

EVERY LIFE HAS A STORY



It was early December. A brisk north wind was blowing. The dry leaves crackled under foot. I was playing soccer with some friends when I noticed a family moving into the rent house next door. It didn't take them long to unload the pick-up truck and small trailer.

By Skip Forsyth Monday morning Annabel was introduced to our class. She was my new next door neighbor. She was quiet. I asked if she wanted to walk with me to school, but that first week she walked alone. There seemed to be a sadness about her as her long wavy hair often covered her eyes.

The following weekend when Annabel was sitting on the front step I kicked the soccer ball her way. She glanced toward me. I sensed a faint smile. I rested on my soccer ball and hesitantly started a conversation. Our words drifted cautiously from one topic to another. Finally I asked, "Why did you move here?" A tear formed in the corner of Annabel's eye, "My mother and brother were killed in a car accident a year ago. My dad said he needed a change." The conversation ended quickly with a softly spoken, "I'm sorry. I'll see you tomorrow."

Before the weekend ended I told my momma and papa about Annabel and her family. My mother, filled with compassion, was moved to action. A few days later she gave them a plate of empanadas, and later in the week homemade tamales. She even invited Annabel and her father to join our family and others in the annual Las Posadas. This was the beginning of an enduring friendship between Annabel's family, the Whitley's, and my family, the Rivera's.

Yes, every life has a story – heroic moments and times of failure, cause for celebration and periods of sorrow, births and graduations and marriages as well as illness and unexpected tragedies.

When we uncover the "story" in a person's life, then the challenge arises, "How shall I respond?" Hopefully we will listen with our heart as well as our head. Hopefully our demeanor will encourage a person to speak with candor. Hopefully we will speak gentle words that cause a person to listen. Hopefully we will understand the need rather than analyze the problem. Hopefully we will assist in practical ways – food or articles of clothing or warm, soft bedding or possibly financial assistance for an auto repair or utility bill. The elderly couple needs help raking the leaves and trimming the shrubs. The young couple with an infant would like a "date night." Mom and dad attend to their parent in the hospital and need someone to watch kids for a couple of hours.

Although we associate the holiday season with charity, random acts of kindness should be practiced throughout the year. Every life has a story, and new details are added to our narrative every day, every week, every month. Let's respond with empathy to a person's story whenever the need arises. Blessings to you all.

A Helping Hand

Ray Hansell

Make a difference

Each day you live

Open your heart

Learn to give

Life for many

Is so unkind

Giving people

Are hard to find

So open your heart

Give what you can

We're all responsible

For our fellow man

It's so easy to look

The other way

But the tables could turn

On any given day

So help if you can

For one day you may be

The one who's down and out

The one no one will see

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities

There are many reasons to take a walk. We may walk to school, to work, or even to our places of worship. We may walk to help us think better and relieve stress. Often, we may take a stroll in order to spend quality time with the people and the pets we love most. And, throughout history, we've walked and marched in order to make our voices heard and our presence felt. As your Surgeon General, I celebrate all the many reasons for walking—and wheelchair rolling. Carving out just 22 minutes a day on average or 2½ hours a week for physical activity, like brisk walking, can do wonders for your overall health.

As Americans, we lead the world in treating disease. We must also lead the world in *preventing* disease. Robust scientific evidence shows that physical activity is critical for both preventing and treating many of the chronic conditions we face today. Being physically active is one of the most important ways to improve health and well-being throughout our lives.

The *Call to Action* is applicable to the health of people at all ages and stages of life. Walking is the most common activity of teens and adults. It requires no specialized skills or equipment and is a great first step (pun intended) for anyone who has been inactive. Taking a walk with family or friends can help our emotional well-being and connect us to our communities. And because active older adults are less likely to suffer from falls, walking is a great way to help us enjoy a good quality of life and live independently for years to come.

The *Call to Action* recognizes that everyone should have access to spaces and places that make it safe and easy for us to walk or wheelchair roll—whether in urban, suburban, or rural settings. This means that the people who design our cities and neighborhoods should include well-maintained sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly streets, access to public transit, adequate lighting, and desirable destinations that are close to home. It also means that law enforcement and community leaders should work closely together to ensure that none of us has to walk in fear for our safety. Walkable communities are good for social connectedness, good for business, good for the environment, and, most importantly, good for our personal health.

Walking for better health may seem simplistic, but sometimes the most important things we can do are also the easiest and the most obvious. It's time to step it up, America! The journey to better health begins with a single step.

Taken in part from an article by **Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., M.B.A.** Vice Admiral, U.S. Public Health Service Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<http://tinyurl.com/nus4hzh>



FEW PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO
TAKE A WALK. THE
QUALIFICATIONS ARE
ENDURANCE, PLAIN CLOTHES,
OLD SHOES, AN EYE FOR
NATURE, GOOD HUMOR, VAST
CURIOSITY, GOOD SPEECH,
GOOD SILENCE AND
NOTHING TOO MUCH.

~ RALPH WALDO EMERSON WWW.VERYBESTQUOTES.COM

THE NAUGHTY LIST OF HOLIDAY FOODS

'Tis the season of tasty foods. The average person puts on a pound during the holidays. And if you're on a special diet because you have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, holiday dishes can be especially tricky. But you can enjoy yourself and make good choices, if you know which items are naughty and nice.

NAUGHTY: The skin of turkey and chicken is loaded with saturated fat. Per gram, all fats are higher in calories than protein or carbs, and bad fats raise cholesterol. Dark meat has more fat per bite than white meat.

Nice: Serve yourself turkey breast or other white meat without the skin.

NAUGHTY: Stuffing is typically loaded with butter and high-fat meats, such as sausage. A single scoop may have up to 550 calories.

Nice: Replace butter with low-sodium chicken broth, and skip pork sausage in favor of a low-fat chicken, oyster, or fruit alternative. Or try making wild rice stuffing instead.

NAUGHTY: Usually, a lot of milk, butter, and salt go into this classic comfort food. A cup of homemade mashed potatoes made with whole milk and butter can have 237 calories.

Nice: Mash the potatoes with low-fat milk or low sodium, fat-free chicken stock and skip the butter, or salt.

NAUGHTY: Sweet potatoes are a great choice. They've got vitamins A and C, plus a dose of calcium and potassium. But if they're in a casserole made with marshmallows, butter, and lots of sugar, that offsets their benefits.

Nice: Leave out the butter, cut the sugar in half, and lightly top with mini marshmallows. This will shave calories and fat, not taste.

NAUGHTY: Although pecans are packed with healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals, pecan pie is a minefield of sugar and calories. A typical slice of pecan pie has more than 500 calories. That's because it's usually made with oodles of corn syrup, butter, and sugar.

Nice: Nibble on a bowl of mixed nuts instead. If you can't resist the pie, choose pumpkin or opt for a very small slice and don't eat the crust.

AVOID NAUGHTY HOLIDAY FOODS

Knowing which foods are naughty is a good start. Take it a step further by using these tips:

- * Talk to people. You'll slow down your eating pace.
- * At parties, sit or stand far from the buffet table.
- * Excuse yourself from the dinner table once you've had enough to eat.
- * Chew sugar-free gum or suck on sugar-free candy to curb your desire to nibble.

<http://tinyurl.com/zf6jjgu>



TIPS TO GET YOUR KIDS THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS GRACIOUSLY AND GRATEFULLY

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The holidays are a time of traveling, cooking, cleaning, planning, cooking more, making lists and counting chairs and napkins. But it is also the time of year when parents are considering how their 2-year-old will hold up during a Thanksgiving meal that starts at 7 p.m. Or how their 10-year-old daughter will react when she opens a present from Great Aunt Edna to find a puppy sweater that she would have liked when she was 3. Or whether their 7-year-old son will understand the importance of togetherness, love and thankfulness when the family gathers around a table.



- **Think ahead.** Figure out what you can do to structure the event for the least negative impact on the family's typical schedule, and prepare the kids for what to expect. In other words, don't do dinner at 8 p.m. if you have children who go to bed at 7:30. Explain to them either before you go to a gathering or as the holiday nears how things will work.
- **Let kids know what your expectations are.** Give them a timetable, such as: So when we get there, you'll have time to play with your cousins. And then when it's dinnertime, we all will sit at the table. I expect you to do that for at least 30 minutes. Then you can go play with everyone again. Preparing kids ahead of time and coaching them about what's appropriate goes a long way.
- **About that weird present.** Again, preparation is key. Kids have bad impulse control and may slip when they get a pair of fluorescent Santa socks for Hanukkah. But tell them before you go out that if someone gives them a present, it's because they like you, and sometimes they might guess wrong. It's really important that they just thought about you, and they thought they were getting you something you would like. Then demonstrate what you would say: It was so nice of you to think of me when you got this. Boom.
- **Be realistic.** Set developmentally appropriate expectations of, for example, how long your child can actually sit. Or how much conversing with adults will actually happen. Think your child can realistically sit nicely for 15 minutes? Let that be the thing you focus on. Want your son to speak kindly to an aunt he doesn't know? Practice that conversation in advance. It may help you, too, so you don't get unreasonably annoyed when your 5-year-old wants to leave the table before everyone is finished.

Add a dollop of gratitude

- **Have a gratitude action.** Ask your children to think about someone outside of the family who has helped them. Think about people you don't normally thank — the custodian at school, the mail carrier, the bus driver. Then do something to express appreciation, whether that's a note, a gift or an offer to do something helpful.

<http://tinyurl.com/hz6rbcw>



Small Ways to Show Compassion and the Spirit of Giving

It's sometimes hard to sympathize with your spouse, much less the cashier who is fumbling with your change. But that's compassion—caring about another's suffering and trying to help (even if that means just waiting patiently). A little love goes a long way.

Lighten a Load

Simple things make a difference for family caregivers who never get a break: a neighbor going to the grocery store for them or a local teenager shoveling the snow. A beautician could volunteer to do hair, makeup, and nails for the patients and their families that don't have time to go out of the house to do this.

Don't Judge—Hug

If someone is upset or acting unusual, consider why before you judge or get annoyed. There's probably a backstory that would make you react differently. And when someone does share, you don't have to have the perfect answer. You can just say, "I don't know what to say, but I'm here for you." Don't forget the power of touch, especially for children, who thrive on feeling accepted as whole people. Give hugs and pats on the head or a squeeze of the hand. And you can always simply say, "I want the best for you."

Let Your Heart Break

The world is full of what seems like intractable problems. Often we let that paralyze us. Instead, let it spur you to action. There are some people in the world that we can't help, but there are so many more that we can. So when you see a mother and her children suffering in another part of the world, don't look away. Look right at them. Let them break your heart, then let your empathy and your talents help you make a difference in the lives of others. Whether you volunteer every week or just a few times a year, your time and unique skills are invaluable.

Taken in part from an article by John Mastrojohn, Helen Riess and Melinda Gates.

<http://tinyurl.com/zk6rcji>



"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive."

~ Dalai Lama

Kids who volunteer are more likely to have a greater respect for others, leadership skills, and an understanding of citizenship that can carry over into adulthood.

As parents, we all want our children to grow up healthy and successful. We also want our children to be grateful for what they have been given and have compassion for those who are in need. Teaching your children the spirit of giving, showing them the importance of thinking of others, and modeling kindness are important ways to help children grow into productive and loving members of our world.

Giving doesn't require that you travel to a special destination. Showing your child how to give can be as easy as being a good neighbor.

- ✓ Mow your neighbors' lawn when you know they are out of town.
- ✓ Help elderly neighbors by cleaning out their rain gutters before the winter months set in.
- ✓ Bring a casserole or fruit bowl to a neighbor who might appreciate it, or reach out to someone who lives alone.

Pay it forward. Small acts of kindness can help someone who is having a bad day see the good in the world and help us feel positive about ourselves. Model the following positive behaviors to your child any day of the year.

- ✓ Leave a note on a stranger's car wishing them a nice day.
- ✓ When you pick up your morning coffee, pay for the person behind you in the drive-through.
- ✓ Offer to bag your own groceries when the cashier is working alone.

Volunteer. Teach your child how to give by giving something priceless—time and energy.

- ✓ Volunteer to help in your child's classroom or to chaperone a school field trip. If you can't help during the day, offer to help with projects you can work on at home.
- ✓ Volunteer to deliver items or staff the pick-up booth for sports and civic groups in which your child is involved.
- ✓ As a family, pick a local place to volunteer, and make it a family date once a month or whenever possible.

Donate. Giving away unused and gently used items is a great no-cost way to show your child how to help someone in need. In addition, helping to meet life-saving needs will show your child that we are all important and connected.

<http://tinyurl.com/hv3qwb3>

My Little St. Nick

By Brenda Bokor Wismer



My six-year-old son, Nicholas, sat in the grocery cart as I perused the canned vegetables. “How about this one, Mommy?” he asked, and handed me a can of asparagus. “I love asparagus!” I told him. “Asparagus is my favorite vegetable, but it’s just too expensive.” I put the can back on the shelf. Three months later, I opened a crudely wrapped present from under the Christmas tree. It was a can of asparagus. Nicholas beamed in delight as he explained how he had saved his pennies to buy me the best Christmas gift I’d ever received.

<http://www.rd.com/true-stories/inspiring/mothers-day-short-stories/>

Talking Is Like Ketchup

By Carmen Mariano

I sat in my dad’s living room reading one night while he watched television. An hour passed before I realized it, and I felt bad for not speaking during that time. I asked if he was OK, and he said yes. Then I apologized for not talking more. “Carmen,” Dad replied. “Talking is like ketchup. If you like the meat enough, you don’t need the ketchup—and if you like the company enough, you don’t need the conversation.” My dad never earned a college degree, but he was the smartest person I ever knew.



<http://www.rd.com/true-stories/inspiring/short-stories-about-dads/>



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is posted on our web site four times a year for parents and educators of Texas.

EDITOR

Terri Stafford, Coordinator

Title I Statewide School Support and Family & Community Engagement Initiative



<http://www.esc16.net/dept/isserv/title1swi/index.html>

ADMINISTRATION

Ray Cogburn, Executive Director
Region 16 Education Service Center

Anita Villarreal
Division of Federal & State Education Policy
Texas Education Agency

Region 16 ESC
5800 Bell Street
Amarillo, TX 79109-6230
Phone: (806) 677-5000
Fax: (806) 677-5189
www.esc16.net