**THIS LIBRARY LETS YOU BORROW PEOPLE INSTEAD OF BOOKS. IT JUST MAY HELP BRIDGE OUR BITTER DIVISIONS**

On a rainy spring morning in Indiana, a White, middle-aged, conservative woman met a transgender woman for a date. [...] This improbable meeting came courtesy of the Human Library, a nonprofit learning platform that allows people to borrow people instead of books. But not just any people. Every "human book" from this library represents a group that faces prejudice or stigmas because of their lifestyle, ethnicity, beliefs, or disability. A human book can be an alcoholic, for example, or a Muslim, or a homeless person, or someone who was sexually abused.

The Human Library stages in-person and online events where "difficult questions are expected, appreciated, and answered." Organizers say they're trying to encourage people to "unjudge" a book by its cover.

This setup leads to some of the most unlikely pairings anyone will ever see. [...] A climate change activist meets with someone who thinks global warming is a hoax. A Black antiracist activist meets with a supporter of former President Trump.

Jamieson says she agreed to be a "book" in the Human Library because she wants to encourage empathy: [...] "There's rough edges around people, and people form opinions based on what other people say or what the TV news says," she says. "And then you get in front of them, and you're sometimes like a nail file, filing off those rough edges."

The Human Library was created 21 years ago by Ronni Abergel, a Danish human rights activist and journalist [...] He wondered if a human library could bring people together like a traditional one. Only in this one, stigmatized or unconventional people would be treated like books -- readers could loan them out, ask them questions, learn something they didn't know and challenge their perceptions. [...] "The library is one of the few places in our community where everyone is welcome", he says. "It's truly the most inclusive institution in our time."

Abergel's idea has spread like a bestseller. The Human Library has hosted events in more than 80 countries, in libraries, museums, festivals and schools. It has more than 1,000 human books in circulation in more than 50 languages, with an especially strong presence in American cities such as Chicago and San Francisco, Abergel says.

"If people check out a book, they won't need a translator. A librarian makes sure to pair readers with someone whose language they can understand. "

Abergel believes the library's mission has taken on more urgency in recent years. People across the globe are becoming more divided by social media bubbles, political beliefs and demagogues who cheer on these divisions to gain power.

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