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As school children, one of the many lessons ingrained in us that leads into adolescence and adulthood is the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would want to be treated. Until attending the State University of New York at Geneseo, NY, I thought the Golden Rule was all-inclusive for active citizens in local, national, and global communities. When I received the opportunity to engage in the educational breadth of a liberal arts curriculum, I gained experience in a more precious metal, the Platinum Rule. Founded in Michael O'Connor and Tony Alessandra's research, the Platinum Rule asserts that you should not treat another as you would treat yourself, but how the other person wants to be treated. My education gave me ways to attribute this method to my interactions with different geographic communities, my hometown, and across the globe.

The opportunity to double-major in two drastically different disciplines, Creative Writing and Communication, allowed me to tie their core principles together. Starting out my freshman year in Creative Writing, one of the first lessons I learned is to tell my own truths through story. My favorite Writing professor once told our Nonfiction workshop, "Truth and fact are not synonymous. Write what is true to *you*." The concept of individual truth was hard for me to understand. How can something be true to me, but false to someone else? I only understood the meaning of this lesson when I took Interpersonal Communication. Here is where I heard for the first time about the Platinum Rule. Finally, I realized that to understand others, I needed to hear their truths, and they needed to hear mine as well. Thanks to the flexibility of my liberal arts education, I found that these truths are the stories worth telling.

Growing up in the small, rural town of Palmyra, New York, I felt that my childhood lacked the diversity that cities or other regions had. I assumed every towns person had the same upbringing, morals, and beliefs about ourselves and our community. I suspected that SUNY Geneseo, a university one hour away, would be no different. The assumptions I had about my town and college were both proved false. The first correction came when I learned my freshman-year roommate lived in Manhattan. I began to panic as references to *Gossip Girl*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Fifth Avenue flooded my mind. I wondered, *how will I relate to someone from the Big Apple? Why would we be selected as roommates? This must be a mistake.* But, SUNY Geneseo knew exactly what it was doing when students from two different settings and mindsets came together in one room. The goal of a liberal arts education is to open perspectives academically and socially, molding well-rounded citizens. In order to give back to one's own community or another's, students must learn to understand and accept the differences between themselves first. I soon realized that my freshman roommate was more out of her element than I was. I started viewing college from both her perspective and mine as we each clung to our familiarities. She traded her stories of subway rides and apartment-living for my country roads and bonfires at twilight. It was a mutual sharing of life in which we both participated.

As in freshman year, the core lessons from my areas of study influence me in my hometown today. During the summer between junior and senior year, I returned home to intern at Palmyra Inn & Suites not knowing that the inn was owned and mostly staffed by Mormons. I knew that my town was the birthplace of Mormonism; however, I assumed that the religion was no longer prominent in the area. Another wise Communication professor once told me that privilege is invisible to those who have it. As someone with qualities in both the majority (race

and religion) and minority (gender), this is yet another major concept I gained and still struggle with today in my liberal arts education. My privilege shadowed me seeing that every community, no matter its size or location, has layers of diversity. I had the opportunity to experience a different linguistic register and the coming together of people across states and nations at the Hill Cumorah Pageant, a performance celebrating their faith. The educational breadth given to me by SUNY Geneseo allowed me to grasp these religious differences and give them the respect they deserved in the way they viewed as appropriate. In addition, my education in cultural competence allowed me to sift through differences and find the universal similarities that are at the center of each community: desired stability, acceptance, and happiness. The Platinum Rule not only highlights differences in perspective and point of view, but also mutual goals for community at all levels.

Another moment in which my liberal arts education provided me with the tools to embrace the Platinum Rule was during my study abroad experience. Forty-percent of students at SUNY Geneseo take the opportunity to study abroad compared to the average less than two-percent nationally. To be an active citizen in one's community, they must engage with the community of others. I was fortunate enough to travel to Groningen, Netherlands in the Spring of 2015 after befriending a Dutch exchange student attending SUNY Geneseo the year before. Living with students of eleven nations across three continents, I gained perspective from an even wider breadth of cultural backgrounds as an American, an identity I found myself attached to as soon as I left the country, and as a woman interacting with cultures where the lines between masculinity and femininity were not so blurred. One interaction I recall is with a Latvian housemate as we discussed marriage and financial responsibility. The Latvian student asserted that earning more money than her husband was unimaginable because it would hurt his self-

esteem and manhood. Coming from a culture in which gender equality in the workforce is a heavily discussed issue today, her contrastive perspective seemed unmodern at first before I corrected my thinking in that with different backgrounds and contexts come different “truths.” In her culture, respecting one’s gender roles provides harmony, while my culture approves blurring these roles with the same goal. Through interaction and thoughtful questions, we crossed international borders to gain others’ perspectives and treat them with the kind of respect they request of us.

The final, underlying aspect of the Platinum Rule that O’Connor and Alessandra might not have realized is that once a person gains the ability to understand others, they feel an urge to use this skill to help others achieve it as well. As a graduating senior, I will be physically leaving the community that has shaped me these last four years, but I will also take the “truths” instilled in me to be respectful of all and make the effort to always have an open mind. Joan Didion said, “We tell our stories in order to live,” and I feel it necessary to add that we also listen to others’ stories – others’ truths – in order to help them live. Through a liberal arts education, we build a diverse community, helping ourselves and others to understand and be understood, which is the basis of active citizenship.