

Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



The Faces of Kindness

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Dear Safety Nets Team:

It seems tough for me to offer help, especially in times of need or during difficult situations. I don't want to be nosey but I'd like to know my help is wanted and appreciated. How can I know?

- Kay Morgan



Great question! Let's turn to why we help others. Being part of a personal safety net helps replace fear and isolation with security and connection, and affirms that interdependence and community are stronger than isolated independence.

Your reaching out not only shows kindness, but also provides a true link and connection to a larger community - a way for others to know they are not

Kindness Trumps Outrage

Reaction to the outrage emanating from the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, became the impetus for the creation of the **Patriot Guard Riders**. Topeka, Kansas is home to homophobic propagandist Fred Phelps, who gathers church members together at military funerals to harass families for "allowing" their sons and daughters to serve in the United States military. The Patriot Guard Riders, sympathetic to the families whose loved ones have died in military service, work to help these same families realize that they are not alone. **What makes this group unique and powerful is that they are everyday motorcyclists who have taken as their mission to escort fallen soldiers from the airfields to the burial grounds, where they form a protective shield around the bereaved families.** Amazingly, this volunteer group of compassionate motorcyclists has grown to 193,000 in just five years.



The poignant and heart-felt stories written by various Riders (soon to be featured in a new Ellen Frick documentary, *Patriot Riders*) chronicle the emergence of a new kind of kindness and patriotism in America. **As one Patriot Guard Rider says: "you don't have to be religious or be an atheist to be in the PGR. You can be a hawk or a dove. You don't have to be a vet. Heck, you don't even have to ride a motorcycle."**

The Patriot Guard Riders tell us of a solemn journey astride thundering motorcycles to the sometimes silent, sometimes turbulent funerals of young soldiers killed in action. Their journey tell the story of a tragic truth: **Soldiers are dying and families are suffering, and an unlikely but powerful bond is growing between the riders and the grieving families.**

Patriot Riders is a story (and a film) about fellowship, about community, about kindness, about veterans, about the effects of war on the home front, about riding, about what it means to be an American. And every once in a while, there comes a bitter-sweet story like the one that follows that puts a smile on your face! Their story also prompted the 2006 passage of the Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act, signed by President George W. Bush. The act bans protests within 300 feet of national cemeteries - which numbered 122 when the bill was signed - from an hour before a funeral to an hour after it. Violators face up to a \$100,000 fine and up to a year in prison. This must have annoyed Mr. Phelps!



alone in their quest for help and solutions.

Your cautious feelings about intruding are shared by many. Our hope is that you'll push past them as you think about roles and motivations. Are you actually being nosey? If so, backing off is probably good. Do you truly want to reach out. **Last month we suggested that you keep handy a list of things you do well and like to do - offer one or more of these. Our workbook presents a similar list of things you might also receive were the tables turned!** Lastly, consider whether you have time to react out in any fashion. Remember that you can't give from an empty cup - so keep yours filled. **Kindness, needs to be both given and received.**

While some may not specifically thank you or know how to appreciate your help, **your actions will speak louder than words. Kindness is understood and appreciated - even if not expressed.** (Of course, a nice note to those who join a safety net goes a long way.) Here are some actual notes we've received dealing with this issue.



"I've had people react negatively to learning about my illness - it freaks them out, particularly if they don't know you a bit already. Well, Lisa didn't get freaked out, she decided she wanted to

Tom Bellomy, a PGR member, tells us: "My first ride was in Concord, N.C. in 2006. The hearse passed our Guard flag line on the way into the cemetery, but no family cars or Patriot Riders followed. After a delay, the bikes rolled by with very nicely dressed passengers on the back of their bikes. **We later found out that the limo had broken down and the family members exited and asked to be taken the rest of the way on the bikes. After the grave-side service, they asked to be ridden back to the church by those same bikers.** *The family said their son*

must have arranged the break down so they'd have something to laugh and smile about that day."

Now, if that's not a safety net stretching from here to eternity, we don't know what is! Our PSN hats are off to the bikers of the Patriot Guard Riders!

(Come visit us on our Facebook page throughout November, where we'll be featuring stories from families who have interacted and been helped and cared for by the Patriot Guard Riders - stories provided directly by Patriot Rider filmmaker, Ellen Frick!)

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and
purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.

help. She's been so consistently there for us . . . It has been wonderful. "
- Deb



"A wonderful thanks to all of you who've found out one way or another and have sent messages of cheer and support. Even though it was entirely routine surgery and the doctors had (ahem) an exceptional physical specimen to work with, the episode nevertheless gives one pause to reflect on the fragility of life and health and the choices we continually have the opportunity to make (if we can resist getting on autopilot.)"

- Bruce

(Correction from last edition: Mary has Invasive Breast Cancer not IBS - we apologize for the error.)

We're On

facebook

We hope you'll be patient with us as we move slowly but surely to add our ideas, articles, stories and experiences to our blog. We will also offer you the opportunity to gain up-to-the minute news and to be our "friend" by joining us on Facebook.

Coming soon:

- Patriot Rider Family Stories
- Cartoon help to answer the

The Words Under the Words: Selected Poems, elise.com

Naomi Shihab Nye



Pay it Forward: Kindness Forged of Steel - Remember to Vote!

This is a story of our Mothers and Grandmothers who were living 90 years ago. Remember, it was not until 1920 that women were granted the right to go to the polls and vote. But the granting of these rights did not come easy, or without great hardship. Now it is our turn to return the steely kindness that these women gave to generations to follow. **It is our job to extend that kindness by using our votes to create the kind of world those women knew would be better served by having ALL citizens engaged. It is our turn to VOTE!**

This story is about the gaining of these rights. It's been called the "Night of Terror," November 15, 1917, (depicted in HBO's movie "Iron Jawed Angels"). **On that night, the warden at the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia ordered his guards to teach a lesson to the suffragists, imprisoned there. Their crime?: daring to picket Woodrow Wilson's White House for the right to vote.**

For weeks, the women's only water came from an open pail. Their food--all of it colorless slop--was infested with worms. When one of the leaders, Alice Paul, embarked on a hunger strike, she was tied her to a chair, and force-fed through a tube down her throat until she vomited. This torture continued for weeks until word was smuggled out to the press. **The women were innocent and defenseless, but they were jailed nonetheless for picketing the White House, carrying signs asking for the vote.**

Forty prison guards wielding clubs with their warden's blessing went on a rampage against the 33 women wrongly convicted of "obstructing sidewalk traffic." **Affidavits describe the guards grabbing, dragging, beating, choking, slamming, pinching, twisting and kicking the women. And by the end of the night, the women were barely alive.**

So, I hear some women say they won't vote this year because - why, exactly? We have carpool duties? We have to get to work? Our vote doesn't matter? It's raining? Because the actual act of voting has become less personal, more rote, or more like an obligation than a privilege? Sometimes, even inconvenient?

The new movie "Iron Jawed Angels" is a graphic depiction of the battle these women waged so all women could pull the curtain at the polling booth. It reminds us and causes us to ask: What would those women think of the way I use, or don't use, my right to vote?

It is jarring to watch Woodrow Wilson and his cronies try to persuade a psychiatrist to declare Alice Paul insane so that she could be permanently institutionalized. And it is inspiring to watch the doctor refuse. Alice Paul was strong, he said, and brave. That didn't make her crazy. The doctor admonished the men: **"Courage in women is often mistaken for insanity."**

Get out and vote and use this right that was fought so hard for by very courageous women. Whether you vote Democratic, Republican or

awkward question:
"what are you doing
with your LIFE?"

Independent party - remember to vote.

"Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

*adapted by Personal Safety Nets
from an article by Sutapa Basu, University of Washington*

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News & Notes

FREE LUNCH: If you're in the greater Seattle area, join Trudy James and Judy Pigott as they talk about Living Well Forever!

Judy Pigott, co-author of **Personal Safety Nets, Getting Ready for Life's Inevitable Changes and Challenges** and its companion workbook, and **Trudy James**, owner of **Heartwork Consulting: Living Deeply . . .**



Dying Well, will speak at the lunch seminar at Northgate Plaza, A Merrill Gardens Community, Seattle - Friday, November 5 (**free but registration required 206-363-6740**). Together they will share methods and ideas of creating the support you need for living life at any stage.



BLOG AND WIN: Are you keeping an eye focused on our BLOG page at Personal Safety Nets®? **We'll be offering free tickets to plays at West Seattle's ArtsWest** - which produces artistic events so fiercely compelling that they require conversation, improve the imagination, and promote cultural vibrancy as a core value for the communities of Seattle. We'll be providing lots of chances for everyone to see a play during the 2010-2011 season.

YES, WE'RE ALWAYS TRADING FOR YOUR STORIES: Write us your Personal Safety Net story, or ask us a question that we answer in our e-Newsletter, and we'll trade you our Audio Book- a \$29.95 value, yours FREE. **Having gone through "something", what would you do differently? What advance planning would have helped you? Who or what do you wish you'd included? You survived. What did you learn?** You can email us your question or story, or simply share it directly to our website.