

Giving the Gift of Time

I didn't know Jane Davidson well enough to call her more than colleague. We were both members of CAPS, a Canada-wide association for professional speakers, and had met several times at meetings and events at the Winnipeg Chapter over the past few years. But we didn't socialise outside of meetings and so I really didn't know too much about her, other than she always seemed to be friendly, positive and enthusiastic – with energy to burn!

When Jane died suddenly on September 22nd this year, it was a shock for everyone, including those of us who didn't know her all that well. As I reflected on the last time I saw her, I thought about how we go through life and often know so little about so many of the people we come in contact with. Especially good people like Jane, as I found out.

Born in Keewatin, Ontario, Jane was all about friends and family. She was divorced, which had been difficult enough for her, but when her son, Scott, died several years ago, she was devastated. Despite her loss, Jane showed that she was one of those rare individuals who could turn things around and convert pain into healing, disappointment into hope.

Choosing to share her loss with others so they would know they were not alone, Jane became a motivational speaker with great visions of ministering to people all across this land. According to her friends, "One of Jane's most precious gifts was that she shared tears easily. She spoke from the heart and captivated everyone in the room."

Jane was also renowned for her volunteer work and involvement in her community. Among other things, she started Meals on Wheels in Kenora, and invested many volunteer hours with Special Olympics as an organiser, coach, fund raiser and friend. There was no doubt she would be sorely missed.

When a few people from the Winnipeg Chapter of CAPS wanted to attend Jane's memorial service at the Bethesda Lutheran Church in Kenora, president Aileen Feicho contacted Jane's pastor, Bill Cowen. He told her that the church would likely be overflowing with people, all wanting to pay their respects. And while CAPS members were more than welcome to attend, rather than make the long drive out there, he wanted to propose another idea.

Bill suggested we think about donating some time in Jane's honour.

The idea immediately tweaked Aileen's interest. She discussed it with Benita Stafford-Smith, who promptly suggested Special Olympics – truly one of Jane's passions. They decided to take the idea to other CAPS members to see who might be interested.

And so on Saturday November 12th, five of us went to a Special Olympics athletic meet at the University of Manitoba. It was great fun and we filled our roles capably and enthusiastically – Rick Weinholdt as a long-jump raker, Shannon Schultz in charge of the medals, Jim Funk as a finish line judge, and Benita and me as track monitors.

Throughout the day, we made a few friends, had a few laughs, and discovered that winning runs a distant second to trying.

Now, I've volunteered many times before in many different capacities, but there was something different about this one. Partly it was because of the unexpected gifts we received – the look of pride and determination on the athletes' faces; the wide smiles and squeals of joy; the kisses they blew as they ran past us; the hugs as they crossed the finish line. But I believe it was also because we were doing it for Jane.

And that got me thinking again.

What if we all embraced Pastor Cowen's idea and donated some time in honour of someone we know or someone we've lost?

What if, in lieu of flowers, obituary notices invited us to donate some time to a worthy cause, charity or non-profit group, either of our own choosing or one affiliated with the person being remembered?

And what if, in lieu of gifts at Christmas, for birthdays, or to mark a special event or achievement, we donated a day or even an hour of our time in someone's name? Or better still, took that someone along so they, too, could experience the 'doing'.

Imagine how much that would add up to if every once in a while we gave even one hour of our time in honour of someone else. What an opportunity that would be. What a gift.

Maybe it doesn't really matter that we know so little about so many of the people we come in contact with. Maybe it's enough just to know that if they are good people, like Jane, then one way or another, they will reach out and inspire us to follow in their footsteps.

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