

Compassion in History

How Much it Meant



The sun was just rising when Mr. Addams hitched up the horses and lifted his little daughter Jane into the carriage. In the rosy morning light, the two drove away from their country home to see the big city.

Six-year-old Jane sat in the front seat next to her father. She looked at the city with excited eyes. How different it was from her small hometown!

"Oh, Father," she exclaimed, "look at the big buildings and the men wearing tall hats. See those ladies in their fancy dresses!"

As Mr. Addams turned the carriage onto a small side street, Jane gasped with surprise. Filthy, cramped houses lined the street, and children played in the mud in front of them. The smell of rotting garbage was so bad that Jane held her nose.

"Why do these people live in such horrid houses?" Jane asked her father.

"They are poor," he answered sadly, "and don't have money for nicer houses."

Jane could hardly believe her eyes. "How can people live like this?" she wondered. Everyone seemed so hopeless. Everyone seemed so sad.

"When I grow up," she declared, "I will have a big house right in the middle of little houses like these so I can let poor children come play in my yard!" Twenty-three years later, that's exactly what Jane Addams did.

After college, Jane asked a friend, Ellen Starr, for help. "Ellen," Jane said, "we should find a big house in the middle of a run-down neighborhood. We can make it a place where poor people can come for food, clothing, and medical help. Can you imagine how much that would mean to them?"

Jane's compassion grew as she spoke. "Perhaps we could build an art gallery, a library, and a gymnasium, too!"

"Jane, your idea is splendid!" Ellen exclaimed. "We must do it!"

Jane and Ellen searched for five months through overcrowded and dirty neighborhoods in Chicago until they found the perfect house. It was a tall red brick mansion with large windows and white pillars in front. The house was in poor condition, though, and would require many repairs.

Miss Addams and Miss Starr quickly started work on the old mansion. They painted rooms, washed windows, hung

new pictures, and bought beautiful furniture. For weeks they gave their time, energy, and money to make the old house ready for those in need.

Did you spot the "I Will"? Miss Addams and Miss Starr gave of their resources to help those in need.

When the mansion was clean and ready, Miss Addams called it "Hull House," after Mr. Charles Hull, the man who built it. Miss Addams sat on the front porch each morning to greet those who walked by. "Good morning!" she would say. "How are you doing?"

Some people only stared back at her, while some smiled and returned her greeting. Others said, "Guten morgen" [goo-ten MAWR-gen], "Buon giorno" [bwon-JOHR-noh], or "Dobrautra" [DOE-brah OO-truh].

Many of Miss Addams' neighbors had only recently come to America from far away places such as Germany, Italy, and Russia. Others came from Ireland, Poland, Africa, China, and Spain. The people had different languages, different skin colors, different cultures, and different beliefs, but Miss Addams reached out to all of them, regardless of their differences.

Did you spot the "I Will"? Miss Addams reached out to others regardless of race, faith, or nationality.

Miss Addams invited all her neighbors to visit Hull House and eat meals, have classes, read books, and enjoy the playground. Only a few people came at first, but they quickly went home and



told their friends about the wonderful lady in the big red house who treated them so kindly.

Soon, people filled Hull House every day. The first year, 50,000 people visited, and over 100,000 came the second year! Miss Addams listened to each person she met as they told about their lives. Whenever someone wanted to talk, Miss Addams was ready to listen.

Did you spot the “I Will”? Miss Addams listened when others wanted to talk.

Late one evening, Miss Addams walked back to Hull House after helping a poor woman with her new baby. On her way, she noticed a small figure curled up by a wooden crate. It was a red-haired girl about seven years old wearing a ragged old dress. Miss Addams noticed the little girl crying, so she stopped to help.

“What’s your name?” Miss Addams gently asked.

“I’m . . . sniff . . . I’m Colleen,” whimpered the little girl, wiping her tears.

“You don’t look well,” said Miss Addams. “Why are you here?”

“I just left the factory, and I’m too tired to make it home,” the little girl replied. “I work from six in the morning to six at night. The man in charge of the factory makes us work every day like that.”

Miss Addams helped Colleen walk to Hull House and gave her a good meal, a warm bath, and a pretty dress. Then, in her nice carriage, Miss Addams drove Colleen home.

Not only did Miss Addams stop to help Colleen, she later talked to the city lead-

ers about other poor children who worked long days in hot, dangerous factories. Eventually, they passed laws to protect children from being overworked and mistreated.

Did you spot the “I Will”? Miss Addams stopped to help not only Colleen, but all the other children working in factories.



Jane Addams, 1860-1935

One night, after a long day of teaching, cooking, and cleaning, Miss Addams blew out her candle and slipped into bed. Just as she dozed off, a noise awakened her. Miss Addams sat up in bed, her eyes searching the darkness.

“Where is your money?” a robber gruffly demanded as he hid in the shadows by the door.

“Why do you want my money?” Miss Addams returned.

“Uh, uhm, I’m hungry,” he stammered, “and I can’t find a job.”

Miss Addams sighed. “The money is in the top drawer of the dresser,” she said, “but that won’t last you very long. If you really want help, come here tomorrow morning at nine o’clock, and I will help you find a job.”

The man left with the money, and Miss Addams went back to sleep. The next morning, just as the clock struck nine, Miss Addams heard a hesitating knock. She opened the door and saw a man—the same man who had robbed her the night before!

“I’ve been thinking about what you said last night,” the man confessed, “and I’d like to get a job.”

Miss Addams agreed and found a position for the man. He worked very diligently and saved his money until he paid back all that he had stolen.

“Thank you,” he told Miss Addams, “for helping me find a way that would last.”

Did you spot the “I Will”? Miss Addams looked for a lasting solution to the man’s poverty and hunger.

Visitors from all over the world came to see Jane Addams during the 41 years she served at Hull House. One day, shortly before Miss Addams died, a red-haired woman and her family surprised her with a visit.

“You probably won’t remember,” the young mother said, “but my name is Colleen. You stopped to help me one night many years ago. You brought me to this wonderful place, you gave me a warm bath, a hot meal, and a ride all the way back home.”

Colleen put her arm around the dear Miss Addams, now late in years. “That was the nicest thing anyone ever did for me,” she said with tears falling down. “My family came back to say thank you, Miss Addams. Thank you so much. You will never know how much it meant!”