It happened in Ingle Park and this event is very much still on my mind. It feels significant. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situation.

It was the report initially that made me think more deeply. It kept coming back in my mind and over the next few days - I begun to think of the situation in lots of different ways. Initially I considered my urge to get to the shop – regardless of the state of the boy. That was an easy way of excusing myself – to say that I had to get to the shop. Then I began to go through all of the agonising as to whether I could have mis-read the situation and really thought that the boy was simply over-dressed or perhaps play-acting or trying to gain sympathy from me or the others. Could I have believed that the situation was all right? All of that thinking, I now notice, would also have let me off the hook – made it not my fault that I did not take action at the time.

I talked with Tom about my reflections on the event – on the incident, on my thinking about it at the time and then immediately after. He observed that my sense of myself as a ‘good person who always lends a helping hand when others need help’ was put in some jeopardy by it all. At the time and immediately after, it might have been easier to avoid shaking my view of myself than to admit that I had avoided facing up to the situation and admitting that I had not acted as ‘a good person’. With this hindsight, I notice that I can probably find it more easy to admit that I am not always ‘a good person’ and that I made a mistake in retrospect than immediately after the event. I suspect that this may apply to other situations.

As I think about the situation now, I recall some more of the thoughts – or were they feelings mixed up with thoughts? I remember a sense at the time that this boy looked
quite scruffy and reminded me of a child who used to play with Charlie. We did not feel
happy during the brief period of their friendship because this boy was known as a bully
and we were uneasy either that Charlie would end up being bullied, or that Charlie
would learn to bully. Funnily enough we were talking about this boy – I now remember
– at the dinner table the night before. The conversation had reminded me of all of the
agonising about the children’s friends at the time. The fleeting thought / feeling was
possibly something like this:– if this boy is like one I did not feel uncomfortable with –
then maybe he deserves to get left in this way. Maybe he was a brother of the original
child. I remember social psychology research along the lines of attributing blame to
victims to justify their plight. Then it might not have been anything to do with Charlie’s
friend.

So I can see how I looked at that event and perhaps interpreted it in a manner that was
consistent with my emotional frame of mind at the time. Seeing the same events without
that dinner-time conversation might have led me to see the whole thing in an entirely
different manner and I might have acted differently. The significance of this whole event
is chilling when I realise that my lack of action nearly resulted in his death – and it might
have been because of an attitude that was formed years ago in relation to a different
situation.

This has all made me think about how we view things. The way I saw this event at the
time was quite different to the way I see it now – even this few days later. Writing an
account at the time would have been different to the account – or several accounts that I
would write now. I cannot know what ‘story’ is ‘true’. The bullying story may be one
that I have constructed retrospectively - fabricated. Interestingly I can believe that story
completely.

(Exercise developed by Jenny Moon. University of Exeter) (Moon, 2004, pp.196-203)

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