

Let A Smile Be Your Umbrella by Kristijojedlicki

Photo Credit: Pinterest

Recently, I have felt like I live in Seattle instead of Louisville, thanks to the rainier than usual weather. While the rain has put a damper on some outdoor activities, it hasn't washed out one of my favorite weekday morning rituals. Nearly every morning when I arrive at work, which happens to be at a day shelter for homeless men, I am greeted warmly by some of the finest gentlemen in all of Louisville. It is one of these gentlemen who refused to let the morning rain showers dampen his spirits or mine.

James used to be a frequent guest at the day shelter, and he quickly earned a special place in my heart, due to his twinkling eyes, shy smile, sweet disposition, and quiet determination. Over the past several years, James graciously has shared the ups and downs of his life's journey with me, and even though he now has his own apartment, he manages to find himself in front of the day shelter most mornings, and today was no different.

As I made my way up the sidewalk in a steady rain, trying to keep my umbrella from being blown inside out, I spotted James, waiting in his usual spot. He did not have an umbrella, but he didn't seem to notice the rain drops pelting his baseball cap and jacket. When our eyes met, we both began to grin and called out greetings to one another, just like we do each day. When I arrived at James' spot, we hugged one another, and as I held the umbrella over both of us, we began our morning ritual of recalling what we each did the previous day and what we had planned for the day ahead. Today, I asked James what he was doing standing out in the rain, and without hesitation, he responded, "Waiting for you, of course. I had to see how my friend was doing and to make sure your day got off to a good start."

I am used to James' caring manner, but I never take it for granted. Today, though, this gesture truly floored me. It touched my heart to know that this dear soul didn't care if he got wet, he only cared about making sure that I was doing well and having a good morning. It was such a sweet and genuine act of kindness that did not cost any money or take more than a few minutes, yet it proved to be a priceless moment that positively impacted my entire day. A smile and being physically and emotionally present were like

bright sunbeams that cut through the gloominess and the rain, and James' kindness led to further reflection during the day.

What if everyone had their own "James" in their life? Someone to care about them enough to want their day to begin on a positive note. Someone to greet them with a big smile and kind words. Someone who takes the time to ask, "How are you?" and then really listens to their response. Someone who will wait in the rain for them. If you are fortunate enough to have at least one "James" in your life, I hope that you appreciate him/her. I also hope that regardless of whether or not there is a "James" in your life that you will consider being the "James" for someone else. It really takes so little to mean so much to others, and if we all followed James' examples of caring and kindness, we could change the world in countless positive ways. It doesn't get much better than that!

Just one thing each day . . .