



Two Stories of Kindness

STORY 1:

Somewhere in West Tennessee, nine women -- or "*The 9 Nanas*," as they prefer to be called -- gather in the darkness of night. At 4am they begin their daily routine -- a ritual that no one, not even their husbands, knew about for 30 years. They have one mission and one mission only: to create happiness. And it all begins with baked goods.

Over the next three hours, *The 9 Nanas* will whip up hundreds of pound cakes, as part of a grand scheme to help those in need. And then, before anyone gets as much as a glimpse of them, they'll disappear back into their daily lives. The only hint that may remain is the heavenly scent of vanilla, lemon and lime, lingering in the air.

The baking began 35 years ago -- when the nanas got together for their weekly card game.

"One of our oldest friends, MaMaw Ruth, would read in the paper that someone had died," Mary Ellen remembered, "and she'd send off one of her special pound cakes. She didn't have to know the family. She just wanted to put a little smile on their faces. And we started thinking about what we could do to make a difference like that?"

So, the ladies began brainstorming. They started by listening. They'd eavesdrop -- all with good intentions, of course -- at the local beauty shop or when they were picking up groceries. And when they heard about a widow or a single mom who needed a little help, they'd step in and anonymously pay a utility bill or buy some new clothes for the children.

"We wanted to help as much as we could," Mary Ellen said, "without taking away from our own families, so we became coupon clippers. Whenever we saw something on deep discount, we'd buy a few so that we could share it with others."

The Nanas would find out where the person lived and send a package with a note that simply said, "Somebody loves you" -- and they'd be sure to include one of MaMaw Ruth's special pound cakes.

The more people they helped, the bolder they became.

"We gave new meaning to the term drive-by," Mary Ellen said with delight. "We'd drive through neighborhoods and look for homes that had fans in the window. That told us that the people who lived there didn't have air-conditioning. Or we'd see



Two Stories of Kindness

that there were no lights on at night, which meant there was a good chance their utilities had been turned off. Then we'd return before the sun came up, like cat burglars, and drop off a little care package."

For three decades, the ladies' good deeds went undetected -- that is, until five years ago, when Mary Ellen's husband started noticing extra mileage on the car and large amounts of cash being withdrawn from their savings account.

So, 30 years into their secret mission, *The 9 Nanas* and their husbands gathered in Mary Ellen's living room and the sisters came clean. They told the husbands about the eavesdropping -- even the drive-bys. And that's where their story gets even better -- because the husbands offered to help.

"They were amazed that we were doing this and even more amazed that they never knew. All but three of them are retired now, so sometimes they come with us on our drive-bys. In our area, all you need is an address to pay someone's utility bill, so we keep the men busy jotting down numbers."

It wasn't long before the couples decided it was also time to tell their grown children. And that's when happiness began to happen in an even bigger way. The children encouraged their mothers to start selling the pound cakes online, so they could raise money to help even more people. And it wasn't long before they were receiving more than 100 orders in a day.

These days, *The 9 Nanas* are able to take on even bigger projects, given their online success. Recently they donated more than \$5,000 of pillows and linens and personal care products to a shelter for survivors of domestic violence. And this August, they'll celebrate their second consecutive "Happiness Happens Month" by sending tokens of their appreciation to one person in every state who has made a difference in their own community.

But that doesn't mean they're too busy to continue doing the little things that make life a bit happier. Sometimes they just pull out the phone book and send off pound cakes to complete strangers. And if the Nanas spot someone at the grocery store who appears to need a little help, it's not unusual for them to start filling a stranger's cart.

"This is our way of giving back," Mary Ellen said. "We want people to know that someone out there cares enough to do something. We want to make sure that happiness happens."

Adapted from: <http://www.dailygood.org/view.php?sid=264>



Two Stories of Kindness

STORY 2:

Late last August, Francine Stein passed away in Rockland County, New York at the age of 83.

Ms. Stein had never married and had no children, and though she had lived for ten years in at the New Monsey Park Home for Adults, after she had been transferred to a nursing home, she had lost touch with all her friends and acquaintances there.

The director at the funeral home called a local rabbi, Elhanan Weinbach, and asked him to lead a graveside service for Ms. Stein. The funeral director indicated that nobody would be attending the funeral aside from the rabbi and funeral director.

"The funeral director said, 'This is the easiest funeral you're ever going to do,'" Weinbach said. But, "The idea of a woman dying alone, as I thought about it, it went from being the easiest funeral to a very difficult one. It just seemed so sad. I was pretty overwhelmed, actually," he said.

Weinbach told his daughter, Ora Weinbach, about it. Like her father, she was unhappy to learn that "literally nobody" would be at Stein's funeral.

"That really bothered me and I felt, like, 'how could that happen?'" she said. "I just felt if anybody could be present that would be a beautiful thing for this woman."

So, she posted something on Facebook asking if anyone was available to attend the service.

For Mindy Liebman, who responded, it was a question of "human decency."

"To me it's mind-blowing that a person can live an entire life and die and have nobody there who cares that they died," she said. "It's important to celebrate her life, to celebrate the fact that she even lived."

People shared her Facebook post again and again, and again. Ultimately, as many as 30 strangers were present Wednesday to pay their respects.

Her pallbearers were strangers — men and women who carried her simple casket and then lowered it, shoveling warm earth into the grave lovingly and with compassion.

Adapted from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/strangers-show-up-to-funeral-for-woman-who-died-without-family_us_57bc8b5ee4b03d51368b0a04