

*Hello again Loyal Her Voice Readers,*

Thanksgiving and Christmas are right around the corner and I wish you and yours all the blessings of Thanksgiving and the shining bright star of Christmas. It is the perfect time of year to give thanks and celebrate the gifts we all have.

This is a story my friend Nicole at work received and shared with me and I wanted to share it with you all. One of the things my Mother would always say when one of us girls would comment about a friend or another family was, "Until you've walked in their moccasins you never know the path they have taken." This story is such a beautiful reminder of that for me. I hope you enjoy it.

It was a Wednesday afternoon when I walked into Starbucks that day nearly six years ago. I stood at the bar, waiting for my drink, when the barista politely asked me what I was up to that day. As it turns out, I was en route to the airport at that moment, about to catch a flight to Italy with my husband. After a brief minute of chatting, the barista handed me my coffee and wished me a nice trip. "But then again", she said "why wouldn't you... your life is golden!"

I'll admit, the gold star was nice. But at the same time, the words knocked the wind out of me. She wasn't being rude. She wasn't being sarcastic. In fact, she was being totally genuine. And that's the part that really took my breath away.

*Because here's the thing...*

This lovely girl saw me for all of five minutes a day. Usually all dressed up on the way to my full-time job at one of the country's most prestigious art galleries, or with my camera in hand to photograph two people in love. Or, yes, on my way to Italy for ten days to celebrate my anniversary. This is what she saw. Therefore, this is what she knew.

And truth be told, there is darkness in this kind of knowledge. Especially now, when so many of our connections happen only five minutes at a time, fully filtered and perfectly hash tagged. In our defense though, it's not entirely our fault. That battle we're fighting, those rough days we are having, they don't tend to translate very well when you have twenty people in line behind you for coffee or a hundred and forty characters to spell out your day.

Honestly, what was I going to tell my barista? "Yes, we're flying to Europe. I just miscarried our baby and we had a terrifying health scare and I'm suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, plus we're feeling pretty far from God right now. So, yeah, going to Italy seemed as good a place as any to just run away from our life and justifiably eat gelato twelve times a day."

No. I wasn't going to tell her this, because shocking total strangers into oblivion is a bit harsh and cruel. Especially when she's the girl in charge of making your coffee every day. But I did spend the entirety of that flight wondering; about our sense of authenticity...our collective vulnerability...our polished identity. And it made me feel like a total fraud, because I'm not any of those things that this girl sees on the other side of her coffee bar.

If I showed up one morning, wearing my most ragged and scarred self it would be a very different girl staring back at her (and she would likely feel inclined to serve me alcohol instead of coffee!)

# Micki's Meanderings

*Because here's the real me...*

I was bullied a lot as a teenager.

I'm afraid of thunderstorms.

I spend an absurd amount of time worrying about what other people think of me.

My biggest challenge in life is letting go of people, even if they hurt me.

I hide behind my humor for fear that people won't accept me without it.

I feel like I have failed as a daughter.

I try to avoid big groups so that I won't feel like the invisible one among it.

I'm insanely self-conscious of my smile.

I feel like I'm an easy person to walk away from in life and it haunts me on a daily basis.

I almost always operate under the assumption that I care more about everyone else than they do about me.

I unfollow people on Instagram if their life seems too perfect because it makes me feel inadequate.

I feel like a terrible mother pretty much all the time.

I hate emptying the dishwasher.

Every day, I'm afraid that my husband is going to wake up and finally realize how much crazy he married and I thank God for every day that he doesn't!

I don't like to try new foods so I travel with my own jar of peanut butter.

I want to write a book so badly that it hurts. But I'm afraid of people telling me that my life was never worth telling.

I struggle, every single day, with feeling like I'm not enough.

Skinny enough. Funny enough. Good enough.

And I cry. A lot.

I highly doubt I would get a gold star for any of this. But, now, six years later, I do know one thing for sure; that even with all of my frailty and all of my fears, all my faults, none of those things make my life any less golden.

Scars tell stories. Scars mean survival. Scars mean you showed up for the fight instead of running from it.

And we've all got them...even the sweet girl serving my coffee. She's fighting her own battle, defending her own front line, I'm sure struggling in her own way.

And maybe it's not about collecting gold stars for the perceived reality we give the world on Facebook, but it's about the purple hearts we get for living bravely among the real one. Because the truth is life requires guts, there are times it requires bravery, and it requires vulnerability.

So, next time you buy your coffee, wear your scars proudly and carry on, dear soldier and friend because none of us are in this battle alone.

God bless and take care,

*Micki*