

Random Acts of Kindness: Small acts that make a big difference for ourselves and others

Jon Potter was getting gas at a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania gas station when a woman in need knocked on his window to ask for a ride to a battered-women's shelter. Uncomfortable with strangers, he said no. Overcome with regret, Potter quickly realized his mistake, but when he got out of his car to offer help, she was nowhere to be found. He vowed to be kinder the next time a stranger needed help.

Potter has an account on a popular social media website, Reddit, and shortly after his encounter with the woman-in-need, he saw a Reddit post from someone needing help installing a TV antenna. Potter jumped to help out. Someone else in the same Reddit group needed a cat sitter, so he helped again.

"It snowballed from there," said Potter, "I decided that for the next year, if anyone asks me for help, as long as it's legal and as long as it won't harm anyone else, I'd do it. It sounds ridiculous, but I did it." And his kindness was so fulfilling for him that he has been helping strangers for four years now, always free of charge.

Potter has done repairs on people's homes, moved furniture, given people rides in the middle of the night, changed countless tires, and found housing for families. A recent example of how far Potter is willing to go to help others is a father who posted on Reddit that he was thinking of killing himself because he needed \$2,000 to pay his bills and at the same time he was in the middle of a divorce from his wife. Potter lent him the money, the most money he has ever loaned to someone, and the man has already started to pay him back.

When asked if he's afraid that someone people could be scamming him he said, "Maybe. It doesn't matter. It's worth the risk of getting scammed, compared to the possibility of helping someone or saving somebody's life."

Potter has gained attention from his community and the media for his kindness, winning awards and even being given \$500 for being so kind. What did he do with the money? He posted on Reddit, "I have \$500 to give away," and asked who needed the money. Other members on the website added to his funds, and he collected \$1,500 to donate." He bought bus passes for people who needed transportation, groceries for families, paid bills for members of their community, bought shoes for a nurse with foot troubles, and donated the funds to a service trip to Costa Rica, and many other causes.

After helping hundreds, if not thousands, of people in his community, Potter recently went as far as donating a kidney to stranger after seeing a post on Reddit from the daughter of Michael Moore, saying that her dad was in need of a transplant. Never one to back down from a good deed, Potter found out he could live a long and healthy life with one kidney, so he got tested and learned he was a perfect match for the man in need. Their surgeries were on August 13th and both men are recovering flawlessly.

"I'm just blown away by the fact he was willing to do it," Moore said, noting the many appointments, tests and rigorous screening process Potter had to go through. Potter also had to lose 20 pounds before qualifying for surgery, which he graciously did. Since first meeting to discuss the kidney donation, the Potter and Moore have become close friends.

Two years ago, Potter started a website to formalize his service work, Pittsburgh Good Deeds, where community members can ask for help and also volunteer their services.

Potter's random acts of kindness to other people have possibly made the most difference in his own life, as he suffers from anxiety and high-functioning Autism. Autism can make interacting and socializing, especially with strangers, very difficult. Those who have Autism typically have trouble making friends, dealing with changes, crowded or loud situations, and socializing. He says, "Pushing myself to interact with people by helping them has given me new appreciation for others." "I trust a lot more now than I did in the past," he said. "I trust people's intentions more."

Potter recommends his unusual lifestyle and encourages others to help people when they can. “Even me, with all these hindrances,” he said, referring to his autism and anxiety, “I still love people, and you can too.”¹

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