

4th January 2024

Positive

“I wake up every day full of hope, positive that every day is going to be better than yesterday. And I'm looking to infect people with my positivity. I think I can start an epidemic.”

Will Smith, *'My work ethic will make me a legend.*

By Siobhan Synnot, in 'The Daily Record', 2007

Brenda, a blind Diaconate student, was assigned to a parish minister for a training placement. He was apprehensive. How was this woman going to cope with the rigours of ministry and pastoral care? Brenda had a Guide Dog, the wonderful Nevis (or “Ben Nevis” as the kids called him). And Brenda and Nevis soon became a familiar sight in the parish.

Brenda asked to be given some routine pastoral calls to make. “No special treatment,” she insisted. It was only after she’d set off that the minister realised that some of the calls were to a tenement stair with an “entry phone” buzzer system. “How is she going to find the right place?” he wondered anxiously. The following week, Brenda reported that all the calls had been completed. “How did you cope with the buzzers?” the minister asked. “Oh! No problem,” she replied. “I stood in the doorway and waited till someone came past, and said, ‘Excuse me, could you press the buzzer for McCallum, please?’ You see, that comes as naturally to me as it does for you to read the names.” On another occasion, Brenda was to call on a family where there had been a violent death. Aggression, distress, questions, bitterness, were likely to be the order of the day. She reported to her supervisor that the visit had gone well. “How did you get over the initial tensions?” the minister enquired. “No need for *me* to worry,” she responded. “Nevis did *that* bit. It only took a few seconds. They were all over him, and he loved it. From then, half the job was done.”

As I step gently into 2024, I am inspired by this, for to me such a consistently positive attitude is quite remarkable. Of course, Brenda had much to learn. But with such a strong foundation of positive thinking, she was surely going to be an asset to her calling. It’s like the wonderful attitude the actor, Will Smith, has, to “wake up every day full of hope, positive that every day is going to be better than yesterday.”

Let’s hope that in 2024 we can infect people with *our* positivity too, just as Will Smith, and Brenda – and Nevis – were clearly able to do.

A prayer for today

To infect people with my positivity? Now, there’s an epidemic worth starting.