



First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 6
Cottey College

Episode Transcript: Vanessa Nail on “Taking Seriously the Perspectives of Others”

Welcome to *First-Year Writing Seminar, The Podcast*. Today we’ll be joined by Vanessa Nail, a freshman taking the First-Year Writing Seminar Class and she’s going to share her “This I Believe” story. In this episode she will talk about the power of understanding, listening and what she has learned from taking seriously the perspective of others, through her own experiences.
(music fades out and soft gentle background music fades in piano through my entire stories with paper flipping sounds through to transition)

Vanessa: I believe in taking seriously the perspective of others. This belief is part of personal and social responsibility, its meaning is to truly understand, listen and respect other people’s life and experience even though they might be different from our own. In First-Year Writing Seminar we learned about the dimensions associated with personal and social responsibility. This document was written by the AACU or American Association of Colleges and Universities: “Character Traits Associated with the Five Dimensions of Personal and Social Responsibility.” This connects with the dimensions of respect and empathy everyone’s stories matter, not just our own. Seeing through the eyes of others and putting ourselves in their shoes can change an entire perspective on one’s life. Working at a nursing home has made this belief really come to life for me. Starting young at just 16, I went in thinking all I was doing was help take care of older people, make sure they ate, are comfortable, beds clean, made and have someone to talk to, but over time I have come to realize it’s so much more than that, something deeper, that every person I cared for carried an entire lifetime of experiences with them a lifetime of love, loss, guilt, anger lessons to be learned from.

(transition sound)

One afternoon I was in a resident’s room, she told me to sit down and talk. I saw the pictures she had hanging up of her and her husband. I had mentioned to her that I’ve never been in a relationship before and they looked so happy. She smiled at me with a smile that said she remembered exactly how that felt. I asked how they met. She said it felt like yesterday that she and her friend was riding the school bus home together when a boy gets on, as her words went, “one not too bad on the looks” she asked her friend who was that and her friend just replied “oh don’t bother he don’t like girls he would never go for you”, where she then replied “we’ll see about that”, then she paused and I said, well then what happened. She looked at me and smiled with raised eyebrows and said in a giddy voice “well I saw about that”. I laughed and she continued telling me how he was very very handsome but was very very mean. Still though, marrying him at

just 22 and had two sons with him. Later he passed due to cancer. Later in her life she ended up remarrying her guy best friend, she said he was the sweetest most loving person there was and ended up having a son with him. I remember sitting there, realizing I was listening to a full life, decades full of love and loss, friendships and laughter all just within a span of just minutes of conversation. It made me think about how many people do we pass everyday without knowing what they have been through and what life they have lived and we'll never know.

(transition music)

Another resident also shared her story with me about one of her husbands. They met when she was just eighteen, the same age as me I told her, she said that he was her best friend and that he had joined the navy. They fell in love and she ran away with him. She left her whole life for him moving around and leaving her family for him. She said being in love with him was extremely hard with him being in the navy, that she was no longer his first priority. She explained how the distance was too hard on her and she couldn't do it any more so she wrote him a "Dear John" letter. She started to tear up and said that was the most gut wrenching and heartbreaking thing she did and he didn't deserve it, she said that his mom disowned her and that she completely deserved it. Even though she moved on and built a new life she said a part of her will always remember that time and she would think what her life would have been if she hadn't written that letter. When she talked about him you could hear both the love, sorrow and regret in her voice and see in her eyes the sadness. She later remarried too and had a son who ended up passing just earlier this year due to cancer. Listening to her, I realized how strong people can be, even when life doesn't go as planned. It made me see relationships even heartbreak differently, not something to avoid but what makes us simply human and that there's no way of avoiding it that you must just simply live.

(transition music)

Before working in a nursing home, I never fully understood how deep people's stories and lives really go. I used to see residents as just people who needed to be taken care of but now I see an entire lifetime that they are not just old people they too were once someone's baby, sister, friend. Every single person sitting in that dining room has lived moments that I couldn't even imagine and haven't even been through myself. Falling in love, raising kids, losing loved ones, starting over. There's a word that describes this and that's sonder, that everyone around you is living life just as complex and complicated as your own. That's what I've experienced everyday I walk into work if they're willing to share their story with me it's taught me to slow down, listen and not assume I know someone because of how they look or how old they are.

(music fade in)

I believe in taking seriously the perspective of others because when you do, you stop seeing people as strangers and start seeing them as stories. Just being a little bit more thoughtful and kinder because you never know what someone is dealing with and has been through, and being human it's hard to have a basic understanding of other human beings, what it must mean to live a

life other than our own. The residents have taught me more about love strength and what it means to really live than I ever would have known, their stories remind me that everyone's got a story worth listening to and that empathy isn't just about being kind but about being willing to see the world through someone else's eyes. You'll never walk in my shoes and I'll never walk in yours but we shouldn't have to, to be able to understand each other. This I believe.

Works Cited

American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). "Character Traits Associated with the Five Dimensions of Personal and Social Responsibility," n.d.

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