

## **Cline: A Difference Maker**

*By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – November 11, 2012*

There's so much to say about the election and the challenges we face as a nation. But, that's going to have to wait another week.

Reality moves at its own pace, in its own time, to its own beat. Life and death don't tend to care a whole lot about how we mere mortals spend our time choosing leaders and plotting our way.

These past seven days, as our eyes and our minds were fixated elsewhere, across this land, lives were begun, altered, and sadly sometimes ended. In Newton County, the family and friends of Mr. Pierce Cline said good bye and mourned the loss of a dear man. And, I will not let events of the day cause me to stray from saying what I have to say about that.

The life of Pierce Cline was well-documented in this newspaper in recent weeks, as he received Oxford College's lifetime achievement award, the R. Carl Chandler Award, and more recently with the sad news of his passing last Saturday. His major accomplishments and great deeds are more than enough to cement his legacy, but I want to tell a different story about his small actions that made a huge difference to me.

My earliest memory of Mr. Cline – I've too much respect to call him Pierce – was sitting beside this white-haired, soft-spoken man in a public visioning session at the Center for Community Preservation and Planning five or six years ago. His words were so gentle, it was hard to catch everything he said; but I quickly realized there was a wisdom there I'd do well to heed.

In the ensuing years, I became more visible in the community – first through my trail advocacy and later with this column. Mr. Cline and his lovely wife Margie stopped by our house one afternoon to pick up some "I Love Trails" signs for their neighborhood. I was honored he would support my cause, and deeply touched as he stood in our driveway talking about our community, its challenges, and the things that really mattered. He was the ultimate southern gentleman, but more than that. He was someone with deep roots in the past who could see the future so clearly. The newspaper called him a "community pillar," but that sounds far too rigid and set in one place. He lifted us up in a way that always moved us forward.

In recent years, he called my cellphone several times. It was always a message of encouragement – commending me for something I wrote and telling me to keep at it and not to get discouraged. Those calls meant so much.

One day, I told a mutual friend how much I treasured those calls from Mr. Cline. "Have you told him?" she asked. I realized I hadn't.

Seeing the October 11 news story about his award, and learning he was in declining health, I sat down to write a letter.

"I want you to know you are an inspiration to me and many others," I wrote. "I was saddened to read references to your declining health, and I hope sincerely such words are an exaggeration. But, realizing also that none of us is meant to live forever here on Earth, I want to say this now... Men like you truly do live forever in the legacy you have created with kindness, caring, selfless giving, and genuine friendship. Your good deeds bear even now the seeds of hope generations to follow shall reap and sow in kind. Thank you, sir, for the trails you have blazed for my generation and those to come."

Sadly, the news of his health was not an exaggeration. I'm so glad I wrote when I did. He responded through Mrs. Cline to tell me how much he appreciated the letter.

If you have something to say to someone who deserves to hear from you, don't wait.

I've seen so much angst, dismay, and despair about who lost and who won in Tuesday's balloting. But, consider this: Pierce Cline didn't wait for someone else to make a difference. He was a difference maker. He accomplished great things in his family life, his profession, and his philanthropic deeds, but he also made an impact with the simplest of acts – by reaching out, encouraging, and inspiring countless others to do their part.

If you feel powerless or frustrated, move beyond those self-defeating thoughts. Be a difference maker. Pierce Cline has shown us the way. We have to take it from here.

Rest in peace, good man.