



A TIME TO REMEMBER

ONE DAY NOT SO LONG AGO A FRIEND SENT ME A SHORT STORY ENTITLED “THE OLD MAN” WHICH I THOUGHT WOULD BE MOST APPROPRIATE AS WE APPROACH MEMORIAL DAY. THE STORY MAKES ONE THINK NOT ONLY OF THIS OLD MAN BUT OF THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS WHO HAVE SERVED OUR COUNTRY SO THAT WE CAN ENJOY FREEDOM. THOSE HEROES WHO HAVE PUT THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE AND LIVE BY A VALUE SYSTEM THAT INCLUDE THE WORDS OF HONOR, COMMITMENT AND COURAGE.

THE OLD MAN

AS I CAME OUT OF THE SUPERMARKET THAT SUNNY DAY, PUSHING MY CART OF GROCERIES TOWARDS MY CAR, I SAW AN OLD MAN WITH THE HOOD OF HIS CAR UP AND A LADY SITTING INSIDE THE CAR, WITH THE DOOR OPEN. THE OLD MAN WAS LOOKING AT THE ENGINE. I PUT MY GROCERIES AWAY IN MY CAR AND CONTINUED TO WATCH THE OLD GENTLEMAN FROM TWENTY – FIVE FEET AWAY.

I SAW A YOUNG MAN IN HIS EARLY TWENTIES WITH A GROCERY BAG IN HIS ARM, WALKING TOWARDS THE OLD MAN. THE OLD GENTLEMAN SAW HIM COMING TOO AND TOOK A FEW STEPS TOWARDS HIM. I SAW THE OLD GENTLEMAN POINT TO HIS OPEN HOOD AND SAY SOMETHING. THE YOUNG MAN PUT HIS GROCERY BAG INTO WHAT LOOKED LIKE A BRAND NEW CADILLAC ESCALADE AND THEN TURNED BACK TO THE OLD MAN AND I HEARD HIM YELL AT THE OLD GENTLEMAN SAYING, “YOU SHOULDN’T EVEN BE ALLOWED TO DRIVE A CAR AT YOUR AGE!” AND THEN WITH A WAVE OF HIS HAND, HE GOT HIS CAR AND PEELED RUBBER OUT OF THE PARKING LOT.

I SAW THE OLD GENTLEMAN PULL OUT HIS HANDKERCHIEF AND MOP HIS BROW AS HE WENT BACK TO HIS CAR AND AGAIN LOOKED AT THE ENGINE. HE THEN WENT TO HIS WIFE AND SPOKE WITH HER AND APPEARED TO TELL HER IT WOULD BE OKAY.

I HAD SEEN ENOUGH AND I APPROACHED THE OLD MAN. HE SAW ME COMING AND STOOD STRAIGHT AND AS I GOT NEAR HIM I SAID, “LOOKS LIKE YOU’RE HAVING A PROBLEM.” HE SMILED SHEEPISHLY AND QUIETLY NODDED HIS HEAD. I LOOKED UNDER THE HOOD MYSELF AND KNEW WHATEVER THE PROBLEM WAS, IT WAS BEYOND ME. LOOKING AROUND I SAW A GAS STATION UP THE ROAD AND TOLD THE OLD MAN THAT I WOULD BE RIGHT BACK. I DROVE TO THE STATION AND WENT INSIDE AND SAW THREE ATTENDANTS WORKING ON CARS. I APPROACHED ONE OF THEM AND RELATED THE PROBLEM THE OLD MAN HAD WITH HIS CAR AND OFFERED TO PAY THEM IF THEY COULD FOLLOW ME BACK DOWN AND HELP HIM.

THE OLD MAN HAD PUSHED THE HEAVY CAR UNDER THE SHADE OF A TREE AND APPEARED TO BE COMFORTING HIS WIFE. WHEN HE SAW US, HE STRAIGHTENED UP AND THANKED ME FOR MY HELP. AS THE MECHANICS DIAGNOSED THE PROBLEM (OVERHEATED ENGINE) I SPOKE WITH THE OLD GENTLEMAN. WHEN I SHOOK HANDS WITH HIM EARLIER HE HAD NOTICED MY MARINE CORPS RING AND HAD COMMENTED ABOUT IT, TELLING ME THAT HE HAD BEEN A MARINE TOO. I NODDED AND ASKED THE USUAL QUESTION, “WHAT OUTFIT DID YOU SERVE WITH?”

HE HAD MENTIONED THAT HE SERVED WITH THE FIRST MARINE DIVISION AT TARAWA, SAIPAN, IWO JIMA AND GUADALCANAL. HE HAD HIT ALL THE BIG ONES AND RETIRED FROM THE CORPS AFTER THE WAR WAS

OVER. AS WE TALKED WE HEARD THE CAR ENGINE COME ON AND SAW THE MECHANICS LOWER THE HOOD. THEY CAME OVER TO US AS THE OLD MAN REACHED FOR HIS WALLET, BUT WAS STOPPED BY ME AND I TOLD HIM I WOULD JUST PUT THE BILL ON MY AAA CARD. HE REACHED FOR THE WALLET AND HANDED ME A CARD THAT I ASSUMED HAD HIS NAME AND ADDRESS ON AND STUCK IT IN MY POCKET.

WE ALL SHOOK HANDS ALL AROUND AGAIN AND I SAID MY GOODBYES TO HIS WIFE...I THEN TOLD THE TWO MECHANICS THAT I WOULD FOLLOW THEM BACK TO THE STATION.

ONCE AT THE STATION I TOLD THEM THAT THEY HAD INTERRUPTED THEIR OWN JOBS TO COME ALONG WITH ME AND HELP THE OLD MAN. I SAID I WANTED TO PAY FOR THE HELP, BUT THEY REFUSED TO CHARGE ME. ONE OF THEM PULLED OUT A CARD FROM HIS POCKET LOOKING EXACTLY LIKE THE CARD THE OLD MAN HAD GIVEN TO ME.

BOTH OF THE MEN TOLD ME THEN, THAT THEY WERE MARINE CORPS RESERVES. ONCE AGAIN WE SHOOK HANDS ALL AROUND AND AS I WAS LEAVING, ONE OF THEM TOLD ME I SHOULD LOOK AT THE CARD THE OLD MAN HAD GIVEN TO ME. I SAID I WOULD AND DROVE OFF.

FOR SOME REASON, I HAD GONE ABOUT TWO BLOCKS WHEN I PULLED OVER AND TOOK THE CARD OUT OF MY POCKET AND LOOKED AT IT FOR A LONG, LONG TIME. THE NAME OF THE OLD GENTLEMAN WAS ON THE CARD IN GOLDEN LEAF AND UNDER HIS NAME...."CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR SOCIETY." I SAT THERE MOTIONLESS, LOOKING AT THE CARD AND READING IT OVER AND OVER. I LOOKED UP FROM THE CARD AND SMILED TO NO ONE BUT MYSELF AND MARVELED THAT ON THIS DAY, FOUR MARINES HAD ALL COME TOGETHER, BECAUSE ONE OF US NEEDED HELP.

HE WAS AN OLD MAN ALL RIGHT, BUT IT FELT GOOD TO HAVE STOOD NEXT TO GREATNESS AND COURAGE AND AN HONOR TO HAVE BEEN IN HIS PRESENCE...

REMEMBER, OLD MEN LIKE HIM GAVE US **FREEDOM** FOR AMERICA!

MAY 2011 PHOTO GALLERY



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH VETERANS MEET WITH LEGISLATOR BARRAGA Pictured L-R; Deacon John Howerton, Deacon Ronald McDaniel, Deacon Otis Martin, Suffolk County Legislator Tom Barraga (R-West Islip), Elder Harry L. Francis Sr. Interim Pastor, Deacon Harry L. Francis, Jr and Deacon Charles Younginer – First Baptist Church



BARRAGA: WEST ISLIP LIBRARY DONATES AUDIOBOOKS TO VETERANS

Shown L-R; Suffolk County Legislator Tom Barraga (R-West Islip); Edward Richards Blind Rehabilitation Specialist, Northport VA Hospital; Richard Kitson Volunteer Service Officer, Northport VA Hospital; Carolyn Agenjo Treasurer, Friends of the West Islip Library; Angela LaGiglia Friends of the West Islip Library; Andrew Hamm Director West Islip Library and Joe Sledge Public Relations Manager, Northport VA Hospital.



BARRAGA ATTENDS BLUE STAR MOTHERS EVENT

Pictured above L-R with Legislator Tom Barraga (R-West Islip) are Blue Star Mothers; Leslie DeMarco, Sandy Seitz and Cyndi Ventura.



MAJOR GENERAL BARRAGA HONORED FOR 9/11 MILITARY SERVICE

Pictured receiving the award is Major General Barraga, Major General John F. Bahrenburg and Brigadier General Donald Singer



BARRAGA DELIVERS SPEECH AT THE 2011 WEST ISLIP MEMORIAL DAY PARADE

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