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Acts of Kindness

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Demetria Hayman

This I Believe Essay for NPR

Aired February 8th, 2012

This I Believe

I believe that for every evil act, there is a kind one. When I'm home, away from my college life in Rhode Island, I usually wake up and lazily watch the news for a half hour and drink a few cups of coffee. Usually the news is a depressing way to start the day, but often there is a short story about something miraculous or cheerful, like when a soldier receives a purple heart or when someone vows to dedicate her life to community service.

Stories filled with hope matter to me. Growing up not knowing where the next meal would come from was hard on me. When my father was finally kicked out of our lives for good during my sophomore year of high school, it meant sacrificing a father-figure and an extra paycheck. My mother sat at our kitchen table that weekend before Thanksgiving, softly crying, looking through the sales flyer from the supermarket. It was the end of the month, and I knew that she was upset about not being able to afford meals for the following week and Thanksgiving dinner, a day when one wants to feel appreciative and grateful.

My mom, strong and always optimistic, walked into the middle school where she worked as a special education teacher. With a smile on her face, she was ready to have a great day at work, and not let our family's trauma get in the way. She walked into her classroom and found a \$200 supermarket gift certificate on her desk. It was in an unsigned card that only said something about how my mom is a good person who deserves to have a worry-free Thanksgiving.

We went food shopping that night, and despite all that was going on in our lives, we had the biggest smiles on our faces. We even cried a little, out of joy and pure happiness. The unknown source of the gift card gave us hope in a hopeless time. My mother never asked for sympathy or hand-outs, and the card-giver knew that my mother would say “thank you” and refuse the gift if it had been handed to her in person. What goes around comes around, and this one act of kindness has inspired me to smile at strangers, make time for community service every week, and have faith that good people really are still out there.