The Power of Kindness

In a Time of Hate and Fear

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Notes from the Author

Are you discouraged by the chaos, hate and fear in the world around us?

Do you have a vision of a better world ... where love and compassion are the driving force in our interactions with one another and in society as a whole?

If your vision is similar to ours, we invite you to become part of our Kindness Community and help us add to a world-wide movement of kindness and compassion that will be a force for good and balance the negativity of current trends that promote hatred, fear, and exclusion of others.

My husband, Larry, has been a companion on my kindness journey, and we have inspired each other along the way. The ideas I share here reflect our shared insights.

First, I want to be clear that we do not have all the answers. We found some for us that changed our lives, but each journey is unique, so the answers that worked for us may not work for you.

But we hope the process that led us to our answers will support you as you seek your own.

Here’s what we do know:

Kindness Can Be a Journey of Self-Discovery

Since you are reading this, you are already practicing kindness in your life. We believe that we all have an innate tendency to connection with others. When we notice the ways in which we are already being kind, and the kindnesses being shown to us, we become more aware of the power of kindness in our lives. That inspires us to have even more of the joy and satisfaction that comes when we connect in a loving way with the people in our lives.

We have found that it is easy to be kind in many situations, but more difficult in others. Some people seem to invite our kindness. Others, not so much. We have found that part of our journey has been finding ways to get past our resistance to kindness with those who do not seem to “deserve” it. That is part of our inner journey – finding ways to open our hearts to more people.

But we all start where we are. There is no right or wrong on this journey. We each have our own kindness path, and we need to walk in our own way – one step at a time.

Our lives changed when we made a conscious choice to let our hearts lead us. As a result, our relationships with the people closest to us and those we encounter in our daily lives became richer and more satisfying.

That is what we wish for you.
I have written this guide to share with you some of the insights that we have gained from our journey, hoping they will help you find a more peaceful way of traveling your own kindness path.

Enjoy your journey. It is a gift.

“Kindness is Love with Its Work Boots On”

When Larry first read this quote (from the 2008 movie, “The House Bunny”), he came to me all excited, because it so clearly represented our idea that kindness is more than a nice feeling about other people. It demands that we put it into practice in our daily lives.

Love is not a wishy-washy feeling that leads people to give in to others. It demands that we take a stand for what we see as good. It asks us to get off the couch and out in the world and carry the power of love into whatever challenging or messy situation we encounter. It means bringing light and love into places of darkness. It means encouraging and uplifting the people we encounter.

Sometimes being kind is easy, a natural part of our day. We smile at a stranger or say something pleasant to the check-out person in the grocery store. Sometimes it requires us to get up earlier or give up some leisure time so we can help at a local charity or help a neighbor who can’t easily get out to the store or just needs someone to sit and keep her company for a while.

Sometimes it means being courageous – taking a stand that is not popular or that involves some risk. Standing up for others is not always easy. It may expose us to ridicule, the loss of a friend, or even physical danger. But when we are serious about living with kindness, we understand the power we have to make a difference in the world.

So, we thank you for putting on your work boots and taking your love out into the world. Together, we really are making our world a better, more loving place.

How to Claim Your Power in the Current Chaos

This is not a time for despair. It is a time for hope and purposeful action. If you feel disempowered by the chaos in the world around us, we invite you to look at this in a new way. The choices we make every day contribute to the kind of society we live in and even the direction of our country.

All around us we see hatred and fear of others, the glorification of excessive wealth, disdain for people who are struggling, the use of anger and violence instead of civil discourse.
There are many ways we can respond. We can become angry and identify someone we can blame. We can let hate for them grow within us until we add our hate to the already toxic mix around us. We can think about what these changes mean for our future and let fear creep in until we are sick with despair and we feel powerless.

Or we can choose not to sit back and let hate run the world. We can claim our power to be a force for good at a time when the world needs us more than ever before.

Living with Kindness means deciding to take the best part of us and expanding how we express it in the world. It means showing up as a channel for love wherever we go, in every encounter with others, no matter how they are showing up.

It is a path of power!

We invite you to become involved in our Kindness Community by sharing your insights and experiences with others. We are all learning as we go, and there is power in sharing with others on a similar path.

If you have not yet joined our community and would enjoy receiving inspiration and encouragement on your journey, we invite you to join us at http://www.livingwithkindness.com/.

Together we can make a powerful difference in the world.

**Why Kindness Matters**

Of course, we feel better when we’re being kind to others than we do when we’re being impatient or annoyed. A simple act of consideration - a smile, an encouraging comment, or just acknowledging someone with a nod of the head – makes us feel good. This simple act actually changes our physiology. Our body becomes flooded with chemicals that improve our health.

Each time we respond to someone with a gentle acknowledgement, we notice how much we have lifted their spirits and our own. It feels good, and the more we find opportunities to keep spreading kindness, the better we feel. We benefit as much as others do from our kindness. But our simple kind act has a much greater impact on the world than we realize.

**Kindness is Contagious**

Every word we say and the energy behind it has an impact. A sincere compliment usually cheers a person up. That simple act may lift his mood and change the way he greets other people, which in turn, cheers them up a bit.
Kindness feels good, even to those observing it. It changes the mood of people around you, and soon they’re spreading it as they go through their day.

Just making a commitment to live with kindness will make a difference in the world. You’re already doing it. So how can you take it to another level?

**We Neutralize Hate with Love and Compassion**

When we react to expressions of hatred or judgment from others with our own version of the same energies, that only adds more negativity to the situation.

But we have another option. We can allow the hate of others to be our incentive to inject love into the mix.

We can step out of that reactive place within us into one of loving kindness – where we listen, we really hear others and we allow them to be as they are – without judgment. We can respond with kindness no matter how they show up. This is not a passive state, but one of deliberate action from a conscious decision to be kind in our response.

Every act of kindness is an expression of love in the world. It has a healing impact on the receiver of the kindness, on the giver and on everyone who witnesses the act.

By choosing this path, you are a powerful force for good in the world. You DO make a difference. This is love in action.

So how do we walk this Kindness Path every day?

**Step #1**

**Decide What You Want**

“Create a vision for the life you really want and work relentlessly towards making it a reality.”

… Roy T. Bennett

What kind of a world do you want to live in? Get a clear vision of what that looks like for you.
Our vision is a world in which we remember our kinship with one another. We all live peacefully together with kindness and consideration. We listen to others, so we can understand them rather than judge or condemn them because they have made different choices than we have.

Love in action shows up as kindness in our personal encounters – with family and friends, but also with strangers. It is considering their needs as well as our own and taking action to support them in whatever way we can – whether with a smile and kind word in passing or an offer of more help where it is needed.

We live in a compassionate society in which we come together to ensure that everyone’s needs are met, and rights are protected. No one is excluded, neglected, or abused in any way. Everyone has access to good education, and all have opportunities to express their talents, contribute to others, and receive fair compensation that will enable them to live a fulfilling life.

We love this beautiful world we live in and we feel kindship with nature, appreciating how our lives are interconnected with hers. We protect our environment from destruction, and work to replenish areas that have been destroyed.

This is our vision of the world. What is yours? Write it down as an inspiration for your journey.

Step #2
Decide How You Want to Show Up in the World

“A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more”

… Rosabeth Moss Kanter

Our vision of a kinder, more peaceful world is not just whimsical thinking. We know it is possible – not overnight, but over time - as more and more of us decide to live our lives with love and compassion, seeing no stranger, but remembering that we are all family.

We are called to be the change we want to see in the world, but how do we do that?

We do it by bringing awareness to every action we take as we go through our day, and then deciding if it is adding to or working against our vision of the world that we want to live in.

We each get to ask what we are being called to do in our daily lives. For many of us, walking a kindness path is answering that call.

Our kindness practice not only enriches our lives, but it also enriches the world we live in.
We all have within us the potential for anger, fear, hatred, intolerance. It’s easy to get angry, to be offended, to judge the other person as wrong and to react according to that idea. We also have within us love, non-judgment, and compassion.

When we choose to live with kindness, we are choosing to stop reacting out of fear, judgment, or anger. When those feelings arise, we can acknowledge them, but make a clear decision not to let them run our lives.

There is a Cherokee parable:

An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life…

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.
“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is filled with anger, envy, greed, arrogance, resentment, self-pity, and lies. The other is full of joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, compassion, truth and faith. This same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old chief simply replied, “The one you feed.”

We all get to choose which one we feed.

**Step #3**

**Tap into the Power of Your Heart**

*“It is the heart always that sees, before the head can see.”*  
… Thomas Carlyle

The heart is the seat of our power. It holds wisdom that the head cannot reach. It’s in our hearts where we remember that we are connected and that we belong to each other.

Everything starts here. What we hold in our hearts shows up in our lives – not just in what we give out, but also in what comes back to us.

When we live from our hearts, we become a channel for love to flow out into the world with its transforming power. We remember that we are all one family.
We are all energy beings, and whatever feelings we hold within us determine the energy that radiates out to those around us. By choosing love, we are not just choosing a wonderful feeling. We are choosing to show up as the highest expression of who we are.

This enables us to relate to others without judgment or disapproval. We are open, receptive, and able to respond with compassion and patience. Others feel the loving energy and they respond to it, as well as to our words and actions.

This sounds simple, but we often find ourselves slipping back to our everyday mind and reacting with annoyance or even just the frustration over the physical and emotional demands of our lives. This is understandable.

Be patient with yourself. Take it one step at a time.

We can choose to bring love into any situation. We can step back, take a deep breath, and respond with kindness, no matter how the other person is acting. It takes practice, but over time, it becomes easier.

It is all about how we want to be in the world. Do we want to be in charge of how we show up in the world? By reacting to others in the way they act toward us, we are giving away our power.

It is easy to get pulled off the kindness path, but tapping back into your heart will return you to your center of power.

**Step #4**

**Put Judgment on Hold**

"*It's not things that upset us, it's our judgment about things.*"

… Epictetus

The key is to find ways to see people and accept them as they are.

Sometimes daily interactions can be annoying – a rude comment can trigger a negative feeling. It’s easy to take offense.

How do we get past our judgment and respond with kindness?

It’s all about the meaning we give to it. We can take offense – or we can choose to see it in a different way.
Shift to Understanding

I heard once that the person who takes offense is adding as much negativity to the world as he who gives offense. That inspired me to look at myself and accept responsibility for my reactions to others. When feeling offended, I realized I was reacting to the meaning I was giving to the incident, without knowing the circumstances or the intention of the person I felt offended by.

That person being rude is probably having a bad day or a life that is daily much more challenging than the one I get to live. I do not know any of the circumstances of their life, but I don’t need to know. I can give them space to over-react by not taking it personally.

Rather than reacting, we can decide not to respond at all. Sometimes, a simple kind word may diffuse the situation “You are really busy today,” may bring a smile of relief that someone noticed.

Sometimes the most compassionate thing we can do is just listen. You might find a gift in hearing other people’s stories. It will open doors to understanding. When we know about someone’s life experience, we gain insights into their current reactions to life.

As Father Greg Boyle wrote, “When judgment ceases to pull all the oxygen out of the room, an astonishing love takes its place.”

That is the goal that I am reaching for – not nearly there yet but making progress.

Step #5
Monitor Your Thoughts and Words

“What we speak becomes the house we live in.”

... Hafiz

The thoughts we think and the words we say - to ourselves and to others - affect our feelings about the people we meet and how we act toward them.

How do we let go of thoughts that prevent us from connecting with others?

Start to Notice What You Are Thinking

What are you thinking when you approach the checkout person in a store? If you hear her being rude to the customer in front of you, do you decide that she does not deserve your kindness?
Now, ask yourself how you can see the situation from a more positive perspective. Can you shift to seeing her having a bad day and needing some love right now?

Our thoughts always pave the way for our next step.

**Be Aware of the Words You Are Saying**

Once you have decided to shift your thinking about the situation, you need to monitor the words you say to others about it. Words have power.

When others ask you how things are going, do you complain about someone you encountered and talk about how badly they behaved? If you do, you will relive that experience of feeling offended. Do you want that energy back in your life?

Why not talk about a time when you acted with kindness and the other person responded in kind. Doesn’t that energy feel better?

Your words carry energy, and they affect you as well as anyone who hears them. What energy do you want to carry within you and put out in the world?

Be patient with yourself. This takes practice. But first it takes awareness. We start by noticing our own thoughts and feelings and how we express them. Then we notice the response of others to what we say to them.

When my daughter, Christie, was a pre-teen, she was with me in a store as I was checking out. I don’t remember what was said, but I felt the cashier had been rude to me and I responded in kind. I remember feeling a certain self-righteousness – How dare she talk to me that way!

I noticed Christie looked uncomfortable. When I asked her later about it, she told me she had been embarrassed. That was a wake-up call for me. It forced me to look at myself, and what I saw wasn’t pretty.

I decided to watch my reactions to others. It has been a long process. I still catch myself reacting with annoyance or impatience from time to time, but I feel better, now, about how I usually show up in the world than I used to feel.

Our automatic reactions are habitual. Changing them takes time and a desire to change how we interact with others.

It is a journey. We take one step at a time as we’re changing a habit. Notice how much better you feel when you bring kindness rather than annoyance with you when you go out in the world.
Step #6

Expand Your Kindness Journey

“*In compassion and grace, be like the sun.*”

… Rumi

Living with Kindness means deciding to take the best part of us and expanding how we express it in the world. It means showing up as a channel for love wherever we go, in every encounter with others, no matter how they are showing up.

It’s easy and rewarding to expand our kindness journey by joining a local organization as a volunteer. One advantage of this step into service to those in need is the opportunity it offers us for our own personal growth. Often, we are asked to step out of our comfort zone and expand our understanding of others less fortunate – perhaps some of whom we may have judged in the past.

Over time, we realize that we are on a journey of transformation. We notice that we are bringing more love into the world, and it is enriching our lives as well as the lives of those we encounter.

Nobody has taken the concept of love in action to a higher level than Father Gregory Boyle, whose work with former gang members and ex-offenders has brought him world-wide acclaim.

He has had a deep impact on us, so we want to introduce you to him. - see his TED Talk - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipR0kWt1Fkc

He shares with us an expanded vision of a compassionate society:

“*Imagine a circle of compassion and imagine no one is standing outside that circle. That is the goal and to that end, we stand with the people who suffer, with the poor and the powerless, the voiceless.*

*And to that end, we stand with the people whose dignity has been denied and we stand with those whose burdens are more than they can bear.*

*And when you’re really lucky, you get to stand with the easily despised and the readily left out. You get to stand with the demonized, so the demonizing will stop, and with the disposable, so the day will come when we stop throwing people away.*”

As a pastor in the poorest Catholic parish, with the highest concentration of gang activity in Los Angeles, Father Boyle sought a compassionate and effective approach to gang members. He eventually left his parish duties and helped found Homeboy Industries, which became the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and re-entry program in the world.
This not-for-profit organization serves high risk men and women by offering hope, training and job skills, with the goal of helping them redirect their lives and become contributing members of their families and their community.

Father Boyle says that this work arose, in part, from questions he lived with:

“There’s an idea that’s taken root in the world … that there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives. How do we stand against that idea?”

“How do we achieve a compassion that allows us to stand in awe of what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment of how they carry it?”

By serving some of the most demonized people in our society, Father Boyle and his staff and volunteers show us the rewards of taking loving kindness into places that had been written off as untouchable. They created a truly safe and loving place where lives are transformed – the lives of those who are served and those who serve them, as well.

“All of us are called to go the very edges of the circle of compassion with sure and certain hope that if you stand there, the circle will widen. And people who are outside will be let in.”

That is an invitation to all of us to expand our own circle of compassion. When we do, we will be transformed in the process.

But we each get to choose the path that is right for us. Every act of kindness makes a difference in the world. You are in charge of deciding how you share your love with others.

However you do it, you are a force for good and you do make a difference in the world.

**Step #7**

**Nurture Yourself**

“*Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.*”

… Anne Lamott

When we find ourselves feeling scattered, going in too many directions at once, we need to take time to get centered and focused.
Create Rituals that Support You

If you spend quiet time every day to reflect on your life, you have a daily ritual. Perhaps you have a daily practice of prayer and meditation, or you set time aside to read something uplifting.

For some people, a morning cup of coffee is a ritual - alone or with a loved one.

Larry and I begin our morning with breakfast, then use our coffee and tea time to be present with each other – talking about any dreams we had or interesting ideas we read, often sharing uplifting quotes that trigger discussion about the things that matter to us.

This became a morning ritual – a time to connect with each other and with the loving, wise power within that guides our lives. We now begin every day feeling focused and excited about taking whatever steps the day holds for us.

Rituals can take many forms. The important thing is that they support you, uplift you and give you a sense of peace.

Do Something You Enjoy Every Day

You might connect with a friend and have a little adventure or just a heart-to-heart conversation,

You may also be nourished by time to yourself. It might be as simple as a book by your bed that you read at night or a TV show that makes you laugh. You can play music you enjoy when you take a quiet break - or as you’re doing your daily chores.

Think about activities that give you pleasure. Then be sure to incorporate some of them into your life now.

Keep a Journal

A journal provides you a way to reflect on your day and make sense of all that happened. By recording your interactions with others, you have a way to acknowledge yourself for things that went well and to think about those that didn’t. Then you can set an intention for tomorrow and ask your inner wisdom to guide you to a better approach next time.

Take Care of Your Health

Be sure to eat well and get a good night’s sleep. If at all possible, take a short walk or a longer hike during the day. Even 15 minutes at a time will make a difference in your physical and emotional health.

Laugh Every Day

Few things are as transforming as laughter. Studies have shown that laughter contributes to the healing of physical illness. It can certainly lighten a gloomy day and improve our emotional health as well.
When we care for ourselves, we feel more balanced and centered, and we are able to take the best of who we are out into the world.

Always Look for the Gift

I have this crazy belief that there is a blessing in everything that shows up in my life. Often it is disguised as a burden or a tragedy, but in time, when I choose to notice, the gift presents itself to me.

We are all going through a challenging time right now. The world seems to be spinning out of control, and it's easy to feel confused, and fearful about the future.

At the same time, we see and hear about people who are stepping up and helping one another in ways they were not previously. People are coming together and creating more connected communities.

Since the COVID-19 crisis first began affecting our community, I am encouraged to see how many people are reaching out to others.

One example is the Nextdoor on-line platform that enables people in local areas to connect with each other to share neighborhood happenings, to ask for help or to offer help to those they don’t know.

In our area, several people offered to run errands, walk dogs, or help in other ways for people who are at higher risk during the pandemic. Others are making face masks and offering them as a gift to their neighbors.

Many people, laid off because of the pandemic, have put on a different hat and offered their services in the community. Others have stood up and hired them, then used Nextdoor to encourage their neighbors to do the same.

This is just one of many ways that our communities are becoming more connected.

In my excursions on the internet, I have been pleased to see how the same impulse for connection is bringing people together in new ways, despite times of enforced physical separation. In so many cities, where people were under orders to stay at home, they used their balconies to connect with each other – often through music.

The internet has also become a channel for individual connection. People are reaching out to old friends and distant family members, sometimes renewing previous relationships.
Let’s make our lives a celebration of love in action

As we find new ways to connect, to one another, we are remembering our kinship, and we are laying the foundation for a more peaceful world.

About the Author

I am the mother of two wonderful grown children and grandmother of three. I am also a wife, daughter, sister, mother-in-law, aunt, cousin, niece, friend, colleague, neighbor and citizen. Every relationship has added to my understanding of myself and others – and whatever wisdom I have acquired has come through many failures as well as successes.

My husband, Larry, has been my constant companion for the last 22 years, and we have supported and encouraged each other on our kindness journey. One underlying theme of our life has been our desire for Love to be the driving force in all our relationships.

As a result, we have looked for ways to express love more fully and to see the intrinsic value in everyone we interact with. We have not always succeeded, but we are better at it now than we used to be.

We have created a kindness community at http://www.livingwithkindness.com/ and we invite you to share your wisdom with us. Your story and insights could help others along their path, and theirs could help you on your journey.

We look forward to getting to know you.

From my heart,
Pat