

Excerpt From: Chapter Nine "The Funny Guy"

"I think you have a really cool job, and I wondered if it would be okay if I emailed you sometime," said Jackson.

He was a high school student who had just attended one of my presentations. It was obvious he had enjoyed the talk and was interested in my line of work. Maybe I was talking to a future motivational speaker. There are a lot of uninspired young people out there. The world needed this spark of encouragement standing before me.

"Sure," I said. "I even have a little resource manual for people who want to become speakers that may give you some direction." But just when I thought I had him sized up, he threw me a curve.

"Oh, I don't want to be a speaker. I just think you'd be cool to talk to," he said. "I don't have anyone to talk to. I think you have a cool job, and you seem really nice. I just thought I could email you sometime."

"Sure," I replied as I handed him my business card. "But why don't you have anyone to talk to?"

His answer was incisive. "I have lots of friends, but no one really cares when the tough stuff starts. I am a really funny guy. But when I'm not funny, people don't listen. They don't take me seriously, so I don't feel like I have anyone who really listens when I need to talk. Since you don't know me, I was hoping that you would listen and maybe help me sometimes."

A class clown with a deep soul. That may sound like an oxymoron but it is common among funny people. Most comedians have a deep, dark side. They grew up with pain and used their humor to survive the demons of despair and depression. The list is long and loaded with familiar names: Louie Anderson, Jim Carrey, George Lopez, Ellen DeGeneres, Roseanne Barr, and many others. Laughing on the outside; crying on the inside.

I wondered if this was what it was like to be a circus clown. The focus is on the painted smile and a strategically-timed squirt of seltzer water. But what happens when a clown needs someone to take him seriously?

As Jackson walked away, I realized that here was another student who barely knew me but wanted to be a part of my life. This young man felt safe confiding in me but not in anyone who was a real friend. Why?

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