

The secret life of gifts

I have thought of this question of yours so often and am reminded that I have had the gift of seeing how I have influenced those around me on occasion. Many years ago, I left Seattle Children's Hospital after working 72 hours during a blizzard. There was no transportation, so I decided to walk home at 2am in the snow. As I crossed the Belmont bridge a voice called out asking if I had a cigarette. It was a young woman in her thirties standing in the shadows. I did have a pack and stopped. We both lit up and began to talk. I DID NOT HAVE ONE OUNCE OF COMPASSION OR WILLINGNESS TO HELP MY FELLOW MAN LEFT IN ME. I had not slept for 24 hours but I was so tired I just stopped and talked. We stood on that bridge for about an hour talking about life, men, existence, "why", trauma and finding your way out of the "thicket". We said our goodbyes and I went home to sleep.

Probably a year later I was working in the ER at Children's and a woman approached asking if I remembered her. I did not. She reminded me of our bridge conversation. She asked if I would come meet her husband and children who were one of the exam rooms. I spoke with her husband – an incredibly kind man -- and her very young children, 3 of them, one a baby maybe 9 months old.

She left the room with me and explained that when we met on the bridge, she had been planning to hang herself and had all she needed to do so but decided she needed a smoke for courage. She was pregnant with the baby at the time. She left the rope there and returned home that night. The next day she checked herself into the hospital and after several weeks was able to handle her emotions with help and move on from there to raise her family.

My lesson? We never know who we are talking to or what is really going on with them. I always try to remember that when I am too tired to be friendly or respond. Maybe we are surrounded by endless opportunities to use our gift which may just be that we exist. I think often of this woman and the gift she gave me of follow through, of seeing me and saying to herself, "I should let this person know about her huge impact on my life and the life of my family."

I don't know much more about her story than that except that so much happens in this world that we are unaware of. I think we often have no idea what good we are doing with our gifts, whatever they are, or with our simple presence.