

The Mirrors of Our Peers

On the last day of a psychology class, I audited 44 years ago at a community college in Baltimore County, the teacher placed all the desks in a circle. Then, she had each student write his/her name on a sheet at their desk. She then placed a stack of 27 small pieces of blue paper on each desk and told students to rotate around the circle of desks and write something they appreciated about each student on one of the pieces of paper at their desk. No signatures were allowed.

I've carried the envelope containing those 28 pieces of paper (the teacher, Ann Kaiser Stearns, added her note to each pile) with me from one state to another . . . from apartment to apartment, and house to house. If my house were to suddenly catch fire, the small envelope containing those love-notes would be the one thing I'd grab before running out. They've nourished my spirit in times of self-doubt. They are a gift that keep on giving!

Here's the text from the card in which I keep my love-notes.

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Because I enjoyed a taped lecture that a psychology teacher had given her class, I sat in on her junior college psychology class for the last half of a semester. There were only three black students in the class. At the end of the semester, the teacher had each student write something on a separate slip of paper about each one of the students in the class, then give the notes to each of their classmates as a final gift. I truly treasured mine. They said all the nice things about me that I told myself and hoped others thought. When one grows up in a house with no mirrors of reflection, the self is never sure of who one is.

Here are transcriptions of their notes to me:

"Kindness toward helping people."

"I admire your strength. You are a beautiful person."

"Your honest, sweet personality is an asset to helping others. Keep at it."

"You seem to me to be very nice and fun-loving. Hope your career helping people works out very good."

"I wish you would have been in this class sooner. You have great ideas and are full of feeling. I hope I see you after this semester."

"You appear to be very intelligent and seem to have feelings for other people. You are also neat and attractive. Stay just the way you are."

"You sound like a nice person."

"You really have a good head and I've enjoyed each contribution you've made to the class. You have a kind face and a nice smile and personality."

"I loved all your comments and your deep feelings which you shared so generously (and your beautiful clothes.)"

"I thought your comments in class were very interesting."

“You are obviously right on! I like the way you contributed to the class. It added much!”

“I liked your little stories and down to earth comments about the lectures. I also like how straight you stand, like a proud person.”

“Glad you joined us. I liked what you had to say.”

“Your comments were meaningful to my head.”

“Many things you said in class meant a lot to me. I think you have a healthy attitude toward life.”

“I like what I perceive you to be. Also, your open, direct and to-the-point manner.

“I experienced you as a very warm, sincere, attractive person.”

“You are one of the friendliest people in the class. You accept others for themselves.”

“I find you refreshing like a breath of spring air – honest, deep, sharing.”

“You are intelligent, pretty and very nice. You have a very warm smile.”

“You have some fine legs – classy. I like you!”

“I like your legs most.”

“Beautiful legs. Lovely taste in dress. Excellent in what you contribute to class.”

“You’re so warm and full of life. I’m so glad you came to class. So pretty and a smile that cares.”

“You’re sharp. You have a quick mind, are very good looking, and nice on top of it all.”

“I like you!”

“I admire your dedication to the people you work with.”

And from the teacher: “You’re a pretty woman, very attractive in the way you dress and carry yourself and also very pretty inside because of your warmth & sensitivity and feeling-ness. I think you added a lot by being here and sharing yourself & your ideas. Thank you for being here. . . and I like you a lot.”