

For Those Who Care

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – June 24, 2012

Much like Mark Twain, reports of the death of friendship in our society are greatly exaggerated. It's fashionable to lament the demise of real relationships and paint the age of social networking as a sad and lonely time. Well, my personal journey these past two weeks, dealing with the death of my father, has taught me many things. And, chief among them is that friendship, caring, and compassion are alive and well in our time.

At his memorial service, I reflected on my father's life and shared my remembrances. Standing in that pulpit, above his casket, I looked out over the sanctuary of the church Mom and Dad attended more than 48 years. Scanning the seated rows, I saw faces of friends they've known over half a century – from business, church, community, college, and even high school. Present also were friends made in more recent years, as well as those there to support me, my sister, my brother, and my aunt.

"To understand the power of friendship," I said. "Consider the word 'old.' There are few less welcome words in our language. We fear growing old, and no one wants to be old. Yet, add the word 'friend' after 'old,' and it changes everything."

It's easy to see human flaws in our parents as evidence of how different we are from them. But, in my father's passing, I became keenly aware of precious qualities I'd lost sight of and undervalued over the years. I was suddenly so grateful for the ways in which he had quietly passed these on to me.

Dad and Mom taught me first and foremost what it means for a couple to love eternally. For almost 54 years, they were as devoted each one to the other as any two people I've ever known. Considering they dated only a few months and I was born nine months and ten days after their wedding, I've always said I knew them almost as long as they knew each other.

They also taught me how to find and to keep great friendships. At Dad's bedside in his final days, at the family visitation, and during the memorial service, my parents were surrounded by wonderful friends. Their caring for my father and mother and the rest of us was so real and immediately felt. And, likewise, I was sustained these past two weeks by the most amazing people who bless my life.

Perhaps in the age of virtual social networks, email, and the like, we need a richer language than to call each connection a "friend." I'll be the first to admit that, among my 300+ Facebook "friends" are people I've never actually met and others I haven't seen in over 30 years. But, I will also tell you some of the most loving, sincere, heartwarming words of support and comfort

came from such people. Caring springs from the most unlikely of places, but the seed is always awareness. Our connections remind us of a world larger than just ourselves; and in that greater awareness lies the birth of caring.

Here's an example... In our slow procession from church to grave site, I drove behind the minister who followed the hearse. Despite our police escort, a car on our left tried to dart through a four-way stop behind the hearse. I doubt this was a mean or hurtful person, but this was someone obviously quite unaware and not at all mindful of what was taking place in these cars filled with strangers passing by.

Later, we passed a line of oncoming vehicles pulled to the side as we passed. From awareness of the suffering of others, these strangers went the extra step to care. As we passed, I waved to salute their kindness. Small acts mean so much, and yet we grossly underestimate our power to give them.

Driving home, on that same road, I was suddenly mindful of each person walking the sidewalks and dirt paths lining the streets. I found myself thinking: wow, she looks tired. I wondered: is he happy or sad? As I gazed purposefully at each one, I cast my silent blessings upon these fellow human beings, wishing them well and hoping somehow the power of my unseen, unheard caring might lift a spirit and make a difference.

I believe it does. Each connection matters. Everyone who called, wrote, visited, or simply thought kindly of me: your worried words were not enough. But your caring made all the difference. Blessings upon you.