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Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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My Biography: What I am Bringing to AHRC New York City

I am Melina, I come from Europe, I am a transfer student from the American University in Bulgaria. My major is public accounting and this is my first semester at Pace University. I was born in Greece but I have lived mostly in Albania. As every european, I speak couple of languages. In my previous school, community service was an important part of the program. We use to clean streets, the dorms and the school mostly of the times. Also I have actively participated in raising funds for homeless people and sick children. The most special community service I have participated was for Christmas and Easter. We organized an event with music, dinner and gifts in a senior housing in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Thas was a great experience for me and I realy enjoyed it. The elderly people got so happy and were smiling and that made me very happy as well. Although I have never worked with children and in any organization like AHRC, I am very excited to meeting the young adults and spend some time with them.

Me, myself and I !!!



Project samples



My Mid-Term Reflections Journal

It took me one week to go through every single row of this book and reflect on it, analyze the message that the author Alan Brightman wants to transmit to the reader. It gets more personal though, because he wants to speak to our heart and tell to it how looks like to live life with a disability, how it feels when everybody is starring at you and feels sorry. The author uses an elegant prose that can touch even the most critic reader : *"So this is specifically not a book about a word – "disability" – but about a place. In that place, big and little lives play out daily and, sometimes, lessons follow. Many of the lessons are ones that could only have been revealed in The Land of Disability. These are what I've tried to capture and convey."* With this powerful start he makes it clear that here we are talking about a world where some things are different and people act according to their own unique situation but overall it's the same world where all humans live. This book is so real to me that I was fantasizing the stories and the reactions accompanied with pain, anger and sadness. I went even further, putting myself in their shoes, and for a moment I got scared. I wondered why and was clear to me that I am a weak person with no strength to face certain situations. The book taught me an important lesson, how much strength people with disabilities have, as much as the other rest of us will never have. The author enriches his brief narratives with some artwork created by

students from the National Institute of Art and Disabilities. *This art gave me the impression that symbolizes a personal response of the "artists" for the way how they concept world. And is not the same for all of them, once you see a heart and two hands ready to give you a hug and in the other you see a depressed picture of an unhappy world.*

I remember I told my mum when I registered for this class that Web Design has nothing to do with what I like and what I want to study and how much I hate this class. I had no idea how it will change my thoughts and feelings, will change a part of my life, accepting and building a friendship that I will never forget.

I had no idea that this class would appear as a lesson from a book that I never saw before, a book that I like to call as the one I was assigned to read "disability land". I felt emotions the first time I met my partner, I felt emotions when I talked with her and I was curious in the way she will interact, I could notice on the tone of voice that I was being afraid to say something that will hurt her or say something wrong. I felt myself insecure and shy. Julia (my partner) was shy too. We needed an "ice-breaker" over there so we could start getting to know better each other. She is a sweet girl that has dreams and ambitions as me , as you , as every human creature. In the mini-presentations, I listened to all of the high-school students carefully, I noticed that each of them had a different personality, I could see movie stars, photographers, Dj-s , singers, painters ect. in their eyes. That day, I realized that are so many things I don't know and that those kids can teach me, they can teach me about movies and songs and Photoshop, they can teach me to overcome my insecurities. Julia taught me that sometimes she does not want to respond to my questions, that she cannot tolerate in her coffee taste and that she likes to transmit me her message through silence and a smile. It took me a long time to understand that for her was easier to type the answers that I was anxiously waiting for. If I had the chance to read this book before it should have been easier for our communication. The book was an eye opener to my "ignorance" as well. I thought I know everything but at least now I admit that I have plenty of empty room for growth. I never knew that Yahoo and Apple have disability solutions groups. Never thought about it because I used to be a selfish creature that never realized that some people are more sensitive than me and for them things are more tough. Navigating in the book, I remember reading sad stories of kids and adults with disabilities that in fact represent a struggle in itself . I wondered why some people are mean and treat them in a dishonorable way. Later on, the author gave me an answer: " Life is a long lesson to humility!"

DisabilityLand is organized into three parts. Common Sense immediately drove my mind to think how different these stories would have been if common sense had been present. I came to class today and tried Julia if she had common sense. I took my answer, she is smart and has a good common sense despite her mental disabilities. Life taught me that not everybody has a common sense.

The second part of the book is called Learnings- things we learn from disability . I had the chance to learn about disability through this precious book and through my present experience in the course but think about it :How many people are out there that they know that disability exists? How many of them that they know, they do not create

misconceptions? How many of them stare at people with disabilities without noticing that yes they do bother? I learned to find a better way to communicate with Julia from her weaknesses to talk to me and respond to all my "investigative" questions. I paid more attention to her needs that are nothing uncommon (we all have ones) in order to achieve a smooth outcome from our meetings. The third part is Leaps- people finding ways to be smart about using what we're learning to change the game – or the world. This book made me ask a question, what would make Julia happy?

It did not take me more than 2 seconds to answer, serving coffee. Every time she sees me she is excited to show me the new things coming out in the Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts. She can now answer mostly of my questions of how is prepared every variety of coffee drink. She will learn soon how to make espresso in a high end "gadget" that not everybody can use. She is walking with big steps to her dream, to what will bring her joy.

I always remember professor's words: *"For you that have never done something difficult in your life, this class may be so".* I have to admit professor that this class is difficult sometimes because It's hard for me to keep Julia's attention for two hours but I have to admit that this is the most pleasurable thing I have ever done in my life. This class and this book taught me to open my eyes and my horizons to a community left totally in dark in my country. I know this world needs more shelves of books like this, more people to read it and much more to bring a blast of hope for a society that faces misconceptions every day. Regardless of whether or not we see ourselves as "having a disability", we all have strengths and weaknesses, talents and uncertainties ,we all have the great chance to be alive! *Thank you Julia for being as great as you are and making me a better person!*

My Final Reflections Journal

This final journal for me is like the "balance sheet" of my work and achievement throughout this semester in a course that changed my perceptions. I hope that this report to myself of how I met the challenge and the opportunity that Dr. Lawler pointed out came with a net profit rather than loss! I can say that for two basic reasons: First, I see in Julia progress. We started as a shy group barely talking but smiling always to each other and we ended as a powerful girls' trio with a very good interaction. Our girlish presentation symbolized a strong bond formed slowly in a computer class! Normally, was the first time for Julia to be part of the program and good things usually take time to be accomplished in life! The fact that she introduced herself in the presentation was a victory for me, in rehearsal I could not even mention that to her because it would disturb and make her nervous. The progress stands also in the fact that Julia overcame her fears and she is open to discussion, a special acknowledgment stands here for David and Ian supporting us in activities. I was surprised to hear yesterday Julia saying that: " We don't have time, are we going to finish all this?" She was confident and powerful to express her opinion for the time concern, a thing that Julia would not do usually. I have noticed that sometimes when the classes were almost in the end, she wanted to ask about the time but never did. She always was polite to stay until the end with a smile and no signs of fatigue. That got better with time, she cultivated patience and calmness to deal with any situation and especially with us

asking her every single questions that she could refuse to respond. Personally, I notice to Julia that she is growing up every day and I could feel the transition of her from being a “teenager” to a young lady with dreams and passions. As the beginning of her semester in Pace University, Julia got well-adjusted. It could not have gone better for her, she became special with her originality of having insecurities, uncertainties and emotions when dealing with us. I feel sorry for blaming her as being reserved, I was too excited to get our relation in the highest level of it rapidly and I failed to understand that is a natural mind response to be reluctant and mature. That was one of the lessons I learnt from this course, you can't skip levels but you have to work and be patient to achieve them.

When comes to the impact of this course to me, saying that changed my perceptions and my world won't be enough. This semester was the first for me as well in Pace where I transitioned from another college from Balkans. As an accounting major with knowledge only regarding numbers and science, I never been distinguished in having good communication skills or any attribute to mentoring younger generations. The only thing I could ace was solving exercises. Honestly, I choose the course in order to better learn computer for my financial career. I m glad that my expectations never met because first I got to develop myself as a human. Now I realize how poor knowledge my country and how ignorant I could be not knowing what autism is and that people in the world engage themselves in the struggle with autism. Thankfully, the course taught me what is going on in the real world and how different communities from mine live and develop. Personally, having this experience I cultivated respect, patience, love, humanity and compassion in this course. I trained myself to be patient and never be rude to Julia, made me accept that she needs more time and she has some particularities. I found that my communication had to change as well and I tried ways to improve it. Discussing the topics for the blogs and reading the articles related with disabilities I got information that I spread out to my family as well! The one-day experience in the community service day proved to me that I actually have done progress, too. I was confident and I knew to pause, listen to my partner, ask her nicely questions, wait the response, make suggestions ect. I feel that I have grown up along with Julia and become more sensitive to disabilities and how a life with that looks like. Although, in my mind before I imagined it differently, I became conscious that talent has no boundaries, and I met a great talent in the young adults and a surprising power to go for it! I overcame my fears too, acting little bit with Ian and being confident that I can make it! The course helped me become a better person, more educated and will not end here. I plan to always be in touch with the course development and in the fall be back to AHRC and show to myself that I can be a mentor!