

Smile Stones

Sunlight was streaming through the gap in the curtains throwing a blinding beam across the hall floor and painting a bright strip up the white board. Miss Brown placed a small tree on the table at the front of the hall and hung on its branches were a collection of small paper hearts that appeared to light up as they caught the sun, throwing shadows on the board behind.

“This is our Kindness Tree,” Miss Brown explained, if you feel touched by a random act of kindness then you can write about it on one of these hearts and hang it on the tree. Toby thought about this idea and had soon collected a list of kind deeds that he could write about. Kindness was a big feature at Toby’s school, it was something that was taught about, encouraged and celebrated. Toby’s school was a happy place to be in that respect, although he didn’t much like doing tests, that happened last week but the teachers were quick to find fun things to do afterwards so it wasn’t so bad.

At home, Toby told his mum all about the Kindness Tree and his ideas for what he could add to it. “You see mum, when you are kind to someone, it makes them feel good and it makes you feel good for being kind. It’s a ‘win, win’ Miss Brown said. I like Miss Brown, she smiles a lot.”

“How else do you show kindness to people then, Toby? Are there rules to how kindness works?” Toby hadn’t thought about that before, how kindness could have rules. The more they talked, the more it made him think about how people might respond in different situations.

“So, if you held open the door for someone, but that person didn’t say thank you, how would you feel?” Toby’s mum was big on being kind, she said that it was good manners to smile at people and help if you can, like giving way to someone in a car or holding doors, but she raised an interesting point, how do you feel when someone doesn’t seem to appreciate your act of kindness? Toby thought on this question for quite some time.

The next day was Saturday. Still pondering his mum’s question, Toby decided to people watch while they were out and about. They had some jobs to do in town so Toby took a little notebook and pen to collect his ‘Kindness Observations’. Mum did her usual giving way to people at junctions or to people waiting to cross the road and nearly every time a hand was raised in thanks or a clear smiling nod was received. One driver though, just pulled out without showing any sign of being thankful.

“Hmm, that’s a shame,” Mum sighed, “That driver didn’t show thanks. Why might that be, Toby?”

“He’s rude!”

“Maybe. Or, maybe he has other things on his mind. We don’t know what’s going on for him in his life at the moment, there may be a really good reason why he just drove off.” They talked about the different reasons for a while and thought of lots of reasons why the driver hadn’t shown thanks.

“Does it change the kind thing that I did because he didn’t show thanks? No, I didn’t get the warm fuzzy feeling from him but maybe I don’t need to get it from someone else, maybe knowing that I’ve been kind is its own reward?”

Toby and his mum thought of other examples where people may not respond how you might like them to and why they might behave in the way that they do.

“Mum, I think you should just be kind because you can be. I don’t think it should depend on someone being kind back.”

“I like that Idea, Toby. How might you help other people to think that way too?”

Toby thought really carefully about that one. Apart from helping people to think about why someone may respond in a way that isn’t so kind or thankful he was a bit stumped.

Toby and his mum arrived in town and went about their jobs. Toby’s favourite bit of going to town was having a cuppa in the cafe; the people who worked there were really friendly and would make patterns in chocolate sauce on his plate, even if he was only having a cookie. Toby went to find a table. They sat by the window and watched the world go by. All sorts of people walked past the window, some looked relaxed and happy, others looked serious and in a rush, some walked alone and others walked surrounded by friends or family. One lady in particular caught Toby’s eye. She was tall and smiley and had streaks of pink and purple in her long braided hair. He watched as she went into a little shop across the way. The shop was painted green and had crystals hanging in the window.

“Can we have a look in there, Mum?” Toby asked pointing to the little green shop.

“What a good idea, we need to find a gift for Auntie Di’s birthday and that looks just the right kind of place to find a treasure!”

Toby swirled his finger over the plate to scrape up the last of the chocolate sauce before grabbing his coat to leave.

As the pair approached the green door, the lady with the braided hair was just coming out. She held open the door and smiled broadly. “Thank you!” chorused Toby and his mum. “You’re welcome!” the lady called backed cheerfully. Another act of kindness and smiles all round, Toby thought.

The shop itself seemed to sparkle, as if Toby had stepped into a jewellery box. The walls and shelves were covered with a bright and shimmering collection of crystals, gem stones of every colour, tiny carved figures and on one low down shelf, Toby noticed some small polished stones. He picked one up and held it in his palm. He noticed how cool and smooth the stone felt against his skin. There was a word written on the stone, ‘LOVE’ it read. Looking back to the shelf where he had selected the stone, he noticed that each one was a little different from the others. The sizes varied, as did the colour and some of them had different words written on them, ‘PEACE’, ‘JOY’, ‘HOPE’, ‘KINDNESS’.

“Kindness! I’ve got an idea mum!” Toby showed his mum the stones and explained his idea to her.

“What if people were to collect stones, small ones that feel nice to hold, like these, and write or paint on them to show a kind thought or feeling? Then, you could leave them for other people to find. They wouldn’t have your name on them but they would show that someone has taken the time to do something kind for someone else – no ties, no expectation to say thank you, just a simple message to share a kindness with someone.”

“What a lovely idea, Toby! I think people would really like that.” Mum hesitated for a moment, “What would you do then if you found one of these stones?”

“You’d smile. It would be like any other time that someone is nice to you but you’d have something to hold and keep... or pass on to someone else to help them smile too.”

The man behind the shop counter was listening to this conversation and wanted to join in with Toby’s idea.

“Perhaps people could leave them in a little basket by the till for shoppers to find too? My children would enjoy doing something like that and I imagine lots of staff around town would enjoy joining in. We could make a little sign, ‘Smile Stones’ please take one to keep or leave somewhere to be found by someone else.’ I think it’s a great idea. You can never share too much happiness in my opinion!”

Toby’s mum selected a collection of the stones and a little gift bag to put them in for Auntie Di’s gift. As they were leaving, the man called out to them, “If you want me to share some Smile Stones then I’d be glad to, if it’s alright with you, I’ll make some with my family to share too. Let’s see if we can spread the kindness around, eh?”

“That would be great.” replied Toby, “Thank you!”

Toby and his mum arrived at home but went straight across the road and along the little path to the park. In hardly any time at all, the pair had made quite the collection of smooth stones, all ready to be decorated and shared around.

“Smile Stones – I’m going to get everyone making these, mum!”

“Yes my kind, thoughtful boy, I really hope you do!”