

On the Corner

by Robert Docter –

Life happens between endings and beginnings. They establish life's boundaries—the bench marks by which we organize our memories. Often, events define them; some self-determined, others imposed; some surrounded by pleasant feelings, others less so; some formed in crisis, others by creativity.

Such a boundary event has transpired in the annals of Army history as Paul and Kay Rader move from offices of international leadership in the organization to retirement and other pursuits. Rules dictate the timing of this event. The Army's implicit rule that individuals must move through progressive chairs of experience prior to significant responsibility fits very poorly with its explicit rule of mandatory retirement at a particular age. For employees, such a rule is illegal in the United States—officers are not considered employees. We are fortunate they have outstanding successors, but their term of service is even more limited. This matter is something to be examined.

My sense of the Raders is personal. The depth of my affection for them both demands that I reframe this event into a bigger picture. While they move off the scene of active leadership, their voices will not be stilled in chambers seeking international evangelization, nor in systems moving toward risk-taking change. Their pens will fly faster, their thoughts will travel farther, their inspiration will capture the hearts of even more.

They present to me a series of images indelibly imprinted on my mind. Some are visual, others auditory and still others within a relationship.

Visually, I sense him walking toward me—approaching, smiling, open, gracious—usually in uniform, never hurried. On one occasion, very early one morning as I waited with my family to be taken in for some major surgery, I looked down the long hallway from the waiting area towards the hospital elevators and spotted this tall, lean figure ambling toward us with a John Wayne kind of gait. He came among us and the tensions of the moment evaporated. The hospital was about 50 miles from his home. He must have started early. He saw it as missing the traffic. He joined us and prayed with us and stuck around till they hauled me away. I remember his presence that morning and what it did for my family, but most of all, I remember that long approach—straight-focused, self-sacrificing.



There have been other occasions I have sensed that approach— in airports and offices, on platforms and prayer benches, in conference rooms and media studios—moving toward people, joining, listening, involving, sharing. And that’s what he and Kay have done over the past five years in exhausting leaps across multiple time zones and cultures—moving toward people and assisting them in the needy corners of their souls.

They have impacted me as I have listened to the power of their messages. They are born teachers—always prepared, always motivating the listener, always designing material in a way that communicates, always finding means to stimulate retention. Whether examining a technical organizational question or expounding on the Word of God, they communicate. They touch the way people feel. They guide a thinking process. They send complete messages from undivided hearts.

They know how to listen as well. They are open to ideas and seek them. They seem to be hungry readers. They tend to surround themselves with thinking people. They enjoy the debate.

Once in awhile as we have met for any of a number of reasons he has asked me to pray. There is no greater intimacy than joining hearts together in prayer. One cannot be both prayerful and faithless. Who gives the gift as one requests another to pray? Perhaps the seeker in communicating both a sense of trust in the other and faith in God. Perhaps the one who prays and opens a heart to God on behalf of both participants. It is impossible to determine, but a gift of mutuality and interdependence emerges.

This is a couple moving through another of life’s passages. Salvationists all over the world have discovered, as I have, the genuineness of their friendship, the intensity of their devotion to God, the strength of their commitment to help the Army be all it can be. They know when to move off the stage and make way for others. We are sad to see them go, but look—down the hallway —moving toward us—approaching still.