

Anne Dutton
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Dear Mr. Kozol,

As I write this letter, it is snowing and 20 degrees outside. I just walked into my house and I am still cold. My house is warm, and I am enjoying the return of heat to my hands. Since I read your book, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*, I have learned to appreciate having a house to shelter me from the snow and wind. *Amazing Grace* has opened my eyes to the world outside of the wealthy bubble of West Des Moines, Iowa.

During my entire childhood, I was completely sheltered. I had no need left unfulfilled and I never had any experience with poverty. West Des Moines is the perfect place for a child to grow up. There are available jobs for the parents and excellent schools for the children; the West Des Moines School District consistently has some of the highest test scores in Iowa. There are limitless opportunities available in the high school. Virtually everyone goes to college, many to the University of Iowa or Iowa State University and several go to Ivy League colleges or schools on the West Coast. The parks are clean and well-maintained. This was my reality for sixteen years. This is all I had ever known when I picked up your book for a class assignment.

If you had asked me then, I would have said that poverty on that level did not exist in America. I would have told you to look in Nicaragua, in Africa, in Brazil; certainly nowhere in the United States. Over the next week as I read it, my world slowly crashed in around me. I started to question my life and myself. Why was I reading your book instead of being a character in it? Who was I, to have all these fabulous gifts? What had I done to deserve such a privileged upbringing? The answer, of course, is nothing. I do not deserve my wealth any more than children of the South Bronx deserve their poverty. *Amazing Grace* was the most eye-opening book I have ever read. This is reality, this is America, this is happening now.

For the next month, I could not stop thinking about your novel. I wandered around West Des Moines and saw it with new eyes. I listened as my friends complained about their parents and our “crappy” school. I felt ashamed of myself as I realized that had this conversation happened two months earlier, I would have been right in the middle of it, certain that I had been given an unreasonable burden to bear.

Through all of these revelations, one question kept repeating in my head. How am I going to help? Now is the time in my life when I am being asked to think about a career. Your book is the biggest factor in my decision. Right now, I am leaning towards social work. Before my revelation brought on by your novel, I wanted to be an interior designer. When I compare these two careers, I can no longer see why I thought interior design would be a satisfying career. I now have this feeling in me that I carry constantly. This feeling tells me that if I am not helping someone, my life is not being lived to its full potential.

Basically, all I want to say is thank you. Thank you for showing me that my dream world is not reality for the rest of the world. Thank you for opening my eyes to the real world before it was too late for me to make a difference. Thank you for writing the most gripping book I have ever read and thank you for changing the way this suburban, white, sheltered girl views her world.

Sincerely,
Anne Dutton

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