

Christmas - A Time for Remembering Friends

By John Rico

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I fail to become excited over poetry, but the lines above are of interest because they were written in 1960 by a man who was not only familiar to me, but to the entire community. It was the late C.J. Uhl, extensive rancher and Vacaville councilman and mayor who wrote this bit of wisdom, and although written nearly 20 years ago, his thoughts could well fit into today's atmosphere.

Around the corner I have a friend
Whose love I shall cherish
Till life shall end.
Yet the days go by and
The weeks roll on and
Before we know it a
Year has gone. And I never see my old friend's face
We're so engrossed in life's maddening race.
He knows I love him
Just as well as I did in
The days when I rang his bell and he rang mine.
We were younger then but now
We're busy tired men
Busy with trying to make a name
Tired of playing life's serious game. Tomorrow I say I'll call on Jim.
But tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes
And the distance between us grows and grows
Around the corner there comes in view
A boy with suit and car of blue
And as I brush the tears away - I read these lines "Jim died today."
And that's what we get and deserve in the end
An aching heart and a vanished friend.

Our priorities are rapidly changing, much of this transition being forced upon us by an increasing population. It was not too long ago when you could go up and down the street, with a "Hi Joe" "What's cookin Pete" "How's the wife and kids, Frank," "Happy holidays to the gang." It is amazing how our episode involving the US hostages and a belligerent Iranian government has at least momentarily brought back some of this unity between our people.

What's happened to the spirit of cooperation between people - men and women alike? I can well recall the cooperative spirit of years gone by; days when families and friends gathered for a hog butchering session; picnics along Putah Creek.

It was not too many years ago when softball became a favorite pastime. Vacaville had several hundred young men, and some oldsters, too, who wanted to participate in the sport, but the only drawback was the lack of facilities. Through the generosity of the members of the board of trustees of the Vacaville High School, a portion of the athletic area at old Andrews Park was made available. But, working men could only spare evening hours to participate in the sport and playing softball in the dark was not too enjoyable.

Through begging, borrowing and the generosity of local utility companies, used poles were made available. Young men with strong backs took on the chore of digging the holes in which the poles were to be erected. Hour after hour, day after day, these volunteers chiseled into the rock formation to go deep enough to support the poles which later were to be the standards for the lights needed to illuminate the softball field.

To raise enough money with which to purchase the light fixtures, several hundred \$3 certificates were sold, and periodically as funds were realized from gate collections at the games, donors were repaid their contribution, interest free.

It was not only an unusual sight, but a gratifying spectacle, to see Vacaville's business and professional men, ranch laborers and landowners, and a sprinkling of other men of varied professions and avocations, all exerting their leisure hours in a concentrated action which resulted in an athletic facility to provide entertainment not only for the participating athletes but for thousands of spectators.

Many people today will say: "Big deal."

Perhaps so, but what transpired was a unified effort which results in an accomplishment. It proved that friends can be friends, and that the color of your skin has very little to do with the action of a pick and shovel.

The installation of the softball facility was only one of several in the community which commands recognition. There's the efforts of Chief Warren Hughes and his volunteer firemen in making possible Vacaville's first firehouse; there's the efforts of many men in doing much of the work on Vacaville's first Chamber of Commerce building; there's the planting of trees in Ulatis Creek by Saturday Club members; there's community effort by several local clubs and organizations (although of late most of these organizations have become experts in handling a knife and fork).

As far back as 1960, C.J. Uhl had become disturbed at the trend for lack of concern between people as he wrote "We're so engrossed in life's maddening race."

Not too many residents of Vacaville today knew C.J. Uhl. He amassed a fortune in fruit growing business, and lost it all in the Great Depression. His love for horses brought him fame; his shrewd and at times ruthless tactics made him stand out among men, yet for nearly 30 years he earned the respect of the voters of Vacaville by being elected to the town council (now city council).

It is quite strange, after reading the few lines that he wrote back in 1960, he could well have been the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of his day.

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