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# The Power of a Smile

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My belief is simple: I believe in the power of a smile.

Something so small and so simple, a movement of the face. It seems to be just a natural human action, just an insignificant part of everyday life, but I believe that a smile is a powerful gesture.

I live in a small sheltered utopian-like town outside Houston, Texas, and although it is pleasant and sunny and the smiling comes easy, it sometimes cuts us off from the poverty and hardships that affect the people of Houston.

One Sunday in March, my friends and I traveled to the fifth ward of Houston to work at Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen. Grilling chicken, chopping salad, mashing potatoes. After a few hours and a few broken hair nets, the doors were opened to welcome the long line of hungry people. The first man to come through the door had on an old ripped T-shirt, and he carried his belongings in a trash bag. The woman behind him had a mass of frizzy hair pinned to her head and wore a pair of torn jeans. Person after person passed through, each looking more hopeless than the last. I could feel my heart breaking and it became increasingly difficult to smile. I tried my best to conceal my pity, because I'm sure that's all they ever get from sheltered kids like me. With each tray I handed out, I felt more and more uneasy. How was I supposed to smile and be happy when life seemed cruelly unfair? I had a warm bed and loving family to go home to, while these people had nothing but a trash bag of belongings.

Finally the line dwindled and the last man hobbled up to the counter. His greasy shirt spilling out over his black pants, he limped over to me to take a tray. Just when I thought I couldn't take anymore, the man paused for a minute to smile. It was an unexpected but sincere, genuine smile full of missing teeth. For the first time that entire day I felt my spirit lift.

I was there to support and help the homeless, but instead they ended up helping me. I finally understood that my smile did not only reflect my own happiness but it could convey so much more. A smile could reveal thankfulness or admiration; show support or understanding. Smiles can connect people and express empathy. It's a form of silent communication that is more powerful than we realize.

When the old man pulled back his lips to reveal a smile, I couldn't help but do the same.

As I started to clean up, I looked around at all of the people enjoying their meal. We are all so similar, but our experiences set us worlds apart. I couldn't even fathom what they had been through and yet I could connect with the last old man through the power of a simple smile.