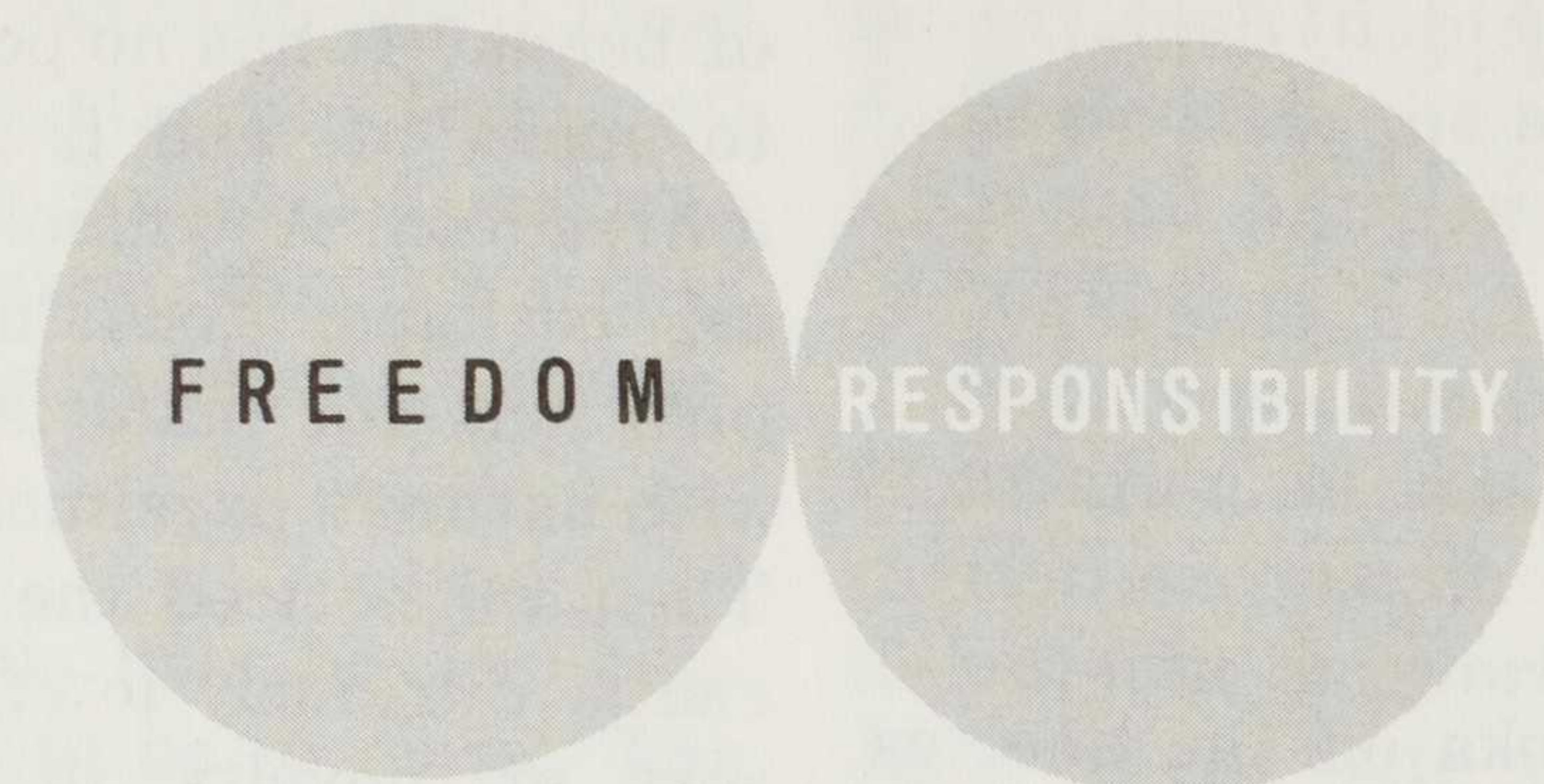




THE COIN OF FREEDOM

D. M. WESTERHOLM

MY 12-YEAR-OLD SON looked up rebelliously from a flower bed he was weeding, his face flushed with exertion and firm intent to speak his mind. "The other kids don't have to weed flower beds. They're out playing baseball, and I don't think it's fair that I can't go, too!"

"Well, son," I said quietly, remembering earnest rebellions of my own childhood, "you did agree that you would do this chore each week. You said that you wanted to do your part to help the family; and you were mighty happy to earn some extra money, too. Right?"

"Sure, mom," he nodded impatiently, "but not when the guys need me to play shortstop!" And

he gave me a look which spoke eloquently of a 12-year-old's opinion of such obviously unfair tactics as reasonableness and logic.

This seemed to be the proper moment to give my lad a small (and somewhat sneaky) gift which we had acquired for just this sort of situation.

He reacted with cautious interest when I returned from the house and handed him a tiny box. Scrubbing his earth-stained hands on his pants, he opened the box and took out a silver disk about the size of a 50¢ piece, and slowly turned it over and back again. On one side was engraved the word *FREEDOM*; on the other side the word *RESPONSIBILITY*.

He studied the shining coin for awhile, and then grinned with

elaborate mock resignation. "Guess there's supposed to be a lesson here, hmm?"

"Maybe," I smiled. "Know what it might be?"

He thought a moment and then ventured: "Could be that if I want the 'freedom' to play baseball, I ought to take care of my 'responsibility' for the weeds, first?"

"Could be," I nodded. "Maybe if you keep that in your pocket it might help explain some other things, too, as time goes on. Freedom always has that other side. Freedom of speech carries with it the responsibility not to malign or slander another by your speech, for instance. It isn't a true coin without both sides — just a counterfeit."

The Cat stuffed the coin carefully into his pocket and said a bit ruefully, "Oh, well — I guess some guys do carry good luck pieces!"

I grinned back at him. "You might find that this one can be a real 'good luck piece' if you use it to help yourself *think*."

"Mothers!" he muttered — but he was smiling as he resumed his weeding.

An Important Lesson

An unimportant little episode? Not at all. There was an extremely important basic concept involved here; and this was one step we were taking to try to teach it to

our oldest child. The relationship between freedom and responsibility is one that has been essential to the formation and growth of this nation. It must be a balanced, equal relationship if the value and strength of either is to be maintained — let alone increased. This relationship is also one which can only be maintained by individuals; for to attempt to delegate or refuse to accept individual responsibility is to lose freedom proportionately — not only for oneself but for all others as well. One cannot legislate away the burden of responsibility without also automatically legislating away an equal degree of personal control — and "personal control" is simply another way of saying "freedom."

It is easy to understand a threat to freedom when it is a matter of someone bursting over the horizon, shooting up the town, and killing or capturing the citizens. It is easy then to understand and recognize the need for assuming immediate personal responsibility for the safeguarding of one's freedom. It is far more difficult to recognize a threat to freedom which comes gradually, insidiously, and through legalized peaceful means, enacted by our own people and loudly claimed to be "for our own good." But the threat is just as real in either case!

A long careful look at the condi-

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