

Student reflections

Expressions of observations, thoughts and feelings by three different students

"I was just in town and standing in front of a store. A bearded man came by and politely asked another man who was passing by, 'Excuse me, can you help me?' This other man, much more affluent by the look of his clothes, replied in a very rude and abrupt tone, 'I don't have time for that right now!' and kept walking. I suppose he thought the bearded man was going to ask him for money. But that wasn't the case. After he stomped off this man turned to me and asked the same question. It turned out all he wanted was for someone to unclip a watch that was clipped to the back of his pack so he could go in and buy a battery for it. Not a huge request. I was glad to be able to help after the first man had treated him so rudely. This experience reminded me how important it is to stop, look, and listen."

"As one of my service experiences I wanted to help an elderly person as I realized that their problems are sometimes neglected or forgotten. That is why I turned to a nurse so that she could find a person in need of help and willing to be helped. I stayed in contact with the nurse and after awhile she gave me the name and address of an old lady whom she described as lonely and having problems with walking. I was happy that I found the opportunity to offer my help to a person in need. On one day the nurse and I visited the elderly lady in her flat. Beforehand, the nurse informed me that the lady used to work physically and retired early (at the age of 45 due to health problems). I got acquainted with her and from that day on I started visiting her regularly once a week.

"I went for walks with the lady and every week we went shopping to the nearest supermarket. However, the most important task turned out to be far more difficult than I had expected. I made the greatest effort to make the woman cheerful, to create a friendly warm atmosphere, but I noticed how reserved and depressed she was. She mentioned the fact that she had been lonely for a long time and it stuck in my memory. It made me realize how loneliness affects human psyche.

"At the beginning I found it very difficult to make her smile, because she was only saying how miserable her life was and complained about the problems that she faced. I tried to show my understanding and convince her that life is worth living regardless of the difficulties one faces, but it seemed to me that it did not speak to her.

"Sometimes I wondered if my visits and help were bringing her anything good. Surprisingly, as time was passing by and we came to know each other better, I noticed a change in her and a change in the character of our interaction. I was very happy when on one day she confessed to me how grateful she was for my help. The experience gave me fulfilment and made me conceive how serious is the problem of loneliness in life and I realized the importance of attention that needs to be paid to lonely people."

"I have seen first-hand the harshness of the aging process. People who were once vibrant, bustling human beings are now confined and subdued by their deteriorating health. Jane has Parkinson's disease and is inhibited by her soft speech and inability to use her hands. I know from the time we have spent together that she has so much to say and many interests, but is slowed and sometimes stopped by her illness. Anne's only disease is effects of time and how it has affected her memory and hearing. Although she always recognizes me, Anne does not remember my name or hear much of what people say to her.

"As time went by, I began to realize that they had wonderful lives. Both have successful and large families, with interesting experiences throughout their lives. Now they are slowed down, but maybe because it is time for them to rest. I have learned a lot from them, about many things, but mostly about how to live with what you are given.... I hope when I am their age and in their situation like theirs that I can have their attitude—life is what it is and the best thing to do is accept it and be happy."