

A PIECE OF MY WORLD

I am an engineer both by education and experience. I was mentored by a brilliant physicist at Stonehill College and studied under some extraordinary engineering minds at Notre Dame. I was wired to solve problems and schooled to find solutions.

Debate was unnecessary. Opinions were pointless. Answers could always be found. They had to be. You can't be "close enough" when calculating the lift force on the wing of a Boeing 747 or "pretty sure" when computing the pipe-wall thickness of the Reactor Coolant lines in a Nuclear Reactor. Wrong calculations result in catastrophic events. You either get it right or you don't. And when you don't, everyone knows.

My world existed in black and white. In order to find answers, you had to think the way I did. There was no gray in my world. There were no unknowns.

But here's the thing. Life has a way of humbling you.

In August 2010 I spent a day with Lisa Scherber of the Dana Farber Cancer Clinic. Lisa is the activities coordinator for the Institute, but never could a job title describe a vocation so inadequately. Lisa is charged with the impossible task of improving the experience of the patients in her clinics. Patients, mostly kids, who have been battered by the unkindest of realities. And she spends every moment of every day smiling through the most inconceivable circumstances you can imagine in order to make that one day just a little bit easier for a child.

In April 2014 I had a phone conversation with Rebekah Gregory, exactly one year after the Boston Marathon bombings shattered both her left leg and her life. With every reason to stay cloaked in darkness, Rebekah Gregory chose to journey to the light. She bore no ill will to her attackers and on the day I spoke with her, she told me "This has taught me what it really means to live and appreciate every single moment."

And in March 2015 I crossed paths with Dr. Jeremy Richman, who's beautiful 6-year old daughter Avielle was murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School. At her funeral, Dr. Richman, a soft-spoken and gentle man, used his pulpit to announce a foundation in his daughter's name that would foster an innovative approach to brain research and help remove the stigma associated with mental illness, effectively building a support system for those like the individual who killed his little girl.

And here's my dilemma. I can't calculate the unbounded level of humanity that exists within these people. I can't compute the abundant levels of kindness that allow these people to see the world the way they do.

These encounters have changed me. These people have shown me that there is something else beyond Bernoulli's equation and Newton's Laws of Motion. These people have taught me that there are different ways to consider the world. Perhaps even better ways. And, because of that, these people will forever remain A Piece of My World.