

Everything I Needed to Learn About a Dungeon, I Learned at the Candy Store

By Jerome Treasure Bambrick



I remember, as a child, the first time I walked into a candy store. I had just come from the doctor's office and had gotten some rather painful shots. As a reward for being so good, my mother told me we would get to visit the candy store, but I was told we would have to keep it a secret from my brother and sisters. While I can no longer remember the pain in my bottom from the shots, I definitely remember the first time I went to see the Candy Man.

I ran from the car up to the doorway of the store and just looked through the window. I was jumping up and down yelling for my mother to catch up, but for some reason, I realized I was also a little afraid. My heart was in my throat, since I was so close to those delicious little treats I had dreamed of, yet all my life I had been told that those treats were bad for me. I had always been told that if you eat candy, your teeth will rot or you'll get sick to your stomach. I was never to accept candy from strangers and I was punished if I was caught eating candy before a meal. At Halloween we used to have to check the candy for razors and see if any were tampered with. Even with the stigma that had been engrained into me that candy was bad, I would still sneak some before dinner whenever I could. I would always feel guilty about it later, but I couldn't help myself.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, my mother caught up with me at the window and came and knelt down to my level (she did this when she was serious) and took both of my hands in hers, looked me right in the eye and said "Remember that you can look, but don't touch unless I say so. Do you understand? You have to have permission before you touch anything. It is safe to eat the candy in here, but you still need to be careful, young man." I nodded my head half-heartedly as I kept straining to go inside. When that door finally opened, my senses were overloaded from all the sweet smells and what seemed to be piles and piles of incredible delights. Every warning my mother had just given me was completely forgotten as I ran from display case to display case. The man behind the counter was smiling at me and asked if there was something I wanted to try. I nodded my head up and down furiously.

"OK, what would you like?" He asked. That's when I realized that I had no clue exactly what I really wanted; I just wanted to try it all. But I couldn't decide, I didn't know what was good and what was bad, it all looked so good to me.

Then I heard my mother's voice saying "Why don't you try the cluster bars, you always seem to be asking me to get you those?" I nodded and the man behind the counter gladly gave me a taste and my world seemed to explode. It was wonderful and all I wanted was to try more and more and keep the taste and sensations coming. I was in heaven and this was my cloud nine.

The wonders just kept coming and the man behind the counter just kept smiling and gladly handed me more of those tasty concoctions. I found that I liked some more than others and some I just spit out, but each time I did my mother would just look at me and say "Well how would you have known you didn't like it unless you tried it?" I will also never forget when I tried one and spit it out and said "iiiiicckkkk, that's just nasty. Anyone who likes that is iiccckkyyy!" My mother spun me by the shoulders to face her and then she kneeled down (so I knew I was in trouble) and said "Don't you ever judge the likes and dislikes of others. Who are you to judge someone else?"

While I didn't understand her completely back then, I knew I had done wrong and just said "I'm sorry Mommy, I didn't mean it." She patted my head and said OK, and then handed me another candy in a wrapper to try. The odd thing I found was that I couldn't always tell what was behind the wrapper. I had always assumed that if the wrapper was black it was liquorish, dark was chocolate, golden was caramel and white was... well that one always baffled me. But they weren't, they just kept changing and every time I assumed, I was usually wrong. I realized that I had to ask questions before I just put something in my mouth. Instead of just grabbing for the sweet I was asking "What is it? What's in it?" If it was something I had never tried, I realized that I was being more cautious, but each time my mother would remind me "How do you know if you don't try it?"

I remember that when we were ready to leave, with a bag of my favorite joy and my belly full, I realized that I was feeling guilty again. I couldn't understand it, I was in heaven and I was feeling that something wasn't right. I realized that I couldn't tell anyone about my experience, I had to keep it a secret. It was the price I had to pay for my little bit of heaven. As we were leaving I will never forget how the Candy Man waved Good-bye and said "Come back tomorrow and I will have something new for you to try."

For some reason, I always remember this when I think about my first time coming into this community. I found so many things remain true today as they did when I was 8 years old. The Candy Man has changed, but he still has something new for me to try every time. He also reminds me that:

- ✓ It's ok to be nervous when you are new, it's normal.
- ✓ Keep an open mind to trying new things.
- ✓ Don't touch others or their things without permission.
- ✓ Learning and being cautious is a good thing.
- ✓ Don't judge others for something you don't like.
- ✓ Don't assume.
- ✓ You will have feelings about what you do, sometimes elations, sometimes guilt. Just know that it's normal.
- ✓ It's ok to say "I'm sorry" if you do something wrong.
- ✓ Mentors can help you when you are not sure.
- ✓ No means NO!

