

I'M FEELING ANGRY, BUT I WON'T HIT Capital Times (Madison, WI) March 4, 2003 Tuesday, ALL Editions

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HEADLINE: I'M FEELING ANGRY, BUT I WON'T HIT

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BODY:

I'm having angry feelings because Fred Rogers, known to millions of children and former children as Mister Rogers, passed away on Thursday, Feb. 27. It is a terrible loss to everyone who loved his show, and to everyone who loved someone who loved his show. Mister Rogers was an important part of my childhood, and I am having angry feelings that he is gone. Mister Rogers taught me it's OK to have angry feelings, as long as I don't hit.

I grew up with "Mister Rogers Neighborhood." The show went national in 1968, and I came along in 1969. The show is the longest running show on PBS. I think I took him for granted - there was never not a Mister Rogers. He taught me, and millions of other children, important and valuable lessons about dealing with our feelings and our fears. He encouraged us to use our imaginations and to find our own "land of make believe." He made us all feel cared for, unconditionally.

Since Mister Rogers died, I've been remembering how much I loved his show as a child. My favorite part was the "Land of Make Believe." I looked forward to that trolley whistle every day. My favorite character was Lady Elaine Fairchilde in her Museum-Go-Round. I wanted to grow up and live in a Museum-Go-Round, too, or at least be beautiful and gracious like Lady Aberlin. I liked Henrietta Pussycat because I loved kitty cats and she spoke mostly in meows.

Mister Rogers' voice is hard-wired into my subconscious. I was listening to an interview with him on NPR's "Fresh Air," and as I listened to his voice, I felt instantly better. It wasn't a conscious feeling, it was as if once Mister Rogers started talking, everything was going to be OK. Mister Rogers wanted me to know that I am special - and so are you.

I asked my favorite parenting expert, Joanne Neff (that's her street name, but I get to call her "Mom") for some of her memories of Mister Rogers. She said, "Mister Rodgers was very calming. As a good mother, I didn't allow you all to watch the TV without an adult (me) there to explain things to you, but I felt that 'Mister Rogers' Neighborhood' was safe."

She described me curling up with my baby blanket (called my "quiltie," if you must know), and how she felt that I was safely minded and she could sit with me and take a nap. "It was a quiet time, except for the occasional snore, and some days, I couldn't have made it through the day without him. Some people felt the show was excessively slow-paced, but for me it was the most refreshing show on television!"

My friend Jody McIntyre pointed out, "In a world filled with hate and misunderstanding, there was a man. A man of peace in a square sweater and flat-soled shoes he couldn't run very far in if the bomb dropped on his street. And he probably would have tried running while carrying the fish tank. Now that was a person made of the right stuff."

There will never be another Mister Rogers, and yet I hope someone else steps up to the challenge. Mister Rogers continued to provide an invaluable service to children and families after his retirement by providing information to help parents on his Web site, [www.misterrogers.org](http://www.misterrogers.org), and returning from retirement after Sept. 11 to help children deal with their feelings about the tragedy.

He also wrote books, including "You Are Special: Words of Wisdom for All Ages From a Beloved Neighbor" and "Mister Rogers Talks With Parents." We need Mister Rogers more than we ever did to help children - and me - deal with our feelings about the incomprehensible violence and hatred in our world.

In the days after Fred Rogers died, there has been so much written about his message and his legacy. As I remember him, I find myself thinking that adults need a Mister Rogers, too. We invite television into our homes all the time, but it so rarely comes in as a friend. We need some quiet time with someone with a calming voice who understands our feelings and fears, who encourages us to play nicely, share our toys and look before we cross - and who reassures us that we can never go down, can never go down, can never go down the drain.