

Poem

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.