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In 1971 a Stanford psychologist, Phillip Zimbardo, did research involving dividing students into prisoners and guards. The experiment had to be terminated early because the guards—even though they were only students playing guards—became too abusive of the prisoners—even though the prisoners were only fellow students playing prisoners....Having charge of others is a heavy responsibility, ...There have been too many instances of college fraternities killing their pledges for us to overlook ...

by Marien Helz

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**The Gift**

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## Prisoners

by Marien Helz

In 1971 a Stanford psychologist, Phillip Zimbardo, did research involving dividing students into prisoners and guards. The experiment had to be terminated early because the guards—even though they were only students playing guards—became too abusive of the prisoners, even though the prisoners were only fellow students playing prisoners. Now, more than three decades later, we have sent our young people to a country where they face constant danger, hostility toward their homeland, and frequent news of their comrades dying. They volunteered to serve their country and are risking their lives with no clear goal and no clear termination date.

Having charge of others is a heavy responsibility, and we have learned from the Zimbardo study that it can turn out badly. There have been too many instances of college fraternities killing their pledges to overlook the dangers of giving untrained people unlimited power over others. Without training on prisoner care, without a strongly stated message on what our values are and how we wish prisoners to be treated, those in the highest level of our government should have expected things to go awry.

Instead of giving our soldiers adequate instruction on prisoner care, our military leaders developed approved methods of "persuasion": among which were isolation, dogs, and "sleep management." —Dogs? I don't even want to imagine how dogs can be used as a persuasion (torture) device.

Once torture, or whatever euphemism is used for it, becomes accepted, the culture that promotes and sponsors it is in danger. When a people are fooled into thinking that torture can be for the greater good, for the salvation of the many, extraordinary degradation of the entire culture ensues. We saw that in the previous century with the rise of Nazism—which looks like a momentary aberration compared to the hundreds of years in which Europeans tortured women under the excuse that they were witches. In some villages, no woman was left alive. The Aztecs and Mayans were convinced by their priests that murdering babies in a painful manner so that they would cry a lot was the only way to ensure that enough rain would fall for the crops to grow.

You can get almost anyone to say just about anything under torture. For hundreds of years, people confessed to being witches and flying through the air in order to make the torture end—despite knowing they would be burned to death once they confessed. It's an unreliable method of gaining information.

It was Saddam Hussein and his sons' despicable torture that made the war, and overthrowing him, somewhat palatable to Americans when no "weapons of mass destruction" were found. Now with some of our soldiers guilty of unacceptable behavior toward prisoners, our moral high ground is becoming awfully swampy.

There is no question that the soldiers involved in molesting and torturing prisoners must be punished. Not to do so would mean that we approve of their behavior. It is crucial, however, to ensure that those who put them in the position that allowed this to happen be penalized as well. There are too many instances of abuses in which some of our military personnel have molested, tormented, and tortured others in the military because they belong to a different gender than that of the majority for us to accept the abuse in Iraq as an isolated case.

We need to make sure that we promote, adhere to, and demonstrate honorable behavior on the part of those in whom we entrust the power to command or to control other people.

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## The Gift

by Charles Miess

Sunbeams danced in the rays of the late afternoon sun that filtered through finger-smudged windows. The smell of dusty fabric and furniture padding tickled my nose as I gradually awoke from a deep sleep. I watched a fly as he walked a zigzag path, avoiding the patches and tears in the back of the overstuffed couch. I could hear my older brother and sister laughing and playing in the next room. The younger two were upstairs giggling as Dad tossed them up and down on the bed. My sleepy, bewildered mind wondered why I was lying there instead of playing too. Then a crushing sense of sadness and rejection swept into my chest as my seven-year-old brain slowly worked its way back to reality.



The year was 1949. There were five of us kids and one on the way. I was in the middle. Being in the middle had its advantages when there was trouble, but otherwise it wasn't much fun. The younger two always seemed to get the love and the older ones, the toys. Mom was more opened with her affection, but there was only once I can recall my dad holding me. I remember feeling so safe as I snuggled into his warm arms, savoring the familiar smell of kerosene and honest sweat in his work clothes. But I had the chicken pox then. When I was well, I had to accept being the invisible one in the family. This day, though, had been far too much for me to bear.



We were all excited earlier that day when Mom and Dad returned from their weekly shopping trip. Mom reached deep into a grocery bag and pulled out several balls of yarn along with the most wonderful toy. It was a small wooden handle with a hole down the middle and metal pegs around the top. "It's a knitting spool," she said as she wrapped yarn around the pegs and flipped one strand over the other while she pulled the string at the opposite end. As if by magic, a thick yarn rope gradually came out of the bottom. She told us you could roll up the soft rope and make all kinds of amazing things—rugs, placemats, and even potholders. It was the neatest toy that I had ever seen.

But there were only two of them in the bag. There was one for Ethel and one for Billy, and there was none for me. My devastated heart sank in my chest while I did my best to hide the bitter disappointment. Dad didn't tolerate whining and whimpering in the house, so I could only watch and try to share the excitement. Finally, Mom went to her housework and Dad to his workshop. I lay down on the couch and quietly cried myself to sleep.

Now, hours later, I was fully awake and still filled with sadness. But what was I clutching in my hand that felt so cool and smooth?! I held it up and focused my eyes on a strange piece of shiny metal. It was a polished brass tube with a round plate welded to the top. Metal pegs were neatly soldered in place around the top plate. It was a knitting spool! My dad had made it in his



workshop and placed it in my hand while I was asleep. My eyes filled with tears, but this time I wept for joy.

~

Much of my childhood I've since forgotten, but I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I know now that my dad felt uncomfortable expressing emotion, unless it was through the expert workmanship of his skillful hands. That day, he had created a work of art for me, and I knew I was loved. What I would give to hold that simple knitting spool in my hand once more! My mom always wore her heart on her sleeve; Dad kept his protected deep within. On the outside he often seemed uncaring, unemotional, and uncompromising. It was difficult to penetrate his armor and see the real man who was full of sentiment, generosity, and love. And it hurts me today, twenty years after his death, that people outside our

family still define him only by what they saw on the surface. There was so much more to him than that. I know, because over a half century ago, I held a little piece of his heart in the palm of my hand.

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We are pleased to present Photography by  
**Armin W. Helz**  
from the 1920's

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