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Wednesday 10th March 2010

A Question of Choice...

I'm sure you must have seen some old black and white footage where an over-coated crowd in hats are celebrating a tumultuous event, such as the launch of a new battleship, the King's horse winning the Derby or the like. No?, Well, at the key moment, almost without exception, the crowd, unable to restrain themselves, throw their hats into the air in jubilation and a very fine sight it is too.

The reason I mention this is that if by some strange chance you find yourself reading this with some species of head gear, bonnet, lid or chapeau in place, now is the time for flinging, as I'm going to replace my usual incisive introductory word-play to this column with a quiz. Just this once, mind.

It's multiple choice, so the correct answer is in there somewhere and to keep a theme going, the subject is headwear. So it's a case of 'hats off to you' then if you get this right.

What was the full name of the hat company that was set up by Mr. Stetson to produce the famous Stetson hat?

- A. The William R. Stetson Company
- B. The James B. Stetson Company
- C. The John B. Stetson Company

You'll probably know but if not, have a guess.

The reason (and, yes, there is one) I've taken you down this route is because of Nicky, a carer I've met and talked with recently. I was struck by how in her story, the choices her life presented didn't have a right answer listed somewhere. In fact, she didn't know if there was a right answer at all...

Nicky: "I've been a single parent and a carer for more than eighteen years and life hasn't been easy. From the age of four the difficult choices began for me and my son. Despite a lot of one to one teaching, his verbal and physical behaviour led to him being excluded from the three schools he started. I was left to decide whether I should send him to a residential school that might be able to help.

But how do you make the right choices? What will be the best thing to do for him as a seven year old and for you as a mother?"

There other equally critical decisions or choices for Nicky. "I had to decide if was it was in his best interests to take medications at that age, to help with his behaviour. What services were there for him, what help and support, who was the best person to talk to, how do I get a clear diagnosis of his problems?"

Nicky, as any carer would, made best choices she could from the information she had available but it was far from easy and Nicky wasn't always helped along the way. "I came in for a lot of criticism from friends and relations, as they thought the residential school choice was a harsh one. But I just had to do whatever I thought would be best.

There have been positive outcomes for me. I've met other parents in a similar position through a carers' support group. It really helps to let your feelings out, be yourself and have a chance to pass on your experiences and opinions that might help others with their difficult choices."

Someone once said to me that we constantly under estimate the huge human achievement of Just Coping, of Just Getting Through. Very often, carers do this without even the usual expectations we all might have for the relationships in our lives. And, as Nicky has found, carers very often go on to be an inspiration to others, helping their peers find some choices in their lives.

Oh, and the answer is C.