

**Subject: What Bill Harper Taught Me...**

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**To:** "Campus Wide Announcements" <campusannouncements@sjdccd.cc.ca.us>

Good Afternoon,

I had the great honor of being a part of Bill Harper's Celebration of Life yesterday, and from that I relearned a great many things... even received my most precious Christmas gift... the knowledge that we are all people with a great many blessings and each of us is worth knowing and appreciating.

So, as a way to honor Bill, his wife Geri, and his four children, I would like to share with each of you, my Delta friends and family, how much I appreciate each of you! I realize we are here to do a business, but we are in the business of people. Bill and his family have taught me that nothing should come before knowing, appreciating, listening, and caring for one another as people.

I have rededicated myself to this belief and will continue to treat all of you, as well as our students, and our community with this understanding and truth.

With that said, I wish each of you an amazing holiday season. May we all enjoy our time in a way that means most to us; may we all be surrounded with love, warmth, respect, and care.

I had the privilege of receiving my Masters Degree last Friday, and during the ceremony the President of the University gave a tremendous speech that I would like to share:

*We are just a week away from Christmas, so let me tell you a true story I read last year about this time in the London Tablet by Dominic Milroy. The setting is a cold, grey day in London just before Christmas, on a crowded subway car where everyone is carefully avoiding all eye contact in the spirit of alienation, isolation and solitude that permeates public transportation.*

*At the second stop, the author's eye catches a splash of bright red, which turned out to be a very large balloon in the hands of a small child who was clearly delighted with his trophy. It was not an ordinary balloon but a special Christmas balloon, on a polished wooden stick with a bright gold knob at the top. The mood of the subway car lightened just a bit as the boy entered the packed car with his family.*

*At the next stop, the heavy silence was shattered by the arrival of a fair-haired girl of about seven who was screaming as she clutched her father's jacket. She was a Down's Syndrome child. There was nothing anyone could do to comfort her, and everyone simply tried to pretend that she wasn't there. Everyone, that is, except the boy with the red balloon. The author writes:*

*"First, I noticed him standing on tiptoe, with a look of concern as he tried to identify the source of the crying. Then he disappeared, but the red balloon started making a hesitant journey down the carriage, held aloft on the stick above the heads of the crowd. When we reached the next stop and the doors opened, the little boy appeared next to me and stood in front of the little girl. As even more people struggled into the carriage, he said, in quite a loud and grace voice: 'Hello, this is for you. Happy Christmas. Goodbye.' Then he disappeared into the crowd."*

*The author continues:*

*"The effect was instantaneous, electric and cumulative. Everyone heard the words and turned to look at what was happening. The little girl stopped crying, clutched the balloon and started to show it to her father, to me and to all her neighbors. That was what we had suddenly become: neighbors.*

*... It seemed astonishing at the time, that one small gesture could change the sense of everybody's grim and silent alienation into the sudden warmth of community... I don't know, of course, whether the boy was Christian, Muslim or agnostic, but what was clear was that he had quite simply given away to a complete stranger, what was at the moment his most precious possession.*

*We all had the sense that what had happened was important. How might the world be changed if everyone acted like this?"*

*What has happened here in Saint Ignatius Church is important. Stop and think for a moment how the world might be changed if every college graduate understood that their education was given to them so that their knowledge and skills could be given to others. To paraphrase the great anthropologist, Margaret Mead, never doubt the capability of good, committed persons to change the world; indeed, it's the only way the world changes.*

Equally, stop and think for a moment how the world might be changed if every PERSON understood that they had a gift in this world all unto themselves, a goodness in them that they could share and can give to others... it would change the world. Thank you Bill Harper for reminding me of this truth.

Heather Mompean

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