



Library podcast

Maxwell King discusses 'The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers'

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[00:00:36] Hello everyone. My name is Jonna Ward and I'm the CEO of The Seattle Public Library Foundation and on behalf of the Library and the Foundation, thank you for joining us tonight and being with us so you all know the library because you wouldn't be here otherwise but you may not know the Foundation and the Foundation is think of us as the development arm of the library.

[00:01:00] We sit alongside the library. We raise money for the library. We invest in their programs and we help the library do the things that it just couldn't do otherwise.

[00:01:10] And I like to say it's probably selfish but I like to say it. Anything special that's happening at Seattle public libraries has private support behind it because our library and our general funding certainly opens the doors. We have staff at the desk. We have a collection. But one out of five items are paid for by a donor and our summer reading programs all the different things that we do for immigrant refugee families you name it. Private support makes it possible. And so when you take that combined with the vision that our city librarian brings to the work of the library I think we have an incredible library system. And I want to thank all of you who have done and helped with that.

[00:01:55] Applause So our support to the library is really designed to ensure the long term vitality of the library. And we feel that a library is so fundamental to a healthy and vibrant community.

[00:02:09] And that really is what we're going to be talking about tonight community and our good friends here. Some of them are here from Pittsburgh. And as you know we've been thinking about you all because there's a lot of hard things going on in Pittsburgh and I hope you'll share some of the how the community is coming together. So thank you for coming. So. We're here tonight because we are these lifelong learners who love. Learning and education just like Mr. Rogers instilled in so many of us whether it was your own shoulder whether it was you yourself whether it's your grandchildren whatever it is Mr. Rogers has done something for us and has touched us. So I want to share a quote from Fred Rogers. We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say it's not my child it's not my community it's not my world it's not my concern. Then there are those who see the need and respond. Let's be a community that responds well let's be a library that responds in an

area where library is an essential role in an area where the foundation invests heavily early childhood development is incredibly important to us. For many children the love of reading and learning begins with their first library experience. Think of that library card the first time you got one. Often it's the first official I.D. any child has their programs like story time World Language story time and are raising a reader program. These are all things that are helping kids develop the love of reading and learning and the habits that come with that. But as important as the reading is the teaching of the parents to create the positive routines that help their children so today we know so much more about early learning.

[00:04:05] And Fred Rogers was a big part of that. His groundbreaking television show that began 50 years ago played a big key role. We are here with local leaders who have focused on. Early Learning. The early child and that's the Apex Foundation. When Craig Stewart of the apex foundation reached out to us to say hey there's this really great book that we're helping create. And would you could the library be host to its north west kickoff. And so we were thrilled. But it's not just the kick. It's all the other things apex is doing for us in addition to programming tonight. I've mentioned to some of you that on November 5th we will have a showing of the movie the good neighbor and interesting fun fact is Nicholas Moore who is the son of Yo-Yo Ma is the producer of that movie and we have really fabulous Blu ray screening so come see it and you'll hear from our producer Nicholas Moore who actually you might recognize from the TV appearances cameo when he was a kid on the Mr. Rogers Show. We also have the incredibly generous support from the effects foundation for over 200 story time so it would be coming out between now and February. And if you think of all the opportunities to incorporate some of the Mr. Rogers values and learning into those story times I think we're going to have some powerful moments ahead. I'm glad you're here I hope you'll enjoy the program. We have some really interesting conversation to come and voices to be heard. And with that I want to introduce Craig Stewart the CEO of the Senate the Apex Foundation a community leader leader of a foundation.

[00:05:57] And we're thrilled to have you here.

[00:06:05] Thank you it's been a special privilege to spend last evening. And and most of today here I don't get to the library as much as I'd like to. But with two grandchildren now and another one on the way I. Anticipate that I'm going to be spending a lot more time in the library but I'm really privileged to introduce a simpatico. Friend and a colleague and a great philanthropic leader. Max Maxwell King his 40 plus years have been incredible incredibly full. He was the editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer for eight years my hometown newspaper one wish which I love to subscribe to again. If I could Max also spent a number of years at the highest Foundation as the CEO one of the largest foundations in the country and that was followed by a stint at the Fred Rogers Center early learning center in Latrobe Pennsylvania

[00:07:38] Where I actually had the chance. I'm not sure Max remembers this because I was sort of in the background but I served on that advisory committee for a couple of years and got to know got to know Max at that time.

[00:07:53] It it was a no brainer for us to to invest in this project. Max was absolutely the right one to to write this to write this story and it's an amazing read.

[00:08:11] I've read it for the second time last night and I'm gonna read it a third time because I'm sure I miss lots of deep details about the incredible life of Fred Rogers and you'll hear a little bit more tonight of how that influence does influence does Max's wife Peggy is here.

[00:08:32] And Peggy I'll bet you're more familiar with this book. And it was Max Porter's.

[00:08:38] Come on up and take his place OK. But Max thanks so much. We love having you here and I look forward to hearing what you have to say tonight as well.

[00:08:56] Thank you very much Craig. Can you all hear me OK. Not too much reverberation. I think we've got an interesting program tonight. I'm going to talk for 15 or 20 minutes about two of the reasons that I think Fred Rogers is a really important figure in American culture and why I think he's particularly relevant today. And then we're going to have a panel up here. I'm going to call Craig Stewart back up and we're going to have Bruce McCall because come back up who is there both board members of Apex which is as Craig said supported the project and Professor Jun lately from Harvard University who has a chair in child development there and like me is a former director of the Fred Rogers Center at St. Vincent College. So we'll have a good panel discussion. And then I think we'll also have time to take questions from all of you out in the audience. But I did want to just as I get started acknowledge the awful awful event that took place Saturday in Pittsburgh in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of the city at the Tree of Life synagogue.

[00:10:12] I think we're just stunned and stricken in Pittsburgh at the killings of 11 people there and the shooting of police officers there. The positive thing I can say is that the community has immediately pulled together and I think last night there was an interfaith service with thousands of people in one of the halls in the university section of the city and thousands of people out on the street who were there and Saturday night just hours after the event at the main intersection in Squirrel Hill a crowd of thousands of people came together for a candlelight vigil in support of the whole community and particularly the Jewish community in Squirrel Hill. That intersection by the way has on one corner the church where Fred Rogers went to church for 40 years. He lived in Squirrel Hill as do Peggy and I. And on the other corner is is the neighborhood library. So there was some strong community symbolism there so as I said I'm going to talk about a couple of aspects of Fred's life and work that I think make him such an important American figure. But taking a page from Fred Rogers himself I think I'll do it by telling you some stories rather than giving you a detective lecture. And I'll start in 1950 when Fred Rogers was coming out of college. He was graduating from Rollins College in Florida where he had gone down to study music.

[00:11:55] He was very very interested in music. He was a interesting young man. He had a very difficult. Lonely childhood. He was sickly. He was introverted. He didn't have a lot of friends. But he came out of that in high school and he sort of pulled himself self together in a remarkable way in high school he became the editor of the yearbook president of the student body National Merit Scholar and

and then he went on to college and studied music and he was a young man who had a new idea every every few weeks about what he was going to do. And he was a little frustrating I think for his parents some time. His father very much wanted him to go into the family business and Latrobe Pennsylvania which was a very successful business and the family was wealthy. His mother wanted him very much to become a Presbyterian minister. And so Fred Rogers came home for spring break in 1950 and his parents who I just said were probably the most wealthy family in that small city in western Pennsylvania had the first television set back in 1950 in La Trobe and Fred Rogers watched television much of the weekend and he was both horrified by it. There was a lot of slapstick PIE IN YOUR FACE comedy but it was also a lot of violence.

[00:13:31] Even the children's programs had a lot of violence in them. But in addition to being horrified by it he was riveted by the educational potential of television. This was back in 1950 but he saw that it had this strong educational potential and at the end of the weekend he announced to his parents that he was going to New York to go into television. And he had previously told his parents he was going to be a diplomat. He was going to be a French teacher. He was going to run an orphanage for children. He was going to be a minister. He sort of hinted that he might go into business with his father. So his parents were not surprised but a little exasperated to hear him say that he had a whole new career idea. But they were wonderfully caring and supportive parents and his father helped him had connections with RCA which owned NBC in New York back then helped him get an unpaid internship at NBC. And he spent three years there and he got a start in television. Then he came back to Pittsburgh and went to work for the first community based educational television station in the United States. WQE day. And in addition to being the program manager there he started a children's program with a woman named Jose Kerry who was a secretary and assistant there. And the program is called The Children's Corner. And it was a wonderful lighthearted entertaining fun program. But it was very frustrating to Fred Rogers because it wasn't educational and he had the thing that had captured him was what he thought was the potential of educational television to help children.

[00:15:20] And this program just wasn't doing it. And so he finally closed down that program and he was he was going to the seminary in Pittsburgh full time and he was trying to think about how he could get his ideas into a form that would be really powerful in terms of education of very young children. And one of his teachers at the seminary said Well Fred when you graduate what church are you going to go have your ministry on. And Fred Rogers said No I want to have a ministry to children on television. And after the teacher explained to Fred that he was crazy.

[00:16:05] He said you know if you're interested in children now you should go over to the University of Pittsburgh and spend some time studying with a professor. Then they are named Dr. Margaret McFarland. And so he did he went over and he took some courses there and it really was a miraculously fortunate occurrence that he made that connection because what was going on at the University of Pittsburgh back then was an extraordinary evolution in early childhood education and thinking. Dr. Benjamin Spock was there. Dr. Eric Erickson No he's not a doctor but the philosopher Eric Erickson was there. Doctor there were just a whole number of other nationally known scholars in early childhood at Pitt back then in addition to Dr. Margaret McFarlane and Fred Rogers had the good fortune to be dropped into the middle of this petri dish of creativity around early childhood education.

And what they were learning back there then was that the old Victorian notions of childhood were completely backwards or completely wrong. You may remember the old Victorian notions were that a child should be seen should be should be seen but not heard that the idea sort of was that childhood was this malaise. And if you put children away for a while they'd recover from it and they'd become grownups and what they were learning at Pitt back then was that it was the opposite of that that the first few years of childhood from from birth to three are the critical time when when learning takes place when language develops when the brain develops and that if those first few years are ignored the potential of the child is greatly reduced later.

[00:18:10] And so these scholars at the University of Pittsburgh were developing really some of the most innovative and important thinking around early childhood education and at that time. And Fred had the great good luck to be dropped into the middle of that. He formed a working relationship with Dr. McFarlane that lasted for the rest of her life. She consulted on all the programs that he did. And then Fred went on and for over 30 years produced television that took all of this learning about the importance of early childhood how children process information the critical importance of social and emotional learning for young children. And he was able to create programming that brought it directly on television to children and to their parents. And so one of the reasons that I think Fred Rogers is this powerfully important figure is that in the second half of the 20th century he's really the person who taught America about the importance of early childhood education.

[00:19:18] We all understand that now in almost every city in the country that you go to today. There are early childhood centers and many many many of the students are the young people if not all of them get a chance to go to early get early childhood education before they go to school. But back when Fred was developing his programming ideas in the 1950s if you said to someone early childhood education that's important they thought you meant kindergarten. Nobody even understood that there was early childhood education before kindergarten. So it's now well understood it's well practiced throughout the United States and throughout much of the world. But Fred Rogers is the one who took this learning that he had the good fortune to to come to understand at the University of Pittsburgh brought it to a mass audience through television and really accelerated and drove forward the early childhood education movement in the United States which is I would say the single most important educational development of the second half of the 20th century so that I think makes him a tremendously important cultural figure for us to understand today.

[00:20:41] But there's another reason and it's actually the reason that was most appealing to me as I researched the biography and and began to write it. I only met Fred twice. I didn't get to know him personally but I got to know him well through the research and I came to understand another aspect of his person and his life and his work that I think in a way is perhaps even more important. And I'll just tell you one story to illustrate that and then we can get to our panel discussion. But in the summer of nineteen Well 2003 and the summer of 2003 Fred Rogers was feeling kind of sick but he didn't like going to the doctor and he didn't go to the doctor very often and he had a trip planned in September with some friends to Scotland. So I went ahead on that trip and when he got back he finally went to see the doctor and they discovered that he had stomach cancer and as many of you probably know within six months five months six months I guess it had it had killed him but they operated on on him

in January and they discovered that it was inoperable. There was nothing they could do. They sold him back home and he went back to the apartment in Squirrel Hill that he lived in with his wife Joanne and Joanne and a very close friend of the families sort of took care of Fred in the last few weeks of his life and what they both reported to me when I interviewed them is that the the number one there were two things on his mind the most important thing on his mind was he didn't want to be a bother to anybody.

[00:22:31] And he kept saying to to his wife and to his good friend Dr. Bill her she was there helping take care of him that he he wished that they could just let him stay in his room and take care of himself because he hated being a bother to anybody else. But there was something else that was going on in those last few weeks of his life. And it didn't become apparent until after he died about two weeks after he died. All the presence started arriving at the homes and offices of his friends and associates. And during the last few weeks of his life he had been working with a friend of his who ran the McFeely or still runs the McFeely Rogers foundation collecting things memorabilia from his life and signing and putting notes on them that he wanted this to go to that person and that to go to another person. And so after he died all of these things that meant something to him and to the person he was sending to them arrive and almost without exception there was no note. It's just the gift itself was was the note was the communication from Fred who had died a few weeks earlier. What that tells me us what that illustrates I think is a person who cared so much about human kindness and the universal human values that I think all everybody here probably values for him so much. And I think that's the other aspect that makes him so critically important today. He is an extraordinarily powerful exemplar of the best human values that there are.

[00:24:26] He was a Presbyterian minister but he was also all through his life a reader a reader and a researcher about other philosophies and religions going all the way back to Confucius and Lao to Buddhism Jainism Judaism the Muslim faith.

[00:24:45] And he saw that in all these face faiths there was a universal set of values respect responsibility caring fairness integrity and he cared about representing those. And he did and he does still today. This is a man who woke up every morning at 5:00 a.m. to read the Bible and to pray but he didn't pray for success for himself or his program. He didn't pray for anything special to happen. Here's what he prayed for every morning he thought about who he was going to see that day at work at lunch in the afternoon and he prayed that he could be as good and kind a person as he could with each one of these people he envisioned that day and he envisioned being a kind person so that's what I value so much and I mean what I think is so critically important today. People often ask me if I can strip his philosophy down. You know we're Americans we want a soundbite and they ask me what's the soundbite for or Fred's values and I can. And I think it's this simple. And it has to do with the way he lived his life and what he taught on his show and what he preached when he wrote and spoke.

[00:26:16] And it is very simply slow down be kind.

[00:26:22] Slow down. Be kind and he felt that those things were related that you can't really be kind and considerate and relate to other people. If you don't slow down a little bit I think they're great values and what I want to do now is call up our panelists so we can talk much more in much more depth about Fred's work and how it relates to the important developments in the field of child Child Development and Early Childhood Education. So I'm going to ask Bruce McCaw who is a founder of the apex Foundation and the Tuileries Institute and whose work in philanthropy and civic leadership is renowned not just here in Seattle but but all around the country and ask Bruce to come up and I'm going to ask Craig Stuart who is the president of Apex as well as a board member and as as Craig mentioned a moment ago also a member of the advisory board at this at the Fred Rogers Center at St. Vincent College.

[00:27:40] And Professor Jun Lai Li from Harvard University who is was at the Rogers Center has now gone to Harvard and is one of the experts on Fred Rogers and early childhood. So if the three of you will come up and join me

[00:28:03] What time did Fred Rogers normally go to bed.

[00:28:07] Bruce I think I'd like to start with you because as I said I appreciated so much your support not just Apex his support for this biography project but your personal interest in supporting this and and the tremendous work that apex has done on behalf of children. And I'd love to hear from you where that came from.

[00:28:31] What were your interest in Fred Rogers user your appreciation of Fred Rogers came from originally well Jolene and I were at a early learning conference at the White House because 2002 and Fred Reserve being honored by the president and when he spoke. You know we knew of him and we'd been we'd started to Larry's a couple of years before that. But I don't know somehow the way what he had to say that day really I think moved both of us. And and and his ability to communicate I think to this day was just truly remarkable. He he was a master communicator and one of the things I think I appreciate it so much about him. He was such a great listener. I mean he listened to the kids and he and he responded to what they had to say. He responded to what they had on their mind. And so I from that day forward I think we were just very very moved by the power of who he was and when the opportunity to do this project came up. I don't think we thought for five minutes that we thought it's an important story and one to be done and I think most of all we're thrilled the job Max that you've done with this because it's he it's really a gift I think to the world.

[00:29:57] Thank you. You know one of the things that Fred cared a great deal about was parenting and parents and he focused on that a lot. He he it was important to him as as much as was possible that parents watch the program with their children and talk with them while they were watching it. And I know that tolerance did such great work in in the field of parenting. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about about that what you what you did to help parents be better.

[00:30:30] Well when we started to Larry's we actually were focused on work supporting research about early learning and then we realized through meeting a couple of people one that we were

talking about last night. Jack Shawn cough was also at Harvard. There was so much research that had been done about brain development but it wasn't being converted into a practical form. And we realized that what was lacking was not scientific knowledge but it was trying to take this knowledge base and convert it into things that are useful to children or to parents so that they had the confidence of being what knowing what they were doing was being good parents. And I think a lot of parenting is actually quite instinctive. But I think people are so worried about other judged about their parenting styles and what they're doing and there's there that it influences people in a negative way. And I think we realized that taking practical information that had scientific support was so important. So the parents really had the confidence of knowing what to do to be good parents and following their instincts. And I think one of the things we talked about also was Fred Rogers belief that commercializing things for his programs was the wrong thing to do. And I think when you look at all the commercialized products you're supposed to make kids you know bright and smart you know the baby Einstein said all this which is totally the wrong stuff. You realize that commercialism would skew the message so badly that it wouldn't be the same message. And he stuck to that. I think his whole life. And that's where he is. Keep kept things very simple and very basic. And he was just like I say a great great communicator and he brought parents and kids together.

[00:32:37] June May I want to get you to talk a little bit about that too about parents and parenting and how Fred's thinking about that the importance of Fred's thinking about that.

[00:32:51] But it's interesting that Harvard University maybe a little late to the game but is now taking a real interest in early childhood and is established I think two chairs now one for research one for practice which is the chair that you will hold. And I thought since you'll be in that august position you could talk to us a little bit about what we can take from Fred Rogers in terms of practice as parents as grandparents as uncles and aunts with children.

[00:33:27] I think one of them the most important message that Fred wanted parents to know and he included in his books and and Joann his wife and Fred talked about this often is that you don't have to be perfect the moment you become a parent. And so often parents feel such a sense of responsibility that they needed to be perfect for their children. I think Fred was so committed to this idea not only of child development but of human development. And by that he means that all of us are learning and growing constantly. So as much as our children from the moment they are born or the moment they come into our own lives that the children are learning and growing their parents are learning and growing to be parents and their Fred didn't think they were that that the kind of principles that helps a child learn and grow are not fundamentally different from the kind of principles that helps a parent learn and grow. So for example one of the first things that Fred focused on with young children is to help children understand that they have inherent worth and value they are capable of loving and that they are worthy of being loved. And when I think of so much of the research work in working particularly with at risk parent that's the kind of success for interventions so often grounded in that idea not to tell a parent how far they have fallen short but that they are capable of loving and they are worthy of being loved.

[00:35:11] I mean most recently one of the most kind of interesting exciting idea as many of you may be aware that our country is swept in the opioid crisis and one of the most tragic situations under that is that the infants are born with opioid addiction. So the traditional practice is to of course blame that parent. How could you write how how could you go to that kind of addiction while you're pregnant. But the practice instead of removing that parent from the infant is actually to room that parent with the infant even while the infant is in the intensive unit care now they almost seem counterintuitive but it's based on this principle that even an opioid addicted mother is worthy of love and capable of loving. And when they do that the hospitalization that withdraws and symptoms in the infant they significantly reduce. And it gave that infant and that mother a great start.

[00:36:16] And now if it is possible to communicate her parent in that situation that message I can imagine that we can communicate their message to any parent under any circumstances one of the things powerful things that I learned in doing research for this book was the importance of the parent's voice that for very young children even in utero the mother's voice the father's voice that's the beginning of language for children. And we all know that it's important to read to children. But what I learned in reading about Fred's work and the kind of research that was going on at the University of Pittsburgh back in the 50s is that parents should be helped to understand that just their voice just talking to children just having a free flowing exploratory conversation with children can be one of the most powerful tools for education.

[00:37:18] There is ever Now I know that that apex is focusing a lot more now on mental health issues with children and that sort of thing. And particularly focusing on juveniles more so. So moving up a little bit older and Craig I wondered if you might talk a little bit about Apex as current work which which relates I think so clearly to Roger's focus on social and emotional learning. He was focused at the very early years but it goes on to probably as old as you and I are.

[00:37:55] Craig Sure Fred had it right.

[00:38:03] The earlier we can start in helping children adjust to their worlds to understand and express their emotions and understand out how to deal with their with their emotions.

[00:38:20] I think would would go a long way in in really ensuring that we're gonna have a generation of of healthy kids socially and emotionally and it is also they have a social socially and emotionally healthy kid Pete predisposes or suggest that the parent and caregivers need to be well socially and emotionally as well.

[00:38:51] And that was an important aspect of our work and early learning I'll never forget when we brought our first executive director on board John Madina. He made the comment which raised a lot of eyebrows. He said if you want your kid to get in Harvard love them unconditionally.

[00:39:12] And that resonated with us when we met with Fred and and heard his message and his message resonates with with from our perspective with adolescents and with adults slow down listen be kind. I love the fact that we talked a little bit about Fred's leadership style which I think was

extraordinary and and for many maybe counterintuitive. But what struck me in the book was the fact that he was beloved by people who worked for him. They developed a language called Freddie isms Freddie fresh which which was an endearing way of saying how lucky we are to work with a man like that is so in terms of the the the issues we're working with with with adolescents.

[00:40:20] It's it's a big field.

[00:40:25] I mean there are a lot of concerns about what's going on in high schools and and and across the country with opiates and you know maybe at some point you can talk a little bit about social social media and perhaps the impact that may have and how we might address that. But aurally McKinstry who is here in the audience somewhere tonight is a real expert in on on what we're doing in adolescent mental health world. So maybe at some point and another time we can grab her.

[00:41:03] Bruce know there was one thing that I just was thinking back on when we started to Larry's that I forget where this came from but I maybe from the governor. I'm not sure but that 50 percent of the kids entering kindergarten or social and emotionally incapable being successful in school.

[00:41:24] And so when you look at how our school systems continue to be a pretty tough battle when the kids aren't ready to enter the environment of school and function within it it's almost impossible for them to be successful. Of course then all the other challenges the number of languages the ability to communicate and then all the social pressures and of course kids are just terrible to each other. And in the social media. This exacerbates all of that because it just it just gets worse and worse. I think it still comes back to these fundamentals that Fred was so focused on. You get it right at the beginning and it gives the kids a good chance.

[00:42:12] When I was at the Fred Rogers Center we went out a couple of us went out and visited a lot of schools and a lot of kindergarten classes and the kindergarten teachers who had been working for a number of years uniformly told us the same thing which is after five or six weeks of kindergarten they could predict which kids weren't going to make it through high school. So they were they came into kindergarten behind socially emotionally and in terms of language skills. And it's not impossible to catch up but most of these kids in their experience didn't catch up which is why this early childhood is crucial. At that stage but remains crucial as the child grows older. GROSS You were. Other than my editor and my wife probably the first person to read the book because I sent you a galley copy to take a look at.

[00:43:14] And I know you loved Fred and you've told me you liked the book. I wondered if there was a particular story in there that that really grabbed you that you thought was charming or interesting or important.

[00:43:27] Well I think one of my favorites when I think as we look at the political landscape today. But it was it was a pivotal moment for PBS when Fred was testifying before the Senate about funding for PBS and that and I forget who the senator was but one of the toughest guys. Yeah tough guy in D.C. to say the least. And Fred later boy it just lay the whole way with one and you could google this talk

and it's worth listening to the whole thing. But he lays it out and the guy said you got the 20 million and you know.

[00:44:10] But it was again his CEO's ability to look at things and articulate them remarkable that that piece of video is still taught in business schools all around the country as an example of extraordinary marketing. And of course the marketing secret was authenticity. He was completely authentic and you know a little while ago I was talking about the reasons that I thought Fred would continue to be critically important and relevant today. But from an educational standpoint John like I'd like to hear you talk a little bit about because you're gonna be focusing on this in your work. How does Fred's importance in education which of course he spend his life in education going to be carried forward in the future as you see it.

[00:45:04] Max you talked about earlier how when Fred went to the graduate studies in Child Development at University of Pittsburgh some of the best thinkers about children's development not just of that era but of the child development field were congregated there. And I think what that enabled Fred was to be ahead of his time and ahead of research itself. So much of the research that we know today about social emotional development have come within the last two decades. The Fred started to communicate about the importance of that starting from the 1960s. So one of the things that we very much hope to do and now with the collaboration between the Fred Rogers Center and Harvard University is to actually take these lessons into policy into practice into programs and I'll just highlight very briefly what we think some of these lessons are the most important of these lessons that came from Fred from the very beginning but that we know today through brain science through every branch of the human development science we know for sure now is that the single most important factor in human development in early childhood as well as beyond is the quality of the human interactions around the child as fancy as the technology are today. Fred said way back in the 70s and 80s and nothing nothing can replace that person to person interaction. He would say something like a computer can help you to spell the word hug but it will never know the joy of giving or receiving. And that is not to put down technology that is just to echo not only Fred's message but all of what science have told us that the single most important factor. So part of the question for any educational system from early childhood to K through 12 to programs for youth who have had extreme difficult Coyote's early in life is what is it we can do to strengthen the quality of the human interactions around that child from a preschool to a school to a group home for youth everywhere where children are learning and growing.

[00:47:23] What can we do other lessons. For example you talked so much about social emotional development from the very beginning Fred talked about. He used the phrase growing from the inside. So he thinks of things like learning your letters and numbers. Those are the things that are on the outside. But what does it mean to grow on the inside as a person. When you're young as well as when you're old and the last one which I'm sure all of you are involved in and thinking about or concerned about is the role of technology in our own lives. And Fred would often say that there's nothing there's no technology that's inherently good or evil. It is up to we. It is when we as human beings give meaning to technology that's when it develops a positive thrust and we have seeing all over our own lives that technology has been used for ill and have been used for good. And I think of

what just happened in Pittsburgh and we think of what the shooter was using his social media for. And you can kind of clearly see what their lesson there is. And Fred just believes so strongly that we human beings. It's not that technology give meaning to our own lives it's that we can give meaning to the technology in our own lives thank you very much.

[00:48:50] You know I want to have enough time for questions from from the audience and I wonder if a couple of people from the library staff could grab a couple of these microphones not mine so any any questions.

[00:49:10] You've got a great scholar and some great philanthropists here to talk to one of the highlights of the book for me was the range of interviews that you did for this. So we got to see so many of the facets of his life not just his television work. I'm curious however who was the biggest fish that got away whether it was somebody who declined to be interviewed or you just weren't able to connect with who would you have liked to talk to who you couldn't for the book.

[00:49:44] Thank you for that very good question. I I need to point out though I did do about 55 interviews. But the key to the depth of the book is all the oral histories that the Fred Rogers Center commissioned just a few years after he died. And they did oral histories with people from everybody from his family everybody from his work other people who were active in television and education. I had access to all those oral histories and it made all the difference in the world. So I would say there are two big fish that got away that I didn't get a chance to talk to Fred. Of course I met Fred only twice and I had a lovely conversation with him but I didn't get a chance to question him about his own life. In fact typical Fred he questioned me mostly about my life during the exchange that we had which was supposed to be about funding that's when I ran the Heinz Endowments. But he never said a word about money or his program. He just asked me about my children and parents. The other one though that got away was France Soir Clemmons who. Officer Clemens who was on the show for years a very elegant opera singer. He's up now at Middlebury College where Craig went to school in Vermont. And Peggy and I were in Vermont for a couple of years after my last retirement. I was a serial retiree. And I tried so hard to get him to talk to me.

[00:51:19] I did have things in the book from him because he did a NPR interview that I could I could access but I really wanted to talk to him and he was just just leery of doing so a question that I had with Fred Rogers you usually see most people you know look at what he did and saw it as you know we have so much to take from him. One thing that I've been curious to sort of see if anybody has thoughts on is if you looked at Fred's body of work you saw him maybe like unanswered questions like where was what was he still struggling with what was his Einsteins last equation.

[00:51:59] I do you want to try that here.

[00:52:02] I think it was actually part in the biography towards the end and I know it's a very challenging kind of a question but towards the end of Fred's life after he retired from television he at times doubted what impact he had made in the world. Now it's odd for anyone who have grown up with the neighborhood as a child and as a parent that Fred would doubt that Fred did. Doubt that. And

I think the much bigger question I think that was in Fred's mind also was there how do we make a lasting impact in the world. In the end I think Fred reconciled to himself this idea that whatever he did was honest and he did the best he could in the domain in which he could impact and the much bigger question that the biography as well as the documentary leaves with us is what are we gonna do now. That that Fred would never expect any of us to become like Fred. He just wanted any of us to become honest to ourselves. And then it becomes this important question for each of us right. What does it mean to make an impact in our own lives even when we're not quite sure that we did. So as accomplished as he was he wasn't quite sure that he did but he was. In the end content that he was honest and that he did the best he could within his domain.

[00:53:41] And so what would that mean right for every person who was interested in Fred's legacy not just in the soldier but in going forward thinking well what would we do when we don't have the evidence that we were hoping for of our impact.

[00:54:00] Thank you.

[00:54:02] I confess I haven't finished the book yet. So the answer may be in the book but I am wondering after watching both the documentary and the feature documentary um are either of Joanna and Fred Rogers sons or other family members or close people to that family participating in carrying on his works in early childhood education.

[00:54:31] There are no family members who are carrying on the work other than his widow Joanne who's on the board of Fred Rogers productions Fred's two sons. One was in Florida when those in Pittsburgh didn't go into the same line of work at all. Fred Rogers productions though is carrying on the work very successfully producing a lot of the very best children's media that's being done today. Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood Peg plus cat are very very good programs that try to use the methodologies and the values that Fred Rogers himself espoused and there are friends and associates of Fred's both that Fred Rogers productions and at the Fred Rogers Center at St. Vincent that are carrying on the work and you know institutions like Apex I think are carrying on the work.

[00:55:33] Oh my. My question is is should the show just continued about to have somebody in his place but it sounds like there's already production or something that are similar to his show. Why didn't we just have to have the show continue with somebody in Fred Rogers Place so at the time there was a serious consider rate ratio between

[00:55:59] 2003 when Fred died to 2013 when the his non-profit started to produce Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood. That was a 10 year span where we weren't sure how to continue it. But I think in the end it was this idea that Fred was this authentic person that was on the program and we couldn't quite pretend right that that's easily substitute to did in there. Fred had thought so carefully about the program that he thought that the program itself can continue to be available for families and for children and in fact they are so. PBS has a number of these episodes online for free and then Amazon Prime hosts hundreds of episodes. But that in the end there was just this idea that you couldn't replace that person in that in order to be authentic to the show. We couldn't continue the

format the way it is. And that the production company has to find a new way to serve children and families which by now they have found I think the Fred Rogers productions have some of the top rated programs and PBS Kids. So in a way they have they're able to serve in children at least as well or as much as what Fred did when the program was on the air I must say might as June Lay said

[00:57:38] The programs are available on PBS and Amazon. But my disappointment is and I know that the programs are dated that that the content reflects the time at which they were produced. But my big disappointment is with hundreds of cable channels out there many of which are filled with crap.

[00:57:59] Couldn't one of them show Mr. Rogers the guy.

[00:58:09] So I grew up near Pittsburgh on the Latrobe side but it's very I I said I grew up near there. So not only on television but in person and I worked at Idlewild where there is the Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. So I'm very near and dear to my heart. But as a parent one of the things I'm wondering so one of the most important things about Mr. Rogers Neighborhood the show for me growing up was that it was worth frequently it was every day it was broken down into small pieces. It was digestible and it had a beginning middle and end it. It gave kids an opportunity to have that arc and I feel like there's nothing I love pickles cat I like Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood. But I feel like there's nothing like that that gives the consistency and I don't know that grounding of day to day and dealing with the moment the thing that makes it dated was what made it amazing.

[00:59:04] So with all the technology I'm wondering if there's anything if the production company is sort of thinking about something like that that aspect of his gift rather than just the education part but the dealing part that was one of the things that was critically important to Fred Rogers that he learned from Dr. Margaret McFarland and others is how important consistency is for little children not only in how they learn but in how they respond to what they're exposed to. So if you want little children or sort of quiet down and pay attention and learn having a consistent format. In which they know what to expect and their expectations are met is tremendously important. And he was I thought Rogers was extraordinarily skillful at producing whole week series on one theme and carrying it through the neighborhood of make believe and then the the neighborhood itself those two segments of the program for four five days and and delivering wonderful wealth of information to children. But in a very consistent and predictable way for them and it I don't well you speak did you lie about whether there's other children's programming that delivers in that same way.

[01:00:33] I think he pointed out something really important and that is that very few programs do that. And I think Fred did that because he had such a tremendous respect for children. So one of the complaints that people would have about Fred's program is it's too slow right. And then people say this slow is boring but what in reality happens is there as far as working with children through media fast is easy slow is hard right. So even for a very young infant if you keep flashing things in front of them infant couldn't help but to look at it. That's the easy part. But to get a young infant to focus on something and look at it for an extended period of time until he or she discovers something that's hard and so Fred was willing to do what was the hardest thing to do which is to slow it down for children.

And they think for better. I think it's for worse that instead of taking on the challenge of going slow we take on the easy way out and excuse it as well. Today's children want fast things that is simply not true that the way our attention system are built requires us to slow down in order to learn. That is true for a young child that is even true for grown up and so the idea that we market what is the easiest to market rather than pursuing what as you suggest is some something that's incredibly hard to do but so worthwhile.

[01:02:17] Question here I think we have time for two more questions and then we'll wrap up I think the comment about the speed is very important.

[01:02:26] And one of the things I'm from Pittsburgh also and I watch Mr. Rogers almost religiously. So but I think one of the greatest things is that he gave small challenges to the kids and they would succeed and he would tell them I knew you could and as their other shows that in other formats that given the small challenges and give the encouragement and the belief like that I think there are a lot of shows that tries to get across a very positive message to children by offering these affirmative messages about how you did it and so on.

[01:03:06] I think one of the things that I find was striking and unique in Fred's approach is that he doesn't expect the child to get it right here right now like in these programs he would ask the child a question for example what do you do when you feel blue like I could ask a grown up a question. What do you do when you feel blue it's going to take a while for you to think about that. And Fred was willing to let you think about that and come back. And I think part of the challenge of the shorter attention span shows is that they expect for example within the 13 14 minutes segment whatever the challenge is gets resolved and that you kind of figured that out right then and there. But that's not what everyday life is like. What Fred did for example over the span of Monday through Friday theme week is that a child or puppet would try to resolve something difficult that they're struggling with for for example one time Prince to Tuesday was really worried that his parents were getting a divorce. So he struggle with a Monday and he'll be reassured. But on Tuesday the struggle will come up again and on Wednesday he's still working but that's what everyday life is more like for children. And I think we don't have enough programs that mirrors the realistic challenges that children and families go through that it's a little too packaged to pristine. So while the positive affirmation aspect is preserved and extended I think presenting and capturing realistic challenges that children and parents struggle with that I think we're falling short on in the media and the programs we have now I think we can take one last question.

[01:05:04] I want to thank you for being here. I've been an early learning in the field of Early Learning all my adult years. Well actually started when I was a teenager working at a pre-school and I'm now in administration and I'm concerned about the the areas that seem kind of bumping up against each other.

[01:05:32] I'm reading a book by some local authors called from thinking from teaching to thinking by and pillow and another local author and now we're really exploring how fantastic it is for wonder and inquiry and imagination and all of this wonderful juicy stuff you know coming out of children to

encourage that and use that as a springboard to their further learning. And on the other side of things we have the cure. Yes the quality rating improvement system and these you know in this thing that's that's you know gangbusters all over the country. You know we're gonna start preschool and we're gonna get these kids ready for kindergarten and it's about this and this and this which seems to really bump uncomfortably in a lot of ways with the beauty and wonder of a child's learning. So I'm just wondering if you can comment on this from your various perspectives on what the resolution is between this and thank you again.

[01:06:46] Would you like to take a stab at it.

[01:06:50] Early on in the first couple of years we did. We actually went around the United States talking to various researchers and I remember a conversation with Maggie Mahoney who was responsible for early look for the early learning program at the Carnegie Foundation.

[01:07:12] And she said there is nothing more important than the parent and and we tend to focus rightly so in many respects on those who don't have access to to the same things that perhaps more affluent parents might have access to but her point was every parent can benefit from support in some way knowing that they are not in this alone that there are others who have had who have led the way or who are going through the same thing that you might be going through.

[01:08:00] But she was a strong advocate particularly in the public policy arena about ensuring that all programs from the from the public sector supported all all parents.

[01:08:15] And to me the message from Fred was that you articulated so well is that is the human connection connected to parents to siblings to grandparents to friends co-workers and to into the neighbors. And if we can figure out how to do that how to replicate that we will have come a long way.

[01:08:49] Yeah I think just to add to that I think you know so much of the public policy work today I mean we get so focused on programs to take care of early learning with kids in too many of them really involved separating the kids and their parents and and so I think we need more programs to really reinforce supporting parents to be successful with her kids rather than making sure they go off to work somewhere you know and things like that and then the kid gets tossed into a program where they just don't have the human interaction and the proximity of kids to an adult that cares about them. I think that becomes the most powerful tool. And when we when we displace that you know it doesn't it's not always going to be a parent but it may be a family member or something. But kids have to have an adult in their life that they trust or adults in their life that they trust. And I think too often we think some program is going to fix this and it simply doesn't.

[01:09:59] You know when I when I heard you put the question just the way you did what I was reminded of is Fred Rogers focus on the importance of serendipity in learning the accidental the unexpected the UN program. And that's why he was such an advocate of free form play without any structure without any learning just that the learning that takes place through play and serendipity. So such a important part.

[01:10:32] Well I thank all of you so much for being here. Please join me in thanking our panel. Of

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