

THE UNWANTED CATALYST FOR SUCCESS

When our son was young, he asked a simple question about his sister. "Daddy," he said, "did God know before Jenny was born that she would be retarded?" "Yes, Son. God knew that." "Well, if He knew, then why did He let her be born?"

And while I struggled to give an answer that satisfied a four-year-old, the question still lingers. It's arisen recently with Olivia Grace Stanton, the baby daughter of friends Mike and Denise Stanton. If God knew beforehand that a genetic disorder would take Olivia's life after only 10 short days, why would she and her family have to go through such agony? The question is difficult--but important.

As we wrestle with the question of why tragedy strikes some and not others, one conclusion is inescapable: there are no pat answers. Olivia showed us that there is far more to achievement than what education, resources, and intelligence can effect. History indicates that suffering sometimes becomes the unwanted catalyst for success.

Through painful hardships and privations, the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804--1806) expanded our country's vision to the exciting possibilities of westward expansion. These pioneers blazed a trail to the Pacific Ocean, and others would rapidly follow.

In the midst of this arduous journey, Meriwether Lewis contemplated his life. "This day I completed my thirty-first year, and conceived that I had, in all human probability, now existed about half the period which I am to remain in this sublunary world. I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little, indeed, to further the happiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation."

Hand-picked by Thomas Jefferson for this job, Lewis envisioned fulfillment not in the prestige of his position, but in being able to transfer something of enduring value to his fellow man. He wanted others to benefit from his mission in life.

In one sense, Olivia is no different. She just had a different mission. And though her expedition through life was ever so brief, it has expanded the vision and purpose of many who would ponder her ten-day journey. Truly, she helped impart vital information to those who will follow.

We will all eventually follow Olivia--into death. And whether we persist for 10 days or 10 decades, the trials of life--even those she and her family endured--are temporary. She showed us that.

To benefit our fellow man, it helps to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. Rejoicing is easy. But to weep with those who weep, we must first weep ourselves. Olivia taught many how to weep.

What greater comfort can we receive, but that from the hand of one who has been where we are going? Olivia opened floodgates of compassion and comfort toward her family.

Olivia may be gone, but she has advanced succeeding generations just like Meriwether Lewis hoped for himself. That's real success.