

## Don't Talk To Strangers.....Unless You Want To Feel Better!

On a recent trip to California and back home again, the memories I have of conversations with strangers stand out in my mind. The young mom from Missouri on her way to visit girlfriends in San Diego and the waitress in Oceanside who is working on her Doctorate in physical therapy, became my confidants, my "passing" friends because we shared a common story. In one case, it was a shared story of marrying a farmer and moving from a larger city to a farm community and the other it was a story of encouragement for a loved one who is struggling through addiction.

We live in an age when we have our heads buried in our tablets and earbuds and when people stare at their phones like zombies when they walk down the street, so it seems almost "inappropriate to engage in conversation with a stranger.

However, there seems to be some strange benefits for humans who engage in interactions with random people. Author Kio Stark is trying to convince people that the pleasures of talking to strangers outweigh the risks. Here, she outlines the benefits.

- It makes us feel human. Brief connections with strangers it is an affirmation of our existence. Saying "hello" or 'how are you doing?" to each other is a social function that makes it clear that we see and acknowledge each other as humans in this place.
- It breaks the monotony of a commute or in my case, travel. Turning awareness outward means I'm not on autopilot but present in the moment.
- It helps us be understood. A number of sociological studies found that sometimes strangers understand us better than our friends and family. How? Sometimes, we explain things more clearly – and more freely – to strangers than to loved ones. In addition, we might find they can relate to what we are experiencing. There is healing and comfort in the realization that "I'm not the only one going through this."
- It's especially good for introverts. "I have been told by a lot of people who consider themselves introverts that they actually enjoy talking to strangers because they know that it will be brief and that they can get away any time.
- It's an antidote to fear. While talking to strangers will probably not solve major geopolitical problems, it might be a start toward mutual respect. "There's so much hatred going around in so many directions, so much suspicion of people who aren't like us," Stark said. "There is this tiny thing that everyone can do, which is spend more time getting to know people who aren't like us and try to understand what it's like to really be them. That extends your empathetic abilities, complicates your thinking about political situations and gives you more nuanced conversations. It's not an abstract group of people; it's someone you've had experiences with."

Next time you are in the grocery store or at the local restaurant and you are given an opportunity to interact with a stranger or even with someone you might know, take time to be open, share a story, offer encouragement, engage with kindness and curiosity and see what happens.

We are fortunate to live in a community that is caring and giving. The Greater Sabetha Community Foundation hopes to help people with their caring and giving intent. Let us help urge you to look up, look at others and follow through in conversation, action or giving.