped? The future would have been changed drastically for that man's family. The future would have been changed drastically for that man's friends. The future would have been changed drastically in a lot of ways...but it wasn't! Why? **One person!** One person made a decision to help and that spurred a lot of other people to help.

How can you make a difference? Here are five steps that will help you become that **one person**...

1. **Don't look at the big picture!** Focus on the one thing you can do to help. Don't get overwhelmed by the "big picture." Can you stop the suffering that was caused by Hurricane Katrina? No, but you can ease the suffering of one person or one family.
2. **Become aware!** I have repeated this in numerous articles but I will keep repeating it. One of the most important steps in bringing change to your life, or anyone else's life, is to become aware of what is going on around you. Don't live your life on autopilot. Take charge of your life instead of letting your life take charge of you. **Get involved in life!**

3. **Be encouraging to others!** Get into the habit of encouraging other people. Speak a kind word to everyone you meet! Give an encouraging smile to everyone you meet! Give a hug to those who need one! Heck, give a hug even if they don't need one! Do whatever it takes to make someone else's day better!

4. **Be encouraging to yourself!** It's hard to encourage other people when you don't feel so good about yourself. Overcome your low self-esteem by getting rid of the negative feedback. Tell yourself positive things. Write down some positive affirmations and read them out loud. Hang them on your mirrors. Put them in your car. Keep them in your purse or briefcase. Stop thinking negative thoughts.

5. **Look for the good in all things!** Always try to find something good in everything that happens! This can be very difficult when you are in a given situation but it is critical that you learn how to do it. Remove yourself from the emotion of the situation. Don't just react, **THINK!** Step back and analyze the situation. Don't make rash decisions. Pause before you make ANY decisions. There is something good in everything. Sometimes it's just buried under all the garbage. Look for it!

A little starfish lay on the bottom of the ocean talking to its mom and dad. You couldn't see the tears run down its little legs because of all the water, but its parents knew! "I was so scared! The current just grabbed me and threw me up on the dry land. I kept calling you over and over but you couldn't hear me. You won't believe what happened next but God came up to me, picked me up and threw me back home. I never knew God was old and wrinkled but I'm glad he was there!"

Was it really God? Nah, but the little starfish couldn't tell the difference. Will you be the one person who makes a difference in someone else's life today?

Riding the Fence Line!

Chris W. Sutton

Do you remember what it was like to be a cowboy back in the 1870s and 1880s? Of course you don't because that would make you around 125 years old, wouldn't it? Well, life wasn't easy for ranch workers back in those days.

A ranch-hand's day usually began before sunrise, ended around sunset and they worked most of the time in-between! A lot of ranch-hands were laid-off during the winter time because there just wasn't enough to do around the ranch; however, a few were kept on during the winter time to do some year-round chores like riding the fence line.

Riding the fence line consisted of a ranch-hand riding along the fenced land to make sure that all the fences were in good working order. Sometimes, animals might knock down a portion of fence or rustlers might cut the fence down to steal a few cattle.

Riding the fence line could be a full time job in itself because some of the ranchers owned thousands of acres of land. It could take many days to make a complete circuit around the fenced land and then it would be just about time to start again.

You know, relationships are kind of like riding a fence line. It takes a lot of work to keep them in fine working order. If you put a lot of effort into them, they can be very rewarding; however, if they are neglected, they can cause us a whole lot of problems.

Relationships are not about what we receive from others. Relationships are not about someone else making the first move. Relationships are not about what you can **get**, but what you can **give**!

Relationships are very special. They are about giving of ourselves. They are about caring about other people. They are about making someone else feel special. I know what some of you might be thinking...*"Well, now hold on there just a dadgum second! Doesn't it take at least two people to make a relationship?"* It DOES take at least two people to make a relationship BUT it only takes ONE person to make it special.

Relationships are like gardens...if you take care of them they will bring you joy and beauty. If you neglect them, they will bring you lots of weeds. You will be amazed at how your relationship with your spouse, friend, parents or anyone else will grow into something special if you just take the time to nourish it.

Some of the fruit of healthy relationships are...

- Joy
- Caring
- Laughter
- Closeness
- Understanding
- Respect
- Honesty
- Giving
- Communicating
- Love
- Sharing
- Desire to be with them

Some of the fruit of unhealthy relationships are...

- Silence
- Selfishness
- Loneliness
- Fear
- Sadness
- An uncompromising spirit
- Bad attitude
- Meaningless arguments
- A “me first” attitude
- Separation
- Anxiety
- Deceit

Which of those “fruits” describe your relationships? You can change them, you know! All it takes is one person making the first move! One person reaching out! One person wanting to make a difference! One person wanting to make a change before change is too late...and one day it WILL be too late! Once that happens, all that will be left is regret!

As you ride that fence line of life, you are going to find those areas that are not in good working order. Sometimes it will take from sun-up to sun-down to get those areas in good shape. Relationships are not seasonal...they are year-round work!

So! Are you riding the fence line of your relationships? Are you making sure those relationships are kept in good working order? You're not letting those herds of emotions get out of control, are you?

The thing I want you to ask yourself is this...*“Is there any fence-mending I need to do today?”* If so, climb down off that high-horse and get to it. In the long run, you'll be glad you did!

Life Is Good!

Chris Sutton

Ahhh, the American Dream. You're sitting by the beautiful Pacific Ocean at Kaanapali Beach on Maui basking in the warm rays of the dying sun as it sets into the horizon. It's not just the sun that warms your body. You also have that warm, fuzzy feeling that comes just from knowing that thousands of dollars are pouring into your very large bank account from your fully-automated home based business. Life is good...or is it? Life IS good, but that's not the reason why!

What is it that makes life so good? Is it wealth? Nope! Some of the wealthiest people in the world live absolutely miserable lives. The suicide rate among wealthy people is very high. Is it love and marriage? Nope! The divorce rate is higher today than it ever has been in history. Could it possibly be power? I don't think some of the Enron executives would say they were having a good life. So what is it?

Okay, are you ready for this earth-shaking revelation? The secret to a good life is ***happiness***! Disappointed? Well, you shouldn't be. Happiness is the Golden Fleece! It's Shangri-La! It's the ultimate high! It's the next big thing just around the corner! Zillions of dollars are spent each year by people trying to find true happiness. Isn't that what we are looking for in a mate? Isn't that what we spend most of our time trying to achieve? Isn't that what you are looking for in that home based business you are trying to get off the ground?

Is it possible to find happiness in this post Sept 11 world we live in today? Absolutely! The problem is, you are not going to find it in external things. Happiness comes from within. THINGS can't make you happy! They are only a temporary solution to a more serious problem.

I know a lot of you don't particularly ascribe to any particular religion, but please

allow me to use a story from the Bible to make a point. One of the best examples of inner contentment and happiness comes from Acts 16:16-36. It tells the story of Paul and Silas who were stripped, beaten and thrown into prison in shackles. That would probably be a very depressing situation to those of us who look to our external circumstances for our happiness; however, their joy and contentment came from the inside, not their external circumstances. They were praying and singing hymns at midnight.

The point I am trying to make is that we have to learn to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves. That doesn't mean we have to stay in the situation, but our happiness must not be controlled by it. Please allow me to give you ten recommendations for changing your life and learning to be content.

Ten Life Changing Steps...

Learn to become "aware" of everything that is going on around you. So many of us live our lives just reacting to things that happen. When that car pulls out in front of us, we just automatically get angry. When someone says something derogatory, we just get hurt. We have to stop being reactive and we have to start being proactive. Take control of your life instead of letting it control you!

Learn forgiveness, forget grudges! I know it may be very difficult to forgive some of the atrocities that may have been committed against you in your life, but it is critical to your happiness. It brings healing to the forgiver, not just the person being forgiven.

Do something nice for someone. Don't do it for what they might do for you but do it for the joy it will bring to your life. I believe in the principle of "rewards." What is that, you ask? Well, the principle of rewards says that if you do kind things for

other people, you will be rewarded in the same manner. I am a firm believer because I have seen it in my own life time and time again.

Make peace with your past and don't let it control your present. The way you see things today is through the filter of your past. If your past is not so rosy, then the way you see things will not be so rosy. Try seeing things from a different perspective. Change your outlook.

Instead of trying to get people to understand you, try to understand them first. Try to see things from their perspective. One event can have many perspectives. What if a young person is killed in a tragic car accident? Some people might view it as a waste of a young life. What if the young person's organs were donated to other people? It would provide hope for those people who received the organs.

Live in the present. Don't dwell on things that may or may not happen in the future. Don't be overwhelmed by the "big picture". Narrow your focus to what is happening now.

There is a saying in the computer world that goes "Garbage in Garbage Out". What you put into your mind has a profound effect on your life. Fill your mind with good things that are pure, lovely, admirable and praiseworthy. Turn away from the negative and embrace the positive.

Live each minute as if it were your last...it just might be. Our lives are too short to be spent in an unhealthy environment. Remember the wise saying, 'God grant me the wisdom to change the things I can, accept the things I can't and the intelligence to know the difference". Take that and apply it to your life.

Tell yourself only good things. Your brain believes what it is told over and over. An important rule in behavioral psychology is "You get more out of that

which is reinforced." Don't keep thinking how lousy you are or how bad a person you are. Tell yourself only positive thoughts. Encourage yourself. Lift yourself up. Do away with negative thinking and start thinking positive thoughts.

Don't settle for temporary solutions. Drugs, alcohol, excessive eating, sex and pornography, excessive dieting, spending money and any other bad habits you might have are destructive behavior. They will not give you long lasting relief. They are just band aids on a critical wound. Do away with any destructive behavior and replace it with something positive.

Life IS good! Start that home based business and you just might wind up on the shores of Kaanapali Beach. Just do it for the right reasons!

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Chris W. Sutton
Senior Editor

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Chris W. Sutton is a transplanted Texan who has been married to his wife, Susan, for 27 years. They have three daughters and they live in the Great Northwest in the state of Oregon, near Eugene. In college, Chris majored in business and accounting, marketing and motivational theory. He also has an extensive background in internet marketing.

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