

# Care Capsule®

*Capsules of motivation to dispense  
care and kindness*

Volume 17 - Issue 2  
No. 49  
June 2014

## A Unique Angle for Friendliness

(Naming the Elephant)

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— Dr. James R. Kok

**Friendliness can live at many levels, all the way from superficial to very deep.** At any depth, friendliness is a worthwhile and loving adventure. But one of the challenges in friendship is working to add more depth and meaning to the relationship.

One of the ways to get there is called “Naming the Elephant”.

I stopped at Starbucks recently. After taking my coffee in hand, I turned and looked for a spot to sit. I saw an empty chair at a table with a young woman I

knew slightly. I walked over, greeted her, and asked if I could join her. She gave me a smile and a green light to sit down.

Immediately something dawned on

me—it was that she had recently gone through a divorce. “*How are you doing?*” I asked in an everyday common way that anyone would say. “*Oh, great!*” she replied. So much for formalities, I thought, and then with lightening speed pondered whether to go into the divorce or leave that distressing chapter alone.

I decided to reach for the heavy stuff while also realizing she may want to

keep the door slammed on that painful chapter. I decided I could not sit and talk without at least trying to touch the pain in her life. So I asked about the divorce and how she was doing with all

that. What followed was a very deep half hour, punctuated with her tears. Then she explained that she had to rush



*(continued on page 2)*

## Naming the elephant

*Continued from page 1*

to her job, but she first, in a very meaningful way, while drying her tears, thanked me for my care. It was a meaningful half-hour for me, too.

I had “named the elephant”, an expression every person who intends to care needs to be familiar with. It connects to a little myth about a person going to visit someone and being asked to sit down in the living room. She ushers the friend graciously into her living room and shows her to a comfortable chair. Tea is served and the hostess sits down on the other side of the room. Between the two of them stands a live, full-grown African Elephant. No word of explanation is offered. She merely leans to the left or to the right as she chats.

A pleasant but odd visit passes, with no mention of the elephant. Both women act as if it isn't there. They just lean around it. During the whole time, they are in fact totally preoccupied with this gray behemoth, but in the interest of courtesy, they say nothing.

This laughable little tale stands for encounters we all have been part of—where we are connecting, visiting, affiliating, talking with someone and ignoring a gigantic or painful reality that we know is a big part of the other's life. We act like it isn't there.

Loving kindness calls us, often, but not always, to name the pain, distress, or calamity, rather than ignore it, or act like it isn't there. Like what happened at the Starbucks, good

things do occur when we take the risk of naming the elephant in the room.

But not always. That is why it sometimes is a difficult choice. Positive results are not guaranteed. Nevertheless, as Jesus' people, devoted to loving-kindness, we must try. We must take risks. We must name the elephant—most of the time—as we endeavor to show loving-kindness.

Recently, a man I know pretty well informed his friends that he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. A few days later I was sitting across from him at a men's breakfast. The elephant (his recent diagnosis) was sitting there and I decided to ask about it. And we had a very meaningful and valuable half hour conversation about what he is living with now. It was good for all of us, and I think it was good for him as well. We care and he knows we care. We are now walking alongside him as he faces this serious change in his life.

Circumstances bring such challenges to us every day. We hear about the misfortunes in people's lives—we usually should ask about them. We see folks with wounds—we must inquire. We notice limbs, amputations, bandages and casts. We meet senior citizens with their unique challenges. Ask. Inquire. Name the challenge, and listen to their story.

Showing interest and concern is loving kindness. It builds relationships, and strengthens friendships. But there is even more. It is love. And such love is healing. Showing caring interest sends a spiritual message which enhances healing and nudges the restoration forward. It

is medicine for the spirit when we demonstrate interest in another person.

A number of years ago, one of our interns reported on a pastoral call he and his wife had paid to a recently widowed church member. They met at a restaurant for dinner and then visited at the man's house for an hour and a half.

The intern felt pleased with the whole evening. “Did you talk about Ruth (the deceased spouse)?” I asked. “Oh, no,” he replied, “we were able to get through the whole time without referring to her.” He said it as if he had pulled off a skillful conversational coup. He was proud of the achievement. I sat appalled. “*A bereavement call without reference to the main character?*” I asked. “*You may have had a good time, but the dominating presence in the room was Ruth, the recently deceased. Joe was thinking of her constantly and so were you. How could you not speak of her?*”

They had leaned around the elephant all evening as truly as in the fictional tea party.

Grieving people report that it happens all the time.

Friends, neighbors and colleagues avoid what the bereaved long for: they want to talk about the one who has died. They themselves are reluctant to insert their agenda. But then they quickly discover the general uneasiness of people with such delicate topics. So they wait, quietly longing for a caring soul to bring up the loved one's name, that memories may be shared. Often, they wait in vain.

It takes a little courage to say, “I

heard you Mother is divorcing your Father.” Or, “How are you doing with your chemotherapy?”

And asking always means taking the time to listen and to talk about the answer. In our new book, **Transform Belief Into Behavior**, there is one sentence that summarizes this: “Friendliness starts at the surface but can move into deeper places and touch deeply.” (p. 138) That is what “naming the elephant” is about. Love takes risks intended to heal and help others and deepen our relationships.

**B**ill W. arrived at my Saturday morning class one day with serious wounds on his face. Scabbed now, they looked about a week old. “What happened, Bill?” I asked. “I slipped on the rocks at Newport Beach,” he said. “I fell flat on my face.” We groaned together for Bill a minute, then I asked, “Bill, how many people have asked you this week what happened to your face?” “None,” he answered, “you’re the first one.”

**Not all elephants are to be named.**

It’s okay to ask the height of a tall person, but no one inquires of a small person, “How little are you anyway?” When a death is attributed to lung cancer, little but curiosity is served by asking survivors if the victim was a smoker. Likewise,

with auto crash victims and your burning wonder about a latched seat belt. **Don’t ask!** It makes no difference now!

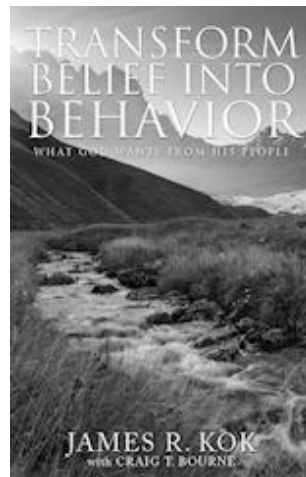
In a caring person’s heart lies a desire to be helpful. Most care requires a little risk.

‘**Naming the elephant**’ is seldom a sure thing, but a loving tactic God’s people **sensitively try** for the cause called loving kindness.



## New Release

Jim Kok’s newest book,  
**Transform Belief Into Behavior**,  
is now available in bookstores  
and on Amazon.com



*If you would like an autographed  
copy, you can order from:*

Care and Kindness Ministries,  
10073 Valley View St, #429,  
Cypress, CA 90630,  
for **\$16.00**

**Decide to give your smile to people  
you meet — clerks, mechanics,  
strangers**

## Your Smile Can Heal

I was walking in the mall, pondering a couple of discouraging encounters earlier in the day. A young boy suddenly was blocking my path and I slowed to step around him. He greeted me with a warm smile and a wave of his hand. I couldn’t help but smile back—and suddenly I realized my mood had lifted! I also noticed that the youth was a youngster with Downs Syndrome. He had healed me of my blue feelings with his smile.

**We all carry a smile!** Too many are unused, or too rarely used. Smiles are instant inoculations of loving-kindness. Everyone needs them constantly. Each of us walks through life carrying this powerful medicine, and we have the opportunity to lift spirits and heal discouraged souls everywhere we go. Not only does it elevate the sagging spirits of others and makes their body healthier, the smilers themselves also receive an infusion of spiritual medicine that makes them healthier.

- Believe your smile can heal another person.
- Decide to give your smile to people you meet — clerks, mechanics, strangers.
- Trust that they, and you yourself, will feel brightened by your kind act.
- Install this new agenda for everyday living — every day — everywhere.

I discovered the truth of these statements that day in the mall. My somber mood was lifted by the warmth expressed by a young boy.



# Care and Kindness Conference in Pompton Plains, New Jersey

*Good speakers with excellent topics . . . inspiring keynote addresses . . . enthusiastic, joyful people listening with full attention . . . warm, friendly fellowship . . . well-planned and organized . . . motivating ideas presented in topic after topic . . .*  
**What more could you ask for in a conference ? This one was a complete success !**





# Acts of Kindness

*I have an act of kindness I would like to share with anyone who cares for a senior who no longer can drive.*

*When my beloved father-in-law, Charlie, was widowed at 86, and lived three more years, I ran many of his errands and took him to lunch or breakfast at least once a week. I found out that a real treat for him was just driving around the greater Long Beach area, particularly to places from his past – homes they had lived in over the years, churches they had attended, work sites, the grandkids' schools, merchants they had traded with.*

*Some of these places were still intact; others had been demolished and replaced. Either way, he loved it. And I would always put in a favorite CD and we would sing along – “Someone to Watch Over Me”, “That Old Black Magic”, “How High the Moon”, etc. And when he'd get out of the car he'd always turn to me and sing, “I'll be seeing you, in all the old familiar places”; then throw me a kiss and shut the car door... When we scattered his ashes and rose petals by plane near Seal Beach pier, the last thing we all did was sing “I'll be Seeing You” to Charlie.*

– Jeri Livingstone



Scott Carroll, 29 years old, after having been passed around to a lot of minor league teams over the years and also having had “Tommy John” surgery two years ago, played for the first time in the majors for the White Sox and won the game (Sox over Tampa Bay 9-2)

The announcers and cameramen had given lots of time to the visible presence and support of family and friends, and even high school classmates in the stands who had attended from Mississippi to view this debut.

Scott was getting ready to leave the clubhouse and stopped to ask a Sox team player, Adam Dunn, for a restaurant recommendation. The only catch was that the restaurant needed to be able to accommodate the 35 guests who were in town for the contest against the Rays.

Dunn made a few calls to set things up for Carroll at a local establishment called Timothy O'Toole's in the downtown area.

*“I just thought he was reserving the spot for me,”* said Carroll with a laugh.

Dunn did more than reserve the spot. The veteran designated hitter picked up the entire tab for Carroll's group. It was Dunn's way of paying tribute to the impressive 7 1/3-inning outing for Carroll, who had pitched 138 games over eight Minor League seasons before getting to the Majors.

\* \* \* \*

The rest of the story is from Adam Dunn who said he was “passing on a gesture made to him when he was a young player and hoped that Carroll would one day be in position to do the same.”

*“This kid pitched great. I know how special it is to kind of remember your first time,”* Dunn said. *“It's just something that was done for me when I was young. That's one cool part of the game where hopefully one day he'll be in position where he's able to do it.”*

–from the **Chicago Tribune**

## TEN (10) THINGS WE KNOW ABOUT YOU

- 1) You are reading this.
- 2) You are human.
- 3) You can't say the letter "P" without separating your lips.
- 4) You just attempted to do it.
- 6) You are laughing at yourself.
- 7) You have a smile on your face and you skipped No. 5.
- 8) You just checked to see if there is a No. 5.
- 9) You laugh at this because you are a fun-loving person & everyone does it, too.
- 10) You are probably going to pass this on to see who else falls for it.

Wife texts husband on a cold winter's morning: "**Windows frozen**"

Husband texts back: "**Pour some luke warm water over it**"

Wife texts back: "**Computer completely buggered now**"

## Thoughts from Jim

Dr. Jim Kok maintained a blog named **Kok's Korner** on the Crystal Cathedral website until his retirement at the end of June 2013.

He has now moved his comments to the Care and Kindness website, [www.careandkindness.org](http://www.careandkindness.org), where they are archived as **Thoughts from Jim**. The most recent posting is displayed on the Home Page, but the menu link above it takes you to the archives, so that you can go back to read earlier ones you may have missed.  
[www.careandkindness.org/ThoughtsIndex.php](http://www.careandkindness.org/ThoughtsIndex.php)

You can have his blogs emailed automatically to you once a week by sending a request to [ShowUp@careandkindness.org](mailto:ShowUp@careandkindness.org)

## Partnering for a Care Conference in your area !

We would like to work with your team to schedule a local mini-conference that would make it easy for people in your geographic area to attend.

We are working with churches in various parts of the United States to present weekend conferences.

**How would you like to help host one in your community?**



We will offer as much help as you would like, drawing upon our past experience. You can determine the topics, speakers, schedule any way you want — or we can provide someone to work alongside your people in developing those things.

Drop us a line at:

[ShowUp@careandkindness.org](mailto:ShowUp@careandkindness.org) to let us know of your interest. Then we can begin planning together!



## Smiles are instant injections of loving-kindness



## Prayer Time

When little Kelli said her bedtime prayers, she would bless every family member, every friend, and every animal (current and past).

For several weeks, after she had finished the nightly prayer, Kelli

would say, *“And all girls.”* This soon became part of her nightly routine—her addition of this closing.

Her mom’s curiosity got the best of her and she asked, *“Kelli, why do you always add the part about all girls?”*

Her response, *‘Because everybody else always finishes their prayers by saying ‘All Men’!’*

### ***Care Capsule***

A publication of Care and Kindness Ministries, as part of the Care and Kindness Campaign. Our web page is at [www.careandkindness.org](http://www.careandkindness.org). For a free subscription to ***Care Capsule***, send an email to [ShowUp@careandkindness.org](mailto:ShowUp@careandkindness.org)

#### **Managing Editor**

Dr. James R. Kok

#### **Production Editor**

Craig Bourne

[www.careandkindness.org](http://www.careandkindness.org)