

I'm Still Here

By: Neema Baddam

I been scared and battered.

My hopes, the wind done scattered.

The snow has friz me,

The sun has baked me,

Looks like between 'em they done

Tried to make me

Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'—

But I don't care!

I'm still here!

This is my favorite poem, by Langston Hughes. Not only is the poem inspiring in itself, but also the way it was presented to me. One day, a public speaker named Mike came to our school. You know what he spoke about? Our world.

This world is becoming cruel. It is played by stereotypes and unfounded hatred. One of the stories that Mike told stuck with me. He said: "Did you know that there are 1800 suicide attempts off the Golden Gate Bridge every year? And only about 30 have survived. Ever. But one suicide attempt really saddened me. A man walked to the Golden Gate Bridge and committed suicide. But when the police inspected his apartment, they found a note. A suicide note. It said: 'I am going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way there, I will not jump.'"

Doesn't that just make you think? If one smile really could save a life, doesn't that just make you want to smile at everyone? But not everyone sees it that way. They are so absorbed in their own lives they can't notice anybody on the street. Not to say hi, not to have a conversation, not to smile.

Mike demonstrated the cruelty of the world through various characters.

An African-American boy, whose dad dies at age ten, he gets into Rutgers University. But this boy was different. He could have gone to college on a full scholarship, but he didn't. But not because he didn't want to- football was something he was passionate about, and he wanted to

play in a college with a good athletics program, but he didn't want to go pro. After college, he wanted to go out and make a change in the world.

A boy suffered from cerebral palsy and was physically hurt because of it. People pushed him out of his wheelchair, just to see if he could get up. And people who walked by didn't do anything. They just kept going, trying not to get involved.

A little boy had attention deficit disorder (ADD). He suffered from clinical depression as a kid. On the day he was born, he was the only baby born in the hospital that night. He was the only baby boy born in that hospital for 6 months. So the nurses pooled some money to buy a golden cross to give to him. They told him he was meant to carry out a special mission, and that he had a gift. His gift was that he was able to see things from a different point of view. To understand. And his mission was to teach us that.

His final note: A Japanese teacup is a metaphor for a person. Remove the handles and see what is on the inside, because that's what really matters. You might have known a person for years, and still not really know them because you never removed their handles. Mike only spoke for an hour and a half, but in that time he changed my life. He changed the way I saw the world. I learned that everyone has a story. I just need to take the time to figure it out.