

## Why Do We Wait?

A column by Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (7/3/12)

I recently attended a woman's funeral. She'd been married to a tremendous gentleman whom I consider a model of aging with wisdom and kindness. As I listened to the eulogy and heard the stories, I marveled at how full her life had been and how she had truly lived in the moment. And that got me to thinking about something that has always bothered me -- why do some of us wait so long to take care of important relationships in our lives?

Why do we wait to tell someone how much we truly appreciate them? Think about the neighbor who always takes in your mail when you are gone on vacation or invites you over for a drink on the deck; the coach who helped your child learn the life lessons of a team sport; the friendly, helpful folks at church that you should get to know better; the co-worker who does their job very well, but also makes yours more enjoyable. The list goes on and on, but the common thread is that we should stop waiting to say 'thanks' to the people who make our life better.

Imagine how different the world would be if instead of 'waiting' to show our appreciation, we just came out and said it. If we took the few moments necessary to listen, to share our thoughts, to say thanks, and to live a bit more in the moment. What exactly are we waiting for?

I watched the live cable TV coverage of the final night of the state legislative session and was heartened to see retiring legislators of both parties proclaim their admiration for the institution and for their colleagues from the other side. And it made me wonder -- why did some of them wait so long to show their appreciation? In the end, they were so proud to have been part of such an important and honorable body, yet they would probably be the first to admit they had too often participated not in statesmanship, but in partisanship. And it made me wonder -- what if they hadn't waited so long to reflect on their rich experiences and had tried harder to understand the sincere intentions of those they disagreed with? What if they had treated each day as if it was the last day of the legislative session? Maybe they could have communicated more clearly and positively. Maybe they could have avoided the gridlock. Maybe they could have understood that compromise isn't a four-letter word and moved the state forward, instead of avoiding the real issues we face. A lot of maybes and possibilities get lost by waiting.

But perhaps the most important place to stop waiting is in our relationships. Think about your spouse, your children, your parents, family and close friends. Think about the things you would say if they became gravely ill, or if they were leaving once and for all. Wouldn't you rush to get your feelings out, wouldn't you hurry to tell them you're sorry, to show that you truly love them? But here we sit, smugly thinking that we'll get a chance to do that sometime in the future.

It reminds me of the Harry Chapin song 'Cats in the Cradle', which weaves the story of a man too busy for his growing child, who then finds that his son has grown up to be just like him -- too busy to spend time with his aging father. Look around your life, and quit waiting to do the right thing.