

Column

The wisdom of older folks is priceless and needs to be heard. I remember a centenarian I regularly visited in the '90s at the Fannin County nursing home. Her name was Antoinette Peterson. She was from Savannah but was living in North Georgia to be near one of her children.

Antoinette had strong opinions about everything and was not shy in voicing them. One thing I remember her saying was that the problem with today's young people was that their parents 'tote' them everywhere; they need to walk more. Of course, the young people of whom she spoke are now in their 30s or 40s. Even so, I dare say her observation still holds and is perhaps truer today than when she spoke it.

I am reminded of Antoinette's words when I see 'Junior' and 'Sissy' in a parked car with a parent behind the wheel waiting for the school bus. A further glance reveals that the driveway is no more than four car-links from the residence. No doubt,

concern for their children's safety is what prompts parents to such vigilance.

Even so, what parents do today stands in sharp contrast with what mine did when I was growing up. In the first grade at the age of five, I was sent out to walk half a mile to school. If it was raining, I and my fellow classmates had yellow, reflective raincoats with hoods made out of a heavy oilcloth material.

More than that, when the bell rang at the end of the day, you were responsible for getting home. There was a patrol woman in a navy-blue dress with white gloves and a whistle to get children safely across the street at a main intersection, but after she had done her job, you were on your own. Sometimes I would climb a fence and walk home through a cow pasture. Here you did not have to watch out for cars, but there was bull whose attention you did not want to attract!

It was the same when the summer break came. Children were not coddled or toted, and they certainly did not stay in the house punching keys on

a tablet. They went out, walked and rode their bicycles.

As I myself am now a senior citizen, I might add an addendum to Antoinette's assessment of what is wrong with today's young people: They are overly programmed. What I mean is that every minute is regimented. Not so when I was a boy. After breakfast in the summer, you were out of the house, either with friends or on your own. To fill up the time, you used your imagination, coming up with such things as creating a secret fort or building a tree house. You did not need to be continually entertained.

Back to Antoinette, she would tell stories about walking under the centuries-old live oaks dripping with Spanish moss through the squares of Savannah. On Sundays, she said her family would walk to St. John's Church on Madison Square, where when older she would teach Sunday school.

Her philosophy on taking children and young people to church closely paralleled that of my own parents. That philosophy could be summarized in the

words of the writer of Proverbs: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (22:6).

As a funny aside, Antionette, as long as her eyesight permitted, was a great reader. When she would see me coming down the hallway, if the book she was reading was at all ‘racy’, she would tuck it under the seat of her wheelchair hoping I would not see it!

Perhaps you know someone like Antoinette, an older person who has strong opinions and is full of sagely advice. If so, take time for them, pay attention and learn. "Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you" (Deuteronomy 32:7).

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect, Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer)

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