



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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The Old Man

By J.R. Roberts

A solo singer from the Irish group Celtic Thunder did a song dedicated to his late father. The lyrics tell how unforgettable and missed ‘The Old Man’ is and how he made the singer into the man he is. His words have moved me to tackle the impossible task of trying to record in one little article “The Old Man” in my life. He was bigger than life. As a child, to me he was life. He made me who I am. And I still miss him, even though I am now the old man.

The Old Man was not my dad and his influence on me. This article is about my Gramps, aka my grandfather, and his positive imprint on my life. It’s important to remember the person who influenced you the most and helped you to be who you are.

Gramps and Granny owned a moderate-sized farm deep in the Ozark Mountain boondocks of Douglas County, Missouri. Due to factors never fully explained to me, mostly economic, I was sent from my birth parents as an infant to live with Granny and Gramps. I remained there through preschool years, the times of deepest impressions upon a young child. And impressed I was.

Tagging along with Gramps on his chores and farm projects ingrained in my spirit what a great man of integrity, compassion and humility he was. He did in many ways make me who I am. I never fully fit into my birth family when I was taken home.

I would anxiously await each summer when I could spend a few weeks on the farm and be with the Old Man again. He had the highest of reputations in his extended neighborhood. He helped everyone he could with limitless generosity. Gramps taught Sunday school class and lived the life he taught.

After such a wealth of experience with this grand and giving man, I finally got to return some of his kindness. Granny fell ill the spring just before I turned 15. As soon as school was out, I went to help Gramps with the chores Granny had always done. She passed away late that summer.

Watching how helpless and misplaced Gramps was in dealing with the domestic side of life, I resolved to stay on with him. I told my mom there was no way I would leave him alone. I

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The Old Man

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registered for school at the nearest town six miles away and stayed on with Gramps, cooking all the meals, keeping house and helping with the chores until the farm sold that fall. What I was able to do for him cemented the person he made me into during my formative years.

Now that I am Gramps to a pair of charming granddaughters, I want to make the same kind of difference in their lives that was made in mine. I cannot see them often, but I stay in constant touch. I want to be The Old Man to them. I want them to miss me as I still miss my Gramps, not for my sake, but because of the kind of person I am to them. I want them to say they won't forget me because I helped make them who they are, just like my old man.

I hope there is someone in your life who will never forget you because of the lasting difference you are making in his or her life.



J.R. and Hazel celebrated anniversary No. 47 in August. Writing remains a chief post-retirement ministry. You may email him at jim.roberts@gci.org.

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Connections

Mission Statement

Primary: The Connections for Clergy Support Department provides intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual support and encouragement in the personal lives of GCI ministry families.

Three primary means of serving are the *Connections* journal, the Connections for a Successful Ministry and Life web pages, and the Nurturennet forum. We highlight women in ministry but are inclusive of the needs of the entire family.

Secondary: To promote respect, understanding and support for women, their personal ministries and ministries that serve them.

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• CALIFORNIA •
TAM 2 U

The Visible and the Invisible

Some of you may remember I began a decluttering project last year. Actually it's been ongoing for most of my adult life, but that's a part of my psyche we don't need to analyze right now. I cleaned out a couple of dresser drawers the other day and felt really good I have only the items I wear in them, instead of those I should have thrown out a long time ago.

As I reflected on and enjoyed my accomplishment, my mind turned to all the remaining clutter. I really should have tackled a more visible area, especially when I remembered we have company coming in a couple of months. What I had worked on was an invisible part of my house, at least invisible to anyone but me. I didn't regret it, but I had a feeling I should have left it for another time.

As usual, my mind turned to the parallel between cleaning and life. Here I was thinking the visible should have been my priority, as the visible always seems to be more urgent. We make sure our homes are clean and

neat, especially when others will see. We spend time making sure we look good—hair, makeup, clean clothes, appropriate shoes and often, perfume to enhance our appearance. This is natural, as we don't want to neglect hygiene and, of course, we have to wear clothing!

But it's infinitely more important to take care of the invisible part of our lives—our inner being, heart, mind and soul. The outside can look fabulous but if the inside is a mess, all the glitz and glamour in the world won't help.

Why is it though, that we'll spend lots of time on outside appearances but when it comes to the inside, we often skimp? And sometimes we even feel guilty because we aren't tackling our to-do list. In our society's overachiever mentality, sitting in a chair, reading, thinking and praying may look like we're doing nothing, but just being with God is doing what's most important!

It's really nothing new—Martha struggled with this when Mary sat at Jesus' feet, but she (and we) learned what Mary did was what was most important after all. Dishes, cooking, cleaning and decluttering come and go and never seem to end, but our relationship with Jesus lasts forever.

If you find yourself rushing through your quiet, feed-your-soul time (I know I sometimes do) because you know that list is waiting for you, push the pause button. Take a moment and remember what it felt like to be a child, lying in the grass watching the clouds. Think of Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, seemingly doing nothing, but in reality, soaking up every word, drinking in Jesus and not only cementing her place in history, but also cementing her relationship with her Savior.



Regardless of the intensity of our storm, we are safest in the middle of the storm with Christ than any other place without Him.

—Jude D'Souza



Tammy

Zorro and Me

Where Are Your Roots?

By Barbara Dahlgren

I do not have a green thumb. Most of my house plants die. I do have a couple of philodendrons hanging in there and one little prayer plant that exists only by the grace of God. Zorro, on the other hand, does quite well with his flower garden and fruit trees. His roses are a sight to behold.

A few years ago Zorro planted some lovely climbing mandevillas. They had cost a little more but were well worth it. Four plants produced large pink flowers that spread across our front fence. Friends, neighbors and those passing by kept commenting about how gorgeous they looked. I had to admit they were impressive.

Imagine our shock when we returned from a trip to find the vines cut straight across about 10 inches from the ground and the plants, roots and all, missing. Whom does one call in a situation like this? The potted plant patrol? The horticulture police? The lawn lawyer? The mandevilla militia? It was all I could do not to wish the culprits ill will. What kind of a warped person steals plants from someone's front yard? I didn't know whether to feel sorry for them or wish they'd get an incurable case of poison oak.

At first the flowers appeared to flourish and looked as good as ever. If you didn't know the roots were gone, you'd have never suspected they were slowly dying. It was sad to see them one by one wilt and turn brown. The top blooms looked as if they were reaching for the sun, clinging to life but to no avail. Without the mother plants and roots, they couldn't make it.

It reminds me of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. Some seeds fell along the path on the wayside. Some fell on stony ground. Some fell among thorns. Some fell on good ground. These seeds represent the

Word of God. Seeds that do not take root will eventually die. Sometimes they grow for a while and even appear to flourish, but without roots, they wither and die. The same thing will happen to us if we are not rooted in Christ. We might believe and endure for a time, but when tempted, afflicted, persecuted or offended, we fall away. Just like our dying mandevillas, we cannot live without being firmly grounded and rooted.

The question is: Where are our roots? Are we rooted in Jesus Christ? Are we rooted in the Word of God? Are we seeking to do the will of the Father? Are we developing an intimate relationship with God the Father, his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? Or do we just give the appearance we are growing and flourishing? If so, when the trials come—and they will come—we will struggle. Being rooted in Christ strengthens our faith, builds us up and helps us be thankful (Colossians 2:6-8).

And I guess I really don't wish those plant thieves an incurable case of poison oak—but a little poison ivy wouldn't hurt.



Zorro and Barbara just returned from an Alaska cruise. She says: "The weather was a little rainy, but it didn't dampen our spirits. We had a great time. Who doesn't love a seven-day food fest? Plus, it was nice to get out of the summer heat." Be sure to check out Barbara's weekly blog at www.barbdahlgren.com or just Google Barbara's Banter. You can email Barbara at bydahlgren@pacbell.net. She loves hearing from you!

It's a Matter of Perspective

By Anne Gillam

If you could see me right now, you might think I had lost the battle. I am sporting a black eye—one I gave myself in an epic battle with the obnoxious, invasive weeds invading my flower beds. This would not be the first war wound, but that is another story.

I was listening to Christian music on my iPod, weeding my flower bed and sending up prayers for all my friends. I was leaning with all of my might on the shovel to get the grass to budge just a little, when it suddenly gave all the way and the shovel handle hit me close to my eye. I have often said I am my own worst enemy. The pain was instant and I kindly rebuked that devil and continued, thanking God for the shovel and the grass that had misunderstood its boundary limits.

“I can’t believe you are still weeding,” my daughter said to me when she saw my black eye. I told her it doesn’t do any good to quit. I had wanted to many times, and even stated it, but the thought of stopping was more than I could bear. I am in the habit of tackling those things I hate to do and getting them out of the way. And this grass was in the way of my passion, the flowers that bloom in abundance with the touch of God’s gracious hand.

I was reminded by one of my relatives in his blog that what we perceive can be a matter of perspective. It is his passion to run for miles in the morning. He began his blog talk on top of a barren hill dotted with stunted juniper, watching the sunrise from this vantage point. As he talked about perspective he turned his camera to the totally different view behind him—a valley below with a river winding through and abundant green crops.

I realized we often do this with God. Our perception is he is not listening or caring when things do not go as we want them to, or

as fast. We think he is not present when we go through our day and everything seems to go awry. Our view of God and what he is doing is distorted by our limited vision, both physical and spiritual.

The wind blows and we feel its presence, but we do not know where it has come from or where it is going and we do not know what it has touched by its presence. We may touch someone’s life by the kindness or compassion we show toward them, but we may not see the results right away, or see it at all, but it is there. We are limited in our perspective. And we are limited also in our perspective of God. Though we are working on it, we still have a long, long way to go.

We may see someone dirty and think they are irresponsible or homeless, when they had just spent hours working hard to help others. That woman with pink hair may look like she is rebellious or out of fashion, but she may have just lost her mother to breast cancer. We judge by appearance and not by the heart. Our perspective is skewed and limited.

Looking at my black eye you may think I lost the battle or gave up the war or that someone else had planted it there, but you would be wrong. I have continued the battle and keep gaining an advantage. For now, those weeds are pushed back behind their boundaries. And yes, I still love that shovel. It is one of my favorite tools.

Merciful Father, I pray you will help us to see clearly, not just in our relationships with each other, but also in our vision of you. Remind us of your passion for us, remind us of how you are working in our lives and build up that patience in us, to wait and be patient for your work to be completed within us. And thank you God for being so patient. Help us live our lives with your perspective. Amen.



You may email Anne at anne-gillam48@gmail.com.



Home Alone

By Denise de Moei

Our son Maarten went on holiday with five friends in Portugal. Our daughter Yvonne has been married since November of last year, which meant Hans and I were home alone. It was the first time since we held Yvonne in our arms as a little baby—is it really 23 years ago?—that Hans and I were without our children for a whole week. You can understand this was really special to us. We planned the whole week off duty so we could spend time together, lots of it!

Of course, while doing all kinds of fun things, we also spent quite a bit of that time talking. We reflected on our life as parents and on the time before we had our children.

When we first met we immediately liked each other. And it's great that after 30 years we like each other even more. It has taken a great deal of getting to know each other though. And continuing to know ourselves better was part of that too.

When Hans and I were dating, we fired questions at each other like we each had a shotgun. We wanted to get to know each other! I've found if you want any relationship to grow, you have to keep asking questions and keep opening yourself up, not just at the start, but in the happily ever after as well.

The times when Hans and I saw each other's behavior but didn't talk about it were the

times we started growing away from each other. We drew conclusions that were usually off somehow. I was particularly good at wanting Hans to know what my needs were without saying anything about them. That did not work well, as you may guess.

When we married we did not know ourselves well enough either. We didn't understand how relationships in our youth with family and others had influenced us, both in good and bad ways. We did not know much of who we were in Christ. Slowly and gradually it all became clearer and our relationship grew better and deepened with it.

Even as we spent this time alone, we found there still is a whole lot more to know about each other. As we talked and spent time together, we saw each other again and ourselves more clearly in who we are in Christ.

As we looked back together at our lives we could see how our loving God has worked with us through our shared history, how he has given us growth, eradicated all sorts of sin in us and helped us get rid of misleading thoughts and teachings. He has helped us see our weaknesses and our strengths. We saw how each of us grew in our own relationship with the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and how we now fit together a whole lot better than when we started, because of our relationship with him.

Our great Triune God knows us better than anyone, even better than we know ourselves. He created us! He knows who we are and who we are becoming in him and already had this vision about us before time began. Isn't it marvelous?

For me getting to know one another in relationship, both in marriage and in all other relationships, is a big part of what life is about. The words of Jesus ring in my head: "Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3, *NIV*). Our relationship with God means getting to know

God tells us, don't give me a schedule—trust me. Watch me do it my way in my time, and see what happens...pray, Lord, I'm available—do whatever you want with my life, and show me what to do.

—Charles Stanley



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Home Alone

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him, more and more and ever deepening. How could our relationship with one another be anything else?

It's ever interesting, there are always new things to learn, always more to know. We're not done. We're not even half way. We will spend eternity together, and not just as the two of us, but with all the children of God! We're all different, we're all unique. All of us reflect something of our infinitely great God. Would you not want to get to know more of that? I do.

Our time alone ended and when he came home, we hugged Maarten with lots of love. Hans and I enjoyed this time together, but our growing in knowing each other will never end and I think that's awesome.



Denise says: "We had an awesome time at the GCI conference in Orlando. Our Triune God came through in many new and older relationships, renewing and deepening them." You may email her at denise@gemeentedehoeksteen.nl.



On Thankfulness

One morning I woke up too early. I didn't want to do something that would thoroughly wake me up on this cold, cold morning, I wanted to go back to sleep. So after burrowing down farther into my sweet spot, I started praying for my friends who were going through trials. And then I thought, Wait a minute. Before I start asking God for stuff, I should praise and thank him.

So as I lay there, as snug as a bug in a rug, I thought, Thank you God for this so very comfortable bed, because not everyone has one. Thank you for these sheets and blankets....

At that moment, it occurred to me that my prayer sounded like the grace I heard a child give once at the table, "Thank you God for ketchup...." and he went on listing *all* the individual foods on the table and then every single person who was ever important to him.

I didn't appreciate it at the time (give me a break—I was hungry!) but I do now. Perhaps not only should we become more like little children in humility, maybe our prayers should be more like theirs as well.

Just a thought on thankfulness.

—Sondra Peters
sondrapeters@bellsouth.net

As there is the most heat nearest
to the sun, so there is the most
happiness nearest to Christ.

—Charles Spurgeon

Let me find Thy light in my darkness,
Thy life in my death, Thy joy in my
sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy
riches in my poverty,
Thy glory in my valley.

—Arthur Bennett, Editor
The Valley of Vision

Briefly Speaking...

Chain Reactions

“No man is an island.” With all respect to John Donne, I think he could at least have written no man or woman is an island. Yes, I know he was using *man* as inclusive of both genders, which was how writers wrote back then.

But, thinking of that quotation, you know it’s true on several levels. Someone else described our human connections as like the silken fibers of a spider web that, if touched even slightly, are all cascaded into motion.

What made me think about this was standing in a line behind a person with a cart loaded with groceries in the 20-items-or-less lane at Walmart. Oh yes, that’s a personal peeve. It does make me want to point to the express sign and ask, Can’t you count?

I didn’t though, and neither did the others standing there with just a couple of items to pay for. But it’s likely some bad thoughts arose about how rude some people can be. If we’re not careful, one thoughtless person can ruin our day.

I know I had to keep my attitude in check. I especially felt sorry for the poor clerk who was patiently checking out this person, knowing me and the others in line were wishing she had enforced the express-lane sign. I also hoped the other customers wouldn’t give her a hard time about it.

Most of us interact with others on a daily basis, whether it be our spouses, children, next-door neighbors or strangers when we’re out and about. How we interact with them, whether with courtesy and respect or with thoughtlessness and rudeness, can create a chain reaction.

Even when it inconveniences us, let’s remember to be considerate. Let’s be sure wherever we go we set in motion the right chain reaction and add some hope, joy and peace to others’ lives. Who knows how far

that sense of encouragement will spread to even more people.

(Yes, I even surprised that Walmart clerk who finally was able to check me out with a how’s your day going and a smile. I hope I wasn’t the only one who recognized her as a real person all day.)



Sheila is still happily remembering how many friends she was able to reconnect with during the GCI Conference in Orlando. She sees our fellowship as one big relationship with each other and with God! You can contact her at grahams@ntin.net.

Nurturenet

Nurturenet is our computer forum for women in ministry. Its purpose is to help you stay connected through digest-mode communication (each day’s messages compiled into one email). You may use it to request information, to request prayer, to share ideas and resources, to receive updates on *Connections* news or just to stay connected!

To join or update your email address, please send Tammy a message at tammy.tkach@gci.org. Please do not reply to a post unless you want to address the entire list.



Please let us know if your email changes!

Digging for Buried Treasure in Palmyra, Tennessee

By Sondra Peters

Often we don't realize what is valuable until threatened with not having it. What comes to mind for most of us would be our mate, health, financial security or a best friend. For my family, it was our septic tank.

Do you know how vital a septic tank is? If you live out in the country, a septic tank goes hand-in-hand with indoor plumbing. Without a septic tank, you're using an outhouse. Yeah, it's that vital.

For 20 years, our septic tank went unnoticed, until one day our neighbor complained of smelling raw sewage. We planned to take care of the problem as soon as we could find the septic tank. That's right. We didn't know where it was.

When I said our septic tank had gone unnoticed, I really truly mean *unnoticed!* No indication on the surface, not even a slight rise in the ground. And there certainly wasn't a cap or lid exposed. You know that saying, "The grass grows greenest over the septic tank"? Well, not for us.

I thought it was in a particular grassy area, but my husband thought it was under one of my flower beds. So we attacked the Japanese maple bed. After removing the gravel, which I use instead of mulch, we carefully folded back the landscaping fabric, dug up some plants and cut through Japanese maple roots (which hurt my heart to do).

We dug for several hours, and all we had to show for it was a 2-foot hole. (Some of you may be wondering why it took two hours to dig a 2-foot hole. Our soil is made up of rock and clay and our usual tool, when not digging for a concrete septic tank, is a pick ax.)

I am not embarrassed to admit my hus-

band and I stood there in our torn-up Japanese maple bed and prayed over our septic tank, wherever it might be. In hindsight, we should have asked God for help *before* we started digging. That's a lesson I need to remember. If I were in constant communication with God, he and I would have already had this discussion.

If we or the plumber couldn't find this septic tank, the plumber was going to send out a backhoe to start searching for it by trial and error. I could visualize it—our lawn would look like a Tom and Jerry cartoon in which Tom tries to eradicate a mole in his yard with everything from Acme explosives to traps to standing guard with a shotgun.

We were hopeful the plumber wouldn't have to resort to hit-and-miss digging, but would be able to find it with a camera—think colonoscopy. Then he could dig in the precise location and take care of the septic tank problem.

As it turns out, the professional plumber found our septic tank within minutes. He didn't use a camera, backhoe or even a divining rod. He poked the ground with a metal stick where he expected the septic tank to be—where any good plumber worth his salt would have put it—until he heard the beautiful sound of metal on concrete. We now have a visible cap to the septic tank, and the Japanese maple looks none the worse.

The take-away from this story:

1. Take care of your septic tank and it will take care of you.
2. If at all possible, ask the person who built your house where the septic tank is located!
3. Don't wait for little issues to become big issues before taking them to God. He cares about the little things and it's those little things that keep us talking to him.



You may email Sondra at sondrapeters@bellsouth.net.



Being a Light...has a lighter side!

My father was completely lost in the kitchen and never ate unless someone prepared a meal for him. When Mother was ill, however, he volunteered to go to the supermarket for her. She sent him off with a carefully numbered list of seven items.

Dad returned shortly, very proud of himself, and proceeded to unpack the grocery bags. He had one bag of sugar, two dozen eggs, three hams, four boxes of detergent, five boxes of crackers, six eggplants and seven green peppers.

A co-worker came to work one day wearing shoes that were identical in style, only one was black and the other brown. I quietly pointed this out to him. He smiled and said, "Unusual, aren't they? Believe it or not, I've got another pair just like this at home."

Our armored car arrived earlier than usual, so my deposit wasn't quite ready. As the young man waited patiently for me to secure the bag, I said, "Sorry to hold you up."

"Delay, delay," he corrected me. "We don't use that other phrase."

A tobacco company sent Dave several packages of cigarettes with the explanation: "We are sending you some of our finest cigarettes. We hope you enjoy them and will want more."

After several months the tobacco company received this reply from Dave: "I got your cigarettes and soaked them in a quart of water which I sprayed on my bug-infested rose-

bushes. Every bug died! These cigarettes make the best poison ever! Please send me some more next month in case any bugs survived."

A study found that many types of head lice have mutated and now have become resistant to over-the-counter treatments. The problem has scientists scratching their heads.

—Conan O'Brien

A woman is having a bad day at the roulette tables in Vegas. She's down to her last \$50. Exasperated, she exclaims to the whole table, "What rotten luck I've had today! What in the world should I do now?"

A man standing next to her suggests, "Why don't you play your age?"

He walks away, but moments later, his attention is grabbed by a great commotion at the roulette table. Maybe she won! He rushes back to the table and pushes his way through the crowd. The lady is lying limp on the floor, with the table operator kneeling over her. The man is stunned. He asks, "What happened? Is she all right?"

The operator replies, "I don't know. She put all her money on 29, and when 36 came up she just fainted!"

A tour guide was showing a tour group around Washington, D.C. The guide pointed out the place where George Washington supposedly threw a dollar coin across the Potomac River.

"That's impossible," said the tourist. "No one could throw a coin that far!"

"You have to remember," answered the guide, "a dollar went a lot farther in those days."

—clean laffs