In a recent post I made the case that it is very easy to dismiss the actions of strangers as being typical for them and atypical for you. We says things like, “That asshole just cut me off!”, or “That cashier was a real bitch.” What we are doing in those moments is a completely normal human behavior, we are using a mental shortcut to save of thinking power. Instead of investing time and effort trying to figure out why someone who doesn’t even know you would treat you so rudely we just go ahead and assume that that is just their modus operandi, that they are always like that to everyone and it’s nothing personal. And to be sure in a thirty second interaction, it *was* nothing personal.

But to assume that the behavior displayed in a thirty second sliver of a person’s day is typical of that whole person’s life is not a reasonable assumption. We are all products of our environment. That is true of the long term, meaning that your personality is due in large part to how you were raised, but it is also true in the present. Your mood is heavily dependent on how hungry you are, how tired you are, how stressed you are, whether you are fearful for your wellbeing. All of these things contribute heavily to your behavior in the moment.

And this is the source of my level-headedness, I remind myself as often as I can that while every person’s life is different, every person’s desires are the same we all want to be happy and health and maybe to have a little extra on the side, we have all, at one time or another, gone through something that was difficult for us and we all hope to achieve a better life going forward. Keeping this in mind gives me an almost zen like ability to forgive the actions of others and a very high level of patience when it comes to dealing with strangers. I have almost never gotten road rage, accept in moment of high adrenaline, like in a near collision, and even that fades quickly after the rush wears off. I always assume that the actions of another person were reasonable in that moment, even if they were not to the greatest benefit for everyone. Because what I have come to realize is that even I make mistakes and even I make poor choices.

What I do that I think other people do less often is I pay attention to the times when I have cut people off, or when I was rude to someone I didn’t know. I those moments I am not trying to ruin someone elses day, I am trying *not* to ruin my own. I have cut people off when I got into the wrong lane, I have been kurt with stranger when I was in a rush. These are not the motivations of an evil person just a flawed person. Some time the motivations for an act can be difficult to understand but that does not mean that they are unreasonable, just that they are unrelatable to you. So as *I* go through my day I try to remember that I am no more put together than anyone else, and as a consequence, that mean that no one else is any more perfect than me. So I try to cut them a little slack.

**And that’s my take on the patience of empathy.**