



## Presentation

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"When you give, you begin to live, you get the world."

This quote is from the song "You Might Die Trying" by the Dave Matthews Band. It's about doing what you're passionate about, regardless of the consequences. Although nothing we did here in PSH had negative consequences, the class gave us the confidence to do what is right & the humility to know that one day we too may need help. That way, when the day comes when we must stand up for something, perhaps something controversial, we will be ready.

Throughout the course of this year, I have met many wonderful people. I have met ~~poor~~ homeless people, blind people, people with special educational needs, all different kinds of children, people who have been abused, & people who dedicate their lives to helping others. What they all taught me is that we are all individuals that cannot be stereotyped. No one can assume anything about anyone because of what they look like or how they live their lives.

One of the best things my first graders taught me is of the importance of exposing yourself to many different kinds of people. By the time we reach high school, we usually only hang out with certain people. And those people are usually somewhat like us. Even in class, we can usually predict what kind of people we will be around based on what classes we take. But in first grade, there are no cliques & there are no choices. I get to see representatives of every ~~group~~ group. There's one girl, Ky'arah, who's a total girly-girl. She tells me that when she grows up she wants to be a movie star & a bikini model. Then there's Chloe, the opposite. Before Valentine's Day, one boy said he was going to bring "Hot Wheels" cards for the boys and Disney Princess cards for the girls. Chloe started ranting about how she hated princesses & she wanted a "Hot Wheels" card because she's a "tomboy," as she's labeled herself. There's Fatima who whimpers when ever she speaks & Phillip who can't stay quiet for one minute. There's Avery who is so smart, but lazy. And there's Seth who's so enthusiastic about his assignments despite the fact that he struggles so much. We sometimes like to think that certain personality types are better than others, but we all have our positives & negatives.

we can also learn from children how to be happy. All they need to be happy is recess. I went out with them for recess one day. Two girls were choreographing a dance routine. One girl was chasing a boy around the playground. When she caught him, she hugged him & wouldn't let ~~her~~ him go. One girl was hanging upside down on a bar. I called her a "little monkey" & she spent of recess saying "Monkey!" as she walked around.

Children also remind us of the importance of curiosity & questioning. Everyday there was a new question for me: How old are you? Do you have a car? Are you married? Do you have a baby? Do you have a mom? Can you come live with me?

PSL has also taught me of the importance of choosing your words carefully. When one girl asked me if I had a baby, I ~~replied~~ <sup>said</sup>, "I'm still in high school, I'm too young to have a baby." To which she ~~replied~~ <sup>replied</sup>, "My cousin's in high school & she has a baby." Then, when I was hanging out with the Ohio State School for the Blind Marching Band, one student, who was completely blind, needed his coat. There were several coats around, so I asked him what his looked like. Luckily, he was very ~~understanding~~ <sup>forgiving</sup>.

The most important thing I did in PSL, was the Cleveland Plunge. When we did the Homelessness Unit, the main concept was: don't stereotype people. But I did stereotype the homeless until I met Leo, a homeless man. In many ways, Leo was the stereotypical homeless person: African-American, middle aged male. But he was so much more. He was talented, kind, & wise. <sup>He made me realize that anyone can be homeless.</sup> My favorite thing he said was, "We have to focus on the good things in life, because it's the good that makes us strong." People always seem it's the bad that makes us strong, but it's the good that makes us happy. And if we're happy then we're not thinking about all the bad in life. If someone who is homeless, can focus on happiness, anyone can.

Finally, I got to go to the Lake County Vocational Training Center prom - a dance for teens in Lake County with special learning needs. I was assigned a date, Ryan, making him the first boy I've slow danced with since 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Ryan ~~was~~ <sup>is</sup> in a wheelchair, has difficulties moving his arms, & has some mental disability. But he had the most genuine smile I have ever seen. It was full of pure joy. He didn't talk much, but he knew the

words to almost every song played. I believe his favorites were "Rock 'N' Roll All Night" by Kiss, "In Da Club" by 50 Cent, & "Glamorous" by Fergie. It was really refreshing to be at a dance with no grinding or making out. I had so much fun. Everyone had fun. It wasn't about who was "normal" & who was "special," it was about having a good time.

Community service changes lives because it reminds us of what we knew as children but have forgotten as we've grown. Children have no prejudices, we learn them as we grow. Community service teaches us that prejudice is more than just outward hatred. It is assuming that you are better than anyone else for any reason. Community service then teaches us that all our prejudices are wrong and that all people deserve our respect.