

Betty Cuanalo

Sociology 10:00 a.m.

### **The Other Side of the Coin**

Cici, a nice lady who happened to be sitting in the dining room, started sharing her story with me, implying her reason to be there was community service, then she asked me, “are you doing community service as well?” to which I nodded somehow confused not knowing what she really meant. As our conversation started to develop I realized what community service meant, and told Cici that my reason to be there was merely to write a paper for my sociology class.

For a long time I had wanted to volunteer in a homeless shelter and suddenly it became clear to me, the right time had come. The air had a peculiar smell, the place showed an unexpected distinctive sense and all of a sudden I found myself in a different and strange dimension.

My first impression was nothing like expected, but there I was, being part of the other side of the coin, so to speak. Not only was I being a participant at that moment, mixed with different emotions but the impact on me would change my perspective in many different ways.

I also met Leona, who had been volunteering for some years, who explained to me that most of the homeless that she knew would always find it difficult to provide for themselves some of the prime necessities like shelter and food and then she added “But when it comes for them to get drugs, they always find a way to get them”.

As the time went by, I found out that Cici and her husband have been homeless for almost 20 years. Cici being an LPN (licensed practical nurse) had her license canceled when she and her husband were caught stealing drugs by breaking into pharmacies in which she showed no remorse at all. Now she was doing community service for a minor incident not mentioned and only had to do 5 more hours to complete before the end of the month.

As the room started to fill, I noticed people from different ages even little kids with their mothers which were happy to get a glass of chocolate milk with cookies. I couldn't help but to feel sadness. As I greeted some of the homeless people and handed them their meals, I noticed some were thankful, others wouldn't say a word and a few would not even look into my eyes.

Hungry indeed for food, love or what about understanding? I asked myself repeatedly. Everybody has a story for sure, and I came to the conclusion that we are accountable for the choices we make in our lives, certainly we all have our trials though we don't always seem to make a wise decision and as a consequence, the outcome usually comes with very a high price.

Different values and norms, diverse circumstances and undisputable ways of seeing life is what I could perceive from them, their circle of life runs unlike "the normal society", what dreams in life could they have? Who knows, all I could sense were silent tears from them and from me as I watched some still being half drugged and wasted just waiting to get something to eat.

This experience opened my eyes to a different perspective and now I am able to see the other side of the coin in which I can tell that there are different kinds of lives or context, but at the end of the day we are all the same, looking to fill the empty gap in ourselves