

Acts of Kindness

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The following 44 stories are a selection of acts of kindness which have appeared in our quarterly newsletter, The Kindness Network, established in 1995.

Someone dragged a coin along the bonnet of a car belonging to a friend of mine. He took it to a smash repair company near his work for the scratch to be touched up. When he went to pick up the car, he was surprised to be told that there was no charge. A little overwhelmed by it all, my friend mentioned that if he ever had an accident, he would bring his car to that establishment for repair. The owner replied, "Sir, I hope you never have an accident."

I have made it my goal to do something nice for somebody every day that I live. I find myself waking up each morning with new and exciting ideas of things to do for others, and the rewards have been wonderful.

The afternoon was cold and windy as I walked through the shopping centre of my little suburb. A busker, perhaps in his late fifties, wearing clothes that had gone well beyond their 'use by' date, played his guitar rather badly. "Don't encourage him!" called a passer by as I dropped a coin into the box. I crossed the road and entered a shop where I made regular purchases. I noticed the assistant would occasionally look out of the window at the busker. She turned to me and asked, "Would you mind the shop for a minute?" Surprised, I agreed, whereupon she took a pie from the warmer, ran across the road, and gave it to the busker. I have since learned that this was not an isolated example of her generosity.

Recently my son, who is a regular user of public transport, caught the bus home from school. Unfortunately he got on the wrong bus, but instead of just being told to get off and wait for another bus to take him home, the driver phoned me and said he would look after my son until he could be placed on the next bus home. I received a call from the second driver, confirming my son had been transferred to his bus. He also told me the time my son would arrive home. Thank you to both of these men who took the extra effort to ensure the safe arrival of my son.

The other day I fell on my way back from shopping. Fortunately all that was injured was my dignity, but I was touched by the actions of a passing motorist. When she saw me fall she stopped her car and waited until I had stood up again. Seeing I was OK, she drove off.

Once when working at the Department of Social Security, I was talking to a coughing client on the phone, so when I sent her the requested claim form, I enclosed a couple of Allen's Butter Menthols in the envelope. She rang to thank me the following day, and said that my act had made her feel better than the cough lollies had! It made me feel pretty good, too.

I have become involved in helping to run a small shop at a local aged people's hostel. We sell at cost items like biscuits, lollies, greeting cards, etc., small luxuries that old folk can't get out and buy for themselves, and that are not provided by the people who run the hostel. I've noticed that some old people come into our shop, not to buy things, but simply to talk to someone from "the outside." This brings home to me that some old folks are just dumped in places like these, and are seldom visited by their loved ones. I think it vital that they should be visited, and to be shown that someone cares. During the next school holidays I intend to take my 9-year-old granddaughter into the shop with me, as I feel both she and the old folks would mutually benefit from the interaction.

I was talking to my doctor recently, and was amazed to learn her act of kindness for Australia's National Kindness Day last year was to treat all of her patients she saw on the day for free!

Standing in a long queue at the post office, I overheard one of the staff tell a woman at the counter that the parcel for her was heavy, and an awkward size. He invited her to go around to the side door where she could look at the parcel and decide what she wanted to do. A man in the queue overheard the conversation, and volunteered to drive the woman home with her parcel.

The lights turned green at the pedestrian crossing and the traffic had just begun to move forward when a stooped elderly lady, obviously unaware of the 'don't walk' sign, stepped on to the crossing. The cars braked and waited patiently while the woman slowly made her way across the road, oblivious of the kindness of the drivers.

Four years ago on New Year's Eve my husband had a serious hang-gliding accident and was airlifted off to intensive care in Melbourne. It was getting late at night by the time I learnt the details of the accident and by then he was far away in a Melbourne hospital, but which one I knew not. We were camping at Mt Beauty and knew no one in the camping ground, and I had a busy 5-year-old, as well as being pregnant! Our situation was made so much more bearable by the many acts of kindness from fellow campers. Money was given for the long distance phone calls to the hospitals, so I could find out where, and how, my husband was. Meanwhile neighbours looked after our little boy who was kept happy playing with their son. The next day, after an unsettled night, I began to prepare for the drive to Melbourne. Another

neighbour rose early (and also woke his sons) to help me pack up the large tent and gear, and pack it all in the car. They even washed the car, and his wife prepared us a cut lunch! Not only that, she offered her home in Melbourne for as long as we needed, and asked if I'd like her to accompany us on the drive down, and said she would catch the train back (I had never met this wonderful lady before this day). The family minding our boy gave me their street directory with a line marking all the way to the hospital - I'd never driven to Melbourne before, so this was a great help. These two special families saw us off with hugs and best wishes and, I learnt later, both phoned the hospital to see how my husband was. He recovered and is looking forward to more (accident free) flying, and I will always remember these kind-hearted people who helped me so much (Our little boy, too - he was so good during that time, I couldn't have asked for more).

When my youngest child started school I returned to teaching. I made it a rule to praise every child every day. The happy smiles they gave me were reward enough.

Six years ago I was left to fend for myself when my husband left me for my so called friend. I was sad, scared, but mostly lonely. After the news became common knowledge, one acquaintance of my husband began to ring me every evening at around 10.30 pm to say, "Goodnight and God bless." I finally asked him why he was doing this. His response was, "I can't stand to think of you being alone and sad without anyone to say goodnight to, so I want to do it while you are so sad." This was a wonderful act of kindness from a man I hardly knew, but it made me feel cared for and not so alone. This man kept up the goodnight greeting for three months until I didn't sound or feel so sad, and then they stopped. I've never seen or heard from him since, but I bless his loving heart often.

My current mission is to promote the Kindness Revolution with all the young people I come in contact with, so far with success. The idea of being kind appeals to my two special little friends Amy and Jessie. Jessie sends me monthly reports of her kindness activities which are really cute, especially the one about her 14 month old baby brother playing 'Barbies' with her. Jessie considers this brother less important than a worm normally.

I would love to tell you of a kind act I had the opportunity to participate in, because of a strong feeling to help someone, who was not in a position to help themselves. A lovely lady in her nineties is a very good friend of my daughter's Godmother. I made a winter basket for her with all sorts of goodies, including a warm hat for the winter. It was such a pleasure to receive her phone call, she was so thrilled.

I went to a cake shop recently and was waiting to be served. There was this little old lady being served, she was asking the price of this and that. I told the man who served me that I would pay for the lady's choice. He whispered this to the sales woman, and I paid for mine and hers. However, she wasn't finished, and ordered a large apple pie as well - oops! The man raised his eyebrows at me, I thought for a brief moment and nodded my head - what the heck! When I was given my change I got out of there as fast as I could, as I didn't want to get sprung.

I wonder if people going about their normal duties realise they can brighten up someone's day. My children's favourite day is Friday - rubbish bin day. As soon as they hear the truck they race to the door to watch. When the driver waves to them it always brings a big smile to their faces. The wave doesn't cost him anything, but it means so much to them. Thank you to all the people who take the time to smile or greet others while doing their job.

Doing my normal Saturday morning shopping, I was attracted by the sound of a flute. Casting my gaze about I spied a man of about 50 standing on a nearby corner. As I walked closer there was something about him that caused me to think I should donate more than the usual one or two dollars. I walked up to him and stuffed a five dollar note into the top pocket of his coat. He stopped playing and said, "Thank you very much, that's very kind of you." As I walked away he began playing again, this tune was decidedly more up tempo than the previous one.

After many years as a city dweller, the opportunity came to move to a small town. Without having any job prospects, I decided to make the move. I hadn't been there very long when I mentioned to someone that I was going to buy a pot plant when I had the money, and put it on the front porch of the house I was living in. The next day, much to my surprise and delight, I found a pot plant on the front porch! It is so lovely to be away from the meanness and bustle of the city, to be in a place where people have the time to talk, to be sympathetic and respond to people's needs. I'm sure all Australians are like that, it's just that the pressure to perform is so much greater in the city, and we seem to be sucked into the 'rat race' all too easily.

One of my friends in Melbourne suffers from an unpleasant illness which robs her of energy and leaves her severely depressed. Despite this, her capacity for appreciation has been highly developed. She asked me to share this example of kindness with you, a reminder that small actions can make a big difference to a person's day. My friend was seeking some refreshment but was deterred by the crowded café. Summoning courage a second time she entered the café, but felt daunted by the lack of available space. A man seated with a friend quickly perceived my friend's dilemma, and carried a chair to a table without seating, so she could sit down. My friend was greatly touched by the man's awareness and swift response. She was able to enjoy a coffee and no doubt her faith in human kindness was strengthened.

My husband and I have a stall at our local market selling fruit, flowers and plants. During the week I look around a couple of Op Shops and pick up the odd Teddy or toy, which we take along to the market. When an irritable child comes along

with a stressed mother, we give the child a toy and distract them for a while in conversation. It's amusing how the child shuts up, and it brings a smile to the mother's face.

I was standing in a long queue at Coles Supermarket. The woman in front of me approached the check out with three items - milk, bread and margarine. She paused as she hunted through her purse and pockets for money. "I definitely had \$5 here" she kept saying out loud to her husband, who merely scowled at her and walked off, leaving her with two little kids. In desperation, she tipped the whole contents of her bag onto the counter and looked through it. Meanwhile, I was getting really upset for this young mother. I looked in my purse and decided I would have enough to pay my groceries and have \$10 left over. So I just handed her \$5 and said, "There you are, have a nice day, and don't forget to pass it on." I don't need to tell you how she reacted, and I thought she was going to kiss my feet. Out of sheer embarrassment I said, "Go on, get out of here and have a lovely day." The next thing I know the check out lady is handing me a bag full of free magazines and muesli bars. "Here," she said. "I'm astounded and so touched by what you did. Never in all my years have I seen anyone do that before."

We have a stall at the markets on Sundays, selling flowers. We look for people in wheelchairs or the elderly, also mums that look really unhappy, and we hand them a bunch of flowers for free - it's wonderful to see their reaction. Only two people have ever refused to take them.

A friend of mine was told he had cancer of the liver and had only a few weeks to live. I called on him and he was looking pretty crook, so I phoned for an ambulance to take him to hospital. At home I tried to think of our past conversations about his son, and where he lived. I remembered it was somewhere near Campbelltown in N.S.W. I dialled the operator and gave her the name I wanted, explaining my difficulties. I said, "Just give me anyone with that name and I'll try my luck." I was told there was no one with that name in Campbelltown, but she said there was one in Picton. "OK, I'll try that," and the computer gave me the number. I dialled the number straight away. A woman answered and I asked her if her husband's name was Kevin. It was, and I told her to tell him to get to Bundaberg ASAP, as his dad was sick and needed him. Kevin rang twenty minutes later, and said he would catch the next available plane. I'm so glad he did, because 48 hours later, on Valentine's Day, his dad died. I feel so good that Kevin was able to talk to his dad and hold his hand and say goodbye, and I feel even better that my friend died happy and loved. Was it just a coincidence that the operator looked in another area for the number - I wonder?

Someone phoned recently and told me the following story. Many years ago a child was reprimanded severely by her parents for something she had done. The little girl (let's call her 'Emma') was distraught, and was found wandering down the street, crying, by someone who lived near by. When the woman heard Emma's story, she considered that the punishment had been excessive, and out of sympathy took Emma to a shop and bought her an ice cream. This was a rare treat for Emma, as her family was destitute and there was no money available for ice cream. Emma maintained contact with the woman over the ensuing years, but this was lost when Emma was of an age where she was able to leave home. Years later, when Emma was in her mid thirties, she chose to visit a nursing home in the hope of being able to bring some cheer to the residents. Much to her surprise and delight, Emma discovered one of the residents, now old and lonely, was the kind woman who bought her the ice cream. Emma became a regular visitor, and spent many hours bringing comfort and friendship to the old woman, until she passed away. Emma told the story to a mourner at the funeral, who in turn told it to the person who rang me.

When I was fifteen, a man kidnapped me, attacked me and tried to take my life. I ended up with a shattered back and serious internal injuries. My family was fractured and were not supportive, but the kindness of strangers saw me through. A lady held my hand one night, and cried over me. The nurses wept, and cheered when I took my first steps months after my back was broken. A nurse called Tony made me laugh and took me out to the gardens, where we would talk for ages. A priest sat by my bedside at five o'clock each morning. Then Tommy came into my life and showered me with kindness. These special acts and special people are never forgotten, and the memory of their kindness is conjured up, and is as new as freshly-baked bread. Sometimes we feel helpless, and wonder what we can do to help. While we may not have much money, time or resources, the simplest acts are often the most powerful [As a post script, the Tommy she speaks about later became her husband].

This week I suffered a home invasion. A bloke pulled off my security screen and smashed a large glass window in the middle of the night while I was at home in bed. I was lucky that only an empty handbag was stolen and that I wasn't bashed. The response from friends has been incredible. I am President of a 50+ Leisure Club, which has in excess of 100 members. Many of them have either rung me to make sure I am OK, or have passed messages of goodwill through other friends. Some have visited me, bringing gifts of flowers and Lotto tickets and (most important) hugs. One or two have offered me a bed for a few nights until I've got over the initial trauma, while others have offered to come and stay the night to give me a feeling of security. I have been given silent phone numbers, with instructions to ring any time, day or night, if I need to talk. Two people have even offered to give me a dog to deter intruders. I have received supportive emails and advice on how to better secure my home. All this wonderful kindness has touched my heart. How on earth can I say thank you? It seems such a hackneyed phrase for a very sincere feeling of gratitude. If friends were wealth, I'd be very rich indeed.

I was waiting with a patient to see her Oncologist. A man walked by and offered us a chocolate each and we thanked him

for his kind gesture. A few minutes later, he was called into the doctor's room, came out, and then it was our turn. The Oncologist then offered us chocolates, on behalf of his patient whom, he informed us, buys 12 chocolates every day and offers them to 12 people so that he can make 12 people happy, and be happier himself 12 times more!

I am writing to you regarding an act of huge kindness toward me and my children that I considered worth sharing with you. I am a sole parent of three children aged 7 years, 4 years, and 10 months. My first partner died a few years ago, and the father of my youngest has gone his separate way. A couple of weeks ago I was unfortunate enough to get pulled over by the police doing roadside vehicle checks, on the way to school to pick up my children. The result was a yellow sticker for faults with my old but 'faithful' Commodore. This presented a major problem for me as the car is an absolute necessity, and finances as a single parent don't allow for unforeseen emergencies. I was very distressed by the whole situation. In steps my friend Jennifer, and her husband Paul, with an offer of assistance. They ended up spending the whole weekend working on my car. Paul then requested half a day off work on Monday to ensure the work was completed before the vehicle examination that day. Another act of kindness by Paul's boss, who was made aware of the situation and allowed him time off. As a result, my car went through the inspection with only minor things to rectify. And of course, Paul again helped with these. Further to this, some other very kind friends of mine, Caroline and Denver, gave hours of their time to work on the car. And while they were there they also pruned all of my big trees and took a trailer load of rubbish to the tip. The happy ending to this long story is that these wonderful people turned around a seemingly impossible situation. The sticker has been removed and the car is starting to look like new.

The other day I was in a busy shopping centre car park with little room to manoeuvre large vehicles, when I saw a lady getting flustered trying to reverse her large 'tank' of a car out of its parking spot, without much success, and a queue of cars waiting for her. I stood in the middle of the car park and it took a while, but with me directing her, she eventually got out and was most grateful. It turned a tense situation into one we had a laugh about - and that's what life is all about. And in closing, one of the many gems I try to live by: "Happiness does not come from what you have, but from what you are."

I was in a supermarket recently, and an elderly man had bumped a vein in the back of his hand and it was bleeding. He said, "Oh, how silly of me," and got his hanky out and blotted it. I was standing nearby, and stood there compassionately. He went on his way and came back a few minutes later with a packet of band aids. He asked me whether I could put one on his hand for him, which I did after it had stopped bleeding. He thanked me and went on his way. I smiled for the rest of the day, with joy in my heart.

A friend of mine told me a story that recently took place at Woolies. She had noticed that the man behind her in the queue had only a few items in his shopping basket, and he seemed to be in a hurry - so she let him go before her. He was so touched that he bought her a chocolate bar from the display at the check out, and thanked her. She said that she and the check-out operator just smiled at each other in disbelief.

Last October, we had to have our 16½ year old much loved family dog put to sleep by our vet, who had cared for Mindy for most of her life. The week following, the vet sent me a lovely letter saying how sad we must have felt at our loss, and thanking us for our care of Mindy. I really appreciated this letter.

The other week I was in one of those bargain shops. I saw a plastic file which I thought would come in handy to keep some documents in. The girl at the check out counter said they were good, and she would like to get one for school (she was working in the school holidays). She said she didn't have the money at that time and would get it later. I thought there might not be any left 'later', so I bought her one. She was so pleased, and it was her birthday in a few days. It made me feel glad that I could help her.

As I was waiting in the supermarket queue, I noticed the man in front of me had three tins of meat and vegetables, and I thought that they were probably were his next three meals. When the tins were scanned he presented a credit card and asked for \$10 in cash. I thought that \$10 was a small amount to ask for, and guessed he didn't have much money. The card was scanned several times, but the message "Refer to card holder" kept on appearing. The man, obviously embarrassed, told the girl he'd have to leave the tins. I told the person I would pay the six dollars and something, and the poor man, now highly embarrassed, mumbled a thank you and rushed away with his tins.

In 1983, the Ash Wednesday bushfires destroyed homes in Mt Macedon, Victoria. My chiropractor came from Melbourne to Woodend (to our place), with his car loaded to the brim with goods for the unfortunate people who lost everything. He and his wife were the only ones who bothered to come visit us, who cared enough. Our house was filthy, but still standing.

Four years ago my son was left with two kids (one just a baby), one teddy bear, and his car, plus all the outgrown kid's clothes, which were absolutely useless to him (his wife refused to let the kids have their toys or their clothes). A friend from my school days arrived with a car load of kid's clothes, books and toys for Steve's kids. My friend had spent every cent she'd earned that week (coaching) on the kids. It didn't finish there! She also gave Steve a single bed, cupboards, a bike, etc. The trailer was overflowing and so was the station wagon. I was in tears.

There was an old lady in the supermarket queue in front of me. She had a tomato and a few other vegetables, and a tin

of ham. When the value of the goods was totalled, she looked in her purse and told the check out person she didn't have enough money. The check out person said, loudly and rather rudely I thought, "Well, which ones can you afford to pay for?" The woman opted to leave the ham. I was tempted to pay for the ham, but didn't have the cash to hand over.

I put my purchases through, trying to 'think' the girl to move quickly before the woman had disappeared, and when I presented my credit card, told the girl I would pay for the tin of ham she had put to one side. "Why would you do that?" she asked. "Because it was probably for her next meal!" I replied.

I ran out of the supermarket and fortunately she wasn't too far away. I caught up with her and gave her the tin of ham. "What's this?" she asked. "It's yours" I replied. "But I can't pay for it" she said. "You don't have to" I said, and hurried off, leaving her standing there staring at the tin. When I drove away she was still standing there, staring at the tin.

I was driving along in the left hand lane when at the last minute realised it led only onto the freeway. The lane next to me started to fill up with cars stopping for a red traffic light. There was a car behind me so I couldn't go anywhere. Just then two cars in the lane beside me reversed to let me in, when they realised I was in the wrong lane. That just made my day!

My youngest son (I am now a sole parent) and I were standing at the local supermarket check-out recently with a full trolley. I noticed an elderly man behind me with only a few items, so I told him to go first. He was very appreciative. After he had paid for his things he walked away, only to return a few minutes later with a beautiful bunch of pink carnations. He gave them to me and said, "Thank you. You've taught me to be giving." I was stunned, as was the checkout girl. My son was so impressed he said to me, "You should marry that man." What a sweet gesture!

As a teenager I had a very bad time, lots of abuse and things like that. One day I decided that I'd had enough, and I was on my way to hurl myself off the bridge and into oblivion. As I was walking I was sort of in a dream, not really aware of anything, but a voice lifted me out of the fog. There was an old man smiling at me, a gentleman, as he'd been wearing a hat and he had removed it and was holding it in one hand above his head, like you see people do in some old movies. I said something like, "What?", and he said to me, "It's a lovely day - don't you think?" I said I suppose it was, and he put his hat back on and walked away.

I watched this small elderly man with a sprightly step walk down the path for what seemed like hours, and I finally sat down on a bench nearby. Yes, it was a lovely day, I thought, and why was I thinking of taking my life on such a lovely day? I moved out of home as soon as I had finished school, got a job as a waitress and did a secretarial course part time. After completing the course I worked for a small manufacturing company as a secretary, married my boss, and we have three lovely daughters. That incident happened about 15 years ago, yet it is still so vivid in my mind. I remember every word that stranger said to me, and those soft blue eyes of his. I think of him as my guardian angel, who took on human form to save my life.

I was on a teaching prac. recently, teaching a 4/5 class. I told them about the 12 Days of Kindness and they thought it was really cool. Anyway, for "Children's Day" I organised an activity where each child wrote his/her name on a piece of blank paper. All the papers were laid out on the table, with the name facing upwards. Then each child (and the teachers too) went around, turned over the paper and wrote a nice thing about each child. At the end of ten minutes, the children each had a piece of paper filled with compliments. They were so excited to read them, but I collected them to hand out the next day (I wanted to read them first, and add my own message to each one). The next day I handed them out. The atmosphere in the room was amazing, as it was the previous afternoon when they were writing down the compliments. Before they left the room, I told them that Sunday was "My Day" and that it's important to give yourself compliments, so they each had to write down one nice thing about themselves. Self esteem is so vital, and it has to be fostered when young!

I work as a checkout operator at a large chain supermarket, which is a job that leaves me feeling quite anonymous at times. However, I always make an effort to be cheerful and greet all my customers with a smile and a pleasant "How are you?", which, I can assure you, isn't always easy some days! Recently, I had an enjoyable experience serving a very friendly, bubbly lady who smiled right back at me and engaged in pleasant chitchat the whole time I was serving her. As many people simply ignore my efforts of friendliness, this was a lovely experience in itself. However, this lovely lady, unbeknown to me, then went on to see the manager solely for the purpose of complimenting me on my service and thanking him for employing such a friendly member of staff. The manager then bought me a box of chocolates as a thank you for my efforts. Well, as you can imagine, I was truly touched by this gesture, both from the customer and the manager. It really made me feel valued and loved, and I still feel teary when I think about it. It really doesn't take much to make someone feel so wonderful.

I went into the bank today to draw out cash to tide me over the next two weeks. There was a woman at the teller next to me and I overheard snatches of the conversation between her and the teller. There was talk about her having a food voucher from Vinnies, and the teller informing her that her account was already overdrawn, so she couldn't withdraw any further funds. It seemed she was a visitor to Sydney, and would be going home in a couple of days. She asked the teller if there was someone else in the bank she could talk to about withdrawing money, but naturally was advised that there was nothing that could be done, bank policy and all that. I pulled one of my precious \$50 notes I had just been given,

said, "Happy Christmas!" as I placed it in front of her on the counter, and walked out of the bank.

I then went to a cake shop across the road and just happened to glance through the glass door as she walked past. Our eyes met, she paused and mouthed a 'Thank you!' before hurrying off. There are times when life is good, and we need to cherish those moments, as their memories can surely help us through the not-so-good times.

I recently had an operation on my leg for a damaged ligament. In my conversation with the anaesthetist prior to the operation, he said he noticed that the operation was self funded, and asked me about it. I told him that years ago I'd dropped out of the medical benefits system because of lack of money. He then asked whether payment would be a problem, and I said that it would be nice if I could pay the \$500 fee in several smaller payments rather than in a lump sum. He squeezed my hand and said he would see what he could do. When I received his invoice after the operation, I was delighted to see that the \$500 had been reduced to \$380! We hear stories about people being ripped off by medical services, but it is nice to know there are doctors out there who have compassion and kindness. In a post-op discussion I had with the surgeon, he said that when the ligament had healed he would tell me about a natural remedy that would help prevent the problem from reoccurring. I thought that was a nice gesture, too.

Please send in examples of acts of kindness for us to post on our site (kindacts@kindness.com.au). If you tell us about an act of kindness that someone has done, and can advise us of the person's name and address who did the kind act, they may become eligible to receive one of our Kindness Award certificates. The Japanese 'Small Kindness Movement' began awarding certificates in 1963, and to date have given out over 3 million of them. We thought it was such a good idea, we have adopted this practise ourselves.