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I was cleaning my room when a spider climbed up my wall to devour its inextricably caught prey. Right before I was about to kill it, the spider web attracted my attention. I noticed that the outstanding strength of spider webs resulted from individual strand of the web; straight strands were carefully weaved in with a concentric circular pattern so that every piece of silk in the web was connected together. Each piece of silk was interdependent of the other strands to hold the web together. In the Rochester community, each person is a piece of that web with a responsibility to hold the community together. As people fail to take part, the community's web weakens. Differences in races, religions, cultures, sexual orientations, and economic situations, however, may impede progress to a united community. If the community recapitulates and integrates its experiences, it will be able to successfully bridge the differences between people to create a better Rochester.

Last summer, I started volunteering at Rochester General Hospital. Rochester General Hospital has been a microcosm of the community; for many people, it is where life starts and ends. This hospital is an aggregate of people belonging to various races, religions, cultures, and economic situations who come together to promote the wellbeing of the individual. The fetid smell of death is concealed by the positive attitudes of the employees and their willingness to help the people in need. There, one not only has to build the bridge, but also one has to cross it, in order to celebrate those differences.

Last winter, I wheeled a white, middle-aged woman down to patient discharge. My shift had ended for twenty minutes already, and my father was waiting outside in our green Vibe, ready to take me home. Impatiently, I asked her when her family was coming. In a weak voice, she whispered, "I don't have any family in New York." Becoming slightly frustrated, I asked again,

"Do you have a friends who is coming to pick you up then?" Again, she somberly answered,

"I don't have any friends around here yet. A taxi is coming for me." Then, I realized that there are few taxis in Rochester, and the hospital taxis usually took over an hour to arrive. My expression subtly revealed that I wanted to leave, and she calmly told me to do so. I started to walk away, but I was not able to leave her there alone. Extremely ashamed of even thinking of leaving, I sat down and introduced myself, and I told her that I would be staying with her until her cab came. For the first time during our trip together, she smiled. We conversed about life in New York until she had to leave. That was when I learned that she had just moved to Rochester only a few months before. It reminded me of the time when I had skipped a grade. Making friends was tough at first because of the existence of groups and cliques. However, making friends became easier as I made the first one and as my self-confidence increased. This situation demonstrated that it is not necessary for people to be racially, religiously, culturally, or sexually different to bridge differences; to build community, one just needs to reach out to fill the gap separating two people. That time, I did, and I made a new friend indefinitely.

One day at the hospital during the summer, the ladies at the front desk in the Pallacini Lobby sent me to find some extra wheelchairs for the incoming patients. I was walking through the hall when a woman who was visiting turned around and stared at me. She did not look familiar, but I think she was Korean. I tried to inconspicuously walk past her, but she started shouting as soon as I started.

"Why have you been following me?"

"I'm sorry ma'am, but I was just sent to find a wheelchair. I wasn't following you. I'm just returning to the lobby."

"Oh really? I hate people like you. You and your kind. Now get away and get out of this hospital!" Frantic and dismayed, I scurried back to the front desk, under the protection of a security telephone and some employees. Immediately, I called security over. As I called, I wonder what wrong I could have done to incriminate me of such a bizarre accusation and insult. In addition, I wondered what "my kind" referred to. She had followed me back. Again, she started shouting, but this time, it was at the security guard. "He..." she stuttered, "he was following me down the hallway. Yes that one right there." She angrily pointed with a shaking finger. "My family does not talk to Chinese people. They killed our people! They killed our soldiers! They killed parts of my family! And that rat still has the insolence to follow and talk to me!" Her anger only increased and she spoke, and she exclaimed, "Get out! This hospital is no place for you or your people!" Everyone around stood in shock, but I carefully exited to avoid creating more trouble. I paced outside and pondered over what she had said. She had alluded to the Korean War, which ended over five years before my parents were even born. I wondered why she held me personally accountable for the deaths resulting from that war. That was when I learned the true meaning of racism. Racism is not just stereotyping and hating a race of people. Racism is the action imposing hate upon each individual member of that race. Not only is the guilty accused, but also the innocent is accused. At that time, I remembered the rampant discrimination that occurred in the early twentieth century, especially against the African-Americans. They suffered through both the verbal and the physical abuse, such as beatings, lynchings, and shootings. Knowing both perspectives of that situation, I concluded that the racists had little reason to debase the people of color other than to feel socially superior. However, I did understand this woman. I understood the harm the Chinese may have caused her for her to develop such agonizing and angry emotions. As a personal victim of racism, I also understood the pain that racism's victims feel when they are discriminated against. This conflict between us may not have been bridged, but we did develop some mutual understanding. As the security escorted her outside, I apologized for any discomfort that I may have caused her. I attempted to explain that not all Chinese are bad – not all participate or encourage fighting and killing. She did not seem completely convinced, but her expression lightened a little.

Aesop, a Greek slave, once stated, "United we stand, divided we fall." The same theory applies for the community. Only when the community feels as if the differences can be celebrated, and not ignored, can everyone feel comfortable and cared for. One common way to achieve this is community service. Community service allows people to help others who are in a tougher position than they are in. It not only makes the assisted more cheerful, but also it gives the volunteer a warm feeling that someone else's life has been improved. Other than community service, more can be done. For example, a walk can be organized where people do not gather to support any specific purpose, but just to meet new people and bond with the diverse population of Rochester. We can use the money raised to construct public recreational areas where people can go and enjoy life with their community. In addition, we need to focus on teaching young children to bridge differences early in their lifetime. In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch believes that defending a black man in a trial impossible to win is the only way to prevent his children from catching "Maycomb's usual disease (Lee)" of racism against colored people. To teach the children, we could set up community intramurals, which will not only keep our children fit, but also will allow them to learn the qualities of cooperation and allow them to celebrate the differences in the community. From these intramurals, the children can learn that people of all ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations, or economic situations can be enjoyable and have fun. These ideas will allow everyone to see that people, despite all differences, should be treated equally and amiably. They will allow everyone to see that differences in culture and race is part of what defines a person, and no one should be ashamed of who he or she is. As our constitution states, everyone, no matter how different, should be given the same opportunity to life, liberty, and most importantly, the pursuit of happiness. In the end, diversity is what makes life so interesting. Only by celebrating everyone's diversity and bridging and building our community can we strengthen the web that supports all of Rochester