



JOINT TASK FORCE CIVIL SUPPORT

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The Carrot and the Egg

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A few weeks ago while in the Psychiatric Ward at work, I had the privilege of speaking with some of our nation's veterans. Their admission to the hospital meant that their journey through life had become so overwhelming they had to seek specialized care in an effort to survive. That day I sat amongst them with hopes that I could share with them some encouraging words that would attempt to ease the pain of their current affliction and give them hope knowing that their tomorrow could be brighter.

In that moment I realized that at any given time, I too, can become inundated with the responsibilities that come with cultivating a family and a career. I can become subject to the perils that accompany paying bills when you've got more month than you have money and your cell phone is ringing nonstop because everyone and their mothers want to borrow the last five dollars that you have hidden under your mattress. To top it off, the wife is nagging about her hair and nails and let's not forget the kids, my God, the kids are behaving in school as if they were raised in a wild safari! These stressors of life have the grave potential to drive all of us to pull our hair out! In addition to the light-hearted aforementioned issues, these men and women who once donned a military uniform also struggle with the darkness of substance abuse, homelessness and even hopelessness.

So that day, while attempting to be an agent of healing and compassion, I shared with them a story I heard that involved boiling water, a carrot, an egg and coffee beans. The simplicity of the objects of my narrative made them smile. "Where is this crazy guy going with this," I'm sure I heard one say. I shared with them that each one of those food items represent a person and the boiling water symbolized adversity.

The carrot, strong, hard and tenacious once placed into the boiling water becomes softened and weak. The egg, fragile and delicate has an outer shell that protects the liquid substance inside; after being placed in the boiling water its inside becomes hardened. However, the coffee beans are unique. Once they have been subjected to the boiling water they respond differently and actually change the water.

As I concluded my simple child-like story the veteran's faces beamed with hope, the very thing that I had desired to give them. They realized that they had allowed their hard, cruel, and excruciating environments to change them when they actually had the power to change their environment.

As I share this with you today, in my transparency I'll admit, that I have been the carrot and the egg at one time or another. When faced with the harsh realities of life I went in strong and unrelenting, but came out mushy. At other times I'd go in gentle and delicate and would come out hardened from the inside out. But most days, with the encouragement and support of my family and friends, I choose to be the coffee beans because it gives me the opportunity to turn something potentially ruthless and devastating into something rich and savory.

My question to you today Ma'am and Sir is this: Which will you be when subjected to adversity?