

That Boy

Anna Feshchenko

BEFORE YOU READ: When you were growing up, was there anyone in your community that the children were curious about but the adults did not acknowledge?

I Knew My Neighbors

When I was growing up, we lived in a big apartment building, and we had a lot of neighbors. There was a playground where I played with kids. I spent a lot of time there and knew almost everyone who lived in our building.

But there was an apartment on the third floor that scared me and the other children. A couple lived there—a man and a woman. They were a mystery to me. I couldn't tell their age. They didn't show emotions. We did not say hello. And there was a big secret behind their door.

Except One

Sometimes, we heard strange sounds coming from their apartment. The sound definitely belonged to a human, but it was incoherent and heart-wrenching. When I heard it for the first time, I came to my mom with big round eyes full of fear. Mom told me not to speak about it anymore, and that made me more scared.

All my friends' parents had the same response. No one explained to us about those sounds. So we told each other all sorts of stories about the sounds. We spread rumors about terrible monsters that lived behind that door.

One evening, I looked out of our window and saw that couple walking down the street. They were leading a man by the arms. This man acted like a toddler, but he was a grown man. He dragged his feet and leaned on his parents. His eyes were blank, and he shook his head in a strange way. I was really scared. I closed the curtains so that I did not have to see him.



Who Was More Disabled?

I ran to my mom and asked her who it was. She said, "We do not talk about that. Don't even think about it." Now, I was really scared. Was my mom, with all her power, even more scared than I was?

My mom wouldn't talk about it, but she could not forbid me to think about what I saw. I laid in bed thinking about that family. I was scared of the boy, but I also felt sorry for him. He couldn't walk well, and he was obviously the one making the strange noises. Were his parents keeping him mostly locked up in the apartment? Were they embarrassed by him? Did his existence make all the parents in the building embarrassed? Is that why they wouldn't talk about him?

I almost forgot that story from my childhood, but one question is still *haunting* me. Who was more disabled—that boy or all the people that would not acknowledge him?

AFTER YOU READ:

1. In your own words, describe what was going on with the children and the adults in this story.
2. What does it mean to be *haunted* by a question?
3. Discuss Anna's question at the end: Who is more disabled—that boy or the people that would not acknowledge him?

Anna Feshchenko is a student at Thomas Jefferson Adult Career Education in Charlottesville, Virginia. She came from Russia a year ago to reunite with her family. She loves literature. Writing her own stories in English has been a rewarding challenge. Thanks to the Advanced Writing class and her wonderful teacher, she was able to write this story for The Change Agent.

