

“First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast,” Season 1

Episode Transcript: Samus Schuler on “Taking Seriously the Perspectives of Others”

**Warning: The following content contains brief mentions of violence and abuse and in-depth discussion of mental health institutions. Listen at your own risk.**

Host: Beliefs come on at a young age. We’re raised to think and act a certain way, and proclaim our values because it’s the way things have always been, and it’s absurd to question what’s always been there. In times of crisis, however, everything can change, including what’s been taken for granted. Samus Bi Schuler first showed signs of depression at fourteen years old, and a year later, was admitted to a psych ward a state away from their home. There, their preconceived notions were challenged, and the way they viewed others that are socially stigmatized would change forever.

(An Ending starts.)

Samus: I believe that taking seriously the perspectives of others is the most important trait anyone can have.

You can strive for excellence when you’re in a position to do so, and you can promise to uphold academic integrity when you’re able. Contributing to a larger community is great if you can first take care of yourself, and ethics and morals can come into conflict if you’re just trying to survive.

But at the core of every human interaction is empathy. Understanding for your peers and doing your best not to make your first impressions a complete judge of someone’s character are vital for a society to function.

I didn’t believe this until I was fifteen. This is my story.

The first time I was admitted to a psych ward, I was so scared. These were crazy people, there were people being violent, I saw a girl with a scar on her neck and a boy that even the nurses seemed wary of, trying to confine him to one hallway. I remember distinctly there being a Laura and a Big Laura, and Big Laura hated being called that. She was in there for anger issues, and when she would try and attack the smallest girl who sat quietly in the corner making origami, the nurses would tackle her. Code Violet blared over the intercom. She’d fight when one nurse grabbed her, struggle when two more came, and when she was tackled to the ground and couldn’t fight anymore, she would scream.

I spent nine days there, with blunt pencils and plastic utensils so we couldn’t use anything to harm ourselves. Chairs were weighted and glass was shatter-proof, and the TVs had grates bolted on them. I signed a million forms to get in, saying I couldn’t sue the hospital if I got hurt, if I got locked up in their safe room, if physical force had to be used to make me comply. I was terrified.

This place is for crazy people, I thought. And I’m not crazy.

I got there in the middle of the day, when everyone was down at lunch. I was the only one on our unit, adolescents, a tiny space we weren't allowed to leave unless we were watched, and even then, it was just to more enclosed spaces. I sat down in the corner of the big room, and I cried.

(An Ending fades. His Theme starts.)

Someone tapped me on the shoulder. I looked up, and there was another girl.

"Would you like to use my weighted blanket?" she asked. She wasn't allowed to leave the unit for whatever reason, so come lunch time, she took one of the carry-out containers provided. Hers sat on an end table next to a chair with metal arms and rough padding, like all the others.

And I sat there, stunned. Would I like to use her weighted blanket? Not "are you okay" when I'm obviously not, not "tell me what's wrong" when I could barely articulate myself. Just a yes or no question, which I nodded to. And... she understood. She understood me, when I'd been all wrong about her and the people I was around.

She was like me. They were all like me. Not monsters, not crazy, just scared. A product of their environment, driven to extremes by situations they couldn't help.

The girl with the blanket had severe anxiety due to childhood trauma. The girl with the scar on her neck had gotten it from surgery, which she wasn't recovering from well. Big Laura had grown up in an abusive household where shouting was the only way she could defend herself, and the small girl she had hated had endured relentless bullying for being selectively mute.

None of them were monsters. I felt horrible that that was my first instinct. None of them were monsters, and we were all just... kids.

(His Theme fades. Waterfall starts.)

I left the hospital different, and not because of any therapy or programs they could have put me through. The fact that I wasn't alone, that other people, other kids my age knew what I was going through but still fought through it was enough to keep me going. It's still enough to keep me going.

They seemed so scary, at first. It's funny to think about. Psychosis, depression, schizophrenia, mood disorders, sociopathy and dissociative identity disorders are so often misportrayed in the media, citing those suffering from mental illness as irredeemable monsters. The phrase "psych ward" alone conjures images of dimly lit hallways, madmen in straightjackets, monsters thrashing in cushioned rooms, accompanied by distant screaming. It couldn't be further from the truth.

For every mentally ill villain, there's exponentially more mentally ill people, drowning in stigma and not being viewed for who they are, human first. Too many aren't given a shred of empathy for our refusal to acknowledge the person underneath their hardships.

I believe that every person deserves the benefit of the doubt, the chance to be understood, a chance to know and be known. It's our responsibility as members of society to make the effort to understand one

another, to love and accept each other as though we were friends. I believe this starts with the self, allowing yourself to be responsible and take it upon yourself to be non-judgemental, to not accept what you see at first glance, and to take seriously the perspectives of others.

Host: This podcast has been brought to you by Cottey College's First-Year Writing Seminar course. We'd like to give special thanks to thisibelieve.org, and Samus's professor, Dr. Quick.

(Waterfall fades. End podcast.)

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