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April 11, 2011

GOING IT ALONE

In church the *'Passing the Plate'* or receiving the *'Offering'* is a fairly standard part of the order of worship. At our local Unitarian Church I have been intrigued by how the lay leaders will sometime introduce the offering with this statement: *"Each of us is warmed by fires we did not build and drinks from wells we did not dig"* Very interesting! This and similar sentiments have been expressed by a number of different writers over the years – but the origin (as best as I can determine) goes back to the Bible in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy Chapter 6, Verse 11.

Now I am not sure what being *'warmed by fires we did not build'* means to you, and I don't know for sure what the intended meaning is – but for me it reminds me that what we have, what we enjoy and what we benefit by has been provided by others. It reminds of Isaac Newton's famous statement: *"If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants"*. Because we have benefited from the work and the kindness of others – we in turn have an obligation to both help and be kind to others. It also speaks to me of the importance of being part of a community.

In New Hampshire we tend to see being a *'Rugged Individualist'* and the ability to go it alone without the need or benefit of assistance as being a real badge of honor. Unfortunately this means that sometimes, some people are reluctant to

ask for help and feel bad about accepting help. To their way of thinking accepting help is the same as admitting failure!

At different times in our lives we each make fires and dig wells in different ways. That can be in supporting our families, serving our nation and helping throughout our communities. There can come times at any age when we are not able to do all the things that we used to do or still want to do. At those times we have a choice to make. We can make ourselves and those around us miserable by bemoaning what we cannot do ---- or we can stop looking back and instead look forward to the things we can still do.

Accepting help is not at all the same thing as surrendering control!

I never tire of seeing the wonderful transformation that happens when people join a retirement community. Similar transformations occur when people join other kinds of groups including those that are faith based and those that are activity based such as sports and theatre. What is amazing about a retirement community is that in creating a real neighborhood of like minded people that amazing things happen just because of all the casual opportunities that are available to come together. Energy shared is energy multiplied – and people coming together constantly find new and wonderful ways to express that energy! Alone many people can find contentment – in my experience relatively few people who go it alone find excitement. There is no reason not to have Fun!

When we allow ourselves to *'be warmed by fires we did not build'* and when we allow ourselves to *'drink from wells we did not dig'* we open ourselves to the benefit of community --- and in return we also add to that community in ways that keep the fire burning and the well flowing.

Going it alone is a choice --- and for some it might be the right choice --- but for many, going it alone also means unnecessary isolation and loneliness. Choosing

to come together in community is a wonderful sign of strength and sometimes of courage – we all know it is easier (though not better) to do nothing.

‘Warming ourselves by fires we did not make’ is a good thing!

Age Well!

*Howard Chandler has worked in elder services for over 35 years and is Vice-President of Meredith Bay Colony Club along with being a Partner of White Mountain Eldercare Solutions. Your comments are always appreciated.
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