Would you do anything differently?

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They say, put your own oxygen mask on first and then help the person seated next to you
But what if there was a mask that breathes life into both of us simultaneously
What if I gift to you my last dying breath and just the act of giving
breathes life back into my own lungs, near collapsed and deflated

What if by lighting your fire
my flame grew brighter
like a mirror to a flame in the desert

What if our bodies forgot which heartbeat was which as you held my hand and pulled me up,
your own heart growing stronger in the process
What if adolescent boys in inner city schools who witnessed community violence
but managed to help others therefore had less aggressive behavior,
the mirror in the school bathroom reflecting back to them
their strength, power and compassion

What if refugees from war torn countries ached a little less for their homeland
as they extended a hand to other refugees who arrived on the shores of Australia
their outstretched hand a welcoming somehow reaching out to their own former selves in the process

What if I am not without you
and you are not without me
What if I am in you and you are in me
and it is impossible for me to pour into you without pouring back into myself

What if helping you fly
gives me wings
like women with MS who became stronger just by providing a compassionate phone call to another

What if just writing a card to a friend in need could reduce spikes in your blood pressure under stress
and reduce the stress hormones in your saliva

What if you lifted a friend in need and that lifted you
What if the Yankees batting average soared every year when they visited the children’s hospital
pouring an infusion of caring into the children which looped back to them like an ECMO machine, warming and oxygenating their blood
and putting it back into their bodies, allowing them to be even more capable
What if just helping a neighbor helped college students cope as they stood in the dust of the Christchurch mosque terrorist attacks in New Zealand and what if even the mere intention of helping someone else in the future led to greater happiness and what if even having helped someone in the past did too as though caring for others was a drug that did not know the limits of time.

What if volunteering weekly brought the equivalent change in happiness of moving from an income bracket of less than $20,000 to a bracket of $75–100,000, as though love were a currency more powerful than money.

What if we had not within ourselves individually, but within the connections and interactions between us an untapped tool for healing.

What if helping others was a public health intervention? What if all of this was true? Would you do anything differently?

Author bio

Ivory is an occupational therapist and poet. She grew up in Van Zandt, Washington and has lived in several cities and countries before settling in the greater Los Angeles area. She has always been drawn to the healing and care of others. Ivory holds a Master of Arts in Occupational Therapy from New York University where she was awarded the Arch Award in recognition for excellence in service. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Boston University. Her doctoral project in occupational therapy is focused on the healing power of kindness and altruism for people who have experienced trauma. Simultaneously, she is producing a documentary about the healing power of helping others with award winning director Assaf Ben Shetrit.