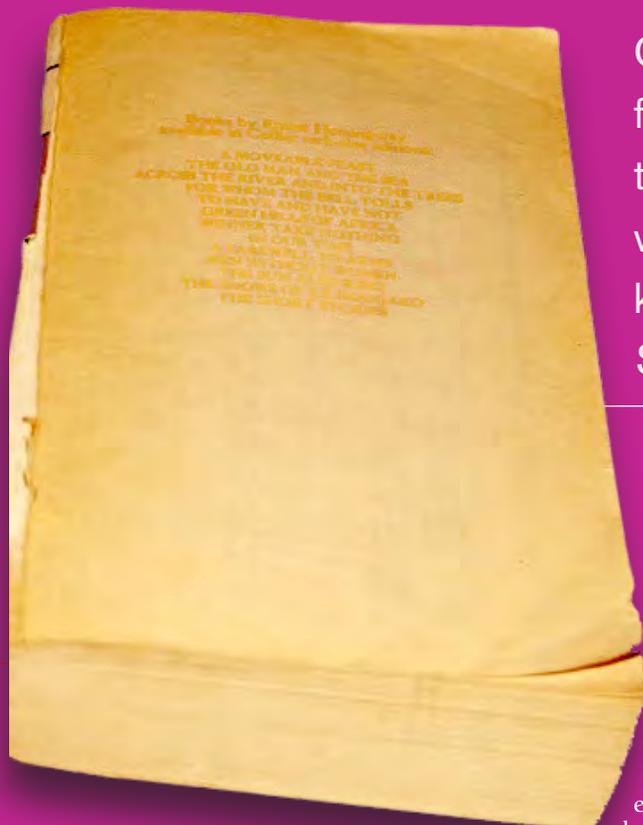


THE UN-COMFORT ZONE

With Robert Wilson

Sometimes You Have to Rip the Cover Off the Book



On a summer weekend in 1977, my friend Tony and I made plans to go waterskiing. When he picked me up there were two people in the car that I did not know. He introduced his new girlfriend Sue, and her brother Bubba.

Bubba was the quintessential redneck. Within minutes of getting on the boat, he stuffed a wad of chewing tobacco the size of a baseball in his cheek, then chugged several beers. In less than an hour we were dealing with an irritable drunk. He belched loudly, spit constantly, complained incessantly, and couldn't string two words together without inserting a profanity. In short, Bubba made our visit to the lake completely unpleasant. Eventually he passed out in the back of the boat and we enjoyed the rest of the day.

My opinion of Bubba's character, talent and intelligence could not have been lower. I looked upon him as a total loser. A dimwit who would never amount to anything.

At the end of the day, Tony drove Sue and Bubba home first. When we arrived at their home, Bubba was awake and somewhat sober. Sue asked Tony to come

inside and see the new dress she'd bought. Then she turned to Bubba and said, "Why don't you show Robert your chickens?"

We walked around to the back of the house and Bubba pointed toward a miniature barn. It was the cutest little building I'd ever seen. Round-ed roof, little windows, bright colors and lots of lacy gingerbread all around.

"Where'd you get this?" I asked. "I built it," replied Bubba.

"From a kit?" I asked. "No, I built it after my grandfather's barn."

For the first time that day, I was impressed by Bubba. When we went inside, the first thing I saw was a display case full of blue ribbons. Dozens of them. These were first place awards from around the country that Bubba had won for his chickens. Then he started showing me his chickens and telling me about them. Suddenly the cussing and complaining Bubba became eloquent.

As we walked around the barn he showed me more than 50 of the most beautiful and exotic looking birds I'd ever seen. Unusual looking birds that I would never have known were chickens. These were not birds for eating or laying eggs – these were prize show chickens.

He explained to me that chickens originated in the jungles of Asia. He told me how he bred and raised them. What he did to make their plumage bright, colorful and plentiful. I was amazed by the extent of his knowledge and I listened eagerly to everything he said. He spoke with an enthusiasm and energy that I could not have imagined earlier. The difference was that I had entered his real world. The world he loved and was excited about. Here was his hobby, but he was so motivated by it that it brought out the very best in him.

I learned a big lesson that day. I'd always heard my teachers say, "Don't judge a book by its cover," but until then I had not witnessed the truth of that proverb. I decided then and there that I would never judge another person completely by my first impression. That if time and opportunity allowed, I would look further, deeper.

When you discover someone's passion, you have discovered what motivates them. And, that is the key to communicating with them in the most productive way possible.

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