First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 3

Episode Transcript: Sam Kastner on "Demonstrating Empathy and Respect for Difference"

Hi, my name is Sam, I am a secondary education major. I am here to share that I believe demonstrating empathy and respect for difference is the most important for global awareness. I believe this because, without said empathy and respect, there would be no action taken to assist others.

I say this because I survived due to empathy. I grew up with my single mother, believing at the time that she was disabled due to a cause outside of her own control. Church food banks, homeless shelters, and extra attentive school counselors are probably the reason why I am here today. It was the empathy of the adults around me that engraved memories of my mother tearing apart a harvester's bag in the front seat of that beat-up ford truck we lived in. Memories of carrying out boxes of nonperishable foods, excited to look through them in hopes of my favorite cereal even if we wouldn't have milk to go with it. Even the lady down the street that came up just to give me a Band-Aid because we owned none. I still have a scar where that Band-Aid covered.

That was all elementary school. In middle school, we settled down into a neighborhood under an affordable housing program. It was the empathy of some close friends who handed my mother an application. It was then I met a really cool librarian. She became more of a second mother. She drove me home sometimes after rehearsal and she bought me a cake for my birthday. I always admired her for having a job unlike my mother, and for having such an open, charitable, and full of empathy heart. Again, unlike my mother. Who only took, and took more, and I had grown tired of it by the time I was learning not everyone just took others' empathy and didn't give it back. Copying those who gave me empathy, I wanted to return it. I joined the student council and volunteered to work at the same homeless shelter I had been in just years before. Worked on food drives for thanksgiving, knowing one of these boxes would show up on my doorstep. I watched those with similar features as my mother returned empathy as I offered it to them. And I wondered why she couldn't do the same.

I know now why my mother had filed for a disability claim. I am aware that her disability was from her own abuse. I was very angry with her when I learned the truth. My anger spread to all of those who were suffering from their own similar situation. I want to become a teacher to help kids in the same position as I was. But I have no care for the parents who put their children in that position. This is why I think empathy and more importantly, respect are important. My lack of respect made me blind. I thought empathy could be my ruling guidance, but respect is just as necessary, if not more needed.

My mother could not provide for me over the summer. A man she once dated had stayed around in my life and he was seeing another woman. That woman always wanted a daughter, and so over the summer she and he would take me in for a month. They bought me school supplies, school clothes, and all the pizza rolls I wanted. They would even buy me maraschino

cherries to put in my sprite, and I thought of it all as a luxury. I ran away from home a year ago. And they didn't hesitate to welcome me into their home with open arms. They helped me apply for food stamps as an independent, file for medical insurance, and sign up for my last year of high school. I couldn't have done any of this without the empathy and respect from all the kind people that explained the forms to me and told me they would help me as much as they could. I think often about where I would be if it wasn't for their empathy to save one, lost child. Every bit of empathy really does make a difference.

Empathy and its contribution to the world, I believe, is most important due to its motivation for change and action. Even if it's handed to one person, that being can take that empathy and share it with the world.

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