



Thoughts from Linda:

The World According to Mr. Rogers Important Things to Remember

Fred Rogers
2003

For November, we have selected two books about two beloved television figures: Fred Rogers and Bill Nye. There are two key reasons for these selections. First, these are two optimistic and kind people who have influenced so many individuals with their humanity and authenticity over the years. Secondly, because the books have great appeal and read so well, they could provide great Christmas, Hanukah, 'Hannamas' gifts for adults and the children on your lists.

This small book, published after the death of Fred Rogers in 2003, consists of his quotes and short speeches and is divided into four topical areas: The Courage to Be Yourself, Understanding Love, The Challenges of Inner Discipline, and my personal favorite, We Are All Neighbors. Overall, there are about 150 individual messages, and if you have had any exposure to Mr. Rogers on television, you will hear his voice as you read these.

This year's most-ever-nominated Emmy winner, [Ted Lasso](#), has illustrated a wonderful resurgence and interest in the power of kindness in a remarkable way. Wikipedia defines kindness as "a type of behavior marked by acts of generosity, consideration, or concern for others, without expecting praise or reward." Fred Rogers was the epitome of a kind, values-centered human being who taught children (and adults for sure) by modeling what kindness looks like in action.

Fred Rogers was born in 1928 near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He grew up in a three-story brick mansion and, as he describes his childhood, lived as an only child until age 11, when his parents adopted a baby girl. He describes having a very lonely childhood, spending much time with imaginary friends, playing with puppets, and spending time with his grandfather. He was a shy child, quite introverted and overweight, spending time at home often because of his severe asthma. He notes that he was bullied and taunted, often called "Fat Freddy" by others. Clearly, his love for children and his life work of protecting and teaching kindness was influenced by his personal experiences.

He began to play the piano when he was five years old, and music was a big part of his life. He earned a degree from Rollins College in 1951 in music and began his television career at NBC in New York. He also met his future wife, Joanne, while at Rollins, and she opens this book with a loving and very personal tribute to him.

Later he returned to Pittsburgh to work at what ultimately became a PBS station. He graduated from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary with a bachelor's degree in divinity in 1962 and became a Presbyterian minister in 1963. He attended the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Child Development, where he began his 30-year collaboration with child psychologist Margaret McFarland.

He also helped develop the children's shows *The Children's Corner* (1955) and *Mister Rogers* (1963). In 1968, he created *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, which ran for 33 years. The program gained critical acclaim for focusing on children's emotional and physical concerns, such as death, sibling rivalry, school enrollment, and divorce.

Through an ancestor who immigrated from Germany to the U.S., Johannes Meffert (born 1732), Rogers is the sixth cousin of Tom Hanks, who portrays him in the 2019 movie, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, based on the television series which ran from 1968 to 2001.

This little book is filled with insight, as you might expect. I'll end this review with the last quote from the book as we all can learn so much from the simple wisdom of this amazing example:

"You don't ever have to do anything sensational for people to love you. When I say, "It's you I like," I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch...that deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive: love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over the way, and justice that proves more powerful than greed.

So, in all that you do in all of your life, I wish you the strength and the grace to make those choices which will allow you and your neighbor to become the best of whoever you are."

I think that all of us, including Ted Lasso and his team, would join in saying, "we would love to be your neighbor."