

James Walker

December 12, 2020

This column first appeared in Hearst Connecticut newspapers.

Reward? Words can bring change to many lives

I am feeling pretty good and the year for me is ending on a high note.

And since it is that feel-good time of the year, I want to share with readers what is making me feel so good.

For the second time this year, I have been surprised by an email extolling the value of my columns and how my words are making a difference.

The latest came from the Westport-based nonprofit, Horizons National, whose mission is to “Inspire, Build and Transform” the lives of low-income children.

The Dec. 2 email informed me that New Canaan residents Doug and Dr. Sharon Karp had made a donation to the nonprofit in my name in “appreciation of your weekly insights and activism.”

“Doug is one of our most thoughtful supporters, and a member of our Founders’ Council, and we love the many ways he spreads the word about Horizons’ mission and our important work,” wrote Christina Sielert MacLean, an associate manager of development at the organization, in the email.

She went on to write that “this gift will help Horizons National fulfill our transformational mission to close these gaps by improving the life trajectory

of students from low-income families, and instilling in them the joy of learning, the skills for success, and the inspiration to realize their dreams.”

It was an unexpected -- but inspiring -- early Christmas gift because it is the kind that can help power another child forward.

According to its website, “Horizons is committed to ensuring all children have the opportunity to thrive and learn. Eliminating inequities in education has been central to our work for over 50 years, and recent events remind us why this work is so important: systems that perpetuate, tolerate, or indulge racial injustice have devastating effects on our society and must be transformed.”

As readers know, I was stunned to receive an email in September from infectious disease doctors at Yale’s School of Medicine asking for my help to erase the mistrust that exists between doctors and the Black community.

That partnership continues to be a work in progress and a plan as to how we are going to tackle this issue is expected to be formulated in January.

But the emails about the effect my columns are having just keep on coming.

Last week, Dr. David Hill, the director of Global Public Health at the Frank H. Netter MD, School of Medicine at Quinnipiac University, contacted me.

“I have read your piece in the Register in August (as well as many of your other reflections), and listened to your podcast about your thoughts regarding the COVID vaccine. As we (nationally and as a university) think about vaccination, your viewpoint needs to be heard by our students. It is an important voice in the larger discussion about vaccine hesitancy.”

I joined Hill and his students on Thursday to share my viewpoint with the next generation of eager doctors because it is not everyday that a person gets an opportunity to make a difference -- big or small.

I don't think the students got the answers they were expecting but these are issues that don't fit neatly into a box of logic.

My email brings me a lot of gratification when people respond to my columns and I am sure other columnists feel the same.

I have received many things from readers -- books, lottery tickets, hand-written letters, gift cards for fast-food and faith-based cards with inspirational messages.

To me, those responses from readers -- whether they are something tangible or a simple conversation -- are gifts to me as a columnist.

And thanks to Doug and Dr. Sharon Karp, Christmas for me arrived early.

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