



Students play an intense game of Spike Ball on the Student Union Lawn on Monday, Sept. 9, 2026. UConn students have been enjoying the end of summer weather all around campus. PHOTO BY MADISON HENDRICKS, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/ THE DAILY CAMPUS

WON'T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

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In 1968, a minister from a small city in Pennsylvania posed a question to the world: “Won’t you be my neighbor?” It was this simple question, posed toward young ears, that carried Mister Rogers for over 30 years on his show. From the first time he put on his shoes to the last time he sang the opening tune, it never changed or faltered. It was just five simple words for the world to answer.

The world needs people like Fred Rogers, and it especially needs his attitude toward children. Mister Rogers and his neighborhood met children on their lev-

el without pandering or dumbing down. The show hit on key points that could happen in a child’s life. For example, in the episode “Death of the Goldfish,” Rogers is able to take the loss of a pet and project that into what a child might go through when dealing with loss. Rogers did not negate a child’s feelings; he always kept in mind that children are people too. Episodes like this one are important because it addresses an issue that many struggle with communicating. Even adults can find loss and grief difficult, so an episode like this can hold value to anyone of any age, not just young ones.

Beyond Rogers’ pioneering work with chil-

dren, his legacy should be one of unity. In this difficult time, we should reflect on the important messages and stories of unity that came from Rogers. He was unafraid to tackle sensitive issues. Rogers shared a pool and towel with an African-American as a protest against segregation. He invited on the actor who played the Wicked Witch in the Wizard of Oz to put a human face behind a character that frightened children. In addition, he aired a five episode series about war and fear, showing his lack of fear about such topics. Now we must finish the work. Rogers showed us the first half, and now we must go the rest of the way. Instead of disrespect, show compassion. Instead of giving

into fear and falsehoods, attempt to understand and learn. This is how we finish what Mister Rogers started.

To be like Mister Rogers there are actions one must take. No, it’s not wearing cardigans or living in the Land of Make Believe. It is the idea that everyone is your neighbor, no matter their skin color, sexuality, religion, nationality or creed. It is the idea that there are more similarities between us than there are differences. That one person can make ripples, but many can make waves. Even if you say that waves die and people grow up, I pose this to you. Even though Rogers has passed, we still talk about his work. Waves lose their energy, but if

the wind starts up, they regain it. We have to be this wind. It can’t just be one person. It needs to be a neighborhood. We all have the capacity to be like Rogers. It doesn’t take much, but it is worth it.

We can be Mister Rogers’ neighborhood. Not in the sense of living in that model neighborhood with the puppets and trolley, but in the sense of a global neighborhood. And it can start right here in Storrs. It starts with saying hello when you pass someone, holding doors for people behind you, saying thank you to instructors and professors and understanding that we are all human. It does not end in Storrs either; there is nothing

stopping us from taking this neighborhood back to our hometowns. Whether it be greeting the old couple who walks their dog, saying good afternoon to the post worker, thanking a veteran for their service or just being a neighborly neighbor. Though it must start small, it can grow to become a true global neighborhood.

I leave you with this: some of the lyrics to the song that started every episode of Mister Rogers’ neighborhood. I want you to reflect on what this neighborhood is like and how it can become your neighborhood. “Won’t you be my neighbor? Won’t you please? Won’t you please? Please won’t you be my neighbor?”



Fred Roger with Bill Nye the Science Guy. Roger was the host of the preschool television series “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.”
PHOTO COURTESY OF “MISTER ROGERS’ NEIGHBORHOOD” ON FACEBOOK