

Becoming Heart People

By Kara Splawa-Neyman

Rose: Faith Filled

Rose dug her fingernails into the cheap, blue plastic chair she was sitting on, not surprised to see cobalt particles under her nails. She took a deep breath. She had a vague idea of why she was here. She knew she would get caught eventually. But she still did it. She still hid from the compulsory school masses. Rose hadn't set foot in a church, not since her grandmother's funeral. She remembered when she was younger, stumbling into the church, holding her grandmother's hand. She used to love going. It was something special that she could share with her grandmother. But now it was too hard. The hymns, the flowers, the familiar parishioners. Everywhere she looked, she saw her grandmother. So that's why she did it. That's why she skipped the school masses. She felt awful, a sinking, guilty feeling that grew stronger every time she hid in a bathroom stall, an empty classroom, or an unused broom-closet. And now she had been sent to this club. It was supposedly meant to help her and three other girls who were having a hard time adjusting to high school. How could they help? Rose questioned. How could they understand her aversion to a *building*? It would sound silly. Stupid. A sudden creak snapped her back to reality. Another girl stepped into the room, pulling her blonde hair over her eyes while she rushed to a chair. She quickly sat down, her gaze at the floor unbroken. Rose studied her. She seemed shy. Meek. Rose wondered if she should say something, introduce herself, but she decided against it.

Tamara: Reverence Relationships

Tamara sighed. Why was she here? Why had Tamara been sent to this stupid club? She knew what this was, it hadn't taken her long to figure it out. This was some forced attempt from the teachers to get her to make friends. It wasn't her fault. She had tried to explain. She talked about how much her classmates disliked her, how they never talked to her, just because she wasn't a member of their little gang. But that wasn't true. No matter how many times she had lain, sleepless, on her bed, trying to convince herself this was the truth, it just *wasn't*. The girls in her class hadn't excluded her, they had tried so hard to be her friend, inviting her to parties, asking to sit with her at lunch. But she had pushed them away. Every question that came her way was met with a simple "No", "Yes", or, in a few extremely rare occurrences, a short sentence, immediately followed by some unconvincing excuse for an exit. Sure, at the start of the year she had tried to make friends. She had done everything right. She held eye contact, remembered to smile, focused on shared interests. But friendships take time, and patience had never been Tamara's strong suit. By the third week, she had given up. No more awkward icebreakers, no more trying to remember names, no more potential friends, only casual acquaintances. And where had that gotten her? Slowly walking to an empty classroom, waiting for the *others*. She didn't know who they were, the teachers were incredibly cryptic, but she could see what was about to happen. The teachers

were going to set her up with some reluctant strangers who had to be prompted to talk to her. She turned the corner. "Here we go", she mumbled. She stared at the door, her last chance to run away, to miss the club, lie, say she was sick. She rested her hand on the doorknob. The calm before the storm. Tamara stepped into the room, hurried to one of the chairs, and plopped down onto it. She could tell there was another girl in the room, but she didn't look up. The others would be here soon anyway.

Becca: Pursue Excellence

Why should I care about some stupid test? Becca looked at the stapled pages in front of her. The big, neat crosses lining up on the right-hand side of the page. At the top of the page in red biro, "*I believe in you, Becca!*", those once inspirational words, now a cruel joke. She knew how to do it, but she just didn't see the point. How was she meant to become a dancer if she was focused on some irrelevant test? *But it wasn't just one test, was it?* She thought. In the past month, she had missed eight days of school, failed two tests, been late to submit four assignments, and disappointed three teachers. But that didn't matter. That was short-term, the sprint. Becca was more interested in the long-term, the marathon. The gold medals and blue ribbons made up for the red crosses and disapproving glances. All her classmates got put in the newsletters for academic awards and social justice events, whereas Becca got celebrated for arabesques and pirouettes. Sometimes she wondered if they felt like their 98%s or extra-credit was overshadowed by Becca's new costume or whatever song she was going to pick, but it wasn't her fault, dance competitions just seemed to garner more attention. It had worked out pretty well, at least, it had at first. Becca's mum had promised the school Becca would keep on top of her studies, in exchange for missing a few days of school. But soon enough, 86% became 61%, and 61% became 54%. Her marks, continuing to drop at a steady rate, had caught the eye of the Principal, who had sent Becca to this "Enrichment program". The Principal had told Becca this program was to help her understand how to manage her time now that the dance competitions were becoming more and more frequent. She strolled into the classroom she was told to come to, checking a text from her mum at the door:

"Don't forget, dance comp on Saturday!"

Ah. Perfect. Saturday, the day she had set aside to slowly chip away at the mountain of homework all of her classmates had already submitted, would now be spent, far, far away from her English notes and HB pencils. Great. Becca made her way to one of the plastic chairs, hardly noticing the two other girls. She looked at her phone, scrolling through all of the calendar notifications reminding her they were overdue. She sighed. What did it matter anyway? She wasn't going to need school if she was going to be a dancer.

Annie: Touch the Hearts of Others

Annie looked at her watch. Three twenty-five. Great. Five minutes until she was expected to be at this silly club. She didn't even know why she was here. She forgot her classmates birthdays, didn't come to cheer them on at awards ceremonies, she didn't sign the "Get well soon" cards. So what? There were plenty of other people singing "Happy Birthday", cheering for their friends, signing those cards. What more could her participation possibly add that hadn't been contributed already? Annie watched the seconds tick by. Three twenty-six. Four minutes. She thought back to the principal explaining this club, describing it as "An opportunity to enrich her academic experience". Annie had tried to explain her philosophy regarding her attendance at non-compulsory school events, but the Principal had told her that she needed to learn to support her classmates. And so, she was now reluctantly making her way to this mysterious program. Three twenty-eight. Two minutes. She stopped in front of the door, peering through the clear window. There were three girls inside. One with red hair and blue chips of plastic under her fingernails, one with blonde hair, staring at the ground, and one with dark brown hair, on her phone. Annie opened the door. Three thirty. Go time.

Miss Silvers: OLSH Pillars

Miss Silvers closed the door to the staff room and walked down the narrow corridor, her shoes clip-clopping as she walked. Earlier that day, she had been asked to run an after-school program to teach four students the OLSH pillars, and how they could improve their academic and social lives with them. She had thought it was a wonderful idea and agreed almost instantly. But after agreeing, she had wondered, what was the best way to teach these young women? She hadn't been told much about the students she would be meeting, but from what she had gathered none of them were particularly excited to be there. Miss Silvers made a right turn and rushed down to the art classroom. Once at the art classroom, she gathered the materials she had put aside during the day. Four canvases, acrylic paint, and some pencils. These would work perfectly for her plan. The idea was to teach the girls about the OLSH pillars, and have them paint a picture of how the concepts manifested in their minds. On her way out of the art classroom, Miss Silvers mentally made a checklist of the four pillars, making sure she had enough paint, canvases, and pencils for each of them. Faith-Filled, Reverence Relationships, Pursue Excellence and Touch the Hearts of Others. She had everything. Perfect. Quickly walking to the classroom the program was being held in, tripping over herself to get there as quickly as possible, Miss Silvers reached the door. Her arms filled with art supplies, she bashed her right knee into the door, making a loud, hollow, knocking sound. A redheaded girl hopped up from her chair to open the door. The redheaded girl studied the art supplies.

"Need any help?" she inquired.

"No thank you, I'll be all right now that the door is open, but it was a lovely offer....?"

"Rose. My name is Rose."

"Wonderful to meet you, Rose. I'm Miss Silvers."

“Nice to meet you.”

They both sat down on a blue, plastic chair. Miss Silvers set down the paint cans. A petite blonde girl raised her hand.

“Yes?”

“Uh, hi Miss, I’m Tamara. I was just thinking, I didn’t really get told much about this program, so I was wondering if you could explain a bit about it?” The other girls were nodding in agreement. Miss Silvers inwardly sighed. This would be harder than she thought.

“Well, I’m here to teach you about the OLSH pillars.”

The girls looked at her blankly. She went on.

“The OLSH pillars are four ways we as the OLSH community keep in our minds and hearts as we live our daily lives”

This was met with more blank stares.

“The first pillar is “Faith-Filled”. This means, that as an OLSH community we must maintain a strong connection to God.”

At this, Rose tilted her head down.

“The second pillar is “Reverence Relationships”. This means that we must work hard to make friends, keep friends and always remember that strangers are just friends you haven’t met.”

Tamara gulped.

“The third pillar,” Miss Silvers went continued, “is called “Pursue Excellence” This means that we dedicate ourselves and try our best at a diverse range of activities.”

A dark-haired girl put her hand up.

“Yes?”

“Hello, I’m Becca, and I was just wondering, if we dedicate ourselves to one activity, and the others get a bit neglected, what can we do to balance them?”

“Nice to meet you Becca. Well, to achieve a balance you may have to cut down on the first activity to make time for the neglected ones.”

Becca nodded, looking disappointed.

“And finally, our fourth pillar, “Touch the Hearts of Others”. This means that we must make an effort at being kind and supportive to those around us and make an effort to talk to them about their interests. You might even like to have a go at one of their hobbies or watch them participate in a competition or something like tha-“

A girl with light brown hair and large green eyes shot her hand into the air.

“You have a question?”

“Yes. Hi, I’m Annie, and I just wanted to ask, what if you don’t know someone that well? Do you still have to talk about their interests or cheer them on or whatever? And if so, *why*?”

“That’s a great question Annie, and not everyone’s answer to this question will be the same, but my answer is, *why not*? Why wouldn’t you want your classmate to look out into the crowd and see as many familiar faces as possible? Why wouldn’t it be worth it to put a smile on their face? Is it that much effort to make someone happy?”

Annie mumbled, “Huh. I’ve never thought of it like that.”

Miss Silvers chuckled. “Any other questions?”

All four girls glanced at the art supplies. In unison, they asked what they were for. Miss Silvers explained to them that, in a moment, she would assign each of them an OLSH pillar, and get them to paint on the canvas how they envisioned it in their minds. She assigned Rose “Faith-Filled”, Tamara “Reverence Relationships”, Becca “Pursue excellence” and assigned Annie “Touch the Hearts of Others”. She handed out the art supplies and let them get to work. But she didn’t just watch them, she *talked* to them, and got them to talk to each other. In the next hour and a half, she saw Rose, Becca and Annie promise to sit with Tamara at lunch, she saw Becca ask if Annie would like to come to her next dance competition, and watched Annie accept. Miss Silvers saw Rose promise to help Becca with her homework, and watched Tamara promise she would sit with Rose in church, to help her take a moment to remember her grandmother. She watched them become friends. She watched them paint, creating beautiful, vivid pictures, that, in Miss Silvers’ opinion, perfectly represented the OLSH pillars.

This is what they came up with:



Faith-Filled



Reverence Relationships



Pursue Excellence



Touch the Hearts of Others