

Living with strangers essay sample



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In all cities and cultures around the world are there unwritten rules, who people outside this place will not understand. That was what has inspired Siri Hustvedt about New York City. She moved from her little hometown Minnesota to New York, which was a big difference from the life she used to live. Especially the unwritten law: "PRETEND IT ISN'T HAPPENING-Law" fascinates her the most. That is how many in New York are thinking, even though most of them actually catch what are happening around them. It is impressing how they can ignore what people do, how they look like or what they say right beside them, or choose not to react on it, when people do things to bother unconscious. Is it something they do on purpose or is it just their nature to be like that? It is also fantastic how small details, like a smile or a trivial compliment, can change a person's day completely. This is what Siri Hustvedt describes in her essay Living with Strangers, where she will tell about some stories she had experienced while living in New York.

The essay Siri Hustvedt chooses to write is a subjective collection of her thoughts. She has divided into three major parts, and the first one is about her life. She tells the reader her personal back story, which gives an idea of who she is and what she feels about New York and the differences she experiences. The second part is about her theory about the "pretend-it-isn't-happening-law". To prove her point about the law, she tells 3 different stories she had experienced since she moved to New York. What these 3 stories have in common is that there are people present on the place the story takes place, and none of them react on the unacceptable or bizarre thing they are witnesses to. They just tell themselves: "pretend it isn't happening..." In the last part of her essay she discusses. She seemed critical

of the urban law, but over time she acknowledges the advantages. She learned that getting involved can have consequences, which her husband proved by asking a man to stop smoke on a non-smoking-area, and the man just asked “ do you wanna die?”.

Living with Strangers is about the differences between New York City and her rural residence Minnesota. She moved to the city and was very curious over their life style and how they act in front of strangers. She describes the city as something inspiring and different. Where she comes from, saying “ hello” to all on your way is normal, and you are even rude if you did not do it. If you do that in New York most of the people will just look at you, like you are bizarre. Another thing which is big different, is the intimate contact with people, you do not know at all. It is normal in cities like New York to live like that, but where she comes from, it belongs exclusively to family and partners. In New York, a girl sits in a train, when a man suddenly declared his love to her, and she was very uncomfortable with the situation, so when the man leaves the train she was relieved. Another man, who was a witness to the situation, saw her uneasiness and said “ It looks like you have an admirer” to make her feel better and he lifted her out of the solitary misery.

The city as Siri Hustvedt sees it is impersonal and inspiring at the same time. It is as difference as possible to what she is used to live with, and the rules she grew up with - even the unwritten rules. Now, when she is moved to New York, and lives in the city by herself, she experiences things she never have seen or tried before. People live with thousands of other people and still they feel for being home and not minding anyone else business. When they are in public, anything could happen and some will still do not catch it, because

they live in their own bubble, and do not see what is happening around them. They do not want to get in trouble, therefore they do not involve in other people's problems. Even though they actually see things around them, they have taught their self to ignore it, to follow the unwritten "pretend-it-isn't-happening-law", to avoid the trouble.

I can conclude that there are unwritten rules in every single town, and people outside will not always understand those rules. Not understanding those rules, or just break the rules can get you serious consequences no one can foreseen, so it is a risk to take. Siri Hustvedt is one of those people who move to another city, and experience many things she is not used to see, where she comes from. She found out that the unwritten "pretend-it-isn't-happening-law" is a life style most of New Yorker lives by. Many times they have to ignore what is happening around them, to not get involved in trouble. So it is like their nature that they do not meddle in other people's business, to avoid trouble. She also experiences that even though people sometimes feel uncomfortable in the situation they are witness to, the happiness or a smile is not more than a compliment away, and everyone can make a day different to another person, if they want to.