How Kindness Saved My Childhood

Growing up, we are taught to be generous, to be respectful, and to be grateful. Kindness is around all of us every day, and whether we recognize it or not, it is instilled in everyone. Kindness is a smile at a stranger on the street, a wave to a car that lets you merge, a surprise party you threw for your best friend, or a great act of service to an organization. Every human being is capable of giving and receiving kindness, regardless of status or personality; we cannot go without it.

One summer night when I was 10 years old, I was at the grocery store with my 7 year old brother and my sick father who was in a wheelchair. We were following our normal routine: taking the public bus to the store a mile away, getting our groceries, and making the walk back to the bus stop to head home and have dinner as a family. Though, this specific time was different from the rest. A middle-aged man approached the three of us as we carried our full bags of food and asked if he could speak with us for a moment. We agreed, and the man pulled out a hundred dollar bill, smiling wide. He handed the money to my dad and said “Do something fun with this,” leaving my dad shocked, and my brother and I filled with excitement. We thanked him, profusely, and my dad shook his hand from his wheelchair. There were no strings or expectations from the man, just a simple act of kindness to a father with his two young kids who would get to go to jumpstreet the next day.

My grandma and grandpa lived two and a half hours away from my brother, father, and I when I was growing up in the suburbs of Colorado, though they made the five hour trip once a week to deliver us home cooked meals ranging from grandpa’s famous smoked ribs to casseroles and other assorted meals. There was no outside force that ensured my grandparents took care of our meals every single week for years and years, they did it out of the kindness of their hearts so
my father wouldn’t waste his little energy on cooking for us. Without the continuous deliveries we got from the two of them, it is likely my brother and I would have spent many nights eating pasta, instant mashed potatoes, and bagged salads over healthy, balanced, and hearty dinners.

From the day my father was diagnosed with cancer to the present day, my mother has always been the biggest help through his battle, despite their divorce that occurred less than a year before the diagnosis. She spent countless hours and full days making sure my dad was attending his doctors appointments and staying as healthy as possible while still living on his own with my brother and I half of the time. She devoted her life for an entire decade to a man she had no obligation to help. Why? This kindness came from her love for my brother and I, and from her unmatched morality. I have never met another person as selfless as my mother. She is my model for how we should all treat each other, the model everyone should have in their lives.

Reflecting on my childhood that required acts of kindness from strangers, family members, and friends to assure we maintained a sustainable relationship with my father, I have had my fair share of receiving kindness. Kindness was arguably the main reason my father was capable of taking care of us as long as he could, and I owe my relationship with him today to the unconditional help we were given from others. My childhood surrounded by kindness from others taught me to be more grateful, to pay it forward, and to remember that we are all going through something. The small acts, such as giving money to a family just so they have a fun day, will stick with them forever, and the much larger acts can change someone’s life. Overall, kindness is all around us, and utilizing it to our advantage will only create positivity in the world.