

David Burton

SOCI 191S- 01

Professor Daisy Rooks

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Service Reflection No. 3

Currently, it is Friday, November the thirteenth at ten til' nine in the morning, and I am riding my bike as fast as I can to get to the Food Bank. **I probably should have changed clothes, because I am wearing the same outfit from yesterday, but oh well.** I did put on new deodorant, **so I guess I'm good for now.** I am in gray sweatpants, a light red t-shirt, black shoes, and my big orange puffy heavy winter coat. I arrive at the Food Bank with about three minutes to go before my shift officially begins, and I get myself situated by blowing my nose in the bathroom, washing my hands, and hanging my orange heavy winter coat on a chair at the table in the noncommercial kitchen beside the office.

As I go to the table by the office's window to sign in, Krystin sees me and asks what I am volunteering to do to, and I reply that I am here to be a ROOTS Helper. Krystin is wearing a light brown jacket with thin pink and off-yellow stripes that are spaced out with light brown between them. She has a beanie hat on that has pink and brown thread interwoven in such a way that the two colors merge to form this creamy pinkish coffee latte color. Krystin tells me that they double-booked the ROOTS Helper shift, and she will make a quick phone call so that the other volunteer knows they don't have to show up. She heads into the office to the phone call. I stand around a little bit while I wait. She returns and begins instructing me how to perform my job as a ROOTS Helper volunteer. Conveniently, just as she begins training me, a customer

named Jaime in overalls and a jean jacket comes up to Krystin and I to pick up his ROOTS package. He has a red baseball cap on his head, thin black-rimmed glasses on, and a black Bluetooth device in his left ear. He tells Krystin and I that he is Jaime and is here to pick up his ROOTS package. He's a white middle-aged to late-aged man with a potbelly, sagging face with a double chin, and gray stubble on his chin. We open up the big black ROOTS customer binder and find his name. Once we find his name, we give him the sheet and ask for him to sign his name on the black line that is above the blue dotted line near the bottom of the paper. After signing his name, Krystin instructs me to go to the giant potatoes box that is sitting under the quilt that is between the two bathrooms opposite of the noncommercial kitchen. I go over to it, pick up a box, and then place it in Jaime's shopping cart. The pre-packaged boxes contain in them two cartons of milk that don't need refrigeration, one bottle of orange juice, one bottle of apple juice, one block of American cheese, cans of fruit, vegetables, and soups, and a few other things that I don't quite remember. These items are checked off on everyone's papers which is why they are able to be pre-packaged. However, going along with the Food Bank's policy of providing dignity and choice to customers, there are items that the ROOTS customers can choose between: beans or peanut butter; rice, macaroni, or spaghetti; two boxes of cereal or oatmeal; of the cereals, corn flakes, rice crisps, or bran flakes; and beef chili or beef stew. Then, ROOTS customers can opt to have Ensure protein shakes and/or fresh fruit as well. I ask Jaime what he would like out of the options given, and I place them into a paper bag which then goes into his cart. He says thank you and leaves through the Food Bank's front door to load his ROOTS packages into his car.

When I look outside, I notice that there is a white minivan parked outside on the side of the street beside the Food Bank, and on the opposite side of street, there is a white mobile home with two big dark red horizontal stripes on it.

The ROOTS pickup station that I am working at is right in front of the office's big window.

In front of me, while I am waiting for the next ROOTS customer to arrive, there is Stephen repackaging onions. He is wearing khaki or tan pants, a red and white "Boring Oregon" shirt, and black rimmed glasses. We say hello and ask how each other are doing, and then, we get back to our work.

After a few minutes of standing around bored, my next ROOTS customers arrive. They are Mr. and Mrs. Chinikaylo. Mr. Chinikaylo is wearing a green jacket, black baseball cap, blue shirt underneath, and blue jeans. He's a white beyond middle-aged man with a round face and beer-belly. The hair that is not covered by his baseball cap is short white hair, and his face is round, clean-shaven, and rather firm for his age. Mrs. Chinikaylo is an elderly white woman with a wrinkly face, wrinkly hands, a green bandana with flowers wrapped around her head, and a plain black jacket. I find their papers in the big black binder, ask for both of them to sign their papers. While they are signing their papers, I fetch two ROOTS packages for them and place the packages in their shopping carts. I then open two brown paper bags and request to have both of their papers so that I can fill their bags. While I am filling their bags, I ask them how they are doing. *I am trying to not be one of those impersonal volunteer staff "that has that attitude" of "we are providing you the service, just consume it," (Morrell, 196).* After I fill both of their brown paper bags, and I wish for them to have a great day. Mr. Chinikaylo says thank you so much, and he and his wife walk out through the front door of the Food Bank.

My next customer comes five to ten minutes later. I don't remember his name. He is a short middle-aged Native American man with a red baseball cap, a gray "Kau Inoa, To Save a Nation" t-shirt with black and red triangles, and black pants on. His skin is slightly tan, and he has long gray and white hair in a ponytail sticking out of his baseball cap. His belly is somewhere between a potbelly and a beer belly, and his face is sagging a little from age and possibly weight as well. He tells me his name, and I find his papers. I follow the routine of fetching the pre-packaged box, and then proceeding to fill up a brown paper bag with the rest of his ROOTS items. There isn't a cart for me to load his ROOTS packages into because he would like for me to carry them out to his car for him. I don't know why, but I agree to do so anyways. After his brown paper bag is full, I place it on top of the pre-packaged box, and pick up his items and walk out of the Food Bank with him to his car. He opens up his car, which is a small gray car of indistinguishable type. The car's interior is in decent condition, nothing banged up, nothing smelly, and no discernable discolorations. It is an easily forgettable car. He opens up the trunk of his car, and I place his ROOTS packages into his car's trunk. I wish him a nice day and return to my post at the ROOTS pickup area.

There is a noticeable lull in the traffic at the Food Bank, and Mo tells me that she would like me pour milk that is past its expiration date down the drain while the traffic is low. It is maybe ten o' clock, but I'm not sure. Mo is wearing a black jacket and blue jeans, and she has her Food Bank staff name tag pinned to her jacket. She wheels a shiny silver push-back wheelie cart to the noncommercial kitchen's sink. I accept the task, and get to work. She sticks around a little bit, and I ask Mo why we don't compost the milk as well. She replies that she had not considered it and asks me if it can be done. I say that there is logically no reason not to compost milk because milk is simply a mixture of liquid protein and fat. There's nothing in it that

wouldn't compost. Mo replies that she might look into it. I then ask if maybe the milk could be used to make cheese, and an elderly female volunteer who overheard our conversation chipped in that making cheese would not work because we'd need whole milk and a certain bacteria to make it work. **I just think it's a waste to pour milk down the drain, whether it is expired or not. It is a biochemical resource that can be put to use. Pouring it down the drain just adds it to the city waste treatment system which is an energy intensive process, and I primarily think the best courses of action are those that have a net zero or positive energy value.** I have now exhausted my suggestions for what to do with the milk and continue to pour it down the drain. Mo leaves me and presumably returns to the office. *I do respect the Food Bank for following through on food safety protocol, as they should be, instead of "download[ing] responsibility onto individuals for matters beyond individual control" like some businesses do in the United States (Weston, 91).* Mr. Murrell (not sure of the spelling) sees that I am pouring the milk down inefficiently and offers to show me a better way. I am draining the milk by uncapping it and then pouring it down the drain. Mr. Murrell is a white middle-aged to over-the-hill-aged man dressed in a black and gray striped plaid shirt with a white background. He is wearing a camouflage hat, dark pants, and black suspender straps that hold his pants up. He has a potbelly, sagging face, and very short- barely noticeable- gray and white stubble on his face. He doesn't have the kind of stubble that is easily seen; you have to squint a little to notice it. Murrell was at the noncommercial kitchen table eating some of the cookies that someone brought in. He gets up and asks for me to let him show me how to pour milk down the drain. I accept his offer, and he pulls out his Swiss army knife. His Swiss army knife is a small compact version with maybe five or six options and a light brown and dark brown crisscrossed stripe pattern, resembling the camo pattern on his hat. He picks up a milk carton from the wheelie cart, places it in the sink, and

begins hacking away at the bottom of the milk carton. Once he has a corner of the container slit, he bends it down, and the milk rushes out of the carton- flooding the sink. “That’s how you do it,” he tells me. He mentions that when he first worked at the Food Bank, pouring milk down the drain was his first task. After a while, he became pretty good at doing it. He then steps back and gives me his Swiss army knife to let me go back to pouring milk down the drain. I hack at the bottom of a milk carton, while holding it in the sink, and pull a corner down to get the milk to rush into the sink. Murrell sees that I have the technique down and tells me that when I am done, I should wash his knife off and give it back to him. He says to me that he will be repackaging flour at the first metal table that is between the noncommercial kitchen and bathrooms.

After pouring a few more milk cartons down the drain, I hear a voice saying that the boy in the red shirt is your man. He can help you with commodities. The woman who said this- a tall thin elderly white woman with a wrinkly face, silver rimmed glasses, and a gray hat that resembles a baby hat- goes over to me and says that I have a customer here ready to pick up their ROOTS package. As I put Murrell’s Swiss army knife down and walk over to meet my customer, I see him get up and take my place pouring milk down the drain.

I see my customer and ask him how he is doing. He says he’s doing pretty well, and then, I request for his name. He says that he is Mr. Wolfchief, and he is here to pick up for himself and a woman named Ellen. I don’t know if a customer is allowed to pick up for another person, so, I ask for him to wait a moment while I go ask one of the head staff at the Food Bank a question. I walk over to the office to find Krystin, and I ask her if someone can pick up ROOTS packages for two people. She replies yes, and I go back to Mr. Wolfchief to tell him that everything is fine. Mr. Wolfchief is presumably a Native American because of his name and tan skin. He is wearing a gray jacket, gray sweatpants, and a rainbow tie-dyed t-shirt under his jacket. His jacket is open

about halfway down which is why I can tell what shirt he is wearing. His face is sagging a little, a little wrinkly, and has black rimmed glasses with a thin frame. I fetch Mr. Wolfchief's and Ellen's papers from the big black ROOTS binder, and I ask for him to sign for both of them. When I pulled out Ellen's paper, I noticed a little statement in the first of two boxes above the signature line that said, "proxy: Mr. Wolfchief." Mr. Wolfchief didn't need me to say anything; he just started talking to me. He mentions that Ellen is on dialysis and can't leave her home; as a result, he is here to pick up her package as well. He also tells me that the days are getting a lot shorter, and he is not sure whether he is prepared for winter or not. I fetch a cart, since he didn't bring one up, and then, I get two pre-packaged boxes from the giant potatoes box and place them into his cart. I get two brown paper bags, and I ask to see both of their papers again, so that I can put together the rest of their packages. After I finish putting together their packages, I place them into his cart and wish him a nice day. He thanks me a lot for the good work that I am doing for the community and heads out through the Food Bank's front door.

I don't really consider what I am doing to be "good work" because it is primarily a clerical role that I am filling out. I could easily be replaced, and it would not make any difference. I am simply handling paperwork, packages, and a little bit of public relations. Public relations do matter, I guess, because they help make businesses and organizations seem more human, at least when public relations is done well.

Considering the job I'm doing at the Food Bank is performed around the world in many other organizations, I can only imagine what jobs like this do to people on both ends of the counter. It also make me wonder what percentage of the jobs out there, especially those at or near minimum wage, are actually "work in the time-honored sense" and what percentage "just

amount to employment,” (Weston, 69). Public relations and clerical duties sure feel like “meaningful” jobs to me- sarcasm intended.

I might be doing a good job of it. I really don’t know because I am the one doing this role, and as a result, my opinion of my job is invalid. I am not, and cannot be, an objective observer of my own actions. By the very nature of being me, it is to be expected that my opinions of myself are going to be biased.

I turn around to see what is happening in the noncommercial kitchen, and I see that the wheelie cart is gone. I look a little further and see that Murrell is back at the shiny metal table repacking flour. I guess he is pretty quick. He got through all the milk cartons in about five to seven minutes.

There isn’t anything for me to do right now, since I don’t have any customers at the moment. I turn back to looking at the front end of the Food Bank. Krystin walks out of the office and asks me if I am holding up fine. I reply yes. **I wonder why she asked me that, and I think it might be because when there are lulls in traffic, I get a little uncomfortable and fidgety. I don’t like doing nothing. I am a person based on substantial, meaningful, relevant, and immediate action. I don’t like standing still. I don’t like doing nothing. It is a matter of efficiency and purpose. It is part of how I view the world; there is always something to be done, something to be repaired, so go do it. To do nothing is to do die- plain and simple. I’ll rest only when I’m dead- no sooner.**

One of the Food Bank’s volunteers comes to the radio that is sitting on a chair near the corner of the office by the sign-in table. He mentions to me that we need to listen to good music. I can’t recall what was playing before, but I know that he changes it to classical music. He is a

thin elderly white man with wrinkly and shriveled skin on his face and arms. His hair is all white and wispy on his head. I remember his hair the most because it looked a little off on him, like he was trying to do the hair styles of people my age. The parts of his hair nearest to his head sweep forward, down his head, and then the middle and upper parts of his hair sweep back to make his hair resemble cirrus clouds. **I never would have thought that I'd have to try and describe the hair styles of people my age, let alone in this context. Try describing a hair style; it is harder than you'd think.** After changing the radio station, he walks past me and talks to Murrell about the Chinese volunteer that he is working with. He says that the Chinese guy is hard to work with. Murrell says that the Chinese man is a nice guy, and the wispy-haired elderly man replies that he is indeed a good guy when you hang out with him, but he is just not an easy person to work together with on things. The conversation dies, and I'm not sure where the wispy-haired elderly guy has walked off to.

My next customer approaches me. She is an elderly white woman with a big belly, wrinkly face, thin silver rimmed glasses, and long brown curly hair. I smile and greet her. I ask how she is doing, and then, what her name is. She is Mrs. Wheeler, and I find her paper in the big black binder for the Food Bank's ROOTS customers. I ask for her to sign on the bottom of the paper while I get her stuff. She brought a cart with her, and I place the pre-packaged box into her cart. I get together her brown paper bag, and she decides that she does not want the Ensures. She thanks me and leaves the Food Bank, and I tell her to have a great day.

It is slightly past eleven o' clock, and I notice that more people are entering the Food Bank. I also see that Stephen is nowhere to be seen. I have not seen him in a while. He is probably either working in the back or has recently left the Food Bank.

Another customer approaches me, and he is Berton Horton. He is a thin elderly white gentleman with a wrinkly face, wrinkly fingers, white hair with tinges of gray, and a goatee of similar coloration that has two “prongs” that extend from it at the bottom of his chin. He is wearing a white long-sleeve insulated shirt (it is between a coat and shirt) and red sweatpants. I introduce myself, and I ask him how he is doing. He replies that he is decent but could be better. I find his paper in the big black binder, and I ask for his signature. Then, I fetch him both parts of his package, and I place them into his cart. He thanks me, and I wish him a nice day. He exits from the front door of the Food Bank, and then he comes back into the store. For clarity’s sake, I am telling the rest of his story now, even though it actually happens about an hour later. Berton Horton is sitting in the folding chairs at the front of the Food Bank for an hour with a woman and two children beside him. The woman has a giant belly, big jiggly arms, a white long-sleeve insulated shirt, a blue sleeveless fluffy coat thing on top of it, and blonde hair. She has a wrinkly face, but not as wrinkly as her husband’s face. I think this might be why Berton Horton picked up only one ROOTS package instead of two. His wife may not be old enough to receive the additional benefits. They have young boys, maybe five or six years old. They are very short- can barely reach the top of the shopping cart by fully outstretching their arms. One of them has dirty blonde hair, and the other has plain blonde hair. Both of their haircuts are rather short. The dirty blonde boy’s hair is a variation of a Mohawk: sides shaved clean, and long strands of hair on the top. The only thing that doesn’t make his hair an actual Mohawk is that his hair is not sticking up. The dirty blonde haired boy is wearing blue sweatpants, a black sweater, and a fluffy sleeveless camo vest on top of it. The plain blonde haired boy is wearing khaki pants and a hoodie. His hair is cut short all around with no additional stylization. After Berton Horton and his wife get interviewed, they and their children walk around the Food Bank to get their one of

their two monthly visits. As they walk around, the boy with the dirty blonde hair gives looks at me, and I return his looks by sticking my hands onto my head like reindeer antlers and waving my fingers. The boy smiles mimics my gesture back at me. I stick my hand, facing outwards like a knife, in front of my nose and wave my fingers. He smiles again and mimics me again. His parents take notice and smile at me. The dirty blonde boy's brother, the one with plain blonde hair, sees how much fun the dirty blonde hair boy is having and looks at me expectantly. I stick my hands under my chin to look like a beard and wriggle my fingers. Both of the boys smile, giggle, and mimic my gesture back at me. Berton Horton and his wife round the corner of the Food Bank shelf that is closest to the office, and I am no longer able to play with their kids.

I find children and elderly people easiest to work with. I like working with children because they see the world clearly and are pretty funny. I like elderly people because they have a lot of good stories to tell and are beyond the point of caring what other people think which makes them kind of funny, too. The feature that I find most conducive to taming children and the elderly is giving them an ear- someone who will listen to them completely and without judging.

It takes maybe five or ten minutes for my next customer to show up. Maybe longer. I'm not fully sure what time it is, but there are a lot of people in the Food Bank, so many that all of the carts are in use and few seats in the front are unoccupied. My next customer is Mr. Dahl. Mr. Dahl is an elderly white man with a sagging wrinkly clean shaven, bald head, a beer belly, jeans, and a zipped up puke green jacket. He asks me if I can get his ROOTS package ready for him even though there isn't a cart available right now. I say sure, and I find his paper in the ROOTS big black binder. I ask him for his signature and get his package ready. I place his brown paper bag in the pre-packaged box, and I lift it up to rest it upon the volunteer sign-in table. This way

he won't have to bend over to get his package when carts become available. He says thank you, and he returns to sit in the chairs at the front of the Food Bank.

I'm really getting tired of my shift at the Food Bank. It isn't full enough of things to do. It is too slow. It isn't dense with things. I'm not sure. I don't know. Maybe I should learn to relax. Maybe I shouldn't, but considering that I've been fighting to do my best my entire life, I've always been in high stress environments and don't fully understand how to have and appreciate peace. I have thought many times that the current pace of reality is too much like a war. We're fighting to survive in many ways: fighting for grades, fighting for jobs, and fighting for so many other things. I don't like the fighting. In a way, I probably have a weird mix of war veteran and old sage attitudes.

It doesn't make sense. Our current society doesn't make sense to me. How can anyone be starving? How can we be in one of the best countries in the world if it can't take care of its own people adequately- physically, emotionally, or environmentally? Our society lacks meaning. It is no wonder why I have felt like committing suicide for many years. None of the things I've been "fighting for" in my life mean much of anything. Meaning is absent. The Void lives, and Death whispers lucratively in my ear.

I think fighting is a rather apt word, too. "The armed economies of our times" create wars and conflicts on various scales to get "profits [for] the few [by] yok[ing]" the many and "mov[ing] the pieces around the board so quickly that it's hard to tell who's doing what to whom," (Weston, 152-154).

Since I'm rather tired of my shift at the Food Bank, without show it outwardly, I turn my mind off a little. I just want sleep or something that uses all of my mental faculties.

I don't like coasting with my mind. I need to use my mind and my hands- perhaps, my true heart as well.

There are many more ROOTS customers that I serve. There is a white elderly woman with gray hair, a white vest, gray pants, and a white cap. Another customer is an elderly woman whose lips extend outward like a guppy and has a permanent scowl in her eyebrows. Then there is an elderly black lady who hobbles with a cane and has a giant white man with her who calls her his mom. I know there are more, but they have been forgotten.

The reason I know I served a lot of ROOTS customers is that when a man tried to get paper towels from the bathroom, there weren't any, and Mo tried to open it but couldn't find her key. Apparently, the key to the paper towel dispenser was placed on the edge of the giant potatoes box that holds the pre-packaged boxes for the ROOTS customers, and somewhere along the line, the key fell into one of the pre-packaged boxes that was given out to ROOTS customers. So, Mo grabbed the big black binder and wrote down all the names and phone numbers of the customers I had already served so that she could call them for the key. When Mo was compiling the list, Jesse was coming to the front from the back and started laughing when Mo was explaining what happened to her. Jesse is wearing a long-sleeved black and white striped blouse.

Around one fifteen, Mo asks me how long I have, and I tell her that I have fifteen minutes. She tells me there probably won't be any ROOTS customers for a while and asks me to empty the trash. I say okay and get to work.

As I am putting the trash in the dumpsters, I meet Will Carter- the Food Bank's goat guy. He is the goat guy because he picks up the containers from the back of the Food Bank that are labelled "Goat Feed" and places them onto the back of his trailer. He is a thin old white man with

gray utility pants, a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, and a dark green utility vest on. His face is wrinkly, has long-ish gray stubble, and short gray hair covered by a dark green fisherman's hat. I find out his name when he goes to Mo asking for his ROOTS package, and I get his package and a friend of his's package, too. Will Carter's friend is diabetic and needs Will's assistance.

When I finish, it is thirty seven minutes past one in the afternoon, and I sign out and leave the Food Bank.

Emotions or the lack thereof, there is one thing that still reminds me I am alive. I cry.

The most important thing my volunteer shift reminds me of from our class is this: "the circle is broken," (Morrell, 243). I find this quote to be true on many levels in our current society. We have broken the biogeochemical cycles of the earth. We have broken the circles of communities that people live in. We have broken the circles of feedback and regulation in both our governments and our economies. Until the circles are repaired, I do not believe anything will get better.

To repair our circles and thus repair our world, it will be necessary to "understand how [the systems are] rigged" so that we can take appropriate action and prevent "the Taker[s] repeat[ing]" a cycle of theft, death, and destruction in our world, (Weston, 154).

Works Cited

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