

DOWN HOME: Everybody here just lost a friend

July 11, 2009

Joanna called with the news that our friend David Pearson died early this morning. When I say “our friend,” I’m not being possessive. David had lots and lots of friends. Think of the “cast of thousands” in a Cecil B. DeMille movie. He had that many friends, and probably more.

David made our church, First Baptist in Lewisville, so much more like Jesus intended it to be. He wasn’t the most pious among us, and he wasn’t the most missions-minded. He didn’t have the deepest theological understanding or the best musical voice.

But David was the friendliest person in our church—and maybe in any congregation anywhere. David just loved people, and people loved him. And as long as David had the strength to pull on long pants and show up on Sunday mornings, he radiated a warmth and happiness that made folks feel like they wouldn’t want to be anywhere else in the world than right there, in the range of his hugs for the women and kids, handshakes for the men, and smiles and laughter for everyone.

I know right now I’ll miss him deeply and tenderly every time I walk in the door.

Ironically, some of the most joyful hours I’ve spent over the past couple of years happened in hospital rooms with David. I never had any trouble finding him, because everybody on his hall always knew him. And if I needed to ask the nursing staff for directions to his room, their faces would light up at the mention of his name.

David always made me violate two basic rules for hospital visitation they

teach in seminary—don't sit down and don't stay too long. Soon as I'd walk in, he'd point to the chair he wanted me to occupy, and I don't recall ever leaving in less than an hour and a half or so.

We always talked about his latest medical procedure, and we usually talked about what was going on at church. Then we swapped stories. I'm sworn to secrecy about some of the stunts he pulled while he was a student at Baylor University, and I still can smile about his excursions as a camera salesman.

I also know how much he loved Lezlie and their children, Hunter and Mackenzie. He wasn't the kind to rave about things like that. But the truth sparkled through the stories he told and the way he looked when he talked about them.

We spent two hours together a couple of Sunday afternoons ago. Like every visit before, David lifted my spirits. He told me how he was doing, how he dispatched a nurse to go pick up pizza and sandwiches, and how he once rode in a blimp over Houston.

David acknowledged how, if he didn't beat his damnable cancer, he'd really, really miss watching his children get older. I can't imagine.

And while I'd like to mine a deep truth about God and life from David's too-young death, I just can't do that, either.

A "cast of thousands" has lost a fine friend.