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Mr. La Tempa

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College Application Essay

Two Legs

Tall dark shadows swiftly move along the streets with only their destination in mind. I was supposedly in the City of Brotherly Love, though was I really? The look of despair etched and scarred into the hidden faces of this “brotherly” place haunted me. To this day the thought of all those in their cardboard penthouses in the alleyways of that city brings me back to that day I spent talking and listening to the sadly unheard stories of the people of the streets, those who truly see that lack of brotherhood.

I stood on a windy street corner surrounded by steel and glass stretching and reaching for the sky above me. My mind raced, filled with countless stories of heroism and bravery, pain and loss. My shoulders felt heavy, like I had just received years of guilt, tragedy, and suffering in one day. To this day I cannot even tell myself what made me turn around on that sidewalk, or what made me look into just the right shadow to see him but I did. Joe was a man of the streets. He had fought in Iraq, lost one leg below the knee and suffered severe burns to the other to the point at which it was nothing more than a hunk of flesh dangling from his chair. And that chair, that rusty, squeaky chair. The wheels had worn through their rubber tires and were gliding along on bent, dirty rims.

For two hours I listened to Joe. For two hours, I did not speak, but listened to this man, this hero's stories and struggles with war, faith, government, and his personal personal demons. I wheeled his creaky chair into Reading Terminal Market to buy this man the meal he deserves. Men and women looked at me with disgust, like I brought a stray dog into their homes. And Joe felt their stares; he put his head down and told me to turn him around. This crushed me; if these people had listened to this man, they would all buy him a million lunches, but no. The tall dark shadows packed Joe up and placed him into a little box labeled 'reject'. I told him to ignore them and I kept going. As he was eating, Joe looked over to a piano in the corner and asked if I played. I told him I dabbled but nothing serious. He insisted I go play for him, so I did, and I saw Joe do something that for the past two hours I had thought he lost in his years of pain. I saw him smile, I saw him laugh. His teeth fought through the scars and dirt, and he smiled and we laughed.

Joe changed me. I had always been outgoing towards helping those in need, especially those in Joe's position. But Joe, he turned something on in me. I genuinely feel for these homeless men and women and I will remain loyal to their cause. After this, I made it my goal to stay positive every day and make sure people knew it. If Joe can stay positive and keep his chin up when those shadows try to tear him down, then so can I. So should everyone. Positivity is contagious. If we all come together, we can turn those shadows into lights.