

THE LION AND THE LAMB

by Robert Fitt

I'd like to tell you a story. Perhaps you'll think that it's a fairy tale. Perhaps it is? I'll let you decide. It's a story about the feelings that lie within the bosoms of troubled youth. It's a story that may challenge your perceptions of what they're like. It may challenge your perceptions of your ability to love. But, most importantly, it may even change the way you act. If you're willing to accept such a possibility, read on....

There once was a school. It was a good school. There was much pride in its accomplishments and traditions. The teachers were good, and the students, for the most part, were bright and responsive. But a few did not respond, and of those few, some did not respond because they so often chose to stay away from class.

They stayed away for many reasons. They stayed away because their friends did, (for the acceptance of the gang that they ran with had become more important to them than anyone or anything else), or because they were unable to do the work, and felt rebuffed when they asked for help; or because they were teased or rejected by unfeeling classmates; or because a high score on computer games made them feel briefly worthwhile again; or because they couldn't cope; or because their parents didn't care; or because nothing awful happened if they sluffed school anyway; or a hundred other reasons as unique as the personality of the student himself.

Though their reasons for skipping class differed, they had at least one important thing in common, they were afraid to return. They feared the cutting remarks of classmates (or teachers); they were afraid that they would be rejected by friends who sluffed with them; or they were afraid of ridicule when questions were asked for which they had no ready answer.

Frustrated by their own lack of desire and skill, and plagued by a deep sense of guilt, it was easier to stay away from school than it was to face their fears.

For Richard, as his occasional sluffing deteriorated into habitual truancy, and into the deepening abyss of alcohol and drugs, the continuing deception began to take its toll. The contrast between what was, and what should be, rapidly robbed him of his self-esteem. Trust was gone, and honor, and he felt deeply the effects of the loss.

He felt useless, powerless, and impotent as feelings of guilt and fear gripped him firmly and drew him inexorably downward into the fetid pool of worthlessness. How he yearned to begin again; to change his life; to regain the ground he had lost; but no trusted hand was there, no caring heart. It seemed a world without hope . . . a dark place, smothered by the fabric of inadequacy and frustration that he had spun from the fibers of his own behavior. But when called upon to account for his behavior, the chameleon fabric changed its colors. In an instant inner fears were crowded aside by outward bravado: "School's not cool!", he shouted loud enough to shield his quaking heart, and, "Nobody's gonna make *me* do what I don't wanna do!"

His anger echoed down the long halls of the school like the dialogue in a familiar play, as 'macho' mannerisms transformed the timid lamb into a raging lion, a frightened child into an abusive delinquent; and when pressed to the limit of his pretense, he covered his feelings of guilt and

worthlessness with a dense smokescreen of four-letter anger that exploded into the atmosphere like fireworks in the night sky!

The reaction of the school staff was immediate—and punitive—and when seen through the fragmentary vision of the injured staff, was a right response to wrong behavior; but seen through the similarly clouded vision of the offender it was one more evidence of his uselessness. He felt rejected as a person, and powerless to change. "Why try?" He muttered, "I always do it wrong, and nothing that I could do would change anything anyway...".

That his own behavior was the cause of his misery did not register in his mind at all. That he was worthless, registered clearly.

"I'll never go back to school," he said. "It's useless, nobody cares about what happens to me there!" And he was right. At least nobody cared in that self-protecting moment of frantic crisis, for the staff saw only a snarling lion. They sensed nothing of the frightened lamb cringing fearfully within.

If this cycle continues, and if society brands Richard a 'lion forever', and feeds him accordingly, then will the lion within him grow strong while the lamb starves within him—emaciating gradually—consumed by anger and frustration.

As the years pass, and as the tender buds of truancy ripen into the bitter fruits of misbegotten acts, the lamb is long forgotten; but the lion ravages the countryside, striking out against society in angry retaliation. A fearsome antagonist fit only for prison walls.

So there is the story, a fanciful tale of a lion and a lamb. Or is it just a story?

Might you stand, one day, at the critical crossroads of a young person's life? You surely will—you often do—and when you do, remember that the things you feel....and say....and do there....will send out soul-waves of influence—for good or ill—that may never end.

The choice is yours. What will you choose....to contend with the lion or to comfort and heal the lamb?