

Be a Friend

As I was walking home from high school one Friday afternoon, a new kid from my freshman class was half a block ahead of me. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. *Only a real nerd would bring all his books home for the weekend*, I thought. I had quite a weekend planned myself—parties and a football game with my friends.

A minute later, a few other boys ran at Kyle, knocked his books out of his arms, and tripped him. Kyle tumbled to the ground. His glasses went flying and landed in the grass a short distance from him. As Kyle picked himself up, he looked my way. Even from half a block away, I could see that he was angry, frustrated, and humiliated.

My heart went out to him, so I jogged up to him. By this time he was down on his hands and knees, looking for his glasses. He tried to hide the tears in his eyes, and I tried to act like I hadn't noticed. I handed him his glasses and said, "Those guys are jerks! They really should get a life!"

Kyle looked at me and said, "Hey, thanks!" He broke out into a big smile—one of those smiles that show real gratitude.

I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me. I asked him why I hadn't ever seen him before, and he explained that he had gone to a private school till now. I would have never hung out with a private-school kid before. We talked all the way home, and I carried some of his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid.

I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends, and he said yes. We hung out all weekend, and the more I got to know Kyle, the more I liked him. My friends thought the same.

On Monday morning, there was Kyle again, on his way back to school with his huge stack of books. I stopped him and said, "Boy, you're going to build some serious muscles with that pile of books every



day!" He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors, we began to think about college. We decided on different schools, but I knew that we would always be friends. The miles between us would never be a problem. Kyle was going to be a doctor, and I was going to study business on a football scholarship.

Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak.

On graduation day, I saw Kyle. He looked great. He was one of those guys that really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more friends than I had, and all the girls loved him. Sometimes I was jealous. Today was one of those times.

Psychologist John Cacioppo, of the University of Chicago, was quoted as saying loneliness tended to raise blood pressure and disrupt sleep, both of which put people at greater risk of heart trouble. Population experts have long known that lonely people tend to have worse health and die younger, but they did not know why. "The absence of stable social relationships affects our minds and biology as few other events can," Mr. Cacioppo said.

I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, "Hey, big guy, you'll be great!"

He looked at me with one of those smiles—the really grateful ones. "Thanks," he said.

When the time came, he stepped up to the podium and cleared his throat. "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your brothers and sisters, maybe a coach ... but mostly your friends. I am here to tell you that true friendship is the best gift you can give anyone. I am going to tell you a true story."

Then I watched Kyle with disbelief as he told the story of the day we met. He told how he had planned to kill himself over the

weekend, and had cleaned out his locker so his mom wouldn't have to do it later. That was why he had carried all his stuff home that Friday afternoon. Kyle looked straight at me and gave me a smile. "Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable."

A gasp went through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. His mom and dad looked over at me with that same grateful smile. Not until that moment had I realized its depth.

Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life, for better or for worse.

—*Author unknown*

What one person can do

There is someone near you who is lonely. And if you reach out to them, you may be their link to life. You may, just by offering a smile and some conversation and a bright spot in their day, be giving them a reason to live.

Don't hold back just because you think people won't like it or might feel they don't need it. They do. And often they will be eternally grateful.

—*Chloe West*¹

You can make a special effort to reach lonely, hungry, needy hearts who are seeking love, seeking truth, seeking they know not what, but seeking happiness—desperately seeking to satisfy their yearning hearts that are so empty for lack of love and attention.

You can start individually, personally, just you or your little family, planting seeds of love, one by one, in heart by heart, day by day, by doing loving deeds for others and by telling them about the greatest of all loves—God's love in Jesus.

Patiently plant the seeds of the truth of God's Word into that empty hole of an

empty heart, then cover it with God's love, and trust the great, warm, loving sunshine of His Spirit and the water of His Word to bring forth the miracle of new life.

It may seem only a tiny little bud at first, just a little sprig, just one insignificant little green shoot. What is that to the forest that's needed? Well, it's a beginning. It's the beginning of the miracle of new life, and it will thrive and grow and flourish and become great and strong, a whole new "tree," a whole new life, and maybe a whole new world!

—*David Brandt Berg*²
(from *Dare to Be Different*)

¹ Chloe West is a volunteer with The Family.

² David Brandt Berg (1919–1994) was founder of The Family. Copyright © 2002 by The Family. Visit our Web site at www.thefamily.org.