

Long distance strengthens love

by Ed Crabtree

“Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” It’s a quote we’ve heard all our lives. In fact, the phrase was originally published in the 1600s in a poem by an anonymous author. It’s a profound and succinct observation of reality. It may take a little work, but it can definitely be true.

I know because I am half of a long-distance relationship. My fiancé and I live seven time zones apart. I’d like to share some of the things that have helped us nurture our relationship through our difficult separation.

My fiancé Tim is from Canada, and up until very recently, I was not allowed to sponsor him for immigration. In fact, the Federal government considered us legal strangers — despite our relationship of 14+ years.

We managed to keep him here legally for our first 10 years, but then, to reset his visa eligibility, Tim was forced to leave the United States for one full year. With teaching openings scarce in Canada, he couldn’t just return. Instead, he landed a position teaching wealthy Egyptian pupils in Cairo. Because of the continuing economic woes, and despite North Carolina’s dire need for math and physics teachers, no schools are sponsoring visas. Thus, one year has now turned into four — and headed to five.

That’s all really beside the point. The point is that he lives a very long distance away, and through these years, we’ve grown closer than ever.

Communication is the obvious and most important element to keeping the love alive. From the daily phone calls and Skype sessions to cards and letters and even Facebook messages, all communication is important.

We Skype daily before Tim goes to bed. I’ve been unemployed for most of our separation, and that has allowed me to call him at about 9 p.m. his time. Skyping to less technologically advanced countries can be challenging, but it is still a godsend.

He calls me when he gets up every morning. We both have iPhones, and we use FaceTime for this call. Sometimes FaceTime fails, and we drop back to Skype. Sometimes both fail, and we resort to international calling cards for traditional telephone conversations. Obviously, these cost more, but living apart has its inherent costs.

Every week, we have a long distance Date Night. We share a television episode or two over the miles. Originally, I simply shared my computer’s desktop via Skype, but I discovered it was much better to connect with Skype on my phone and place it on a tripod to “watch” my laptop screen. You can even do this with a tripod in front of a larger television in your living room. That’s how we watch the Thanksgiving parade each year! The picture and sound quality are so much better than sharing a desktop. We watched the entire Ugly Betty series and are now working our way through the original Beauty and the Beast series.

Cards and letters are also crucial. Before initially leaving for Egypt, Tim hid about 20 greeting cards in different places throughout our home. He left one on his pillow. One was in a pair of boots I wear only when I’m going out. One was tucked next to one of my favorite DVDs. One was in the spice cabinet. He wrote thoughtful messages in each card, and I will treasure each one as long as I live. I keep them in their own special album.

I also send him cards regularly. Buying cards — and stamps — can get expensive, but it’s worth every penny when I think of him checking his mailbox at school and seeing a card. Sometimes, I take a card to gatherings and ask friends to sign; it keeps Tim in their minds and them in his.

Lately, I’ve begun creating cards at home. They’re not only more economical, they’re more personal and thoughtful. Not only that, when you send so many, you can easily run out of options at the card stores. Making your own ensures no duplication.

I also journal every day when he’s away. Each entry is a letter to him. Some days entries are detailed and focused and others just ramble. Some days, it’s just a line or two, but it’s always a moment to think about the one I love.

Visits, too, are important. Tim visits at every break. It gets expensive, but it’s less demoralizing to count down 50 days than 300! It does mean more tearful departures, but the joy of each reunion makes it worth it.

Living and loving so far apart is hell. I won’t lie. I’d never wish it on anyone, and I can’t wait for us to be together again, but I truly believe that Tim and I have a stronger relationship because we have been forced to work through the separation.

Ed Crabtree, a life-long North Carolinian lives in Durham, sadly seven time zones apart from his partner of more than 14 years. Skyping to Egypt, Human Resource Development classes, and searching for gainful employment fill his days.

Grow older, get smarter

By Jeff Davidson

In the 1960s, a Sunday night situational comedy called “My Favorite Martian,” featured Ray Walston as the Martian. Periodically, he “drained his brain” of the excess information that had accumulated. His earth host, played by Bill Bixby, found this to be most curious.

Flash-forward 50 years and researchers now believe cognitive decline as we age might be a myth.

For the longest time, behavioral scientists believed that old age and cognitive decline went hand in hand. Now, studies reveal that rather than cognitively declining, we are simply accumulating more and more information. This accumulation causes us to be a little slower when

it comes to recalling specific details, but while we might be a bit slower, we’re actually smarter as we age. You might have suspected this all along — I know that I did.

Many times I have thought to myself, I know so much more than I did even five years ago, let alone 10, 15, or 20 years. My current self is immeasurably more intelligent than my college-age self, and I was no slacker in college.

Encouraging Findings

Dispelling the myth of cognitive decline is encouraging to anyone over say 40 or 45, and opens up an array of possibilities for your advancing years. Would you like to learn a foreign language? This capability is more difficult than when

you were younger, but completely within your grasp.

Do you want to start reading the classics? You have what it takes to get through them and to gain the perspectives and wisdom that the author meant to impart to readers. Do you want to tackle any type of intellectual challenge which, until this point in your life, has not been on the front burner? You have the capability.

Reference: The Myth of Cognitive Decline: Non-linear Dynamics of Lifelong Learning by Michael Ramscar, et al. In Topics in Cognitive Science, volume 6, issue 1, pages 5 to 42, January 2014.

Jeff Davidson, “The Work-Life Balance Expert,” is the author of Dial it Down, Live it Up; Simpler Living; Breathing Space; and The 60 Second Self-Starters. Jeff can be reached at www.BreathingSpace.com

Joy Ride

Full disclosure: In 1963 my family drove from Manteo to Andrews, NC (last stop before Murphey). We had driven from our home in Detroit to NYC for my older brother’s wedding, and were taking the scenic route to Cherokee County, NC, where my Aunt lived. We drove down the coast to spend a couple of days on the Outer Banks before the long drive west, past Asheville to my Aunt’s home. It was a joy to observe the landscape all

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the way from the coast to the mountains; fields and forests, rivers and streams, small towns and good sized cities, I fell in love with North Carolina all over again.

Fast forward to 2014: on Friday, March 14, I drove from my home in Chatham County to the coast to speak to the Wilmington Faith and Values “Port City Peace Breakfast” on Saturday morning.

It was my first visit to the Port City since 2009, when Peace Mom Cindy Sheehan and I were on our way to Cindy’s appearance at Brunswick County Community College. Amanda Greene was a welcoming hostess for the Saturday breakfast, as the Wilmington FAVS Religion News editor.

The Keynote speaker was my friend Sam Wazan, the Director of the Charlotte Cooperation Council and the first Muslim-American Global Trustee of the United Religions Initiative. Sam is the author of Trapped in Four Square Miles, a fictional account of his 15 years growing up in Beirut during the civil war in Lebanon. When it came my time to speak, representing NC Peace Action and Veterans For Peace, I told attendees that they had good reason to understand why I recommended that Sam address the Veterans For Peace National Convention in Asheville this coming July 23-27. Sam has an uncanny ability to translate his experience growing up in a war zone, to a determination to unsubscribe to the cycles of vengeance and violence, and to become a peacemaker.

Other organizations represented at the Port City Peace Breakfast included Grandmothers for Peace, YWCA of Lower Cape Fear’s Kids for Peace, Sister Cities Association of Wilmington, NC Council of Churches, New Hanover NAACP, and Peace 4 the Port. I was especially grateful to meet my breakfast table mate, Brian Grimm, director of the documentary film Racial Taboo: Why Black and White Americans Can’t Talk About Race (see the film trailer at www.racialtaboo.com).

Next stop was the Ethical Humanist Society of the Triangle, Sunday in Chapel Hill. Orange County Peace Coalition co-chair Jan Broughton, a member of EHST, invited fellow OCPC co-chair Wes Hare and me to talk about OCPC and the World Beyond War Campaign. We screened David Swanson’s 10 minute video, The Two Trillion Dollar Question, (see www.worldbeyondwar.org) and had a lively discussion: “Was there ever a just war?” “What about our responsibility to protect?” “How should we respond to the crisis in Ukraine?” “When will Americans wise up to the fact that while our government claims to champion democracy, peace and freedom, we are still, as Dr. King told us 47 years ago, the greatest purveyors of violence in the world?”

Ethical Humanists Society members greeted Sam Winstead, noted bicycle Rider for Peace. Sam, 88, a retired farmer from Person County and former WW II Marine Corps combat veteran, invited attendees to join his seven day, 350 mile Ride for Peace from Raleigh to Lafayette Park in Washington DC April 27—May 3rd. This will be Sam’s 3rd annual Ride for Peace, and he will be distributing copies of David Swanson’s book War No More: The Case for Abolition to local libraries and hosts along the route. Applications and details of Sam’s Ride are available at www.ncveteransforpeace.org.

On St. Patrick’s Day, Monday, March 17, Herman Greene addressed the weekly meeting of Elders for Peace at Carol Woods Retirement Center in Chapel Hill. Herman spoke on the topic of Ethical Environmental policy, and advanced the idea of Gaia (planet earth) as a living organism with which we humans have been at war in recent centuries. Professor Greene testified to the discrediting of scientists as a community of unbiased observers of our current circumstances, and the need for political advocacy to promote social, economic and ecological justice.

Next stop, Tuesday, March 18, Lake Junaluska, planning the 2014 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference, March 27—30, on the theme “Faith, Peace and Health.” The planning committee mourned the recent death of 87 year old Ahmad Amara, a gentle soul who had been such an endearing ambassador of Islam for Lake Junaluska Peace conferences through the years. On Wednesday, I was finally able to meet my darling new granddaughter, Josie, in Burnsville, NC, born March 4th to son Jack and his wife Heather, my new best reason to work for peace, and a joyous conclusion to a week circumnavigating North Carolina.

— John Heuer is Director, NC Peace Action, in Pittsboro and Chair, NC Veterans for Peace Eisenhower Chapter.

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