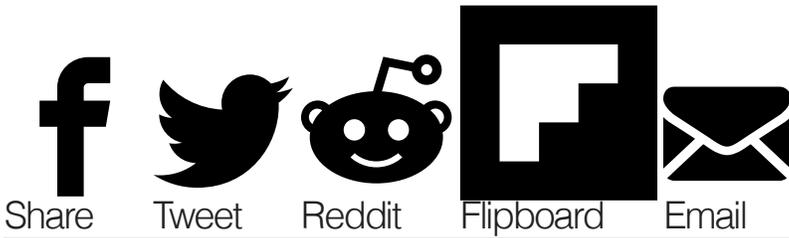


Promoting the power of kindness



In 2000, as part of a response to bullying, Modesto, California's Johansen High School instituted a course in world religions. Sherry McIntyre said she was the only instructor willing to teach it. "To be quite honest, a lot of people were afraid of it," she said.

"Why were they afraid?" asked correspondent Mo Rocca.

"Because it's a very delicate subject," McIntyre replied. "And if you don't do it right, there's a lot of fallout. And wars are fought over this stuff, so it's a pretty scary topic to teach.

"But I'm pretty much not afraid of almost anything," she laughed.

McIntyre's goal is to promote understanding by drawing connections among the world's major religions. "I teach the Golden Rule; that is the thread," she said. "I've had students say, 'Well, these religions are really all the same, aren't they?' They're different, but at the heart they're all asking for us to treat each other with kindness."

"You're teaching a course on world religions, but are you also kind of secretly teaching about kindness?" asked Rocca,

"Yes, I actually am."

McIntyre is just one crusader of kindness featured in a new documentary, "The Antidote," on Amazon Prime. Directed by Kahane Cooperman and John Hoffman, the film was inspired by what Hoffman sees as an increasingly dangerous cultural and political climate.

"There has been such division and such rancor that if that division starts eating away at these common decencies that we exhibit towards one another, then our democracy might truly be in danger," Hoffman said.

Kindness, he and Cooperman believe, is the antidote. But what does "kindness" mean? The word itself has been nearly beaten to death, reduced to a slogan on a par with "nice."

"I think kindness implies action, more so than nice," said Cooperman.

"I would never be compelled to make a film about niceness!" Hoffman laughed. "My gut tells me there's not enough there."

And so, the film highlights people for whom kindness isn't a random act, but a full-time commitment. Cooperman said, "Kindness is a fierce tool and a weapon for change."

Asked to define kindness, De'amon Harges, a community organizer with Indianapolis' Broadway United Methodist Church, said, "The first real cornerstone is love thy neighbor."

To him, that means *listening*. "Being very curious is an avenue to being a good listener."

Known as the "Roving Listener," Harges starts by asking not what people in his hardscrabble neighborhood need, but what they can *give*.

"We normally ask people how poor they are, and how can we help them, instead of asking: what gifts do you have and how can we celebrate those?" Harges said. "There are 45 gardeners in a four-block radius around my house. Who knew that was there?"

Rocca said, "You're like a talent scout of the soul?"

"Yes! Yeah, something like that," Harges laughed. "I just kidnap people to fall in love with each other."

And to help each other

Three years ago, Harges started the Biker Boyz & Girlz Shop, where kids learn how to fix bicycles, along with marketing and communication skills.

Where do the bicycles come from? "People donate 'em," Harges said. "The last two years, we got a shipment from the police department."

And neighbors who need bikes, get them. As explained in "The Antidote," one bike shop worker said, "We've had people come up and was like, you know, 'I really need to get a bike to get to a job interview,' or something like that, and a lot of times we'll go loan them a bike so that they can go do that."

Rocca said, "I think a lot of the time when people hear the word 'kindness,' it's lost a lot of its power. It's just like the word 'nice,' it feels kind of anemic. But you're describing something much more muscular."

"Yeah," Harges said. "It's a stance. It's something that we decide to do and we stand by. It's also a practice, right? It's hard to be kind sometimes."

Cooperman said, "You could drop in anywhere and find people like this, everyday people doing these kinds of things."

Another subject in "The Antidote" is Dr. Jim O'Connell, the founding physician of the Boston Health Care for the Homeless program, which serves more than 12,000 each year. Perhaps no one is the victim of more un-kindness than the homeless.

Rocca asked Dr. O'Connell, "How do the people you serve see themselves?"

"If there was a universal feeling that I would gather from the people we serve is that they are not only poor, but they are very lonely," he replied. "Homeless people wander the city all day long. No one ever says their name with any kind of dignity. Often they never say their name."



Dr. Jim O'Connell is the founding physician of Boston Health Care for the Homeless. **"THE ANTIDOTE"**

Thirty-six years ago, O'Connell was planning to become an oncologist, when his mentor suggested he work for a year at a shelter. The shelter's chief nurse told Dr. O'Connell to set aside the stethoscope and the medical bag. "And she put them aside, and I had to soak feet," he recalled.

Yes, soak the feet of the homeless.

"It was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, because I was stopped in my tracks," he said. "I was used to going a hundred miles an hour. And during that two months, I probably

learned most of the foundations of the care we now provide."

"That act would help build trust?" asked Rocca.

"It does. It's surprising. First of all, it flips the power structure, so that you're at the feet of the person and they are in charge. And I think just that – the symbolism of that, and the practicality of that – let people open up."

Rocca asked, "When we pass a homeless person on the street, what should we do?"

"The most important thing you can do is to look the person in the eye and just acknowledge them," Dr. O'Connell replied. "Really, what they're looking for is not to be ignored. Just saying hello to somebody, rather than ignoring them, is really, really powerful."

Kindness is a power we all have. We just need to decide to use it.

To watch a trailer for "The Antidote" click on the video player below: