

5 Seconds or a Lifetime

We don't choose when we are born or where we are born. We don't choose the neighborhood we grow up in or the middle school we attend. However, once these stipulations are chosen for us, it is largely up to us who we connect with. A mixture of chance encounters and force of will, the people we interact with can either be a passing event or the beginning of a long friendship. As we grow older, these webs of people we connect with become more and more intricate.

But even on a larger scale, when we are grown and have a bit more say in our circumstances, we're still only floating around. Billions of people, all with their own complex and sophisticated story, just like you. Their own ambitions, friendships, religious beliefs, anxieties, joys, illnesses, loves, opinions about the latest Fast and Furious movie, the list could literally go on forever. The point is, everyone's web is equally elaborate and ultimately their own. You are merely an extra in everyone else's movie as they are in yours. When you connect with someone, whether by chance or choice, you entangle your webs together. For however brief it may be, you become a part of someone else's life story.

I think it's important to realize the impact we can have, once these connections have been established. What we say or what we do carries much more weight than we think. When you enter someone's web you are given a pretty extraordinary privilege and power. The power of influence. A power which I think many abuse. You could talk someone out of going to college, talk someone into a certain career choice, alter perceptions about religion, save someone's life. This influence is capable of triggering an infinite amount of unique emotions and thoughts. Influence is true power. Even if your interactions are on a much smaller scale and seemingly inconsequential, you will never know just how much you had a hand in something much, much larger.

It's important to remember we have this power to change other people's lives on a fundamental level. Don't say something to someone purely out of spite. Don't physically lash out at someone in anger. Don't shut someone out because it's easier than talking to them. The absence of certain words can be infinitely more powerful than speaking them. It doesn't matter if you meant to hurt them or not. It doesn't matter what your intentions are, the effects can be damaging and permanent. It is completely up to you to preserve these connections with the people that you meet. Words are more than words, actions are more than actions, looks can be more than looks.

Every once in a while, take a step back and think about [all the other webs out there](#). They're intangible, but important to remind yourself of. The world does not revolve around you. The only thing you can do is decide the impact your connections will have and how you wish to preserve them. Will it be 5 seconds or a lifetime? Will you be an extra or a leading role?

Anytime you are feeling wronged by someone or feeling that familiar contempt to those less considerate to you than you are to them. Anytime you turn on the news and watch the highlight reel of horrible people doing horrible things around the world. Anytime someone cuts you off on the freeway and you assume they're rotten to the core. Stop and think. Actually take a moment to remember just how good some people are.

Think about the people closest to you. Think about everyone you love. Everyone you have loved in the past and everyone you may love in the future. You are so fortunate to have these people as part of your web. They don't always do the right thing and make their fair share of mistakes, but they are amazing through and through. Think about the way they treat you. The time they set aside to talk to you and more importantly, listen to you. Whether it's grabbing a beer or falling in love, these connections are what are most important. Nothing else matters.