

Chapter 11-Jasper (“Treasure-holder”)

The next story is characteristic of the behavior one might see in a young child who appears to have somehow lost control. However, the individual that is about to be discussed is no longer a child, but an individual who is in his mid 50's, married, and has two grown children. When an individual perceives that his or her life, family situation, household, or world around them is chaotic or out of control, he or she may react to this chaos refusing to work. Often, it is not just a perception but a reality. If you take some time to examine an individual's family system, household, the forms of communication used, or all three, you may find that the environment really *is* a chaotic one. Children who are raised in chaotic environments are often aware of the chaos and also frequently perceive their world as one in which they have little or no control. In many cases because they are merely children, they really do have no control. For whatever reason, the adults may be continually fighting or arguing. The environment may be a very conflictual one. The adults themselves may have so many challenges that the children are basically forced or allowed to raise themselves. A child may react to this in any number of ways.

Some of the ways they respond may be healthy, while others may be far more detrimental. Often the one way that children can establish some sense of control in their lives is to get outside of the home environment. If they get to a school setting or a setting in which there are fairly rigid expectations, these children may become non-compliant or defiant. Often they are viewed as oppositional. Children are simply expected to comply both behaviorally and academically regardless of how chaotic their worlds may be. Children may, in a school or any other setting, refuse to do work or comply with an adult's wishes because they may be angry, frustrated, afraid, unable to complete an

academic task because they may not have the acquired skills, or any combination of the above. In chaotic, stressful environments children are often expected to not only take care of themselves, but others as well, sometimes other siblings and quite possibly the adults as well.

In many chaotic environments children do not have the opportunity to be children. In many ways they are expected to grow up very quickly. They may often be treated without compromise, feeling, or compassion. Many of these children have very serious control issues, which is probably a very natural reaction. One way that they can establish control is to refuse to do work. On the surface they appear non-compliant, uncooperative, and oftentimes defiant. Underneath they experience elevated levels of anxiety, anger, sadness, or any number of feelings. Most of these children (elementary, middle school, or high school) are very bright, capable, resilient kids. Some children who grow up in the inner city not only survive, but thrive in neighborhoods that most people would be afraid to walk through during the day. On the other hand, many do not. That is not to say that every child who grows up in a chaotic family system also grew up in an impoverished or dangerous neighborhood. Even if a family's socio-economic status is high, the family system may still be a chaotic one.

Often, children who refuse to comply are smart enough to know that they are only really hurting themselves by refusing to do the work. They know that they will either get a bad grade or a phone call to the parent. For the time being, the behavior does provide them with a sense of control in a unstable situation or lifestyle. You often find with some investigation that these children are often being bounced back and forth from one parent to an extended family member, between biological parents, or from one foster home to

another. Think about that for a moment. If you had no control over your life (or perceived that you did not), what would you do? How would you react? Would you act compliantly in any or all situations in which you were expected to conform, cooperate, and perform?

Most school settings are comprised of some of the most empathetic, competent, caring, hard-working, responsible, and lowest paid people of any profession. While private/parochial school teachers also have challenging students to work with, in many cases they do not have the number of challenging students that the public school teachers do. Most private/parochial school teachers will admit that the public sector is a far more challenging environment to work in. Unlike the private and parochial school systems, the public systems cannot automatically count on all of their students to perform, behave, or conform when they arrive at school. Many children in the public setting have countless challenges to deal with before they even make it to school. When an instructor automatically expects that all children are ready to learn and perform without taking time to think about why a child is not performing, problems and misunderstandings in the form of anger and resentment can occur. Often, public school teachers may simply not have the time to think about these considerations because classrooms are extremely crowded and the pressures to cover the curriculum and prepare students for state and nationally standardized tests are extreme. Often, the assumption is that the child is defiant. The misunderstanding on the student's part is that he or she is not liked or cared for by the teacher. Oftentimes children in the public sector have never had any structure imposed upon them in the home setting, so when they get to the public school system, of course problems will occur.

You often hear that a child is doing or behaving just fine in the home environment. This could mean any number of things. In many unstructured environments, children are left unsupervised; as long as the children do not bother the parents, they are left to do whatever they want to do. What happens when they arrive at school and are suddenly expected to do things they have never been expected to do, like work? Unlike the private and parochial school settings who only accept students who are compliant, easy to direct, and average or above average behaviorally and academically, the public school system takes on the task of working with the most challenging children in the country. In their attempts to educate and work with these challenges, the public setting regularly gets blamed by the media and unfairly judged for low scores on high stakes state and national tests. Private and parochial schools are not expected to complete these tests. Other problems frequently ignored by the media and private/parochial systems may be related to children's learning or emotional problems. For parents who have the money or receive a voucher to send their child to a private or parochial school, if the child performs poorly either academically or behaviorally, he or she is often referred for special education and winds up right back in the public sector. Public schools do not have this same luxury.

One may also consider the structural changes that take place once the student arrives at school. Many public school students experiencing elevated levels of anger, anxiety, and frustration are smart enough to realize that once inside school that they are no longer under the care of the parent. Many of these children have no fear of punishment from either the school, the police, or anyone in the home environment--least of all the teacher. These are the children who will often drop out and eventually wind up

involved in crimes that lead to prison. These are the children who need to be provided with long term and intensive treatment therapies by a good therapist or an adult who knows how to talk with them. Unfortunately, budget cuts and decentralization have weakened the public school system and left budgets in the hands of many administrators who are not trained in problem solving. The indirect push for privatization of schools has left open the opportunity for numerous privately run charter schools to open up that have little or no idea of how to work with children and have little or no accountability. The individuals who financially support these private charter schools often have no idea what is going on, how these schools are being mismanaged, or how their money is being spent. Consequently, the children do not receive the services that they absolutely require.

Jasper, unlike the children that he supports, uses all that he has reportedly experienced growing up as an excuse to do as little as possible--to avoid responsibility and to live a self-centered, self-serving life. There may be more than one reason why Jasper's behavior appears characteristic of a child from a chaotic background. For example, it may be more than just a perceived life of chaos. Much of his behavior may have involved feelings of bitterness, resentment, anger, frustration, or a combination of all four. He was reportedly subjected to varying degrees of both abuse and neglect as a child. Some of the abuse may have been sexual and may have ranged in severity from moderate to very severe at times. On the one hand, if the abuse was severe, as Jasper reports, it might be a miracle that he is functioning as well as he is as an adult. Some people would argue that he does not appear to be functioning very well in his relationships with family, friends, and the people that he works with is because he is often very abrasive and unproductive. The problem is that regardless of how much he

reports that he has somehow been victimized, he carries himself as a relatively happy-go-lucky person. In many cases, he does not show any signs of unhappiness or depression as a result of his reported past. If people who have an excessive need to control other people and things are not capable of proving that what they report to have happened to them actually did, it is difficult to tell if it is only their perception that they were or are victims or if it is really true. Up until the bitter end, Hitler believed that he was the victim. In fact, I would argue that Hitler's book Mein Kampf could be summed up into four words "I AM A VICTIM." Such is the case with many people who have an unnatural, excessive, and unhealthy need to control other people and things. They often blame everyone but themselves for their own mistakes, problems, and shortcomings.

Jasper claims to be a victim, but he certainly does not present that way in public or at social gatherings. If there was neglect, perhaps his parents did not have the ability to care for themselves much less Jasper when he may have needed it the most. It appears that both of his parents experienced moderate to severe degrees of alcoholism. As mentioned earlier, in many cases of neglect, the biological parents may simply be incapable of caring for the children physically, emotionally, spiritually, and almost every other way despite their desire and awareness. Sometimes the abuse or neglect is financial, though this is not meant to be any sort of justification or excuse for the abuse or neglect. My goal is to provide an understanding.

Whether or not Jasper really experienced any level of neglect or abuse as a child or how severe or mild it may have been is difficult to substantiate. Regardless of veracity, he has adopted a belief that "no one cares." We must consider why? If abuse or neglect did occur, perhaps his parents experienced neglect or abuse themselves and

allowed the same thing to happen to Jasper. Again, because he does not appear unhappy, but instead very content, it is difficult to know if his reports are true. The only time he appears not content is when he is expected to work or be productive. As mentioned, in public or in social settings and at work (as long as he is allowed to loaf), he appears happy and jovial. He is constantly making jokes and often engages in attention-seeking behavior. In public and particularly in restaurants, he often makes sexual, sexist, and derogatory comments in an attempt to get attention from others. He is in a sense like the proverbial bad child who never grew up. Often, his rude and derogatory comments are directed specifically at waitresses. Because most waitresses deal with such behavior on a daily basis, his comments are often ignored even though most waitresses would probably love to pour a whole pot of hot coffee on his lap. He will begin by making certain comments to the wait staff. He will then sit back and wait to see how they are going to react. Whatever he says to them, he always portrays himself as the victim. He will say how much he is misunderstood by his wife and children and how he is always the victim. Whenever he brings up his wife (and in restaurants he brings her up almost constantly), he says what a burden she is, how he can't wait for her to die, and how mistreated and neglected he is. Jasper is an expert at crying the blues. The problem is that he has been doing it for so long that he believes his own stories. Jasper can be very charismatic and charming and he will regularly use manipulation and charm in order to try to attain sex from women. In some ways he is very entertaining to watch in public. He uses humor and jokes to describe his life. While on the surface his jokes may appear funny or entertaining, his stories are often very disturbing and he will talk about very personal things openly in front of complete strangers. In many ways his stories are really an

attempt to gain pity, draw people in, and then control them. Because he is so charismatic and charming, an unsuspecting person may from time to time get drawn in. In a sense, he has many of the characteristics of a good cult leader. It is often interesting to see just how far they or the owner of the restaurant will let him go. Even though most of his behavior could be explained as attention-seeking and the result of his excessive need to control other people and things, it is at the same time extremely offensive and disrespectful.