

“My Interview with Mr. Fred Rogers”

By Father John Catoir, Aug. 1, 2019

Fred Rogers was a good friend for many years. He entertained and educated children for more than a generation, and died on February 27, 2003.

When he came to New York we often had dinner together. It's my privilege to introduce him to you again today. Children still love him and parents trust him.

The theme song of his TV Show, Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood, contained the words, “Won't you be my neighbor?”

When I did my TV show with him I began with this question, “Why did you choose that opening?”

He replied, “When I hear words like those, I think the person I'm speaking them cares about me. And I want them to know that I care about them and all children. I want them to feel that each one of them is special.

JC Your new book was entitled “You are Special.” Tell us a little about it.

FR I've collected lots of quotes over the last forty years, and they all describe how I feel about the person I am with at the moment. It is one of the most glorious things you can do in life, making the person you are with feel special. Evil in the world would want us to feel as awful as we could about who we are. But Jesus wants us to look at ourselves, and our neighbor and see the best. How wonderful it would be if we all became an advocate in life rather than an accuser.

JC How do you select the themes for your show?

FR - Many ideas come from the mail we receive. Who would have thought years ago that we would one day do a whole show on divorce? But children need to know that it is not their fault when their parents separate. Little children tend to think that the world revolves around them. And so consequently anything that happens to them must be because of them; as though the divorce was their fault. They think that it must be “something I did.” If a child spills the milk at breakfast and it leads to loud talking between the parents, the child thinks he or she was at fault for causing the breakup. ..We try to get through to them that divorce is something that only has to do with adults, not children.

