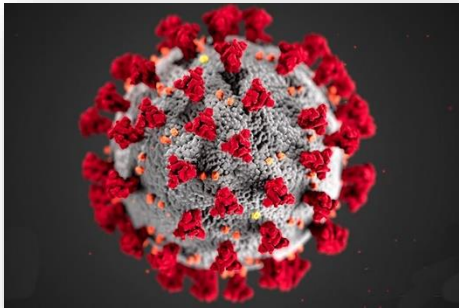


# 'HELPER'S HIGH': THE GOOD FEELING FROM DOING GOOD



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By DAVID KLEMENT

As I sat in the drive-up line at my local Outback Steakhouse for curbside delivery of our Easter dinner –Alice Springs Chicken, of course, my all-time favorite – I reached for my wallet and took out a \$10 bill. Even though I knew my wife had put a 20 percent tip onto

her credit-card order, I wanted to do something more for the harried server going car to car checking on orders and handing out bags of meals. A sudden swell of emotion passed through me as I handed him the \$10 bill and said, “Thank you for being here for us.”

What I experienced in performing that small good deed, according to scientific research, is “helper’s high.” A *New York Times* article I had read that morning cited studies showing that “volunteering, donating money, or even just thinking about donating money can release feel-good brain chemicals and activate the part of the brain stimulated by the pleasures of food and sex.” The article, by Tara Parker-Pope, said studies of volunteers show they have lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol on days they do volunteer work. It also mentioned a study of middle-schoolers who volunteered to mentor younger students after school. The mentors wound up spending more time on their own homework.

So, if you want to lift your spirits in this time of self-isolation during the Covid-19 crisis, do something nice for someone else. It’s not just leaving extra-large tips for servers. There are funds set up to assist employees thrown out of work by the national lockdown; leave a generous gift there. The daily stories in this newspaper about the generosity of Sarasota-Manatee residents should be both inspiration for and tip-sheet on how to help.

I learned long ago about helper’s high, and, hopefully without sounding boastful, would like to recount a couple of experiences that illustrate the personal benefits of helping the less fortunate. During the winter freeze of 1985, as a journalist I helped organize a

caravan of cars loaded with food, blankets and warm clothing for starving, freezing farm workers in Wimauma, in southern Hillsborough County. Knowing a couple hundred people had been fed and clothed by the outreach gave me a huge helper's high.

But as an indirect result of that outreach, a pregnant migrant worker's teenage daughter found adoptive parents for her unborn child in a couple helping deliver the food and blankets. That couple, friends of mine, named the baby boy David as a gesture of appreciation for my indirectly bringing them together. My namesake should be around 35 years old by now.

In 1980, churches in Bradenton and Sarasota volunteered to sponsor refugees from the killing fields of Cambodia to be resettled in the United States. I led a team at my church that accepted responsibility for a family of 10, six of them children under 15. Those children adapted, grew up, went to college and became attorneys, CPAs, electronics engineers and nurses. Who is to say that one of those homeless waifs from 1980 won't wind up being the nurse in hazmat gear tending to me or a loved one at Sarasota Memorial Hospital should either of us be unfortunate enough to contract the virus? It's possible.

That's the thing about good deeds. You never know how far they may ripple across society. You do your act of kindness, get that quick "helper's high," and go on about your day not knowing the full impact of your good deed. Now, I'm not suggesting a \$10 tip is going to change that server's life. But it's going to give him a momentary morale boost. So is the plate of brownies you take to your widowed neighbor who has no one looking out for her. Or the hot meal you take to the friend who's feeling sick and is fearful she may have been exposed to the virus.

Among the most vulnerable to infection, I admit that I'm having my share of down days, when life seems to have lost any purpose. But helping others helps me. It gives me a purpose and it lifts my mood. In these desperate times, that's a big payback for a small act of kindness.

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