



tell me something. He finally looked at me intensely in the eyes and said, "You're the only person who has talked to me like I'm a normal person." I swallowed hard. He continued: "All the other students that have been here just stared at me like they were scared of me."

I felt myself tear up, ashamed at how 15 minutes prior I was tempted to hide away in the conference room and do the same exact thing. His words made me realize how easy it is to look at a psychiatric patient and see only that. In reality, these patients are so much more than a label or diagnosis. Stephen, recently diagnosed with schizophrenia

at age 22, is more similar to me than I would have ever guessed. Maybe it is human nature to try to focus on the obvious, to keep our distance, put people in a box, and perhaps that makes working in health care easier. But easier is not better, and when you dig beyond labeling a patient with an illness, health care can become more encompassing by treating the entire person and not just the illness. Stephen's words that day changed my perspective of what it really means to be a nurse, because sometimes just treating someone as a human and simply talking to them makes an immeasurable difference in their level of care.

When I left the unit that day, I walked up to Stephen to say goodbye. He handed me a picture that he drew me, a picture of a beautiful, vibrant sunset. He proudly told me that he used all the crayons in the box and even mixed some colors to make it just perfect for me. On the sheet of paper above the sunset, it read, "Thank you for truly seeing me." I vowed that day to never write off a patient or to let their illness define them. There is so much more to people than what meets the eye. Walking out of the unit that day and waving goodbye, I did not look at someone who was a psychiatric patient, I just saw Stephen as Stephen.