

A Child Called Dis-LABELED

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Once upon a time there was a land called Labelland. There was a person there called the Grand Labeler who gave every person and every thing in the land its label. No one knew when the labeling started, they only knew that things had always been that way and no one ever tried to change it. Every person and everything in the land had its label and they could be nothing more than the label. Every chair was just a chair, meant only for sitting on. You could not climb onto a chair to reach something up high, for that you needed a ladder. You could not use a chair for a ladder or a ladder for a chair. Having multiple talents or multiple purposes was frowned on. Everyone and everything had to live up to its label.

When a new baby was born into the land, the Grand Labeler gave it a label. He would decide immediately what the child's future was. He labeled them things like "Mommy", "Daddy", "Doctor", "Musician", "Teacher", etc. He even had to label a child who would grow up to replace him as Grand Labeler. It did not matter if they were boys or girls or if they had any special interests or talents. From birth they had their label and they were raised to live up to the label they were given. Sometimes children grew up resenting their label. They were labeled "Lawyers" when they would rather have been "Dancers", but they did their duty and studied law and never, ever danced.

One day a baby was born into the land and the Grand Labeler was called. Usually, when he looked at a new baby and read about it's short life history, he knew immediately what to label it. He had been doing his job for a long time, after all. But, this baby was different. It was not the same as other babies. It looked a little different too. For the first time in anyone's memory, the Grand Labeler was stumped.

Some people suggested labels for this "different" baby:

"Why don't you label it 'Stupid'?" someone said.

"Maybe you could label it 'Slow'?" suggested someone else.

The Grand Labeler did not want to give this baby a bad label. He tried to reason it out in his mind. "This baby does not look able to live up to a normal label. Maybe that should be his label&emdash;'Dislabeled'."

The Grand Labeler announced that this baby's label would be "Dislabeled". The people in the land accepted the label, but since no one in the land had ever had this label, they did not know how to treat the child. No one expected this child to sing or dance. No one expected this child would learn math or spelling. No one expected anything of this child at all.

As "Dislabeled" grew, amazing things started to happen. Since no one forced "Dislabeled" to learn things he wasn't interested in, he began to develop his own interests. He was allowed to grow and mature and develop his own talents and his own unique personality. Some of the other people in the land, dissatisfied with their own labels were drawn to "Dislabeled". He was allowed to be who he was with no preconceived notions about what he should be. Maybe he didn't know how to read or write and maybe sometimes he acted a little different, he was interesting. He was funny, and caring and come to mention it, downright intelligent about some

things! He was simple, uncomplicated way of looking at life. He took time to appreciate beauty and he didn't waste time being angry or holding grudges.

It didn't take long for people to start thinking that maybe it was better to be "Dislabeled" than "Labeled". Maybe it was better to be free to develop your own personality, your own likes and dislikes. Maybe it was not a good thing to have your future decided at birth, by someone who knew nothing about you. Ever since "Dislabeled's" birth the Grand Labeler had been having his own doubts. He had decided to resign his position, but no one in the land had ever given up their label. What would his new label be?

The Grand Labeler called together all the people of the land. He announced to them the news that he had given up his label.

"People of Labelland", he proclaimed, "I have decided to give up my label of Grand Labeler. I am no longer certain it is best for everyone to be labeled. I think it may discourage creativity and individually. Our good friend, "Dislabeled" has shown us that we do not need labels to grow up to be happy, worthwhile individuals. In fact, he seems to have thrived without a label.

Henceforth, I want also to be known as "Dislabeled".

There were many murmurs of assent from the crowd. What the Ex-Grand Labeler said was making sense. There were shouts from the crowd of: "I want to be "Dislabeled too!"

The Ex-Grand Labeler saw that this could create a problem in Labelland. If everyone was called "Dislabeled", it could get very confusing.

"People", he said to them, "We cannot all be called "Dislabeled". Since none of us is happy with the label we have been forced to live with, why don't we all chose what we would like to be known as? When new babies are born, their parents can choose what they will be called. We can be Doctors AND Mothers, or Lawyers AND Fathers, or even Teachers AND Dancers! From now on I decree that no one shall ever be labeled again!"

The people of Labelland were excited. Everyone picked out new labels for themselves and they called the new labels "names". People cultivated new interests and explored their own talents.

They began to have two, three or even more things they were good at and enjoyed. They began to use their multiple talents to invent new things and create new ways of doing things. Children were free to grow up to be anything they wanted to be, with no restrictions. They even changed the name of the land from "Labelland" to the Land of Possibilities.

As for young "Dislabeled", he chose the name David for himself. He grew to manhood with many interests, talents and many, many friends. Many years later, when David was a very old man, the Land of Possibilities did bestow one more label on David. This label was given to David out of the people's gratefulness and great respect for him and what he had done for them. He was known as "David, the wisest man in the land"! And the people passed on this lesson to future generations: IT IS ALWAYS BETTER TO BE "DISLABELED"