

# Conscious Acts of Kindness

Twenty years ago when I began teaching in the graduate program at Notre Dame de Namur University for individuals earning a credential or master's in education, I started a ritual.

It was the reporting of a conscious (not random but planned) act of kindness.

My reason for doing so is that being either a teacher or a student teacher is hard work and research is clear that going to the movies, having dinner with a friend, or bowling is fun while it lasts, but the effects are transitory. The 'hangover' effect from a good deed, however, goes on and on – much like the Energizer bunny.

Theodore Isaac Rubin stated: 'Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom.'

These are tough times (and maybe it's just because I'm getting old) but –

I see sadness in people's faces;

I see and hear too much about physical violence;

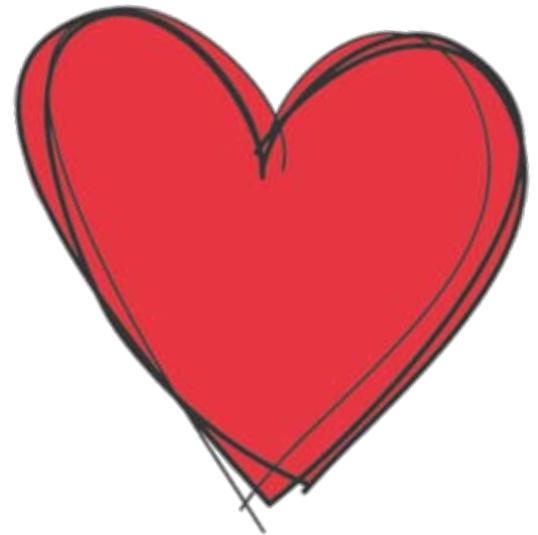
I see and hear about people who sleep under black garbage bags and who carry their world in a shopping cart;

I am afraid that people are forgetting to laugh; and

I am afraid that children are not learning how.

William Wordsworth wrote:

"That best portion of a good man's (or woman's) life,  
His (or her) little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love."



At a local high school in a tiny rural community in Indiana, one of the boys had been diagnosed with leukemia. He was in the throes of chemotherapy, and as a result had lost all his hair. This was very frustrating and embarrassing for him. So, his friends got together and started a "bald campaign." Eighteen of his classmates all shaved their heads so that he would not stand alone. Hurray for them!

While Gandhi was stepping aboard a train one day, one of his shoes slipped off and landed on the track. He was unable to retrieve the shoe, as the train was moving too fast. To the amazement of his companions, Gandhi quickly took off his other shoe and threw it back along the track to land very close to the first. Asked by his fellow passengers as to why, he replied, "One is nothing; two are something!! Now the individual who finds them will have a pair!"

When you are filled with doubt and your self-confidence seems to be a distant memory, do a kind deed. When confusion and chaos appear to reign supreme in your life, perform a kind act. When a person gives in this way, it becomes an anti-depressant. Kindness is a salve for our personal mild attacks of loneliness, fear or despair. And it is an opportunity to add to the joy, the delight, and happiness of the life of another.

We do not always know the effect our kind acts and deeds have on each other; perhaps it will be like the Chinese bamboo plants. The Chinese bamboo tree is planted after the earth has been well-cultivated and prepared – and for the first four years all the growth is underground – the only thing visible is a little bulb and a small shoot coming out of it. Then in the fifth year the plant grows 80 feet. I believe our kind deeds will have similar offshoots.

Albert Schweitzer wrote, “Sometimes our light goes out, but it’s blown into flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light.”

I would add:

Who has sustained your soul?

Who has inspired you to hold on – when all else was pulling you over the cliff?

What was the nicest “act of kindness” you can think of that was done for you? Today? Last week? Last month? Last year?

Several years ago, I had lithotripsy surgery for kidney stones. At the same time I had a new arrival in my house – a brand new puppy (a Christmas present from my parents.) Several of my friends got together and came to my house on a daily basis to make sure we were both fed and watered and that the puppy was exercised. They even worked on her potty training. How kind was that?

When I worked at Nueva, we had a shy, reserved parent who was taken under the wing of a Nueva staff member. Mostly she listened to this individual and gave some friendly, casual advice. When this parent left the school, she gifted the staff member with a gorgeous quilt and said, “For all your many gracious and thoughtful acts of kindness.”

You, for your acts may not receive a gorgeous quilt, but you will receive much more.

And so my challenge to you is for each of us to perform as many acts of kindness as possible. My request is for each of us to:

1. Seek out opportunities
2. Tune in to our surroundings
3. Pay attention and be aware of the other’s personal need
4. Then perform a kind act of deed
5. And, please make your act of kindness as anonymous as possible

My ultimate goal is to have 'conscious acts of kindness' spread around and around the world creating a cocoon of compassion.

I don't think we are there yet but I am encouraged by an incident that happened recently.

I was standing in line at Cost Plus – and the person ahead of me at the cash register had just purchased a tin of ginger snaps. When he completed the purchase, he began unwrapping it. Then he turned and made a brief speech – “My girlfriend is taking a psychology class and one of her assignments is to do a ‘conscious act of kindness’ every week. I’ve adopted the assignment as well and so here is mine. Please have a cookie.” And he passed them down the row.

I certainly indulged and chuckled all the way home.

What will be your "conscious act of kindness" this week?

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<<http://www.6seconds.org/2011/10/10/conscious-acts-of-kindness/>>.

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