

The World is Your Canvas

- Amanda Schillinger

My grandmother Bunny Hannaway lost a two-year battle to a brain tumor three months after my sixth birthday. I shared few moments and little time with her. I remember calling her Bebe, I remember that she was crazy (in a good way), that she cherished every moment with her family, she admired lighthouses and sunsets, she loved Elton John, and she specialized in watercolor painting. Bebe not only painted sunsets, but she urged us to observe them whenever possible. She often said to me,

“Watch the sunset every chance you get, because one sunset will never be the same as the next. Sunsets are a work of art as well as a part of the world’s canvas.”

At six years old, this didn’t strike me as important. But as I grew, so did the meaning of what she told me.

I believe people should treat life like a canvas, as well as appreciate it like a work of art. I believe that we are handed this canvas to make it our own by making small gestures here and there to fill the canvas with as much color as possible, a little bit at a time. Not only should we fill the canvas with our own attempts at compassion, but we should also admire the small delicacies we create that are put into the canvas as we paint, like we should admire the small beauties in life itself.

A close friend I’ve known since fourth grade fills in her canvas one stroke at a time for each thank you letter she stamps, mails, and sends. A week after every birthday party of hers, I check my mail and there sits a pink envelope addressed to me. Tearing the seal and reading considerate, handwritten notes brings a smile to anyone’s face, and my face is no exception. Can you imagine how happy the world would be if everyone frequently received letters like this? Just this small stroke of humanity adds to her painting of colorful gestures, and with each letter she mails, she paints on.

I can remember a day when I felt less than awake, dragging myself along and struggling to keep my eyes open. Days like this happen to everyone, but I never knew something other than a nap or a cup of coffee could cure me. As I trudged down the street, I walked past a boy who probably noticed my tired eyes. He gave me his best and most immense ear-to-ear grin, nodded hello, and kept walking. Just a smile and nod added more color to his painting. This small act of kindness made my day go from what would have been a long, sluggish one to a brighter and more hopeful day filled with the opportunity to make someone else’s day.

The small tokens of consideration like this add life to the canvas. I’m not asking you to cure brain tumors or to paint the whole picture in one day. Take it one stroke at a time. I believe these small actions of pure generosity can most definitely make a huge difference in other people’s lives. I believe we should not only perform these modest acts of goodness, but we should try to appreciate them like something as simple as a sunset, because it’s the little gestures here and there that make the painting full of life and beauty. So, how will you paint your canvas?