

Candles by the Roadside

Since Lola and I moved to Cleveland in the 1960s, we often have made the two-hour drive back to our hometown of Cookeville, Tennessee, for the holidays, for family get-togethers, for class reunions, for graduations, and the list goes on and on. And we still do, although not as frequently, since both sets of parents are gone.

After a few years, beside the road across the top of Grandview Mountain overlooking Spring City, Tennessee, we noticed a neat home with a well-kept yard and candles in every window visible to travelers. The candles were burning, no matter the time of day, and they shone the brightest in the dark of night, or under the cloud of fog, or in the midst of a storm. In winter, their warm rays danced on the snow.

The candles continued to shed forth their glow year after year (and perhaps still do; I'll check on the next trip).

What is it, we often have wondered, that led to the placement of these candles to attract the attention of passersby? Perhaps for a son who went away to war and never returned. Maybe they are intended to keep alive the memory of a child who died much too young. And it could be the homeowners' wish, in this small way, to remind motorists who have come their way that there is always the light of hope in a world filled with darkness and tragedy.

Whatever the intent, these lighted candles inevitably have the power to change any feelings of gloominess with warmth and security.

Edith Wharton, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, short-story writer and designer, said that there are two ways of spreading the light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.

Sometimes we are the candle. We shed the light of love and hope. We shine encouragement into dark souls, for this is a bleak and cold world for too many people, a frightening and lonely place in need of light. St. Francis of Assisi, Roman Catholic friar and preacher, got it right: "All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle."



But sometimes we are the mirror that reflects the light. We reflect back what we see in others to help them see their own light – their own goodness and beauty, their own strength and resiliency and resourcefulness.

So there are two ways of spreading the light – to be the candle or the mirror. Which are you?

(more)

And although I have not met them, it is my guess that the owners of that home on Grandview Mountain have figured out how to do both.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter