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Why do I Want to be a Helper?

There were moments in my life when I saw people down on their luck, and I was fortunate enough to have had the most beautiful example of humanity in my mother. Her actions made the difference in the lives of countless people. Over time, I have had the opportunity to assist different types of individuals during disaster relief efforts with the Red Cross in my country of origin, Mexico. The United States is now my home, and I want to be able to make a difference in my community. This is the reason I am in the Human Services program, acquiring the tools that will turn me into a professional helper, with benefits and responsibilities, and with the satisfaction of empowering others to help themselves.

The person whose influence I treasure to this day is my mother, Emma. For as long as I can remember there were people knocking at our door, with tin cans in hand asking for my mom. She would come out, take the tin can from them, go into the kitchen and come back with the can full of food, a piece of bread and a glass of water. A lot of people asking for food were homeless; some of them might have suffered from mental illness. A couple of them did not speak. There was an older woman dragging along a young girl, and thinking of them now still breaks my heart. My mother never denied food or water to anyone, and if people wanted to talk, she would listen. Sometimes she would send people to the dispensary at the church we frequented with the $5.00 pesos it would cost for them to ride the bus round-trip. Whenever people would thank her, she would say that she did what had to be done for a fellow human being.

Back when I was 16 years old, there was a terrible earthquake in Mexico City. There was destruction everywhere. Several buildings were leveled, and the death toll was enormous. I was ready to enter high school. My best friends from middle school lived in buildings that completely fell apart. I left my house at the first opportunity. While removing the debris, we found the bodies of my friends Emilio and Raul. I was devastated and unable to sleep several nights afterwards. I always wished I could have done more for them.

Several years later, I was living in Cozumel, Mexico when hurricane Gilbert hit the Island. I signed up as a volunteer with the Red Cross to distribute food and water to those affected by the hurricane. Some people were left homeless and in need of relocation. Others needed medical attention, and I had to consult with the social workers and follow their instructions to respond to the needs of the community.

Another time, I was living in Cancun when hurricane Wilma struck, I then again signed up with the Red Cross and distributed food and water. At one point I was sent to direct tourists from all parts of the world to the places they needed to go so they could be safely evacuated and go home. Once the tourists were gone, and only the local people remained a girl came to me telling me she had been raped the night before. I knew she needed to go to the police, but she was alone. I went with her and held her hand while she told the police what had happened and later on when she was examined by a doctor, I held her hand again. Not long afterward, a woman approached me. She wanted to get away from her abusive husband and did not know what to do; she had two kids with her. There was a shortage of social workers at the assistance center, so I had to figure things out on my own. I called several organizations and was able to find one that would give shelter, protection, and legal counsel to this woman and her kids. Helping her felt good, but I really wanted to know what to do in any situation, how to comfort the person suffering and how to find resources for them.

Because of all of these experiences, I became a caregiver, working with people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. I see a lack of resources for the families of these people within the Latino community and I would like to set up an agency of compassionate and professional people to tend to this vulnerable group. It may take a long time, but I am taking the first steps in the right direction. I do realize that I have helped people, so I am a helper already, but I want to be an effective helper, professional and respectful of the cultural and ideological differences between my own beliefs and those of the people I help. I am learning strategies every week that will help me accomplish my goal of one day becoming a counselor. I also want to be mindful of the laws and standards that regulate the human services field. I will make a difference in the lives of many people. I realize that if I help one person, the benefits of that will extend to his or her family, and the effect will benefit the community. It is a small change, but the consequences have ripple effects that resonate with humanity.