

THE GOOD THE BAG AND THE UGLY.

Good evening gentlemen and Ziessler.

The ugly part of my title has nothing to do with me standing up here behind this lectern. This speech has three distinct moment of my life that define the progression of a caring and compassionate young man into a man in prison who one day, decided it would be a good idea to tattoo his face with four tears to remind him of the pain he caused his children.

~The Good~

I was 17 years old and living with my Aunt Michele and Uncle Ben, who ran a home for mentally challenged men whose mental capabilities were around the ages of 8 though 10. (No, my Aunt and Uncle were not my caregivers.) These men couldn't take care of themselves beyond simple task like bathing and dressing themselves but they had jobs. This story is about a man named Fred who had downs syndrome.

One morning as he was making ham sandwiches for himself and the rest of the men who lived in the home, Fred decided to eat a piece of ham while he worked. Unfortunately, he tried to eat it like a seagull and swallowed the whole piece of meat un-chewed.

I was making a glass of tang and I looked over at Fred and his eyes are bugged out, tears are streaming down his face and his hands are clawing at his throat. I was stoned so, at first I was mesmerized at this spectacle, until I realized with horror that Fred was choking. I could tell by his bright red face that he had been for a long time.

I've watched a lot of television so, through the process of osmosis, I know what to do! I jumped into action by grabbing him from behind and started to do the Heimlich maneuver because I knew that this man could not afford to lose any more brain cells.

After a couple of tries, a huge, un-chewed slimy piece of meat explodes out of Fred's mouth and lands on the kitchen counter. My Aunt walks in a couple of seconds after my heroic deed of saving Fred's life. Fred gives me a hug and thanks me and tells my Aunt of my heroic actions.

Undaunted by his brush with death, Fred goes back to making his sandwiches and I am a hero in my Aunts eyes; until one day, she realizes that I had stolen all of her codeine pills she had been prescribed after she had given birth a couple of months prior.

~The Bad~

I was 20 years old when I went from being good-ish to bad. I had just moved to West Covina and I was in the beginning stages of becoming a true drug addict. One day, I was walking down an alley looking for other addicts to buy drugs from. I stumbled up a man in his forties lying unconscious and not breathing.

Now remember, I am a fallen hero, so after I stole his wallet, I proceeded to give this man mouth to mouth and chest compressions. He starts to breathe on his own and slowly becomes conscious. He members to me "what happened?" I explained to him that I found him unconscious and not breathing. He asked me to go get his brother at the liquor store.

I found his brother and explained the situation. No sooner had I finished talking before he took off running to find the man whose life I had just saved. I followed closely behind with my spidey senses tingling, somehow knowing that these guys would know where to score some drugs.

The brothers thanked me and were now asking me the question "Have you ever shot cocaine?" I said "no" and then they collected the hype kit from a tree nearby. When the needle tore a hole into my flesh and the liquid cocaine flooded into my blood stream, I smile as I turned into a broken and selfish creature who would eventually crave cocaine, heroin and speed. For the next six years I had a needle fetish that almost killed me three times.

~The Ugly~ (age 32 -2008)

I've been incarcerated for six when I realized that I was missing some vital key components that would allow me to consider myself as a normal and healthy human being (whatever the hell that means). I had truly become an ugly person inside and out. My cellys name at the time was Shane Major and he was serving a 25-life sentence. At that time, life meant life.

One day, Shane explained to me that if he ever overdoses, has a heart attack, or anything that would allow him to cheat California out of any time, he wanted me to let him die; No problem!

One night, Shane decided he wanted to get a jump-start on his dying by choking on some food. He jumps up from the lower bunk with pleading eyes full of tears; spastically he mimes the universal sign language of choking by pointing to his neck. I look at him very casually

and slowly lower the book I was reading and with sloth-like quickness, I take the right ear-bud out of my ear.

I starred at him with indifference and slight curiosity until I realize that he wants me to save him. I'm confused because we had an agreement that I was to let him die. I looked into in his pleading eyes and slowly put the right ear-bud back in and picked up my book and began to read again.

Shane smacks my bunk a few times and I looked at him and shrugged my shoulders. I remember seeing his eyes the moment he realizes that I'm going to let him die.

Shane is 6 foot 4 inches and weighs in about 280 pounds. He begins to punch himself in the upper stomach with enough force to knock the breath out of another man, yet he's incapable of doing the same for himself. Shane lowers himself onto the corner of the lower bunk and begins thrashing around trying to dislodge the food and escape his potential death. I have no idea how Shane was able to save himself but all of a sudden he is standing up and taking deep, *life-sustaining* breaths.

I take my ear-buds out because I know we are going to talk about what just happened. Shane's first question surprises me. He wants to know why I didn't help him. I say: because you want to die remember? What Shane says next is even more shocking, he says he doesn't want to die by choking. I respond with the following: Shane, you can't have rules about how you want to die.

I must confess that it didn't cross my mind one time to help Shane. As far as I know, Shane is alive and well, but I can tell you one thing for sure, he never asked me to let him die again.

I am not at %100 of being a caring and compassionate man that I was at 17 and yet I am not the same man suffering in the darkest depths of his soul when I was 30.

By giving this speech I am not using the gavel club or it's members as a pseudo confessional booth to expunge my soul of its sins so I can sleep better at night. The gavel club allows me the opportunity to know myself and claim not only the good, but the bad and ugly as well.

written for my speed group called Gavel club. All of the stories are true.

Roland Stoeker
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