

Tony's Inner Battle

Tony and his dad, Carl, were downtown one day when they ran into Carl's friend, Tom. Tony always hated these encounters because they did not go well for him.

"Hi Tom, how you doing?"

"Hi Carl, I'm doing well, how about you?"

"I'm doing OK, Tom, doing OK."

"Tom, this is my boy, Tony."

Tom extended his hand to shake hands with Tony, "Nice to meet you Tony. How old are you?"

"I'm eleven sir."

"Well mannered boy, Carl."

"He'd better be. He knows what will happen if he's not."

Tom was taken off guard with that response and trying to move on he asked – "So what do you want to be when you grow up, Tony?"

"I want to be a fireman," Tony proudly proclaimed.

"Naah, he'll never do that, not smart enough, Tom."

Tom was surprised by that and didn't know what to say or do. Tony just slipped away quietly, tears in his eyes and his head down, embarrassed -- as Tom and Carl conversed.

Tony's family could be very cruel. Any time Tony expressed his dream to grow up to be a fireman, a policeman, a marine -- it didn't matter what it was -- he always was greeted with laughter. "Ya sure, you can't do that. You're too short, you're not smart enough, and you're just not good enough. You'll never be able to do that."

Once he made the mistake of declaring he wanted to grow up to be a deep sea diver. The laughter was so humiliating that he never ever mentioned his dreams to anyone again.

Tony grew up and graduated from high school -- at the bottom of his class. Soon after, Tony joined the Army. He was not too dumb, not too short, and he was good enough. Four years in the army toughened him up and gave him a great deal of self confidence. He was a helicopter mechanic and a door gunner. After serving his four years in the army, he went to work for the US government as a helicopter mechanic. He was very successful and rose to the rank of director of his department. His family marveled at his wonderful luck. It had to be luck, right? I mean, "You can't do that" was their mantra.

Tony knew that to advance he needed an education. So he signed up for night courses at the local Junior college. After 10 years of night classes with an occasional Saturday morning class, he graduated with a degree in Business Management from a four year college. He finished at the top of his class, on the Dean's list and an invitation to join the National Honor Society.

Tony retired after 35 years of working for the government. The kids were grown and had great careers themselves, so it was now time for him and Donna. Donna was his high school sweetheart and knew him well. They sold their house in California and moved to a small town about two hours north of the old home town, where they had a lot of old friends.

They immersed themselves in the local social life. Donna took up pottery making and Tony took up photography. Donna became quite the successful and sought after pottery maker. Tony was her biggest fan and supporter.

One of their friends, Tim, was an actor. He also wrote music and was a bit of a playwright. Tim wrote a play and he wanted Tony to play a part. It was a western satire. Of course, Tony's answer was -- "I can't do that. I've never done anything like that -- you've got to be kidding."

"Sure you can," Tim said. "It's not a big part. Come to the first meeting."

Donna talked him into giving it a try. She was very familiar with Tony's upbringing and thought it would be good for him to try this. Tony figured he would probably play the dead guy or something simple.

At the first cast meeting, Tim gave a brief biography of himself and what he expected from everyone. Then he handed out the scripts and assignments. To Tony's surprise, Tim gave him the lead role. Tony would be the evil land grabbing bad guy.

"Wait a minute, Tim, I can't do that" said Tony.

"Yes you can" Tim replied.

Then the rehearsal began. The cast formed a circle on stage and began to read their parts out loud.

“Wait a minute!” Tony said --“This is a musical, I can’t sing!”

Again, Tim replied, “Yes you can”

Later that evening Tony showed the script to Donna and told her what his role was in the play. She laughed and was so happy for Tony.

“But you don’t understand, Donna, I can’t do that!”

“Oh yes you can.”

“I haven’t told you everything. I have to sing a couple of solos. I can’t sing.”

“You have a great voice Tony, I love to hear you sing,” Donna replied. Tony suspects she’s involved in a conspiracy with Tim.

Tony grumbled, “I’m committed now, I can’t quit -- as much as I would like to, I can’t. This goes back to my army days. Once one commits, he is committed. No turning back. Everybody is depending on you to do your job for the team. OK, OK, I get it. I’ll do it.”

After weeks of tortuous rehearsals, opening night was upon them. Tony had told his mother and sisters about the play and his role in it. “And I’m singing a couple of solos.”

“You can’t do that...can you?” That was their supportive response. “Whether I can or can’t, I’m doing it,” Tony answered.

Opening night -- *Flying gunner in a helo was a whole lot easier than this*, he thought. Looking out at the audience, Tony saw a full house.

The show was a big hit. Tony shined, never missed a beat. The play ran for two weekends, four shows each weekend. Sunday was a matinee and an evening show. Neither Tony’s mother nor his sisters ever showed up.

The End