

The Magnificent Power of Maybe

497 words

My mother was by no means a scholar; in fact she had only a high school education. But she often did something that, in retrospect, seems genius. That is, she would most often say, “Maybe” when I asked to do or have something as a child.

“Mama, can I go to the movie on Saturday?”

“Maybe.”

“Mama, can I get a dog?”

“Maybe.”

“Mama, can I go to my girlfriend’s house?”

“Maybe.”

And so it went, time after time, no matter what I wanted, the answer was the same. Sometimes I got what I wanted (going to my friend’s house). Sometimes I didn’t (dog). But I always anticipated the *possibility* of getting or doing what I want and so I grew up a happy child with big expectations.

Perhaps she sometimes said, “maybe” when she knew I was about to get what I wanted. Perhaps she knew that I never would. As an adult, I asked her once why she always said “maybe”. She explained that it was because she knew that as a child, my wants were infinite and changing. If I always got what I wanted, I’d soon tire of that and want something else. She was right, of course; but, more importantly, she somehow – without knowing the effect of her technique – set me up for a positive attitude.

My mother never studied psychology. She grew up as one of six children in a poor immigrant household. Her own mother suffered many and diverse difficulties including loss of two children, early death of her husband and subsisting while living alone in a tiny cabin. I seem to remember my grandmother using the “maybe” technique as well. Despite her adversities, she was always upbeat and took life in stride. All my aunts and uncles did as well.

Many modern psychologists have proven the value of intermittent positive reinforcement and the power of anticipating joy. It has been shown that anticipation of an event is often more pleasurable than the event itself. Many psychologists, particularly Scott Barry Kaufman and Charles R. Snyder have developed a *hope theory* which essentially states that hope is a vehicle for happiness and can lead to methods of overcoming life’s difficulties. With hope, one is constantly exploring ideas to problem solve, be creative and think positively. That person is always anticipating a joyful outcome. Even in the event of occasional failures, one can look forward to the next possibility of success.

So I find that although I have lost many family members (including all those wonderful aunts and uncles, several cousins, my parents, a husband, a sister and many friends), and although my career is over and I am now enduring my own health issues (as we all do as we age). I am still hopeful, joyful and happy. And although find many things I used to do much more difficult, I tell myself, maybe, just maybe I can do them anyway.

Thanks Mom.