

## Won't You Be My Neighbor?

By Laura Stoll

My childhood friend Mister Rogers is making a comeback in popular culture. With a hit movie starring Tom Hanks, a 2018 feature documentary, podcasts, and books, everyone is talking about Mister Rogers and how the core values he taught to a generation of children are more relevant than ever.

As a child, one thing I loved about "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" is the familiarity of the welcome song and the routine of Mister Rogers taking off his sportcoat and formal shoes and changing into his cardigan and Keds. Being able to count on this repeated procedure brought me a sense of fellowship with Mister Rogers. Mister Rogers was aware of what child development experts had already determined: that structure and routine give children a sense of security. He regularly incorporated this and other tenets of childhood development into his show.

I was fascinated by the episode when Mister Rogers visits the Crayola Factory and showed how crayons were made. I still remember the satisfaction of watching the warm wax being poured into the molds and then the excess being scraped off. Another episode took viewers behind the scenes of the Land of Make Believe; my parents still tease me that that was the first time I understood that King Friday and Daniel Striped Tiger weren't real. However, this lesson taught me and other children to be prepared for what was to come in the real world.

"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" began as a local broadcast on Pittsburgh's PBS station and later expanded nationally as his fanbase grew. In August 2001, Mister Rogers retired, believing that he had said all he needed to say. Little did any of us know that just a few weeks later, on September 11, his wisdom and thoughtfulness would be needed more than ever. When he addressed his fans following the terrorist attacks, he spoke to the children who grew up watching him, saying he was proud of them and knew that they would carefully guide children through the harrowing days ahead.

Some of Mister Rogers' other lessons addressed the importance of loving ourselves and others just the way we are; how to gracefully handle complicated issues like death, divorce, and our own anger; and how to express our love for others. Producers of the recent film "A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood" say those lessons are more important today than ever.

If you feel you need a dose of Mister Rogers in your life, the Kirkland Town Library has several options:

"Won't You Be My Neighbor" is a documentary about Mister Rogers' life that was released to theaters in 2018 and now available on DVD at the library. Viewers learn about his childhood, his career in children's television, and introduces some of his colleagues and friends as they reflect on his legacy.

*A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* is a colorful, illustrated volume of 75 songs from Mr Rogers' television shows. With the combination of his unique blend of silliness and sincerity, the poems convey important lessons for children about individuality, kindness, and more. The illustrations by Luke Flowers are fun, especially the ones of the familiar characters from the Land of Make Believe.

In *The World According to Mr. Rogers*, readers can get a small dose of plainspoken wisdom based on Fred's philosophy. This book is geared towards adults, both who grew up watching the television show and those who didn't.

If you are familiar with podcasts, "Finding Fred" from iHeart media is a 10-episode look into how the lessons from Mister Rogers can be used to cultivate a more meaningful life. The show is hosted by Carvell Wallace, who grew up watching "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" and now, as a father, finds himself reflecting on his own childhood.

"A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," now out on DVD, stars Tom Hanks as Fred Rogers. The film follows writer Lloyd Vogel who writes a piece about Mister Rogers while grappling with his troubled relationship with his father.

Mister Rogers has left us with many familiar phrases and quotes that still resonate today, partly because his message withstands the test of time. One that resonates with the library's role in the community is:

*As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is, that each of us has something that no one else has - or ever will have - something inside that is unique to all time. It's our job to encourage each other to discover that uniqueness and to provide ways of developing its expression.*

At the library, we strive to provide resources that help our patrons find and express their own uniqueness. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help you reach that goal.