

WHAT ARE MY REASONS FOR WRITING THIS STORY?

In my opinion the American civil war was one of the many most important wars in the history of mankind. This war wasn't just about black slavery, each side fighting for it or against it. It was about common people standing up for what they believed in. It was the first step the United States took towards being a slaveless country, and standing up against racism. If it weren't for this historic event, who knows what America, or even the world, would look like today? That's why I think we shouldn't forget about it. And keep it's stories alive with us, no matter if they are true or just made up.

MY INTERVIEW WITH CLARA BARTON (1901)

"CLARA BARTON WAS A FAMOUS CIVIL WAR NURSE. WHEN SHE BEGAN NURSING SHE USED HER OWN MONEY FOR HER SUPPLIES. SHE DROVE A HORSE DRAWN "AMBULANCE" RIGHT INTO THE BATTLEFIELD TO HELP SAVE WOUNDED SOLDIERS. FOR THIS REASON SHE BECAME KNOWN AS "ANGEL OF THE BATTLEFIELD." (Cit. 1. page 76)

That's what I read in a heavy book on the Civil war, that I borrowed from the only library I could find. I'm a reporter at the New York Times. And as thrilled as I am for getting an interview with the famous Clara Barton I have to admit preparing for it is more exhausting than I thought it would be. Just the trip alone from New York to Baltimore was horrible. But, well I am finally here now, and now I just have to find a motel to stay the night in and then tomorrow it's 'Bye, bye Baltimore !' I pick up the other book I borrowed, this one is a little thinner. The title reads: Heroes of the civil war. I flip through it, until I find a chapter on Clara Barton, and I read.

"AFTER THE WAR CLARA BARTON FORMED A BUREAU TO SEARCH FOR SOLDIERS WHO WERE MISSING AS A RESULT OF THE WAR. HER WORK BROUGHT INFORMATION TO MORE THAN 22 000 FAMILIES. IN 1881 SHE FOUNDED THE AMERICAN RED CROSS. HER ORGANIZATION NOT ONLY PROVIDES RELIEF DURING TIMES OF WAR BUT ALSO HELPS PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED TERRIBLE NATURAL DISASTERS, SUCH AS HURRICANES OR FLOODS." (Cit. 2. page 76)

Wow. I think to myself. She sounds like a wonderful person. I put both books in my bag and head out of the nice bar I was just in. After walking around for a while I find a small, but clean motel and rent a room. Tomorrow is going to be a big day, so I go to bed, without even reading at least one chapter of my book.

I wake up just as the sun is coming up, and decide to head out for breakfast to a pub I saw yesterday somewhere near the Inner Harbor. I walk past a closed shoe shop with a year old flyer, that reads: New century, new shoes! The title makes me laugh. I find the pub and order scrambled eggs with bacon. The street is very quiet, like a sleeping beast. I breath in and cherish the fresh cool air. I am pleased I woke up this early. My interview with Clara Barton is set to half past twelve, so this way I have loads of time to tour the city. I have never been to Baltimore. I travel a lot, but this is my first time here. I enjoy my breakfast and then head out to explore.

I stumble into the cafe where I'm meeting Clara just five minutes before the agreed meeting time. I like to be there first for my interviews, it makes me look more important. Because, well, important people are always early. Luckily she's not here yet. I seat myself at a small round table in the corner, so we won't be disturbed. I prepare the paper I wrote my questions on, and my notebook, and my pens. I order a coffee and wait.

After a couple of minutes I see a petite, thin old lady walk in through the door. She has miraculously dark hair, only a few silver streaks indicate her age. I wave her over, and help her get seated in the chair opposite mine. "Hello." She says in a warm raspy voice. "And hello to you. " I reply. "My name is Abigail Sanders, and as you know I am a reporter for the New York Times. First I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet up with me. It is an honor to meet you." Clara smiles at me, the skin under her eyes wrinkling from the gesture. "Well I must say I was surprised t-to hear from the New York Times themselves. Although I am n-not quite sure why you seem to have so much interest in an old woman such as m-myself." I notice a hint of a stutter in the way she talks. But it is probably just a

result of the many years spent on the battlefield. I also notice she talks very slow. The nice slow way old people talk. I like that. “Well miss Barton—“ “Oh, please c-call me Clara.” I’m pleased by her kindness. I hope I am still like that too when I’m old. “Very well, Clara. The New York Times has decided to write an article about your brave actions during the civil war. And that is why I am here.” She seems delighted with the idea, smiling at me again, the skin under her eyes wrinkling even more. “Alright t-then. Ask me anything you want my dear.” I can’t help but smile. She is so warm and motherly, no wonder she was such a good nurse. Without any further delay I grab my notebook and a pen, and we start our interview.

“Alright Clara, why don’t you start by telling me your full name and age.” “Clarissa Harlowe Barton. And I am eighty y-years old.” She says, pausing for a while before telling me her age, as if she wasn’t sure if she remembered it right. “And may I ask you what inspired you to become a nurse?” Clara sighed, and looked down at her hands. “My y-younger brother was a soldier, we were very close. When he heard he had t-to go fight, he came to say g-goodbye. He said it was not likely for him t-to come back from the war, and he would hate himself forever if he did n-not say goodbye. I did not want him to go. I wanted to protect him. So a week after he left I took all the money I c-could find, and bought myself a horse, a cart, and all the m-medical supplies I needed. I knew I couldn’t just sit at home, while my brother was risking his life. And I also wanted t-to do something... something important. And that was that. That was how I became a nurse.” I nod my head. “Interesting. And whatever happened to your brother, may I ask?” Clara chuckled under her breath. “Oh he survived the w-war alright. L-lost his leg, but he is alive.”

“Well that must have been a relive for you no?” I ask. “Yes, indeed it was. You would n-not believe.” Said Clara, her mood lightening. “Well good.” I say, smiling at her.

“So, could you maybe tell me some of your most moving memories from your time as a nurse? You know the ones you remember the most?” I ask. This is going to be my favorite part of the interview, I know it is. “Well, let’s see..... my biggest memory...” She says, looking up at the ceiling in thought. “Oh yes I have one. But it is n-not a pretty one, my dear. Are you sure you want to hear it?” Her kindness is overwhelming. I smile and nod. “I can manage.” I say. “Very well then.” She sits back, and entwines her hands in her lap. “I think it was t-the year 1863. I was headed from Petersburg in Virginia to Fort D-Donelson in Tennessee. I was sitting in my cart, holding Rosies reins. Rosie was my horse. And I remember I was t-talking to her, because we have had a hard week in the battlefields near Petersburg. It was not easy b-being a war nurse, you can take my word for that. The things I saw... It was just terrible. And do not say you can imagine, b-because you cannot. You were not there and you should be very grateful for t-that. So anyhow I remember we had just come to the top of t-this hill... it was a very small hill. And there before m-me I saw about thirty tents put closely together. The land around them was devastated, a result of another battle n-no doubt. There were women with medicine or bloody rags running everywhere. And the screaming... Oh the screaming. It was the worst sound I h-had ever heard. It was like— It sounded like those men were being t-tortured, like someone was ripping out t-their organs. I can still her their screams in my dreams. Sometimes when I close m-my eyes I can see their faces taugt with pain. Well I immediately started helping the n-nurses tend to the wounded. Well... at least the ones who stood a chance. And I remember I had finished with one patient and I moved over to the next b-bed. And there all bloody and ripped apart was this young black b-boy. He could not have been older than seventeen. I started cleaning his wounds and h-he looked at me in surprise. He said “*How come you are tending to me?*” And well t-that shocked me. “*What do you mean?*” I asked. “*Well none of the other nurses would tend to my wounds, because I am black. They brought me in from the battlefield but they refuse to take care of me.*” He s-said. I was astonished. How could someone do that? I thought. So of course I tended to his wounds and took care of h-him for the next four days. But by then the nurses were getting restless because they did n-not like having a negro amongst them. I have grown very fond of this boy, although I only knew his first name, which was J-John. When he was leaving the field hospital he gave me this.” She reaches in her pocket and takes out a small carved peace of wood, the size of a child’s palm and hands it over to me. When I look at it more closely I recognize what it is. It is a bell. It looks exactly like from a clock tower.

"He told me his mama had given it to him so he would not forget her. And that he wanted me to have it, because I reminded him of her." I hear a quiver in Clara's voice. I look up and notice that she has tears in her eyes. "When the war ended I formed a bureau to search for missing soldiers. One day I noticed his name on one of the lists of the remaining missing. And he was one of the many I did not manage to find. He died somewhere in battle and did not get to see his family ever again." Clara closed her eyes and tears rolled down her face. "I am really sorry Clara. That must have been hard." Is all I manage to say. I am not good at comforting people. After she calmed down we started talking again. She told me lots of amazing stories, I almost cried. But the last one was the most heart wrenching story I have ever heard.

"I had heard some talk that there was fighting going on in North Carolina in this valley somewhere between Hickory and Granite Falls.. Do you know where it is?" She asks me. "Uh.. no I don't know where it is." I answer. "Well no matter." She says. "It isn't important. So anyway I set out to see if they needed my help there with the wounded soldiers. And when I arrived it was such a mess. I could still hear muskets firing, and cannon shells exploding in the distance, the fighting had moved along, and left devastated farmland behind. The valley itself would have been so beautiful, but there were hundreds of dead soldiers laying everywhere. It is indescribable... what I saw, it... it was a nightmare. Everything smelled like decaying human flesh. And there were flies buzzing through the air and crawling all over the bodies, or rather what was left of them. I had never seen anything so disgusting in my entire life. It was just horrible. So anyway, a few miles further up the valley I found a small flat piece of land, where a few nurses have set a small field hospital. They were struggling to help all the wounded. Immediately I took out my equipment and asked the nurse, who seemed to be in charge, where I was needed. She gratefully directed me towards the nearest tent, and I went inside. Once inside I could not help but notice the copper taste of blood on my tongue. That meant that the patients were losing too much blood. I looked around and headed to the first unattended bed I saw. The man occupying the bed was around twenty years old, and even though his uniform was completely soaked in blood I could still see that it used to be navy blue. So he was fighting for the Union. He was very injured. He had a broken arm and leg. His left ear was ripped off, and he had a gun wound in his stomach. I didn't think he would survive. But of course I took care of him anyway. I always tried to talk with my patients, to take their mind off the pain. So I asked him what his name was. He said his name was Henry Porter, and he was fighting for the Union. "Why?" I asked. And suddenly he looked worried and scared. "If I tell you, will you promise not to tell anybody? Because if you tell anybody... it will be bad." He said. And instantly I was curious, whatever he was scared of telling me about, I wanted to know. So I promised him I wouldn't tell anybody. "Okay" he said. "I don't want there to be slavery in America anymore, because I fell in love with a black slave from one of the plantations down in Louisiana." "Well that is not such a bad thing." I said. "Yes that is true, love is not a bad thing." He said. "But it is in the eyes of others if a man is in love with another man." And I was so stunned... I did not know what to say to that, you know. Until then I didn't even know something like that was possible. But I didn't want him to regret telling me, so I just said: "Well I better not let you die right?" And he looked so relieved, almost like my not minding meant the world to him. And I never told anyone because I was scared that he could get arrested for that, or maybe even killed. But I know I did the right thing saving him. He seemed like a good person." "Wow." Is all I manage to say. "That is so surprising, that he had the courage to tell you." "Well I think that he thought he was about to die, so he figured it didn't matter if he told me." Clara says. "Yes that does make sense." I reply. "Well I regret being the bearer of bad news, but I am afraid our time is almost up. So may I ask you one last question?" "Of course." She says. "Is there something you would like people to know? Like something you have learnt from your experiences in the war?" I ask. "Well as a matter of fact there is." She says. "I think that everybody should know that there is nothing good about war, any war, no matter how big or small. Nothing good can come out of it. Only pain and suffering, and ruined land. And death. Lots and lots of death. The soldiers are torn away from their home, from their families, and

are forced to fight against other m-men. Day after day, they sit in the trenches, firing t-their muskets at one another. I myself c-cannot imagine how that must be like. And when someone is hurt, you g-give them a helping hand, no matter who they are. I have seen courage and kindness on b-both sides of this war. Sometimes things are not as s-simple as they seem.” She pauses. “When I was riding through the battlefields I always took the wounded soldiers and helped them into the back of my wagon, and t-then, when I could not fit any more soldiers in my wagon I took them t-to the field hospital, and rode out to the battlefield again. And it d-didn’t matter what side they were fighting on, I gave them a helping h-hand anyway.” “But could a Confederate and a Union soldier be together?” I ask. “Sometimes men are s-simply too sick and tired to be enemies anymore, sometimes t-they even knew each other. Many families and f-friendships have been torn apart by this war.” Another pause. “I guess what I am trying t-to say is, that we are all people. We are all exactly the same, and w-we should all be treated the same way. We should all have the same r-rights and respect each other. And remember, that w-war isn’t the answer to anything. There is always a different way to solve a p-problem, then by f-fighting. That’s what I w-want everybody to know.” She says sternly. “That’s a very nice thing you just said.” I say, smiling. “Well I thank you very much for your time Clara, I enjoyed hearing all your stories.” I say. “And I am very g-glad I had the opportunity to share some of my m-memories with you.” She says. We say our goodbyes, and head our separate ways. I am so overwhelmed by all the things that Clara said. I have to take a minute and process it all. When I get back to my motel I sit on the bed, take out one of the books I took from the library, and start flipping through it. Suddenly a small paragraph catches my eye. It reads: **IN HER TIME CLARA BARTON INSPIRED OTHER NURSES, AS WELL AS MANY WOMEN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, WITH HER DETERMINATION TO HELP OTHERS. HERE IS A LIST OF RULES THAT CLARA BARTON WORKED BY:**

BE CHEERFUL.

LESSEN SORROW AND GIVE HOPE.

BE BRAVE.

PUT ASIDE YOUR FEELINGS.

DON’T GIVE UP.

DO NOT FORGET THE ONES WHO LOVE YOU. (Cit. 3. page 23)

And at that moment I can’t help but laugh.

THE END

Dear readers,

If there were to be a hidden message behind this story, I suppose it would be this: Do not judge a person by the way they look. Do not judge them because they’re different, or because you simply don’t know them. Judge a person by the way they act, speak, think. Judge them by their heart and soul and nothing else. And remember, everyone has two sides, a dark one and a good one. And no matter what you think of them, there’s always going to be both.

Literature:

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- 4) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uniforms_of_the_American_Civil_War
- 5) <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/brief-overview-american-civil-war>