

As the family vacation unfolded outside the station wagon window, I was reading a quirky little book entitled, Cool Dead People: Obituaries of Real Folks We Wish We'd Met a Little Sooner by Jane O'Boyle. As the title implies it is about the people who never grabbed headlines but nonetheless contributed to the comfort or happiness of a great many people during their time on this side of the sod.

These everyday celebrities receive a full page about where they're from (almost exclusively the United States) and a bit about what made them interesting to the author. Shirley Polykoff, died June 4, 1998, was the advertising genius behind the Clairol ad campaigns – "Does she, or doesn't she?...Hair color so natural only her hairdresser knows for sure." Apparently, as the book reveals, Shirley did.

Stanley Terrick died on July 19, 1999. A photographer for Look magazine, you'll know him best as the man who took the picture of John Kennedy Jr. peeking out from under his daddy's desk in the Oval Office. Ms. O'Boyle notes that ironically Mr. Terrick's demise preceded John Jr.'s tragic flight into the waters off Martha's Vineyard by 3 days.

And then came Dr. Peggy Rummel. She took her medical degree and sought out an isolated town in Georgia because she wanted to practice rural medicine. Her own words were, "We need to be proud of the little places and not assume that because it's small, it's inadequate."

In the short time she had before cancer claimed her at the age of 43 on May 7, 1999, she cared for the 6,400 residents of Colquitt County, raised eight foster children of her own, involved herself in the local high school events and ran the county's 38 bed hospital.

Even reading the good doctor's thumbnail sketch was tiring. I mean there are times I find having to change the dog's water on a daily basis more than I can manage. But then again, I don't think it is necessary to invite the entire village in for popcorn and a video in order to cherish what we have in "little places".

In fact just visiting Edmonton was enough for me to look forward to returning to Esquimalt. Edmonton is huge and getting bigger. Since I left, 'lo those many years ago, it has changed in more ways than I can describe. Well there is one way: who remembers the scene in "It's a Wonderful Life" where George Bailey gets to see his home town turned into the warm up act for Sodom and/or Gomorrah?

Well, maybe it isn't that bad. Mostly I found my old hometown to be unfamiliar when we would venture on our own – except when we went on a pilgrimage to the Pyrogy Hut on 118<sup>th</sup> street – but entering the homes of friends and family it was like slipping into old slippers. A big barbecue was not chilled at all by the clouds. My cousin Jack took a few precious moments away from cuddling and feeding his new grand-daughter to give me a bear hug and tell the latest jokes. His attention was pretty much focused on this new role of proud grampa and everyone enjoyed cooing over his shoulder at the latest family star.

It was good to pull our little trailer over the top of the hill at Lampson and Old Esquimalt when all the traveling was done. After the late August heat the air seemed to turn just a little cooler as we crested it. Our neighbor stopped in to bring us our mail he'd collected. We chatted with another one who is the block watch captain. My youngest immediately wanted to zip off to play with her friend down the street and the oldest was already on the phone to her friend before I'd got the key out of the lock. This is home.

It is easy to see the big things but I think Dr. Rummel is right: it is important to understand that even though something is small it can still be important.

Cherish the moment and the small things. We were barely home from Edmonton when my sister phoned to tell me cousin Jack had just suffered a heart attack and had died. Such sad news, yes, but we knew he had treasured his time as "Grandpa Jack" and when the angel came, apparently he was with friends and telling a joke. These are important things.