

POST BULLETIN NEWSPAPER COMPLETE INTERVIEW:

1. Where did your “passion” for compassion come from?

I was inspired by my younger brother Kevin. Kevin was my hero and a shining example for our family. He died due to complications of Cystic Fibrosis at age 20. I believe our true potential for greatness comes from ‘walking in another’s shoes’ and responding with compassion. These acts of compassion empower those in need so that when they are stronger, they will turn around and utilize their skills and talents to help others. People often asked my parents how they had seven children (yes, I had six incredible brothers) who all loved each other so much and acted like they were best friends. I am convinced our love for each other was strengthened due to the compassion instilled by our parents. We experienced each other’s sorrows as well as the joys and accomplishments. I actually felt joyful sitting on the end of my brother’s hospital bed telling jokes, rubbing his back, giving him back “beats” to the music to help clear his lung and eating popcorn. He was brave beyond words, faithful, and kind. And we were all made better for “walking the walk” with him.

2. What is Locks of Compassion and how did it get started? (details in book introduction)

The “Locks of Compassion” project united people of all ages, genders, faith traditions, and ethnicities. Both residents and visitors from around the world decorated padlocks with signs, symbols, and words of compassion and attached their creations on a community display that was located in Rochester’s Peace Plaza in 2017. The initiative has received both community and national recognition. The display was gifted to the city of Rochester, Minnesota. It is now located in the Mayo Civic Center.

3. Why did you decide to write a book, “The City that Locked in,” about the project?

This initiative was so overwhelmingly embraced by both residents and countless visitors to our city (approx. 40% of the locks represent those visiting Mayo Clinic who come from around the globe with hopes of healing) I felt the book would touch more people; allowing them to experience the initiative from it’s inception and to step into the shoes of those in the pages. Both residents and visitors expressed that the display was “cathartic” and a symbol of hope because they were able to unite with others who were experiencing heartaches and struggles; knowing they were not alone. Many expressed they felt stronger and peaceful after creating a lock that expressed what they felt compassion meant to them...even if people did not have time to create a lock --those who passed by the display and gazed at the hope filled messages and pictures left smiling—some with a tear, but all with a positive feeling within... a feeling they were not alone in their pain and life challenges.

Because a picture tells a thousand words...a good portion of the book tells the story of the initiative with a great many pictures displayed in a fun social media flare. This book can be enjoyed by 3 year olds and 103 year olds. The lock creations represent those from age 3 years (our youngest creator) to 104 years (Sr. Antoine Murphy who passed away this year created a lock for the display...it was quite a gift knowing the Mayo Brothers were present at Sr. Antoine’s graduation and she spent the majority of her life serving with compassion at St. Mary’s Hospital. She was truly an amazing symbol of compassion for all of Rochester and beyond.

Those who have seen the book draft express their excitement to see it in print. They feel the book in many ways represents their pride in our great city and the genuine and compassion hospitality that we

embrace. Visitors who came to the display and saw the welcome and hope on those locks expressed the fact that the compassion they felt within the walls of Mayo Clinic permeated throughout the city. Those locks are in various languages and represent various parts of the world—they are united and locked in together on this compassionate piece of art (now located in the Mayo Civic Center).

4. How did you get the Dalai Lama to write a forward for your book?

I have great admiration for many compassionate world leaders past and present... Pope Francis, Elie Weisel, Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King to name a few. I've used a quote by the Dalai Lama while working on this initiative that sums up our need for compassion.

"Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive."
~Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama has visited Mayo Clinic, Rochester on occasion. He is familiar with our city. He spoke on Compassion and Healthcare a few years ago at St. Mary's hospital Chapel. There was a lottery to attend that presentation. His books and his teachings all focus on the necessity of compassion in our world. I thought it would speak volumes to have his words on compassion in a foreword for this book. It would be both an honor and blessing to have his support.

After sending details of the initiative and various pictures, along with my desire to inspire all those who read the book to use compassion as a guide when making life choices to His Holiness, I was notified by his Secretary that the Dalai Lama would welcome reviewing my information and request. I was told He would get back to me on my request.

I was humbled that the Dalai Lama was drawn to the project and thrilled to receive an email confirmation the following week indicating the Dalai Lama would gift me the foreword to the book. I am sure those who read his words will be inspired.

5. How did locks become associated with this project? In what way do locks symbolize compassion? (details in book introduction)

Locks are often a symbol of restricting access, but locks also unite one to another. Keys lock people out ...but, they also open doors. The keys that were worn on leather necklaces gifted in the creation packages were symbols to remind those creating their locks to always "live with an open mind and heart."

6. So here's a political question: Given the tribal times we live in, do you think our society suffers from a shortage of compassion?

I do. I find in my present position as Advancement Director for Catholic Charities there is great power in "listening" intently and having an ability to "walk in another's shoes" to determine exactly what each person is trying to convey to me. That listening helps me serve better and fulfill their goals of creating positive change. Compassion calls us to experience another's challenges, heartaches, and struggles. We all have the power of compassion within us; sometimes it is just hidden under the surface waiting to be ignited. We need to spend time listening.

The initiative is not political in anyway. It is universally embraced as an expression of compassion from people representing varied views and coming from all walks of life. But, when discussing society suffering a shortage of compassion, I find that the use of social media while it can be a powerful and

valuable tool, now allows all of us to instantly express our every thought and feeling without stepping back long enough to reflect a bit and truly feel for each other. If not used wisely there is a danger of caring too much about ourselves and our own happiness. In some ways, it may encourage a bit of a narcissistic culture that avoids looking at the pain of others because we are too interested in our own thoughts and opinions.

I presented to high school students recently and told them compassion was like empathy on steroids. We don't just stand back and see another in pain and say, "Wow, how sad, I guess I am lucky I am not him or her." We try to be a source of healing and help in this world. We take action.

There is a powerful quote by Mother Teresa that has guided me this year. I really think she was remarkable. I'd even go so far as to say she is an ideal model for the mission of Catholic Charities that helps the poor and marginalized regardless of age, ethnic background, or faith tradition. She said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Ponder on that quote and it will truly humble you and put things in perspective.

7. You indicated that social media has helped carry the initiative's message around the globe? How has it done that?

Social media played a huge part in the success of this initiative. The slogan was, "What if a decorated lock could express your compassion and the hope it inspires begins to ripple." That rippling of hope was created with social media. People shared their locks on Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, etc. We have followers on #locksofcompassion as far away as Australia and Africa.

The element of social media was meant to especially draw in our millennials and our youth. I find it compelling to see the power our youth have to use their skills with social media to promote good. I wanted to challenge them to use social media to change the world for the better and to be that ripple of hope (to share their lock creations and messages of compassion).

Yes, I get it. It's fun to snap a picture and input those bunny ears or the hundreds of other filters out there. But, if we "only" use our I phones to take selfies...we have a tendency to end up selfish...and we may be missing out on some great opportunities to use social media to change society for the better.

You'd be astonished at the stories behind those "shared" locks: Cancer patients making locks in honor of others in their Stage 4 Support Group. Parents hanging their son's "Transplant Donor" bracelet on a lock in memory of their son who died the week prior, a little girl who was adopted creating a lock honoring her new parents, the word *love* decorated in a dozen languages. You will see some of the most inspiring messages at that display and you will be able to take the journey from start to finish in the book.

In fact, there is an interactive page you can cut out and create so you can "Lock In" to Compassion and share your creation on social media.

8. Is this your first book?

Yes...I've created short stories and written numerous articles, but this is my first book. Although, I have a binder with my thoughts for a children's book that has been on my wish list for years. I hope to see that book come to fruition in the future.

9. What do you hope people come away with after reading your book?

I hope they come away looking at the many people they encounter each day feeling a connection. As my Executive Director-Robert Tereba so poignantly states in a testimonial on the last page of the book, “What we share through our common humanity far out weighs that which makes us different.”

I hope people of all ages come away feeling hopeful and inspired. I hope they see clearly by experiencing the compassion on those pages (from individuals who come from all walks of life) that we are all happier, healthier, and better when we allow compassion to guide our life choices.

10. Who was involved in the success of this initiative?

I am extremely grateful to our Mayor and many other civic leaders who supported this initiative. And I am forever grateful to the many sponsors, staff, volunteers, residents, and visitors from around the world who lifted up this project. It may have started as a vision and a dream on my part, but I am always reminded of the words of Sr. Generose Jervais who was a great friend and mentor. “If you have a great idea Mary, bring it to great people and they will help you lift it up.” I feel like I was just an instrument and I thank God for creating the spark within me to dream the dream.

***The proceeds of the book benefit the poor and marginalized served by Catholic Charities—people of all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and faith traditions. How appropriate---because the display represents all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and faith traditions.*