

## Won't You Be My Neighbor?

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I just saw the movie "Won't You Be My Neighbor" and I was deeply struck by Mr. Fred Rogers' message that being nice is not a weakness; that speaking with care is a thing we do simply because we believe the person we're talking to is a human being with worth and dignity. He said, "Love is at the root of everything; all learning, all parenting, all relationships-love or the lack of it...The greatest thing that we can do is to let somebody know that they are loved and capable of loving."

Most children growing up in the late 1960s through 2001 watched Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. Since my family didn't own a television until I was in middle school, I didn't pay much attention to his show until I had children of my own. Together, my boys and I learned many aspects about the world through watching the show -- from learning from mistakes and dealing with fears to how crayons, pretzels and brooms were made. Using simple sets and puppets, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood addressed a wide range of topics including relationships and differences as controversial topics as death, divorcee, race and more.

On one episode in 1969, Rogers quietly made a civil-rights statement on his show, by companionably sharing a wading pool on a hot day with Officer Clemmons, who is black -- at a time of segregated pools in much of the country. In the documentary, Director Morgan Neville intercuts this scene with footage of white lifeguards pouring bleach into a pool where black kids were swimming.

Mister Rogers reminded us, in gentle song, that we were special and that he liked us as we were. I want to wield kindness every moment of every day as Fred Rogers did in his life, on his television show, and out in the world. The world is a much scarier place now. Kindness feels like a revolutionary act! I find it challenging as a daily practice, especially like today when someone honked at me and flipped me off as I was looking for the correct exit on my way to the movie theater. Kindness requires me to work hard at having empathy, patience, understanding and a willingness to listen. But I believe that this message is one that we greatly need--to see each other as neighbors and interact with empathy and kindness.