

KEEPING YOUR SANITY BY FINDING THE BEST WITHIN US

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Nevil Shute (1899-1960) was my mom's favorite

author. He mirrored her sense of optimism and perseverance, so for me they are a kind of time capsule, with an emotional quality and a spirit of life that I learned, in part, from her.

If you have never read him, you're in for a treat. Not just because they're great stories; I recommend them for the sense of life they convey.

Nevil Shute's stories are about *ordinary people doing extraordinary things*.

Crises have the effect of forcing us to do things that we would otherwise not have done – for better or worse. We can have talents, strengths, and abilities that lie dormant unless and until we are challenged with an unavoidable problem to solve.

We all need this message in the troubling times all of us are facing today. Visions of bold opportunities can spur us to rise beyond what we may have ever considered.

These are the moments that Shute writes about. When people find themselves thrown into circumstances that challenge them to be their very best, what do they do? What kind of character do they show through their

actions?

Villains are not central in Shute's books. His heroes and heroines don't battle evil people so much as overwhelming circumstances. The antagonists for his heroes are their circumstances... and their challenges are our challenges.

Shute's stories are about those moments where any one of us might find ourselves up against a situation we would never have chosen, or had never before envisioned; but to struggle with it, to bring our very best to it, and to master and triumph over it, is to fulfill our greatest potential.

Life's victories for most of us are not written in history books. Very few are glorified with public awards or acclaim. The most meaningful and heroic moments more often come when we rise to an occasion we didn't anticipate; when we overcome odds and dig deep inside for the strength, the optimism, and the perseverance to see a challenge through to its best possible conclusion.

This may mean picking ourselves up after a devastating financial loss, determining what we have to do to take care of debts and rebuild our business, and come out the other side with a sense of honor and pride in how we handled it. It may mean facing and overcoming an addiction, and repairing the damage done over time; or seeing through a challenging time with a loved one; or handling an illness or disability with dignity and faith.

We may have a bold idea that will take years of effort with no guarantee of success, and we step up to the challenge and put everything we have into it.

Or, like his protagonist Jean Paget in "A Town Like Alice," we may have businesses to create and a town to build in what had been the middle of nowhere; an airline to build on a shoestring in strange lands, like his character Tom Cutter in "Round the Bend;" an obligation to fulfill that requires a perilous adventure, like Keith Stewart in "Trustee from the Toolroom," or John Sidney Howard in "Pied Piper."

Or, like Jennifer Morton in "The Far Country," you may have to leave a home turned dismal for a life of hope and opportunity in a strange land.

Shute's stories capture this spirit like no other author I'm familiar with. They are stories of quiet courage and perseverance, with a deep appreciation and understanding of what makes real people tick. There's great humanity to his characters, and a tremendous respect for human freedom, ingenuity, and resilience.

Having served in both World Wars, he has a sense of the tragic yet heroic potential in humanity. As an aeronautical engineer and entrepreneur, he knows what it takes to make things happen in the real world. His experience resonates throughout his stories.

Cynics look at the complex nature of people and assume that there is phoniness and corruption everywhere – even when people are good to each other.

In today's world, where every important event throughout the planet is constantly beamed directly into our living rooms or computer screens, it can be easy to lose sight of what really makes life worth living. If we're not a winner on American Idol, or a wildly successful public figure, it can be hard to see how we can possibly measure up.

But this is a severely distorted vision of real life. Think of the people in your own life who have mattered to you; the people who have inspired you, supported you, egged you on to be your best, and delighted you with their company. Think of the feats of heroism and valor that you have actually witnessed – or performed – in your life. The chances are that these were not the subject of a Pulitzer Prize winning news story.

They were the things that good, honorable, and quietly heroic people did just as a matter of course. “It’s what anyone would’ve done,” is the phrase we hear from these folks – and the phrase that you may very well have said yourself.

These are the people that make a world full of good people; who make a free society possible, because they allow us to trust one another; the familiar giants who do the everyday moral work of a society, and make us proud to be connected with them.

These are the people who through the ages have brought us out of primitive violence and mayhem into the most moral and peaceful time in human history.

These people are us, and we’re everywhere.

We don’t have to be famous with the power to influence the whole world. We just need to look for the best within ourselves – and the best within others.

And when life brings circumstances full of hardship and trouble, or opportunities that stretch us beyond anything we had imagined, those are the times we use the best within us to rise to the occasion, make the very best of it, and see it through to the end with honor and dignity. “The times that try men’s souls” are the times that give us the chance to do things that we can feel proud of, and elevated by.

Take some time to reflect on the people who have meant the most to you in your life. If you explore your memories for awhile, you’ll begin to see these qualities shining through more people than you might have considered. If you take some time to read a book or two by Nevil Shute, you might find that your vision for such things expands delightfully.

PS: My course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you with this part of your life in much greater detail, with deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well.

You can also give a gift of *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* for a loved one or friend, simply by using their email when you place your order.

And now you can purchase the workbook for this course separately for \$29.95 plus shipping. You can still get the online course with the downloadable workbook at a deep discount, for \$99, if you use this code: LB99.

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