

Not to be cynical, but...

Deconstructionism vs. Mother Theresa

Two Sundays ago, I called my favorite aunt. The first thing she said was

"So, when are you going to India?"

I'm pretty used to this question, seeing as how I'm going on Neal Bushoven's winter term trip.

"Oh, a couple of days after Christmas."

"No. I mean, permanently."

"Huh?"

"Remember?"

"Remember what?"

"Remember when you were five and I read you that book on Mother Theresa?"

"Umm... Yeah?"

It had been a gruesome story, full of babies being left in trashcans and all sorts of injustice. But as a five-year-old, I had loved it.

My aunt lived with us at the time, and I'd made her read it to me over and over and eventually forced my mother to read it to me at night. I'd sometimes read it myself, but what I loved most of all was to lay back on the couch and form pictures in my head as my aunt or my mother read it to me.

"Well," my aunt said. "When are you going to take on her work?"

"Huh?"

"When you were a little girl, you said you wanted to go to India when you were grown and help Mother Theresa. Then you asked me how old she was. I said I didn't know. You said that she looked pretty old and that she'd prob-

ably be dead so you'd just go to India and take over."

"Oh."

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"I was just kidding." Aunt Jackie finally supplied.

"Yeah, I know" I said. "But it still bothers me."

I thought back to when I was a little girl. I remembered knowing that President Reagan was a bad man, but not being sure why. I knew that there were poor people in the world and that there were rich people in the world and that comparatively, I was a rich person, but almost everyone in America was. And I was going to go to India and help the poor people because that's what rich people were supposed to do.

I was about that age when I read a book about the life of Jesus Christ and was so moved I asked my Aunt (with whom I always shared secrets) to give my life savings (twenty-five dollars) to the poor.

Although my aunt preached on the perils of sexism, I was not aware of racism at all as a five year old. I remember knowing that if you were Jewish, you didn't celebrate Christmas. Other than that, I was pretty sure it was a lot like being Presbyterian. I thought that being Catholic was really different and weird, though.

And when I was five years old, I wanted to go to India and help poor people.

It's fourteen years later. My complacent, almost halfway college-

educated self is sitting in the computer lab, writing my enlightened thoughts for publication. I think President Clinton is a pretty good man, and I can articulate why in sentences that fall into place like little tin soldiers. I know that there are poor people in the world and that there are rich people in the world and that comparatively, I'm a pretty rich person. I'm going to India to see the native art and to take in the culture because that's what rich people are supposed to do.

I know about sexism, although I haven't experienced much of it. I know about racism. I know that being Jewish is fundamentally different from being Presbyterian and that being Catholic isn't weird at all.

It's a no-brainer that I've progressed in many ways. But I have to ask myself what I've lost. I mean, when did having an opinion on something become more important than doing something? When did understanding Clinton's position on the welfare policy and how that could impact the Democrats in the year 2000 become more important than giving a poor guy on the street a buck? Is telling myself that he would just spend it on liquor really enough to save him? Is voting occasionally, keeping up on the news and considering doing charity work enough to save the world?

Why, at nineteen, do I find myself arguing whether ideas undermine themselves, while the five-year-old was making sandwiches for the homeless? The nineteen-year-old asks if the homeless

man on the street needs a societal structural change. The five-year-old answers, "No, darn it, he needs a sandwich."

I have a secret suspicion that the liberals of the world squandered their political power over glasses of chardonnay and long discussions of Foucault while the conservatives were quietly taking over the government. It's just a suspicion, but it bothers me.

Before I'd read Ayn Rand, before I even knew the meaning of the word "Deconstructionism," before I wondered the great questions of life, I had a few answers. They were simple answers, but they were answers just the same. Is it so much worse to have a few simple answers than to have questions and analogies and literary references and ironies and homages and allegories heaped upon each other like so many cans at the recycling center? I honestly don't know.

So, I'm going to India in January. I'm going to tour around and look at the poor people. Vida Mia Ruiz told me that in some villages, children will come out and beg for pens. So, I'll give them their pens and I'll take pictures of the little children and their smiles. I'll look at art and I'll read about the government and the culture and I'll feel very saddened in a fashionable sort of way, have an epiphany or two, and maybe even shed this feeling that I'm really missing the point of life.

And maybe not.

-by Suzyn Smith

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