

CHANGING THE WORLD

ONE SMILE AT A TIME



PAUL D. DUKES

Changing the World

“One Smile at a Time”

by

Paul D. Dukes

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Published by Bodhisifu Publishing

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 9798267613200

This book is intended to inspire kindness and connection. It is not for resale, and all proceeds go toward the Give Out Smiles project.

Dedication

To every smile that has ever found me, in childhood classrooms, on crowded trains, in markets halfway across the world, and in the quiet moments when I needed them most.

To the strangers whose kindness became connection, and to the friends whose laughter became family.

To all who lifted me when I stumbled, reminded me of hope when I had none, and showed me that even the smallest gesture can change a life.

And to Pennapa, whose smile lightens even the darkest days, whose presence turns struggle into strength, and whose love makes it easier for me to simply be.

This book is for you all.

Introduction

This book is about the simple yet extraordinary power of kindness, connection, and compassion.

I believe that every good life carries within it a thread of giving back. We are not here only to take, but to share; not only to achieve, but to uplift. True success is not measured by what we keep, but by what we give away freely, without expectation, and with a heart that is open to others.

What you hold in your hands is more than a collection of stories. It is an invitation. An invitation to rediscover how a smile, a gesture, or a single act of compassion can ripple outward and change more than we could ever imagine.

My hope is simple: that these words reach the right eyes and the right heart. That you, too, will feel the call to spread kindness — in your home, in your community, in your workplace, and even with strangers you may never see again.

A smile costs nothing, but its value is infinite. It has the power to soften anger, to ease loneliness, to inspire courage, and to remind someone they are not alone.

If, through this book, even one person chooses to pass on a smile, extend a hand, or carry this movement of kindness into the future — even long after I am gone — then it will have done its work.

So I welcome you, dear reader. May you join me on this journey, and may we, together, change the world one smile at a time.

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Chapter 1: Why I Chose A Smile

The story of this book begins in 1965, the year I was born. From my very first days, I learned the language of smiles. The simple smile of my parents told me that I was safe, that I was loved, that everything would be okay. The smiles of schoolmates made me feel included and accepted. The smile of the first girl I liked gave me confidence and pride I had never known. The smile of a teacher when I turned in my first assignment told me I was capable. And the smile of my mother when she saw the grade I earned showed me that my effort mattered. Those smiles were more than fleeting expressions. They were building blocks, shaping the way I saw myself and the world. Looking back now, I realize that some of the most defining moments of my life were illuminated by a simple smile.

As I grew older, that truth only deepened. In boardrooms and breakrooms, I discovered that a genuine smile could ease tension and open doors no title or position ever could. While traveling across the world, often in places where I didn't know the local language, I found that a smile was the only translation I needed. It built bridges, broke barriers, and turned strangers into friends.

One day, I sat with a homeless man. I didn't have much to offer except a bracelet and a smile. He gave me his smile in return and slipped his own worn bracelet onto my wrist. In that exchange, I realized something profound: smiles are not just given, they are shared. They create connection, dignity, and hope where little else can reach.

And yet, smiles are rare. Too many people are weighed down by burdens so heavy they forget what hope feels like. That is why I want to bring more than just smiles. I want to bring what people truly need, wrapped in a smile, as a reminder that life can get better. Whether it's a veteran who's fallen into hard times, a patient lying in a hospital bed with a devastating diagnosis, or a child watching classmates use school supplies his family can't afford—these are the places where our community of smiles must shine brightest. In those moments, a smile is not small or corny. It is strength. It is hope. It is proof that none of us are alone.

That's why I chose the smile as the symbol for this movement. A smile transcends age, culture, and even species. The smile of a baby carries the same power as the smile of an old woman, a dog wagging its tail, or a patient reaching for comfort. Smiles show hope. They unite us. They bring courage, especially in the darkest of days. When we can smile at the very bottom—when life feels hopeless—we find a light, however small, showing us the way forward.

This book is a reflection of that truth. It gathers the stories, lessons, and reminders I've collected along the way, breadcrumbs left on the path, that all point back to kindness, compassion, and connection. My hope is simple: that as you read, you rediscover the power of a smile, not only to change your day, but to change the world around you.



Chapter 2: The First Challenge

In 1992, my life felt like it was standing at a crossroads. I was just stepping away from the military earlier than I had expected, carrying with me a small pension and a pocket full of money that looked bigger than it really was. To an outsider, I might have looked like a man who had everything lined up. In truth, I had no real path. I was floating. The structure of the service was gone, the daily rhythm that had dictated where I went and what I did was suddenly silent, and I was left with one question pressing in on me: What now?

I didn't yet have the answer, but I did know I couldn't just stand still. So, I enrolled in a few college classes, a way to keep moving while I figured out my next steps. One of the classes I chose was psychology. I wasn't sure why at the time, maybe because I had always been curious about people, about what makes us tick, what drives our choices. Maybe I just wanted to understand myself better. Either way, that decision turned out to be one of those small choices that end up shaping the bigger picture of your life.

One day, our psychology professor walked into the room with a grin on his face, holding nothing more than a handful of pennies. He set them down on the desk and gave us an assignment that sounded almost childlike in its simplicity. "Take ten pennies," he said, "and put them in your right pocket. Every time you do something kind for someone else today, move a penny into your left pocket. At the end of the day, you'll see how many acts of kindness you've created."

That was it. No essays, no textbooks, no complicated theories. Just pennies in a pocket.

At first, I almost laughed. Was this college? Was this psychology? But I did it anyway. That morning, I slid ten pennies into my right pocket and went out into the day.

The first few hours, I hardly touched them. I was too caught up in my own thoughts—What am I doing here? What's next for me? What does "kindness" even mean in practice? I'd smile at someone in the hallway, but was that enough to count? I'd hold a door open, but was that just manners? At the end of the first day, I still had several pennies sitting cold and heavy in my right pocket, untouched.

It bothered me more than I expected.

The next day, I tried harder. I looked for opportunities. I picked up a paper someone dropped. I offered to share my notes. I asked a stranger how their day was going—and really listened when they answered. Each time, I would slide a penny into my left pocket.

It was such a small thing, just the light scrape of copper against my fingers, but I began to realize it carried a kind of weight that wasn't physical.

By midweek, I was noticing things I had never paid attention to before: the tired look in the cashier's eyes at the bookstore, the student sitting alone in the cafeteria, the neighbor carrying groceries up the stairs. Suddenly, kindness wasn't just something you stumbled into it, it was something you could choose. The pennies in my pocket were a constant reminder that opportunities were everywhere.

Still, it wasn't easy. Some days I ended up with pennies left over, reminders of the moments I had missed or ignored. Other times, I caught myself doing something kind just to move a penny, and I wondered if that would have cheapened the act. Did it matter if my motivation was partly to "score points" for class? Or did the outcome, a smile, a lifted burden, a human connection, matter more than the reason behind it?

When I explained the assignment to people, many of them laughed. "So, you're doing kindness homework?" they'd tease. But I didn't mind. Because along with the laughter, there was always a smile. And I found that their smile felt like a reward all its own, a confirmation that what I was doing wasn't meaningless.

By the end of the week, I had begun to see the world differently. The pennies weren't just coins; they were prompts, little nudges reminding me to look outward instead of inward. To pay attention. To reach out. To create small ripples of kindness in a world where most people were too busy to notice.

When the time came to present in front of the class, I wasn't sure what I would say. I stood up and shared honestly: that I had struggled, that I had failed some days, but that I had also learned how powerful even the smallest intentional acts could be. I told them how I had started conversations with people I never would have spoken to otherwise. How I had seen the tired light up in someone's eyes when I noticed them. How moving a penny wasn't just moving metal from one pocket to another—it was moving a connection from potential into reality.

Most of the class, I think, treated the assignment as just another box to check, another grade to earn. They wrote their papers, gave their speeches, and probably forgot about it the next week. But for me, something stuck.

No, I didn't carry pennies in my pocket forever. I didn't make it a lifelong ritual. But the lesson it carried, lodged itself deep in me: connections matter. Kindness matters. And sometimes we need a simple reminder to bring it to the surface.

That little challenge, as simple as it was, became the first step in a much larger journey. It was the first time I truly experienced what I now call the "currency of kindness." Pennies

may not be worth much in a bank, but in the pocket of a man trying to find his place in the world, they became priceless.

Looking back now, I realize that the pennies weren't just a college project. They were seeds. They planted in me the idea that small, deliberate acts of kindness could change the course of a day or a life. And as I moved forward, that seed would grow into something much bigger than I could have imagined at the time.



Chapter 3: From Pennies to Paper

After finishing a handful of college classes, I decided it was time to move forward and start building a career. Like many people at that stage in life, I didn't have a clear roadmap. I worked a few odd jobs, mostly in retail management, until I stumbled into my first entrepreneurial venture, buying and selling textbooks. It was a scrappy little business, the kind where you learn as you go. For a while it kept me busy, gave me purpose, and even paid the bills. Eventually, though, the market shifted, and the business dried up.

But what I didn't lose during those years was the lesson from the pennies challenge: that connection and kindness mattered. Traveling, negotiating, and working in sales and importing taught me that success often came down to whether you could earn trust quickly. And nothing earned trust faster than a genuine smile.

That truth became more real when I accepted a position with Academy Sports in Dallas, Texas, as a store manager. Suddenly, I had a team of associates depending on me, looking to me for guidance and motivation. Many days I'd walk the sales floor and notice someone dragging through their shift—eyes heavy, shoulders slumped, clearly carrying something heavier than the merchandise on the shelves. I tried the usual manager tricks: pep talks, jokes, little nudges to lift the mood. But I found myself wanting something more tangible, something small but lasting that would remind them they mattered.

One day, almost without thinking, I scribbled a smiley face on a scrap of paper, folded it, and wrote the word smile across the front. I slipped it to one of my associates who seemed to be struggling. They looked at it, laughed, and tucked it into their pocket. Later that day, I saw them showing it to another coworker. By the next week, I was handing out little notes at random, each one carrying the same simple message: smile.

It caught on faster than I could have imagined. Soon my employees were joking, "I wonder if I'll get a smile today." The notes became something of a tradition, a small reminder that no matter how tough the day felt, they weren't invisible. Someone noticed. Someone cared.

Within three years, I had been promoted several times. When people asked why, I heard the same answer repeated by my associates: because he cares. At first, I didn't fully understand what they meant. To me, I was just doing what felt natural, stopping to talk, asking about their families, listening to their stories. But I came to realize that leadership wasn't just about managing tasks; it was about creating a culture where people felt seen. And sometimes all it took was a sticky note with a smiley face.

That practice followed me into my next chapter. One day, a regional manager from Walmart approached me. He had tried to recruit some of my Academy employees and was impressed with their loyalty, their customer service, and the way they spoke about our store. “If I can’t beat them,” he told me, “Then I might as well hire the guy leading them.” And so, he asked me to join Walmart as a store manager.

Overnight, my team grew from forty-something associates to more than 250. It was overwhelming at first, but I carried my little tradition with me. Even with the bigger numbers, I made it a point to walk the floor every day. If I noticed someone struggling, I’d hand them a folded note with a smiley face inside. It wasn’t about grand gestures, it was about small, personal moments. And the notes still worked.

After a year and a half, I was promoted to Market Director of Health and Wellness. My role shifted. I was now responsible for the pharmacies and doctors across the market, ensuring that health and wellness standards were met. But I wasn’t working alone; I was part of a larger market team, collaborating with leaders who oversaw the entire stores. Together, we carried the responsibility for more than a dozen locations and thousands of associates.

It was a bigger stage, and yet my small tradition carried weight. Though I couldn’t hand out notes to every single person, I made it a point to connect with those who needed it most. Sometimes I would hear whispers when I walked into a store: “Here comes Paul—I wonder if I’ll get a smile today.”

By then, I had stopped seeing the notes as scraps of paper. They had become tokens of care, little sparks of encouragement. They were reminders that leadership is less about authority and more about humanity.

When I finally retired, I left with the certainty that I had touched lives—but also with the humbling awareness that those lives had touched me right back. Every folded note, every shared laugh, every smile passed back to me fueled my desire to keep going, to keep leading, and eventually, to keep spreading smiles far beyond the walls of any one store.

Chapter 4: Losing My Way

When I finally retired, I thought I would feel free. For years I had been chasing promotions, building teams, and carrying the weight of responsibility for hundreds of people. But when the meetings stopped, when the schedules were no longer mine to run, I was left with something I didn't expect: silence.

At first, it didn't seem so bad. I had a pension, a little bit of savings, and time on my hands. But freedom without direction quickly turned into drift. I didn't know what to do with myself.

I filled the emptiness the way many people do, by leaning on the wrong things. Addiction crept into my life quietly at first, then louder. I told myself it was just a way to take the edge off, to pass the time. But before long, I was tangled in it. I found myself in recovery programs, in treatment centers in Southern California, trying to claw my way back to the surface. I was surrounded by people who were struggling just like me, each of us trying to find a reason to keep going.

When I wasn't in treatment, I kept busy with odd jobs. I drove for Uber, picked up part-time work here and there, and lived mostly off the retirement money I had set aside. It was enough to get by, but not enough to feel alive. Each day blended into the next, and I often felt like I was simply existing rather than living.

I was only fifty years old. Too young, I thought, to be "done" with life. Too young to retire. And yet, I felt paralyzed, too scared to chase the one thing I had always wanted to do: travel. The world was out there waiting, but I couldn't bring myself to step into it.

Instead, I walked the beaches of Southern California, trying to think my way into a new life. I'd watch the waves roll in and out, wondering if my own life would ever find that same rhythm again. Sunsets became my companions. I would stand there as the sky melted into gold and crimson, trying to convince myself that tomorrow would feel different. Sometimes it did. Often it didn't.

I went to concerts, lost myself in the music, and tried to forget the rest. I filled days with little distractions just to keep moving. But underneath it all was a gnawing emptiness, a sense that I had lost my way. The man who once carried smiles in his pocket now couldn't find one for himself.

Looking back, I realize those years were a kind of a wandering wilderness, a necessary pause between chapters. I didn't know it then, but life was preparing me for something.

The pain, the addiction, the searching, the nights I wondered if I would ever feel whole again, they were all paving the way for a moment that would change everything.

At the time, though, all I knew was that I was drifting. And drifting, if it lasts long enough, will break you. I was broken, but not beyond repair. Something was coming. A moment, a meeting, a spark that would remind me of the truth I had almost forgotten that even at our lowest, connection can bring us back to life.



Chapter 5: The Gift I Didn't Expect

It was supposed to be just another night out. I had taken the train up to San Luis Obispo for a reggae concert, a chance to get out of my own head for a while. The music was good, the crowd was friendly, and after a few beers I felt lighter than I had in a long time. For a few hours, it felt like life had some rhythm again.

When the concert ended, I climbed back onto the train and rode south toward Carlsbad, where I had been living. By the time I stepped off at the station, it was late, so late that the world felt quiet and hollow, the kind of quiet that only settles in long after most people are asleep. I wandered the platform, waiting for an Uber, still humming the echo of the concert in my mind.

That's when I noticed him.

A homeless man was sitting on one of the benches, head tilted slightly forward, eyes tired but awake. He looked worn down, the kind of worn that goes beyond the body and seeps into the spirit. I sat down next to him, not because I had planned to, but because I was tired. Maybe I thought I'd pass a few minutes in silence until my ride came. But he looked at me, and before long we were talking.

He asked me why I looked so down. It caught me off guard. Here was a man who had nothing, at least nothing visible and yet he was the one asking me about my troubles. I shrugged and told him the truth: I didn't have any direction. I didn't know what I was doing with my life anymore. I admitted, maybe a little dramatically, that he probably had a better life than I did.

He laughed. Not cruelly, but with a kind of knowing humor that came from experience. Then he said something I'll never forget: "You've got new shoes on, and I don't. You can get up and walk anywhere you want to go. I can't. You're just feeling sorry for yourself."

His words hit me harder than I expected. At first, I argued back, pleading my case like I was in front of a judge: I told him about my lack of direction, about bills, about the weight of trying to figure out what came next. But as I spoke, I realized he wasn't wrong. I did have new shoes. I did have the ability to get up and go. I was the one holding myself back.

When my Uber driver arrived, I waved him off. Something told me I wasn't done here. I stayed on the bench with the man, the two of us sitting shoulder to shoulder in the cool night air. He was exhausted, anyone could see it, so I told him, "Why don't you get some rest? I'll sit here and watch over things. You can sleep for a couple of hours."

And he did. As he slept, I thought about what he had said. I stared down at my shoes, the same ones he had pointed out, and it struck me that he was right: I could go anywhere. Costa Rica, the Grand Canyon, Thailand, even back to Japan where I had been raised. Nothing was stopping me but me. As the trains rattled in and out, I found myself scrolling through flights on my phone, dreaming of places I had always wanted to see but had been too afraid to pursue.

When he woke up, I wanted to thank him. I wanted to give him something to show my gratitude, something small to acknowledge the kindness of his wisdom. So, I slipped off the bracelet I had bought earlier that day at the reggae concert. It wasn't much, just a simple band, but I thought it might mean something. "Here," I said, "take this. Just a little something to remember this conversation by."

To my surprise, he smiled and reached for his own wrist. He slid off a ragged, worn bracelet, frayed from weather and time and handed it to me. "Here," he said. "I hope you remember this conversation too. And remember, you've got it better than you think."

In that moment, I realized something profound. This wasn't charity. This wasn't me doing a good deed for a man in need. This was an exchange, equal, honest, human. I had given him a place to rest, but he had given me something far greater: perspective, gratitude, and a spark of hope.

As I walked away from that station, the bracelet heavy on my wrist, I knew something had shifted inside me. The man on the bench had reminded me that life was still wide open, that I wasn't as trapped as I felt. That simple exchange, a bracelet for a bracelet, a smile for a smile was more than just a passing moment. It was a gift I didn't expect, one that would ignite a journey I hadn't dared to take.

I had connected with a stranger, but in that connection, I had also reconnected with myself. And in the days that followed, I began to realize: if a simple act could touch me so deeply, maybe it could touch others too. Maybe kindness could travel, one bracelet at a time.



Chapter 6: The Life Changing Trip

After meeting the homeless man on the bench and holding his worn bracelet in my hand, I couldn't shake the thought: maybe I really could go anywhere. For years I had dreamed of traveling, but fear and hesitation had kept me rooted. This time, I decided to stop waiting. I booked a ticket to the one place that had always tugged at my heart, Thailand.

I had been there once before, just briefly, on a week-long trip, years earlier. This time, I saved enough to stay two or three months. My plan was simple: go, explore, party, and finally live the adventure I had denied myself for so long. I had no idea just how much that decision would change the course of my life.

The irony struck me almost immediately. Thailand is often called the Land of Smiles. After everything I had been through, it seemed almost too perfect, almost as if life itself had guided me here.

Before I even made it out of the airport, I met her, the young woman who would become my soulmate, Pennapa. Her smile wasn't polished or posed. It wasn't perfect in the way magazine covers try to sell. It was effortless, natural, and radiant. The kind of smile that could stop you in your tracks and remind you that joy can exist in its purest form.

As I traveled through Thailand and spent more time with Pennapa, I noticed something about the people there. They didn't have much compared to what I was used to back home, and yet they carried themselves with an abundance of joy. Children ran barefoot, laughing and chasing each other through dusty streets as if the world was theirs. Families welcomed strangers with warmth, offering what little they had without hesitation. And everywhere, everywhere - there were smiles.

I began to feel something shift in me. For the first time in a long time, I felt at home. I knew I still wanted to travel further, to see more of the world, but Thailand became my anchor. It was the place I knew I would always return to not just because of the beauty of the country, but because of Pennapa, her family, and the spirit of joy that surrounded me there.

There was another detail that struck me. In the airports, I saw tourists walking around with simple strings tied around their wrists. At first, I didn't understand. But then, visiting temples, I experienced it myself. Monks would tie plain cotton strings around my wrist, murmuring blessings as they did. The strings had no monetary value, no fashion appeal. And yet, they meant everything. They symbolized connection, to faith, to gratitude, to something greater than yourself.

What surprised me most was how proud people seemed to be of those strings. Travelers wore them like badges of honor. They were reminders that they had been touched by something spiritual, something beyond the surface.

It made me reflect on the bracelet I carried from the homeless man, and the bracelet I had given him in return. A string. A band. A circle. No real “value” in money, but priceless in meaning. Suddenly, the idea of bracelets became bigger in my mind. They weren’t just trinkets. They were connections. They were reminders. They were stories that tied people together across cultures, across oceans, across the very fabric of life itself.

When I left Thailand to continue traveling, Pennapa’s family and friends gathered around me. With warmth and laughter, they tied strings around my wrists and told me they would bring good luck. I boarded my flight with wrists full of threads and a heart full of belonging.

Thailand had given me more than just a destination. It had given me a spiritual connection to the people, to the smiles that surrounded me, to the woman who would hold my heart, and to the idea that even the simplest string can hold the power to connect us all.



Chapter 7: An Idea Worth Sharing

When I left Thailand, my heart was both full and restless. I had found something there, in the temples, in the smiles, in Pennapa, that had given me a sense of belonging. But I also knew I wasn't finished. I wandered through a couple more countries, carrying with me the strings on my wrists, the bracelet from the homeless man, and the growing sense that these little tokens meant more than I could yet explain.

Eventually, I made my way back to the United States, back to Texas. My mother was living there, and I had lived there earlier in my life, so it felt like familiar ground. The cost of living was low, the community was solid, and the local VA hospital offered the kind of support I needed. It seemed like the right place to try to start over again.

On the long flight from Japan to Los Angeles, somewhere over the Pacific Ocean, the thought hit me: What if I sold bracelets?

It sounded crazy at first. A business built on bracelets. But then again, they had already changed my life. The homeless man's gift, the strings tied by monks, the smiles I had carried across oceans they all centered around this simple object. Maybe there was something here, something worth trying.

So, I leaned into the idea. I pulled out my phone and started researching. To my surprise, I found that bracelets were selling for anywhere between \$5, \$10, even \$15 apiece. Yet I could source them overseas for as little as a dollar or two. The math lit up in my head. I thought this was brilliant. I could start small, make a little money, and carry forward this thing that had somehow woven itself into my life.

When I returned to Texas, I put the plan in motion. I bought about \$2,000 worth of inventory, picked up some fold-out tables from Walmart, a few colorful Mexican blankets to use as displays, and a secondhand trailer to haul it all around. My little mobile shop was born.

I set up at farmers' markets and flea markets in San Antonio. My pitch was simple: "One bracelet for \$5, three for \$10." People loved the deal. They would crowd around my booth, sifting through bracelets for men, women, and children, leather bands, beadwork, colorful strings. I had them all and at a dollar a piece, my profit margins were almost unbelievable.

Business was good. The money came quickly, the work was easy to transport, and I enjoyed the freedom of running my own booth. But something unexpected happened along the way.

As I stood behind that table, selling bracelet after bracelet, I found myself giving some away. A child who looked at the table with wonder. A customer who lingered to share a story. A stranger who simply needed a smile. Without even thinking, I'd slip a bracelet into their hand and say, "Here, this one's for you."

People thought it was unusual. Here I was, selling bracelets, and yet I was giving them away too. But to me, it felt natural. It wasn't just about the money. It was about connections. About that moment when two people shared something more than a transaction.

I did this for months. Day after day, week after week, my booth became more than just a little business. It was a place where people came to buy but often left with something they didn't expect: a moment of kindness, a reminder that even in the middle of a busy market, someone saw them.

The money I earned was good, better than I expected. I saved up enough to take another trip, this time back to Thailand. I was eager to see Pennapa again, to return to the Land of Smiles, and to keep chasing the life I felt I was finally meant to live, traveling, meeting new people, and carrying this strange little mission forward, one bracelet at a time.

Looking back now, I see that what began as a simple business idea was more than just a hustle. It was the seed of a movement. I thought I was starting a business, but what I was really doing was learning how to share.

It was, in every sense of the word, an idea worth sharing.



Chapter 8: Returning to the Land of Smiles

After months of saving money, I planned another trip back to Thailand. The idea of returning to the Land of Smiles had been tugging at me ever since I left, and I knew I wanted to see Pennapa and her family again. This time, though, as I packed my suitcase, I made a small but meaningful decision.

In the corner of my bag, I tucked away a hundred bracelets. They didn't take up much space, but I thought they might serve as a small gesture, a way to thank Pennapa's family and her village for the warmth they had shown me before. At the time, it felt like nothing more than a thoughtful souvenir. I didn't realize then that those bracelets were about to take on a life of their own.

At the first airport on my trip, I wandered into a bar and ordered a beer. A couple sat down beside me, the kind of people you can spot from a mile away, free spirits with sun-worn skin, dressed like they had just come from a festival. As we struck up a conversation, they told me they lived in Costa Rica and spent much of their time moving from one festival to another.

Something stirred in me. Without hesitation, I reached into my bag and pulled out two bracelets. "Here you go," I said, handing one to each of them. "I hope this makes you smile."

They looked surprised. "What's this for? Do you want us to buy them? Are you selling these?"

I shook my head. "No. They're just to make you smile. That's all."

They laughed, slipped the bracelets onto their wrists, and walked away, still smiling about the unexpected gift. As they disappeared into the crowd, I sat there with my beer, wondering where those bracelets would go. Would they end up on a beach in Costa Rica? At a festival halfway across the world? Would they break, or be passed to someone else? Each bracelet seemed to hold a story; one I would never fully know. That thought fascinated me, the idea that a small act of kindness could continue its journey long after it left my hands.

After that encounter, I pulled out about twenty-five bracelets and placed them in the front pouch of my carry-on bag. From that point forward, I decided I wouldn't just carry them, I would share them.

At airports, in waiting areas, on flights, and in bars, I handed out bracelets one by one. Each time I offered one, I was met with a smile. Some people laughed at the randomness of it. Others asked what it meant. Some simply slid the bracelet onto their wrist without hesitation. One man, a grizzled fisherman by the look of him, surprised me the most. He didn't seem like the type who'd wear jewelry, but he immediately slipped the bracelet on and displayed it proudly, as if it were a medal.

The more I gave, the more I realized something important: this wasn't about the bracelet itself. It was about the connection. The bracelet was just a vessel. The real gift was the smile it sparked.

By the time I reached Tum Tao, the village where Pennapa lived, I had only about thirty bracelets left. Seventy had been given away along the journey. Seventy connections made. Seventy smiles shared. And for me, each one carried a story, a mystery of where it might go next.

Somewhere along the way, I began adding a phrase when I handed the bracelets out. "Peace be your journey," I would say, as if I were sending each person off on their own adventure. The words felt powerful, almost cinematic, and I liked the way people responded to them. They nodded, smiled, and often repeated the phrase back to me. It became my mantra, a little blessing to accompany each bracelet as it traveled forward.

When I finally handed out the last bracelet in the village, I realized something profound. This wasn't just a kind gesture anymore. It was becoming a practice, almost a calling. The act of giving bracelets gave me something too, a sense of joy, a sense of meaning, a reminder that kindness multiplies when it is shared freely.

I had started with the simple thought of bringing a gift to Pennapa's family. But somewhere between the airports, the gates, the flights, and the village, I found myself caught up in something much larger. The bracelets had become messengers. And with each one I gave away, I was reminded of a truth I could no longer ignore: kindness, when shared, always finds its way back.



Chapter 9: When the Bracelets Ran Out

By the time I settled back into Tum Tao, the little village where Pennapa lived, my supply of bracelets had vanished. One by one, in airports, on planes, at festivals, and in quiet moments, I gave them all away. Each bracelet carried its own story, its own mystery. And with every smile I received in return, my own joy had grown deeper.

But now, they were gone.

At first, I laughed about it. Who runs out of bracelets? But underneath the humor, I felt something more pressing, a hunger. Not for profit, not for material gain, but for that feeling of connection, that overwhelming joy that came when a simple act of kindness bridged the distance between two strangers. I didn't want it to stop just because the bracelets were gone.

So, I asked Pennapa and her family if we could find more. We searched the local markets, wandered through stalls, looked in every shop we could, but nothing seemed to fit. The bracelets I had given away were more than trinkets; they had become symbols. And without them, I felt like I had lost my way again.

Then, one scorching afternoon, as we left a 7-Eleven, I noticed a woman sitting on the corner. She was homeless, sitting quietly in the relentless Thai heat with nothing to shield her. Something inside me stirred. I walked back into the store, bought a cold bottle of water, and handed it to her.

Her eyes lit up as she took it. She didn't say much, just smiled in gratitude, but the gesture felt powerful. When I returned to Pennapa, she told me, "That was a very good thing to do. It will bring you good luck and good fortune."

Her words stuck with me. Maybe I didn't need bracelets in my hand to keep giving. Maybe kindness was about noticing the need in front of you and answering it.

So that's what we did. We went out and bought cases of water, loading them into the back of a truck. We took them to the local temple, where monks relied on the people in the village for support. As we stacked the bottles high, their gratitude was quiet but unmistakable. I felt the same joy rising inside me, the same joy I had felt giving bracelets in airports as I traveled.

Not long after, we attended a festival. In Thailand, these celebrations often include free food and gifts, with neighbors caring for neighbors. This time, I arrived not with

bracelets, but with crates of water. As we handed them out, I watched the smiles spread across tired faces, people refreshed by something so simple, so necessary.

It was different from handing out bracelets, but it was no less meaningful. In fact, in many ways it felt deeper. A bracelet carried symbolism and connection, but water, water was life. People didn't just appreciate it; they needed it. And that realization struck me hard.

Still, I couldn't let go of the bracelets entirely. They were light, easy to carry, and they carried a story that traveled with each person who wore one. I loved imagining where they might go, how far they might travel, and the way they tied people together like invisible threads across the world. Water met the need of the moment, but the bracelets held something timeless.

So, I began to dream again. What if I could find a way to keep giving bracelets but not just give them? What if I could connect them back to me, to the giver, to the story? What if each bracelet carried not only kindness, but also a way for people to join in, to share their own journeys, to show where kindness had carried them?

At that point, the idea was still fuzzy, swimming in the back of my mind. I didn't know yet how to make it real. But I knew this: I had touched something powerful, something bigger than myself. And whether it was a bracelet or a bottle of water, I wasn't going to stop.

Until then, we kept handing out water. Case after case, festival after festival, we gave what we could, where we could. And every time, I felt that same rush; the joy of giving, the spark of connection, the quiet reminder that kindness, in whatever form, always finds its way back.

The bracelets had run out, yes. But the mission was only just beginning.



Chapter 10: From BOGO to KOGO

The bracelets had started as simple tokens; little circles of leather, beads, or string that carried with them a smile and a story. At first, I handed them out freely, offering them as gestures of kindness. Later, I sold them at farmers markets, mixing business with generosity, finding that sweet spot between making a living and sharing joy. But I wanted more. I didn't just want to sell bracelets. I wanted to spark something bigger, something that would inspire other people to give the way I had.

So, I began experimenting. My first idea was straightforward. If someone bought three bracelets for ten dollars, I would slip in an extra one, a bracelet marked with a smile, and tell them, "This one isn't for you. It's for someone else. Give it away."

People loved it. They got the sense of receiving something extra, something unexpected. But what mattered more was the way they reacted to the challenge. Suddenly, they weren't just buyers, they were participants. Some laughed, some got thoughtful, some even lit up with excitement. I knew I was on to something, but it still felt incomplete.

I wanted more than a freebie tucked into a purchase. I wanted a call to action. I wanted a campaign.

The breakthrough came in the most ordinary of places: a shopping mall. I was walking through Macy's, of all places, buying a gift for Pennapa. Hanging above the racks was a sign I'd seen a hundred times before: BOGO - Buy One, Get One Free.

I stopped in my tracks. Buy one, get one... It was catchy. Everyone understood it. But it didn't fit what I wanted to create. My idea wasn't about people getting more for themselves. It was about giving.

What if it wasn't BOGO? What if it was... buy one, give one?

For a moment, I thought I had it. Buy One, Give One. It had the right rhythm. But the more I sat with it, the more I realized it wouldn't work. People would confuse it. They would think they were simply getting two for themselves. That wasn't the point. That wasn't the movement.

Then the lightbulb went off. What if I created something brand new? Something people hadn't heard before, something that carried giving right in its name. That's when it hit me: KOGO - Keep One, Give One.

It was simple. It was unique. And most of all, it was clear. When you bought a bracelet, you kept one for yourself and gave the other away. The giving wasn't optional. It was built into the deal.

I could feel the excitement building inside me. This was it. This was the piece I had been missing.

I wasted no time. I reworked my pitch. Instead of three for ten, I started shouting like a carnival barker: "Two for five! Keep one, give one! Two for five!" The words rolled off my tongue, and people responded. They smiled, they laughed, and they bought in. The signage sealed the deal, bold letters proclaiming KOGO, inviting people not just to buy, but to participate.

It worked. People saw the value in getting two for the price of one, but more importantly, they understood the message. They weren't just consumers anymore. They were part of a movement of kindness.

And still, I wasn't done.

I went to Michael's, picked up twine made of hemp, and bought little square labels. On each one, I drew a smiley face. Handmade, simple, imperfect. Each bracelet now carried not only the circle of string or beads, but also a little reminder to smile. When people bought them, I showed them how easy it was to make their own. "You could do this too," I'd say. "You can make someone's day with something this simple."

It wasn't just about selling bracelets anymore. It was about planting seeds. Every person who walked away with one now had a reminder not only to smile, but to share.

Something was still missing, but I could feel the momentum building. The bracelets were evolving into something bigger. The people weren't just customers. They were participants in a story of kindness, and I knew this was only the beginning.



Chapter 11: Time to Make a Plan

The KOGO idea had worked better than I ever imagined. People were buying bracelets, giving them away, and spreading smiles. But as I watched it grow, I felt a tug inside me, something was missing.

I realized that in the rush of setting up tables, shouting pitches like a carnival barker, and stacking bracelets on display, I had lost the part that gave me the most joy: the simple act of giving. I missed walking up to a stranger, pressing a bracelet into their hand, and watching their face change as a smile appeared. I missed the water bottles handed to the thirsty, the small gestures that carried so much meaning. Somewhere along the way, I had turned into more of a retailer than a giver, and that wasn't who I wanted to be.

So, I decided it was time to sit down and make a plan.

The first step was to ask myself a simple question: Who do I want to help? The answer came quickly, almost naturally. I wanted to help the people who needed it most, the ones who often got overlooked or forgotten. I wrote down five categories: the homeless, children from poor families, veterans struggling with recovery and PTSD, patients in hospitals, and the elderly or isolated in institutions. These were the people who weighed on my heart, and I knew they were the ones I wanted to serve.

But there was another piece to this plan. It couldn't just be about me. I was only one person, and no matter how hard I worked, I could only reach so far. If this was really going to grow, I needed a way to inspire other people to get involved — to make giving their own. I wanted them to feel what I felt when I handed out that first bracelet or bottle of water. I wanted them to know the joy of giving.

I started thinking about what I could realistically take on. Veterans felt natural to me. I was already a peer support specialist, and I understood the struggles of PTSD, addiction, and recovery. I knew I could give away books for free, offer counseling, point people toward VA programs and shelters, and even bring care packages to stand downs. That piece I had nailed down.

Helping the homeless and children in need felt just as clear. I could partner with shelters and local organizations, put together care packages, and show up where people needed encouragement most. And hospitals, especially children's wards and places where the elderly were alone, offered endless opportunities to bring comfort, even if it was just through presence and compassion.

But one question remained: How do I get people involved?

That's when the idea of a nonprofit began to form in my mind. I didn't know much about how they worked, but I knew this much: a nonprofit could be the vehicle to carry this vision forward. If I built it, people could join, contribute, and expand the mission far beyond what I could do on my own.

So, I took a small step, something simple. I sat down at my computer and opened Gmail. "I need an official email address," I thought. Something that would sound real, something that would give me a sense of direction, even if I didn't have a full plan yet.

I started typing in names, one after another, most already taken. And then, almost by accident, I typed in giveoutsmiles@gmail.com.

To my surprise, it was available. I felt like I had struck gold. The name itself carried the mission. Give Out Smiles. It was simple, clear, and full of possibility. If no one else had thought of that email address, maybe no one else had thought of the domain either.

I raced over to GoDaddy, typed in "give out smiles," and sure enough — both the .com and .org domains were available. I snapped them up on the spot. I didn't have a plan yet, but now I had an identity, and that felt like a foundation.

GoDaddy came with a free seven-day website builder, so I decided to try it. I threw up a simple page with a picture of me holding a bracelet and the words: Let's give out smiles. I added a little contact form so people could share their stories; where they took the bracelets, where they traveled, and how they were spreading kindness.

For about five days, I lived on that high. I felt like I had launched something. But soon, reality set in. I didn't have traffic. I didn't have volunteers. I didn't have a plan beyond the page itself. I had a name, an email, and a domain, but not much else.

Still, I knew I had taken the first steps. And sometimes, that's all a plan needs at the beginning, a name, a direction, and the courage to believe it can grow.



Chapter 12: What to Give

When I sat down to figure out what I wanted to give, the obvious answer came first: bracelets. They had been the foundation of my journey, the small tokens that sparked smiles everywhere I went. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that bracelets alone weren't enough. They were powerful reminders, yes, but in the end, they were just symbols. What I longed for was something that would stay with people, something useful, something they needed in their daily lives.

Naturally, the thought of money came up. But money was the one thing I didn't have much of. I was working within a budget, and just handing out money wasn't realistic. If I was going to give, it would have to be through something sustainable; items that carried meaning, stretched my resources, and could be shared widely.

So, I started to brainstorm. I reached out to my sourcing manufacturers overseas, the same people I had worked with when I was selling bracelets, and I asked them a simple but important question: What could I give that was easy to transport, easy to store, useful across different groups, and still carried the spirit of kindness?

They sent me back a list of about twenty items, mostly promotional-style products: coffee mugs, keychains, stress balls. Most of them didn't make sense for what I was trying to do. I wasn't looking for trinkets. I wasn't building a brand for profit. I was trying to create moments of kindness.

But as I scanned the list, a few items stood out like beacons.

The first was backpacks. Immediately, I saw how they could cross almost every category I wanted to serve. Children from struggling families could use them for school supplies they couldn't afford. Veterans could use them for prescriptions, belongings, or paperwork as they went through recovery programs or lived in shelters. Patients in hospitals often needed a simple bag to carry their things during their stay. A backpack wasn't just an item — it was dignity, organization, and mobility. I knew this had to be part of the plan.

The second item that caught my eye was teddy bears. At first, I thought of children in shelters, children in hospitals, children who had lost so much and needed something soft, something comforting to hold. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized teddy bears weren't just toys — they were companions. For a scared child, a teddy bear could be a friend in the dark. It was simple, but powerful.

The third was water. It seemed too obvious, but that's exactly why it was perfect. Everyone needs water. It was universal. In every country, in every city, in every shelter

or hospital, water was life. It was inexpensive, easy to source, and always appreciated. And with the simple addition of a sticker, a smiley face, a message of kindness, a bottle of water became more than hydration. It became a gift, a reminder that someone cared.

Then there were stickers themselves. They might not seem like much, but they carried the same energy as the Post-it notes I used to hand out with little smiley faces scribbled on them. Stickers could be slapped onto water bottles, backpacks, or hospital bags; tiny reminders scattered like breadcrumbs of kindness.

Finally, I settled on blankets. They wouldn't be as easy to source or transport as the others, but I knew their impact would be immeasurable. A blanket meant warmth on a cold night. It meant comfort in a hospital bed. It meant security for someone who had none. A blanket could be the difference between misery and relief.

By the end of my brainstorming, I had narrowed the list to what I called my core six:

- Bracelets
- Backpacks
- Teddy Bears
- Blankets
- Stickers
- Water

It felt solid. It felt practical. And most importantly, it felt human.

I knew that these items were only the beginning. They would serve as icebreakers, opening doors and building connections. And as I went deeper into the work, I would learn what people truly needed and adjust as I went. But for now, this list gave me a foundation, a toolkit of kindness I could carry with me anywhere.

It wasn't just about what I could give. It was about creating a movement where others could join in, pick up a bracelet, a backpack, a bottle of water, and say: Here, this is for you. You matter. You're not forgotten.

And that, I knew, was the next step in giving.



Chapter 13: Location, Location, Location

Once I had decided on the core items for the movement, another question immediately rose to the surface: where would I put them? Backpacks, teddy bears, blankets, and bottles of water don't exactly fold neatly into a closet. And once they were stored, where would I take them? How would I get them into the hands of the people who needed them most?

The reality hit me hard. I had already spent almost every penny I had sourcing the goods. My heart was full, but my wallet was empty. A warehouse or rented storage facility wasn't in the budget. Even if I had the space, I didn't have the volunteers to help me distribute everything. It was like I had gathered the tools, but still had no workshop to build in.

At the same time, another thought was pressing on my mind, I missed Pennapa. My partner in life, my anchor, my reminder of what a simple smile could do. And as I sat there, tangled in problems of logistics and dollars and distance, it was as if lightning struck. The answer had been with me all along.

Thailand.

We already had a house there. More than that, we had family, brothers, sisters, nieces, cousins, even an entire village who would be willing to help. We had storage space too. Several homes sat empty, perfectly capable of holding goods until they could be placed in the right hands. And beyond the practical benefits, it was the Land of Smiles — the most fitting place on earth to run a pilot program.

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. A pilot program in Thailand would show me whether this idea could truly work. Could we move goods efficiently? Could we inspire people to give? Could kindness scale when rooted in a small village? The need there was real, undeniable, and urgent. If it could succeed in Thailand, I knew it could succeed anywhere.

Then came another spark, we had a teacher friend in the village. Teachers were the gateway. They could not only distribute goods but also teach children about kindness, about giving, about the power of a smile. Suddenly, the movement wasn't just about items anymore. It was about education, about planting seeds of kindness in the next generation.

Everything seemed to be aligning. The pieces that once felt scattered were falling into place. Without wasting any time, I called my manufacturers and redirected the shipments.

Instead of sending the goods to Texas, I asked them to ship everything to the small village of Tam Tao, where Pennapa's family lived.

This was no longer just a theory on paper. It was a plan, a pilot program, and the beginning of what would one day become a global movement. Tam Tao would be our sister village, the first place to test our ideas, the first place to learn what people needed most, and the first place to prove that giving out smiles could truly change lives.



Chapter 14: The Coloring Book

After I realized that the pilot program would begin in Thailand, I reached out to our teacher friend in the village. I asked her a simple but important question: What do the classrooms really need? I wanted something universal, something that would transcend language barriers but still carry the heart of the movement.

I told her my story, how it all began with a pocket full of pennies that turned into a folded Post-it note with a smile on it. She smiled and said, “That’s perfect. The children can do the same. They can color smiles and give them away to their friends and families.”

That was the spark. The idea of a coloring book took root.

I had never created a coloring book before. I had never even written for children. The books I had published under a pen name were bucket-list projects, things I did for myself. But this was different. This was important. This had to be done right. So, I struck out to design a book that would be simple, meaningful, and powerful enough to carry the message.

After weeks of late nights and sketches, the book was born. I called it *Suzy Colors Her World with Smiles*. It was the very first book tied directly to the movement and in many ways, it will always be the most important. It teaches children that something as small as giving a smile can change someone’s day, maybe even their life. It shows them that kindness isn’t complicated. It’s not expensive. It’s as simple as sharing a smile.

The beauty of it was its simplicity. I could create a PDF and, without needing to ship anything, print it out anywhere in the world. Walk into a classroom, hand out pages, and suddenly the lesson of kindness was in the children’s hands. It was accessible, affordable, and easy to spread.

But then another thought struck me: What would the children use to color? Resources in Thailand were limited. In some classrooms, a single box of crayons was shared among dozens of students. If I was going to hand out a coloring book, I couldn't ignore the need for the tools to bring it to life.

So, I went back to my manufacturers and asked a question that seemed obvious to me but felt bold at the time: Can you make branded crayons? Their answer was quick and certain. "Yes. We can have them there by next week."

And with that, the list grew. What began as six core items now expanded to eight:

Bracelets

Backpacks

Teddy Bears

Blankets

Stickers

Water

Coloring Books

Crayons

This was no longer just about giving goods. It was about teaching kindness. It was about helping children understand, in the simplest and most joyful way, that they already had the power to change the world, one smile at a time.

And that was the beginning of something bigger than I had ever imagined.

Chapter 15: The First 5,000 Smiles

It's been said before, I can't even remember by who, that ideas are easy, but putting them into action is the tough part. I had the idea. I had the plan. But now it was time to see if it could actually work.

The first challenge was money. My budget was thin. Every dollar mattered, and I had to decide carefully what to order, how much to send, and how to stretch my resources so we could launch the pilot in Thailand. I knew water would be easier. I could buy that on-site from the local markets at a reasonable price. But the other items had to be shipped ahead of time. So, I made tough calls, balancing what I wanted with what I could afford.

The final tally looked like this:

- 100 backpacks
- 100 teddy bears
- 1,000 bracelets
- 50 blankets
- 250 boxes of crayons
- 250 coloring books
- 500 stickers
- 3,000 bottles of water

That brought us to a grand total of 5,250 smiles, enough to hit my goal of 5,000 for the pilot program.

The items trickled in slowly. Pennapa handled the logistics on the ground, storing everything neatly in one of the empty houses we had in the village. She made sure nothing was lost, nothing damaged, and she let the village know that something special was coming. She even recruited five solid volunteers to help, with more ready to jump in if needed. We had a teacher on board, too, ready to introduce the coloring books and crayons to her classroom.

We chose her school for the first distribution, where children eagerly dove into their new coloring books and crayons. The backpacks went to children in surrounding schools and villages that needed them the most. The teddy bears and blankets went to hospitals and

orphanages, where they brought comfort to children who had so little to call their own. Water was shared in villages and temples, where the need was constant and immediate.

And then there were the bracelets. We decided to take them to the local markets, where crowds gathered every day. We handed them out in true KOGO style: every person got two bracelets. One to keep, and one to give away. The idea caught on immediately. People loved the chance to wear a bracelet themselves while passing another along to someone else. Smiles spread quickly in those crowded aisles, and strangers became connected through something so simple.

Everything was in place: the product, the storage, the logistics, the volunteers. Everyone was excited. And I'll be honest, so was I. This wasn't just a dream anymore. This was real.

The next step would be the most important one of all: putting the plan into action, seeing where we stumbled, and learning how to do it better. Because this wasn't just about Thailand. This was about building a model we could take back to the United States. A movement of kindness that could grow far beyond one village.

Chapter 16: Returning to the US

When the plane touched down back in the United States, I carried with me more than luggage. I carried the proof that our idea could work. Thailand had shown me that people not only appreciated kindness, but they also welcomed it. The smiles on children's faces, the gratitude in the hospitals, the joy in the markets, all of it convinced me we were on the right path.

But success comes with its own kind of weight. For every smile handed out in Thailand, I knew there were a thousand more waiting here at home. And here, the challenges looked different. Veterans struggling with invisible wounds. Children in classrooms where kindness was in short supply. Hospitals where people fought battles that a smile could ease, even just for a moment. I wanted to be ready for all of them.

So I did what I thought I should do: I hit the ground running. I filed for 501(c)(3) status. I found a warehouse. I bought a trailer. I lined up the beginnings of what looked, on paper, like a real nonprofit. And yet, after the paperwork was filed, after the keys to the warehouse jingled in my hand, after the trailer was parked and ready—I sat still.

The noise of Thailand had faded into quiet. The buzz of markets, the laughter of children, the bustle of handing out thousands of gifts all replaced by silence. And in that silence, I found myself with too much time on my hands, staring at four warehouse walls and wondering if I had already peaked.

It was in that stillness that I realized I needed to tell the story. Not just for the world, but for myself. This book became my way of reminding myself that what we had done mattered, that it wasn't just a fleeting trip or a one-time project. It was the foundation of something much larger. Writing it gave me a way to look back and see how far we had come and at the same time, to sketch out the road ahead.

I wanted this book to be more than a memoir. I wanted it to be a pep talk. First for me, because even the founder of a movement needs encouragement. But also, for you, the reader, because movements don't grow with just one person. They grow when people link arms, share ideas, and bring their own hearts into the work.

That's why this book will always be offered for free. It's not about profit. It's about planting seeds. If it can spark even one person to volunteer, to donate, to start a chapter of their own, then it has done its job.

So, if you find yourself, like me, staring at the blank walls of your own life and wondering what's next, take heart. We can build something together. We can take what started as one bracelet, one smile, and carry it across neighborhoods, across states, across oceans.

Thailand showed me it could be done. The United States will show me how far it can go. And maybe, just maybe, you'll be the one to help carry it further.

Chapter 17: Our Goals for 2026 and Beyond

I don't have the luxury of sitting still anymore. The time for thinking has passed, now, it's time for action. 2026 is right around the corner, and for us, that means July. We'll be working on a fiscal year that runs from July to July, and when July 2026 arrives, we plan to officially launch our nonprofit here in the United States. This will be the moment we hit the ground running.

Our goals are lofty. We'll begin small, but we expect growth. The Thailand pilot proved that the model works. Were there hiccups? Of course. But the core idea; giving without expectation, creating smiles through simple acts of kindness worked beautifully. And we believe it can work just as well here at home, with the support of people like you.

To stay grounded and focused as we move forward, we've identified what we call our Founding Cornerstones, five guiding principles that will serve as the foundation for everything we do:

The Five Founding Cornerstones

1. Give Without Expectation

At the heart of this movement is a simple truth: giving should never come with strings attached. We don't give because of what we might get back. We give because it's the right thing to do. This will always be our number one rule.

2. Share Free Resources Freely

Growth happens when knowledge and tools are shared. That's why we'll build Give Out Smiles University; a library of free resources, lesson plans, and activities created by teachers and volunteers. Anyone can download, print, and use them without barriers. When one teacher shares with another, kindness multiplies.

3. Keep It Simple

Complexity kills momentum. We won't try to solve every problem in the world. Instead, we'll stay focused on what we do best, spreading smiles and kindness through practical items that meet real needs. Bracelets, backpacks, bears, blankets, water, and stickers - simple, meaningful, and impactful.

4. Lean Into KOGO

Our Keep One, Give One initiative is more than a sales pitch. It's a culture-shaping principle. Whether it's bracelets, backpacks, or bears, the idea is simple: keep one for yourself, give one away. It's easy, it's affordable, and it reminds people that kindness doubles when it's shared.

5. Ask for Help

No movement grows alone. We'll reach out to schools, churches, community organizations, and individuals. We'll invite them to create their own chapters of Give Out Smiles, taking care of needs in their neighborhoods while being part of something bigger than themselves.

These five cornerstones are not just our roadmap; they're our call to action.

We've already seen what's possible when people come together. Over 5,000 smiles were shared during our pilot in Thailand. But now, the work begins here. If 2025 was proof of concept, then 2026 will be proof of impact. And with your help, it can grow beyond anything we could imagine.

This is not about money. It's about kindness, compassion, and community. It's about proving that one small act, one bracelet, one backpack, one smile, can ripple out and change lives.

So, as we move into 2026, we're inviting you to be part of this journey. Volunteer. Share your skills. Start a chapter in your community. Or simply take the time to keep one, give one, and pass a smile along. Together, we can do far more than we could ever do alone.

The road ahead is wide open. The question is: will you walk it with us?

Chapter 18: How You Can Help

When people ask me how they can join the movement, I always give the same answer: start where you are, with what you have. You don't need a warehouse, a big budget, or a trailer full of supplies to make an impact. You only need the willingness to share kindness. That's how all of this began, with a handful of pennies in my pocket and a decision to give.

There are countless ways you can help carry this mission forward. Whether you're a teacher, a business owner, a student, or someone simply searching for a way to give back, there's a place for you in Give Out Smiles.

Start Small

You can begin right where you are. Give a bracelet away. Share a coloring page with a child. Offer a smile to a stranger. Every small act adds to the momentum of this movement.

Be Part of the Movement

Volunteer your time to hand out backpacks, blankets, water, or bears. Join us at community events. Share kindness in your neighborhood and let us know your story so we can celebrate it together.

Start a Chapter

If you're part of a school, church, or organization, consider starting a local Give Out Smiles chapter. This allows you to focus on the unique needs of your own community while being part of a larger global vision. Every community has its struggles—and every community has the power to create smiles.

Share the Message

Wear a bracelet. Give one away. Post on social media using #GiveOutSmiles. Tell your story of kindness and inspire others to join. Movements grow when stories spread.

Teachers, Share Your Knowledge

If you're a teacher and you have a lesson plan, activity, or lecture that promotes kindness, share it with us. We will include it in Give Out Smiles University, a free online library of resources for teachers everywhere. When you share, you help other teachers shape classrooms filled with compassion.

Translators, Use Your Voice

If you speak another language, help us by translating materials so they can reach children, families, and schools in communities that speak your language. Kindness has no borders, but sometimes it needs your words to cross them.

Businesses, Use Your Space and Skills

If you're a warehouse or a business owner and you can spare storage space, you can make a huge difference. If you're a manufacturer and can donate goods, we can put them directly into the hands of those who need them most.

Support in Any Way You Can

If you're unsure how to help, even a small monthly donation can create an enormous impact. A simple \$10 per month can help us deliver thousands of smiles to children who need school supplies, veterans who need support, patients in hospitals, and families in shelters.

Other Ways to Contribute

- If you're a graphic designer or writer, you can help us create materials.
- If you're a social media advocate, you can spread our message online.
- If you're a parent, you can teach your children to join in—because kindness learned young lasts a lifetime.

The Call to Action

The truth is simple: everyone has something to give. Your skills, your time, your resources, your voice, your donations, all of them matter. Movements don't grow because of one person's story. They grow when people link arms and walk together.

So here is the invitation: step in. Find your place. Share your gift. And watch how something as small as a smile can change the world.

Chapter 19: A Final Word

This organization is still in its infancy. We are just beginning to find our footing, and there is still much work ahead if we are to grow and become sustainable. We will move forward slowly and deliberately, reaching as many people as we can with the resources available and those we are able to procure along the way. Growth will take time, but the vision is clear.

What began as the dream of one person now belongs to many. My hope is that this dream will continue to bleed into the dreams of others, creating a sense of community, connection, and smiles in a world that needs it most. We live in a time where hate and division feel louder than they should. We cannot afford to stand by and let that be the story we pass to the next generation. From the very beginning, this movement was designed to combat those forces not with arguments, but with kindness. Not with division, but with connection. Not with despair, but with hope.

We are also living in an age where technology and humanism collide. The screens in our hands grow brighter, while our connections to one another risk growing dimmer. We want to stand firmly on the side of kindness. We want to remind people and especially our children that compassion still matters. That no matter how advanced our tools become, it is kindness that makes us human.

We cannot allow our children to be buried by technology alone or overwhelmed by the hatred and anger that spreads so quickly across the world. Instead, we must teach them, remind them, and show them what it means to care. To smile. To give without expecting anything in return.

That is the legacy we want to leave behind. A movement rooted in kindness, fueled by community, and carried forward by every person willing to take part.

So, I leave you with this: you are part of this story now. Together, we can build a future where smiles are stronger than hatred, where kindness outpaces division, and where compassion becomes the common language, we all speak.

A smile may seem small, but its impact is not. Together, let's see how far a smile can go.

Contact Us

We believe that kindness grows stronger when it is shared. If you feel inspired to join us, support our work, or simply want to learn more, we'd love to hear from you.

Visit us online at:

www.giveoutsmiles.org

Together, we can create a kinder, brighter world, one smile at a time.

