

Facets
By
Daniel E. White July 1, 2024

“We knew her as we knew her.”

The son of a dear friend spoke those words at her memorial service. The audience was comprised of more than 100 people who, in fact, had known her in a variety of ways. She had been a pillar in many community activities, and she came from a large extended family with roots in Hawaii well back into the 19th century.

At one level, the words state the obvious. With further consideration, the words suggest something more, that she was a person of many dimensions and interests, a complex person with many facets. We who knew her knew facets of her.

That thought made me think about diamonds, the ones without a pitchers' mound or fences. Online, I found “Diamonds 101—Diamond Facets,” by Christopher F. Neil. Mr. Neil wrote “facets are windows into diamonds. They refract light and give it a gleaming appearance.”

I liked the metaphor that was emerging. The facets of her life were windows that refracted light and gave her life a gleaming appearance.

I already knew some of what Neil wrote about diamonds. Most emerge from the ground without the shape and sparkle that cause them to be considered valuable. There are qualities of color and size that vary but, in raw form, they are most notable for their hardness. That quality is the result of being under incredible pressure for thousands of years.

A skilled jeweler will see in the raw diamond the possibilities for faceting: Main, Star, Pavilion, Culot, etc. They help to create the sparkle which creates the value, along with the weight of the diamond in carats.

Like most of us, my friend was lucky enough to have multiple “jewelers” in her life who contributed their expertise to fashioning the woman I knew. Each facet contributed to a window into her life. Each facet added interest and sparkle.

Mr. Neil wrote that “the gold standard” for high quality diamonds is 58 facets. There might be more valuable diamonds with as many as 70 facets; generally, the more facets there are the more sparkle there is. Implied is that there is an ideal number of facets that combines with other factors to produce a prize diamond.

People of a Certain Age, I confess. I have known people who did not seem to me to sparkle much. I can even list reasons why I have found some people to be dull. (Well, isn't that opposite of sparkle, dull?)

Topping the list are people too sure of themselves. These include ideologues, zealots for any cause, those who tell me more that I would ever want or need to know about themselves and who they have met, the ones who never ask a question about me, so wrapped up in themselves are they.

Perhaps in those lives, the jewelers never got past one facet, one window, with little chance that any light would be turned into sparkle.

I prefer people whose sparkle comes from facets of kindness, respect, curiosity, noticing others and the immense and wonderful world around them, generosity of spirit, courage, endurance, hopefulness and so on. None of these facets require wealth or education, privilege or social standing. They are facets carved by character.

Of course, there is the strong possibility that I have chanced to know a person in a limited way, that time and circumstance might have combined to allow me to see only a fragment, one facet when, in fact, there are many. I suspect that there have been many times when the light has not been quite right for me to see the sparkle.

Who among us is immune from the possibility that we have only seen the ugly duckling when there is an elegant white swan there? Touching the tail or the trunk and proceeding to describe with “passionate conviction” the whole of an elephant is not an error limited to the Blind Men of Hindustan. Sometimes, a little more information might produce a more accurate and sympathetic reaction.

We knew our friend as we knew her, and we were lucky to see many facets. Hers was a diamond of a life with a core of integrity cut expertly into facets that sparkled, gleaming to the others whom she touched.

She would have agreed with me that none of these facets require wealth or education, privilege or social standing. Her work in the community came from a commitment to serve others however she could, and she found ways to give others the opportunity to serve. My friend was a “jeweler,” too, helping to fashion facets in others.

Diamonds and their qualities, facets as windows into diamonds, gleaming and sparkle; quite an appealing metaphor.

May we each be a “jeweler” in the lives of others, helping them to sparkle. In the end, we will all be known as we were known.

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