WHY SHOULD I HELP?

An exploration of what it means to work in Human Services

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Fall 2012

Why did he have to be abused? Why did *I* have to be abused? My mother, bless her soul, had the worst of it—if I dare lay claim that one thing is *not* as hurtful as the other. No, our pain did not come from the same source. But, through our lives we were all touched by emotional experiences that forever shaped our social interactions, mental stability, and physical health. It’s because of our stories, and the stories of others, that I realized; no individual is the same, but their unique experiences affect every person touched by their life, whether it be stranger or friend.

I never wanted to work with or be touched by the life of others. I wanted to be an artist, completely shut off in my own little world. To be completely honest, I was escaping from reality. After graduating high school, my mother pressured me to apply for a child care position. I grudgingly accepted just to get her off my back, but I thank her every day for her persistence. Those children in the program forever changed the way I looked at life.

That said, I will tell you the story of what I truly believe was the day my blinders were removed. He was only a third grader; intelligent and full of kindness, unfortunately those characteristics did not show. When fearful or upset, he lashed out in extreme anger—from foul, derogatory language to endangering the safety of others. My co-workers were discouraged and the other adolescents used bullying tactics to cope with his personality. I was guarded around him, afraid of what his next act could be. Because of his intelligence, chess became a wonderful activity to calm him down. No other child could beat him, nor could any adult. It had to have been a miracle that I was able to hold my own while playing against him. I became his buddy during those calming-down periods. During the course of our time together, we had many invigorating conversations. He asked me about my opinions on certain topics, and in turn I asked about his thoughts on others. A bond developed between us that I will never forget. Then on one fateful day, this young boy brought up the subject of family. I was asked if I could ever hate my mother. Naturally I responded that, yes, sometimes anger does occur, but true hate was something I could never have toward either of my parents. The boy responded, asking me if I would change my mind if my mother didn’t protect me from horrible, terrible things. I had to pause at that. What do you mean by horrible, I asked. It was then that he lifted his shirt briefly, only letting me see a glimpse of his stomach underneath. There were burn marks and stab wounds covering him. I was put into shock for a brief moment. How could anyone do that to their child? I looked him in the eye and begged him to tell me, though protocol made it so that I couldn’t speak the words out loud. My dad, the boy said simply, with his fork at the dinner table.

Being faced with this event changed my outlook on children, family, and life in general. I began to understand that being molested by a relative did not make me filth (and that he was in just as much pain) and that my mother only had a harsh edge toward my brothers because she was brutally raped by her “good” friend (as well as other circumstances that I will hold in my heart out of respect). I became less impatient for my “me” time and more engaged in with interacting with others. I wanted to learn everyone’s perspective, opinion, grudge, struggle—what made that person who they were—without judgment. My dear friend confided in me about her abortion in high school, and, as a Pro-Life advocate, I still stood by her and supported her through the pain that followed. When my grandfather was attacked by flesh-eating bacteria received from a Staph infection followed by a stroke, I treated him like he was the healthiest person I knew and grew from the wisdom he confided in me (all the while keeping a hawk-eye view on his stability). These people brought me to Human Services.

When I first began this journey, I thought I wanted to work primarily with mental disabilities and disorders. For a little over a year, I went to school for Special Education/Elementary Education. My goal was to work toward developing social skills in struggling pre-teens at the “identity” stage. But, now, after hearing these stories, I realized, it’s not just about the children, it’s about *everyone*. No person is perfect and every one of them has a story to tell and an obstacle to overcome. Yes, I have my preferences. I will always advocate for the Right to Life (or Death)—including being pro-life, anti-death penalty, and slowly understanding Death with Dignity—and my hope is to work with anyone but young adults (though if the opportunity arose I’d still take it). However, I know that Human Services is the type of profession that you never stop learning and growing from. My preferences may very well change.

Though I want to rid myself of judgment, I accept that such an emotion is the flaw and strength for all of us.