

Kindness – the past present & future

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As a child I was surrounded by people, images, stories and songs that instilled, in my opinion, the greatest of the virtues, Kindness. The Church seal of the Lion, Jesus and the Lamb symbolising Peace, was hung prominently in the foyer at Hughesdale, it was painted by my father John. There was the very handsome, Jesus tenderly holding a lamb, surrounded by adoring animals and little children. I was taught stories of Kindness, the Good Samaritan, healing the leper, dining with the sinner Zacchaeus and the bleeding woman who dared touch the hem of Jesus's garment! One of my favourite hymns was All Things Bright and Beautiful... another, the campfire song, Peace.

My family, church community, neighbours ensured I was raised in and was surrounded by protective and loving Kindness, but as I entered my youth and adult years, attending Leadership camps and stepping into broader society, I was awakened to the reality of the unkind world, its unjust poverty, the plight of refugees, human rights violations, political and religious manipulation, corporate greed, lies and destruction, racism, sexism and so many social and cultural practices leaving me horrified, sometimes overwhelmed with feelings of grief, anger and despair. I learnt from my Mother, feminist thought, my Grandfather, the workplace collective, people like Rick Sarre and Gough Whitlam exposed the victims of unkind policies, ideologies, systems, superstition, tradition and aspects of our culture, In My World, In My Time and In My Place. This is when I understood Justice and The Golden Rule, both of which are acts of Kindness.

Some acts of Kindness are simple, easily practised and appreciated in our daily lives and, some are fierce, the true intended recipient not visible or even thought of as worthy, the kindness giver, idealistic, naive or an annoying activist.

Working with Ambulance Victoria, being professional and disciplined is a given, but being kind will always improve our situation. It's easy for me to offer person centred care, a smile, a gentle touch, validation, to actively listen and to empathise. I also work with my dog Anna in AV Peer Support. The power of animals is well understood and as a team we touch base with frontline Paramedics. We offer an ear, encouragement, services and understanding to the many experiences they have. Being on the receiving end of generous acts of compassion and care, occasionally very hurtful words, and my own regretful acts of unkindness,

has deepened my empathy for others. The beauty of kindness is you don't have to love or even know someone to be kind and make a difference.

Humans have been progressing slowly towards a kinder world thanks to universal access to education, science, the arts, democracy and more recently with its liberating technology, the internet. Handheld and readily accessible photography and audio have for the first time, given voice to millions of otherwise hidden victims of oppression, to their allies and their advocates. This is where, what I call fierce kindness has entered the zeitgeist and it is challenging every part of the human experience on the planet, our past, present and our future. This is where my increasingly uncomfortable cognitive dissonance was resolved in one jaw dropping, face palming instance, viewing a speech about Kindness in action (Veganism). So much rubbish fell away from me in that one moment as I allowed compassion to flood my heart and mind and I put it all into action. It was visceral. It was liberating. I instantly and organically expanded my circle of compassion to everyone, everything in nature, and this is where my kindness has become deeper and fierce. I acknowledge the abhorrent cruelty and disrespect, of unimaginable suffering, at a scale that is horrifying and mindboggling. I see the injustice to other animals solely because they are not human (speciesism). I know about the destruction of the environment, deforestation, poisoned rivers, lost wildlife, dead oceans, pollution and disease is a direct result of this human activity. I recognise greed, gluttony and every one of the 7 deadly sins and I know the virtues are our only counteraction. My understanding, of this injustice, intersects with all forms of oppression and discrimination. Kindness, or Action resulting from our empathy, originates in our heart as compassion, sometimes it originates in our mind from critical and rational thought. There is a Kindness Movement, it's touching, exciting and healing us as it manifests itself in the liberation of all that share this planet. HEART, MIND and GUTS. I just love it.

Tip for the day

If you're considering buying a goldfish, rethink! Science tells us that fishes are social animals, who have individual personalities, who value their life, who, in their natural world, live up to 30 years. A goldfish is bored, lonely and lives a purposeless life in a small glass bowl.

all creatures great and small
be kind to all kind