

Reflections and Resolutions

As I write this the week before Christmas, I'm feeling a little melancholy. Actually, I wasn't really sure what melancholy meant, but Mr. Webster tells me it's 'gloomy or sad'. I have always associated the word with 'nostalgic', a yearning to return to the past.

Actually, yearning for the so-called 'good old days' makes us both sad and happy. Thinking of good times in our lives makes us happy and hopeful for more in the future, but we just can't help missing lost friends or family members who are gone that we shared some of those times with, and that makes us a little melancholy.

Those of us who have been involved in the bowling industry for decades seem to yearn for the past a lot, perhaps more than we should. I'm only 54, but 47 of those years have some bowling memories, most of them good, a few I would like to forget.

CJ and I watched a TV movie recently entitled 'The Five People You Meet In Heaven'. It wasn't a Christmas movie, but it had many of the qualities of the Capra classic "*It's a Wonderful Life*," the film that made Jimmy Stewart an American icon.

The film was about a man who spent his entire life working as a maintenance man in a small amusement park. When he died, he left this earth thinking his life had been wasted, but those who greeted him in Heaven made him realize how significant his time had been.

So, while I'm in my melancholy mood, I'd like to share a thought or two about some of those I'd like to meet again when my days are done . . .

My mom and dad, of course, who have been gone since 1976 and 1988. I'd like to know a lot more about them than I do. It would be great to just get to know them better than I did while I was growing up. I know they had a positive influence on me, even more than I understood as a young man.

My brother Michael. I miss talking with him. He was one of the smartest people I've ever known. I really looked up to him, and to my brother-in-law Gene. They taught me a lot, mostly by example, of how to be a good man, husband, and father. They both had intelligence, common sense, and talent.

I think of famous people I'd like to meet - Marilyn Monroe, Walt Disney, Elvis, Natalie Wood, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan. I'm sure there are many more, but those come to mind. When President Reagan died this year, the week-long tribute to his life and the funeral services were a welcome break

from the heated media frenzy presidential campaign. It was the best reality show ever on television. I really enjoyed hearing the tributes to him by President Bush 41 and 43, among others.

Since most of my years have been spent around bowling, there are many industry friends whom I've admired and would like to meet again. My friend and mentor Pete Moore tops that list. What a great man he was. He was a World War II vet and a member of 'the greatest generation' for a reason.

Chief Wapensky and Ben Yarbrough are a couple of other greatest generation gentlemen I enjoyed knowing and admired. Among the bowling writers, I wish I'd had more time to talk with Don Snyder. He was a terrific writer with a quick wit and wonderful sense of humor. Jerry Cowan, who we lost only a few months ago, was another who truly loved bowling. He generously supported the men and women pros by hosting events in his Port Arthur, Texas center.

Since much of my career has centered around great women bowlers, I have a tremendous respect for many I've been privileged to know. It was devastating when breast cancer took Luci Bonneau in 1999. Luci was a great champion and will always be my idea of what a professional woman bowler should be.

I've heard it said by some during interviews and conversations, "I have no regrets", or "I wouldn't change anything". I think everyone has a few regrets, something said or done in haste we'd like to change. One of mine is that I never got around to interviewing Don Johnson. We had a few conversations, and we talked about sitting down together for an interview during one of my dozens of trips to Las Vegas, but we both thought there was plenty of time. Don was a really good guy and a great bowler. I wish I'd made the time.

And if we should be so fortunate to make heaven's list of residents, will our pets be there to share our joy? I'd really like to see some of them again - my childhood mutt Buffy, our first kid after marriage, our German shepherd Sheba; our beautiful blonde cocker spaniel Tiffany, our papillon Katy, and our super smart Pekinese Pepper. With all these K9's around, there won't be much room for the cats (oh dear, I'm going to miss Buttface, aptly named because she couldn't seem to resist sticking her tail section in your face every time she jumped on your lap). I guess the cats can wait, or go live with the girls.

If reading this brings back memories of your departed family and friends, think of how they touched your life and cherish their memory, as I cherish those I've known. Each one is a little piece of the puzzle that shapes our values and beliefs,

and makes us who we are.

The message of the movie I mentioned was that every life is significant and meaningful; which makes it so hard to understand how those idiots who attacked our country and others who continue to hate our country today can justify their beliefs. Thank God we have a President who has the character and resolve to defend our freedom against those maniacs, and Thank God for the brave soldiers who sacrifice so much so we can stay in our little comfort zone.

I can only imagine how the families of those lost in Oklahoma in 1995 or New York, Pennsylvania and Washington in 2001 must feel. I think it's okay for them to be angry, but I pray they don't tarnish the memory of their loved ones by blaming the wrong people for their loss. When I read reports of those 9-11 families or of lost soldiers parents or families angry with our President or our government, I hope that anger eventually subsides enough for them to feel proud and grateful that we live in the greatest nation on earth at a time of incredible accomplishment and opportunity for success; and I hope they find some comfort in believing they will see their lost love ones again.

When CJ and I had only been married for a couple of years, we bought our first small house in Dallas, I think it was 1972. A Mexican-American family lived next door to us. One spring day, a tornado ripped through the neighborhood. Our house had only minor damage, but the roof was taken off the house next door. No one was injured, but later that year, two of the little boys from that family were struck by a car while playing in front of their house. The older boy, about ten, was pushing his 6-year-old brother up and down the sidewalk on one of those plastic big wheel trikes.

Somehow, the kids got into the street, and in front of a car. The woman driving wasn't speeding or doing anything wrong, but the 6-year-old died and his brother was seriously injured. I'm ashamed to say I don't remember their names. It happened 30 years ago, and I'll never forget.

When my time is up, I'd like to meet that little boy, if only to recall his name and tell him how awful we felt that tragic day and how we prayed for him and still remember him 30 years later. I wonder if he knows, that even though his life was very short, that he is still remembered by strangers 30 years after he left us?

My resolution for this New Year is to try to be a little more tolerant of those who I think occasionally abandon their senses, and to be a little less cynical, and to make more time to enjoy the friends and family still with us. I'm trying to remember, even when our lives seem a little difficult and complicated, it's still a wonderful life.

