

Chance Encounter

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I was walking down the street, staring at all the cobblestones lining the walkway—counting them. One. Two. Three. Four. The weather was pleasant enough, I suppose. The snow flurries sparked as they landed on the ground and disappeared without a trace; the cool air blew, kissing my warm forehead. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. The street was bustling with people, rushing from store to store preparing for the quickly approaching holidays. I, on the other hand, was heading over to the arts store to pick up more paints and canvases. Twenty- eight. Twenty- nine. Thirty.

I should have been looking where I was going. By cobblestone forty- seven, I accidentally ran into someone. I felt my cheeks and ears begin to burn with embarrassment.

"Sorry!" I blurted out. But the man just smiled and looked at the person walking next to him. She did some funny gestures with her hands and I realized what was going on. "Oh! He's deaf, isn't he?!" I shouted, "Did you tell him that I was sorry?" (Grandin, T., 1995).

"Yes, I did," the woman replied. The man grabbed her arm. She turned and he signed something to her. Turning back to me she said, "He says that's ok, you can make it up to me by joining me for lunch." I didn't know what to say. I was set on getting those paints... The man signed something to the woman again. "By the way," she translated, "my name is Danny."

He seemed to be nice. "My name's Jesse! If it'll make you feel better... I'll get lunch for you." After the lady told Danny what I said he smiled, and we all started walking towards a restaurant. I wonder if he was born deaf or if he grew up and lost his hearing. I wonder if he likes art, or maybe astronomy.

When we arrived at the little restaurant the lady asked "Do you like spicy food?"

"No."

"Well that's ok, we can get you something else, Danny loves spice." I don't see how people can eat that, I think that spicy food is worth only three sunrises.

We ordered our food, and while we were waiting for it to arrive I kept asking Danny questions, and the nice lady played the role of translator for us. "So, were you born deaf, or did you lose your hearing when you were a kid?" I shouldn't have asked that.... What if he gets mad? I know I would...

Danny smiled and replied with "I was born deaf, I have a disease called Usher's Syndrome, meaning I can't hear, and that I'll eventually lose my sight."

I had no idea what to say, that was horrible! How could one person live without being able to hear AND see?? How could they see the stars?! How could they paint?! "Ohh.... That's not good. I have autism, so it makes talking to people hard. My mother helped me with learning how to do that. What's it like knowing that you won't be able to see later?"

Danny waited what seemed like forever to reply. I hope I didn't hurt his feelings. "Sorry, I was trying to think of a way to explain. I feel as if that's just part of who I am, I can't really change who I am. I can really only accept what is happening in my life and make the most of it while I have time." I liked that idea, live the life you want to live, and accept who you really are, there's no need to change.

"Would you ever want to be able to hear? Or do you think that's part of who you are too?"

"I would much rather be able to get my sight back if I could, but I don't think I'd ever want to be able to hear. I like the quiet."

"I like quiet too, sometimes things can get too loud for me, and it hurts my ears. I don't really like it when people ask me 'what' or 'why' questions though, I think it's annoying. Do you know what causes Usher's Syndrome?"

"Well," Danny began, "my family may or may not have a history of interfamily relationships, and one of my ancestors may have had a mutation in one of their genes, that I can never remember what it's called (Bork, J. M. et al, 2001). Either way, that's what caused me, and a lot of my community's members, to have Usher's."

Isn't incest a bad thing to do? I don't think that people should do that. I probably shouldn't ask about that though, I don't want Danny to get mad

at me. "Do you like to do anything? Do you have any hobbies? I really like learning about the stars and space. I also really like painting and using lots of colors and putting the stars into my paintings. They have to be accurate though, otherwise what's the point of adding the stars? I used to really like learning about security systems, now I don't anymore, I'd much rather spend my time learning about the stars and painting them."

"That sounds like fun, I think I would have tried painting except I'm already having problems seeing, that's why I sign so close to my face. I basically see a tiny box of my surroundings, everything else is either a blur or dark. I really do like cooking though, it's my passion to cook Cajun food. I actually work at a restaurant that specifically employs people with my condition. I enjoy being able to do what makes me happy, one time I even got to feed the president. I would have tried to do engineering, but there weren't many opportunities for me to get a job" (Ehn, M., 2016)

"That's nice, I hope the president liked your food, and that it wasn't too spicy for him. I don't like spice, I only like eating certain food that make me feel happy."

We finally got our lunch and I told him more about my art and how I got to show off my art and answer questions at a panel, and Danny told me more about his restaurant. As much as I don't like eating spice, I'm tempted to try Danny's cooking, he seems as if he knows what he's talking about.

Lunch was over, we said our final goodbyes, "I hope to talk to you again!" Danny smiled at me and waved. I think I made a new friend. I smiled to myself. Now, time to go get those paints, where was I? oh, yes, forty- seven. No matter if an individual has a neurological disorder such as autism, Usher's, or another type of "deformity" (to put it harshly), he or she is still capable of achieving whatever they put their mind to. Just like Danny and Jesse they pushed past their limitations and rose to the top despite not being able to hear or having difficulty communicating, respectively. Danny and Jesse use their talents to express themselves and ensure that their own voices can be heard, even when there are some barriers.

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