

L. Citton

Ms. Citton

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I Am Not Dangerous

I work at the mall – in the food court. I know it's not glamorous or high paying, but it's a job. It pays the bills, has flexible hours so I can go to school, and it's on the same bus route as my house. I'm the guy who makes the smoothies and sometimes cleans up and wipes the tables down after a food court rush. Yesterday I was making smoothies when a group of girls came up to the counter and ordered three berry blast smoothies with a boost of protein. As I was making the smoothies, I couldn't help but overhear their snickering and somewhat snide remarks. I shrugged and brushed it off. I gave them their smoothies; they paid and sat at a table in the court. Once they were finished, they left and I went to wipe down the table. I found a piece of paper on the seat and was just about to run after the girls to return it when something caught my eye. It was a drawing; a drawing of me. I'll admit the girl who drew it was talented – she captured every piercing, and every tattoo that was visible despite my boring work uniform. It was then that I regrettably decided to see what else was on the paper.

The drawing was accompanied by a piece of writing that said I was aggressive, fearless, and a danger to society. I couldn't believe it. How could they judge me so quickly; me – the guy who makes smoothies at the mall?

Aggressive? Fearless? A danger to society? Hardly. I wear my piercings and tattoos as a reminder of who I am, and who I wish I could be. I couldn't hurt a fly! I played the clarinet in high school. I was pushed into lockers and bullied to the point of skipping school out of fear. My eyebrow ring hides the scar I got from being knocked down in the parking lot in my junior year. All the piercings on my ears represent how many times I gave up my lunch money or was shoved into a locker. Each of the piercings on my lip epitomizes how many times I was punched in the face. I'm not aggressive – I'm far from it. Those girls have no idea.

The tattoos on my face hide my insecurities – make me look tougher than I am - because truth be told, I am always afraid; afraid of taking the bus home after work, afraid of the shadows across the street, afraid of my own past. Fearless – I wish. Each of the tattoos has a story – some happy, others not so much. While I may let other people “permanently scar and disfigure” my body, it's only because I'm showing the world my story – my pain,

my happiness, my pit falls and my triumphs. I literally wear my heart on my sleeve. I am the most honest person you will meet – ask my tattoos, they speak for themselves.

And as for a danger to society, I'm taking night classes at the local college to finish my high school degree before I go to university. My dream is to be a veterinarian. I love animals and have two amazing golden labs at home. The only danger to society I might be is if Planet of the Apes actually happens and I take care of the Ape King. I pay my bills and taxes just like everyone else. I have never been arrested or reckless. I have two nephews who look up to me and I take my cool uncle role very seriously.

Ladies at the mall – what you see is a broken person haunted by their past, afraid of their future, and now a little apprehensive of the present. The piece of paper you forgot at the mall is hurtful. You have decided to judge me based on my tattoos and piercings – superficial things that do not define my personality, but tell my story. I'm not ashamed of who I actually am: kind, generous, thoughtful, and respectful. So if you so choose to come back for another smoothie please feel free to ask me about my appearance before you judge me by it.