

# FLORAL PARK



NEIGHBORHOOD GAZETTE

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Kindness**

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**FLORAL PARK LOVE STORIES**

FEBRUARY ISSUE / 2021



# The Road To Kindness

*by Jeffrey Katz*

*Photograph by Eric Stein*

# AT THE END OF ROAD

we will not be thinking about awards, stocks & bonds, swimming pools, cars, first-class travel, six-pack abs, adulation, notoriety, Facebook, jewelry, politics, violence, or revenge. We will be thinking about the people we love, the ways their love made us feel, and the kindness we shared.

I heard Denzel Washington say, “You never see a U-Haul following a hearse.” But kindness, when expressed, is unique because of its duality. It’s our legacy that resonates here after we are gone. And, yet, it intertwines our soul with a benefaction that endures to the hereafter.

In previous columns, I have written about the mystical qualities of the homes in Floral Park and how the branches of our oaks can magically offer the pensive pedestrian a comforting hug. But I am most grateful to Floral Park for teaching me the difference between neighborhood and community. The words had been interchangeable to me, but they are vastly different.

A neighborhood is defined by geography. A community is defined by the kindness shared among neighbors—a bond among people. It is more than being nice and “neighborly.” Even the friendliest of neighborhoods can lack a sense of community. When a neighborhood elevates itself to community, a zip code transforms into something more than numbers. We celebrate each other’s differences and embrace kindness by accepting everyone, regardless of age, race, beliefs or circumstances. It may be a town filled with people from all walks of life going through a variety of hardships, but we are one community.

In 2013, my wife Suzee decreed that we would be leaving Irvine, a city she dubbed “souless.” She found a prospective home on Heliotrope Drive in Northern Santa Ana. I accompanied her on her initial visit, but I protested, “I am not going in the house, because there is no way we are moving to

Santa Ana.” As she toured the house, I waited outside. And Seymou started to whisper to me to “come in.” (Seymour is the lazy sycamore that stands in front of our home. Suzee names seminal inanimate objects in our lives.) I liked the house, but I still was not moving to Santa Ana.

Well, you know Suzee. We moved in one month later. I had buyer’s remorse immediately, but the first weekend in the house coincided with the fall concert. I met a crazy couple dressed as hippies who lived in the castle house on North Park (Pete & Erin) and thought, “there is more to this ‘hood.’”

“How do we change the world? One random act of kindness at a time.”

—Morgan Freeman

A few years later, Suzee was seriously ill, necessitating an extended stay at Keck Hospital of USC. That became our home for four months. During this time, neighbors shared the key to our house to take Tula, our dog, on walks. When we returned, neighbors (many whom we had never met) brought us dinners or took Suzee for walks while she regained her strength.

And remarkably these acts of kindness opened my eyes. They helped me forgive the failures of my own city and to love Santa Ana. These acts transformed me into a humble servant who loves this place, and who loves the people within it—not for what they are or what they can do for me, but just because they are *mine*. And I

wondered, could these acts of kindness not only transform a person, but also transform the world?

Last month, Rachel Borack Moloo (the chair of FPNA’s care & compassion committee) and I sat down for a Zoom talk with Tom Tait, the former mayor of Anaheim (2010-2018) and brother of Floral Park resident, Richard Tait (North Park Blvd.) Tom is responsible for re-branding Anaheim as “The City of Kindness.”

The idea all started with crayons and some paper. Natasha Jaievsky, who tragically died in a car accident in 2002 at age 6, loved drawing colorful pictures of rainbows. Along each rainbow’s curve, she also wrote messages of kindness.

Her father, Dr. Edward Jaievsky, found his daughter’s drawings while searching for ways to preserve her memory. He hung up her kindness-filled art around Anaheim. It wasn’t long before the local community noticed the messages’ power.

Dr. Jaievsky was an Argentinian holistic doctor whose Jewish family had escaped Europe during the war. He observed that in medicine you can either treat the symptom or you can stimulate the body to heal from within, holistically. Tom said, “That was the light bulb moment for me.” He thought that the same principle applies to a city.

Tom, who was at the time a councilman, saw Natasha’s pictures and was inspired to run for mayor, using kindness as a platform that could potentially transform the city. He won.

As mayor, Tom drew inspiration from the late business management guru Peter Drucker (who famously said “culture eats strategy for breakfast”) and Abraham Lincoln (“he who molds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes.”) Tom set out to create a municipal culture of kindness where each resident understood it was his and her civic duty to be kind. Tom introduced a number initiatives including asking the students in the Anaheim Union School District to pledge to complete one million acts of kindness.

Some remarkable things happened in Anaheim over two years in its march to the million. Tait saw a drop in bullying at schools, addiction, senior loneliness, crime, and mental illness.

It doesn't take major action. Examples abound in Floral Park such as Tammy Heider (Flower St.) taking her Yorkie,

Gracie, to Santa Ana schools to comfort children with special needs; Olivia Matas (Ross St.) giving manicures to women in an assisted living facilities, Jeff Brumett (Heliotrope Dr.) leaving snacks and water for delivery people and postal carriers during the pandemic.

Do you want more ideas? Give a

Valentine's Day card to a widow who lives next door, play live music in your front yard, plant colorful flowers in your garden, make home-made dog treats and give them away door-to-door, share home-grown produce, deliver a small gift basket or hot meal to a neighbor who is on lock down, put a tip into the tip jar at the coffee shop along with a small card with an uplifting message, or bake and take cookies to me... I mean, your neighbor.

Add up these acts and talk about them and you create culture. Floral Park should not be known only as a "historic district," but also as "the neighborhood of kindness." With a change in culture, we can change the DNA of our city.

In her book, *Joyful*, designer and TED speaker Ingrid Fetell Lee writes, "The infectious quality of joy makes its dispersion as efficient as the most prolific weed. Even the smallest efforts—a painted mural, a knit cozy around a parking meter, a single flower—can be the beginning of an upward spiral that changes a community, a neighborhood, a life."

This past year has tested our places and laid bare the fragility of our cities, towns, and neighborhoods. It's tempting to imagine that this year will bring about better times. But wishing for it won't make it so. Only hard work on a local level will.

It's important to know, especially after such a god-awful year, that while unrest and turmoil was unfolding in streets across the U.S., acts of love and kindness were happening in Floral Park: a food and toy drive, a meal train, scholarships, helping a neighbor with her garden, and more. While chaos has reigned in Washington, D.C., compassion ruled in this corner of Santa Ana. The soul of America cannot be ransacked and the solution to what ails us cannot be found under a dome or in City Hall. It's not a matter of politics; it's just a matter of loving people. And there's your battle cry for an uprising of kindness.

“Floral Park should not be known only as a historic district, but also as the neighborhood of kindness.”

## Letter From The Vice Presidents

by Julie Humphreys and Tracey Stein



On behalf of the board, we would like to wish all our neighbors a very happy and healthy new year!

Since this is the Love issue, we'd actually like to give some back to you! If you don't know already, our role as co-1st vice presidents (sponsorship) means we have the awesome job of selecting, with our committee, our yearly Floral Park Neighborhood Association scholarship winners and charitable award recipients. Even though 2020 was rough, we still awarded ten (\$1,000 each) scholarships and donated to ten (\$450 each) Santa Ana-based charitable organizations.

The scholarships were awarded to very deserving students, who have gone on to college to pursue their dreams, and the charitable organizations were chosen based on their works to make Santa Ana a better, kinder city. But while our committee

had a hand in choosing the recipients, we would not have been able to award anything if it weren't for our generous neighborhood and neighbors. You have endowed individual scholarships, contributed to the success of our "First Night" fundraiser, and helped make our home and garden tours successful year after year.

Opening your homes, volunteering your time, coming to events, sharing your Instagram stories, getting your friends to move here...that's how you've shown Floral Park your love, and it has not gone unnoticed. We wish we could send you each a valentine.

I love these lines from the poem *The House By The Side of the Road* by Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911):

I see from my house  
by the side of the road,  
By the side of the highway of life,  
The men who press  
with the ardor of hope,  
The men who are faint with the strife.  
But I turn not away  
from their smiles nor their tears—  
Both parts of an infinite plan;  
Let me live in my house  
by the side of the road  
And be a friend to man.

Enjoy this issue, celebrating love, and may your hearts always be full.