

The Way He Is ---  
Upbeat  
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The day was fresh. There was a new snowfall and only the tire prints could be seen in the blue-white snow of Eighth Avenue. I met Mike the very first day that I moved here from Pittsburgh. Things were not so different in a small mid-western city as they said it would be. The kids here felt the same as the kids back in Pittsburgh. The only difference was that they seemed to talk slower.

Mike was a good basketball player. He was also the drummer for a group at the school. Everyone liked him, including my mom and dad, and all the teachers at school. He lived on Seventh Avenue and used to stop at my house on the way to school so that we could walk together. During basketball season, Mike practiced everyday so we couldn't walk home together. But the coach was sick today and there was no practice, and we were supposed to meet where the red brick wall began. That was behind the school, near the storm drain. I didn't understand why we should meet in such an isolated spot. Nobody went back there.

I finished my seventh period class at 3:10 and went straight to my locker to grab my books: French, World History, Biology, and, of course, Algebra II. We didn't have Algebra II until our junior year in Pittsburgh. That was my last class of the day and I seemed to be hating it more everyday, no matter how important they said it was.

I grabbed all my books and headed for the back of the school. When I got there at 3:20, Mike was already there. He looked strange and I had a feeling that something was coming. He was smoking pot! Of course I tried not to look shocked when he explained to me that it doesn't hurt you, and didn't. I see that famous psychologist on the news who said that marijuana wasn't even as harmful as alcohol!

I really didn't know how to handle it when he offered me one – but I refused. I guess I was scared. I left without him and told him I'd see him tomorrow. He said he would be walking home later.

So much ran through my mind that night. What made me refuse? Is it true that "everyone is doing it" – Why? I seemed mixed up with both a sense of excitement and a sense of shock. Was there something wrong with me that I was not smoking pot like some of the others. And Mike! He was surely a well-liked student. And I thought that this stuff went on only in the big cities. My mom would be shocked. That's one of the reasons why we moved here.

I wanted to talk to somebody about it. Who? I couldn't talk to my dad although I could usually talk to him about everything. He simply wouldn't understand. And Mr. Santori, the guidance counselor, would probably cause a major F.B.I. investigation. Father Stephen, the new priest at my church was blessing homes – it was Theophany Season –

and he had a special meeting tonight, so I couldn't see him. The night passed. I did my homework, watched the Tom Jones show and went to bed.

We walked to school the next morning without talking about it since Jimmy, my younger brother who was only in eighth grade and is a "pain" to me, wanted to tag along with us. The day passed and I still didn't know how to handle it. Algebra again! But it finally ended and I went to the same spot where the red brick began from the corner of the building and as I moved toward it, I still wasn't sure.

When I looked at Mike, a thousand things shot through my mind. But suddenly it came to me? Father James, the Orthodox Priest at my old church in Pittsburgh, suddenly came to my mind. I remembered his talk during one of our retreats about temptation and will and all that. Somehow it didn't mean that much to me then, but now I knew that it was my decision alone – not my father's nor the priest's, nor the teacher's. I knew also that it was more than a question of whether to smoke or not – it was a question of my will or not!

I remembered that there was some saint, I think his name was Seraphim or something like that, who talked about resisting the temptation. Of course I would never tell Mike or anybody about the fact that I thought of something a saint said which kept me from taking a weed that day. But then Father James also told me that it really didn't matter whether or not you remembered the saint's name, or if you could tell another person about what the saint said. All that was important was that you did remember and that you lived it. Now I knew it was all before me. Either I was going to live it or they would only be pretty nice words.

So I couldn't explain very well to Mike. All I could tell him was that I knew that it wasn't "me." Then I left him. I hope someone will explain all this to Mike someday, because I can't. Hoping there was a handkerchief in one of my pockets...I started to walk home. It was snowing again here – just like it did in Pittsburgh. My name is John.