

Resilience

Happy 2019! I am trusting that everyone had an awesome time ringing it in, I know that I did for sure! If you have not chose your word of the year yet, take the time to do this very important task. My word is COMPLETION. “He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” My word for 2018 was COMMITMENT. It took me 10 months to fully grasp my word; better late than never! I am laser focused and committed to follow my calling to completion. But this story is not about my word.

Now at this point, my writing pad will be dotted with tears from the absolute saddest story I have ever heard. Ok, I have gained my composure; here goes. I walked out of the condo I was staying at on New Year’s Eve, excited to get to the Shark’s Tooth Tavern to sing karaoke at the Trade Winds Resort in St. Pete’s Beach Florida. I went to my car to get something and 45 minutes later, on the curb I had listened to an incredible story.

Ronda and her friend Dave were unloading their car. I could see that Ronda was struggling to walk and Dave was trying his best to help; I offered my help. Turns out Dave has dementia (but he remembered my name the next day...super cool!). As I live each day fully present and very intentionally, I started a conversation about the New Year, the weather, where I am from, where they are from (Indiana), how long they are staying, etc. And somehow, Ronda told me her story; she is 71 years young. She has spent her entire career as a cardiac nurse (the sweetest lady, but in her own words “very tough on her rehab patients”).

Her son Andrew and his older sister Amy got off the school bus right in front of there home. I’m sure Andy was an energetic, excited 1st grader! Little Andy followed his older sister getting off of the bus. Eager to get in the house, I’m sure, he walked in front of the bus to meet his sister on the other side. With his sister screaming at the bus driver to STOP, the driver did not see Andy and ran him over, killing him instantly. Here come the tears again!

Then she proceeded to tell me how her husband, Rod, had retired at 57 and had a massive heart attack within 11 months! And how she is the care giver to Dave, a friend since high school. How much can one person take? I immediately thought of Job in the Bible.

After saying our goodbyes, Ronda became my Facebook friend and sent me a private message asking me to call her. She told me about Andy’s best friend, Kyle. Kyle’s mother was driving with Kyle in the front seat, no seatbelts for either of them. (1984) They were involved in a horrible crash, and Kyle, at 5 years old should have gone through the windshield. His mother didn’t have the time to put her arm over to protect little Kyle, everything happened way too fast. When she turned to look at Kyle, he said “Mommy! Did you see Andy put his arm out to protect me?” Wow! Andy became his best friend’s guardian angel.

Andy was a huge fan of Kenny Rodgers from the age of two. He would sing all of his songs, while playing his tambourine. Once Ronda had found out that Kenny's birthday was the same as Andy's, August 21st; (my daughter Amber's birthday as well!) she contacted Kenny Rodgers Productions to request an autographed picture for Andy's 6th birthday. They sent a picture along with an autographed album as well. Boy was Andy excited to get those! His most treasured possession for sure!

Ronda and Rod decided that they wanted to take Amy and Andy to a Kenny Rodgers concert the following year. They were able to get the very best tickets. Andy of course brought his tambourine along! But Ronda had grander plans for Andy. Through determination and perseverance, she was able to get back stage passes for Andy to meet Kenny in person. The entire family was able to get a photo with Kenny. Andy died exactly one month and one day from meeting his idol.

A few years later, the family planned a trip to Evansville, Indiana. It was a wonderful trip and they had so much fun! On the car ride home, an extremely lonesome feeling came over Ronda. She couldn't pinpoint it exactly, but thought maybe it was because Andy's birthday was coming up; Rod was extremely quiet, and she asked if everything was alright. He just said that he had a lot on his mind with the renovation project he was doing. He kissed her goodbye the next morning on his way out to play golf with their son-in-law. They said "I love you" to each other. Those were the last words they spoke to each other. Rod had a massive heart attack on the golf course and died there. Of course, Ronda beat herself over this for not seeing the signs; after all, she is a cardiac nurse! The autopsy showed a blood clot, no signs; nothing she could have known.

It took Ronda 28 years to attend another Kenny Rodgers concert. The pain was just too great to bear, going without Andy. But she knew that she should go. Of course, she received a back-stage pass and management arranged for her to be the last person to visit with Kenny after the show. Ronda brought the picture with Andy and they talked for quite a while. Kenny wanted another picture and just as it was being taken, he stopped and "something isn't quite right". That startled Ronda, as she thought she had done something wrong. Kenny asked to hold the picture, saying "Andy needs to be in the picture with us!" What a thoughtful and cool guy! That picture is Ronda's Facebook cover photo!

As I listened to Ronda's story, all I could think about was the word, RESILIENCE. Webster defines it as, "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness". Now I'm not sure we can classify it as quick, these hurts just don't go away quickly, if ever. But Ronda is the most resilient person I have ever met. What an important lesson God had for me, allowing me to meet my new friend. And allowing herself to be completely vulnerable, telling her story to a complete stranger. My lesson was to never take for granted the time I have with family and friends. Kiss my kids more often. Hug my parents every time I see them. Tell my loved ones how much I love them constantly. We just never know if it will be the last time we see them.

Live in Love, Love to Live,

Mark Cammilleri