

## **Kindness: Cultivating My Second Nature**

(Original)

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*(Age 17, U.S.A.)*

She was a cashier at Panera Bread—the one located across the street from Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I don't remember what she looked like, and I never learned her name, but her words will remain etched into my memory forever. "You are beautiful," she told me, "and don't ever let nobody tell you otherwise."

I am not used to being complimented by strangers. I have albinism, a genetic condition that makes my skin, hair, and eyes unusually pale. Because of this, I have received countless curious stares and was a favored target for bullies in elementary school. I am also decidedly introverted: I am independent, reflective, and deeply emotional, and, for the most part, I am comfortable being ignored. Nonetheless, I have discovered that I thrive most when I am the recipient of others' kindness, and I feel most fulfilled when I bestow kindness upon others.

In the 1990s, the British anthropologist, Robin Dunbar, proposed that humans are capable of maintaining around 150 stable social relationships at a time. Considering that the current global population is just over 7.7 billion, each person on Earth has social relationships with only 0.000002% of all other people. This is an unimaginably small proportion. And yet, evolutionary theory holds that every human on Earth is related to every other human. So, in the end, no one is truly a stranger, and no one should be treated like a stranger.

I keep this principle in mind every day. In times of personal difficulty, it reminds me that, no matter how ostracized I may feel from myself and those around me, I am still human, just like everyone else. It has taught me to treat others with acceptance and compassion, no matter how different they may be from me, and it has given me confidence that, if I do so, I will inspire others to follow my example.

Over the past few years, I have worked to make kindness second nature. I began by treating myself kindly, which meant living a life of integrity, responsibility, and positivity. I practise diligent self-care. I challenge myself to take risks, ask for help when I need it, and

not become attached to unnecessary things. As a part of my kindness toward myself, I have cut down on my material possessions, which has allowed me to look inward and become more self-aware. I have changed my sleep and exercise habits; dedicated more time to things I enjoy, such as reading, writing, art, and music; and put effort into controlling my emotions.

Because I have become more kind to myself, I am able to be more kind to others. I have become more observant of others' needs, which has helped me spread positivity and confidence. I have become more generous because I know that even the smallest compliment or gift can make a profound difference in someone's life. My own struggles with mental health issues have taught me that everyone deserves to be treated with courtesy and compassion, even if they are a stranger. Since I first began trying to withhold negativity and anger, I have become more open-minded, more patient, and more thoughtful.

As a measure of kindness toward others, I have become more kind toward the Earth. I have always been environmentally conscious, but, last year, I decided to change my ways more drastically. I have stopped eating meat and consuming single-use plastics. I also walk and use public transport more often, as opposed to driving—which is an additional kindness toward my family. These changes have taught me to think more carefully about each action I take and have infused kindness into my everyday mindset.

The adjective "kind"—according to the Oxford English Dictionary, "having or showing a friendly, generous, and considerate nature"—derives from the Old English "gecynde", meaning "natural" or "native". I am not surprised by this etymology. Even in my worst moments, kindness feels natural to me, and I know that it exists in every person alive, even if it has yet to be uncovered. By living a life of humility, generosity, and social consciousness, I aim to inspire others toward kindness, just as that stranger in Philadelphia inspired me.

Reference:

Oxford English Dictionary. "Kind." *Lexico*. Accessed 13 Jun. 2019.

<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/kind>