

Now, let's be clear: I am not *afraid* of growing old. I'm just sometimes surprised that I am!



Faithful

IT CAN COME AS AN UNWELCOME SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM to be reminded that one actually does *not* still look like a high-schooler, that one's hair-line has *not* remained where it began, and that one no longer has the stamina to run around the block a few times.

One such shock recently jolted me back into reality. With Mom's passing this last year, Linda has been going through her closet and dresser drawers: stacking, organizing, throwing out. Not surprisingly, a few meaningful artifacts have been unearthed. Yesterday she brought down to me a handful of old cassette tapes that she had found in a drawer. Popping one of them into the player, I was suddenly transported back in time—and immediately recalled the circumstances under which the tape had been made.

Dad died in 1979 during the time I was a fashion photographer in San Diego, California. Later that year, on the occasion of my birthday, Mom sent me a small tape recorder. To thank her for what I considered an extravagant gift, I used it to make a voice recording in reply—in fact, I was working in my darkroom, early one morning, while I began the recording. On that tape yesterday I heard the voice of a young lad talking to his mother about the things important in his life: shooting sessions with models, working with a hair stylist and makeup artist, processing rolls of black-and-white film and making contact sheets, new camera equipment I had just acquired. On the tape I refer to people important in my life: my faithful assistant, Marty; my partners in the business, Ellen and Rebecca; advertising clients; models I was working with.

It might as well have been the man in the moon describing the life on that tape, for it is all foreign to me now. It was another life. As if that were not sufficient shock to the system, later yesterday, the one constant in my life since those days—my good wife, Linda—reminded me that that tape was recorded thirty years ago.

Thirty years ago!



In the autumn of 1979 there were certain things and certain people important to me. Now, three decades later, with only the aforementioned exception every last one of them is gone from my life. I no longer work around beautiful models, and all that expensive camera and lighting equipment has been replaced by one tiny digital number that fits into the palm of my hand.

As close as I was to some of those people at the time, I now haven't any idea what happened to them. What are they doing now? Are they in the same profession? Are they still married, or did they ever get married? Are they even still alive? I haven't the answer to any of these. And if I ever had feelings of affection for any of them, those feelings have certainly dissipated over the last three decades—as, I am sure, could be said about whatever feelings they entertained for me.

Sadly, it can also be said that during the last three decades my feelings of affection for God have vacillated. Oh, those feelings never disappeared entirely, but the love I have had for Him since the day He came into my life more than fifty years ago has passed through many valleys as well as mountain tops, many droughts as well as periods of abundance.

There have been times I wept with joy at His feet, aglow with the warmth of His intimate embrace, but there also have been times I spurned His embrace, and turned a deaf ear to His voice. At times I argued with Him, ques-

tioning His wisdom in favor of mine. I have even, as Peter, been a disappointing friend, denying my relationship with Him to others.

But all of that was from my end alone.

**“But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly;
They became stubborn and would not
listen to Your commandments.
They refused to listen,
And did not remember Your wondrous
deeds which You had performed
among them;
So they became stubborn and appointed
a leader to return to their slavery in
Egypt.
But You are a God of forgiveness,
Gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and abounding in
lovingkindness;
And You did not forsake them.”**

Nehemiah 9:16-17

The fickle emotions and lazy memories of people on earth stand in marked contrast to the steady love and longsuffering of their Maker. He does not forget His children, and His love for them does not fade. No matter how arrogantly or stupidly they behave toward Him, though He may chastise and discipline, He never forsakes those who are His own.

God loves me as much today as He did yesterday.

He loves me as much as He did thirty years ago.

He loves me as much now as the day I first took Jesus as my Lord fifty-one years ago. And He loved me as much that day as He did the “day” in eternity past when He penned my name in the Lamb’s book of life.



Man passes through phases in which people once important and dear are exchanged for new people important and dear. And then later the process begins again—a process of the flesh that illumines our transient, fallen condition. And until The Day, the moment when we stand before our Lord face to face, we will probably treat Him the same way.

There will be days—perhaps years—when we treat Him as an errant and absent eccentric uncle: out of sight, out of mind. Then we will move into a different phase during which He becomes more central to our lives, more vital, more important. And there will be more phases after that.

But God does not pass through phases. We are important to Him every day. His love for us is unchanging; it does not wax and wane.

**The Lord appeared to him from afar,
saying,
“I have loved you with an everlasting
love;
Therefore I have drawn you with
lovingkindness.”**

Jeremiah 31:3

*When my heart looked away,
The many times I could not pray,
Still my God, He was faithful to me.
The days I spent so selfishly,
Reaching out for what pleased me;
Even then God was faithful to me.
Every time I come back to Him,
He is waiting with open arms
And I see once again.*

*He’s been faithful, faithful to me,
Looking back His love and mercy I see
Though in my heart I have questioned,
Even failed to believe
Yet, He’s been faithful, faithful to me.*

Carol Cymbala

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