

What If...?

Billie Willmon Jenkin

Women

WC: 1,198

Tech: JJ 6/25/08, KM 7/7/08

Content: AW 7/17/08, RAV 7/24/08

Final: ABA 8/3/08

I jumped when I heard the shotgun blast from my older son's bedroom. Both my boys knew not to play with guns inside the ranch house.

“Dammit, Son! What are you...?”

As I opened his door, no question remained as to what he had done. But why had he done it? There on the carpet, bed and far wall were the remains of my firstborn, the one I had held in my heart even before I held him in my arms 17 years before, and for whom I'd had so many dreams.

Honor roll student, raised in church, a leader among his classmates, teachers' pet. Now dead, he left no clues to answer my, “Why?”

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As a toddler, I found imaginative ways to entertain myself. Lying on my grandparents' living room floor, gazing at the high ceiling, I often played “*What if?*” While adults droned on, I silently speculated, “What if the ceiling is really down and the floor is up?”

In my *What if?* game, the adults seated on furniture were stuck to what was really the ceiling. I, meanwhile, floated near the “ceiling” and considered surprising the adults by drifting down to the empty white floor.

Today, I use my tweaked version of *What if?* to change attitudes that no longer serve me. Using this tool, I shift my own perspectives and bring emotional healing to others. Before you investigate this game-tool with me, be forewarned of the one rule: “Thou must be childlike!”

### **Prior to our birth, *What if* we...**

- ❖ actually *chose* to participate in this adventure called life? Would that mean that instead of human beings, we are *spiritual* beings having a human experience?
- ❖ had a conversation in which we volunteered for certain Planet Earth assignments?
- ❖ knew our parents' characteristics: their habits, quirks, race(s), socioeconomic level, religion (or lack thereof); knew in which country on Planet Earth they would raise us?

If these *What ifs* were so, then (although we have forgotten our agreements and origin) prior to our birth, perhaps...

- ❖ we would have known the experiences our parents needed to maximize their progress along their Earth Path. (So, we lovingly chose to supply such opportunities for them. Perhaps each generation makes this agreement!)
- ❖ for others' sake, some of us volunteered to be "different" including challenged physically, emotionally or mentally; gay or transgender; a minority religion or race; lower socioeconomic status.

**Based on these possibilities, *What if* is a tool for facilitating changes in attitudes.**

When my sons were in Boy Scouts, I noticed my resentment against people who disappointed me. Following my own day of teaching, I drove 50 miles roundtrip to Matador, Texas, so my sons could participate in scout meetings. More than once I made the trip, only to discover that Ronnie, the scoutmaster, apparently had forgotten! Grrrr!

In planning the annual scout meeting, Ronnie agreed to reserve the school cafeteria and send announcements to parents. To promote the scouting program, the area scout representative (who lived 100 miles away) planned to meet the boys and their parents at the appointed time and place.

The day before this event, the representative phoned me, inquiring about specifics of the meeting. Self-righteously, I reported that the forgetful Ronnie apparently had overlooked the event because no announcements had been made. Consequently, there would be no big meeting. I wasn't the only one peeved about Ronnie's alleged amnesia!

Fast-forward to 5 a.m. following the scout meeting that never happened. An in-law's phone call awakened me. "Billie, is it true that the Matador School blew away last night?" he asked. *How the hell would I know, Dummy? I try to sleep at night*, I thought.

Turning on the news, I learned residents of the tiny west Texas town had less than 15 minutes warning to prepare for the tornado. The twister roared straight through the school. Then it reversed, retracing its path. The cafeteria, pounded twice, was totally demolished. If Ronnie's memory had been wonderful, approximately 75 little boys and their parents—our family among them—would have been meeting in that cafeteria at that very time!

*What if* our local scoutmaster's "faulty" memory was a gift for this very occasion?

Yes, *What if*?

The opening story of my son's suicide came within an instant of being 100 percent accurate. At the last moment, my firstborn, shifting from victim to choice, laid the gun aside. Years later, I recognized that the harsh judgment spewed out against those who

were “different” had almost robbed me of my son. And I was one of the judges who had prodded him to feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness!

Once I was willing to be open to new perspectives, I could ask *What if Spirit\** had gifted me a gay son, both for my own healing and others’ growth? What if, for others’ benefit, Rusty had volunteered pre-birth for his unpopular role? (That thought gave me new insight to “Greater love hath no man.”)

*What if* “problems” are Spirit’s priceless gifts which we have not yet unwrapped?

Viewing all our difficulties and offenses open-heartedly is *empowering for change*. Whether the other persons realize they are gifting us is irrelevant to our experience. If we can believe that they gifted us (even if we do not yet know what that gift is or how we’ll use it) we find there is nothing to resent, nothing to forgive.

Serendipity—making fortunate discoveries by accident—is a faculty we can cultivate through intent. We can choose to discover gifts through the most unlikely sources. The people who irritate or anger us the most, for instance, gift us by mirroring qualities we dislike in ourselves. Recognition of our own intolerance is a fortunate discovery, which provides us opportunity to shift our perspectives and see a clear image of ourselves.

Perhaps the greatest gift to ourselves is to find ways let go of the negativity we harbor. If we imagine we *are* that other person, we realize if we had been raised exactly the same way, made the same agreements with Spirit and had the same belief system, we would do exactly as she did. Such a “*what if*” often eliminates our judgment.

Another way to reduce our criticism is to ask ourselves, “What if that person and I switch roles in a future voyage? Would I want her to have the same attitude toward me that I currently have toward her?” Discovering we don’t want to be judged the way we have judged, allows us to shift perspectives.

Great ideas and opinions, including mine, don’t change lives. Perhaps *What if* is an effective tool for you to replace attitudes that no longer serve you. All the ideas and tools in the world won’t make a difference if they remain in the book or the box. To “hit the nail on the head,” you have to “pick up the hammer.”

By opening your heart and mind and using the tool of *What if*, what possibilities will you create in your life and in the lives of others?

\*I find *Spirit* a neutral term. If you prefer, substitute “God,” “Allah,” “Yahweh,” “First Cause,” “Supreme Intelligence” or whatever term suggests unlimited love.

Billie Willmon Jenkin

Jenkin, Billie Willmon

As a teacher, Billie Willmon Jenkin saw a need for the emotional education of both teachers and students. Before retirement, she developed and facilitated a course in attitude change for adult prison inmates. Her passion for empowering others to make positive changes in their lives is evident in her writing, mentoring and speaking. *The Knock-Kneed Cowboy: A Tale of Being "Just Right:"... Just as We Are*, her first children's book, which she wrote and illustrated, is a joyful, empowering tale of individuality.

Web site: [www.EmpoweringForChange.com](http://www.EmpoweringForChange.com)

E-mail: [EmpoweringForChange@gmail.com](mailto:EmpoweringForChange@gmail.com)