

Friendship with the late Don Bixler had great meaning

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5891>

It is with a mixture of sadness and joy that I bring to you the news of the passing of a good friend of mine, Don Bixler. Sadness because Don is no longer with us, but joy because I know that he is with the Lord now.

I decided to veer away from my usual topics to write about my friendship with Don, or The Bix as many of his friends called him, because Don was one of those remarkable people that come along in life and leave an indelible imprint. For his family and many friends, I would like to share what an impact Don made on me.

I met Don about 15 years ago in a networking club. He was in his mid-seventies at the time, and he had come out of retirement to work for BancFirst marketing the bank's services. In true Bixler style, he wasted no time in persuading me to take my banking business to BancFirst.

Don and I became friends from the beginning, and for over a decade, at least once a month, Don would call me to ask, "Randy, are you hungry?" That was Don's invitation to take me to The Oaks Country Club for lunch.

Lunch with Don was no quick affair. By the time I picked him up, drove to the club, ate lunch and dropped him off at the bank, it was always a couple of hours. But during that time, Don and I never ran out of things to talk about. It was always a pleasure to be with him.

Don came along not long after I had lost both of my parents to cancer. Still in my 40s, Don filled that natural need to spend time with someone older than I. I could ask Don questions that I was no longer able to ask my own father about, and Don was always full of good advice. Not only that, he had the gift of encouragement. Whenever I was going through hard times in my business, he never failed to tell me not to give up, that I was going to succeed.

In one of our times together, Don told me how he had retired from a long career in banking, but retirement life hadn't suited him. It wasn't long before he wanted to get back to work. He was always a hard worker, but I think what Don missed most about working was being with people. I never went anywhere with Don that people who knew him greeted him, and he never forgot a name or face.

One day after a lunch at the club, Don told me that he and the Missus had decided to sell their home and downsize to a smaller home. Don was in his eighties by then and said that their home was just too much for them to care for.

At the time, we were driving by a very nice gated retirement subdivision with homes that would have been about the size they were looking for, so I asked Don if he had ever considered living in a place like that. He looked at me in feigned shock and gave me a resounding "No!!" Asking

him why, he grinned and said, “I don’t want to live with a bunch of old people! I want to be around young people like you!”

Not long after Don had recovered from a serious illness that was nearly fatal, I asked him about his relationship with the Lord. Even though he had spoken frequently about the church he attended and was never one to express his beliefs too openly, he assured me that he and the Lord were doing OK. Don and I had become close enough friends that I could ask him questions you couldn’t ask someone who was just an acquaintance, so I asked him, “Do you ever think about dying?” He said no, never. Don was just too full of life to think about things like that.

During one of our country club lunches, Don told me that he had decided to retire again. Believing that retirement is not a good thing for most people, especially guys like Don, my first impulse was to try to talk him out of it.

I emphatically said, “Don, you can’t retire!” He gave me a puzzled look and said, “Why not?” - to which I replied, “Don – the bank just changed their mandatory retirement age to 95 just so you could keep working!” Don laughed, but said that his mind was made up.

After Don’s retirement, we didn’t see each other as often. I think he was about as busy after retirement as before, and between our busy schedules, we only managed to have lunch together a few more times. But when we did, he was always happy to see me, to have a good laugh, and to have good talks.

I visited Don last fall as he was recuperating from another illness. When I entered his room, there he was, dressed as dapper as always, a smile on his face, words of encouragement, and a mind as sharp as a tack.

I would like to think that I was special to Don, and in a way I know I was, but I’d be willing to be that - that’s the way he treated everyone. It was a shock to hear of his passing.

So farewell, Don, my old friend. I’m a better man for knowing you and I’ll be looking for you when I get to the other side.

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