

A Touch of Life Remembering a friend

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I have followed my own unwritten rule during the nearly four years of writing this column. That is, not to write about people departed from this world. I have violated that rule only once. A couple of years ago I did a column about my old friend Dale Cottrill, known to many of you as the "Tin Man" for his outstanding tin creations. This column is my second violation.

When returning from my Texas vacation I was pleased to see the **St. Albans-Nitro Bridge** renamed the Richard J. "Dick" Henderson Memorial Bridge. This is a fitting tribute to a fine man. A man that had been my friend since the late 1950s. We were first friends by telephone when he was editing a paper at Carbide's Texas City Plant and I was doing the same at the Technical Center.

Dick mentioned on several occasions I was the first person he met when he arrived in West Virginia in 1964. We were friends, close working associates, and fellow retirees from that time forward.

Having a bridge named in his honor came about, I'm sure for his activities in the political arena, as he served three terms in the Legislature. He served his electorate honestly and efficiently during those terms. I tried to support Dick through my vote, my work and my money during those periods.

To my knowledge, we disagreed on only one major point. He favored the school "voucher" system; I do not.

It is not the political arena that I have my fondest memories of this man who passed away last summer. Dick was a model husband, father (of nine), friend, Carbider, community worker, church worker and in his latter years as a public servant. One may not agree with his political views, but in the other areas there were few times when this man of stature came up short. At about 6 feet 4 inches, he stood tall, but he would have "stood tall" at 4 feet 4 inches.

The entire Springer family admired Dick, and the entire Henderson family for that matter. We were all saddened by his death, as were many others who knew him. Dick could bring smiles to the face of all who knew him, and he always seemed to possess that unique ability to put a positive spin on things about him.

He knew some sadness - the loss of the Henderson home in a hurricane while living at Texas City, the loss of his mother (I believe on the day he moved to the Kanawha Valley), the death of his eldest son Bill who was then a young adult, and shortly before his own death, the death of his father. There were others, I'm certain. When our house burned 10 years ago, Dick stood in what had been the front door, tears flowing from his eyes, and then dug in to salvage what he could.

We worked together in a number of areas. Back in the '60s and '70s, we were both deeply involved in the St. Albans Town Fair and members of the local library board. We worked together on several church-related items - he a Catholic, myself a Presbyterian. Of course, we found ourselves frequently working together at Carbide for more than 30 years.

We would disagree occasionally and have rather heated discussions about a point. We would upset each other, but it never dented our friendship. We had a trusting relationship that made that impossible.

As I matured in my dealings with Dick, I found that most people who associated with him had the same feelings. He had contained within him a trust in his fellow humans that was quite unique.

His family honored me by asking me to do a eulogy at his funeral.

Between tears, I uttered a page full of words. Among those were the words, "I shall miss him." I have very much. I now smile a little more each time I cross the Richard J. "Dick" Henderson Memorial Bridge. I hope you do as well.

Such are those people, places, and things that have touched my life in my West Virginia home.

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