



OCTLA President

**Doug Vanderpool**

VANDERPOOL LAW FIRM

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## Cold doesn't have a color

### THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF ONE OCTLA MEMBER

I have a sign hanging above my desk: It says: "Be kind. Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." This is attributed to Plato, but I have not verified that.

In the midst of all of these global crises, kindness may be too easily dismissed as a "soft" issue, or a luxury to be addressed after all of the other urgent problems are solved. But kindness is the greatest need in all those areas. Until we reflect basic kindness in everything we do, our political gestures will be fleeting and fragile.

Although I am not a particularly religious man, I have studied the Great Books of most religions. One theme that runs through all of the world's great philosophies is giving and generosity, especially to the most downtrodden, the most despised. The Bible is replete with instructions to give freely:

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did to one of the least of these, you did to me." Matthew 25:35-45.

"Good will come to those who are generous and give freely, who conduct their affairs with justice." Psalm 112.

The Buddha taught: "If you knew as I know the benefit of generosity, you would not let an opportunity go by without sharing." The Buddha taught and lived what is really a "way of life": giving and receiving – the practice of *dana*. The cultivation of *dana* offers the possibility of purifying and transforming greed, clinging, and self-centeredness, as well as the fear that is linked to these energies of attachment. Generosity is the ground of compassion; it is a prerequisite to the realization of liberation.

The Tibetans have a practice to cultivate generosity. They take an ordinary object such as a potato or a turnip, and hold it in one hand and pass it to the other hand, back and forth, until it becomes easy. They then move on to objects of seemingly greater value, such as a mound of precious jewels or rice. This "giving" from hand to hand ultimately becomes a symbolic relinquishment of everything – our outer material attachments and our inner attachments of habits, preferences, ideas, beliefs – a symbolic "letting go" of all the ways that we create a "self" over and over again.

"Indifference, to me, is the epitome of evil. The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference." — Elie Wiesel.

Islam encourages this concept of generosity so much so that it is embedded in one of the five pillars of Islam, the obligatory charity known as *Zakaat*. In Arabic, the term

*Zakaat* literally means purification of the heart. However, it is also the payment, from surplus money, of an obligatory charity designed by God to provide for all the needy members of the community.

Whenever I see someone who, for whatever reasons, has ended up on the streets, I think: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." As I have written in this column previously, my theme for this year is Generosity. We all know that one kind word, one small gesture, or one helping hand can change a life. Can save a life.

At the OCTLA Installation on February 12, I told the story about a little girl. Her birth mother gave her up for adoption. Unfortunately, even though she was very lucky to be adopted, her adoptive parents wanted boys, not girls. Even worse, this little girl was repeatedly abused physically, mentally, emotionally and verbally. She endured things that we really don't want to think about. One day at the age of 14, she realized she had to make a decision. She could stay there and continue to be abused, or she could leave. When she told her adoptive mother that she was leaving, she was handed a suitcase and told to get out. This 14-year-old girl landed on the mean streets of Long Beach, California.

This innocent girl couch-surfed when she could, but more often than not she ended up sleeping on people's lawns, in unlocked laundry rooms, porches, and on the beach. At the age of 15, she had her first child. Eventually, she was put in foster care, and then a group home for unwed mothers. At 16, she was told she would now be legally emancipated. She was given 12 days' notice, and had to leave the group home. She again had nowhere to live.

### One kind word, one kind deed, one helping hand

One of the defining moments in her life came after meeting with a career counselor who encouraged her to join the military. She joined the Marines, and this helped to change her life. She had her second child at the age of 21. After leaving the Marines, she started working at Horton Barbaro & Reilly while also going to school at Golden West Community College.

This young woman had such will power, such strength of character, in spite of all that had happened to her. She decided to go straight to law school without receiving her undergraduate degree. She graduated from Western State, and after passing the bar exam, worked as an associate for Frank Barbaro, then

started her own law firm.

We all know who I am talking about. Kim Valentine. Kim knew that one kind word, one kind gesture, one helping hand, can change a life, can save a life.

Kim didn't want to start a charity for some sort of accolades. She just wanted to do something to make a difference in people's lives. She did it quietly, privately. Because it was the right thing to do. To set an example for her children.

Kim decided she wanted her son Cory to see a different side of life, so she got together some of his friends, and they filled 50 brown bags with hygiene items and blankets. They went down to an encampment in San Diego, and let the kids lead the way.

Later, they switched to backpacks, with the assembly taking place in Kim's garage. Their first time back, 100 backpacks were distributed. The next time, 250, and the next, 500. Operation Helping Hands – OHH – was born.

Kim will tell you about one of her most memorable moments. They were handing out backpacks and blankets, and had one left – a *pink blanket*. Kim handed it to a homeless man, and she apologized for the color. He told her: "Cold doesn't have a color."

OHH is now going beyond backpacks. OHH is now funding year-long scholarships for students who are housing insecure. OHH can pay the rent for one of these students for one year, with just a \$10,000 donation.

We are very excited to have selected Operation Helping Hands as the recipient of our Top Gun silent and live auction proceeds this year. Kim's story leading her to start this charity and the time, heart and soul she dedicates to strengthening and broadening its mission moved our hearts tremendously and we are honored to be able to give back to Operation Helping Hands. The spirit of giving and generosity was so palpable at our Installation that it appears we have already raised more than \$50,000 for OHH in less than a week. The Top Gun event will take place on Saturday, November 12th at The Westin South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa.

