

THE CHRIST IN THE CAB

By Michael J. Carroll

The cabbie gave me a quick glance in the rear-view mirror, half opened his mouth, then looked away. I must have radiated “leave me alone.”

“I’m running late,” I said, trying to sound less like an uptight grouch than I felt.

“I’m supposed to be at my kids’ school at 7 and it’s almost that now.”

The cabbie was a little down in the wardrobe. His collar-length brown hair needed a trim. There was more than a day of stubble on his unshaven cheeks, and a weary kindness in his eyes. Pushing a cab around dark Philly streets after age 50 was not living the American dream, not even the Philadelphia version.

I had run out of the office a short while before. I could walk from my job to the school in 20 minutes, and usually did walk. It was a calm walk, given enough time. On a nice fall or spring evening, it could be a peaceful and enjoyable part of the day.

That particular day I had lost track of time and of myself, trying to do just one more thing before I left, one more thing that could wait until the next day without the world ending.

One more thing that was nowhere near as important as being a dad. Almost out of time and no time to walk, I flagged the cab.

I did not want to be late. It seemed wrong and the wrong message to send to my kids, to their mom... and to myself.

The substance of these school meetings can sometimes be of questionable or at least unclear value. But it’s the going

itself that is important. Showing up for your kids. Presence is a statement. The statement is “I care,” maybe even “I love.” It is important to show your face at the institution where the number of hours a child spends is second only to the number of hours spent at home. If you subtract the hours spent sleeping and count only waking conscious hours, the school time total probably wins. Deduct TV and computer time at home, and it’s not even close.

Near the end of the ride I was beating on myself, berating myself to the only one there to listen. This was a mistake, I thought. I’m making a fool of myself with this guy. He could care less about my babbling. Forget it.

Debating for a moment whether to run the yellow light, the driver elected to jam his foot hard on the brake as the light turned red, then drooped wearily under the weight of his own troubles and fatigue. His image in the mirror did not quite form a smile, but his face crinkled a little around the eyes.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, man. You’re here. You made it, dad.”

Maybe he had a point. Life mistakes, big ones and small, but this was not one. I was there for my kids in a small but important way on a short warm fall night. A guy who had taken his share of life’s knocks helped me reach my destination. ■

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