

DOWN HOME: Picking right up where we left off

October 3, 2009

Our friends Heidi and David recently came to town. This was a big deal—a highlight of the year.

The last time Joanna saw Heidi and David was Thanksgiving weekend, 1982. Jo and I lived in Louisville, Ky., where I attended seminary. We drove out to Overland Park, Kan., where Heidi and David had lived for just more than two years. The last time I saw them was the summer of 1984, when the Southern Baptist Convention held its meeting in Kansas City, near their home.

Heidi and David were our first “couple friends.” They and we moved to Atlanta in the late summer of 1979. David had enrolled as a graduate student at Georgia Tech, and Jo and I had moved there so I could take a job with the old Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

We visited WeiUCA Road Baptist Church on the same September Sunday. That church was mammoth, and if memory serves me correctly, it had an entire Sunday school department for folks who were born from 1955 to 1957. Jo spied Heidi and David—big-eyed and quiet—in Sunday school and whispered to me, “I think this is their first Sunday here, too.” Later that morning, we saw them in the sanctuary, and Jo walked up and asked, “Can we sit by you, because you look as lonely as we feel?”

In an instant, we became fast friends. (By the way, that’s a great argument for Sunday school. It’s a terrific place to make friends, which is a huge part of what being church is all about.) Over the next year, we spent scads of weekend evenings and Sunday afternoons together—eating meals, playing games, seeing sights and filling the deep places in our lives with each

other's company and the sound of our laughter.

Well, we moved far apart and raised families. But we kept in touch by sharing Christmas cards.

So, when we heard they were coming to town and wondered if we had time to get together for dinner, we were surprised and thrilled.

We didn't need to wonder if we would recognize them. When we pulled into the parking lot of their hotel, it was like driving back in time. They still looked practically the same as they did when we first met them three decades ago. If you've ever noticed my picture, you can imagine my looks have changed a ton in 30 years, but not Heidi and David. Jo and I would've recognized them spontaneously anywhere in the world.

Even better, their kind, generous, faithful spirits haven't changed, either. We instantly recalled why we first loved them long ago.

And so, we enjoyed a long evening. We ate New Mexican food, talked about our children and careers and churches. We lingered over dessert and coffee, but more, we savored the sweetness of friendship that has stood the test of time.

As we dropped them off, I couldn't help but thank God for allowing Jo and me to intersect with Heidi and David and other friends whose lives have blessed us beyond measure.