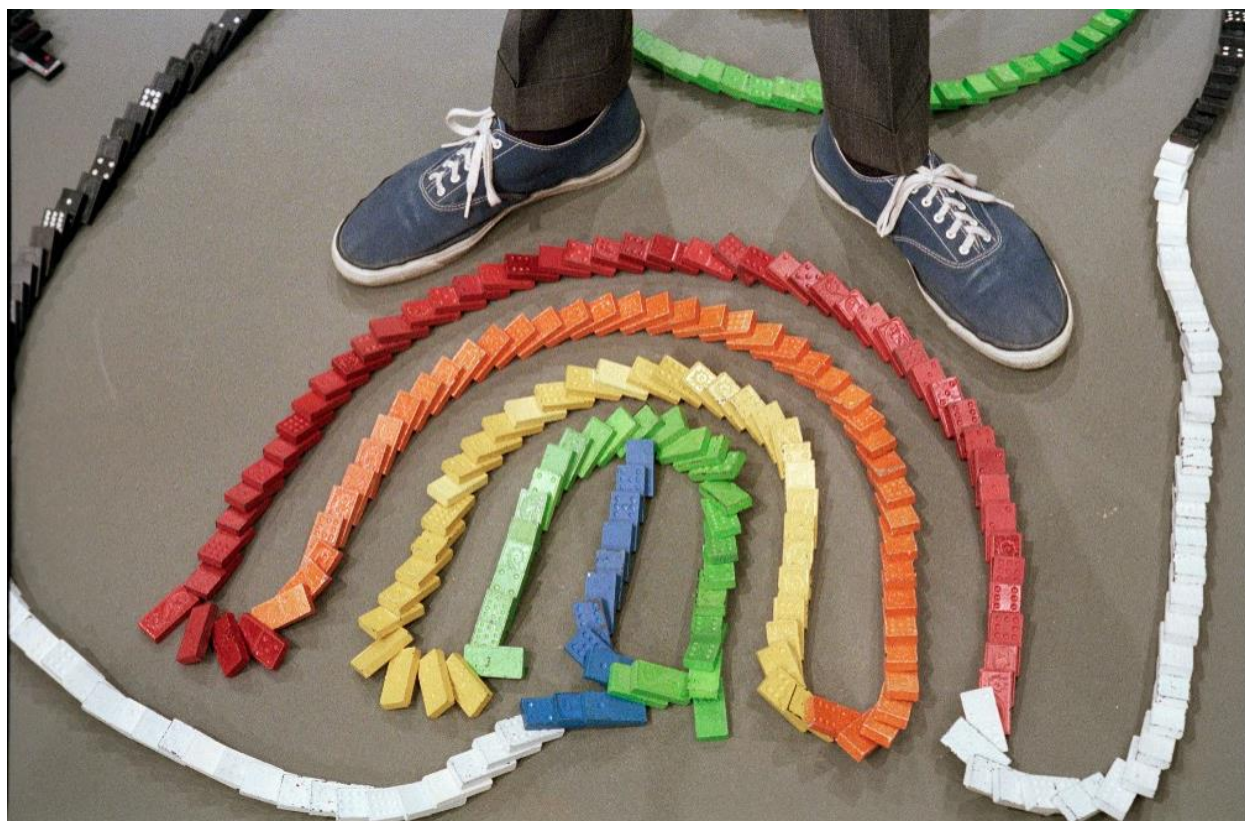


September 2021

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Don't Forget the Fun!



In the midst of all we've been going through in this pandemic time, I've thought about something that Helen Ross, a noted children and family mental health specialist, told Fred. As he was working on *Neighborhood* scripts which often dealt with serious childhood concerns like feeling jealous, angry or afraid, she reminded him, "Don't forget the fun." What great advice for us to think about, especially these days.

Think about the fun you've seen in your work with children. Some of it might be quiet fun, like being totally engaged in some activity, delighting in some new materials you've offered, or feeling that wonderful sense of satisfaction at having accomplishing something. It's also fun to sing and dance in a group. Then there's the laugh-out-loud kind of fun. I had that kind of a laugh with my sister the other day, and it opened my eyes again to how important that kind of fun is for all of us.

I did some research, and I found that for children, laughter is not only a great sound, but actually a healthy sound! Laughter raises endorphins, which increases immunity, lowers stress -- and as we all know, "it's such a good feeling." Humor creates a feeling of being in a warm, caring place. It also activates the brain's dopamine which helps cells make connections, contributing to memory and retention. What a great psychological and physiological climate for learning!

Fred had a wonderfully whimsical sense of humor, and he understood how helpful it was to share that with children. Watch how much fun he is having making music with his musician friends - master guitarist Neighbor Joe Negri and percussionist Bobby Rawsthorne who was part of the Johnny Costa trio contributing to the outstanding music of the *Neighborhood*.



It helps us all to be reminded how much we're helping children when we find fun and laughter in our work with them.

Laughing with the children

I remember walking by a classroom when I heard the wonderful sound of laughter. I had a chance to talk with the teacher afterwards, and she told me that now and then she likes to add something silly when they're singing. That morning she changed the "Old MacDonald" E-I-E-I-O to "Oinky, boinky, doinky." To the three-year-olds, that was hilarious, and she had great fun, too, joining in laughing with them.

Of course not all "fun" makes us laugh out loud, but moments like that are priceless and add strength to our relationships.

Enjoy the things children say.

Children do say the darndest things! I remember taking an autumn walk with my young granddaughter, and as I commented on the colorful leaves that had fallen on the ground, she asked, “How are the leaves going to get back up there?”

Here’s another one – a teacher was helping the children learn the words to the Pledge of Allegiance. After she told them the words, “and to the Republic for which it stands,” a child asked her, “Who are the four witches?”

Not only does it feel good to laugh at the delightful things children say, we can also learn a lot from them. Their questions and comments help us hear our words and see the world from their perspective. You might even want to share those stories in staff meetings – to enjoy a good laugh together and to see the world through the eyes and ears of a child.

They say laughter is contagious. I suppose that’s because laughter is a social experience and helps us feel we’re part of a caring community, whether we’re children or adults. And isn’t that feeling important for us all, as we wind our way through the zig-zag world of the pandemic. Let’s not forget the fun -- in our work and in our everyday lives.

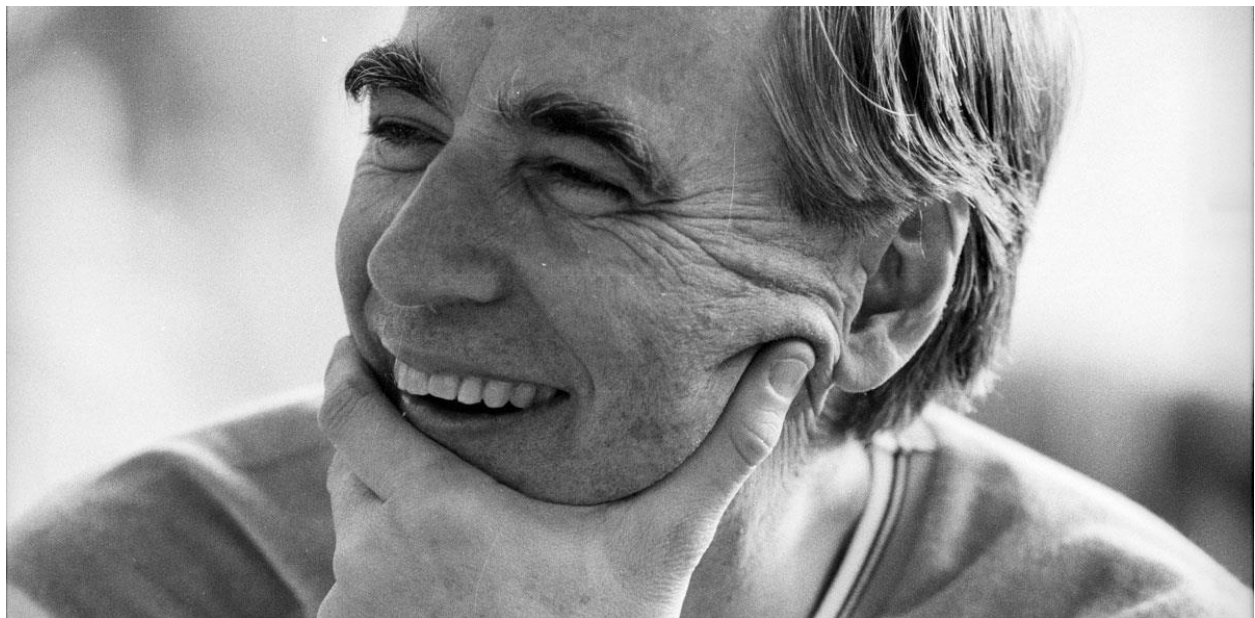
Best wishes for the year ahead,



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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Maybe you'll find that by watching a child at play, you'll tap into some of the playfulness inside you – remembering your childhood and discovering new things about yourself."

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