

The not-so evil Internet

Many people say that the Internet is evil — the Devil reincarnated, luring men, women and children to an amoral society ripe with crime, violence, sex, drugs and anything else that might be included in the Seven Deadly Sins.

Whew! That's an awful lot of blame to put on a keyboard, tower and monitor, don't you think? I may be in the minority, but I happen to think that the Internet is the best thing to happen to all of us since sliced bread, and I have a story to share that boosts that perception.

This year, in June of 2005, I will be celebrating the fortieth year since my high school graduation. I'm on all the popular Internet Web sites that cater to graduates — www.classmates.com and www.graduates.com —

in fact, I hold a silver or gold membership to both simply because it's nice to be able to reminisce about the good old days.

However, my good old days weren't always good. In fact, they were pretty grim. I was a geek in high school — a tall, awkward, shy girl who didn't date until I was in my senior year and then only because one of my friends took pity on me and set me up with a reluctant blind date. I was always seated in the corner of a classroom, dreading when a teacher might find me and call on me, praying that I'd make it through 45 minutes of class without having to



As I
see it

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open my mouth.

To pass this dismal teenage existence, I took refuge in watching "the cool girls" and secretly wishing that I could be more like them. There was the queen of the class, JoAnn, beautiful, popular, carefree and always surrounded by a crowd of girls. Her immediate court consisted of Vickie, Lois and Donna and when they walked down the hall — well, you just had to stop, watch and wonder why the good Lord gave them so much and skipped you when He was picking from the gene pool.

Now I never spoke to any of the girls, especially JoAnn, but one fateful afternoon in gym class I came as close as I ever could to being within a few feet of her. As luck would have it, somehow I landed on a basketball team consisting of JoAnn, Vickie, Lois and Donna. Till this day, I think it was the gym teacher's way of punishing me for all the times that I tried to get out of climbing the ropes.

So, there I was, trying desperately to block the other team of girls dribbling the ball and failing miserably to steal it, pass it or make a basket. Needless to say, Vickie, Lois and Donna were all over me, calling me all sorts of names and shaking their heads in disgust. But JoAnn remained silent until finally, she turned to the three girls and sternly said, "Why don't you leave her alone? Can't you see that she's doing the best that she can?"

There was no arguing with JoAnn or, mercifully, any more name calling by the girls as we finished out the game. After the game, the three girls gave me dirty looks, but JoAnn looked over and smiled at me. I had wanted to say thank you then, but was too shy to do so even though that moment was probably the happiest one of my entire high school life.

Well, readers, that was over forty years ago, and I never spoke to JoAnn again — until just a few days ago on the Internet. Yes, the purveyor of wickedness, the Internet, had sent a message into my e-mail box from www.graduates.com announcing JoAnn's arrival and asking its members to welcome her into the fold.

It didn't take me long to send her a note and re-introduce myself as a former member of the Class of 1965. I relayed the basketball story pretty much as I relayed it to you, except that in my e-mail, I finally got the chance to thank her for coming to my aid so many years ago. Forty years may have passed, but in some small way it made me feel like another chapter of my life could finally be closed for good.

You see, we all affect people's lives, no matter how inconsequential or how profoundly, and acts of kindness that may seem miniscule to us may have had an intense affect on someone else.

There are some really wonderful chapters in Dr. Richard Carlson's best selling book, "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff... and it's all small stuff," that correlate to the above story, especially Chapter 24, "Spend a Moment Every Day Thinking of Someone to Thank."

According to Dr. Carlson, who has appeared on nationwide television and radio venues, including the Oprah Winfrey Show, gratitude and inner peace go hand in hand. He suggests that we begin each day by thinking of a person to thank whether it's your spouse, family member, friend, someone from your past, teacher, someone from work, someone who gave you a break, or someone who just does something nice for you during the day, such as allowing you to merge into traffic, someone who may have held the door open for you when your arms were filled with packages, or perhaps someone who offered you a seat on the subway when your feet were burning. Perhaps it's the trash man who waited patiently while you rolled your trash bin out to the curb or perhaps the bank teller who dropped a dog biscuit in the drive-in window canister for the faithful companion sitting next to you.

It might be time to thank your spouse for the way he or she listens while you drone on and on about the tough day you've had or how about thanking your parents for being there when you needed them most? These little acts of kindness deserve special attention and that simple thank you may be just the boost your psyche needs.

Dr. Carlson says that this simple exercise blocks out negativity and replaces it with focus on the good aspects of one's life. As you think of one person to thank, he promises that the image of another person will pop into your head, then another, and so on.

I think Dr. Carlson's on the right track and one of my New Year's resolutions is to practice what he preaches. After all, his book's a best seller ... and I have a feeling he's also on the Internet.

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