

## Monday Musings...Remembering Mr. Rogers

*It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,  
A beautiful day for a neighbor.  
Would you be mine?  
Could you be mine?  
Won't you be my neighbor?*

Do you recognize this refrain? Then you must know about Mr. Rogers and his Neighborhood. Fred Rogers came into my home back in the 1970's. His show was unique in children's television since he wasn't there to "entertain" young children. He wasn't "performing". He would look through the camera, right into the children's eyes, and be fully present with them...and with their parents. He accepted them for who they were and made them feel good about themselves.

He often talked to children about important issues at the time; topics like divorce, war, death, and racism. He would ask how they were feeling, and he respected them, feelings and all. But he also gently guided them towards the realization that there was always something positive they could do with "the mad" they were feeling.

One episode I recall demonstrates how his actions were even more powerful than his words. It was a hot summer day and a local police officer came to visit. Fred was so warm that he wanted to soak his feet in a small plastic pool, and he asked Officer Clemmons to join him. The Officer said, "But I don't have a towel", and Fred replied, "Don't worry. I'll share mine with you."



At the time many swimming pools were still segregated. A hotel had just been in the news showing the manager screaming at Black people to get out of the pool, while he walked the perimeter pouring jugs of disinfectant into the water right next to the people.

Yet, here was Mr. Rogers, simply "washing" his feet with his neighbour, his friend.

Washing of feet...does that remind you of something? Fred was an ordained Presbyterian minister and his love of neighbour...his kindness...his washing of feet certainly had their roots in his Christian beliefs. Yet, at no time was "religion" or "church" part of the script. He showed his audience that he didn't need the formalities of organized religion to teach about loving your neighbour and about recognizing who your neighbour is.

He started all his shows the same way, by entering his home, removing his sports jacket and dress shoes, and putting on a cardigan sweater and sneakers. It was a time for him to relax and share a moment with his young friends. I recently read that until his mother's death in 1981, she hand-knitted all his sweaters. I'm sure he felt wrapped in

her love when he wore them, as children felt wrapped in his love as he spoke so personally with them.

Mr. Rogers ended his shows by saying, "You've made this day a special day, by just you're being you. There's no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are." I can imagine God saying that to Fred after his death. He certainly was a humble, faithful servant.

May we, like Mr. Rogers, continue to recognize our neighbours, and be fully present to them, respecting their feelings, accepting them just the way they are, and showing our love in kind and gentle ways.

Bernadette