

Personal Essay: Life should be lived by accepting that you are broken and limited, but are capable of overcoming those limitations through accepting the help and kindness of others

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Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (*The Message*, Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12)

The birth of Canada was inspired by meetings of the leaders of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to discuss how they all might do better as a group than they could on their own. These meetings attracted the attention of Upper and Lower Canada as well, which would become Ontario and Quebec, who saw the value of this approach in growing economically and defending against a potential threat from the United States. In 1867, these colonies agreed to become the country of Canada at confederation, forming one strong body to face these challenges. (Charlottetown Conference) I believe life should be lived by accepting that you are broken and limited, but are capable of overcoming those limitations through accepting the help and kindness of others. By exploring this theme through one of my favourite U2 songs, the life story of Terry Harrington, the resignation of Green Bay Packers Vice President Jason Wied and the final moments of Liliana Heker's The Stolen Party, I will show the importance of living life in this way.

In Western society, the trait of personal strength and independence is highly valued, the ability to do things for yourself without needing others to do them for you. In certain cases, this is important, especially when you're young, including learning to dress yourself, tie your shoes, learn to manage your time and set priorities for your life and follow through. There are times where this belief can leave people feeling overwhelmed and unable to "make it," and it's difficult to know when it's OK to reach out for help and when to handle things on your own:

Tough, you think you've got the stuff
You're telling me and anyone
You're hard enough

You don't have to put up a fight
You don't have to always be right
Let me take some of the punches
For you tonight

Listen to me now
I need to let you know
You don't have to go it alone (Bono, Clayton, The Edge and Mullen, Jr)

U2's song Sometimes you Can't Make it On Your Own states this dilemma, and validates the choice to let others in when circumstances are simply too much for any one person to cope with. While this act may not be easy, if we are to overcome the challenges we will experience in life, learning to let others in to be our strength in times of need is an important part of a life well lived.

Some difficulties we face are merely temporary, lasting moments. Others can be lifelong or span decades. Perseverance, refusing to quit, is an admirable quality needed to survive these types of challenges, but remaining hopeful or resolute in the face of a hardship that never seems to change can destroy hope and motivation, especially when faced alone. Terry Harrington was a nineteen year old recently graduated from high school with hopes of playing college football for the University of Nebraska when he was wrongfully convicted of murdering an off duty police officer and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison without parole. Terry fought the system that failed him and appealed this conviction on his own for fifteen years, but it wasn't until hairdresser Anne Danaher, without any legal training, heard Terry's story and devoted her life to seeing him freed from prison that things really started to change:

[Anne Danaher] went to the local library and read about the case on microfilm. Danaher had no legal training, but she quickly sensed that her instincts about Harrington and his case had been accurate. Early on, for instance, she learned that his first lawyer had not been licensed to practice in Iowa. Something wasn't right.

Soon, advocating for Harrington became a full-on obsession. She quit her prison job so she could devote all her time to the case, moving back to Kansas City, where one of her brothers was an attorney, so she could have access to a law library. She requested records, read thousands of pages of transcripts, filed post-conviction papers, badgered legislators for meetings, and wrote letter after letter to the editor of the Council Bluffs newspaper, the Daily Nonpareil. (Wertheim)

Terry Harrington could have quit after fifteen unsuccessful years of appeals. He could have told an untrained hairdresser she had no clue how to fight the legal system. Anne Danaher could have given into her own doubts about her ability to win an appeal for Terry. But in both cases, Terry and Anne allowed each other into their lives, and in doing so, found the strength to remain hopeful and achieve something

remarkable. In 2003, ten years after Danaher began working with Harrington, his conviction was overturned and he was a free man, declared innocent by the court. These two unlikely allies both found ways to escape hopelessness by accepting the kindness and help they offered one another and righting a terrible injustice in the process.

Whereas some difficulties in life arise due to circumstances beyond our control, others come about through our own errors and flaws, often with serious consequences. At times like these, admitting our personal brokenness and limitations can be humiliating but necessary if we are to find a way to resolve the problems we are responsible for creating. This is evident in the example of former Green Bay Packers Vice President Jason Wied. Hired as a high-ranking executive with a National Football League franchise, Wied began taking a natural medication for legitimate reasons, but became addicted through overuse. This had an impact not only on the performance of his work duties, but also on his relationships with his family. In deciding to seek treatment via a rehabilitation center, Wied credits his family with providing the strength he needed to address his addiction and make changes to live a better life:

“...I’ve had some health issues, including sleep apnea and insomnia, for the last couple of years and have tried many treatments, herbal remedies and medications. Recently, I developed a dependency on one of the herbal remedies that had been suggested, and my long-term health became a real concern.

“With the support of my wife, family and the Packers, I entered a treatment center on Nov. 7. While there, I realized that I needed to make some changes and some tough choices, and I feel that moving on from my employment with the Packers will allow me to make the changes I need in my life right now. (Demovsky)

While the decision to seek treatment for a substance abuse problem would be difficult for anyone in a highly visible position, Wied also faced the question of whether or not he could continue to fulfill his responsibilities to the team while recovering, responsibilities which paid him a six figure or greater annual salary. To decide to leave such employment to get a handle on his health took enormous courage. Imagine having a well paying job you need to leave due to a substance abuse problem. Where will the finances to support the family you have impacted come from if you leave? Wied states he found the courage needed to make this decision in the love and support of close family and move on from the Packers to a life that allowed him to be healthier. Even when our brokenness is the result of our own

errors, we see how accepting the help and kindness of others is an essential piece of overcoming these problems and finding a path where we can become whole again.

We realize our limitations through adversity. Sometimes adversity is simply part of life. In others, it comes from our own mistakes or poor judgment. Perhaps the most difficult adversity to deal with is the kind we experience as we grow up, coming to terms with the way the world is and discovering things are not as we believed. This is the case in The Stolen Party, a short story, where the nine year old protagonist, Rosaura, is blinded by her youth to the realities of the class struggle in front of her as the daughter of a maid in a wealthy and privileged home. Believing herself an equal to the daughter (Luciana) of her mother's boss (Senora Ines), she attends Luciana's birthday party conflicted about which world, of the working or the wealthy, she truly belongs in. In the end, Rosaura is awakened to the reality that she doesn't have a choice in the matter, and is shocked to learn she is nothing more than a potential servant to the privileged. However, her reaction to this knowledge speaks volumes about how she copes with coming to terms with her place in the world: "Rosaura felt her arms stiffen, stick close to her body, and then she noticed her mother's hand on her shoulder. Instinctively she pressed herself against her mother's body. That was all. Except her eyes. Rosaura's eyes had a cold, clear look that fixed itself on Senora Ines's face." (Heker 5) Rosaura falls back into her mother's protective presence; with her mother at her side, Rosaura comes to understand that she cannot cross over the gap between the rich and the working classes. However, the defiance in her eyes clearly states that she refuses to be defined by her class or work. Only with the love and immediate support of her mother does Rosaura find the strength to deal with the unfair limitations society imposes on her as a member of the working class.

At some point in their lives, everyone recognizes that their ability to overcome adversity in life will be a struggle due to their own flaws and limitations. These moments can break a person, creating despair, defeat or loss of motivation to live and grow. Thankfully, these moments are not guaranteed to end this way, especially if we learn to let others in whose character and strengths can compensate for our own weaknesses. The band U2, whose incredible fame has meant very public and painful problems for its members, including broken marriages and the deaths of close loved ones, reveals that they have learned

this truth through leaning on one another in Sometimes You Can't Make it On Your Own. Terry Harrington suffered a terrible injustice when he was imprisoned as a teen for a murder he didn't commit. He lacked the skill and experience to fight his conviction to have it overturned. However, by opening up to Anne Danaher and allowing her to tap into her undiscovered passion for justice, they formed a bond that helped them both escape their respective prisons- Terry, a jail cell, and Anne, an unfulfilling, dead end career. After overusing a legitimate medicine, Jason Wied found himself stuck in an addiction that threatened his family and work with the Green Bay Packers football club. It was only when he humbly accepted the help and love of his family that he found the strength to leave his high pressure job and make choices needed to live a healthier life. Rosaura, a child, is crushed to discover that she cannot escape the ugly reality of prejudice based on social class. Through her mother's love and wisdom, she finds courage to understand the way the world is but not let it define how she sees herself. In these examples, we see a range of people whose flaws or limits create enormous difficulty in life, yet rise above these problems through accepting others' help and kindness. I believe that if everyone lived this way, the world would be a more understanding and patient place where weakness is not despised, but valued as necessary for growth in all people. Each of us would be able to stop worrying about how we appear to others, and find, through the bonds we share with those around us, a way to reach our greatest potential in life, regardless of how flawed or limited we may be. (2055 words)

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