

# Kindness and Happiness Transforming Lives

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

*Worthing Herald Article*

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Instead of gathering in church, our extended family created an internet-enabled Service for Easter. Time-keeping was not brilliant during the hymns; it was better during the prayers. A senior cousin spoke about the eight survivors from the devastation of the Great War and the ravage of the influenza that followed. Now over one hundred descendants meet annually.

One of the next generation spoke about life and death in a wonderfully inspiring way that was accessible and comforting even for the youngest in each household group. She is an experienced funeral director, as used to the transition from life to death as the nurse, the doctor and the police officer.

In the wider world there is death and sorrow. It is good news that my favourite paramedic has returned to her ambulance duty after the virus. In addition to the parent of a friend and colleague, deaths of friends include a great woman who has been this generation's custodian of a fine old family garden. She was a colleague doctor with one of my cousins. Her life, working professionally, caring for the garden or entertaining her brood of children, grandchildren and friends, was a collection of chapters of kindness.

I have a little book by Dr David Hamilton, an organic chemist. He switched from pharmaceuticals to work passionately to help inspire a kinder world. We can keep the whole wide world in our mind as we deal also with local concerns. Thank God for the perception, the drive and the fortune that Bill and Melinda Gates are giving through their Foundation to transform lives.

Dr Hamilton writes that kindness is a glue that holds people and holds society together. It includes the gestures, the assistance, the support and guidance that helps us through days and nights that might otherwise be dominated by worry or by loneliness. He recognises that kindness softens things. It can work through patience or forgiveness.

He is right to write that it is a two-way process: '... we know from being the receivers of kindness how much difference a helping hand can make. Who hasn't come to know the relief when someone takes a difficult situation off their hands, or when someone steps in to save the day, or even when someone is nice when others are not?'

He adds that kindness makes people happy, that it is cardio-protective, boosts the immune system and reduces the nervous system and inflammation: it can be an antidote to depression. Stress does the opposite.

I do not know much about the oxytocin gene, the kindness gene. I do believe our growth and well-being is built significantly by the kindness we show and by the kindnesses from which we each benefit. This is at each stage: infancy, childhood, the middle stages and responsibilities of life and during the pleasures and pains later on.

Many are involved in caring groups, in support networks and in practical ways to help others with difficulties. I know from those who contact me the concerns they have for the front-liners as well as for their kin, including whether they have the best gear. I know commercial businesses offering to help with distribution and I know how fast the government and opposition parties respond together to make the best of our bad situation.

By this time next week we will know more about whether schools and parliament will meet virtually or physically. I send best wishes to children of all ages as they try to keep parents under control and happy.

We cannot presently give hugs outside the household. We can ring and we can write; we can make connections for hope, happiness and for health.