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### Peace Through Bucket Filling

I've spent a lot of time with children over the years, whether it be at camps, in classrooms, or babysitting. Throughout this time, I've been the one leading, helping, and teaching them, but looking back, I would argue that they've taught me more, especially when it comes to life lessons. I've spent a lot of time in my life considering the relationships between love and hate, light and darkness, and peace and violence. I've thought about how these concepts correlate and interact with one another, and I've searched for answers. I never expected to receive such profound answers from children, and most recently, a class of first graders. I'm an Elementary Education major, and last semester I spent time each week working in a first grade classroom. Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology readily applies to my experiences in this class. When I read King's quote on the power of light over darkness, I am reminded of a lesson taught by this school's guidance counselor on "bucket filling."

The lesson goes like this: Picture a bucket in your head. This is your emotional bucket, and every moment of every day your bucket is being fulfilled or depleted. When someone or something makes you feel uplifted, your bucket is added to. On the contrary, when faced with an uncomfortable or bad situation, something from your bucket will be removed. Your bucket also has a lid. This means that you get to decide when you want to open your emotional bucket to the world. When you are experiencing something positive, keep the lid off of your bucket, so that it will begin to fill. When something negative is happening, close the lid to your bucket so that it is secure. She continued to talk about the impact that we have on others; how we are either adding to or taking away from each other's buckets. I was immediately inspired by this idea, what it visually looks like, what it represents, what it can lead to. In the classroom, I could see that the students were also genuinely intrigued by this new idea of "bucket filling."

When the lesson was complete, the guidance counselor departed the classroom, and I sat at a table with a group of students as they returned to their work and regular activities. All at once, a girl's hand came in contact with her pencil cup and the entire thing fell to the floor—crayons, pencils, and glue scattered everywhere. When something like this happens in a classroom of quiet first graders, everything seems to come to a halt. I looked up as this little girl stood there, looking down, defeated. Without hesitation, a boy dropped to the floor, reached down, and began to pick up one item at a time, placing them back into her cup. Her mouth curled up into a smile, and as their tiny hands grabbed the last of the crayons, she looked up at him with eyes wide and said "Thank you, you just filled my bucket." He smiled, a genuine, caring smile,

and she grinned back at him. Their entire demeanors changed for the rest of the day, just from that simple exchange of kindness.

These six year olds understood something that day, something that is easily forgotten: only kindness and love can heal wounds. The exchange of a single act of kindness can alter someone's entire outlook, and it creates a ripple effect. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Let's lift each other up, celebrate one another, and relish in each other's successes instead of their faults. As a future teacher, I want to show my students the impact that they can have on the world. I aim to teach them to have civility, to be leaders of transformation, and to create positive change that will lead to a more peaceful world. Humanity's future of compassion, love, and justice lies in the ways in which we raise our children and in how we treat each other. Let us follow in the kind footsteps that Martin Luther King Jr. has left for us. Let us remember that we are all uniquely individual with different stories to tell. Let us encourage each other to be giving, to love themselves and others, and to see the beauty that small acts of kindness will bring to the world, one bucket filler at a time.