

Jeff's Jottings

Two thoughts on independence

July 6, 2017

By Jeff Japinga
Executive Presbyter

This week, it's only me for a few words. I have been teaching this week in Chicago, and that's pretty much consumed my time. That's my excuse; but this is my hope. I have been wanting for a while now, to add other voices to Jottings: thoughts to inspire and challenge us as we understand ourselves and Christians and Presbyterians, and as we pursue ministry together as the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.

So starting, well, today and at least once every month, I'm making a commitment to offer perspectives beyond my own. Given the recent holiday, today's are both related to the Independence Day holiday on Tuesday.

The first is titled "Those Blasted Presbyterians: Reflections on Independence Day" (<http://bit.ly/2sKAzKc>), about our forebears in the faith. You can click on it. It's by Don Sweeting, the president of Colorado Christian College.

The second is by Gordon Stewart, honorably retired in the PTCA. I saw it on his blog (<http://bit.ly/2sKLt2v>) last week and was moved by it. Thank you, Gordon, for permission to share it here. Even in a difficult world, there is much for which we can give thanks.

Bill in the Waiting Room

He sits by himself in the hospital waiting room.

"Where you from?" he asks, welcoming the gowned stranger who's come for a stress test.

“Chaska,” I answer.

“Where?” he asks over the whine from his hearing aids.

I’m not anxious to strike up a conversation. I’m here for a stress test. I’m an introvert. Talking with strangers when I’m going inside to cope with stress is the last thing I want in the waiting room.

“Chaska!” I repeat.

“Oh! I’m from Waconia! I’m Bill.”

He gives a broad smile as though we’re related. (Waconia and Chaska are neighbors in Carver County, Minn.)

His gowned wife, fresh off the treadmill, interrupts the flow of the conversation.

“This is my wife, Jane. She’s a lot younger than I am. I’m 96.”

“94,” says the younger wife. “We’ve been together 15 years.”

“Chaska’s the county seat. That’s where I was sworn in.” [Clearly, he’s an extrovert.]

“World War II?”

“February 6, 1942. Eighty of us. A lot of guys from Chaska.”

“Where’d you serve?”

“He was part of D-Day,” answers Jane. Bill’s head sinks toward his lap. His chin begins to quiver. A long pause follows.

“Only 15 of us came back.”

“Were you injured?”

“No,” he says, forming his hands in prayer and looking up. “I don’t know why.” He falls again into silence. He’s back on the beach at Normandy.



“That a lot of death. A lot of killing. A lot of loss,” I say.

He looks up and nods before dropping his head again.

“Posttraumatic stress,” I say quietly to Jane. “I’m a pastor. I’ve seen it so many times with Vietnam War and Iraq War veterans.”

“I think so,” she says. “He still can’t talk about it after all these years.”

The technician calls my name. “Mr. Stewart?”

As I leave the waiting room, he reaches up to say good-bye with a firm handshake and friendly smile for the young guy from Chaska.

I get on the treadmill, reminded that there's stress and there is stress, knowing that mine bears no comparison and thankful for a few moments with 94-year-old who has every reason to think he's 96.

Gordon C. Stewart, Chaska, Minn., June 27, 2017