

## What could you do?

When I look back over my life, and review all that is, was and will be it is the faces that I see. The faces of people desperate and in need, mostly by no choice of their own are what disturb me so. I see their eyes, which gives insight to the person behind the façade and the illusion that they try to portray in order to appear tough or normal. I see the hurt behind the act of toughness that projects a wall or barrier to keep people at bay, as so many have inflicted pain throughout their lives. I see people that can not translate their emotions into words, therefore manifest their pain through anger and physical defense. I see people that do not want to be victims or considered victims, but they are. They are victims of circumstance and victims of their illness, but more so than anything victims of the stigma that defines their illnesses rather than the reality and truth that should define their illness. These are the mentally ill that sit in jails, prisons and hospitals throughout the country. These are the mentally ill that sit on the streets, the people that we see and cross to the other side to avoid.

I have also looked into the eyes of others in this world. Children with exploding stomachs due to hunger, babies so ill from AIDS that the only communications tool they have are their eyes for they are too weak to cry. A mother who is inflicted with AIDS lying nearly dead as her 9 years daughter simply stares into the abyss wondering what is this all about – as they have very little to compare their situation to. They do have the ability to look at the healthy foreigners around them and wonder what exactly the difference is. The only answer would be geography, I guess.

For a large part of my life I generally asked the question, “why?” why are people choosing to live their lives this way. You see, I

grew up middle class in the United States of America. I had the ability (and some live with the idea, 'the right') to a good life. All I needed to do was apply myself and life could be anything I wanted, and was. I had everything and wanted for nothing – much less needed for anything. When I say everything, it is important to realize what 'everything' really is. You see, I was born to two parents; two parents that were married and lived with the belief they had a responsibility to me, as a child. As with my whole family, you were loved by the simple fact of your birth right. My life was not 'everything' because in my adult life I was able to fly first class, have a fancy office, live on the 32<sup>nd</sup> floor or sleep on one thousand dollar sheets at the Four Season hotel. I had everything because I had love. The old adage of you don't know what you've got 'till it's gone – is true. When expensive sheets turned into a park bench and love turned into not even being able to call home, you realize that you have a responsibility to the privileges and gifts that you were given by birth right.

I don't see the world horizontally. I don't see people for what my eyes fixate on. I see the world from an aerial view. This is not some grandiose vision, it is simply a product of what I have lived through and have seen in my life. It would be impossible for me to live my life without the realization of not everyone has what I have. I grew up in a near perfect world. I lost my sister, my only sibling at a very young age. I spent a majority of my life in the complete incomprehension that she was not experiencing what all WE (she and I) had been given. It simply was not fair. Is she seeing dad on vacation teasing mom? Is she seeing mom educating herself and teaching so many? Is she seeing OUR parents work and work to make everything beautiful and comfortable around us? I had lots of guilt throughout my younger years getting all of this and she was getting none of it. While so

many made their comments of ‘spoiled only child’ it hit me in a way that is hard to explain, because while my physical life was that of any only child, my spiritual life and the reality of my life, was far from that – she always has been and always will be a part of my world and gifts – I have made sure of that by including her in everything that is good.

I say all of this to bring upon a point. When I looked at the mother dying of AIDS and the daughter left alone... The little boy simply sitting there until he does die – and people are somewhat nonchalant about it because it is status quo by now... When I look at the schizophrenic person on the streets, the Depressive person in the hospital and the Bipolar person in a prison, I realize by my aerial view that they may never and most like will never experience even a 10<sup>th</sup> of what my life has been and that is unfair but the reality. When I look at people from my world, people defined as “normal” and “successful” and “doing the right thing” I understand that they will never comprehend what I have lived through and fight every single day of my life. I realize what most of them don’t. That my life will never experience a 10<sup>th</sup> of theirs and that due to not only my illness, but all that I lived through, my life span is 20 years less than theirs.

How much effort does it really take to care? To love? To have compassion? To hold out your hand? When I was homeless... If two people would have walked up to me, one would say, “here is one thousand dollars” and the other “come here, give me a hug and say I will hold you” I would have taken the later without a second guess. Charity is not just about writing checks. Advocacy is not just about shouting. A human beings needs cannot be met with money, they can be met with love, and compassion are sincere heart. You have nothing to feel guilty about for having a

good life – I don't! But you will never experience anything more powerful than the joy you will gain from giving and sharing your heart to another human being.

I don't know how far Harrison's Story will go or how many people the series, "Voices" will reach or how many people will stumble onto this website. What I do know is that I have chosen to take an aerial view of life and the fact that I love those I have explained above. I see their eyes every minute of my days and I sense joy because regardless of the distance my writings will travel – it is from my heart and my soul. I will always throughout my days on this earth use my voice to speak to and for those cannot speak for themselves. I will always strive to empower people to be, simply 'be'! The young man that did die in Africa and the young woman's mother have made an impact on my life just as the countless mentally ill have, their pain became my cause – I shared it with them and they gave me the empowerment and reason to live. They had no money, no education and no power – but they kept me alive... just think what you could do!