

A Counselor's Holiday Greeting: 2008



Contrary to what is implied in the popular underground FX hit, it's *not* always sunny in Philadelphia. Just as you can count on the three “H”s of summer here—hazy, hot, and humid—so are there the 3 “Gs” of winter—grey, gusty, and gothic-looking; such is this day less than a week before Thanksgiving, 2008.

Whether I mourn the loss of daylight savings time, learning that the day's temperature will be dropping faster than the Dow Jones Industrial Average, or sensing the early onset of SAD, the half-mile walk from where I park to my faculty office on campus has become tedious and trying...quirky podcasts for entertainment and all. Yes, it is that time of the year when some of us citizens of the Northern Hemisphere find “looking ahead” (to three to four months of the three “G”s) something of a challenge. And then, when you least expect it, fate—or as I view it, a Higher Power—produces a playable card in “the flop”—please excuse the *Texas Hold'em* analogy ☺

As I was walking to campus this morning, collar turned against a stiff, cold breeze that swirled the first snow of the season around my ankles, listening to a podcast about how U.S. Presidents have historically conducted themselves during their post administration years, I notice a laminated card lying on the sidewalk among the typical detritus to be found on any typical urban American city street. I suspect the card caught my eye because it was in pristine condition, suggesting that it was not only recently dropped but also recently minted; this prompted the thought that it may not so much have been “lost” as “left” to be found, like the old custom of surreptitiously leaving pennies to be found by strangers where the find triggers a recollection of the old adage...“Find a penny, pick it up and all the day you'll have good luck.”

In any event, I picked up the card as I was learning about the post-presidential lives of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams and how they both died on the same day—July 4th—hours apart, in 1826, and read: “Linda C____'s Tips,” (last name exclude) at the top. Below the heading was a simple list of seven “to do tips”:

1. Be yourself
2. Not perfect
3. Ask questions
4. Go with your gut instincts
5. Small things you do (do matter)—parenthetical words added
6. Be positive
7. Enjoy life outside of your job

I found myself pausing on the busy sidewalk, looking at the card. I suspect seasoned Philadelphian's paid little notice as there is not much to be seen on the streets of any large urban center that has not been seen before—even a “Friday casual” dressed professor picking “trash” up off the street—and likely so often previously viewed as to be perceived as “business as usual.” In any event, I found myself thinking as I began to walk again, “I have been a professional counselor for 37 years and have all the requisite initials after my name; I teach behavioral health counseling at a major university; I have been involved in the treatment of countless addicted clients, having received many cards, emails, and personal testimonies of thanks for a role played in their recovery; I have raised 2 children who are healthy and successful, and am active in the lives of 3 grandchildren of whom I am immensely proud; and I do the best as I can to realize Emerson's admonishment, “...to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived...that is to have succeeded.” Yet it was this simple card on a busy, cluttered city street that suggested that I had “taken my eye off the ball.” Like the rube taken in by the “3-card Monty” hustler, I believed I knew the answers to the puzzle and because of that hubris, lost my wager.

Although the 3-Gs of winter in the “Northern climes” may be real, they simply influence how I should dress or when I should start out from home to arrive at my destination on time...they should not regulate my being; Linda's simple list reminded me of this...thank you...and thanks for officially putting me in the Holiday Spirit.

My grandfather used to say—and I am certain that he was just passing along what someone had shared with him—“No matter where you go, there you are.” The Navajo—or is it the Hopi—have a saying, “Beauty before me; beauty behind me. Beauty to the right of me; beauty to the left of me. Beauty above me; beauty below me. I am on the pollen path.” Every point on this plane of existence where I may find myself is at the exact dead center of the universe...and if the universe is infinite, then this must be so...but I wax metaphysical. Back to Philly in late November...I wonder if there is significance to the *number* of items on Linda's “to do tips” list, “7,” but then I may have read one too many Dan Brown novels ☺ In any event, I share these thoughts as a way of wishing you season's greetings and inviting you to attend to the “detritus” you may encounter as you walk through life's “3-Gs” lest it provide another item for the “to be thankful for” list next Thursday...or “any” day for that matter.

Peace in 2009,
Robert

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