

TALK WITH THOMAS

Sometimes, it can be really hard to change your perspective of how big our world is. Nearing our final exams, the last few months have been challenging for me. It can be hard to remember that there is even a world out there... when your own world seems to only revolve around study.

This I'm sure is the same for a lot of people.

To be honest, my world perspective has become fixed and stuck. I often wonder when the time will come, when all the things I have learnt will be turned into positive actions,when what I have learned will allow me to make a change and have the effect that I want my knowledge and learning to have.

I have discovered in the past few weeks, that it only takes one conversation, one experience, to completely change one's perspective and reignite a passion to work for change in our world.

A few weeks ago, I was given the privilege to talk to Thomas Schaefer, an incredibly inspirational man, who works as an Orthopaedic Surgeon in the Gaza Strip in the Middle East, right at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The Gaza Strip borders Egypt and Israel and sits on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. To give you some perspective, the Gaza Strip is roughly the same area as that contained within the Lower and Upper Denmark Road, and within it lives 2 million people. I am sure you have all in recent months and certainly years, heard and seen the devastation of the ongoing conflict there.

Thomas has spent many missions in the last few years working for MSF or Médecins Sans Frontiers as a surgeon, helping thousands of young men and boys returning from the border after fighting. Thomas's stories were so incredible and really put into perspective the complexity and tragedies of the conflict. If I shared all of these with you, I would be here for a very long time.

Although, there was one thing that Thomas said that really stuck with me. He asked me to imagine there was a jungle on fire. All the animals – tigers, lions, elephants and hippos have run out and are standing looking at their home being consumed by flames. Suddenly a Hummingbird, flies over the jungle and spits on it. The animals laugh at the Hummingbird knowing that he could never put the whole fire out. But the Hummingbird turns to the animals and says, "I have done my part, now you do yours."

We know that little Hummingbird could never save the jungle on his own, but with the help of all the animals they could save the jungle together.

The Hummingbird is a famous saying that surrounds Thomas's line of work.

Sometimes we may feel like a Hummingbird, when we are faced with the overwhelming challenges of the world, and I am positive that Thomas feels like this when the never-ending train of casualties continues for months and months. But this should remind us, that together we have the power to make serious change, unbelievable change, change that some of us think impossible. Thomas knows that he cannot fix the problem of the Israeli-Arab conflict, but he has the power and ability to change even just one life for the better.

Coming to the end of year 12, as you can imagine, a lot of our conversations have consisted of what it is we are going to do for the rest of our lives. The lucky ones have already decided what it is they wish to do, and for many of the people I have spoken to, these dream jobs mean they picture themselves remaining within our westernised, first world country.

Our relatively stable political, economic and social systems allow these jobs to exist and are the reason that our world (the world that you and I live in here), keeps ticking. Doctors, politicians, baristas, teachers, nurses and tradies are a privilege we experience within our developed world.

I believe that it has never been more important to give back to the wider world than it is now. We live in a time when we as humans face pandemics, climate change and the gap between the haves and the have nots getting wider than ever before, at a time when 689 million people across the globe, live in extreme poverty on \$1.90 or less a day. When most of these people are women and children who have little power to change their circumstances. When it is those, living in extreme poverty, who are dying in greater numbers from COVID due to the lack of basic health services.

Thomas told me about one experience from a recent mission to the Gaza Strip. He was asked to go for dinner with a man he had treated, Mohammad. Mohammad is a member of the Palestinian terror organisation known as HAMAS. Yes, a terror organisation according to the west, known to have murdered hundreds of people. Although HAMAS was elected by the Palestinian people to be their government, the organisation has not been recognised by other governments around the world.

After getting permission to attend the dinner from his HQ, who believed it was better to be on friendly terms with HAMAS, Thomas went to dinner with Mohammad.

To my surprise Thomas said he found that Mohammad was an amazingly kind man who didn't actually bring up his beliefs and was more interested in getting to know Thomas. Thomas asked Mohammad what would satisfy him enough to bring an end to the conflict in GAZA. He said that he fought for a homeland for the Palestinian people, an independent

state where they could make life safe for their children. Thomas told Mohammad that he was crazy to believe this, that he thought the Israelis would obviously never allow this to happen, the past 100 years has proven this. But Mohammad said that he knew this and knew that this would not happen within his lifetime. He prayed this would happen in the next 200 to 300 years. Pushing the context of Muhammad's life and beliefs to the back of my head I forced myself to see this from a different perspective, one that I think can all inspire us.

Mahammad believes in something; we don't all have to agree with it, but he has dedicated his life to his beliefs. He has spent his life fighting for what he believes and plans on doing it for the rest of his life. Mahammad isn't thinking about himself here, he knows he will never get to enjoy complete peace. Instead, he is working for the good of generations to come.

No matter what job we do in life, we can all play our part in working towards a safer future for all humankind. A world where opportunity is available to all, equally.

If your dream is to become an engineer, think about engineering cheap, safe housing for people following natural disasters.

If you become a teacher, think about inspiring young people to work toward building a more equal world.

If you become a scientist, think about working toward new energy systems that limit the damage of climate change.

If you become a Barista or work in a Café, think about supporting sustainable fair-trade producers not multinationals.

For myself, I know I want to work in International Aid and Development, but I know I am only one person. Many people around the developing world rely on Hummingbirds, people like you and I, to do our small part to improve the lives of others.

Please look for moments in your life that have the potential to change your perspective. We are all so much more powerful than we think. It only takes one and the rest will follow.

Thank you.