

Ames, Iowa

Dear Mr. Keyes,

I've always looked at the mentally challenged people differently, not hostilely, but rather in an unusual and awkward manner. I thought they are different from us; their world of thoughts is exotic to us; there is a communication barrier between us. But after reading your poignant story *Flowers for Algernon*, the truth struck me: I was wrong. Wrong in my perception on the people and on my life.

They are no different from us. In fact, it is the mental concept many have that invisibly blocks the daily contact between most people and those with mental challenges. If we change our perspective and apprehend the truth, the barrier would naturally disappear. We would realize that they are as "normal" as we.

They, like us, also have two basic but vital needs: love and respect. As I was reading the earlier progress reports, my heart aches as Charlie doesn't get the love and respect everyone deserves. His heart was so pure that he was naïve. Having never imagined the dark side of reality or even known the reality he had always thought his so-called friends "really liked him." In my opinion, people like Charlie deserve to be loved and respected more than anyone else for simply two reasons. First, that extra love and respect is needed to make up for the disability they are born with and to boost their self-esteem. Also, many mentally challenged people, like Charlie, treat others with tremendous love and generous heart. These people always forgive and have no hatred or even dislike for anyone. The saying "treat others the way you want to be treated," should also be stated, "be treated the way you treat others." They had given more, therefore, should receive more.

We are the same, and yet, we are all different. It is the unique characters one possesses that define the individual. This is the reason why Charlie was left out, why everyone had been left out at some point in his/her life. Charlie, as a special case, was lonely through out the story: in the beginning because of his low IQ, during the period of intelligence growth because of his abnormal actions, and at the peak because his sophisticated mind was beyond any normal person's understanding. I've learned to be flexible. Other people's distinctions and changes, subtle or significant, shouldn't be your reason of rejection, as long as you feel the same love and respect toward them. The workers at the bakery, at the end, penitently felt their conscious and sincerely accepted Charlie as their true friend. I couldn't express my blessing more, for Charlie had finally gotten love and respect, for he had an impact on others' attitudes and lives.

*Flowers for Algernon* also helped me appreciate the priceless gift we've got: the decent life. I used to complain about life and think it is monotonous. Nevertheless, how many would have loved to be in my place? I feel shameful to have taken my decent life for granted. Lives of millions are by far more difficult than ours. I should cherish every minute of my only life in this world. A life of meaning and value is the worthiest and most successful.

This insightful book of yours has changed my perspective in the judging of people and the purpose of life. Thank you for creating Charlie guiding me to seek a meaningful life with motivation. I will cherish everything I possess and try to improve others' lives by bringing happiness.

Sincerely,

Hongmeng Zhou