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Good morning. I am working on micro-insurance schemes for farmers in poor countries, which can offer them protection when they endure drought or other disasters. How is it that I have come to design and implement a survey tool that would allow for the largest study of farming in sub-Saharan Africa in over 20 years?

On 25 May 2005, two days after my university graduation, I found my brother dead in his room from Sudden Cardiac Arrest during the night. He was the picture of health and the pride of my family; and my best friend. In the coming weeks I was subjected to tests and surgery because of a suspected genetic condition, which was later proved false. So, at the age of 21 I learned the fragility of life in a somewhat brutal and scary manner. I could have taken a route of sadness, self-pity and sorrow for the rest of my life. But I wanted to live in a way that would honour my brother and his penchant for making people happy and his ability to see the best in all.

Thus, began my journey towards working in environmental and development economics; it was my way of giving this one beautiful life meaning. I worked hard, getting accolades in all that I had done in academia. But as I wrote more papers on theoretical models I came to see that the 'human face' of climate change is simply hidden beneath faceless calculations.

This became very clear to me when I was present at the Copenhagen COP15 negotiations. I was there to support a small team which formed here at Caux during the Forum for Human Security earlier that year. As I was able to interview representatives from small island states, and observed the inequity of the negotiations, via language barriers etc. I began to experience a real sense of intense helplessness that I had never before known. I know that there were many there doing a great deal to move forward, but from the outside, looking in, the power struggle seemed so engrained in the system, that many were no longer even aware that things could and should be different. I read articles about delegations from the poorest nations who were drinking coffee and eating a piece of fruit because the cost of living was so high in the host country. Angry and disillusioned do not even adequately explain my emotions from that time...

When I was most frustrated there, I thought of my brother. I have so many anecdotes of times when he really saw people for who they are inside, rather than how they appear at first glance. In short, I realised how far the world is from that way of seeing people, but that with the right tools and openness, the goal is attainable.

And what I came to realise is just how dire the need is to come towards relationship-focused, rather than transaction-focused negotiations, which the UN negotiations in Copenhagen seemed to be fundamentally missing. And I can enact this in my own work. This has guided me towards redefining my research topics and has taken me to the developing world. When I first approached Grameen Foundation with this work it was not an automatic, yes, great, let's go. I offered lots and lots of consulting time and energy and field visit free of charge to them to provide a proof of concept. As a result I have made an effort to cultivate real relationships with farmers in Uganda and with that a sense of duty to develop tools that help people like Willy, Miriam, and Batya; rather than something to help those farmers somewhere far from my office in some distant Western capital. The Community Knowledge Workers know that they can email or text message me any time and I will answer no matter where I am. And my visits and stays in the village are now visits to friends and respected colleagues. The more we work together, the greater is my resolve to create systems that respect their cultural needs and wants in the adaptation tools we develop as a team, whether it be a part of the package that is micro-insurance based or a learning and training initiative lead by community knowledge workers within the village.

I try not to look back to my personal losses often, but they come and they are difficult. But then I think about how my brother lived his short time in this world and I think of the quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Happiness is a perfume you cannot pour on others without getting a few drops on yourself."

I hope that we all are able to spread that to others in the form of responsible work to make this world more equitable and beautiful.