

The other night, I was at Taco Bell with my friends and this man sitting next to me was singing along to the music playing inside. I gave my friends a weird look because I was judging him for singing in a public place and seeming to not care what other people thought. Later when we got in our car to leave, and the man was pacing about the parking lot and around his beat up car. You could tell that he lived in it due to all the things piled up inside, and the man was wearing old dirty clothes. He looked confused and flustered and then started shaving his face in front of his car under the street lamp. I was very aware of him and told my friends that I was uncomfortable. Shortly after I said that, I remembered our self intervention assignment and felt shameful for judging and otherizing another human being who I knew nothing about. The fact that he was homeless or struggling did not mean he was any less of a person. He has his own story and his own feelings and his own thoughts and we are probably more alike than different. I should not have assumed he was dangerous or weird just because he may be dealing with a mental illness or the effects of homelessness on his mental health. I also noticed that after looking his way, he seemed to retreat to his car like he was aware that I was staring and judging. He knew that I was uncomfortable and tried to lessen his presence so that I would feel more comfortable. This must have been really harmful to him, and I bet he often feels judged with the way that the public either ignores or acts scared afraid of the homeless population. He probably sees people walking about and avoiding eye contact, or people locking their car doors when he walks nearby just minding his own business. Although he has nowhere to really go, it seems he is unwanted and a nuisance everywhere. I feel badly that he was only taking care of himself, shaving his face in a parking lot because that's the only place he could go. I was invading his safe space, but made him feel like he was invading mine, as if I am above him or something. I really liked this assignment because it helped me check my biases, which I want to continue to do before writing my own narrative for others.

Last winter family reunion, my 14-year-old niece called my sister (her aunt) a bitch. My sister complained to us and we told her there's not much you can do with a teenager... but maybe we just didn't want to deal with it. Yesterday, I spoke with my sister, she's not over it. She's dreading this year's reunion. I was trying to explain to her that no one liked what my niece said, but that we all had our own shit going on... and I tried to get her to imagine what was going on for the rest of us... and I was thinking "why does she have to take all this so personally, can't she just let it go?". I was otherizing her. And it occurred to me to think about what my sister had going on. I imagined that she felt unappreciated, and she felt unheard. She also felt that she had been wronged and there was no acknowledgement or attempt to come to her aid. I said, "I'm sorry I didn't talk to her after she said that to you, and I'm sorry I didn't spend more time to talk to you about it." She relaxed. We agreed that she could tell me this year if something upset her and I would stop and talk to her. She responded with appreciation.

I didn't realize that I "otherize" elderly people until I had an assignment for a class called Family Psychology. In this class, we were supposed to have a casual conversation with an elderly person we don't know. So not only were we supposed to talk to a stranger, but also someone who is "far removed" from my generation. Although I worked with elderly people when I volunteered at a senior home, I expected this conversation to be different. I think with the senior home, there was less pressure because the elderly people knew we were there to do crafts with them and have surface leveled conversations. But this assignment was prompting us to spark up a conversation in a casual setting like a coffee shop. I specifically remember getting coffee with my friend and we just so happened to sit next to an elderly couple. Knowing it was my assignment to talk to an elderly person, I suddenly got very nervous and didn't know how to initiate a conversation. There were thoughts racing through my mind saying, "What if I can't hold a conversation with them? Will they be responsive to what I'm saying? Would we have anything to talk about?" Looking back I realize how naive I was. When I finally got the nerve to talk to the couple, I could no longer "otherize" them. They asked me questions, opened up about their life stories, and even took a picture with me in the end! Through my eyes, I'm still at the

beginning of life waiting for the “next” journey. Through their eyes, they’ve lived a fulfilling life that allows them to dwell on the past rather than the future. Throughout the conversation, they probably were glad to share their story with someone who hasn’t even experienced the “real world” yet. More often than not, they are probably used to the younger generation avoiding conversation or just giving them a quick smile. But at that moment, they had the opportunity to look back on their life growing up and were probably shocked by how much things have changed since then.

When I first thought about trying to empathize with someone else, my mind immediately jumped—as I’m sure many others’ do—to politicians who don’t share my views. Especially in today’s political climate, I think it’s easy to see people who are different than us as the “other” rather than actively work to seek common ground and use discussion of our similarities and differences as a way to reach consensus and policies that work for people on both sides of the aisle. After thinking a little more, however, I decided to focus on someone who was a little bit closer to home for me, and that I’d had firsthand experience with during my time in college: one of my ex-roommates from last year.

Don’t get me wrong, I don’t hold anything against this guy; we still will say hi when we see each other on campus, and despite our differences I think we left the year on a mutually good note. What I came to realize during our time living together is that we have pretty dramatically different views on many things, though the biggest point of contention was how to treat our (other) roommate’s cat. I loved the little guy, but my roommate didn’t—like, really didn’t. I talked it out with him for a while during the beginning of the year because I was curious as to why, and we ended up discussing how we thought animals should be treated and why. He said he just couldn’t believe that animals have thoughts and feelings, and didn’t understand why people would want to have pets—while he thought animals might be cute, he also wouldn’t feel remorseful for leaving our cat outside to fend for itself or ignoring it when it was in the house, since he didn’t think it would feel any emotional difference anyways. Obviously, I disagreed with him (as I’m pretty sure the actual science would to an extent, too), but I think looking at where those beliefs came from and why he felt the way he did gave me a little more perspective and hinted more at the underlying issue.

As it turns out, he’d never had any pets when he was little, and was scared of dogs and cats overall—since he’d never had a positive interaction with them or taken the time to engage with them, he’d always assumed they didn’t want to engage with people, which led him to believe they weren’t capable of doing so. While I still fundamentally disagree with him—and despite my arguments to look at evidence that supports that dogs and cats do, in fact, have feelings—I think understanding that his beliefs came from a place of both inexperience and fear of what our cat might do made it easier for me to empathize with him and his dislike of our roommate’s pet. From his perspective, this little wild animal was running loose through our house without any specific intent, which, to be fair, would be rather terrifying. At the end of the day, both the roommate and the cat stayed and managed to coexist peacefully for the rest of the school year—and while other disagreements with my roommate did crop up, I think the precedent we set of talking out issues when they arose definitely helped put out a lot of little fires before they grew into something messier.

A very good friend of mine and I decided to room together, which seemed like a very good idea since we both thought that we knew each other too well. However, on moving together, we

realized that we did not, and chaos ensued. We both quickly found out that we had very different lifestyles. After a while, I started otherizing them, and I found myself easily annoyed by even the smallest thing that they did, but I never really noticed that I did that. However, when this intervention came around, and after doing the readings we had for the previous week regarding empathy, I realized what I was doing. Instead of putting my energy into being annoyed every time something happened, I decided to try to understand them, and put myself in their shoes. Upon doing that, a lot of things came into perspective. I was able to have good heart to hearts with them, something that we hadn't been able to do since we moved in together. I quickly realized that they were struggling with a lot of tough things, and cleaning a stain on the kitchen counter was not exactly the highest priority. This served as an excellent reminder to always give people the benefit of the doubt. You may never know what they are going through, just because they put on a smile, does not mean that they are not struggling. Even the meanest actions could be unintentional and be stemming from a place of pain, rather than hatred.

Growing up, I was always told to put myself in other people's shoes. Most of the time though, I find myself "otherizing" people. I work at small restaurant, and just the other day I had a rude encounter with a customer. We were understaffed and food was taking longer than usual to come out. One customer confronted me, telling me that their order was messed up and that they wanted a full refund. Initially I wanted to yell back at the customer and maybe share some expletives. Instead, I thought about this assignment. I didn't know this customer personally, but I do understand what it is like to be a patron, and not an employee. It is frustrating to wait for food you're paying for. A lot of the time, though, it is hard to be empathetic. My interactions with customers are so quick, it is just easier to "otherize" them. I can take away from this assignment, however, that if you simply take the time to show empathy, you can build more meaningful connections with people.

As with many things, empathy is something that I possess but it's also something that I can definitely improve on. I think in today's world there are many people that can work on improving their empathy and should do so. We are all quick to judge and make assumptions but we hardly take time to look at things from someone else's perspective and truly understand them and their actions.

For my empathy intervention I decided to focus on a girl in my volleyball class. I honestly don't even know her name or really anyone's in the class. Not even having the connection of knowing each other's name made it easy for me to "otherize" her. I don't think I judged her or anyone in the class because I don't know any of them that well but I do enjoy playing volleyball with them. Having to do this intervention is what made me really think of her and her actions that she does in the class.

To me, she seems kind of mean, not very empathetic of others, and for lack of a better term - snotty. She complains to the professor about doing drills that are too easy for her and then occasionally just stops playing. I've played with girls like her before so I know how to just deal

with it but those instances were on competitive teams not just a class of some volleyball players and some beginners.

So putting myself in her shoes, she may be frustrated by the easy drills because she thinks she's already done her time learning the basics. Maybe she has never played with beginners while being an advanced player so she just doesn't have the experience and therefore doesn't know how to deal with the class. I get it can be frustrating when you want to compete but the other people don't know how and just goof off. Since she is good at volleyball, that may be why I perceive her as snotty. She may just think she is acting confident in her skills and that's good for her and I can see that now. Her sitting out may be because she is dealing with other things such as injuries or she just can't deal with everyone and needs a break which is how she copes. Take a step aside might be what works best for her and I'm glad she knows that.

I think in college we all have a lot going on that others may not know about so I think it is important that we all learn to empathize, especially before we make assumptions and judge (which shouldn't be done anyways).

I realized this past week that everyone has differing views on a subject, and that it is not their "fault" that they feel about a subject differently than someone else. It could be due to their upbringing, their culture, or just the way their brain is wired. However, it is equally important to respect people regardless of their different views, and this I feel requires empathy. It requires empathy in my experience for me not to punch someone when they elbow me during a sporting event, because maybe they didn't mean to, maybe it was a total accident. It also requires empathy from me to understand where someone is coming from and to respectfully debate with them without putting down their views. I have found that by practicing empathy, I don't think so many negative thoughts of others, because I start to understand more of why they act the way they do, and sometimes I find myself understanding their point of view more, and having my own views shifted.

OTHERIZE:

I am a self proclaimed and labeled empath. I think too much about what other people think and feel that is sometimes more important to me than my own emotions. With that said, going into this intervention felt very natural to me. However it was more difficult than I expected. The most difficult part was focusing on just one thing. I realized that I empathize well with most people, and then it hit me. I was working at my lovely job at Starbucks in the UU on a Saturday morning. It just so happened to be parents weekend. Here I was thinking that I had the magic ability to empathise with anyone and then walks up this man. He proceeded to yell at me because the waters he had ordered literally 5 mins earlier had not come up. We had a full line and many other drinks to make but he yelled at me until I brought him his water. Even though there is a drinking fountain with a water refill station right around the corner. I was almost in tears, I hated him. How could he be so mean and rude? Didn't he ever have a menial minimum wage job he hated when he was 20? Thousands of questions popped into my head as to why this man is around 50 years old thought it was necessary to yell at this 20yr old college student. I realized that all of these questions were my empath attempting to connect the act to my own rationality. Maybe he was in a rush? Maybe his wife was divorcing him? Maybe his cat died? Maybe he lost his job?

Maybe he is a homophobe and his son just came out? Maybe his gay lover just broke up with him? Maybe his favorite character in a tv show died? Even after these countless scenarios and options I still had not rationalized the disrespect and rudeness. And that is when it hit me. I have a hard time empathizing with someone who is doing something I would never do. If the act is foreign to me, then I have trouble understanding them. I otherize people who do things that I would never imagine doing. I could never yell at a person who was just trying to do their job. As much as I tried to connect with him and rationalize his actions and see the world through his eyes, I couldn't really. I feel connection, whoever you are, if we have the same moral code. Mostly if you aren't a rude-ahole, I can empathize.

I met This man when I started working at the University Housing Depot in January of 2019. We immediately became really good friends and spent a lot of time together even outside of work. Over time, I learned about his family and all the hardships they have faced in their lives. For reasons I am not going to disclose, he dropped out of college in 2014 when he was a sophomore at Cal Poly and started working full-time at the University Housing Depot. Funny thing is, I have never seen him without a smile. Despite all his problems and worries in life, he goes out of his way to make sure everyone else around him is doing well. For those reasons and more, I have much respect for him and our friendship. It was with him that I first learned what it was to be empathetic.

One day, I bought him food after work and stopped by his house to drop it off. He told me how he had to work that night and that his girlfriend, who usually helps him, was out of town. I offered to help so that he could get his work done quicker and then he could spend time with his pets at home. Before I knew it, he had tears in his eyes and told me that none of his other friends ever offer to help. If he tells them about how he works three jobs, they almost always say "oh, sorry you're so busy". He thought it was selfless of me to offer without realizing what I was getting myself into. I didn't realize that I was setting aside my time and work to help him out, simply to lessen some of his workload, expecting nothing in return. In my eyes, I knew how tired he was, and me helping him was just a polite thing to do! I guess there was more to that.

After that day, I realized how different our lives were. I grew up in a situation where everything was given to me without me asking. I worked hard to get good grades and get into the school of my dreams, but I never worried about where the funding would come from – I thought that was a given. Since the beginning of this year, I have modified my definition of empathy - it is not only about putting yourself in the other person's shoes; it is also accepting the fact that not everyone has the same opportunities as you. Hence, to be empathetic, one should set aside their experiences and understand how it feels to be someone else who has led a very

different life! He has taught me a lot about that, and I wish to continue learning because it is quite eye-opening."

I learned a lot about empathy through living with my roommates. After the first year of living together, we became more comfortable and less guarded. We became less likely to do dishes often and were more quick to anger at times. In times of trouble, we would have to communicate our disagreements but I learned quickly that it's not just what you say but how you say it. Understanding our different backgrounds and placing myself in their shoes taught me a lot on how I would address each of them differently.

One roommate in particular, I would butt heads with frequently. He told me that he felt excluded and I would do things that would remind him of his stepdad, whom he hated. Therefore he hated me. This was out of my control and while I didn't agree, I recognized that I would have to make a better effort in including him as he was often excluded growing up. Even if he didn't want to go to the park or the pool, I started to make more of an effort to keep him in the loop if we decided to do other things. I had to take myself out of the equation to see what he needed before placing myself back in the equation to see what I could do. After this, we were able to speak more candidly and get along better. Although there were still some rough times, I am glad to have learned through this experience on how to empathize with others on their different upbringings.

I think one way I have "otherized" someone is when my new roommate moved in. Although I already kind of knew her, I had assumptions about her that turned out to be completely false. She is an only child, so I was a little worried that she was not going to respect the boundaries of my other roommate and I. As well as potentially be more territorial, because she is not used to sharing a small space with others. I realized very quickly that my assumptions were wrong. She is very considerate of my space and things. This assignment helped me to realize how easy it truly can be to judge someone based off of a little thing you know about them. In my case, I judged my friend for being an only child when that simply wasn't something she could change.

"It is clear that we have a homelessness issue in SLO. It is oftentimes so difficult for me to simply walk downtown and not feel a stinging mixture of guilt and fear towards people who have clearly fallen on hard times. I feel guilty because I know I can use my privilege to help them somehow, whether it be through money or connecting them with resources, but I don't act on it out of fear of that help being taken advantage of, or putting myself in an extremely uncomfortable and/or dangerous situation. However, I think some of that fear also comes from the predisposition to dehumanize others when they are in such a different and terrifying situation, especially when it's much easier to let your eyes slide blindly past those in need than confront the harsh fact that anyone can end up in a similar situation if the circumstances are right. This past weekend, I was walking downtown when I passed a person who was clearly homeless and struggling with mental health issues. My instinct made me avert my gaze and nearly pretend that the person was not there. This action came along with the spike of fearful adrenaline and intense guilt, especially because of this empathy intervention. As I walked on, I realized how that must make that person feel like as a human; ignored, worthless, something (rather than someone) to be feared. To become homeless, it likely means someone has lost or been estranged from those that care for them and could help them. To be looked over by so many and be vulnerable to harassment and danger on a daily basis must tear down a person's soul piece by piece. It makes me also think of the many people who don't have access to proper housing, healthcare, and/or face food

insecurity but keep up the appearance of "normalcy." The people I interact with every day who live without these resources that I take for granted must feel such a burden of maintaining a livelihood on top of not having access to basic human needs. It makes me realize how lucky I am to be provided with these resources, but how broken our society's system of providing welfare to those in need is. This empathy intervention has made me more conscious of what hardships others face, how despite being in extremely different situations, I need to be able to recognize the humanity in others, and that empathy can be a call to action to help those in need."

I've caught myself a couple of times over the past week starting to "otherize someone," and the overall feeling I notice is that I put myself in a very bitter state of mind. It's not that it's intentional, but what I think happens when I start to *feel* that someone does not understand me or think the same way that I do, I focus on that, letting it boil rather than focusing on understanding the other person. It's like my mind automatically assumes that the other person was acting against me, when nearly every time there's a bigger picture I am choosing to block out.

For example, I had left a room to use the restroom, and when I came back, someone had taken my seat, so I had to sit on the other side of the room. This is obviously not a big deal -- it's a chair -- but for whatever reason, at that moment I could feel myself getting frustrated; and then the fact that something so small was frustrating me frustrated me. Looking back, these mind games are all so silly and it's made me be more actively aware of controlling my emotions. I hadn't thought about bigger picture instances of this until the idea of disagreements over climate change's existence was talked about in class. This is something I find much more difficult to empathize with. While still in disagreement over a lack of emphasis on the importance of climate change, I have, though, come around to at least understanding that people who think this way, just as I have, learn their information from those they are surrounded with, and likely have different deeper value systems.

EMPATHY INTERVENTION:

In India, I have a younger cousin who always annoyed me when I was younger. She used to have a very big mouth in my opinion; she had no sense of social boundaries and often came across as disrespectful. She would never share but would always take other people's stuff. All in all, one could call her selfish, greedy, and rude.

I remember complaining to my mom, grandma, to anyone who would listen about her. I would see her every two years but in the allotted time that I did, I disliked her entirely and vocalized it.

Only recently when I went to India after three years and visited her did I realize why she acted the way she did. I was able to empathize with her and recognize that all her annoyances stemmed from a root.

Here is what I reflected on. I realized that she did not grow up with the same lifestyle that the rest of my cousins and I did. She grew up with almost nothing, a father that worked all day and night but hardly made anything comfortable. Her mother tended to all the work around the house and aided my grandparents and would hardly make time for her. She lived in a tiny, tiny room with her mom and dad. Growing up in a low income household in a not so great community in India as an only child made her dependent, very attention deprived, and (to me) annoying.

When I saw her this year, she had changed entirely (at least to me). Because I was able to understand her situation first this year, she became tolerable and as a result, I became more friendly to her. I learned that

I do not have to like someone to be able to step in someone's shoes and empathize with them. I also realized that going to college made me a more open and receptive being.

This weekend, I talked to my friend about what going to church is like. I grew up Catholic but I stopped going to church and believing in God in elementary school so it was very interesting to hear his perspective on a topic I have not deeply thought about in years. He said what drew him to church was how important it is for his family. For me, I am a lot more likely to become involved in something that my family is involved in. The reason that I stopped going to church is that my family stopped going. If my family, like N's family, kept going to church and never exposed me to other religions or questioned Catholicism, I think I would be a lot more involved in the church, like my friend N. I think that N values church because he grew up in a household that values church.

N was telling me how he found a sense of community in the church. I think this was very comforting him to know that he had a group of people that he could trust that valued his same values and beliefs. I have felt the same need to belong, and a church group would give a sense of community. He said that being vulnerable by talking about faith and belief bonded his friends together. I could relate to this because whenever I had told a friend something vulnerable about myself, I have felt closer to them. N must feel a sense of comfort that he can be vulnerable to a group of friends when talking about his faith.

N told me that believing in God is like sitting down in a rocking chair and having faith that it is not going to break. I think that he could personally relate to this analogy because he thinks that God provides a safety net for him. I think that this gives him comfort. With this analogy, I think that N feels like he can live life with the confidence that it will work out under God's plan. At first, this was hard for me to empathize with because I always question things. Then, I was thinking about how many things I do not question and how many chairs I have sat down on

without worrying that they will break. I could empathize with his analogy in relation to science.

Once I research that a topic has been peer-reviewed and gone through the scientific process by distinguished scholars, then I trust it, just like N trusts that God will hold his life together. I think that religion gives N and purpose and makes him feel hope.

At a job I worked in high school I had a coworker that got on my nerves all the time. He was notorious for milking the clock and working slower and longer than was necessary, which often made me not be able to get off as early as I would have liked. It would often cause arguments and I developed a lot of animosity towards him. Thinking back on it now and trying to empathize with him, I can remember that he was living in hotels and he had no support from anybody else and was working multiple jobs. So the reason he would often take more time was probably cause he really needed the extra money. So now I feel I can understand why he did what he did and why, although frustrating to me, he would work very slowly at times.

I would say that my mom and I are a lot alike. We are also extremely different. I have become my own person and changed over the years. I have become more laid back and have learned to pick my battles. My mom is a worrier she worries over everything a little too much, whether it is me getting my flu shot ASAP or securing that summer internship. I like to be independent and roll on my own timeline, I am 21, I do feel as if I have most things handled. Then I started thinking about this intervention. I do not have things figured out, at all. My mom was my age and her advice comes from a good place, she loves me and wants the best for me. I sometimes lash out but I have been trying to empathize with her. She lives in Texas, that is far away from Cal Poly. She worries because she cares. This last weekend she was in town and we did not fight, we usually bicker over stupid things like if I got my oil change like I was supposed to. This intervention allowed me to realize to pick my battles, to understand that her worrying comes from a good place and although I might take it a different way, she does care about me.

I am a showjumping rider who recently moved my competition horse to a new barn. My new trainer is a professional rider from Brazil, who moved to the states 3 years ago with no real understanding of English. Recently, we got into an argument about the ability of my horse, in which at its culmination he asked me to perform an exercise and I laughed at him, because I thought he was joking. In response, he angrily shouted at me and rode off on a mini dirt bike. In

the aftermath of this situation, I asked myself, "Why is he so melodramatic? Why is he being so egotistical? Can't he tell that he offended me with what he was saying? He should be apologizing to me! I am HIS client, paying HIM money." And I realized in that instance I had failed to see the situation from his perspective. Seeing this as an event that could become a huge problem if not addressed, I put aside my ego and approached him. I explained to him the reasons why what he had said had insulted me, and why I responded by laughing. I then apologized for laughing and explained that my intent was not to insult him but out of defense in myself. I was shocked and hearted by the fact he also apologized. He explained that he had not meant to offend me, and explained culturally why he didn't understand the situation at hand.

I can recall several examples of me "otherizing" people as it is a natural reaction whenever I am irritated or disagree with someone. It is so easy to write off other people's opinions when you cannot understand them immediately, but this is the effect of that varying backgrounds has on us.

My family has a fairly wide range of political views, especially between that of my Mother, my Sister, and I. The three of us have often gotten into heated arguments about our political ideology, and usually we are able to resolve them at the end and accept the fact that we see things very differently and react to current world issues in different ways. My sister and I are often on the same page generally while my mother tends to have a different perspective. Recently, the three of us were in a discussion that got out of hand over the course of a two hour drive near Seattle. In the aftermath of that, my sister and I agreed to simply not discuss politics with our parents again. While we had normally been able to explain our thinking and see eye to eye somewhat, this argument ended in hurt feelings and yelling that only seemed to ruin the day for all of us.

This past week however, while talking with my sister, we both came to the conclusion that this was an extreme response as we came to understand that our mother was trying very hard to see things our way as she had initiated a political discussion with my sister earlier in the week and it was apparent some of her views had slightly changed/were impacted by our heated argument before. After my sister explained this, we both agreed that the simple act of discussion had outcomes (not always good) and promoted all three of us to think. We also realized how my sister and I 'teaming' up against our mother could just make her more defensive, and her views came from an upbringing that was a far cry from how we were raised. Our understanding of this has prompted me to initiate political discussion with my mother twice this past week, which have both gone well as I believe both sides have a newfound appreciation for the discussion itself, especially after apologizing for past actions.

I have always felt empathy for people in dire situations, especially those in impoverished countries without access to basic necessities. I remember as a 6-year-old giving all of my change away to other children in Mexico while on vacation and telling my dad that I wanted to join the Peace Corps when I was in 7th grade. However, something that I have more recently been trying to work on is my empathy towards people in my community, from the homeless struggling with addiction to my crabby neighbor, I hadn't really stopped to think more in depth

about the people nearest to me. I was at work recently when a homeless man came into the store, clearly on some kind of drug or simply not stable from previous use, and proceeded to tell me his entire life story without any sort of prompting. At first I was annoyed, as I had been pleasantly chatting with my coworker prior to his arrival, but the more I listened, the more I realized that this man was also in a dire situation, as he told me about his wife and family and of how they had once owned a restaurant that ultimately went out of business. I tried to imagine the sort of events that must have gone on since losing the restaurant, and the amount of desperation and sorrow that he must be feeling. There is an assumption that people who use drugs “did it to themselves” and don’t deserve help, but my heart broke for the man who stood before me, wanting only for someone to listen to his story and maybe understand who he is, even just a little. I vowed to untrain my brain, unlearn what society had told me about those that abuse drugs, and listen to their stories with the knowledge that even just lending an ear and a comforting word may brighten their day.

I’ve had a pretty interesting year. I’m a first generation American citizen, with most of my extended family living in either Hong Kong or Japan. My grandparents in Japan run a small, local farm business which has been in the family for a long time (generations and generation). My dad is the oldest child, and he was the first to get a college education and start working in the United States. Recently, however, my grandparents are getting older and have started worrying about the future of the family farm, and want me to come back to Japan (I used to live there), post graduation to take over the farm business along with my cousins. I felt pretty frustrated by this, since I’ve taken lots of steps towards securing my own professional path post undergrad. It felt selfish and wrong for my grandparents to ask me to give essentially my education what I’ve worked for in order to take up the farm.

This week, I made a conscious effort to try and understand where they are coming from by having a phone conversation with them, and talking to my parents about it. I feel like after our conversations I have a much better understanding of how they feel and why they asked me to do this. This farm has been in our family for generations, going back over a hundred years. Their worried viewpoint really stemmed from a lifetime (and our ancestor’s lifetimes) on dedicating their lives to this farm. They really invested in the farm on all levels (emotionally, physically, financially) and not being able to secure its future before they passed through the family was something that weighed heavily on their minds. It’s their legacy, essentially. After hearing this, it really made me saddened as I can relate to where they are coming from, and this situation really made me reflect on my own future and what my family and the farm means to me. I feel pretty conflicted now, as I can understand their viewpoint, but I also have my own set of goals that I want to achieve. I’m now looking into ways to continue my path as a designer, but also help out the farm in the ways I can remotely.

My parents have always taught me not to judge someone and treat others how you would want to be treated. But there was this one instance when my roommates were telling our other roommate lets go get some food and watch the football game. This roommate is always energetic and wants to do everything, but today was a completely different day he seemed a bit off, something was wrong. Everyone was trying to do everything they could to get him to come out with us. They began to poke fun at him just like how he has done it to others many of times. We began to otherize him and believe that he didn’t like us anymore or that we did something to make him mad and started to jump to conclusions. But no one took a step back and put themselves in their shoes. We asked him what’s wrong and everything and he said he’s just tired and doesn’t want to go out today. We could tell he was lying and this is when we began to otherize him again. It turns out that one of his pets weren’t doing

well and he was just not in a good mood. This was a learning experience for everyone in the house to respect other peoples boundaries because you never know what is going on in their life.

The angriest I got at someone this week was when a girl almost hit me with her car while I was biking home. I came to an intersection where I didn't have a stop, but cross traffic did, so I didn't slow down. Right before I entered the intersection, she started to accelerate forward out of the stop sign. I had to slam on both of my brakes so hard that my tires were skidding, and she slammed on her brakes too (barely in time). Had we not both stopped so quickly, she would have either sideswiped me or caused me to slam into the side of her car at at least 20mph. I consider myself lucky that this wasn't the case since only a few weeks ago, my bike barely had working brakes until I fixed them.

I was very angry about this in the moment. As soon as I came to a stop I threw my arms into the air to show my disapproval, and lest that not be enough, I may or may not have mouthed something along the lines of "What the fuck?!". She looked really sheepish and mouthed "I'm sorry" back at me as she let me through; 2 other cars watched this happen as they were stuck waiting for us to both move out of the intersection. As she drove away, I continued to shake my head angrily at her and hoped that she recognized how terrible her driving was that afternoon. I hadn't thought about it from any perspective other than that of the guy who almost got smoked on his bike; after all, she could have put me in the hospital or worse, and compared to that, the risk of a broken windshield or some dents seems negligible.

This assignment made me revisit this moment and question whether I should have thought about more sides to this situation. Come to think about it, I think I have a pretty good idea of how she must have felt. I've made stupid driving mistakes and almost caused accidents in the past as well. I've always felt very bad and much less confident in myself for a while, and I'm sure she was feeling much of the same. I'm sure that she wasn't intentionally trying to scare me, so I understand that she would have certainly avoided this situation given the chance. I can understand that there is nothing putting her below myself, as someone who has made similar mistakes and likely felt the same way.

However, empathy only means understanding the other person's perspective; it doesn't mean I can't or shouldn't still be mad about it. I did almost get hit by a car after all, and whether or not I should be angry about that, I can and I'll choose to again if this happens again. And I hope that she felt enough remorse and ego damage to consider being a more careful driver.

We have always been at a time in our lives when we disagree with another persons actions or maybe even with how they feel. I have a thirteen year old daughter that I have raised for the first 9 years of her life by myself. After 9 years my daughters father started a relationship with a girl that was about ten years younger and stated to want my daughters full time custody because I have two other kids and don't have time for her. We went to court and he was granted 50/50 custody which broke my heart because she had always been by my side. It was the simple things like helping her with homework or even going on hikes with her that mad a small difference in our times. I felt so much anger toward a person that my daughter was spending time with because I would understand if my daughter was spending time with her father, but it was not with him; in fact it was with the dads girlfriend. This empathy assignment has made me think why she does what she does. Although since then I have taken her father back to court and have not gotten 80% of custody so I have more time available to spend with her. The fathers girlfriend on the other hand has continued to do mean things and make horrible decisions such as doing my daughters homework, and even buying her cloths that are not appropriate for her to wear as a 13 year old. I have discovered that she is young and if I were in her shoes I would try to do my best in trying to create a relationship with the child of my boyfriend as well. She probably doesn't understand how to build a relationship with my child because she is very young herself, however she is trying. I think that I need to try and understand that she's probably doing this in order to have a healthy relationship with her boyfriend, as well as my daughter. I should probably be thankful that she is actually nice to may daughter, unlike some step parents there is out there. In conclusion, putting myself in her shoes has helped me realized that maybe I should try to build a relationship with the girlfriend as well so that we can all get along and make good choices together that will benefit my amazing daughter.

I recently found myself in a conversation with a close friend about mental health. Mental health is something I've experienced both personally and within my family for quite a long time. You could say I'm pretty comfortable with the topic and the options that come with dealing with the topic. This friend of mine recently started feeling symptoms of anxiety and depression, something that she had never experienced in her life before. Knowing that I have knowledge about the topic, she came to me asking for advice and someone to talk to – I was happy to help. Once we had established what was going on, I offered her the advice of maybe talking to someone, like a therapist, to get some real answers about how to deal with what was going on in her life. She quickly became defensive, saying she was at that point in her life. This conversation quickly turned into a dispute about whether or not therapy was affective, along with the affordability aspect and other controversies about the topic. I had not intended to get to this point of the conversation, however I personally have seen a positive impact of therapy in my family with family members who were struggling personally. I began to see her side of the conversation, realizing that people struggle and cope in their own ways and therapy can be a very serious conversation. I realized that I could've better used my time just listening to her instead of trying to force advice onto her just because I had seen it work with other people in my life and that it is not my place to tell anyone how to deal with their feelings or anxieties.

I went home last weekend to visit my parents and found out my dad has moved into my moms house. They have been divorced since I was 5, so this was a shock to me. They are not back together, my dad just moved out of his house and was staying there temporarily in my room until he found a place to stay. I got mad at my mom for letting him move in because I know they will just fight all the time and I didn't want her to have to go through that and I didn't understand why she put herself in that position. We didn't talk for a few days and then I called to apologize because I realized my mom just re did our entire first floor due to a flood and it was a lot of money. She told me my dad is paying her some "rent" money which is helping her out a lot. I didn't think about why my mom really needed to do this and I know it was a hard decision because she doesn't want to live with it but she has to and I made the whole situation even harder than it already was for her.

I was walking down the street and I noticed somebody smoking. I have this tendency to dislike people automatically when they don't lead a "clean" lifestyle. *Side Note: I put "clean" lifestyle in quotes because my definition of a clean lifestyle is different than others. Anyways, I realized that I immediately began to otherize this person simply because he was smoking and wearing clothes different than I was. I began to try to see things from his view, and realized that maybe he was smoking because he had other problems in his life that I couldn't imagine, maybe he grew up in an area where his entire family smoked, and maybe he dressed the way he did to cover his body from the world because he is very self-conscious. I immediately began to change my body language towards this man, and as I was walking by I nodded a greeting to him. He smiled back and seemed so happy that someone had acknowledged him in a friendly manner and I felt very happy too. I realize that by putting myself in his shoes, I understood that I couldn't possibly put myself in his shoes. I know that last sentence may be a tad confusing and what I am trying to say is that when I tried to see why he was smoking, I realized that there were so many possibilities of why he had begun smoking that it was unfair for me to label him as a bad person because I don't know what circumstances in his life caused him to start smoking. However, by respecting him as a human being regardless, and understanding that he has struggles of his own like all of us, a simple "hi" from me could make his day.