

Silences can be deceiving

Ruth Ostrow

OVER the past few months I've trained to become a yoga teacher. In my course was a young woman, beautiful and strong. One could only feel awe for her flexibility as she twisted her tall, lean body into many challenging and inspiring positions.

But there was something strangely withdrawn about her. She didn't make contact with many of us and some complained her manner was aloof and arrogant. I presumed she was nursing a superiority complex and left her alone.

She was often the last to leave. One evening I stayed behind to go to the toilet. Not knowing I was behind her, she made her way to her car, shuffling with agony, hardly able to walk for the effort involved, groaning and grabbing tree branches to help her along. I stepped forward and helped her to the car where she shared her remarkable story.

Without self-pity she showed me her scar-covered feet which were filled with metal pins. She has a rare degenerative disease that affects the bones in her feet and ankles.

Over time her bones are predicted to disintegrate to dust. She is in constant pain despite many operations. The only thing keeping her from a wheelchair is her commitment to yoga, which has strengthened certain muscles and tendons enough to compensate, and her determination not to give in.

She explained that often the pain was too great for her to chat with us. She needed all her energy just to get through the day with a positive attitude and with hope.

This young woman became a true mentor. Every time I felt lost or not good enough – that sense of inadequacy which afflicts us all – I would simply look at her smiling face as she performed one of her extraordinary backbends or postures balancing on those feet, and feel blessed to be reminded of what in life is possible, and how much is attitude.

There are many things I could say but the facts speak for themselves. We should never be too quick to judge others, their moods, their silences. Some people are simply being incredibly brave.

But most importantly, when we see a half-empty glass we should always remember that there are some – the lucky ones – who see the glass as half-full. Darling "C", who took all her energy to smile, who I pray will be doing this at 80, this one is for you.

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First published in The Weekend Australian SAT 29 APR 2006