

During a period of time in which the nation is caught up in the complications of an upcoming war, nightclub safety and fires, terrorism inspections, and a continuing investigation of a space accident, news of death brings no real shock anymore. To many, the obituary of Fred Rogers, host of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood,” was of little importance and was quickly passed over. And yet, Mr. Rogers played a more significant role in American life and society than most imagine. The show may not have produced Britney Spears or N’Sync, and it’s highly unlikely that there exist any Mr. Rogers action figures or dolls in toy departments, but his wisdom, delivered to us through puppet characters, simple stories, and straightforward talks, have stuck with generations and generations of children and adults.

Fred Rogers was born in a small town in Pennsylvania in 1928 and attended Dartmouth College, but graduated from Rollins College in Florida in 1951. He later received a divinity degree in 1962 from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. As calm and habitual (and maybe even boring to older viewers) as his show was, “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” broke new ground in that it dealt with the “emotional life of children,” rather than only providing kids with meaningless entertainment. Mr. Rogers often talked about feelings and fears, “managing and mentioning” them without hesitation. He wanted to promote self-esteem, imagination, cooperation, tolerance, curiosity, and appreciation of diversity, among others. Daniel Lewis, of the New York Times, writes that “the daily half-hour show... caught on as a haven from the hyperactivity of most

children's television. Let morphing monsters rampage elsewhere.... "Mister Rogers" stayed the same year after year, a low-key affair without animation or special effects." It didn't matter that the shows didn't drastically change from episode to episode or season to season because, as one of the Mr. Rogers' spokesmen said – "the audience is always new."

Fred Rogers didn't only produce, host, write, and puppet the longest-running public television show; he was also the chairman of a White House forum on child development and mass media, and he was heavily involved in many other activities as well, including production of books and television specials. And according to Daniel Lewis, he's "one of the country's most sought-after commencement speakers." Mr. Rogers died on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003 due to stomach cancer. But his website tells parents and children that Mr. Rogers will always be a friend, even after death, and that "feelings are natural and normal, and that happy times and sad times are part of everyone's life."

Perhaps we should take some time off one day and watch an episode of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Apparently, there's a lot more wisdom to "it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood" than most people see at first glance. Maybe George Bush, Tony Blair, and Saddam Hussein should get together and listen to what Mr. Roger has to say.