

## HEART MATTERS

KDAWG Radio Station – Univ. of Redlands

*The heart matters. Change is an inside job, and it begins with the heart. Join Dr. Fran Grace as she explores this inner-outer link through stories, guided meditations, and interviews with people on the front line of hear- based activism. Produced by Shapari Samimi*

**Episode 2 – May 2017 – COMPASSION Class** – Professor Fran Grace interviews 4 seniors who used Mother Teresa’s teachings in their community service.

### Part 1

Fran Grace:

Today we’re going to be talking about Mother Teresa and her expression of compassion in the world that had a profound impact that lives on today. We study Mother Teresa in a course called Compassion here at the University of Redlands. In 2005, we offered the Compassion course for the very first time. Here is the description:

This course explores what it means to live a life of compassion through these lenses: 1) biographical models such as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, The Dalai Lama, Mary Oliver, Viktor Frankl, and Mother Teresa; 2) the compassion teachings of the world’s religions; 3) the psychology of compassion; 4) first-person investigation of compassion practices.

That is, we put into practice the compassion practices – internally within ourselves and also externally in our daily lives.

In 2007, the University of Redlands opened the first contemplative classroom of its kind at any college campus in the country. This kind of approach to education integrates objective, academic learning with introspective, self-inquiry practices that cultivate the inner self of the students. The Compassion course is one of these integrative courses.

What is compassion? When we speak of compassion, we’re talking about two directions – outward and inward. If our compassion is turned inward, we’re looking at ourself. What is the attitude toward ourself? Is it rejecting? Does it call self-harm? To have a compassionate attitude toward ourself would be to look at what causes our inner suffering, and to work to turn away from anything within ourself that causes this suffering—physical habits, mental habits, emotional habits. For example, some of the students notice early on in the first weeks of the semester as they start to observe themselves consciously, that they have physical habits of not getting enough sleep, which makes them feel exhausted and draggy through the day. To have compassion for oneself means to get the rest you need for

your wellbeing. Or they notice that because of peer pressure and wanting to fit in, they'll go out and get blasted at parties night after night, or go to every happy hour in town, some starting on Tuesday night... Wednesday night... Thursday... five nights in a row some of them go to the bar they tell me! Heavy drinking, drugs, sleeping with people they don't really love... all of these ways that people notice that they are working against their own contentment, wellbeing... When you have compassion on yourself, you start to ask yourself, "Why am I degrading myself? Dragging myself down? I'm in college! It's a time to learn, to explore, to be at my full mental, personal, interpersonal, creative level. What can I do to eliminate what makes it hard for me? What is it that creates these obstacles for me? Compassion means we try to reduce the amount of suffering that we put ourselves through. We have to look at the underlying conditions and see if we are willing and able to change those. It takes courage, discipline, and patience.

Compassion outward means we notice the suffering of others and wish to relieve it. True compassion, complete compassion, is that the suffering of others actually *feels as if* it were our *own* suffering. This is the great example of a Mother Teresa or a Dalai Lama. Our heartfelt wish is that the people we encounter would be free of their suffering – physical suffering, mental anguish, existential agony, loneliness, homelessness, poverty, disease, sadness, etc.

Compassion going outward starts with looking at our own inner motivation to reach out because due to our narcissism sometimes when we want to help people we end up harming them. This is the critical place where the Compassion course begins. The students we'll be hearing from today went through several weeks of an inner analysis about their motivation to want to help others, working to be free of attachment, free of pitying, free of self-centeredness. The key thing is that they wanted not to harm in their serving. Activism and service without self-reflection and wisdom can harm rather than help.

For example, if we look at the tendency to rip away the protective casing away from the chrysalis before it fully forms – we think we're helping a growth process by taking away an obstacle. The being appears trapped. But by cutting through the casing, we're actually killing the being that will become one day a butterfly. So do we have the patience to wait and watch in a situation? And to stop ourselves, to pause our activism, to pause our service and ask ourselves, Why am I reaching out? Am I seeking any personal gain out of this, or am I truly selfless? Am I really seeing it the right way? Is my view of the situation muddy or clear? It's no good to pour muddy water into muddy water. In true compassion, our motivation and view are clear. We ask, How can I be most *truly* helpful to relieve the suffering of this being, to empower the life force of this being?

Mother Teresa is a great exemplar of true compassion. For her, there was no separation between herself and those she served. Someone asked her one time, "How do you love so many people day in and day out?" She replied, "I only ever have loved *one* – the same Jesus in all." She said, "I believe in person-to-person contact because in every person is that Christ for me. I am meeting only one person in the world at any given moment." And each person, she said, "is created to love and to be loved."

So you see that in her approach is the inherent dignity of every being. That each person has the presence of goodness and even perfection in them. She didn't seek to rip that away, she didn't rip people out of themselves, not even their conditions. She went *alongside of* and *cared for and loved*. She didn't value quantity. She said, "Don't look for numbers. Every small act of love for the unwanted is important. Begin in a small way. Do small things with great love. It's not how much we do but rather how much love we put into it."

Sometimes, she said, we have so much love in us, but "we're too shy to express it." We hold back or we don't believe in the power of Love or that it would have any effect. We think we have to do some great big huge world-changing, global alliance alternation to the planet that will last forever! But really if we start with one person, one at a time.... And we can begin with that smile. "A smile is the beginning of love," she said. The biggest disease today, she said, is not leprosy or TB but "the feeling of being unwanted. Uncared for. Deserted by everybody." "If we have no peace," she said, "it's because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Many students have graduated from the Compassion course over the years and they look to Mother Teresa as a person that really instructed them in how to be a human being, how to bring help and not harm, true compassion and not pity.

Liz Ricks-Ahearne graduated in 2009. Recently she wrote me from Berlin where she was doing social work with Syrian refugee children. She said,

I continue to always reflect on what it means to lead a life of service and how to do it. In Compassion, we worked with the idea of Mother Teresa to "do small things with great love," and engage in service not from a perspective of pity, but rather, from the knowledge that the suffering of one being is the suffering of all beings. No one is separate from me. I still find that challenging to truly put into practice, but I also find it incredibly liberating, as it frees me from my ego attachment to "being right," or thinking I have to have all of the answers to someone else's situation or to world problems.

Very few students in the class are Catholic. Mother Teresa was a Catholic nun, recently canonized in Rome as a saint, but the students find a real help from her simple teaching "Do small things with great love."

Mother Teresa's impact on students is *surprising!* When they come into class and see the 7 books we're going to read, they often roll their eyes when they see the book of a Catholic saint. But the impact by semester's end is such that they say that out of all the people we studied, her teaching is going to stay with me.

## **Part 2**

11: 15

Fran Grace: We're talking with several students today from the Compassion class that just ended. The first person that we are going to hear from is Sydney Bennett. Hi Sydney, welcome!

Sydney Bennett: Hi, how are you today?

FG: It's great to have you here. Where did you do your community service?

SB: Youth Hope Foundation.

FG: What is that?

SB: It is a foundation that serves underprivileged youth—homeless, runaway youth that are at risk for economic struggles and educational.

FG: How did you learn about Youth Hope? What was your first encounter?

SB: My first encounter was through a club that I am the founder and president of, Active Minds. It is a suicide awareness and mental health club that we have here at the university and I reached out to help because one of their youths had committed suicide last April.

FG: I want to backtrack a little bit... why did you found Active Minds?

SB: A lot of personal experience. Struggles with mental health have really impacted me and family and friends, and I just found it a very important cause to support and reduce the stigma of mental health and start a conversation on campus about it.

FG: Have you been suicidal?

SB: I have not myself been suicidal but I have been in relationships with people who have been suicidal. I went to a high school where three of my fellow classmates had committed suicide and it deeply impacted the whole school and myself. I also come from parents who are heavily involved in psychology; my dad is a psychiatrist and he deals with a lot of serious mental health cases on a daily basis.

FG: Would you say that loneliness is a factor in people contemplating suicide?

SB: Absolutely. Loneliness is one of the largest risk factors for someone who is suicidal. They feel like no one is going to miss them and there is no point in going on because they are not wanted.

FG: Mother Teresa taught that the greatest disease is the disease of loneliness and feeling unwanted. So, in a way, her teaching really speaks to us decades later in your work with Youth Hope.

SB: One of the biggest things that I heard from homeless youth is they also feel like they're a waste of space and they're unwanted and it really ties into mental illness.

FG: What did you do with them at Youth Hope?

SB: I did many things. Sometimes I was in the back office, inputting data and attendance of the youths. I was working hand-in-hand with them serving meals, cleaning up after them, and sometimes just relaxing with them and having conversations. Allowing them to connect to someone who is closer to their age than the usual volunteer. And it really impacted me, I feel, just as much as it impacted them.

FG: How did they impact you?

SB: Every time I walked in there, I was greeted with a smile no matter what they were going through. I have never encountered the type of struggle that they encounter on a daily basis. And yet they appreciated me. It was very heartwarming.

FG: I'm sure they felt your attention and your care for them.

SB: I always tried to smile, as Mother Teresa taught. I'd always have a smile on my face and always love unconditionally no matter what.

FG: You were in the Compassion class for 4 or 5 months—and you're a psychology major, right?

SB: Yes.

FG: And you had been involved in the mental health environments and even started a club! Therefore, for a long time, you've had an awareness and consciousness of mental health and how to be with people who were suffering. But was there anything in particular from the Compassion class that trained you, that brought you a way of looking at suffering that is different, that changed the way you were with people who needed support?

SB: I would definitely say that the biggest skill that I was taught in the Compassion class was the idea of the *tonglen* meditation. To breathe in other peoples' suffering, pain, hatred, and then to breathe out hope and positiveness. For me, having different experiences with people misunderstanding or disliking me for something that I couldn't change. It really helped me get over those experiences by breathing out hope and breathing into their hatred and trying to change my attitude within myself because I can't change them.

FG: Yes, this was an episode of hate that you encountered. You learned the *tonglen* meditation from the Dalai Lama, as it is a Tibetan Buddhist practice. It's done even for one's enemy, or someone that we're having difficulty with. We can still somehow feel the common human bond that we're all suffering. We don't want the other person to suffer.

SB: Exactly.

FG: What of Mother Teresa's teaching were you aware of when you were going to Youth Hope?

SB: I was really aware of "doing small things with great love." I think that's the biggest thing besides smiling and being unconditional, and showing love to the youths that way. Because a lot of the times I wasn't able to directly serve the youth like I thought I would be or wanted to, but by doing the smaller things, like the office work, I was able to allow other people to have undivided contact with the youths.

FG: So even doing filing or, in other cases, students washed blankets that the kitties at an animal shelter had thrown up on... not being with the kitty or the youth person hands-on,

directly having a connection. But, it's doing the small things that matter also. What difference does it make that you did those things with love?

SB: I think it was just a personal change and instead of being frustrated—"Agh! I really wish I was out there, helping them and having conversations!"—I was at peace with the work that I was doing. And I was grateful to provide someone else with the opportunity to then provide the youth with what they needed. At the end of the day, that's all support for the youth.

FG: At the end of the day it was just as important. Because without those "small things," the organization would not have been able to be there. You were an integral part.

SB: Yes and Youth Hope is an amazing foundation. It only has 3 employees and the rest is volunteer-based and it's a nonprofit so all of the funding is through government grants which isn't very much and then also donations. So, it's a lot of other people doing small things so that a huge purpose can come together and be successful.

FG: One of the things that Mother Teresa dealt with a lot was that people would criticize her: "Mother Teresa you're not out there really changing the systemic oppression and changing policy," and she would say: "I'm not called to that. If you're called to do that part, please do. And I'm called to do my part. You do your part, I do my part, and *together* we do something beautiful for God." Is there anything from the Compassion course that will make you a better doctor or physician's assistant?

SB: Absolutely! Bedside manner is the most important thing and making sure the patient isn't just taken care of physically, but all of their questions are answered, they feel comfortable with you. A lot of times I'm going to have peoples' lives in my hands, or their children, their baby that was just born and they need to be able to trust me. If I can't connect with them and show them compassion for their pain, then I feel like I have failed my job—even if they leave the hospital stitched up and completely "fine."

FG: Was there something in the pod experience when you were with two other students in the class, you were assigned to two students you did not know and the three of you had a really pretty deep experience of listening? How did that impact you?

SB: I've always wanted to help and give advice and I think the biggest thing I learned and will take away from the pod experience is that giving my advice isn't always the best thing to do!! Better just to let someone truly know that you're there with open ears and listening. There's a peace that you feel and you're able to get everything out without being interrupted. I think that's how true healing starts.

FG: Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience in the class or community service? How's it going here at the very end of your college career?

SB: I transferred from 3 different schools to finally find my college home and I am so thankful that I was able to be a part of this campus. It's so welcoming and loving, and this class has been the best experience out of all of that. It has taught me a lot of lessons and skills that I will forever tap into in multiple situations that I'm going to encounter every day, and hopefully pass onto other people, other students.

FG: Well, Sydney Bennett, thank you very much for being here. I was grateful to have you in class for several months and I appreciate and respect the bravery it takes to do all the work you did inside yourself and to offer what you knew to others because you lived it. We can only give to others what we ourselves have come to know within ourselves. Thank you so much, Sydney.

SB: Thank you so much for having me.

### **Part 3:**

FG: Hi! Sydney Finkbohner! Thanks for coming in today. You've just finished your semester of Compassion class.

Sydney Finkbohner: Yes, I have!

FG: And it's the last semester of your college career—you're about to graduate. What's your major?

SF: I'm a chemistry major with a religious studies minor.

FG: Fascinating mix.

SF: It is...I love it!

FG: So...the Compassion class, has it had an impact on you?

SF: It has! It's been an experience to really see myself grow as a person through compassion and to really grow into this being where I can see myself in a mirror and be happy, be happy with who I am and be happy with the life I live. I couldn't do that before. I think it's really inspiring to have a class to be able to do that for you.

FG: 21 years of being unhappy with yourself, so thankfully you got to get to a place where you're happy with yourself before getting out into the world, huh? Was there a certain turning point?

SF: I think the turning point for me during this class was probably the midterm exam that we had to do where we had to really step into our inner enemy and face it and work on little ways to get passed that. I think that was my big turning point, and learning how to open doors that I needed to.

FG: Did the compassion course cause you to take a pause and breathe and see life from a new vantage point?

SF: Definitely. I never wanted to miss Compassion class. It was one class that I always wanted to be at. If I ever had to miss it was because I was dying of a sickness or couldn't function! I think I emailed you about a migraine one day but I always made an effort to come to Compassion even if I felt tired, or "I don't want to" or "Oh I could miss this class session..." I thought about it and decided, "This is the one class where I sit and I relax and I get to just breathe and enjoy learning, and I'm not thinking about how a (math) problem is solved or how much work I have to do, you know? The workload was not an issue because it was such a pleasure to do. As chemistry major, I never thought that this would be a class that I would take. I kind of just fell into this class, really, but I'm so glad that I did fall into it. It has really inspired me to be such a better person. Not only to myself but to other people.

FG: You had an unusual community service experience—working with hospice. How was that?

SF: It was very eye-opening. It has been really interesting to see how the elderly live and how they're treated, and how much they do just need someone to be there and hold their hand for even 10 minutes. If you could do that for 10 minutes per day—and I wish I could've gone every day—it brings such a smile to their face and such a brightness to their heart. The people in the hospice program are dying and I never really thought about what I would be like with people who were going to die so soon. There was a lady who I sat with, and she died after one visit. And that was so crazy for me to think that I just met her and I just started to have this connection with her and she's now gone. And then my second lady also died. Her younger sister had actually just passed away a couple of weeks before her and she was in so much pain because of that. It just broke your heart. She didn't really talk very much but I just liked being there, rubbing her back, holding her hand. We often went during lunchtime, so I'd get to feed her when she needed it because she wasn't in the spot to feed herself. So it was touching and interesting to see that really all these people need in their time is to be loved, and to be cared for in a way that the nurses really don't do in the same sense. They're not all doing it because they *feel* for these elderly people, they're doing it because it's a job. That kind of broke my heart. All of these people got left by their loved ones in a way—their loved ones either couldn't take care of them, or just didn't want to and they put them in this home where, often times, not a lot of people would visit them that could see. They *need* that. It was very touching and very eye-opening. And it really taught me what it meant to give to other wholeheartedly and selflessly.

FG: Is there anything in particular from our study on Mother Teresa that helped you be in that challenging environment? You were going into a place you hadn't been before, with people who were total strangers to you, and they were *dying*. What a challenge!

SF: Through the Mother Teresa reading I really resonated with the teaching to always be smiling. Because the people have their own pain that they're going through, and when you're sad or upset you really need to not show it to them, because they have enough going on in their lives. I mean, for goodness sakes, they're dying! What could be worse than that? But also, I really resonated with her compassionate touching. In class, we looked at this picture where Mother Teresa was touching someone's face and how much that meant to that person. You could feel Mother Teresa's energy running through that person. So when I got there I tried—I mean obviously I wasn't grabbing their faces, that would be a little weird—but I really tried when I was holding their hands or rubbing their back to just put all my positive energy into them and let them know that I was there and I cared and that I do want to be here with you and that you are loved, and you have someone who cares about you and loves you. My favorite patient, her name is Louise, she has Alzheimer's so she never remembers when I'm there but every time I visited her in her room (and she's usually watching some sort of children's show that they put on for her), she would just get this big smile on her face like she is so happy, and so joyous to be there and have people be

there. It's so wonderful. You can really tell when I'm holding her hand, she squeezes on tight and doesn't want me to let go and doesn't want me to leave. Mother Teresa always comes to mind in that moment. Louise really just *needs* someone there to love her and care for her and give wholeheartedly to her and I'm that person at that moment and I think that's really special.

FG: Yes it was for a moment. You are now graduating, you're moving on with your life, but you had these profound moments with other human beings that, I'm sure, helped them feel less lonely or to have companionship at a time when they may have most needed it, we don't know. And it sounds like the encounters had an impact on you?

SF: They really did. It's hard to explain. I just feel...it's kind of like going to class, I think...sometimes I don't want to go to class. I don't want to get up at 9:30 in the morning and go to class. But when I'm there, I'm already doing it. With going to the hospice center, sometimes it's hard to want to go because it is very sad to see the environment that they live in, not that it's bad. It's a great environment—it's a 5-star assisted living facility. It's just... they're there alone. But when you get there you feel this energy that makes you feel like you are needed and you no longer feel lonely because you know that you're with them and they're with you. It's what I needed every Friday when we went. It's what I needed at the end of the week. When you're there you just feel so amazing to be with these people who have lived these amazing lives. You don't know their lives but you can sense it. And you can sense that they've had these amazing adventures and have done amazing things. Like Louise used to be a famous painter. She has all these beautiful paintings in her room and she has no idea that she ever did that! But it's so cool to get to know them on a level that isn't necessarily a corresponding but just to kind of look around be like "this is your life in objects! This is how I'm getting to know you, and I'm so grateful that I am getting to know you in that way".

FG: It's like getting to know another person not based on externals. Like usually in our life we ask "What do you do for a living?" or "What's your major?" or "Where do you live?" All these externals. But at the point of death all that is gone and you have to be with those people with the inner being and show that part of yourself too because they just felt your hand and they felt your love.

SF: Yes, it's beautiful. It has made me really look at life and look at death differently.

FG: What about the death meditation we did in class? Did that help you be present in there?

SF: It did. It really did. I think that being there not necessarily at the time of their death but close to their death, doing the death meditation has opened up that that was their time and they needed to go and I needed to let it go. I was upset and sad that they left and that they were gone, but they had lived their lives and they had done what they needed to do. That was their time.

FG: So death is a letting go. When you did the death meditation you went through a process internally of letting go. Fully seeing your life from the standpoint of when you're at the end of it. What really mattered to you at the very end?

SF: That I was happy and that I finally found the joy in my life that I had been searching for all these years, and that I accomplished the things that I wanted to. Just knowing that even if not everything was accomplished, what I did was meant to be and what I didn't wasn't meant to be. That I lived a fulfilled life.

FG: That's beautiful. Sydney, thank you so much for being here.

SF: Thank you, Fran.

#### **Part 4**

FG: Welcome, Katie Bozner. Thanks for coming today.

Katie Bozner: Thank you so much. I'm so excited.

FG: So this is your last semester you're finishing up in college. You're a senior. What's your major?

KB: Psychology with a minor in Biology.

FG: Wonderful! And you've been in the Compassion class, you took it your last semester. What has been the impact of the class?

KB: One of the biggest things that it has taught me is empathy. And I took that out when I went volunteering in my community. I volunteered with the Tim Tebow Foundation, Children's Hospital LA, Miss Amazing Pageant, Veteran's Hospital—I just got the email today that I get to do an event at Paramount Studios next week.

FG: Let me just say that there is an important factor here. You have a special role as a volunteer. You are Miss Los Angeles.

KB: Yes, 2017.

FG: 2017...so that lasts for a year - this title?

KB: Yes.

FG: And how is it being Miss Los Angeles and being a college student? And then doing all of this community service?

KB: Well it's amazing! It's so important to have time management and your priorities. Volunteering is something that is so close to my heart and I really want every single person to experience the love and compassion that I have through volunteering. And in this class everyone the amazing opportunity to pick an organization that is close to their heart. And they can relate to it and find happiness that they never thought they had. So I am so grateful to you to give all the students this amazing experience to get out there and find so many amazing people that they connect with. When you develop love and compassion for others, you see the world in a different light, which is so cool!

FG: I'm struck by your story, Katie, which you shared in class, that you had been in three near-fatal car accidents in such a short amount of time. Hit by semi-trucks. And the feeling was that your life was spared. This close brush to death had a change on you, didn't it?

KB: Definitely. When I was 19, about to be 20 years old, I was a sophomore at the University of Redlands. I was on my way to take my last final for Susan Goldstein's

Personality Theories class, so I was going over in my head what to remember for the test and sort of focused in that moment of getting an A in that class. And a lumber truck lost its load on the freeway, it hit the semi-truck, semi-truck starts rolling, hits my car, my car flies through the air, I wake up in the hospital 5 hours later to a police officer asking me exactly what happened. At that moment, I said, "Oh my gosh! I don't even know what happened!" I was really depressed. And about 6 months later, I got hit by another semi-truck. After that I researched online because I really wanted to go out into my community and help people because I felt that if I could get a sense of other people's story, we could connect and figure out a way to get through these hard times.

FG: So it was hard for you, going through those accidents. Did it make you think about your life in any new way?

KB: Definitely. When I was a lot younger I competed in beauty pageants, and when I was 19 I cared so much about the way I looked, and how other people viewed me as an individual and not so much on the inner beauty. When I was 19, after the accidents, I realized that all of that could change. And it's so important to get out in your community and help other people. I volunteer at Children's Hospital LA and one of the girls I mentioned in class touched my heart forever. Her name is Jojo and she is 8 years old. She has cancer. And she loves princesses. So it was so amazing to be able to go see her before she got her bone marrow transplant and I got to see her the day before and I let her wear my crown and sash. We sang 'Let it Go' from the movie *Frozen*. She is such a fighter and it is so important to give back to people in need and just be there with them in the moment and smile like Mother Teresa taught us in class.

FG: Mother Teresa! So, you are talking about her teachings to smile when other people are down—they don't want our frowns.

KB: Yeah! They just want a smile! To this little girl.... I was a princess to her. I was able to give her love before her surgery. If I could have one wish it would be to cure all sickness in the world. If I had one magical power and could take away the pain. I know when I visit her to have her smile is something that warms my heart and I just love her so much!

FG: And you are taking away the pain that many young girls or boys, young people, have around body image. When you go out to be with young people, you share the struggles that you've had around thinking you have to have the perfect body and it has to look a certain way. Can you talk about the suffering that they have?

KB: Yes. I did the Dove campaign for kids that are in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and going into 8<sup>th</sup> grade. So, it's that middle school, awkward stage in your life. A lot of the young girls, I could not believe, were comparing themselves to the girls in the magazines, to the models, and they were saying horrible, horrible things about their body at the beginning of the intervention. So, it's the Dove Campaign: it promotes inner beauty, helping others to see the gorgeousness in themselves.

FG: Gorgeousness is a great word.

KB: I was able to talk to the young girls and they all looked up to me and they were saying, "I wanna look like you in this picture!" and I told them, "I don't even look like that in that picture, it's photo-shop!" I told them, "Your true beauty comes from being confidently beautiful within." I got a piece of paper, and I gave one to each individual, it had a heart on it, and they all wrote down something they like about every single person in the room. And when they got it back, there were 50 things that other people thought of them and liked about them. And I told them, "Keep that throughout high school. Anytime you're having a bad day look at that paper and look at 50 individuals that like your smile, your attitude, people who like every single thing about you, and you're an amazing person. It's not the way you look, it's the way you make a difference on other people." I told them that. I told them, "Try your best in high school. High school's hard! But, if you have a good support system and friends around you, you can get through anything."

FG: I think you're making a big difference. Where it matters most -- when they are young. You're a beauty queen, you're successful, you're gorgeous, but you're telling them, "Listen, I don't feel that way. I struggle!" You're being vulnerable about it, saying that you're just human too. You think that helps? When people say, "Hey, you know what, I don't have it all together"?

KB: Yeah, I think it's so important to be real with these kids. Not giving them a false reality of "You need to look like this in order to be happy." Because if you interview the happiest people in the world, they don't have possessions, they don't have materialistic items, it's just the relationships. I know if you talk to older people right before they're about to die, one of the biggest regrets that they have is not spending enough time with family and friends. When you leave this world, you're gonna leave behind the Louis Vuitton purse, but you're going to take away all the memories you made. I think it's important to get out into your community. I always encourage everyone to volunteer at an organization that is close to their heart and they can give themselves to and share stories with other people that have experienced as well. Before this, I used to volunteer when I was younger at beach clean-ups, or stuff like that. I never had an impact because I would never litter at the beach or anything. But when I started volunteering with people who have been in car accidents, girls who are younger in middle school who struggle with body image and living up to society's standards, it was different. I think it's so important just to be yourself because there are so many cool things about each and every person and we need to emphasize the inner beauty in others.

FG: I like your advice here—to go where our heart leads us. Mother Teresa would say "You don't need to come here to Calcutta and do the work that I do. Calcutta is everywhere. Even in your own life. Be there for the people who are lonely. Be with *them*." Would you say that you've met people who suffer loneliness?

KB: Definitely, yes. I volunteer at Life Rolls On. I've been doing that for almost 2 years. It's an organization that allows people who have been paralyzed to be able to surf and skate again. So I plan events. On May 6<sup>th</sup> I'm doing a big poker event to raise money.

FG: Poker!

KB: It's at the Johnathan Beach Club on May 6<sup>th</sup>. It's an organization that helps people who are paralyzed be able to surf and skate again. The owner of it was going to be a pro surfer when he was in his 20s. He was going through a wave and hit his back and became instantly paralyzed. So he started Life Rolls On to help other people who are paralyzed be able to surf and skate again. It's really amazing that his story, how he's able to turn a negative into a positive and change so many lives around and he's an amazing.

FG: What else stands out to you from this semester of studying Compassion? We did different things in the class, such as the death meditation, several compassion techniques, like those from Mother Teresa. Anything in particular stand out?

KB: One of the quotes that I say every single day when I wake up is, "Be the change you want to see in the world" by Gandhi. That is so true. You can change one person just by smiling. Someone could be having a hard day, feeling like everyone hates them, or they failed a test, but if you smile and bring happiness to them you just changed the world by changing that one person. You never know when your last day on this earth is, so it's so important to live each day to the fullest. Just be a positive role model in each and every day of your life for other people.

FG: So how do you want the world to change? And how are you *being* that change?

KB: I would want the world to have more empathy toward other people. I realized you never know what someone is going through. The person at Starbucks you think is mean, they could have lost their child. You never know the struggles behind someone's pain. It's so important to love everyone and try to look for the good in people because there are so many good things about other people. If you spend time just making a list of every single thing you like about that person, and ignore the negatives about them, you'll fall in love with that person all over again. You'll gain so many friendships. That's why I always encourage people to volunteer because you'll meet people that have similar interests as you and you can develop more friends. Through Life Rolls on and volunteering with so many other organizations like Miss Amazing, I have hundreds of friends who have the same interests as me that like getting out there and volunteering and if I ever want to get out there and do something I can ask them, "Hey! Let's go to events and volunteer and we'll make more friends." Your life becomes happier and you just become so much more compassionate by loving people.

FG: What about compassion for yourself? Early on in the semester, we talked about compassion also turned inward, and noticing what is in our own minds or our thought patterns and our own emotional, physical habits that cause suffering. Over the last 4 months have you seen anything inside yourself that you've worked to undo?

KB: When I was younger, I used to really struggle with body image and trying to fit the perfect mold. It's not a good idea to fit a mold because you're your own individual. We are all unique. And when I was younger I wanted to be on America's Next Top Model. I wanted to do all these things but I needed to realize that I needed to be my own version, the best

version of myself. And I can't compare myself to others, and that was the biggest thing. But now I am able to go out in my community and be a role model to these young girls. I was able to do the Tim Tebow Organization, which is a Night to Shine Prom. So it gave people an opportunity from ages 14 to 37, I believe, the opportunity to go to prom for the first time. So being Miss Los Angeles County, I got to crown 300 girls at this event. They got to wear my crown and sash and I got to write about it in my Compassion final portfolio—I'm looking at a picture in front of me right now. To see the look on their faces when I got to put the crown and sash on them made it so amazing. I just absolutely was blessed. I got to dance with *all* of the boys and they got to show me their moves. And the girls were princesses for the night. Everyone got to be prom king and queen and it made me feel so so special because in high school I was nominated on the prom court. It got me thinking back on that -- "Wow these kids got to experience that too!" No matter what you think of Tim Tebow as a person, he's getting out there and he's making a change in this world, and doing all these amazing proms all over, for churches, and just helping other people. So I think it's so important like Gandhi says to be the change in the world one step at a time.

FG: Showing empathy and loving people for who they are. Not forcing ourselves or someone else to fit in a box. To let each person uniquely shine and be crowned. That is so beautiful.

KB: I love that.

FG: Katie, thank you for being here.

KB: Thank you! I'm so blessed.

FG: By the way, Katie, where are you going now? You're graduating? What's on the horizon for you?

KB: My father is an optometrist, so I'm going to be attending Western University so I can become an optometrist just like him. And still volunteering.

FG: So you can help people really *see*!

KB: Yes, and I compete for Miss California December 1<sup>st</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> next year.

FG: Alright so you'll be a Dr. Bozner giving people new vision.

KB: Definitely!

FG: Thank you so much!

## **Part 5**

FG: Hi Olivia Tassinari welcome!

Olivia Tassinari: Hello, thank you!

FG: Thanks for coming in today after such a long day. You just defended your honors thesis for your degree in Philosophy.

OT: I did!

FG: So you're a senior, about to graduate, double major in Philosophy, with honors, and Religious Studies. And you were in the Compassion class your last semester. How was that?

OT: It was great. It was great having that course to balance my schedule. And to have a class where I could go and relax and learn at the same time, amongst all the chaos of senior year.

FG: So it was balancing, relaxing... you don't often hear relaxing with reference to a college course. What do you think made it relaxing?

OT: I think it was just that the learning came easy. That doesn't mean that it's easy content but I think part of what made it easy is that the assignments were applied to our lives so we could incorporate it into our every day reflection and contemplation. So it was really easy to incorporate it into my schedule and beneficial to my life at the same time.

FG: Beneficial to your life. So a college course that's beneficial to your life. How did it help you get through your senior year? Any particular practices or ways of being that you learned, skills you learned that helped you as a human being?

OT: A lot! I'm trying to pick one. I think being compassionate with myself was the main lesson that helped me through my senior year because I was taking on a lot. I was expecting a lot from myself but I learned that you need to be compassionate with yourself before you're compassionate with others. Because I was conscious of that and mindful of that, I was able to not take things so seriously and to give myself a break when I needed it and to really take care of myself and that was really important to keep in mind during this time.

FG: You accomplished a lot even as you sought to have balance in your life. So we don't have to stress ourselves out and get the whip out and punish ourselves and push ourselves in order to fulfill something?

OT: But we *think* we do! But I was actually more productive because I was implementing those compassion practices.

FG: Yes, that makes sense. And you did community service. What was that?

OT: I did my community service at Friendly Hospice. I went into a retirement home and our job was to socialize with patients and keep them company.

FG: Whom did you meet?

OT: I was assigned two patients. One was named Missy and one was named Mary-Lou. We're assigned patients who are closer to death than the others, and who don't have a lot of family that come and visit them. They were both in their late 90s and had dementia or Alzheimer's.

FG: Did you feel like you connected with them as human beings even though they didn't have a lot of mental capacity?

OT: Yes, it was really different. I'm used to connecting with people through words and having a conversation, but I couldn't do that with them. So a lot of it was through touch and through eye contact, and just a sharing of energy and being in the same presence at the same time. It was about having that kind of a connection. It was very deep and very true. I feel like it was something that we often don't do, because we feel like we have to fill silence with words. In hospice there were no words but there was still a connection.

FG: So these were total strangers in a place you had never been before, people you may never see again, and yet you felt connected to them. Can you think back to a particular moment when you were with them?

OT: Yeah. A lot of it...the moments that I remember were when we walked in and they usually have their head down because there's nothing exciting going on around them. Sometimes they would be mumbling to themselves and they just looked very... not content. And then when we approached them, we always touched their arm and we said, "Hi how are you? How are you doing?" We asked them questions even though they probably won't answer, but just so that they can hear our voice. Then they would get a light on their face and they looked in your eyes like they're saying something. It's not verbal but you can definitely see that there's a glow about them just because of your presence. So I can imagine them looking into my eyes right now - it's very potent.

FG: Mother Teresa is a person that we studied in the Compassion class. Did her teachings have any particular help for you when you were there with them?

OT: Her works had the greatest influence for me. The first day I went to the retirement home, I met Mary-Lou's daughter. Because of that I was able to get some background about Mary-Lou. Her daughter explained to me that she had met Mother Teresa in the past and she met her in Mexico, and that she really looked up to Mother Teresa and aimed to live her life how Mother Teresa did. And above her bed was a Mother Teresa quote, and it says, "Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier." And, so, I was able to see that quote every time I went and volunteered. I was able to know that this woman had dedicated her life to a life that was like Mother Teresa's, so in a way I was kind of giving that back to her because she had done so much.

FG: And what's your sense of what she gave to you at the end of her life?

OT: Mary-Lou?

FG: Yes.

OT: I think she gave to me the understanding that you can connect deeply with anyone, any stranger. And that you don't need a long past with someone to know who they truly are and to connect to who they truly are.

FG: That's beautiful. At the point of midterm in the Compassion class, you had to identify what the book called an 'inner enemy'—an obstacle between us and others and even between us and ourselves. An obstacle that blocked compassion. What did you uncover?

OT: For my inner enemy, I identified a feeling of needing to feel superior. So a feeling of needing to meet expectations so that I uphold an image in the eyes of others and also expectations that I uphold for myself for various reasons of trying to please others or trying to maintain some type of image that for some reason I think is what people want.

FG: Sort of wanting to be better than, smarter than others? Each person had to draw a picture that personified their narcissistic self-image. In psychological theory when we personify some aspect of ourselves it's done with humor, not taking ourselves so seriously, getting it down on paper so we can visualize it. What was your drawing?

OT: I drew a flower on top of a hill and that flower represented myself because it was by itself and it was elevated by a hill that to me represents everything that I am building myself up to be, that isn't necessarily true. And then on the ground were other flowers and they were all connected. I wasn't connected to them because I was elevating myself as something that I'm not. Because of that, people tend to not truly know who I am, so I'm not connected in that way.

FG: Yeah, so that element of pride and having to feel secure in ourselves because we feel better, that made you feel separated whereas you really wanted to connect.

OT: Yeah, I would live my life to fulfill this image and that's how people would know me. Because of that people wouldn't know who I truly am. So, in a way, although I may *know* a lot of people, it's easy to feel lonely because they don't *truly know* me. Even though on the outside it might look like that.

FG: Are you revealing yourself now more?

OT: Yes. I have definitely been practicing being vulnerable with people that aren't just people who are really close to me and I found it very beneficial. I'm walking down the hill. The flower is walking down the hill.

FG: You're walking down the hill and you're going to be with the other flowers who are all beautiful in their own right. In the picture you drew, they're all dancing and colorful. And Mary-Lou? Was she like one of those colorful flowers? And Missy?

OT: Definitely. Very humble, because all they're doing is sitting there and looking in your eyes. And they're completely vulnerable. They look at you like they have nothing to hide. They are the model of, I guess you could say, my *goal* of being.

FG: So, yes, touch was an important part of the experience with them?

OT: Yeah, I would just put my hands on their arms and rub their back, and hold their hands. And they would hold my hand back and they would clench my hand with their fingers. They didn't have to look at me; they just knew I was there. I think that was very comforting for them. I learned that from observing Mother Teresa's practices that she and her nuns would often touch people who are extremely poor, and people who are suffering and have physical ailments. Just seeing the light in their eyes that comes from simply touching and exchanging that energy is really powerful.

FG: So, Olivia, where do you go next?

OT: In life?

FG: After graduation.

OT: After graduation, I am going to Peru for a 3-week yoga teacher training, and then I am going to Japan to English through the JET program for at least a year.

FG: You're an adventurer!

OT: Yes!

FG: World traveler.

OT: Ready to travel.

FG: Is any teaching of Mother Teresa traveling with you?

OT: Yes, definitely. At first, I didn't know if I wanted to do the JET program because I didn't know if it was meaningful. Being in the Compassion class, I realized that it's up to me to make the experience meaningful and I can bring the practices wherever I go. And no matter the circumstance I can make it an impactful experience for me and those that I'm with.

FG: Thank you so much Olivia.

OT: Thank you!