Neighborly Ways to Celebrate
I’ve always thought of the March newsletter as special because March 20 was Fred’s birthday. Over the years, we’ve even celebrated Fred’s birthday on March 20 in a special way - by wearing a sweater – and doing something neighborly. Maybe you’d like to join in that tradition too.

I thought you might like to know why wearing a sweater became such a signature part of the Neighborhood, because some of those reasons are connected to your work with children.

Fred started the tradition of putting on a sweater on his very first Neighborhood episode. The program aired at 5 p.m., and the premise was that Mister Rogers was stopping by his “television house” on his way home from work to have a “visit” with his “television neighbors.” Changing from his suit jacket and regular shoes (which he wore for work) to a sweater and sneakers helped set a welcoming tone for a “visit.” In your own way, you, too, create a welcoming atmosphere that lets children know you’re there for them.

Fred also understood the importance of starting with a ritual. He changed to his sweater and sat on the bench to put on his sneakers, giving children a signal that we’re about to start our “visit” together. Rituals and routines give children structure and predictability which provide a sense of security and trust. Through your rituals and routine, you’re offering that to children, too.

As you can hear on this Neighborhood video, there was another, more personal reason why Fred wore those sweaters. When I watched it, I found a new appreciation for what “things” mean to children -- and to all of us.
The way Fred talked about his mother's sweaters isn’t so different from the way children use “transition objects.” Those “things” (things that they can touch, smell, see and hold) help children feel connected to their loved ones, even when they’re apart. That’s like the stories I have heard about some children who sleep better when they have some small item from their mother. Those personal things can be very comforting.

Maybe it’s not so surprising, then, that in the cold winter days, I find myself reaching for the scarf that my mother, who died almost twenty years ago, knitted for me. I hear that from some of my friends, too. One wears her mother’s coat. Another wears his father’s sweatshirt. We all are holding on to those “things” to feel connected to those important people in our lives and to remind us of who they were and how they helped us become who we are.

So if putting on something like a sweater is a way of connecting us with Fred and honoring him, maybe it can also remind us of Fred’s kindness – and help us think of doing something kind and neighborly as a way of celebrating his birthday and his life.
On a special note:
I can’t help but mention the remarkable images of neighborliness and kindness for the Ukrainian people that we’re seeing these days in the news. What a great reminder of Fred’s words: “Look for the helpers. It’s reassuring to know there are many caring people who are doing all they can to help others in this world.” That’s a message you might want to pass on to families, too.

Thank you for being our neighbor,

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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers
"The purpose of life is to listen—to yourself, to your neighbor, to your world... and, when the time comes, to respond in as helpful a way as you can find...from within and without."