

To All Students Everywhere **Art Johnson**

Published in the BMES Bulletin, vol 33, no. 1, 2009

“It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again. . . who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly.”

This quote by Theodore Roosevelt exemplifies two needs: 1) to recognize and celebrate those who work diligently toward good and noble ends, and 2) to become those people ourselves. The world is a tough place, and it demands toughness in order to survive. The world can be cold and ruthless, taking those who aspire to no more than to be left alone and to leave others alone, and grinding them to small pieces of subhuman protoplasm. There are victims; there will always be victims of war, starvation, fraudulent schemes, the powerful, and adverse circumstances. The most these victims can do is to subsist uncomfortably with little hope for improvement.

You are not victims; you are winners. You have advantages of family, friends, resources, and education. You could lose every material thing you have in this world, and you could rebound. You have hope, confidence, energy, and spirit. You can thrive. You are, by some miracle, in the right place at the right time to prosper, to be comfortable, and to take care of yours. Your worries are little worries, and your life is in your hands.

Such a contrast, you and the impoverished. You have everything you need and much of what you want; the impoverished have nothing, no safety, no surety, no future. You can live a life that counts for something; the impoverished barely have life.

You are hardly responsible for your advantages. You did not choose to be born who you are, to the parents you have, and in the comfortable environment that surrounds you. You have friends, who like you, are here because of circumstances they did not choose. You have physical and mental health, you are robust, you are intelligent and you are capable. But you didn't choose these things, they chose you. You are here, and that is how lucky, and how rich, you are.

There are those out there who need you. The mother who lives in poverty; the child who will nearly starve to death because of war; the victim of inhuman acts on our streets; the elderly who face uncertain futures; the driver of the other car; the high schooler harassed because of being a conscientious student; the patient with incurable genetic disease; your friend succumbing to stress. The world will never improve if you don't do all you can to improve it.

It is up to you, each of you, because there are enough problems for everyone to tackle. We are all involved, whether we like it or not. It is up to us, not someone else, to be marred by dust and sweat and blood, to strive valiantly.

We may not succeed. No one succeeds all the time. But when the alarm clock wakes you in the morning, you need to remind yourself that is a new day to make the world a better place, and you need to get going because without you the world will not be better in the unique ways that you can make it better. It is up to you to kick-start yourself

to do what you can. Without you, there is one less dusty, sweaty, bloody face that the world needs right now—immediately.

And, remember, there are others who are dusty, and sweaty, and bloody because they, too, are trying. It may be convenient to associate with the powerful, the well-placed, the rich. It may even be expedient to forget those who wear rags rather than tuxedos, who are only capable of doing little things, not big things, to improve the world. But talk to those people and share a little of their dust, and sweat, and blood. They deserve respect not only for what they do, but also for what they are. Perhaps, someday, you, too will be elevated to their level.