Jacob Harleton

FHC High School Essay Contest

March 24, 2023

Empathy

My dad and I were walking down the sidewalk, the streetlamps illuminating the path from the movie theater to our car. Out from the dark emerged a woman, clearly stressed, struggling, strands of hair in disarray.

"Please sir, I am trying to escape my husband, do you have twenty dollars, please", she desperately cried out to us. Somewhat scared, 13-year-old me unsure of how to react to such a situation, I looked towards my dad for his response.

"Of course ma'am". A simple yet powerful response. In my mind I am thinking, she could easily be conning us, using her story as a basis for her grift. What were the odds that her hopelessness was honest? My dad clearly must have neglected that thought.

Back in the car, the woman long gone, my mind still racing, I express my concerns to my dad. His response was one of the most memorable concepts I have ever heard.

He went, "you never know someone's full backstory, their homelife, their struggles. True, she could have been simply conning me, but I will take the chance that someone who is desperate enough to come up begging for money has issues that I can help with, regardless of whether those issues are the ones she explained to us. Anyway I can understand and help the feelings and struggles of others, I am going to. Empathy, Jacob. Empathy is of utmost importance."

This powerful message leads me to my point: my one wish for the future is that everyone would prioritize empathy. I wish that before the conflict, before the comments, before the condemnation, people would step into each other's shoes. I wish that people would consider all the external factors that play into why someone may act the way they act, may dress the way they dress, may do the things they do. I wish that nations

and organizations and religious groups and communities would show empathy and understanding in their actions.

If the world prioritized empathy, I believe that hate would be extinguished. Misunderstanding and anger drives resentment. A world of empathy would entail a world of understanding. It would entail rational decisions based on selflessness and compassion rather than ones focused on emotion and selfishness. Like a flame with no oxygen, hate would suffocate. What would be left: empathy.

Above all, in the future, if everyone prioritized empathy, the world would have more kindness. My dad's decision to give the woman what she needed was an act of kindness with empathy at its roots. By aiding her, not only did he potentially assist that woman's escape of her husband, but he shared his empathetic way of thinking with me. In reality, the future does not need everyone to have more empathy; it just needs more people to have empathy. As people continue to embrace the idea of empathy, so too will this ever-impactful idea spread. My wish does not have to be a wish. It can be a movement, a social shift, a universal campaign, or possibly, just helping a person in a time of need thereby showing and spreading the great power of empathy. I wish that everyone would prioritize empathy.