

A Simple Dare
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" I dare you! "

Three simple syllables, accompanied by a playful tone. Yet it was these three words, this childish string of letters, that completely changed me.

It was early May, that lively month when spring blossoms into the warmth of summer. The scent of summer and vacation beckoned on the gentle breeze. My friend and I were discussing Common Ground, a four day long program at our high school that is dedicated to welcoming new freshmen and erasing any prejudices they may hold.

"You should try out as a leader!" My friend exclaimed. I shook my head immediately. I knew how important this program was to the unity of our school and I had heard that it was extremely up close and personal. However, I wasn't sure that I was cut out to be a Ground Crew Leader. I voiced my insecurities.

She glanced back at me impassively, and said it, said those three irrevocable words.

" I dare you!"

I exhaled loudly. "Fine. I'll do it." I would never get selected so I wouldn't have to worry about being the perfect leader. So I filled out that fated green sheet, confident that they would never pick someone as shy as me. Three months later, I found myself in the school staff lounge wearing a cardinal red shirt that was too large for me, emblazoned with the words "FHS Ground Crew Leader."

The next day , I greeted approximately 80 new freshmen, just as nervous as I was. Would I be able to alleviate their fears? After a few ice breakers, we were divided into smaller, more intimate groups and began the simple introduction process. Our goal for the day was merely to form new friendships. This was no time for me to hide behind the timid image that had been my disguise for so long. I attempted a few jokes, and soon, we were all laughing.

The next day, I made sure I learnt the names of each and every freshman present. I abandoned my reticent habits, and forced myself to sit next to someone new, to make every effort to welcome these freshmen. Soon, I no longer had to push myself to be more outgoing; I was actually enjoying it.

Our small group discussions focused on racial and gender stereotypes. I spoke about my experiences with only the slightest hesitation, and for once, did not close myself off from the rest of the world. To my delight, the freshmen opened up more easily after seeing that I was willing to put myself in a difficult position. One of the girls emotionally described her life on the streets and her motivation to return to school. I promised her and the others that I was there for them, and they could always find me when they needed a shoulder to lean on.

By the last day, it felt like we'd known each other for years. We did an exercise where we stood in two lines facing each other, each member solemnly regarding the others. A question was asked and we had to step up to the middle of the two lines if it applied to us. The questions started off simple and then delved into emotionally difficult ones. After the exercise, there wasn't a single student without tears in his or her eyes.

As we waved goodbye to the freshmen that had become family to us, a girl from my small group approached me.

"Thank you," she whispered, a hesitant smile breaking through her tears.

"For what?" I responded, puzzled.

"For showing me that I'm not alone. For actually caring about us," she truly smiled then, a smile of relief, and pure happiness. "Thank you."

I was deeply touched by her response, and will never forget that moment. That simple smile meant everything to me. Maybe this was where I belonged. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. I now know, that this was a journey, not just for her, but also for me.

Today, I am still the same girl I was a year ago, but with one major change. I am no longer afraid to be myself in front of others, no longer afraid to be wild and crazy. And all because of a simple dare.

So I dare each and every one of you to step out of your comfort zone, and try something new. You never know what you may discover about yourself. Your journey begins now.