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Society: Overlooking the Invaluable

“You want to play some ball?” were the first words out of Josh’s mouth when I opened my front door.

It was a hot, sunny afternoon in late-May. The sun’s warm heat licked my skin, leaving a sticky residue of sweat that, even after a shower, returned at the first hint of the inescapable, sweltering heat. I had just been nose deep in my advanced placement biology book when Josh knocked at my door, and I needed a break.

Playing basketball was a common past-time Josh and I did, although I would be overestimating myself if I said I really played. It’s not that I was really any good, which to be honest, I wasn’t. It’s just that Josh was, to be frank, worse. Josh was slightly less of the average underdog; he was short for a Caucasian, standing at a mere 5”2, pudgy, uncoordinated, and relied on hand-me-downs from his older cousins. Being an only child, he didn’t have the best social skills. Despite all this, Josh was one of the kindest souls I’ve ever met. He spoke politely, always saying please and thank you. He didn’t swear. He would hold the door for you even if you were a good fifty feet away, and he would give up his seat for you, which is actually how we met. Coming home from school, I found myself struggling to hold onto both my plethora of books and the grab bar on the bus, as there were no more available seats. Josh, seeing this, offered his seat to me. His act of kindness, him being five years younger than I, took me by surprised since it wasn’t everyday you see a preteen go out of their way to help somebody. We got to talking and it was then I discovered he lived in my neighborhood, and from then on, we played basketball together whenever we needed a break from something.

Out in the 90 degree weather, we tired easily as we found the hot, thick air hard to breathe in, and mostly sat in the shade.

“What’s eating you today?” I asked Josh.

“Same old things,” he mumbled in reply as he played with the basketball in his hand.

“Are they still bugging you?”

Josh gave no reply and instead dribbled the ball. *Bounce bounce.*

“Do you want me to speak to them? Or your teachers, maybe?”

“You can’t speak to *everybody*.” *Bounce bounce.*

Again, Josh was an outcast. He didn’t have many friends, just a few acquaintances here and there. I felt really sorry for him, actually. He sat alone during lunch, he was almost always picked last in gym, and he was just plain picked on. He was picked on because of his generic SuperCuts haircut, his round physique, and the same baggy sweatshirt he’d always wear. He was picked on how his hands would sweat whenever he had to present in front of the class, on the drawings he made, and the bag lunches he brought to school. He was the unintentional class clown of the school, except he was laughed at, not laughed with. He was, to put it straight, miserable.

Later on towards the end of summer, his sadness took a turn in the road when he made, or rather, adopted, a new friend: Ralph the dog. Ralph was a one-year-old brown and white male Victorian Bulldog who was gentle, yet rambunctious, and slobbered a lot. He wasn’t the type of annoying dog that, at first sight of you, would hop onto your leg and start humping. Instead, Ralph was the type of dog to dawdle his way towards you, sniff your shoes, lick your shoelaces for a bit, and then run around you in circles in hopes of playing a game of “catch-me-if-you-can.” Most importantly, he was the type of dog, or friend, that Josh needed.

From what was once a lonely, Debbie-Downer pariah emerged an optimistic, happy-go-lucky boy in a matter of a few months. My bedroom window had a view of the community park, and whenever I looked outside, there I saw Josh and Ralph, enjoying each other’s company in the cool summer evenings. They did everything together. They adventured around town on nice, warm days, stayed home and sat in front of electric fans on exceptionally warm days, raided the refrigerator together in the middle of the night, and fell asleep together, snoring loudly on the living room couch. Ralph brought out the best in Josh. Josh now had a companion to eat with, play with, talk to, and confide in. He had a companion who didn’t care about the way his SuperCuts haircut looked funny, or how his sweatshirt was so raggedy and over worn, or how his palms sweated like ice melting on a hot day, or how he couldn’t shoot a ball. Instead, Josh had a companion who would love him no matter what he looked like, a companion who would grow to love that raggedy sweatshirt, a companion who would lick those sweaty palms, and a companion who would be there to run after the overthrown basketball. He had a companion who would appreciate everything Josh did and more. He had a best friend.

While watching Josh and Ralph play one day, it made me realize something about us people: how we value the un-valuable, and overlook in invaluable. I think back to a quote from John Grogan’s best selling novel, *Marley & Me*, a book about a man and the world’s worst dog, and how relatable it was to this situation. The quote goes:

A dog has no use for fancy cars or big homes or designer clothes. Status symbols mean nothing to him. A waterlogged stick will do just fine. A dog judges others not by their color or creed or class, but who they are inside. A dog doesn’t care if you’re rich or poor, educated or illiterate, clever or dull. Give him your heart and he will give you his. It was really quite simple, and yet we humans, so much wiser and more sophisticated, have always had trouble figuring what really counts and what does not. (280)

Here was Josh, an outsider, rejected by his peers because of his flaws. After years of being rejected, he found acceptance in a simple dog. As nice as it is that Josh found a best friend in a dog, it makes society look shallow and shady. As famous writer and poet Oscar Wilde once said, “Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.” We tend to overlook values that were once held as the cornerstones of life, such as loyalty, simplicity, kindness and joy, and instead overrate superficial things, like fashion trends, physical appearance, fame, and wealth. In doing so, we set those with little to no values on high pedestals and leave those with real and true values in the dirt. So next time, before we shun those who are considered different from the mainstream, we ought to reevaluate ourselves and what our values are, for what values do we have if we shun someone we don’t even know?