

An Angel Reached Out To Me

The coronavirus will be gone one day. College students will be back on campus to study. What will never be gone is the love that Ed and Jill Geidner, members of All Saints Lutheran Church and Student Center, give to their large “family” of international students. The students feel so close to the Geidner’s that they called Jill’s mother “Grandma.”

The story of Jill and Ed’s friendship with international students who attended Slippery Rock University is so inspiring that I asked Jill if she would write a few words about how this came about, and about how the relationship continues to this day. The letter Jill shares assures us that love and friendship for college students does matter: some received “forever families,” which is a special blessing because they often live so far from their biological families; some become believers in Jesus Christ. The following is Jill’s letter.

During this scary time with the coronavirus all around us and all around the world an angel reached out to me. The angel’s name is Sheila.

About 20 years ago my husband and I went to a friendship dinner at church to meet and greet Slippery Rock college students from around the world who might need a friendship family to help them with little things they might need.

We were seated across from two sisters from Macau, Sheila and Lavena. We hit it off right away. At one point I asked them what faith they were and they replied that they didn’t have a faith. They didn’t really believe in any higher power, but she said, “But we love Christians. We love everyone.”

We became very close, not only with the sisters but their two brothers, Rhyme and Hoi, and a friend of theirs, a beautiful girl from Macau. The other girl from Macau texts me to make sure we are okay. She still texts or calls every Thanksgiving. She said that was her best meal ever. She tells me she misses mashed potatoes.

Our two original girls, Sheila and Lavena, love visiting our family and they asked me if it would be okay to call my mother “Grandma.” Of course my mom was thrilled.

Back to the beginning of this letter about the Angel. These three girls and at least one brother have become Christians, were baptized, and have a very strong faith in Christ.

One sister now lives in New Jersey with her husband (who is one of the two brothers) and their two sons. New Jersey is one of the hardest hit areas by the coronavirus. Yet she texted me to find out how we were and told me she loved us and wanted us safe. They asked if we had facemasks. She told me: “I am sending some to you and your families. She still has connections in China. She sent out 100 masks. Unbelievable! We shared with family and friends, church members and older people in

stores. Because of this Angel, a lot of people are safer. She is definitely a disciple. We are blessed to have met them and thank God for that first night at the dinner.

After receiving Jill's letter, I called Sheila, the friendship student. Sheila had mailed her the masks, which were sent from China. She is the Angel Jill referred to, and is married to Rhyme. It was obvious from the call that they still love Jill and Ed. They especially are glad to see their new grand boy on Facebook! They said they are Christians, and are involved with daily devotions and regular worship, while raising their teenage sons who love music.

Sheila and Rhyme clearly remember All Saints, where they were invited to a free student meal by Satoru, a student from Japan, who never stopped sharing his faith in Christ with them (He is now a pastor in Japan). Sheila and Rhyme were not Christians at that time. Yet the seeds of faith were planted by the love of Jill and Ed and Satoru. It is still thrilling that after so many years, the Gospel planted by this friendship family is alive. The Geidner's refer to their students as their "family". Their other "children" are Nana, Linda, Hoi, Lavena, Zuzana, Wendy, Denim, Beatrice, and Maria.

The virus will be gone in time, but such love given to students lives on, into eternity.