I was watching TV with my wife one evening, and one of the characters in the show said a small but thoughtful comment to another character that was feeling poorly. The saddened character smiled and appeared to be comforted from that small but thoughtful concern. My wife turned to me and said sometimes it is just those little things that occur daily that mean so much to people. This comment did not register with me until days later when I saw a patient and was struck by a home-made bow-tie he was wearing clipped to his tee shirt. It had been given to him by our clinical assistant because his birthday was in a few weeks. This had brought a smile to his face.

In my corner of the room looking out, I listen to NPR on the radio on my commute to and from work. I watch the news at night prior to going to bed, and I try reading some of the newspaper (The Boston Globe) as much as I can so that I can keep up with current issues. In my experience, most of the news and information is driven by drama, severity, or shock and the few positive stories reported are too few and far between. This can make people feel quite poorly about the world around us and make some feel that there is no hope for humankind. After hearing my wife’s comment and seeing our clinical assistants’ gesture, I decided to be more attentive to the daily events that occur around me to see if it is true that these small and thoughtful daily gestures make a positive difference. So, on a routine day in my life I woke and got ready for work. On my commute to work there is an intersection where I need to make a left across traffic and I sometimes sit there for a long time before being able to make that left. On this day, however, someone stopped and signaled me to go across. This was a kind gesture, and I waved a thank you and smiled. That made me feel good. I got into my office and ran over to the hospital for a moment to see 2 of my patients. As I was walking into the hospital, I overheard a person, who had stopped to ask a hospital worker for directions. The worker began providing directions but then stated that she would accompany the individual since it would be easier. I saw the sigh of relief and the relaxation occur on the person’s face as she followed the hospital worker knowing she would get to her test or family member on time and without undue stress. As I was getting into the elevator to go to the 4th floor the door was closing when someone suddenly stuck their hand in the door from the inside to keep the door opened. The person smiled and said “…going up?” Already I had experienced 3 gestures of kindness and it was not even 7 o’clock in the morning. I recall my father saying to me once that if a person does something kind for you that you should pay them back by doing something kind to 2 other people. Can you imagine the enormity of kindness that would occur if this rule were to be followed (I
will let you do the math)? So already, I had to do 4 nice things for someone throughout the day. This rule I decided to follow. I was amazed how easy it was to be able to give back and do 4 small acts of kindness that really did not take much effort but did require caring and kindness: 1. I opened the door for a patient being wheeled into the clinic; 2. I served water to a family and a patient waiting for treatment; 3. I noticed a coworker at the hospital having a bad day and tried to reassure him, for which he thanked me for that effort and stated he felt better (he had been up all night with his new born and had not gotten much sleep); 4. I thanked one of our nurses for the thoughtful caring she had given to one of my patients. And as my day was progressing, I noticed many more small but significant acts of kindness that just made me feel good in so many ways. Someone once said, “Some believe it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. I have found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay... simple acts of kindness and love.” That is what I witnessed on that routine day of enlightenment (and what I now witness and am aware of every day). My eyes were opened, and I saw so many small everyday good deeds. That night when I drove home, listening to NPR, then being at home and watching the news, hearing and seeing all of the awful events going on in the world, the hate, the violence, the pain and destruction, I came to realize that the good in this world out-weighs the bad by such an enormous amount, it is unfathomable. This restored my faith in humankind, knowing that everyday millions of acts of kindness are occurring, that keeps the darkness and badness away. So, I thanked my wife for opening my eyes to the real world, and I try to follow my father’s advice with the hope that others will do so as well. Think of the possibilities (again, you do the math). And that is what is happening in my corner of the room.

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