**2016 Motivational Minutes on Making a Difference**

**(Also see Giving and Relationships.)**

1. **Helper’s High**

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**Quote of the day:**

"The little unremembered acts of kindness and love are the best parts of a person's life.” — William Wordsworth

**Reflection:**

Maria E. Pagano, PhD, an associate professor of psychiatry at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine in Cleveland, has investigated the helper therapy principle (HTP), which is based on the concept that when people help others, they are also helping themselves—particularly when the helper and the recipient of that help share a common malady. Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly published her review article on the topic. Among the evidence cited were studies showing that… While service to fellow sufferers is a cornerstone of 12-step programs of recovery, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Dr. Pagano noted that it is not necessary to share a common health problem in order to benefit from doing good. For instance, helping others in general has been linked with longer life, less depression, higher self-esteem and greater life satisfaction.

For a “helper’s high” and a significant health boost, lend a helping hand to someone in need.

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1. **The Hundredth Monkey**

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**Quote of the day:**

"The influence of a beautiful, helpful, hopeful character is contagious and may revolutionize a whole town.” -- Eleanor Emily Hodgman Porter

**Reflection:**

Sometimes we think there is no way to make a difference but maybe that is not true.

*According to Ken Keyes Jr., the author of The Hundredth Monkey, some natural scientists were observing monkey behavior on the island of Koshima. These monkeys lived primarily on some sort of sweet potato that they dug out of the ground. One day a scientist noticed that instead of just eating the potato fresh from the ground, the monkey washed it in the stream first and then ate it. This was a new behavior—none of the other monkeys did this—but “monkey see, monkey do,” and before long all the monkeys on the island were washing their potatoes first and then eating them. There was no rational explanation for this sudden change of behavior, so the scientists documented it as the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon.*

Go ahead and be the first monkey. Start your project. It does make a difference.

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1. **Charlie Chaplin**

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**Quote of the day**:

“You, the people have the power—the power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure.” – Charlie Chaplin

**Reflection:**

With the world in so much turmoil, it’s hard not to be overwhelmed by the almost-daily bad news of terrorism, disasters, violence, war, and human suffering. I sometimes feel my efforts are like a drop of water in a vast ocean of what needs to be done to truly help the world and make any difference at all.

*In the stirring speech by Charlie Chaplin’s character in his movie “The Great Dictator” he said,*

*“We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other’s happiness—not by each other’s misery. We don’t want to hate and despise one another. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.*

*“Greed has poisoned men’s souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical, our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost.*

*“You, the people have the power—the power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure.”*

The above-mentioned movie was produced in 1940. The message was true then, but how much *more* can we relate to this challenge today! I believe spreading peace on earth can work in much the same way. Changing the way you see others, being kind to those who cross your path, doing kind deeds when opportunities present themselves without expecting something in return. Sometimes it just takes a kind word or a helping hand when most needed, t to show us what a beautiful world this can be.

1. **Dare to Be Part of The Solution**

 

**Quote of the day**:

“Discovery of a solution consists of looking at the same thing as everyone else and thinking something different.” — Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

**Reflection:**

Whenever I hear someone bemoaning the state of the world, I'm reminded of something I first heard many years ago, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."

It is easy to identify the problem as being due to "all the injustice and suffering in the world." This quote, I later learned, was by U.S. civil rights activist Eldridge Cleaver. It didn’t tell me how I could become part of the solution, but it did reinforce my growing conviction that I couldn't turn a blind eye to problems.

If you want to be part of the solution, try to do your best, day by day, wherever you are, and it will make a difference. Will you dare to be part of the solution by thinking something different?

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1. **Be a World Changer**

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**Quote of the day:**

“Remember, there’s no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple.” — Scott Adams

**Reflection:**

In my writings, I often speak about making a difference and helping others. I encourage you to do more for others, but I don’t often give practical examples. Today I share one such example with you—an excerpt from Anna Perlini, co-founder of Per un Mondo Migliore, a humanitarian organization in the Balkans. This is an illustration of an alternative lifestyle choice to escape the frustrations of our greed base society.

*Ivan and Francesca often expressed their frustration in trying to adjust to a society that was losing its values. They wished they could adopt a different lifestyle, but didn’t know how. Then, on one of my more recent visits, it was immediately obvious that something was very different. For one thing, their dining room had extra tables, which quickly filled with what seemed like a river of lively children from the neighborhood. Ivan was busy serving and introduced me to Claudio and Manuela, another couple who not only lived in their small town, but also shared a similar vision.*

*Later on, I got to know other families who were also part of a network called Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale (Ethical Purchasing Groups). The aim is to cooperate in order to buy food and other commonly used goods directly from producers or retailers at discounted rates, while also emphasizing the use of local and fair-trade produce, and reusable or eco-compatible goods. Ivan and Francesca (and their now three children) were some of the founders of the local branch, and needless to say, they always found a way to direct some love and attention to their “neighbor near or far.”*

*“If we want a message of love to get to others, we need to send it. If we want a lamp to keep burning, we need to keep feeding it oil.” As time passes, it’s clear that what was once an experiment has grown into a tried-and-proven alternative life choice.*

I’m not suggesting that we all start Ethical Purchasing Groups but it is good food for thought—how one couple changed their little part of the world for the better.

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1. **The Mouse Trap**

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**Quote of the Day:**

“First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.” – Martin Niemoller

**Reflection:**

Here is an old fable about how our lives are woven together.

*A mouse looked through the crack in the wall to see the farmer and his wife open a package containing a mousetrap. Retreating to the farmyard, the mouse proclaimed the warning that there was a mousetrap in the house!*

*But the chicken clucked and said, "Mr. Mouse, I can tell this is a grave concern to you, but it is of no consequence to me. I cannot be bothered by it." The pig sympathized, but said, "I am so very sorry, Mr. Mouse, but there is nothing I can do about it.” Then the mouse turned to look at the cow to hear what she was saying, "Wow, Mr. Mouse. I'm sorry for you, but it's no skin off my nose." So, the mouse returned to the house, head down and dejected, to face the farmer's mousetrap all alone.

That very night the sound of a mousetrap catching its prey was heard throughout the house. The farmer's wife rushed to see what was caught. In the darkness, she did not see it was a venomous snake whose tail the trap had caught. The snake bit the farmer's wife. The farmer rushed her to the hospital, and she returned home with a fever.*

*As you know you treat a fever with fresh chicken soup, so the farmer took his hatchet to the farmyard for the soup's main ingredient. But his wife's sickness continued, so friends and neighbors came to sit with her around the clock. To feed them, the farmer butchered the pig. The farmer's wife did not get well and she died. So many people came to attend her funeral; the farmer had the cow slaughtered to provide enough meat for all of them. The mouse looked upon it all from his crack in the wall with great sadness.*

The next time you hear someone is facing a problem and think it doesn't concern you, remember–when one of us is threatened, we are all at risk. We are all connected in this journey called life. We must keep an eye out for one another and make an extra effort to help one another.

1. **Eudemonia**

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**Quote of the day:**

“The vocation of every man and woman is to serve other people.” — Leo Tolstoy

**Reflection:**

One of the central questions that philosophers and theologians have struggled with for millennia is the mystery of what gives life meaning. Everyone wants to be happy and fulfilled, but how can we tell what true happiness is and where it comes from?

The ancient Greeks believed that the source of happiness was internal and could be cultivated by living a worthwhile life. They called this state *eudemonia*. Aristotle described it as taking part in activities that draw on our talents and challenge our abilities, acting in ways that benefit others, and guiding our lives by principles and virtues. It isn’t enough to simply possess an ability or disposition—*eudemonia* requires it to be put into action with deeds.

The more we learn to put others at the center of our thoughts and actions, the more meaning and purpose our lives will have.

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1. **Leaving a Legacy**

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**Quote of the day:**

“I don’t want to have lived in vain like most people. I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to all people, even those I’ve never met. I want to go on living even after my death!” — Anne Frank

**Reflection:**

This quote goes right along with the story behind the beautiful botanical garden in Kotkata, India.

*When walking into it you feel like you have been transported away from the hustle and bustle of the city and into a world of beauty with vibrant and vivid colors of the flowers and exotic plants. It turns out that the missionary William Carey started this institution—the oldest of its kind in India—in 1820, with a goal of helping the local people in a practical way. He saw the local farmers using inferior seeds and ineffective farming techniques, and he wanted to improve their livelihoods and help them to realize, as he put it, “the capabilities of the soil to enrich a nation to an almost indefinite extent.” Carey’s vision was a whole lot greater than just planting and exhibiting pretty flowers. He gathered near-extinct species of plants and nurtured them in the society’s garden so they’d be preserved for the future. He also included maize, cotton, tea, sugar cane, and cinchona from various countries and introduced the concept of plantation farming to this part of India. He was successful in imparting this vision to others, and the society he created helped pioneer the introduction of a wide array of cereals, cash crops, fruits, vegetables, and other trees and plants.*

I am impressed by how Carey’s legacy lives on almost two centuries after he had his initial idea. When he started this garden, it was a completely out-of-the-box concept and it is likely that

he faced many challenges and much opposition, but he persevered.

What sort of legacy will you leave behind? Even small things can have a great impact on generations to come.

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1. **Boomerang**

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**Quote of the day:**

"What goes around comes around. Keep your circle positive. Say good words, think good thoughts, do good deeds.” – Author Unknown

**Reflection:**

I’m a firm believer in the old sayings, “You reap what you sow”, and “what you give comes back to you.” This reminds me of the boomerang story told by Virginia Berg.

*When I was a little girl, I went to my first circus. There, before my awestruck eyes, were three rings in full action—performing animals in one, and acrobats leaping and flying through the air in another. What interested me most, though, was taking place in the third ring. A girl and a boy were flinging brightly colored missiles, which, after they had crossed the ring, turned and returned to the very hands that had flung them. No matter which direction they were thrown, the things curved and swiftly came back to the young performers, who would catch and fling them again. I watched in amazement. “They are boomerangs,” someone beside me said. It was the first time I had heard that word. Since then I have heard that word often. I’ve also seen the principle behind it play out in life. In fact, life itself is a boomerang.*

You either “fling” good or evil. Either way whatever you “throw out” will come back to you. Every word or action we fling out comes back to us in some way. Whether good or bad, it will return to us, and it often gains momentum along the way. When you give to others, you receive in return and surprisingly, many times over! You never lose by giving. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated. Anyone who lives unselfishly, caring for and lifting the burdens of others, easing their pain, and helping to supply their needs, will see that boomerang come back in the form of blessings some day!

What sort of boomerang are you throwing out?

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1. **Any One Can Be a Hero**

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**Quote of the day:**

“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.” —Arthur Ashe

**Reflection:**

When I read this story I thought it illustrated the above quote well.

*In ninth grade, there was one teacher who stood out to me more than all the rest. We called him Uncle Jo. Uncle Jo was a funny guy, aging in years but a kid at heart. He made those boring history books seem exceptionally fun and put the sparkle into everything about life. Uncle Jo cared for a boy named Mikey whom we called “the special child.” Mikey was indeed special, for he was handicapped with autism, which left him unable to care for himself. So it was our teacher, Uncle Jo, who fed him, dressed him, walked him, and read him stories. I admired Uncle Jo for his love for Mikey in spite of being sick himself with cancer. Uncle Jo taught me many subjects in school, but for all those lectures, it was his sample of sacrifice that taught me the biggest lesson. Here was a dying man who spent his final days not making his atmosphere a more comfortable place for himself, but for a helpless child.*

*A very great man made his mark in history then, and engraved that mark in my mind, to remember for many more years to come. I realized at that early age how precious one’s life is, and how short its span may be. One day Uncle Jo was up and about, and the next he was gone. He understood that the present day was all he had to make the most of, so he put his best efforts into that day, no matter how lowly the task. Today, I close my eyes and think back at the time that was, and then I see the image of Uncle Jo’s face and the twinkle in his eye as he smiles and says, “Life is too short to spend it on only yourself.”*

The matter of how short is trivial, because what lives on in the hearts and minds of others never dies. It is the deeds you do, the words you speak, the love you give, and your greatness-of-lowliness that will be treasured forever.

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1. **Be Important To A Child**

 

**Quote of the day:**

“A hundred years from now, it won't matter what your bank account was, the sort of house you lived in, or the kind of car you drove, but the world may be different because you were important in the life of a child.” — Author Unknown

**Reflection:**

I read this article from the Activated magazine written by Rosane Pereira. It so impressed me, that I wanted to share it with you.

*I recently took my teenage son to an ecotourism project in the big Complexo do Alemão group of favelas [slums] in northern Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There are cable gondolas that stop on all five mountaintops, from where we could see the entire bay and all the beautiful mountain ranges. Dotting the mountains, there are also thousands of small huts lacking decent roofs and with bare and unpainted brick walls.*

*Those were the favelas. At one point, my son commented: “It’s amazing how many more poor people there are than rich!” On our way back down, we talked with a missionary who had begun working there before peace had been achieved, at the time when the police and drug cartels had been engaged in daily gun battles. Another woman described how she used to have to walk to the fountain to get water every day when she was younger, until her father and others had been able to dig a community well. Life in the area has improved significantly in the past few years, but the stories these women shared were a reminder of the dire conditions so many people live in. This excursion had quite an impact on my son, who is now showing more interest in helping destitute families in our city rather than being primarily concerned with having his own wants met.*

Children can develop compassion for others through participating in services for the community, scout groups, or helping the less fortunate, and if they have been taught these values from an early age, they will be more likely to hold on to them for the rest of their lives.

Even if you don’t have any children of your own we can all influence the children we come in contact with for good. Take some time to think of ways you can contribute to the next generation’s development even if it’s only by sponsoring worthy character building programs.

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1. **Don’t Be Indifferent**

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**Quote of the day:**

“The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.” —Albert Einstein

**Reflection:**

Albert Einstein said this many years ago but from all I can see, the world has only gotten worse and society as a whole has become even more indifferent to helping those in need.

*In 2004 there was a drama on BBC1 entitled 'Passer By'. James Nesbitt played a radiographer by the name of Joe Keyes. Late one night he is travelling home by train, and he sees a young girl. A number of fellas start to chat her up and when the banter becomes threatening, Joe is faced with a dilemma—he is unsure whether he should intervene or not. When he reaches the station he glances across at this girl, who seems to be appealing for help. He just doesn't know what to do, should he stay on the train, or should he get off and get involved, or should he just go home? After the two episodes of that drama, the viewers were invited to give their opinion. I don't know what the figures were of the percentage of people who said 'You should intervene, Joe', and those who said 'Leave well enough alone, don't get into trouble yourself'. I imagine that the sentiment was to help, but in practical terms, in everyday experience, we often find that people don't any more, they walk on by.*

*That was only a TV program but there have been many similar incidents documented and just as many, if not more, non-documented incidents. To name a few, I remember years ago hearing the story of a mail man who was shot by a sniper. He stumbled into a hotel lobby and was ordered out of the building because he was dripping blood on the carpet. A woman gave birth unexpectedly on a footpath, and the bystanders turned their faces. A taxi driver looked, and then sped away. A nearby hotel refused her even a blanket. In the United States, a woman drove her car into the Miami River. A dozen people watched, totally indifferent, as she climbed onto the roof of the car. The car was sinking and she screamed that she couldn't swim, and that woman drowned as the people watched her.*

You might think these are extreme cases, perhaps they are, but nevertheless they illustrate how things are in our modern world. Take a moment to think about what you would have done in those situations. Are you indifferent to the needs around you?

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**13. Change Your World**

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**Quote of the day**:

"Be the change you wish to see in the world.” —Gandhi

**Reflection:**

Sustaining the environment has become a serious concern of nearly every nation. Debates on how to best achieve this are continuous and often contentious. Overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue, most of us look to scientists and others with more knowledge and resources to find solutions.

However, Abdul Kareem is one man who hasn’t waited on anybody else. Here is his story.

*If you were to visit him at his home in southern India, you would see acres of rich forest with abundant wildlife. In a part of the world where water is often in short supply, his land and the villages around it have no such problem. But it hasn’t always been that way. Twenty-five years ago, the area was a series of dry, rocky, lifeless hills. Kareem was strangely drawn to the area during visits to his wife’s family, who lived there. “I would walk around the area and see barren hillsides,” he recalls. “It was a heartache of a sight, and yet the pull on me was strong. I suddenly realized that I had often—though only for brief moments—dreamt of the Kaavu of India’s collective memory. They were the Sacred Groves that every village had once upon a time. I had been told of them as a child. I think I had subconsciously yearned for one.” On an impulse, he bought five acres. In spaces between rocks, he planted saplings of trees native to the region. The well on the property barely yielded a bucketful of water at a time, so for three summers Kareem used a motorbike to haul water from a source a kilometer (about 2/3 mile) away. During this time he also bought adjoining land from neighbors who were happy to exchange their desolate properties for cash. The fourth year, Kareem’s efforts began to pay off. The new vegetation, sparse as it was, helped his land retain more rainwater. The water level in his well rose, and that made it possible for him to gradually plant and tend the rest of his property, which had grown to nearly 13 hectares (32 acres). The transformation was slow but steady. As the saplings grew, birds flocked to the area and sowed the seeds of a variety of other plants. A natural revival was underway. Year by year, more vegetation grew, more wildlife arrived, and the water table continued to rise. As a result, other wells within a 10 kilometer (6.2 mile) radius of Kareem’s, now also have more water. With few resources at his disposal, Kareem has changed his part of the world, day by day and step by patient step.* Source: www.goodnewsindia.com/Pages/content/inspirational/abdulKareem.html

This is just one man’s story on how he changed his part of the world. We can all do something, even if it’s not as grand as this, but every bit helps.

1. **Two Brothers**

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**Quote of the day:**

“No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave.” -- Calvin Coolidge

**Reflection:**

Here’s a story to illustrate the quote.

*There is a story of two brothers, Ahmed and Omar. Each wished to perform a deed whose memory should not fail—but which, as the years rolled on, might sound his name and praise far abroad. Omar with wedge and rope lifted a great piece of marble on its base, carving its form in beautiful devices and sculpturing many a wondrous inscription on its sides. He left it to stand in the hot desert and cope with its gales—his monument. But Ahmed, with deeper wisdom and truer though sadder heart, dug a well to cheer the sandy waste, and planted about it tall date-palms to make cool shade for the thirsty pilgrim and to shake down fruits for his hunger.*

These two deeds illustrate two ways in either of which we may live. We may think of *SELF* and worldly success and fame, living to gather a fortune or to make a splendid name—as the tall sculptured marble—but as cold and useless to the world. Or we may make our life like a well in the desert, with cool shade about it, to give drink to the thirsty and shelter and refreshment to the weary and faint!

Which will you do?

1. **The Bus Driver**

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**Quote of the day:**

“When the world feels cold and dark and lonely, take heart: Anybody can make their corner of it brighter.” – Author Unknown

**Reflection:**

This quote reminds me of the following story told by Elizabeth Gilbert:

*Some years ago, I was stuck on a cross-town bus in New York City during rush hour. Traffic was barely moving. The bus was filled with cold, tired people who were deeply irritated with one another; with the rainy, sleety weather and with the world itself. Two men barked at each other about a shove that may or may not have been intentional. A pregnant woman got on, and nobody offered her a seat. Rage was in the air; no mercy would be found here. As the bus approached Seventh Avenue, the driver got on the intercom. “Folks,” he said, “I know you’ve had a rough day and you’re frustrated. I can’t do anything about the weather or traffic, but here’s what I can do. As each one of you gets off the bus, I will reach out my hand to you. As you walk by, drop your troubles into the palm of my hand, okay? Don’t take your problems home to your families tonight— just leave ‘em here with me. My route goes right by the Hudson River, and when I drive by there later today, I’ll open the window and throw your troubles in the water. Sound good?”*

*It was as if a spell had lifted. Everyone burst out laughing. Faces gleamed with surprised delight. People who’d been pretending for the past hour not to notice each other’s existence were suddenly grinning at each other like, is this guy serious? Oh, he was serious. At the next stop—just as promised—the driver reached out his hand, palm up, and waited. One by one, all the exiting commuters placed their hand just above his and mimed the gesture of dropping something into his palm. Some people laughed as they did this, some teared up—but everyone did it. The driver repeated the same lovely ritual at the next stop, and the next—all the way to the river.*

I love this story. What a great way to help others with their problems. We live in a hard world, my friends. Sometimes it’s extra difficult to be a human being. Sometimes you have a bad day. Sometimes you have a bad day that lasts for several years. You struggle and fail. You lose jobs, money, friends, faith, and love. You witness horrible events unfolding in the news, and you become fearful and withdrawn. There are times when everything seems cloaked in darkness. You long for the light but don’t know where to find it.

But what if you are the light? What if you are the very agent of illumination that a dark situation begs for? That’s what this story and bus driver taught me—that anyone can be the light at any given moment. This man wasn’t some big power player. He wasn’t a spiritual leader. He wasn’t a media-savvy “influencer.” He was a bus driver—one of society’s most invisible workers. But he possessed real power, and he used it beautifully for the benefit of others.

When life seems especially grim, or when I feel particularly powerless in the face of the world’s troubles, I think of this man and ask myself, What can I do, right now, to be the light? Of course, I can’t personally end all wars, or solve global warming, or transform vexing people into entirely different creatures. I definitely cannot control traffic. But I do have some influence on everyone I brush up against, even if we never speak or learn each other’s name. How we conduct ourselves matters because within human society everything is contagious—sadness and anger, yes, but also patience, kindness and generosity. We all have more influence than we realize. No matter who you are, or where you are, or how mundane or tough your situation may seem, I believe you can illuminate your part of this weary world. In fact, I believe this is the only way the world will ever be fully illuminated—one bright act of grace at a time, all the way to the river.