

Essay by Bianca Fox  
New Manner of Thinking

A substantial portion of modern society appears to be more concerned about the individual, but not necessarily in a good way. People seem to be much more self-centered and dissatisfied with their lives, always wanting something bigger and better – bigger house, better job, nicer car, better body, etc. Higher levels of stress and increased competition in almost every activity evolve out of this view. Students are taught that they need to receive A's so they can go to an excellent college and get a good, high income job in order to buy the nicer clothes and fancy car. This has only created one, big unhappy cycle of existence for many people as morals degrade and families disintegrate.

I admit I fully partook in this as my success in school can attest to, but I began to change this past summer when I met Elliott Stroope, an eight year old boy with muscular dystrophy. As part of my graduation requirements, I have completed service the past four years through various activities, including working in soup kitchens, helping children with mental and physical disabilities play soccer and basketball, and volunteering as a tutor for local disadvantaged children through IMPACT tutoring. Slowly, I began to forget that service was a requirement and to fully enjoy helping those in true need. After my week at Muscular Dystrophy Association camp taking care of Elliott, who is in a wheelchair with two metal rods in his back, needs a hearing aid, and has a mickey tube in his stomach, my passion for serving others was in full bloom. That week was the most fulfilling, joyful, heartbreaking, invigorating, and tiring week of my life. Not a day goes by that I do not think of Elliott and the other kids at the camp. The MDA camp enabled me to willingly embark on the life-long journey of self discovery and the process of finding what I know to be true, right, and just. That single week cemented my desire to serve others, not for recognition or class credit, but because I know it is right.

Elliott taught me to be more empathetic, to maintain a positive attitude, to keep on dreaming, and to take everything in stride. This is a lesson everyone needs to hear and attempt to embody. If more people, especially the younger generations, are encouraged to help those who are poor, destitute, and truly in need, whether physically, mentally, or socio-economically disadvantaged, then they will be more responsible and empathetic. If more people are not as concerned with themselves, with achieving success according to society's definitions, and with excessive competition in every action, their concern for others can spread to concern for the world. Maybe then we can actually learn to put our differences and prejudices aside and live in peace, rather than in competition and war. This is not an easy task and requires sacrifice, but if mankind is to survive we need to learn to acquire more concern over the plight of others.