

My Friend, Barbara.

Not long ago I received a call from a woman who said she had a huge tree that desperately needed trimming (my business), and would I come have a look. Upon arrival I was greeted by a good natured woman in a wheelchair who appeared to have severe Cerebral Palsy along with a noticeable speech impediment.

What impressed me most about her, right away, was her general good attitude and how she pushed through her obvious disabilities to communicate with me. She told me her name was Barbara and she had lived in her home (very modest and run down) for many years.

She showed me the tree in question. It was a huge Chinese Elm tree that was over eighty years old and had never been trimmed. I told her it would be expensive to have me artistically lace and shape it because it was such a huge job. We agreed on a price and since she lived on a very modest income, I agreed she could pay me a small amount every month until it was paid off. She put me on 'auto pay,' and every month her small amount was deposited automatically into my account.

This went on for many months. I would also go visit her from time to time just to check on her and say hello. She told me she took a special handicap bus to work five days a week to a company she had worked at for many years. I was deeply touched by her courage and integrity.

While there one day, I noticed she had an old and very dilapidated, and quite frankly, unsafe raised wood deck and access ramp for her wheelchair to go in/out of her house. The railings of the deck and ramp were rotted and falling off and there were holes in the deck itself from years of neglect and decay.

I asked her if she had ever had a government agency try to help her remedy this unsafe situation. She told me she's tried for Five Years!, calling every agency she could but no one would help replace the unsafe deck and ramp. She even had her Social Worker try as well, all to no avail. She even told me she called the local Police who came over and said they'd do a fund raiser for her to build the new deck, but they too, failed her. She had gotten an estimate of over \$5,000.00 to do this work. After I listened to all this, I thought for just about 30 seconds and said the following to her:

Barbara, I'm going to say something right now and I don't want any thank you for it and it comes with no strings attached. I am going to build you a new deck and ramp, at no cost to you!

Well...she started crying, and couldn't believe what she was hearing, probably thinking back on all the other people who'd let her down over the past five years. Furthermore, I told her we would get started next week!

The short of this story is, I built her a new deck and ramp, which involved me hiring a carpenter to help me demo the existing deck and then rebuild the new one with materials I had purchased at Home Depot. I even made the deck about 20 % larger to give her more room to sit out there to enjoy her yard. It took us three days in all. I even found out her favorite color was Maroon, so I painted all the wood that color.

Now...Barbara has a new and very solid and safe new deck and ramp, which makes us both feel better about it all.

Shortly after I completed this project, I called her to check in on her and she sounded sad. I asked her what was going on. She told me her husband had died in her arms recently from a brain aneurysm, and the bank had called her about the mortgage which made her fearful of losing her home.

I asked her how much she still owed me for the tree work I'd done and she said she owed me \$1,000.00. I paused for a moment and told her the following:

I'm going to tell you something right now and I don't want you to thank me and I don't want to hear about it again, and it comes with no strings attached. I told her that I immediately forgive the \$1,000.00 debt. You owe me nothing. Well...she was taken aback and she was appreciative. I don't think I did any great thing in this because it naturally and intuitively seemed the ONLY decent thing to do in this situation, given the fact of this sweet and modest woman's plight.

Barbara is a brave and courageous individual who is an inspiration to me, particularly when I think I might have some troubles to deal with. I am grateful for her friendship.

Gary Walker 2016