

# **The Kindness Project**

**Chris Daems**

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## Dedication

Sophie, who makes me laugh (almost!) every single day. I'm excited to see the places you'll go and all the laughs yet to come!

Charlotte, my podcast partner in crime and travelling buddy. Thank you for being amazing.

Cassie, the woman who holds it all together. I love you.

Oh, and let's not forget...

'Producer Russ' – The podcast, or this book, wouldn't exist without you. I'm proud to call you both my brother and my friend.

## About the Author



Chris Daems is a business owner, father of two and somebody who strives to make the world a better and kinder place.

In his professional life, he is a Chartered Financial Planner. However, one of his ‘favourite hobbies’ is as co-host (along with his eldest daughter Charlotte) of *The Kindness Project* podcast. Hosting the podcast has provided him with an opportunity to explore kindness in all its forms and interact with the people who are doing kind things in this world.

His optimism and positivity give him a unique perspective on the world and those within it. For the past five years, he has compiled an archive of altruistic achievements from across the world while sharing laughs and inside jokes with his daughter Charlotte and his brother, ‘Producer Russ’.

The podcast, originating in the UK, has evolved into a community of listeners from across the globe and has been listened to in 164 countries across the world (all the way from Albania to Zambia).

## Reviews

“This wonderful book has captured what it really means to be kind, and just how easy it is. It picks up and expands on some simple but truthful themes, and you can feel the pages radiating with the same infectious smile and sense of fun that makes *The Kindness Project* podcast so good. Well done Chris!” **David Forsdyke, Knight Frank**

“During reading this book I walked past a homeless man - ‘any spare change’ to which I said sorry no and walked on, then one of Chris’ similar stories popped into my head. I went back and gave him the brownie I’d been saving. This is a book that makes you reflect on your own character and relationships, what it means to be kind to yourself and others. A warm, enjoyable, inspirational read, packed full of wisdom and actionable ideas. Chris is kinder than he knows, and it’s a timely reminder for us all to be kind to ourselves and others. Once you start on the kindness journey, it’s infectious!” **Keith Boyes, Spentwell**

“In *The Kindness Project*, Chris Daems gifts readers a brazenly honest and highly engaging account of his own quest to be kinder in life, with off-the-shelf lessons for the rest of us. In reading *The Kindness Project*, you’ll be reminded of the joy that comes not only from simply being kinder, but in finding connection with another human being... something the last few years has shown us is critical to our own humanity.” **Lauren Janus, Phila Engaged Giving**

“Overall I completely agree with the points raised in the book. I personally would struggle with some of the things suggested but the I fully support the basic premise in that

the world would be a better place if we were all a little kinder.

“I’m also very interested in the concept of ethical investing. Something I’m going to discuss with Chris at our next meeting.

“As for abseiling or jumping out of planes. Not for me!

“Overall a short and concise review of how being kinder can make the world a better place, backed up by some interesting facts and science.” **Mike Corder**

“For me, there are two things that need to impact me to make me want to immerse myself in reading a book - commonality and community. How does this resonate with me and how does this apply to me? Chris’ storytelling instantly resonated with me and his insights around the subject of kindness was delivered in a non-fluffy, ‘real’ way that most people avoid. A must read!” **Nick Elston**

“I thoroughly enjoyed reading *The Kindness Project* and was sad for it to end. Thanks to Daems for sharing the collective wisdom gathered from years of podcasts and lessons about kindness and insights from his own life delivered with such honesty, heart and humour. This is a handbook and collection of notes from Daems’ personal journey full of discovery, inspiration and nostalgia. It feels like Daems is in the room with you, sharing stories about his childhood, family, professional life and the many high, lows and laughter along the way. Read this book to learn about the science and benefits of kindness, and find practical ways to be kinder to yourself, others and even the planet.” **Patrick Luong, GoodGym**

“The really inspiring and practical guide that we all need to bring a bit more happiness into our lives and the lives of others in these trying times. A funny, honest and

informative read.” **Sally McEnallay, Marketing Director, Greenkit**

“This is not a self-help book but you will help yourself by reading this book immediately! A lovely read that will fill you with kindness!” **Sam Chilton-Cox, Law Choice**

“I read it with interest and enthusiasm. Having had the pleasure of participating in *The Kindness Project* podcasts and with my work in health, mental health and overseas- this writing and the story speaks to our wellbeing, as humanity, on so many levels. Thank you for sharing your story with humour and accessibility.” **Vasanti Hirani, Daal Bhaat Panni**

## Foreword

Over the past few years I've enjoyed being part of an amazing project. Five years ago when this all began, my dad and I started out sitting in the garage at home with a microphone he'd bought especially for the podcast. Since then, this project has given us so much more than we originally intended.

The podcast was designed to share kindness in the world – but it has brought me enormous joy, as well as a treasury of special moments with my dad captured through the microphone.

When we started this journey, Dad was talking about writing a book for *The Kindness Project*. A collection of people, events and acts, that showed that there was kindness out there in the world. When I think about what the podcast was all about, I think back to one of the earlier questions of the podcast; are people generally good?

I remember being uncertain about this question, and even when we got to the end of our discussion in episode three, we never truly reached a conclusion. It is something that we continue to examine in each episode of the podcast. From what we have found, what we have shared, and what we have learned, I believe that people have a great capacity for good.

It has become a large part of my life, working with my family to create this wonderful little thing that grew far more than any of us could have imagined. It has become a beast of a thing that has connected with and touched more people than I can count.



Then there was lockdown. Covid-19 came out of nowhere and, suddenly, we couldn't leave the house, hang out with friends or even go into school or work.

Near the beginning, Dad introduced the idea to me of doing morning live sessions instead of our regular recording sessions. Most mornings, we would stream our little talks on a Facebook live, and later, the recordings of these lives would be released after editing.

Soon we added live guests joining us in the sessions, so I got to be involved in more interviews than I ever had before. It was wonderful to respond to the live comments and get an actual sense of engagement. Before we did the live shows, the idea that anyone would listen to these podcasts was a bit abstract and intangible. These live recordings gave me a focus in the mornings and were something that gave me purpose besides walking my dog, reading and thinking of what I would do when lockdown was finally over.

*The Kindness Project* has been a journey in many ways. While the podcast grew and grew, I was growing alongside, perhaps not at the same pace. I was just a teenager when the podcast first began and it has seen me through my teenage years and into my early adulthood. That is definitely a weird thing to say.

Now that I am living on my own for the first time, I cherish every recording session, each in-joke made, every intro and outro and slip of the tongue seem more weighted with meaning now that I don't have access to it as often. While I cannot be certain of how my dad perceives *The Kindness Project*, for me it started as an idea, it became fun times spent with my dad and since then it has even become an important aspect of my life that I am immensely grateful for.

While we were usually the faces, or rather voices, of *The Kindness Project*, we owe a lot of the podcast to Russell too, who looked after all the technical aspects. To anyone who has been listening to more recent episodes of the podcast, my uncle's voice can be heard a lot more. Not only does it add a third voice to the podcast, but it has also introduced even more to our recordings. But long before that, when he was our producer, he was adding so much to the content of the podcast, with his skills of editing and his organisation of a lot of the behind the scenes things that I am not even one hundred percent aware of. I don't know if this podcast would have gone as well or run as smoothly without our amazing producer, Russ, managing things in the background while we shared our take on kindness with the microphone.

This book is amazing and I am incredibly proud of my old man for it. I have always known him to be a man of conviction. I have seen him push himself and work himself hard in pursuit of his goals. This year it seems that several of the goals that I have seen him strive for as I grew are finally coming to fruition. Not only has he managed to complete the book this year, but he has also attained another qualification, the highest he can achieve. And even as he completes these goals, he continues to set himself more that I know one day he will achieve (although I may be a little bit biased).

I hope you love this book as much as I do and, perhaps, you will join us on the podcast too.

~ Charlotte J Daems

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# Prologue

I'm not particularly kind.

I'm probably no kinder than you and certainly no kinder than the kindest person you know. However, in the last few years I've tried to be a little better; a tiny bit more understanding, a little bit more compassionate.

I want to be kinder.

This book is the story of what I've learned about kindness. I've done this by listening, by sharing the stories of people doing amazing things around the world on our podcast.

Oh, I haven't mentioned the podcast yet have I? I host *The Kindness Project* podcast with my daughter, Charlotte. It's close to both our hearts and has become an important part of our week.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's go back a bit; it's 1985 in a cold infants' school hall in East London. This is when I truly appreciated how important kindness was.

This school hall, like so many built in the late 19th century, was in a particular style - high ceilinged and brown bricked with natural light streaming through the windows.

The teachers and the pupils on the other hand were straight out of the eighties. They sported a lot of obscenely-patterned jumpers, a smattering of shell suits and a collection of massive hairstyles.

It was fun looking back at the old school photos, remembering the old teachers and grimacing at what I wore. Then I noticed in one of the photos a teacher was standing

there, as proud as punch, who looks exactly like Stan Lee.

I don't remember him. It did make me wonder if Spiderman's creator was looking for inspiration for his next super-villain and decided to do a couple of terms as a teacher at an East London Comp.

There was no school uniform at the time, kids wore what they wanted. This meant the attire was a combination of casual sportswear, denims and a decent amount of wool. Looking back at the photos it seems that the more flammable the outfit the more popular it seemed to be.

### **Tuesday. 8:50am. School Assembly time.**

As was typical at the start of an assembly there was a cacophony of noise as kids found their place in the hall. There was always a bunch of boys digging each other in the ribs. There was always the teacher who felt that yelling at the kids in their class would get them to settle down faster. There was always a kid running late and, in a rush to get to his place, stepped on the hands of at least half of the class.

The sounds faded and, apart from the occasional cough, the room was so silent you could hear a pin drop.

At the exact moment the headteacher stood, a loud noise echoed through the hall.

The offending noise making object wasn't a pin. It was Trevor, who had decided it was an appropriate time to throw his pencil case up against the wall. A giggle reverberated across the room and Trevor smiled broadly. Mrs Tritton, the headteacher, did the look. A look I'm pretty sure all teachers must learn at teacher training. That particular look on this particular day was laser-focused on Trevor and had the desired impact. The giggles subsided and Trevor's cheeky grim turned to stone.

It was a standard assembly in a lot of ways. There were the songs you heard in primary schools across England at the time. ‘If I had a Hammer’, ‘Let it be’ and a song called ‘If I needed a neighbour’. This particular ditty had the line, “I was cold. I was naked,” which, in a room full of primary school children, always generated a laugh.

There were a few announcements then, about three-quarters of the way through, it happened.

A teacher, whose name I fail to remember (although I do remember it wasn’t Stan Lee), stood up at the front of the room.

“We’ve got a special announcement today. It’s incredibly rare we do this but we’d like to present a very special child with a gift. Every break time this young boy sits quietly on a bench reading his book. However if he sees someone who needs help, or needs some support, he actively goes to help that person.”

A quick cough and then she continued, “We’ve never done this before, but we’ve got something special for this particular pupil - a special award for kindness.”

At this point I’m searching the children. Wondering who this amazingly kind superchild could be. Was it John? Or Terry? It definitely wasn’t Trevor!

“So, can Chris Daems please come to the front?”

I remember the shock. Then the surprise. Not only that ‘it was me’, but also the fact that my face had very promptly turned from cream to crimson.

All eyes were on me as I wandered to the front and stood next to the teacher facing the entire school.

“We’re got a special prize for you Chris just to say thank you.”

I wondered in that second what it might be. Would it be a transformer, or an etch a sketch. It's probably going to be something more educational like a speak or spell.

"We're giving you -"

It might even be a Tomy-Tronic, or a game for my Commodore 64, or a bike!

"- a plate."

The plate in question was passed from one teacher to another. Then to me. I tried to look impressed. Don't get me wrong it was a lovely piece of crockery. Blue and white. A garden with two birds. Willows. Chinese in style. Just not something you want when you're eight years old or, come to think of it, forty-three.

I took my plate, thanked the teachers and sat down, embarrassed, but also a little bit proud.

I remember walking home wondering what would happen when I told my mum. I soon realised, as I turned the corner and could see our house, she already knew. I remember her waiting outside. I remember the smile on her face. I remember a hug. But most of all I remember her words...

**"I'm so proud of you. Don't stop being you. Don't stop being kind."**

I'd never felt better.

Thirty two odd years later I'm sitting in my mums flat. A few weeks before she'd got the news. It was lung cancer and it was terminal. I'm not sure at that point I'd come to terms with the news, but my mum was being practical.

She wanted to organise her funeral and knew the songs she wanted played and how she wanted to speak. She also had an idea of where she wanted her possessions to go.



She kept all her keepsakes in a wooden cabinet in the middle of her front room. This cabinet she told me contained good memories. Times we'd made her proud, school reports, little mementos that produced good memories. And hundreds of photos.

We were looking at an old photo. Mum looked happy and youthful with a broad smile across her face. Me, my brother Russ and my sister Kay all looked awkward in a outfits we'd clearly been forced to wear.

She smiled.

"That reminds me," she said as she headed to her keepsakes cabinet, "I've kept something for you, boy!"

After a couple of minutes of rummaging my Mum had found what she'd been looking for.

Blue and white. A garden with two birds. Willows. Chinese in style.

"Do you remember this?" she said smiling.

I smiled, but had tears in my eyes. "Yep."

"Do you want it back?"

"I do."

A few weeks later. My 16 year old daughter Charlotte and I are sitting on a bullet train bound for Tokyo.

We'd been planning the trip for a year and wondered whether we should cancel because my mum was so ill. My mum insisted we didn't.

### **That's when the call came.**

My brother Russell with two simple words.

"She's gone."

I immediately looked at Charlotte and she knew - and there we were. An English dad and his teenage daughter, in floods of tears on a Japanese bullet train. Surrounded by Japanese salarymen who were looking rather confused and embarrassed.

After a few minutes of tears I was feeling a little calmer. Then, as I was looking out over the Japanese countryside, I found myself contemplating one memory.

**That plate. The plate she'd kept safe for decades.**

and then...

My Mum waiting at the end of our road for me to come home on that particular day. Her words that I'd forgotten, then remembered, but now would stay with me forever...

**"I'm so proud of you. Don't stop being you. Don't stop being kind."**

## Introduction

The idea for *The Kindness Project* started in earnest in the Spring of 2016. Three decades after I'd received my blue plate. Three years before my mum would lose her life.

Looking back I wish I'd known we had so little time left. Three more years to spend some proper time with my mum. Three more years for my daughters to create memories with their nan. Three more years to drink my mum's awful cups of tea and listen to the stories we never knew were true or half made up.

Usually I'm not a fan of looking back, preferring instead to focus on what's to come. But every now and again I do wonder what I'd change if time was rewound and I had those three years again.

On this particular evening, the sky was dark and the bright spring sun had set a few hours ago on a balmy Saturday in London. I was hungry, tired and more than a little grumpy. Actually, a little grumpy is an understatement. I was a combination of Oscar the Grouch, the Grinch with a little bit of Gordon Ramsay's anger thrown in.

Walking, headphones on, I reached the road which I knew led to the entrance to a hospital. That's when the man approached me.

It was difficult to determine the age of the man - he could have been anything from fifty to seventy. It was dark and his head was down. One thing for sure, he wasn't in great shape. He was walking with a limp, his hair was unkempt and dirty, his clothes ill fitting.

He slowly looked up and managed a half smile. Despite not being in the best mood I managed to smile back expecting nothing more. A smile between strangers forgotten as soon as it happened. But then something interesting happened.

The man lifted his head, looked me in the eye and started to speak.

“Excuse me pal. Can you help me out?” said the man, his eyes looking more melancholic than tired.

“I’ll try,” I said, not entirely meaning it.

“You see I’m just out of the hospital,” said the man. “I’ve got nowhere to sleep tonight and I’m heading off to find somewhere to lay my head down. I usually sleep in the graveyard or on a bench. You couldn’t do a fella a favour and help me out with a couple of quid.”

My immediate reaction was typical. It was one I’d repeated hundreds if not thousands of times on the streets of London.

“Sorry mate, I can’t help you,” I said, “I haven’t got any change.” It was more of a reflex - a homeless man asks for money and this was my practised response.

In fact, I didn’t have any change - I didn’t have any cash at all. I did however have my bank card. A bank card which could have purchased a sandwich or a coffee from the Tesco I knew was two minutes’ walk away.

But I didn’t. The reflex response had already kicked in, I’d already said I couldn’t help despite knowing I could have done SOMETHING. I’d lied.

I continued to walk down the road past the man. Then they both hit me. A simultaneous thought and a feeling.

The thought: “You know you could, and should, go back

and see if you can help.”

The feeling: Guilt.

I stopped. Here this guy was. He clearly needed some help and I was in a position where I could deliver that help. What kind of fella would I be if I didn't even offer?

I turned around and realised that the man had continued walking after I'd rejected his request to help. I ran after him and as I approached he was picking up a cigarette butt off the floor.

“Excuse me, mate,” I said.

The man jumped back startled.

“Sorry,” I said, “I didn't mean to frighten you. I know I told you that I didn't have any change to give you. That was true. What I do have is my debit card - and if you wanted a coffee, coke or sandwich there's a Tesco two minutes up the road. I'd be happy to help.”

The older man stood up a little straighter and smiled, his eyes still apologetic, “Can I have a beer instead?”

I was taken aback. I'd offered hopefully, but he'd said something I wasn't prepared to help with. Looking back I should have said 'no' and repeated my offer of a drink and a bite to eat.

I'm not proud of what I did next. I hope with hindsight if this ever happens again I'd try to do things differently. This time I took the easy route.

**I mumbled 'sorry' under my breath and walked away, leaving this poor guy more confused than before.**

To my shame I didn't look back. I walked away from this guy needing help for the second time that day.

Ten minutes later this particular encounter with this man started to bother me. I usually find walking quite a cathartic experience. One where time floats away as I simple focus on one step in front of the other. This time I had questions on my mind which wouldn't go away.

Why didn't I buy him a beer and a sandwich? What made you instinctively turn away again when he asked for alcohol? What's going to happen to him now? Why doesn't the hospital continue to look after him? Should have I taken the man back to this hospital to see if they could have helped? Could I have taken him to a shelter?

For a few weeks I couldn't get this short encounter with this man out of my head. It bugged me that despite my hunger, tiredness and mood I could have helped.

I spoke to my wife Cassie, the kids, friends and my dad about my meeting with this guy. A meeting that lasted minutes, but had continued to gnaw away at my psyche.

All the time, all the questions I asked myself led to one underlying question. One as much as wanted to I couldn't avoid -

“Why didn't you do more?”

Everyone I spoke to reassured me. They told me not to worry. They told me, despite knowing this not to be true, that I'd done all I could to help.

Then I found that I was asking myself some different questions.

Next time I see someone living on the street how am I going to react? What do I need to do to understand how I can help more? What do I know - REALLY know - about being a kind person? What can I do to become more kind?

You see I wanted to be better. I wanted to be thoughtful,

considerate, loving, generous and kind. I felt I wasn't doing enough. I also believed, and continue to believe, that most people are decent.

My acts of kindness were more likely to be accidental than intentional. I was a bit of a kindness Frank Spencer. Although the cat has never done a whoopsie in my beret. Probably because I don't own a cat - or a beret.

So, I wanted to be a little kinder - only a little. My aspirations were pretty modest; I wasn't aiming to be a kindness Superman or Spiderman. I was just trying to be a bit more of a modest kindness hero. Like Bananaman.

The catalyst to be kinder may have been sparked by that random encounter on an East London street. I suspect however the fuel to continue to be kinder came from somewhere deeper. The relationship with my two daughters.

For me being a dad is one of my primary drivers, but I've got to admit that it's the 'job' I'm most conflicted about.

On the plus side it's the thing in life which I love the most. The pride you feel when one of your kids does something special can't be beaten.

I love it when I hear my girls laugh, or do something that makes me proud, or achieve something that means so much to them. I also love it when they make me laugh, or make me think or challenge me to see life from their point of view.

But there is a flip side...

As parents you have this responsibility - the burden, amazing as it is, of guiding a young life. I became a father in my mid-twenties and was given this awesome responsibility.

You're responsible for guiding. You're responsible for nurturing. You're responsible for supporting this small

human through their early years. All with no guide book. All while you're still trying to work out what good parenting actually looks like.

So, there's no parenting rule book. No instructions to this young human apart from lots of well-intentioned advice. No warning on the economic impact of having kids (why didn't someone warn me about THAT!). No choice but to try a lot, fail a bit and scramble towards the goal of having raised a functional human being or two.

We've got two girls and this comes with challenges. If you've got three kids or more you're clearly a glutton for punishment...

**...and with all that said, it's still the best job in the world.**

There's no denying parenting is challenging and draining. There's pressure to want to do your best and an unescapable reality that often your best isn't good enough. There's glimmers of hope that you're raising decent human beings. The challenge is this comes with the fear you might not be.

Despite all this it's still worth it. Being a parent can be amazing. Especially when you find out your child is funny, likeable, hard-working and kind.

The biggest motivator in my life are my daughters. You see I wanted to be a role model to my girls. To be someone who acted in a way they could be proud of. A good man. A kind man. Someone who succeeded, whatever that means, and did it in the right way.

The challenge I faced was that 2016 didn't feel like a year for kindness. Trying to be kind in 2016 felt like I was swimming against a cultural tide. At that time the world felt, to me anyway, a little crueller than ever before. Part of it



was what was happening in the UK politically.

In the middle of the year in the UK the vote to leave the European Union was at the forefront of people's minds. Everyone had their own opinions, but an interesting thing happened.

**The debate became polarised and, for many, it got much more personal, particularly online.**

It seemed that you either sat in one camp or the other. Each side becoming more convinced they were right. You were either a 'Remainer' or a 'Brexititeer'.

As the debate roared on each side became more entrenched. Direct insults were thrown around like confetti. The debate became less respectful, less nuanced - definitely less kind.

On the other side of the pond another political leader had emerged who broke all the rules. A man famous for being famous and who used a clear skill for showmanship to great effect.

Donald Trump was direct and bombastic. His approach clearly popular with those who felt ignored by the mainstream. He talked about being different to career politicians who has spent too much time in 'the swamp'. He sold himself on his business experience.

During 2015 and 2016 Donald Trump's political power went from strength to strength. Through all the lies, scandals and controversy, more and more American citizens rallied behind his cause.

What bothered me the most about Donald Trump was the way he treated people. He chose to divide instead of unite. He insulted, he bullied, he took aim at the individual - not their ideas. It seems he would do, or say, anything to win. He'd never admit his mistakes.

As Trump grew more and more popular there were many who looked on in disbelief, including me. I wondered whether my view that the world was mostly full of decent people was naive.

I wondered whether the world had become less kind - and I was considering what to do about it in my own little way.

I decided to start on my own doorstep. How could I be a little kinder to myself? Then a little kinder to my community? Then a little kinder by fundraising for a couple of local charities?

As the autumn nights drew in I found myself losing motivation and inspiration. I've got a tendency in the autumn and winter months to start hibernate, I get a bit more insular. Like a dormouse, if a dormouse lived in Essex and called himself Chris.

So I needed to take more action.

It's important to be clear. There are plenty of people kinder than me. People who are kind every day as part of their jobs. People who spend their majority of their time helping others.

For me I wanted to understand more about those people. The people who were the kindest among us. The individuals who, in a world which recently seemed less compassionate, had compassion by the bucketload.

I've always found that the easiest way to learn is to ask questions. However phoning someone up to ask them how to be kind felt a little strange. So I needed an excuse to learn more about kindness. A reason for these people to share their stories. A way we could use these stories to benefit them.

Then it hit me - we'd start a podcast. I'd host it with my

elder daughter Charlotte, who at the time was 14 and invite people on to tell their story. They could be from any country, any background, religion, race or creed, but they all had to have one thing in common - they must be doing something good in the world...

Now I appreciate 'good' is in the eye of the beholder. Like so much in our lives it's down to perspective. You might think a foot long subway sandwich is 'good'. I might think an eighty year old woman wing walking is amazing. You might feel better after a particularly satisfying burp.

However the criteria was clear. We'd interview people who did amazing stuff which benefitted others. Which benefitted the world. People who were proactive and active in their acts of kindness.

That 'doing good' might be to educate. It might be to inspire. It might be to support, or teach, or fundraise. Some of our guests have launched mobile apps used by millions. Others have started life changing charities. Others have helped people by building kinder workplaces. All of our guests have been amazing human being in one way or another. All of them have amazing stories to tell and insights to share.

Interviewing these people has changed me. I feel more optimistic about the world. Most inspired. More positive in the belief that most people are generally good.

One side benefit of recording the podcast is that I'm lucky enough to work with one of my favourite people in the world. My daughter Charlotte.

The interviews on our podcast are focused on sharing stories of people doing good. There's also a decent amount of time where Charlotte and I talk about anything and everything. There have been times where we've 'gone deep'.

There have been times where we've made each other laugh until we cry. There's been some strange conversational rabbit holes...

We've chatted about jazz, Muppets and Pompeii. We've discussed brown bread ice cream, earwigs and bus journeys. We've laughed at Knobbly knees. Chortled at the Hamburgular. Chuckled at the fact that I'm the proud owner of a niche Facebook group all about satsumas.

For those who are interested the *Satsuma Appreciation Society* is still live on Facebook. It's got two members. Me and my wife Cassie. Clearly there isn't enough appreciation for satsumas.

I've been close to tears when Charlotte has recited her poetry on the podcast. We've cried with laughter at the names 'Barry' and 'Beryl' at least four times. We've discussed everything from Japan, exams, feminism, omelettes and flirting.

Since late 2016 we've produced a show which has gone out every week without fail and gradually grown in popularity. Although if I'm comparing it with my Satsuma fan club it isn't a particularly high bar.

In the early days we struggled to get guests to come on and talk to us. Now we get emails from people who want to come on and tell us their story and promote their book. We've had tens of thousands of downloads and thousands more every month.

We've been voted one of the happiest podcasts in the world. We've popped up in the Philosophy and Comedy podcast charts. We still love doing it.

I'm still inspired by the stories I hear on the podcast and feel lucky that I get to share these stories. In this book I'll share what I've learned about kindness along the way...

We'll first talk about being kind to yourself and how to put your own 'oxygen mask on first'. Then we'll talk about the small things we can all do to become a little kinder every day.

I'll share what I've learned from my guests about using our time more effectively to help others. I'll then explore how we might choose to be a little more charitable.

At that point we'll investigate how we can choose to use our money for good. I also believe that we can all show we're kinder at work and will explore why I believe kindness is also important in business.

Along the way we'll talk about the science of kindness. How kindness makes us happier. Why we should think about kindness in a practical way and much more.

If I've written this book and if you aren't inspired to take some positive action I haven't done my job. If you read this book and choose not to be a little more kinder it's a wasted opportunity. I'd encourage you to take what you learn from this book and apply it today. And tomorrow. And for as long as you can until being a little bit kinder becomes an integral part of your life.

So, first before we start our journey through kindness together, let me say thank you. I know there's plenty of choices when it comes to how you spend your leisure time so I'm grateful for the fact that chosen this book. I promise you I've worked hard to make sure you'll enjoy it!

So, let's tell some stories and have some laughs. Let's learn about become a little more caring, loving and kind. Let's learn how doing this will improve lives - most of all yours.

**Shall we begin?**



# Chapter 1

## Be kind to yourself

If you've ever been on a flight you know the drill. It's after the bit where the cabin crew shows us how to get out of the plane if we need to. It's straight before we're told where our life jackets are kept. The attendant explains:

**"If cabin pressure drops oxygen masks will drop down from the compartment above your seat. Be sure to put your mask on before helping others."**

Thankfully I've never have had to use an airplane oxygen mask. Although I suppose it's a lot better than having had to use the lifejacket or, even worse, the whistle and torch!

The oxygen mask announcement always makes me think about kindness. Specifically - **how to be kinder to yourselves.**

A few months ago on a typical Sunday morning I was sitting on the sofa reading the paper. Charlotte came into the room tears streaming down her face. As a caring dad I asked her "What's the matter darling?"

At that point she mumbled something, then ran out of the room with tears streaming down her face and crimson cheeks. She stomped upstairs. Then I heard the noise every dad of a teenage daughter across the land must be used to by now - the slamming of a bedroom door.

As I've already said I can't pretend I'm a particularly good dad - although I try my best. When it comes to parenting, despite trying to get a little bit better for years, I'm still a