

Alumni president's message: *A ripple of kindness*

I would like to tell you a true story about a hero who was color-blind. He made a simple choice. I don't know that he wrestled with his decision that day or whether it was a spontaneous response. I don't know if he gave much thought ever again about the choice he made or what he did—because heroes typically don't think in those terms...but I am getting ahead of myself.

Often, we are too immersed in our own lives to notice issues or needs around us. Time passes unnoticed. Not often enough we become reflective. If our self-assessment seems lacking, we ask ourselves, "What can I do to change things?" Seemingly small things can make a difference—like putting money in an expired parking meter for a stranger who is about to get a ticket. Or voluntarily doing a needed procedure on a hard working single parent, contributing to a charity, or working at a free clinic. These random or planned acts of kindness can produce ripples that can change the lives of those around us.

Let's continue with our story. An orphaned, young man and his brother, by hard work, struggle, sacrifice, and the kindness of an aunt, had finally made it to the United States. They both applied and were accepted into the College of Medical Evangelists—which would eventually become the Loma Linda University School of Medicine.

One of the brothers hitchhiked, which was not uncommon in those days, to the East Coast to work for the summer. At summer's end, he started hitchhiking back to start school in Loma Linda, California and enroll before the deadline. After several days, he came to a toll bridge in St. Louis. He did not have the toll to cross. He sat for some time on his suitcase waiting at the toll crossing. Deep concern began to give way to despair. He wondered if all the work and sacrifice would be for naught—all for the need of a coin needed to pay the toll! As more time passed, he lamented, sadly realizing, that his dream of becoming a doctor was fading—he knew he would be dropped from the class. But... the tollbooth operator, as his shift was ending, walked over with a smile and a nod and flipped him a coin with which he could pay the toll. He made it to Loma Linda on time!

Today, retired after a successful career as a doctor, he still thinks of the kind man who was not too busy to notice his need. This unknown stranger started a "ripple effect" that continues to resonate today. He had no idea of the lasting ramifications of his single action—yet his story is being told yet again.

The man in the tollbooth was a hero—he never expected recognition, nor was he the type of hero that risked life and limb. He simply saw a need and met it. He changed the outcome in a small—but global way. Heroes quietly do



what they do, regardless of who is watching or not watching. Sometimes they save the day. Most of the time no one notices. Heroes are driven by the strength of their character and do things because it is the right thing to do—then just go their way. They are not so busy that they do not notice the needs of others. Further, they quickly and quietly remedy the need they observe with little deliberation or expectation.

Who caught the tossed coin in the story and became a doctor? That man was my uncle. The other brother was my dad.

I hope the story of "Mr. Ripple—the Tollbooth Operator" will be retold often. But, there is another extraordinary element to this story. The tollbooth operator was a "man of color." Rather than cursing the darkness of the times, he chose instead to be a light. Before political correctness, prejudice, and racism were household words, this man of color—was color-blind. This "colored" man showed kindness to my uncle—a "china man" over 60 years ago...long before words such as "African American" and "Asian" came into correctness. Acts of kindness transcend all boundaries. Attitudes are embodied in actions. Whether only a coin or a smile—a little effort can go a long way. Just how far it goes... we may never know.

Trends and preferences can evolve into habits and convictions. Consider creating a ripple. Amplify and multiply the ripples of kindness that you have experienced by "repaying the debt" and "paying it forward." Practicing "random acts of kindness" can grow into "spontaneous, habitual acts of kindness." Who knows? Your kind simple act could go viral! Your ripple of kindness could turn the tide, become a wave in the lives of others—and change the world!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Gary H. Chan".

Gary Chan, SD'89, MS'95
President, Alumni Association