

Recovery: Importance of a Circle of Friends

We all know in a sort of general way that our lives can change in a split second. We see it happening to other folks on television and in the newspapers. We never really expect it to be us on the eleven o'clock news. On March 22, while on the way from a meeting with our Golden Tones counsel and a singing member who is also a lawyer to a meeting of the Wayland Business Association where my musical colleague and friend, Betsy Moyer, was to be speaking, I was hit head on by a van forced into my lane on Cochituate Road. My car ended up facing the opposite direction. Out of my shattered windshield with the powder from the airbags and steam from the crushed engine mingling and misting over me, I could see the senior center where the Golden Tones practice from one side of the window and the steeple of First Parish in Wayland where I am affiliate minister out of the other. I never lost consciousness and quickly became aware that I could not move my legs. The first EMT who reached me turned out to be the son of one of the Golden Tones. My overwhelming feeling while sitting in my destroyed car was awareness of how lucky I was to be alive and a sense of blessing. As I was pulled from the wreckage, I saw what was left of the car and realized how it might have very easily been otherwise.

As the five weeks of hospital stay, ambulance rides, operations, and therapy proceeded, I was profoundly grateful to those in our community who came forward to wish me a speedy recovery and to offer assistance. It has made—and continues to make—such a difference: the circle of friends. When I was in the ICU and then in an acute recovery ward, I received so many flowers that I felt like I was lying in state. The Golden Tones board established a Sunflower Fund so that well-wishers could donate to the Golden Tones program in my name. The hospital had to insist that folks stop calling because their telephone lines were tied up. And one day I awoke to see three of colleagues in ministry—a Jesuit priest, a rabbi, and a Methodist pastor—standing around my hospital bed, next to the Golden Tones treasurer. Friends divvied up the time so that someone would be with me and called family, colleagues and friends to let them know what happened. My colleagues at First Parish in Wayland, Ken Sawyer and Erin Splaine, found ministers to officiate at the weddings I was booked to do and informed churches that I would not be able to lead worship. And the cards began to arrive—so many cards! Meanwhile, my part-time assistant, Deborah Foner, and our intern, Jennifer Duhamel, stepped up their hours, filling in for me at concerts and rehearsals, as well as addressing the concerns of members and the community.

I returned home on my birthday at the end of April with a hospital bed, a wheel chair, a commode, and a shower bench. Parmenter began coming in with their nurses and physical therapists. I was housebound until June 9 when, with the help of former head of music of the Wayland Schools, Richard Conti, and Jane Mansfield, Golden Tones treasurer, I was able to leave the house for the first time and attend the Golden Tones annual banquet in my wheelchair at the Wayside Inn. The next day I directed the Golden Tones from my walker at a Memorial Service for founding member, Eleanor Benjamin, at First Parish in Wayland. I am now able to do stairs and hobble about on crutches, going to outpatient therapy. My circle of friends, colleagues and the community are driving me to appointments and just to take me out, as I will not be allowed to drive until the fall. The doctors tell me that I should be walking normally by around November and it might take up to a year to recover fully. Both legs and one knee were broken and I will definitely be setting off alarms at airport security once I am able to travel again.

Recovery is a full time job, but I would never have been able to do as well as I have without all those in the community, family, neighbors, and friends who have stepped forward to bring food, visit me, fulfill some of my professional responsibilities, take me to appointments and more. As a professional

singer, I have often sung with my friend and Wayland native, Lorin Rowan, a song he wrote with his friend Alex Call, Circle of Friends: "A circle of friend is a ring of trust. It can never break. It can never rust." As a minister who founded and administers the non-profit Golden Tones, I have often reflected on how to build community and the loss of the sense of community in our modern world. Just lately there have been articles written about the results of a recent Duke University study, "Social Isolation in America". As a minister who gives sermons in churches on the importance of being in community to express faith, for our individual health and for that of the communities we live in, going through an experience such as this one and being personally aware of the importance of the safety net that friends and community provide is the ultimate lesson.

This Sunday, July 23 at 6:30 PM will be the first time that I will be in front of the Golden Tones in our community since the accident. For many years we have given a free concert for the community next to the Gazebo in Hannah Williams Park on Route 27 in Cochituate, across from the Community United Methodist Church which co-sponsors the Concert-in-the-Park. Folks from babies to seniors attend. The concert takes place rain or shine—we move into the church if it rains. Most of the Golden Tones program of over sixty concerts a year takes place in what I call the "invisible arena" of nursing homes, assisted living centers, and under-served audiences. This is a chance for the community and the families of Golden Tones to join in singing with what we do, "singing through our lives". Sing-along sheets are provided. And we pass the hat at intermission.

Most people can imagine that I have personally been hit financially by this sudden accident which was no fault of my own. But most do not realize the financial hit this has made to the non-profit Golden Tones program. We had to double my assistant's stipend, we lost income from some concerts which had to be cancelled and some grant deadlines could not be met. We have established a Sunshine Recovery Fund to defray some of the \$11,000 of extra costs to our program related to my accident. Any income past the costs of putting on the Concert-in-the-Park will be put in this fund, so that we can begin our Nineteenth Season in September in good financial health. We are looking to our Circle of Friends to help with that cause, either by putting a larger donation in the hat on Sunday or by mailing a check made out to the Golden Tones with "Sunshine Recovery Fund" on the memo line to 41 Cochituate Road, Wayland, MA 01778.

Thank you to the supporters of our local builder of community, the Golden Tones. And my personal thanks to the police and fire here in Wayland who responded to the accident, my colleagues, friends, neighbors and members of the community I didn't even know who have come forward to support me at this time. You have made such a difference.

Maddie Sifantus