

What if we said every good thing that came to mind?

By Kate Rose Lee

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BOUNTIFUL — The thought came after my best friend Stacy and I passed a girl in the halls at Bountiful High School.

“That girl always looks so cute,” I said nonchalantly. While Stacy quickly agreed, I was suddenly hit with an idea. “What if we told her?” I let that thought linger for a minute before I continued. “In fact, what if we always told everyone our kind thoughts, even if we don’t know them?”

We both started to giggle thinking about all the cute boys that we had at some time or another commented about during our three years of high school. It could get embarrassing and we might even look weird, but who didn’t love being complimented? We were seniors now and more confident. We had nothing to lose.

We started the experiment right away. Stacy was an officer and a darling girl and I loved seeing how the boys’ faces blushed or the girls’ eyes lit up when they received a compliment from her. There was only one rule — whatever we said had to be sincere.

After awhile it got easy for us. We’d stop each other midsentence, “Hold on one second.” Then we’d tap someone on the shoulder and they’d turn, “Hi. I just wanted you to know that I’ve always thought you had the prettiest smile.” Then we’d wave, walk away and continue our previous conversation before we had another kind thought and had to stop someone else. “You don’t know me, but I’ve noticed how kind you are to everyone, thanks for your example.” Sometimes it took us awhile to get to class.

It was so simple, yet it changed both of us. It made us so much more aware of people around us and helped us to be less self-centered — something that didn’t hurt either of us.

I’ll never forget one Friday morning. I saw my next target and turned to Stacy, “I’ve always thought that boy was so cute. I think he’s a year younger than us, but I don’t know his name.”

Stacy nodded, “I’ve always thought that too. We should tell him.”

I nodded back, but for some reason this time we both walked past and said nothing.

That night Stacy called. She was crying and could barely get the words out. “Oh, Kate. That boy today — the one we didn’t say anything to ... he killed himself tonight.”

I thought I would throw up as I slumped to the ground. Neither of us talked for sometime, we just listened to each other sob. Of course we asked the what-if question and it pained us thinking that maybe we could have prevented this suicide. We understood that if that boy was in such a dark place it may have happened regardless. Still it made the “what-if” no easier. The reality was that we had no way of knowing.

We attended the boy’s funeral and found out his name was Devon.

Our resolve strengthened after that, and Stacy and I made sure we never missed another opportunity to say something kind to someone.

I often think about that experience. Especially now, with how aware we all are of bullying, kids posting horrible things about other kids, depression and suicide.

I had the privilege of substitute teaching high school and junior high for four years, and I loved it. I came to realize something. Most kids, even the ones that I wouldn't have guessed, have a desire to be good. Yes, there will always be sadness. Kids will post mean comments, kids will be bullied and will bully and some kids will even take their own lives, but I will never think that good is gone, that kids in this generation aren't kind anymore, or that they can't be taught how to be a good friend to everyone. I believe that they are and I believe that they can.

As for you students who wonder what you can do to make a difference, the answer is simple. It's you. We all have good thoughts about others all day long. What if you tapped someone on the shoulder? What if you simply opened your mouth? What if you said that kind thought out loud instead of just walking past? You never know whose day you will make and possibly whose life you may save. I will guarantee you one thing. It will change you for the better.