They're being mean to my friend William at work. They make fun of him behind his back—but not far enough behind that he doesn't hear. My friend William can't defend himself very well. He doesn't take pleasure in ridicule others. It puzzles him—this taste for ridicule. So they berate him, and he doesn't fight back. They're winning.

William wants to win. He wants to be successful. He wants to be successful because his father wasn't. At least his father never thought he was (and William believed him). He was just a lawyer for the Housing Authority in Cleveland. But he sent William to Mount Hermon School, and then to Brown University, and then to Penn Law School. And now William is in a large corporate law firm in Philadelphia.

Recently he got himself into the Philadelphia Racquet Club. That's not as good as the Union League. It's miles behind the Philadelphia Club! But if you're going to have a chance to run in Philadelphia, you've got to start running in the Racquet Club.

I can't talk to William about any of this. I don't know why. He's my friend. It hurts him, I can see, that they're mean to him at work. I should be able to say something. But it's not something that men talk about.

The American Dream exacts a price from us. But we cling to it, even when it hurts, because we have woven our lives into it, or parts of our lives. We need to be gentle with each other, therefore, when we criticize the hope. When we're told that the Dream doesn't work, we grieve.

GIFTS ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

I should have known that, but I didn't—not at first. It was easy to see through the charade, to document the realities of locked-in privilege behind the myths of equal chance. What I had to learn was how sad this news makes people. They end up bereaved, not angry. This I learned from a middle-aged electrical worker in Philadelphia.

It was in March, during the recession of '75. I was being paid (by public funds) to spend time with unemployed and underemployed workers discussing American realities. I presented statistics and charts showing how unequal our country is, how locked-in the advantages, how unfair the distribution of burdens.

The workers were getting angry—"Yeah, that's right! Tell us how to get even!" Suddenly, one of them stopped the rest of us. "No, John," he said "that can't be right. My son's just finished Penn State. He's studied

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