

THE TRUTH IS...

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Today was one of those days, with a lot to do, but not sure where to start. Earlier in the day my friend had left a National Geographic magazine on my bunk, I don't care too much for magazines in general, but since I couldn't make up my mind as to what to do at that moment, I looked over at the magazine and reluctantly picked it up. I began flipping through the pages without much interest, until I got to the last article in this National Geographic issue, the title: "In the City's Shadow" by Emma Marris, caught my attention right away.

Who would have known that an article on the rising population of urban rats around the world would have a lesson in store for me? I sure didn't, but I was about to find out.

Rats, I have always been disgusted by them, and I'm not alone, in almost every human culture these animals are also considered vile and disgusting. Towards the end of the article Emma Marris mentions the following which blew my mind ^{this} allowing me to reflect on my own life. This is what she wrote "Despite their bad rap, rats have redeeming qualities, they're smart and maybe empathic too." She goes on to mention a study in which "rats freed other rats from cages, even though it gained them nothing and even when they could have gorged on chocolate instead... once the helper rat frees his companion, he follows the liberated rat, jumps on him and he licks him, apparently to console the distressed animal."

When I finished reading that paragraph, I paused for a few seconds, I guess I was just in disbelief as to what I

HAD JUST READ, SO I SLOWLY RE-READ THE ENTIRE PARAGRAPH AGAIN. YEP, I HAD READ IT PERFECTLY FINE THE FIRST TIME AND ONCE AGAIN, I COULD NOT CONTINUE READING AND PUT THE MAGAZINE DOWN. A SIMPLE PARAGRAPH ABOUT RATS AND THE FACT THAT THEY NOT ONLY HAD REDEEMING QUALITIES BUT COULD ALSO BE EMPATHIC, BY CHOOSING TO DO THE "RIGHT" THING INSTEAD OF ^{SELF-INDULGENCE AND} INSTANT GRATIFICATION, MY THROAT GOT KNOTTED UP AS REMORSE AND THE TRUTH SET IN.

THE TRUTH IS THAT I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE MURDER OF IVAN ~~██████████~~. I COWARDLY RAN AWAY AS HE LAY ON THE GROUND, STRUGGLING TO TAKE HIS LAST BREATH, DYING FROM A GUNSHOT WOUND TO THE HEAD. A CRUEL AND EVIL ACTION.

THE TRUTH IS THAT AT ONE POINT IN MY LIFE I WAS WORSE AND LOWER THAN A RAT. UNLIKE A RAT, I LACKED COMPASSION AND EMPATHY. I DID NOT CARE ABOUT ANYONE NOT EVEN MYSELF, UNLIKE A RAT IF IT DID NOT GAIN ME SOMETHING I WASN'T INTERESTED. UNLIKE A RAT I LIVED ON INSTANT GRATIFICATION EVEN IF THAT INSTANT GRATIFICATION MEANT TAKING A PRECIOUS HUMAN LIFE, AS LONG AS IT GAINED ME WHAT I FELT I NEEDED.

I SAT ON MY BUNK ASKING MYSELF HOW THIS COULD BE? HOW COULD THIS HATED DISGUSTING ANIMAL SHOW MORE COMPASSION AND EMPATHY THAN ME; HOW COULD I HAVE BEHAVED AND CONSCIOUSLY ACTED WORSE THAN A RAT. I DID NOT HAVE THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION FOR MOST OF MY LIFE. TODAY HOWEVER, I HOLD THE KEY THAT HAS UNLOCKED THE ANSWER, AN ANSWER THAT HAS COME THROUGH MUCH SELF-WORK & DEEP INTROSPECTION BUT ALSO THROUGH MUCH SELF-INFLICTED PAIN & SUFFERING. THERE HAVE BEEN MANY SITUATIONS, CIRCUMSTANCES AND EVENTS, MANY FACTORS THAT WERE OUT OF MY CONTROL DURING MY CHILDHOOD, THAT CONTRIBUTED →

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IN FORMING ME INTO THE ANTI-SOCIAL, MURDEROUS INDIVIDUAL THAT I BECAME, AND ALTHOUGH MANY OF THE EXPERIENCES I LIVED THROUGH WERE DIFFICULT TO ENDURE, AND BECAUSE OF THEM I BEGAN TO PERCEIVE LIFE AS CRUEL AND UNFAIR. I MAKE NO EXCUSES FOR MY CHOICES OR ATTEMPT TO RATIONALIZE, MINIMIZE OR BLAME ANYONE OR ANYTHING, LIKE I ONCE DID. TODAY I TAKE AND ACCEPT FULL RESPONSIBILITY. TODAY, I HAVE THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS THE WAY I CHOSE TO PERCEIVE AND PERSONALIZE THE EVENTS THAT TOOK PLACE IN MY LIFE, THE BELIEFS I FORMED AND ADOPTED BECAUSE OF THEM AND THE CHARACTER DEFECTS I DEVELOPED BECAUSE OF THOSE BELIEFS, THAT LEFT ME WITH A VOID, A FEELING OF EMPTINESS WHICH I VAINLY TRIED TO FILL THROUGH A DESPERATE SEARCH FOR LOVE, RESPECT, AND A SENSE OF VALUE. MY UNHEALTHY NEED FOR ACCEPTANCE PROGRESSED UNTIL IT LED ME TO WHOLEHEARTEDLY BELIEVE IT WAS OKAY TO TAKE IVAN DELGADO'S LIFE.

THE TRUTH IS THAT NOTHING I SAY OR DO WILL EVER CHANGE WHAT I DID, IT WON'T BRING IVAN BACK OR WIPE AWAY THE ENDLESS PAIN I HAVE CAUSED.

HOWEVER, THROUGH THE SHAME, GUILT AND REMORSE I HAVE EXPERIENCED, I HAVE LEARNED TO HAVE EMPATHY AND COMPASSION TOWARDS OTHERS, I HAVE LEARNED TO CREATE HARMONY WITH MYSELF, MY FEELINGS, MY PERCEPTIONS, MY MENTAL STATE, WHICH HAS GIVEN ME PEACE WITHIN MYSELF AND MADE IT POSSIBLE TO BE AT PEACE WITH OTHERS. I AM FAR FROM PERFECT BUT EVERY DAY I CHALLENGE MYSELF TO ENSURE THAT I WILL NEVER AGAIN BECOME WHAT I ONCE WAS.

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