

It was a warm and bright September day in Seattle as I wandered rather aimlessly through Pike Place Market with my friend Dana. Our lack of direction as we drifted along with the crowds almost perfectly mirroring the lack of direction I was experiencing in my own life. It was the early 1980s and I was working in corporate America in a job that while fun, showed little promise of ever becoming interesting enough to call a career. I am not even sure if I knew how rudderless I had become. The universe must have been listening to my heart, because it was about to send me a call to action that would dramatically lead me to an expression of my life's purpose in ways I never could have imagined.

Dana and I were continuing our amblings at the market, and had left the inner walkway as we headed outside, pizza in hand. Once outside, we noticed a commotion and saw two men, one chasing the other. People were moving out of their way as they rapidly approached us. Suddenly, right in front of us, the second man slipped on the cobblestone and fell down hard. He just lay there, sort of dazed, looking up at the sky. As people began circling around him, Dana and I just sort of stood there with our pizza in our hands looking down at him. After what felt like forever, I handed my pizza to Dana, took off my coat and leaned down to put it under his head. I could see the police as they headed toward us.

I remained kneeling by the man, with my insides being torn in two. Here I was, sharing this experience with this human being who was completely incapacitated. He was young, strong, athletic-looking, and utterly helpless. At that time, I had no medical training, no emergency skills to call upon, and so felt completely helpless myself. As my mind raced and my hands shook, I called upon the only thing I could think of, the bond and comfort of human connection. Instead of treating his wounded arm, I looked into his eyes and touched his arm as he looked up at me like a drowning man holding onto a life preserver. He had no words. I had no words. All we could do was look into each other's eyes. As the police arrived to help, I stepped back, hesitant to break that connection

between us. Despite the help and flurry of activity around him, he kept my gaze until someone stepped between us.

Dana and I walked away, completely shaken. We talked and talked and talked about what had happened, trying to process the event and make meaning out of it. I talked about it with other friends, at work and at home, to anyone who would listen. What took me a long time to realize is that I was hoping and waiting for someone to tell me, “You did all you could.” I would not have believed them, but I so desperately wanted to hear those words. I felt such a deep sense of disappointment in myself for my failure to act. That stream of disappointment became a raging torrent of unforgiving and self-loathing. I did not act. I did not act. I did not act. It became a mantra to me: a searing judgment of myself.

Five days after the event, I was reading the Seattle Times when I saw a small story—barely 100 words—about a man who was shopping at the Pike Place Market on the eve of his wedding when he was robbed of the \$589 he had in his back pocket to buy last minute wedding items. He gave chase, slipped on the cobblestone and shattered his elbow. He died five days later of a blood clot as a result of that injury. I could not think. I could not breathe. I stared out the window and let the tears flow for this man. I grieved for a vital life lost in such a senseless death. I grieved that this man’s death was written in 100 words or less.

I was consumed with sorrow for this man I did not know. I was consumed with self-reproach for my inaction. Could I have changed this outcome? Probably not, but it did not matter. I was tried and convicted, as I played judge, jury and executioner in the court of Pam. I had failed the gift of a bright mind and strong arms. Inaction. Worse than death in this court.

I sat for days lost in despair, desperately trying to find something I could do to change the way things had turned out. After countless days of regret, I still sensed the downward push of grief, but now I also started feeling the beginning of the upward pull of something else. Ideas. Thoughts. A

gelling of the ether inside. A call to action. Action is forgiveness. Action is repentance. Action is my resurrection. At that exact moment in time, I knew the part of me that had spent the better part of life drifting, unfocused, unenthused and disconnected, had died along with this man. A new person had emerged, one who would never be at a loss for action again.

Within a few months, I was teaching first aid and CPR for the Red Cross. I went through emergency medical training, and a few years later, I was a firefighter in a small fire department. Now I spend my life teaching businesses how to prepare for and respond to emergencies. Just DO something. That became my mantra, and that phrase has utterly transformed my life. Without knowing it, this man, this vital life, had given me a soul gift. The best gift I have ever received. He ignited a passion in me to live my true mission in life. Action. Teaching others how to take action.

It has been almost 30 years now, and I still give thanks for his sacrifice. It took me years and years to understand what that fateful day meant for my life, and it is only by telling this story have I realized that the fire in my soul every day is to prove myself worthy of him. And for that I am forever grateful.