

March 2021

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## What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers

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### Won't You Be My Neighbor Day

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I've always thought of March as a month of hope. Spring is on its way. It's been a whole year since the pandemic changed our lives, and we're just now beginning to see hopeful signs of returning to some kind of new normal.

For us at the Fred Rogers' Center, this has always been a time to celebrate because we're coming up on Fred's birthday, March 20. We call it "Won't You Be My Neighbor Day." A number of years ago we started it as an annual tradition to honor Fred on that day -- by wearing a sweater and doing something neighborly.

There's been much to celebrate about Fred's life and his work. For this newsletter I thought you would like to join me in celebrating and remembering Fred's music which is as nurturing and nourishing as the hope of Spring. Music was his first love, and he often said that he thought of himself first and foremost as a musician.

Most people don't know that Fred composed all of the songs on the Neighborhood – more than 200! The melodies grew out of his music composition degree from Rollins – and the lyrics grew out of his graduate work in child development through the University of Pittsburgh. And then he turned his music over to the brilliant jazz musician Johnny Costa to arrange the songs and play them live in the studio as we were taping.

Over the years a number of musicians and performers came to the Neighborhood who sang or played one of his compositions. Sitting on the sidelines in the studio we could see how much Fred loved hearing others work so beautifully with the music he composed. This is one of my favorites from 1975 when Broadway star Rita Moreno charmed us all with one of his songs.

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Here are some of Fred's reflections on his melodies and lyrics for us to think about on March 20 and all through the year...for what they can mean to children and to us, for our work and our everyday lives.

**“All these songs are real songs about how we feel about ourselves. How children feel about themselves is what I care about most. If we can help our children feel accepted and valued when they are small, they’ll have a better chance of growing into adults who can feel good about who they are, too.”**

**“You don’t ever have to do anything sensational for people to love you. When I say, “It’s you I like,” I’m talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch . . . that deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things**

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**without which humankind cannot survive: love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more - powerful than greed.”**

**“The greatest thing we can do is to help somebody know that they are loved and capable of loving.”**

**“We have a song on the Neighborhood that says, “There are many ways to say I love you...” and there are. And one of the ways is working as well as you can to bring to others what you feel can be nourishing in their lives. It’s an offering of love, what we do.”**

**“Music has given me a way of expressing my feelings and my thoughts, and it has also given me a way of understanding more about life. For example, as you play together in a symphony orchestra, you can appreciate that each musician has something fine to offer. Each one is different, though, and you each have a different “song to sing.” When you sing together, you make one voice. That’s true of all endeavors, not just musical ones. Finding ways to harmonize our uniqueness with the uniqueness of others can be the most fun—and the most rewarding—of all.”**

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Happy birthday, Fred! And thank you for the richness of your songs that continue to resonate with us, on March 20 "Won't You Be My Neighbor Day" and all through the year.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



Hedda Sharapan  
M.S. Child Development

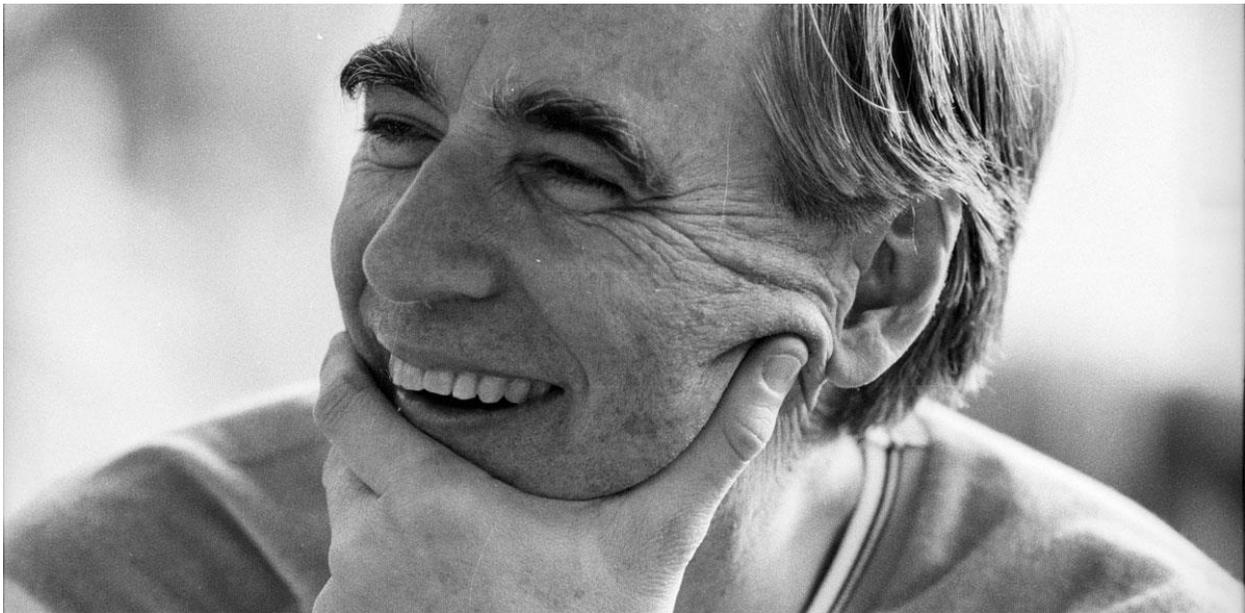
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P.S. To hear Fred singing some of the treasured Neighborhood songs, [click here](#).

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## Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Feeling good about who we are doesn't come just from people telling us they like us. It comes from inside of us: knowing when we've done something helpful or when we've worked hard to learn something difficult...or when we've been especially kind to someone else..."

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