

Editorial: What will you leave when you're gone?

March 31, 2022

I attended a funeral today for a couple who were an absolute joy to know. They were members of our Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Plano.

Don and Nancy Boyd loved each other the way we want every married couple to; they delighted in each other. That delight spilled over into their love for other people, and that love was huge.

Don and Nancy were married more than 60 years, and God granted them the rare gift of dying the same day. What's more, they died at home, their hospice beds pulled together so they could hold hands through the days of their declining health.

Their funeral was called "a celebration." "Celebration" is a strange way to describe a funeral, and yet, it's difficult to remember Don and Nancy without celebrating. They loved so well and gave so much for so long to so many people.

One of Nancy's close and long-time friends marveled: "What a legacy! Who can leave a legacy like that?"

If you're reading this, there's a funeral in your future—your own—and, no, it's not because you read this editorial, nor is this a veiled threat. The simple fact is, unless Jesus returns first, each one of us will breathe our last breath. Each of us will die, and someone will be left to handle a funeral or memorial service.

When that time comes and if it is indeed a celebration, will people

celebrate we were here or that we're gone?

Let me put a finer point on that: When you are dead, will people celebrate you were here or that you aren't here anymore?

I think even those "few old soreheads" in Stanton, Texas—as the town's welcome sign calls them—wouldn't want people to cheer their death.

How do we leave people glad we were here?

Who were Don and Nancy?

The best of us learned to be so good through the example of those who went before. Don and Nancy are an example we—the best of us and those of us who aren't so good—can learn from. This doesn't mean they were perfect. If perfection is the bar, we're desperately short of exemplars.

Don remained doggedly dedicated to God, Nancy and their children, and the church. He served his country during several years in the Army, maintained the family ranch passed down to him from his father and now passed to their son, and worked 40 years for Lone Star Gas Company. In a word, Don was steady.

He is consistently described as "a solid foundation" and "spiritual leader" for everyone who knew him.

Unlike her quiet husband, Nancy was gregarious and described as a mixture of class and fun. Two of her trademarks were mischief and an infectious smile (I'm smiling now just thinking about it.). However, her overflowing love for people was her signature trait.

Nancy served Plano Independent School District more than 40 years as a teacher, counselor and administrator. She taught pregnant teenage girls in the 1970s and recognized the school day wasn't long enough to teach the

curriculum they needed. Nancy went above and beyond, teaching them life skills in her own home.

In 1988, Nancy and a colleague founded CITY House to address the needs of abused, neglected and unhoused children, teenagers and young adults in North Texas.

In 2007, she brought Rachel's Challenge—named for Rachel Scott who was killed in the Columbine High School shooting in 1999—to Rockwall Independent School District, where Nancy was director of student services. Rockwall ISD elementary school counselors developed a curriculum celebrated by Rachel's Challenge and now used throughout the United States.

These are just two of the organizations Nancy poured herself and her philanthropic efforts into.

Like Don, Nancy was deeply committed to Christ. She regularly read Sarah Young's *Jesus Calling* and bought 200 copies to be given out at her funeral. I suspect that won't be her last act of generosity.

The choice is yours

You may be tempted to think you can't do what the Boyds did because of where you're from or where you are now. Don was from Cayuga, a wide spot in the road between Corsicana and Palestine. Nancy was from Gober, an unincorporated area west of Flat Prairie.

I was a pastor in a place like where they're from, and the three of us would tell you place isn't the deciding factor for faithfully following Jesus or for what good you can contribute to this world, no matter how important location, location, location is in real estate.

Some of us are tempted to think we can't do as much good in the world as

the Boyds, because we don't have as many opportunities or connections as they had. Some of us think if we had more money, we could do more good.

What we leave when we go isn't a matter of how much money we have, how many people we know or how much we accomplish. We celebrate Don and Nancy, not because of their money, connections or opportunities—or where they came from. We celebrate them for their love and their generosity with it.

When Nancy's close friend asked, "Who can leave a legacy like that?" I thought, "You can."

What about you? What will you leave when you're gone? Will people celebrate you were here because of how well you loved them, or will they celebrate that you're gone? It's really up to you, and that choice is something we all have in equal measure.

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