

The Counselor's Corner

Helper's High

Every evening my husband and I sit together and watch the local and world news. Sometimes I do not know how we survive being bombarded by stories about hurricanes, floods, fires, wars, shooting sprees and other killings, while our country seems politically and racially at odds, and Kim Jong-un feels at liberty to launch ballistic missiles over Japan and closer to our land. Then, the end of the week comes and the news actually brings us hope by featuring a "Person of the Week". These Americans come from all walks of life and are of all ages. One thing they have in common is their great, positive impact on large numbers of people through their selfless work, dedication, and donations. These segments are motivating, making me want to emulate the actions that generally originate from ordinary people.

Doing good deeds impacts more than the recipients of our giving. Sherrie Bourg, Psy.D., talks about givers getting a "helper's high" ("High Octane Women, Sept 4, 2014). Chemicals are actually released by parts of our brains, and they put us into a free and legal state of euphoria.

Psychology Today cited two February 2016 studies that were published in *Psychosomatic Medicine: Journal of Biobehavioral Medicine*. These researchers actually did many MRI neuroimaging tests. What they found was that both giving and receiving bring about positive changes within our brains. However, the MRI scans documented that giving has more benefits than receiving. One of the major benefits is stress reduction, something we greatly long for in this changing, and sometimes chaotic world.

An article in *Mental Floss*, "7 Scientific Benefits of Helping Others," is not as detailed, but it lists more benefits to altruism including, living longer, feeling happier, feeling less chronic pain, and gaining a sense of purpose and satisfaction.

To give personal credence to these studies, let us look at the times we were being helpful in big or small ways. Whether we gave volunteer time to our churches or schools, emptied our closets and donated bags to our favorite charity, shoveled or cut grass for an elderly neighbor, took food to people who were grieving or are sick, or completed a major, charitable project, we have felt good. We have chosen to put good deeds on a calendar along with personal wants. Our good deeds acted like fluffy, little boomerangs and brought us a sense of satisfaction.

Some people thrive on giving, and can become fanatical. Service and giving are important, but being able to receive help is critical, too. All humans thrive with moderation and balance. This area is no exception. Bottom line for most of us is that we can and should do more for others without endangering our own needs. Let's move forward with a plan of action today.

Diane L. Rivard