**Eulogy**

*Earl Shane Funeral* – Sept. 7, 2022

Torbert Funeral Chapel – Dover, DE

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word *“Eulogy”* as: *“a speech in praise of some person or thing.”* In all truthfulness, as a care giver, I’ve only known Earl Shane, for three months. You may feel that short time span doesn’t qualify me to give a eulogy for a man with a far-reaching shadow. But, as someone who has been in ordained ministry for 50 years, I’ve heard more eulogies than I can count. Yet, it isn’t those 50 years that qualifies me to praise Earl, but a 3-month relationship, begun in giving care on Monday May 16, deepened through 90 days of care giving, turning into friendship, and ending with his transitioning to divine caring on Tuesday August 30th. Aside from his children, I was one of the last persons, to sit with him, and wish him well in his transition. And yes! I was pleading with God for there to be an inventory of new cars for him to sell when he got there.

As I look back on a three-month journey of care giving, I have gained insights into Earl Shane, that may, no doubt, be different from yours. There is a wisdom saying that has guided my life for years: *what you focus on determines what you miss!*  My insights are culled from looking at him more with my soul, than with my eyes. As a result of that kind of looking at him from the inside, out, there are a few things I discovered about Earl, that I would like to share. In doing so, I will answer a question you all may be pondering: *what could a 76-year-old ordained priest have with in common with an 89-year-old former car salesman.* It certainly wasn’t our height or weight.

First, Earl and I were both in sales. He sold cars for 47-years before he retired. 11,000 of them. If there were such a thing as the Delaware State Car Dealership Hall of Fame, he would have been inducted into it upon his retirement.

I sold hope, charity, reconciliation before retiring five years ago. Earl had a passion for caring about his customers, especially those who brought their cars in for repairs.

I had a passion for caring how to motivate people to befriend their demons, repair broken relationships, bind up the wounds of unresolved hurts that help people clean up the regrettable messes we foolishly make in life.

It should come as no surprise that there wasn’t a day when we didn’t talk about cars. I preferred that more than talking about politics. Cars, even in his retirement, were like oxygen. He should have been a consultant for Pixar Production for the first installment of the movie: CARS.

I especially zoned in on his stories about customers returning a new car with some complaint. The question to Earl, the master salesman, was always the same: *what are you going to do about this?* His answer was always the same: *Willis Chevrolet is going to fix this.* His message was delivered in the same quiet, soft tone. As a 6’2” salesman, his voice was non-intimidating. Translated that means Earl was a care giver to his customers with broken cars, as I was a care giver to people with broken lives. They came to me with the same plea, only with different words: *help me fix this mess I am in.* I used my soft, Zen voice to reassure them, as he did.

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Those of you who saw the movie “Forrest Gump” may remember his mother, portrayed by actress Sally Field, passing on a wisdom teaching to her slow-minded son: *Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re going to get.*  Those 15 words rested inside me for a long time after the movie until I filtered them through my soul to become a new mantra for my profession: *the spiritual life is like a box of chocolates; it’s not about what you get, but what you do with what you get.* We only have two choices: taking risks to experience ongoing personal growth or staying stuck in our impulsive behaviors that fuel a diminishment of life.

What Earl did with customers-turned-complainers, customers who embarrassingly released their demons in public with eye-raising behaviors, was to stay centered, stay calm, stay professional. It helped that he dressed every day in a suit and tie, the typical dress of a storied salesman. He was the opposite of Arthur Miller’s depressed character, Willy Loman in the Broadway play, “*Death of a Salesman.”* Earl’s outer appearance, dressed like a Bloomingdale model, made a difference in turning down the tone of the conversation. He chose to listen to a different voice inside than the one complaining to him. The fruit of that choice is that he chose a behavior that calmed customers whose anger was diffused in such a way that they returned time and time again for new cars.

Earl didn’t just sell cars to customers, he sold cars to people, with needs and wants, some with money, others with loans, all with hurts and dreams. These people became part of Earl’s wider family beyond the Shane’s. They were part of the extended Willis family, not just the owners, salesmen, mechanics, accountants; but the people who took as much pride in owning a Willis car as the employees who sold and maintained them. Many of you here today know what I mean and your presence is testimony to that truth.

Earl and I also shared in common an adventurous spirit for traveling. We shared details about trips to Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, many of the 50 states, the Caribbean, and historical places in Europe. We talked about how engaging people from different cultures expanded our inner world view and taught us to be more people friendly.

I told him that after every trip I took to a different place around the globe, it deepened my appreciation for Walt Whitman’s famous insight: *Be Curious, not Prejudiced.*

Earl and I both enjoyed the homely taste of Delaware food. He raved about my Oyster Stew, my crabcakes, my fresh lima beans soaked in real butter, my whipped potatoes singed in cream cheese with onion and chives. The only soar face was mine, when he talked about his muskrat lunch with home fries.

But the deeper issue here was not food that satisfied tangible hungers, but deeper hungers that could only be satisfied with intangible food. The food of laugher, happy faces, new memories.

When it came to the food of laughter, I was well fed every time we watched **The Price is Right**. It didn’t take me long to figure out that his interest in the show was not watching the adults

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contestants display their silly and childish behaviors, but he couldn’t wait for George Gray to announce that the prize was “a new car.” Then the show became a game where he and I would compete for the correct price of the car. Sometimes, as the vintage salesman, I would let him win.

I was fed again with the intangible food of laughter watching “Cowboy Reality TV Shows” and the gold standard of all “Rodeo Quebec.” It wasn’t the cowboy portion that he preferred, but his preference was watching cowgirls perform. Ditto for “Wheel of Fortune.” It wasn’t the game he enjoyed, or solving the puzzle, but watching Vanna White do her thing with the game board. Ditto for Judge Judy. I think his interest was in her line, *“we’re done here”* and how it was delivered reminded him of the love of his life, Shirley Shane.

This eulogy, this praise in honor of Earl Shane has been a mixture of memories, laughter and insight about a man, whose weaknesses and strengths, are now resting in my heart. He was big in physical stature and humble in setting his flaws aright. He could be temperamental, but quickly apologetic. “I’m sorry” was in his vocabulary as often as the choicest of four-letter words.

Let me conclude with this spoken truth. Earl would be embarrassed by my words. We talked often about his 8th grade education, but little did he know that this speech of praise, was crafted and spoken by a man with three Masters degrees and a doctorate. Earl Shane was a human face for the wisdom of Mark Twain, who once said, *never let schooling interfere with your education.*

Earl was blessed with a DNA for survival as a veteran, he was blessed with risk-taking in the career as a car salesman, without any apprenticeship, he was blessed with 53-years of married life with a woman who helped his better angels grow him into a better man. And he was blessed with three children in whom he took pride and nurtured in them the kind of love that they gave back to him, especially in his final months of life.

Care giving with them, the past three months reminds me of a story from Sufi literature.

*Once upon a time, a wise Eastern teacher was conducting a town hall meeting. All the questions people were asking were about life after death. The teacher didn’t answer those questions. On the way back to the monastery, a student asked, “Master, how come you didn’t answer anyone’s question about life after death?” The teacher smiled and said, “Have you wondered about those people who don’t know what to do with this life, and want another one that will last forever? The student said, “But Master, is there life after death or not? The Master replied: Is there life before death, that is the question.*

There was much life before Earl Shane’s death during my three months as a caregiver. I heard a thousand, “I love you dad” whenever his children came or left the house. No matter their dad’s mood, no matter his handicap, no matter whether he had a good or bad day, Gary, Terri and Eric made sure that 831 McQuail Road was a house filled with love. It was mutually given and mutually received. Earl Shane knew a full life before death because his children made sure he experienced the eternal truth that love alone, lasts, long before he died.