
Where Everybody Knows Your Name

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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It was time. We had talked about it. We had planned for it. Now, it was time to do it.

Sally and I packed the "way back" of her Toyota Prius with duffle bags and a cooler. We coaxed our two dogs, John Henry (a 19 pound Jack Russell Terrier) and Montana (a 60 pound Boxer mix) into the back seat. We climbed into the front and settled in among the water bottles, maps, sun glasses, cell phones, snacks, and other "must be within reach" essentials. And, we backed out of the driveway.

We were driving from Missoula, Montana back to Atlanta, with a scheduled stop in Durham, North Carolina to see family and friends.

All of our planning lasted exactly five hours. We had carefully charted a route across South Dakota on I-90, stopping in Sturgis on the first night. (I was secretly hoping for a set of black leathers with a Harley logo.) But, some friends, who were a few days ahead of us, reported back that the Missouri flooding had closed I-29 south of Sioux Falls.

So, to avoid the uncertain delays of a detour, we decided to drive south to Denver and take I-70 across Kansas to St. Louis. We had forgotten about Kansas. It is really flat. It is really a lot of the same. And, the road is really, really straight. I don't think we saw as much as a curve for two days.

We were fine, though, enjoying our time together watching the world go by.

Yet, in a way, we never completely left Kansas. The excitement of being on the road faded into the sameness of our daily routine. The calories started coming as fast as the miles. As we finished the salads, fruits, and vegetables in the cooler, we defaulted to fast food burgers, fish sandwiches, and fries. The pet friendly roadside inns began to look and feel the same. La Quinta, Best Western, Holiday Inn Express. They all had the now familiar "it's clean, but the chemicals we use are going to give you a headache" smell. The only people who called you by name had just read it off of your credit card.

I became absolutely certain that the guy who just passed me doing 80 so that he could pull in front of me and slow down to 55 was the same guy who had been doing this same thing to me twice an hour since Denver!

It had not completely dawned on me that we weren't in Kansas anymore, when I raced into the Cathedral on Friday afternoon for a wedding rehearsal. That's when it happened. As I passed by folks, they stopped, called me by name, and asked how I was doing. "George, welcome home. How was your trip?"

And, then, perhaps most surprisingly, they waited for my answer and listened to what I had to say. It occurred to me that I wasn't a guest to be processed any more. I wasn't an interruption in someone's day. They weren't looking for a chance to tell me where to go or how to get there.

In other words, I wasn't just being acknowledged. I was being accepted, respected, and loved. I had come home.

This is what Paul meant, I think, when he encouraged Christians to "welcome one another, ... just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Romans 15:7)

This Sunday is Homecoming Sunday. School is starting again. Summer adventures are coming to an end. And, it's time to come back to the Cathedral. We'll have the Ministry Fair in Child Hall, and an Outreach Fair in the Atrium. There will be new classes, groups, and events to learn about.

But, most importantly, there will be friends here waiting to ask you how you have been. There will be familiar faces here eager to hear what you have to say. There will be Christians here who know you by name.

Welcome home!

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