

# Essay – The Gift of Kindness

## **The Gift of Kindness**, by *David Copperfield*

*Magician David Copperfield makes mind-boggling illusions like walking through the Great Wall of China seem easy. But he believes simple gestures of kindness are far more valuable than any magic trick.*

I believe in kindness.

But it's hard to be kind. We're not trained for it. Kindness is for sissies; we learn that early. "Nice guys finish last." If they even get invited to the race. Kindness is taken for weakness, rube-ishness, stupidity. No one seems to respect the kind. They respect the killer. We're taught to value competitiveness, strength, cunning, Darwin.

I work in the entertainment business, where kindness just never seems to be "in." It's not macho. It doesn't sell tickets. In the movies, the hero never kills the bad guy with kindness. But I believe Economics 101 is right. The value of a thing is determined by its scarcity. Which makes kindness spiritual gold.

I am writing these words a few weeks after my father's death. He was a fervent Republican. He preached an eye for an eye. He was a hawk. But he practiced kindness to everyone, including people he didn't know, and people he knew too well. My father wanted to be an actor. He traded his dream for solid middle-class security, a beautiful wife and a son.

For my father, being kind was natural. He had a gift for it. I have to really work at it. I love competing and winning, conquest — not words you usually associate with kindness.

As I became successful — famous, even — my father wasn't jealous. He basked in it. He and my mom came with me everywhere I toured. I'd always stop and introduce him to the audience, and he'd stand and bow. Afterwards, he'd sign autographs. I knew he loved getting the attention.

Only recently did I understand that he loved giving attention as well. He loved the chance to be kind to the thousands of people who came up to him. He drew strength and vitality from that chance to be nice. The chance to learn that gift was, more than anything, his legacy to me. He showed me that kindness doesn't have to be dramatic. It can be very small. It's something that's not expected and that's offered absolutely gratis, no strings — like an act of friendship. Now, the memories that hold the most peace for me are of kindness, of my dad offering it to strangers.

With my dad's passing, I've resolved to make life more about those moments. My dad taught me that what you do counts. For me, that has to be about being kind, despite the odds. I believe in kindness, plain and simple.

For discussion or writing:

1. Remember a time when some act of kindness occurred to you, or to someone you know. Describe it. What were the feelings that the involved people had?
2. Identify a person that you know who is kind to others in ways that you admire. Describe a kindness and the value of that kindness for that person, as well as the receiver of the kindness.
3. Do you believe that kindness is an attribute that is worth developing? How could you do that? David Copperfield states that “it is hard to be kind”, why? What does he mean by, “We’re not trained for it.”?

*Adapted from NPR series, This I Believe*