

## A Billion Dollars Worth of Empathy

My favorite piece of art is a bit of an eyesore. None of the many elements really seem to fit together. A rudimentary map of San Francisco is painted in the middle of the canvas, a sheet of notebook paper filled with illegible writing is pasted on the left side, and somewhere near the bottom is the phrase “Life is a full time job”. It’s almost exhausting to look at, mostly because I can’t focus on one aspect of the piece before another distracts me and curiosity drags my gaze away. The complexity of the piece is both perplexing and enchanting. But after I stare at the canvas long enough, its secrets start to give themselves away, the most important of which being that cohesion doesn’t require harmony as long as we recognize that everything is part of a bigger picture.

This disorganized, confusing, and very captivating piece of art is not dissimilar to the world we live in today. It serves as a reminder that however distant things may seem, we all live under the same stars. The issues that varying communities face may be vastly different, but they are interconnected solely because we are bonded by our existence on this planet.

If I had a billion dollars, I would dedicate my life to spreading this message of understanding and empathy in whatever capacity necessary. I would travel the world, visiting different communities where I could listen to people’s stories and devise ways to share them with greater audiences. I would donate money to build and maintain schools in impoverished areas to both employ local workers and to create an educated next generation. I would use my wealth to create a dialog among people with contrarian viewpoints. I would search for ways to make every community more sustainable--be it through decreasing waste or finding better energy sources--so that we can continue having a world within which to coexist.

Coexistence has become especially imperative in present day society, as history threatens to repeat itself by dividing ethnic and social groups. All over the world, political figures are gaining popularity due to the people’s approval of xenophobic rhetoric. We are failing to see the immense value in diversity, and we have resorted to fearing one another rather than adapting to one another.

The underlying issue is the human tendency to desire for our *own* health, happiness, and safety rather than to think of the greater community. However, we must remember that everything is interconnected--no matter how complicated the bigger picture may appear. As a result, embracing tolerance can bring about good fortune to all simply based on the interdependence of different issues.

But at the end of the day, we must keep in mind that despite how money often makes goals more attainable, having limited finances does not hinder our ability to spread empathy. The truth is, no one needs a billion dollars to effectively bring about compassion.