

## **Butterflies are freeing**

*By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – April 28, 2013*

When I finished high school, I left my childhood behind. It was an unconscious decision, but one I recognize now was necessary for me to evolve into the person I was meant to be.

There was nothing bad about the days of my youth, but I've spent most of my adult life largely disconnected from that time, those places, and the people with me then. Except for 2-1/2 years in Cleveland, Ohio in the mid-1990s, Kim and I have never lived more than a short drive from the north metro neighborhoods where I grew up just outside the Perimeter. Yet, I let high school friendships slip away during my years at Georgia State University, and we've kept close contact with just one couple from those college days.

Reflecting now, it's not so difficult to see that separation as the cocoon in which my caterpillar youth was transformed into the adult butterfly I was to become. Each journey is different, but to grow I needed to break from my past.

Shy and quiet as a teen, in adulthood I learned I am an extrovert at heart, I love making people laugh as much as I enjoy getting them to think, and I can be an effective agent for positive change in the world.

To find that true self, I had to create space away from those who might unintentionally lock me into being the person they'd already decided I was. I needed freedom to grow.

If I had it to do all over, I wouldn't change a thing. But, thanks to the ease of reconnecting in the age of social networking, I've been bumping into old friends through Facebook and other sites on the internet.

I didn't actively search for childhood friends. I would seldom issue a friend request, but I'd accept one when the other person initiated. It can be awkward saying "hi" out of the blue after not seeing someone for more than 35 years.

But, as the connections grew and strengthened, I began experiencing an upside I'd never imagined. It's a special treat to catch a glimpse all these years later to see how each life has turned out. Where once there were young boys and girls, I find amazing men and women with full life stories, families of their own, careers, accomplishments, and incredible talents developed since last I saw them.

It's like leaving a handful of seeds scattered on the ground and returning years later to find a diverse and wonderful forest. Through whatever metamorphosis we were each to undergo, we've emerged as a flock of unique and lovely butterflies.

That simple realization fills me with hope for humanity and faith in the future of our planet. It's too easy to despair in our time, seeing events like the brutal and senseless acts in Boston as yet another harbinger of the fall of our civilization.

But, we humans view current events too narrowly through the lens of our own point in time, failing to zoom to a proper perspective by panning back across the years.

My friends and I were born into the crucible of a segregated south mired in a violent civil rights struggle. We endured the assassinations of President Kennedy, his brother Bobby, and Dr. King. Our world was shaken as our parents wept – trying without success to hide their fear and anxiety from us. We watched brothers, neighbors, and babysitters leave for Vietnam never to return, while protesters on a college campus were shot dead by riot police. A President resigned in disgrace. We were shocked and disgusted by the Manson Family murders. Shocking terror at the Munich Olympics, massacre in Jonestown, and hostage taking in Iran were scarcely the stuff of youthful innocence.

For their part, our mothers and fathers were born of parents who fought to save the world from a madman who exterminated more than six million people in pursuit of his hate-filled delusions. That war was ended using a new weapon that would leave a permanent dark cloud over our world and dramatically raise the stakes in future human conflicts.

Like every generation, my friends and I were born into turbulence, uncertainty, and times that tested faith. Yet, here we are. I marvel at the men and women we've become. For all we may have yet to learn collectively about how to live in peace, I take comfort in the enduring stories of each individual life lived. That's the wondrous journey today's children have before them. And it's not a bad thing to leave them at all.

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