

Simple Acts of Kindness

(Original)

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We live in a world where the 'self' has been greatly overemphasized. Conferences, talk shows, seminars and school programs have been dedicated to self love, self actualization, self preservation, self esteem and believing in yourself. And as much as these lessons are great, we could fall into the trap of selfishness by default, thereby creating a bunch of people who would only ever go out of their way to help other people if it favours them.

The world is beautifully diverse and because of that diversity and difference in the makeup of each individual, we can truly appreciate the concept of multiple perspective. But in all that diversity, the one language we all speak is kindness. Mark Twain couldn't have been more correct when he said that; "kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see". Everyone responds to kind words or kind gestures with a resulting goodness of their own, and I call that the ripple effect of kindness.

Kindness is the language of humanity, it is the faith we have in the goodness of the human race. And even though it does not cancel out all the badness in this world, it reminds us that inside everyone of us is an innate goodness that is either buried under a whole lot of hurt, or nurtured into tiny acts of kindness. Kind gestures do not need to be grand or exaggerated, it is the simple things; It is the smile you put on the face of that old lady when you give her your seat in a filled commuter bus, it is the ridiculously inexpensive plate of food you give to that little hungry child on the street corners, it is trying to make that sick teenager in the hospital- who mourns her isolation- smile again. True kindness, is doing something for someone who could never repay you for the act.

I am a student nurse in a teaching hospital in eastern Nigeria, and on one of my many postings to the wards, I encountered a particular incidence that has left a mark on my life. During the course of my training, I worked in a pediatric oncology unit and I met this little girl, barely 9 years old. Her name was Blessing and she had Hodgkins lymphoma that left her stomach bloated but made her bones painfully prominent. I would never forget her eyes; sunken, but old, like she was familiar with pain and even resigned to it. Her parents

had just been in a fire accident and she had no one to take care of her. She was in the hospital alone and afraid, so we didn't blame her when she became sullen and disrespectful. She only ever had one visitor; another young girl about her age who would come from another children's ward nearby and sit with Blessing and tell her funny jokes. This girl (I never did catch her name) would sit with Blessing a little while and then would walk round our ward making everyone laugh before she left. She did this for a couple of weeks, everyday, till one day she didn't show up. Then we heard she had died, after weeks of struggling with a rare type of renal disease.

I didn't much know her, but her life had left a mark on mine and many others especially Blessing. How someone so young could be so positive about life despite her own pain was something I would not forget in a hurry. She chose to be kind, even when it was not convenient. A lesson people thrice her age did not know; that you only truly live when in the service of others. She didn't get as many years as she deserved, but she had mattered in the most important ways. That is the world we could have, where everyone is taught that more important than self actualization and the love of self, is a true selfless love of others. If we all learned that lesson, then the world would truly be full of kindness.