

A LITTLE KINDNESS GOES A LONG WAY

I normally don't feel as old as I am (almost 86), except when I walk. It is then that my back begins to ache from a fractured vertebra I suffered several years ago and my arthritic knees feel stiff and sore. Yet I continue to walk for about 1 ½ miles in my suburban neighborhood trudging up and down four hills. I don't think I walk like an old lady. I don't use a cane or a walker and I am a fairly fast walker. So it was with some surprise that, as I was going down my last hill, an African American mailman who was taking mail to deliver out of his car, began waving to me as if he knew me. As I approached his beaming face, he said, "I've been watching you walk every day, congratulations! Walking is so good for the heart." We then got into a friendly conversation about walking. I told him my age, which he seemed surprised by, and I learned that he sometimes walks 15 miles or more in addition to the walking he does to deliver mail. I also told him how much I appreciated what he did for a living and how the postal service is so poorly funded and underappreciated.

It wasn't a long encounter, but that friendly gesture suddenly dissolved all my aches. As we parted, I told him that he had made my day. A friendly face and a kind word, even among strangers is our antidote to the menu of violence, hatred and cruelty that is served up every day by our president and his sycophantic minions. The fact that this letter carrier had noticed me made me realize how often I have failed to notice all those people who labor day in and day out to make our lives more comfortable. During the pandemic we began to notice them: the health care workers, the delivery men, the postal workers, and we began to call them heroes; but sadly, we tend to fall back into old habits of unseeing when emergencies like the pandemic subside.

A few months ago I arrived at about 5:30 AM at LaGuardia airport from a cross-country trip. As I was waiting for my Uber ride in the still dark dawn I began to notice the stream of people—mostly black and brown—getting off buses to go to work inside the airport—as store clerks, TSA workers, cleaners, the people who push wheelchairs, those who work at ticket counters, airline mechanics, air traffic controllers, stewardesses, pilots, and the like, and I realized how much I owed all these people who daily sacrifice their precious sleep so that I can fly safely to my destination. I should have said something to some of them, but I didn't.

Many of these hard-working people are those the Trump administration has called "rapists" and "criminals" and is in the process of deporting. Without their contributions to our Social Security fund, we will not be able to support people in their elder years. A friendly smile, a thank you, an offer to help when someone is in distress can go a long way. It helps not only the recipient of the kindness but the giver as well to see the world in a different way, to believe that cruelty and injustice is not the norm, but the exception.

From now on, I am going to recognize and thank all those who contribute to my wellbeing. It is just one of the ways that I can resist this authoritarian state.