The augustana human library: “good for the soul”

Tanya Pattullo, Sarah Barriage Nancy Goebel SUBMISSION

On September 17th and 18th, the Augustana Campus Library hosted the 8th edition of the augustana human library. The augustana human library is held near the beginning of each term. Staff, students, faculty, and members of the Camrose community are always invited and welcomed to participate.

Human libraries began twelve years ago in Denmark by a group called Stop the Violence, which was formed in response to a violent attack on a young gay man. During a human library, individuals who are willing to share their stories with others, called “human books”, are available to be “checked out” for a conversation with interested individuals who are called “readers”. By sharing their significant life experiences with others, human books give readers the opportunity to see things from another’s perspective, which can help to break the stereotypes and erase the prejudice that exists against them in society.

Participation in the augustana human library has generated positive feedback from both readers and human books. Several readers checked out more than one book during the event, and many offered positive comments on the process. One reader who checked out I Was a Hungry Billionaire stated that the experience of reading this human book “provided a new perspective on events that happened in history.”

Another reader stated that the human book Hopeful Non-Believer “was great, very informative – shared his own experience and research – very cool!”

Many of the human books cite a number of personal benefits from participating in the event. “Telling a story that is tough to tell is good for the soul,” said Ramonda Kunz, who participated for the second time as a human book titled He Took His Life and Left Us to Live Ours.

Echoing her sentiments was Jason Peterson, a human book titled Memoirs of an Emptied Brain, who said it “always feels good to share things not commonly talked about”.

This term, nine human books were available over the two days of the event. Their stories covered a wide range of topics, including: I See, a visually impaired individual; I Was a Hungry Billionaire, an individual who lived in Serbia during hyperinflation and the NATO bombing; Memoirs of an Emptied Brain, an individual with a brain tumour; Surviving the City and the Village, an individual who is gay; Infidel in the Community, an individual of the Baha’i faith; He Took His Life and Left Us to Live Ours, an individual whose brother committed suicide; If These Walls Could Talk, a professor who has taught at Augustana for 83 terms; Hopeful Non-Believer, an individual who is an atheist; and The Hopeful Non-Believer, an individual who is an atheist; and The Greatest Risk is Life is Not to Risk at All, an individual who has travelled to many of the world’s poorest countries.

During the upcoming Winter 2013 term, the topics of the human books available at the augustana human library will be related to the 2012-2013 annual campus academic theme of Resilience. It was decided to do a theme-based Augustana human library because the experiences of so many of the human books reflect a life of resilience as defined on the academic theme’s webpage: “The general meaning of resilience is taken from the Latin ‘to jump or leap back’, and refers to the ability to recover from, or adjust easily, to misfortune or change”.

The Augustana human library continues to serve its purpose of educating and enhancing the Augustana community. The library is held near the beginning of each term and is open to all interested members of the community.

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