



Like many small towns, the private and public middle schools came together to form one school for high school in my hometown. As a freshman I was with a new group of guys trying to make friends, and I invited them to our family's cottage in Wisconsin. We were all having a great time together water skiing and swimming.

After the water activities, we gathered around the picnic table to play cards. All of a sudden I noticed my sister, Lois, coming towards us from the cottage. My friends had never met her before and she was doing something incredibly embarrassing. I tried to get her to stop by holding up my hand, but she couldn't see me. Her handicap has severely affected her eyesight and glasses can't correct it. So, she kept walking toward us. What embarrassed me was what she was wearing over the top of her head, nose, and mouth. It was an athletic supporter.

There I was with my new friends trying to fit in, when Lois came walking up with a jock strap stretched over her face like a mask you'd see worn in an operating room. Panic gripped me. If the jock strap wasn't bad enough, Lois said, "You guys wanna play doctor?"

I cringed and braced for my friends' reactions. They weren't sure how to react, whether to laugh or not. One of them asked, "Bob, who is this?"

I'm ashamed to tell you I didn't stand up for my sister. I struggled with my own identity and wanted to fit in so badly. "I don't know," I said. "It must be some neighbor girl my mom is taking care of."

I denied she was my own sister. I made believe I didn't know her. I didn't have enough guts to stand up against the system. I didn't have enough courage to stand up for the dignity, worth, and beauty of my own flesh and blood. I thought their approval was life to me. I'll never forget the guilt and emotional turmoil I felt by denying my relationship with my own sister!

Never again. I will never again deny Lois of the dignity she deserves. That's why I speak, and that's why I'm writing this book. Every person has value. No one deserves to be bullied, harassed, left alone, put down, mocked, or left feeling worthless. And no one deserves to feel abandoned, invisible, or rejected like I rejected my sister that day.

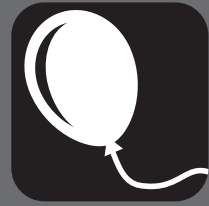
If you're not willing to stand up against the system, would you please go tell my sister, Lois, she's not valuable or gifted? Would somebody please have enough courage to say, "Lois, I'm sorry, you don't have what it takes. Lois, you don't have a nice body, a clear complexion, or nice hair. Lois, you're not very intelligent and you'll never go to college. You'll never have a boyfriend, never drive a car, and you'll never own a home. Lois, you're just not valuable."

Would you say, "Lois, I hate to tell you this, but not only are you not gifted; you're not even normal. According to society's system for determining self-worth, you're nothing but luggage. Lois, if we get too much luggage, if we get too many handicapped people in society, it's going to drain us financially and become a burden. You know what happens to excess luggage, don't you? We'll simply have to eliminate some. We'll just call it mercy-killing, because what kind of an identity can a retarded person have anyway?"

Sounds harsh, doesn't it? Who would ever say such a thing? I love the campaigns to get rid of the "R" word. But believe it or not, as I've traveled around the world I've actually met people who have said they would say these words to Lois. Some have joked, but others have said with complete sincerity, "I'll tell her because it's true."

It seems hard to believe anyone being so cruel, but it's more common than we'd like to admit. This kind of societal system and belief has been demonstrated in other ways throughout history. This type of societal system is unacceptable and unfair, and I fear if the system isn't reversed through a Dignity Revolution, it may continue.

Excerpt from *Dignity Revolution: Standing Up for the Value of Every Person* (Lenz 23).



Dignity Revolution Pledge

- 1. I pledge to be kind.**
- 2. I pledge to be loving.**
- 3. I pledge to be peaceful.**
- 4. I pledge to be patient.**
- 5. I pledge to be a person of goodness.**
- 6. I pledge to bring joy everywhere.**
- 7. I pledge to be a person of faithfulness.**
- 8. I pledge to be gentle with my words and actions.**
- 9. I pledge to have self-control.**
- 10. I pledge to be a friend to all.**