

THE HEART'S WELCOME WAGON

It was the early 1950s. A strange woman (well, a stranger to me, anyway) in a bright yellow dress and with wavy ginger hair (I'd never seen a redhead before) sat with my mom on the brand-new sofa in the living room of our brand-new house in a brand-new housing tract. Our family was brand-new to the neighborhood, as well.

The woman—whom I now know was one of the 8,000 Welcome Wagon “hostesses,” purveyors of friendship and gifts of corporate largesse sent to welcome new families to their communities—was carrying the largest, most crammed-full basket of goodies I had ever seen, surpassing even those from the legendary Easter Bunny. My mom, a bit teary-eyed, “oohed and ahed” as she gingerly began to unearth the treasures within what to my small eyes seemed much larger than the laundry hamper I'd crawl into playing hide and seek.

All the while the strange lady chatted away in her musical and merry voice, making certain my mom knew where to buy the freshest vegetables, which dry cleaners was the fastest, what restaurant would deliver Chinese food on New Year's Eve, how too much spring rain was delaying the new landscaping, and that the newly-elected mayor and his wife (who were “very down-to-earth,” she reported), lived just across the street. When her visit ended and the door closed behind her, it was as if the sun had gone to play hide and seek in the clouds. My mom sighed, smiled down at me and said, “Now we belong.”

I was entranced. And I never forgot that day.

Years later, during a college seminar on the Romantic poets, while reading John Keats' magnificent poem, “Endymion,” I was gobsmacked by his words:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemiz'd, and free of space. Behold
The clear religion of heaven!

All at once, I realized why the memory of the visit of the Welcome Wagon lady remained with me when so many others had faded: she formed my first inkling

that there was a bigger world outside my four-year-old self—a world that welcomed you to a happy home. It was my earliest brush with fellowship.

One of God’s first decisions was to create human beings to be connected, to give and receive love: “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). While this passage generally is seen as applying to marriage (which it does, but not exclusively), it also encompasses a broader proposition, which to me means that no one truly can thrive when isolated and insulated from others. It is in the existence and quality of our fellowship with other souls that we achieve the greatest happiness.

That leads me, then (and not at all surprisingly), to the notion that such fellowship magnifies our relationship to God, even as it mirrors it. I find that extremely comforting, as it echoes one of my favorite quotes: “Our love to God is measured by our everyday fellowship with others and the love it displays.” (Andrew Murray, South African writer and pastor).

When David and I walked into this church for the first time last fall, it was as curious history buffs only, interested by this lovely old building. We returned the following week in part, at least, because you had greeted us so warmly. We have stayed because it is here, in this small but vibrant church community, that we experience true fellowship.

Thank you for being our hearts’ Welcome Wagon.



David and Linda help prepare the Chicken Pie Supper.