

The Power of Choice – Cold War Patriots’ Day of Remembrance, part 2

We continue with the story of Reon Schutte’s life where he learned to control his choices while in prison in Zimbabwe as presented at the recent Cold War Patriots’ Day of Remembrance. His presentations were inspiring and his personal example of how he changed his mental state even while serving 12 years and eight months in the most horrible of conditions in the Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison made the audience think about their own circumstances and chosen mental state.

In last week’s column, Reon’s story had covered how he got into prison and how he had trained his mind through choices he had made relative to the meager amount of food he was getting and his fear of the daily beatings. Now his story changes from his focus on his mind to how he influenced others.

Reon fixated on the single hole in the floor where the 50 prisoners were allowed to use as a toilet. It was never cleaned and it had a terrible odor. Interestingly enough, Reon said the odor was not noticed after some time of being routinely exposed to it. But he wanted the toilet cleaned. So, one day when he was given a small amount of water as happened once per month, he got up and went to the messy hole in the floor and with his bare hands and that small amount of water, he cleaned the feces from the floor and the hole.

The rest of the prisoners grew very silent at this unusual behavior. He cleaned the hole in the floor each month for some time until one day another prisoner stood and said, “It’s my turn today.” Soon all the prisoners were taking turns in an unwritten and unspoken agreement that each person would take turns cleaning the nasty hole-in-the-floor toilet.

He also made a point of the situation he was in being one where he first wished he was anywhere by where he was, in other words he thought life would certainly be better “there” and it did not matter where “there” was. However, when he decided that he would take control of his choices each day regardless of where he was, he learned another truth that had great impact on him. He learned to accept the limitations on his physical state and not allow that to negatively influence his mind. He learned to live in the present and appreciate being alive each day.

Reon got very sick and was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He endured seven surgeries and was told he was going to die. He was allowed to go to the hospital after much pressure from the support group that had been formed in his name. But he was handcuffed and chained for all the time except when he was under sedation. He was always surrounded by armed guards.

Then one day the door opened to his cell and guards told him to get dressed and follow them. He did as he was told not knowing what to expect. When he got outside the prison block he was placed in front of a large barrage of cameras and handed a cell phone. He did not know what it was. He had spent 12 years and eight months behind prison walls.

When he was returned to South Africa, he found he was no longer wanted as a soldier by the new government. He realized that he had a new lease on life and it was up to him what to do with it. He decided to share his story with others.

The following statement by Reon was found on Maggie Kuhn Jacobus’ web site. “We may not be able to choose or change our circumstances,” Reon says, “but I’ve learned that we can change our mental state, adjust our attitude, and thus manage our reaction to those circumstances. In this way, we take back control of our lives and can overcome any type of adversity or rise above the most dire of situations.”

Reon Schutte is living proof that a person can use their mind to overcome adversity and to endure the situations life brings them. The audiences who heard him speak at this event were moved by his personal story, not his flair or his showmanship, but by his sincere example of using his mind to free him from the negative reactions to adverse circumstances.

Many Y-12 retirees proudly told how long they had worked at Y-12 and the other sites and were proudly given a lapel pin to recognize their service to our country. Our nation has not been engaged in a third world war because of their efforts during the Cold War. As these patriots grow older, giving them recognition is very important.

Here are Reon's Power of Choice Life-Changing Principles

1. Forgiveness is setting yourself free
2. Be a victor, not a victim
3. Failure only exists when YOU choose to give up
4. Acceptance of circumstances allows for change
5. You choose how you will respond to your circumstances
6. Lead by example
7. Serve others
8. There is no "There"
9. Don't ask, "Why?" ask, "What for?"
10. The Power of Choice Resides in Each of Us

It was good to see folks who braved the rain to come to the New Hope Center to honor the Cold War patriots. Thanks to Reon Schutte for sharing his tremendous story with us.