



The Building Community Institute

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August 2008
E-Newsletter

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PHILANTHROPY: REMEMBERED & UNDERSTOOD

As a young teenager growing up in the Mississippi Delta, one of my favorite television programs was the *Millionaire*. I could hardly wait for the weekly show to come into our lives, the unseen man, the graveled voice, the sometimes shaky hand and of course the 'check' handed over to the trusted administrator who would then go out into the world to change the life of someone. For me, this was the look of a philanthropist, an unseen and withdrawn person - a tired old man surrounded by money or a withdrawn eastern dowager being cautiously benevolent, never one who smiled or showed you their heart.

This picture remained with me for some time. Through college, my military career and my travels throughout the world, I saw the benefits of philanthropy. I saw the impact of the 'Millionaire.' I saw it in donated buildings for public use, medical wings named for the benefactor, and a myriad of other health and education initiatives funded by the largess of someone's heart. But for the most part, these gifts just appeared on my horizon and I never expected to actually know the 'Millionaire.' I was just seeing my favorite childhood television story lived out, that is, until I became a member of the University of Tulsa's Board of Trustees. I finally met the 'Millionaire,' not a wealthy recluse, but a tennis player with a big smile. I met Fulton Collins, the Chairman of our Board.

If you walk around the University of Tulsa's beautiful campus, you'll see his name on a number of beautiful buildings. More importantly though, Fulton was not the TV 'Millionaire' of my youth, we were all given the opportunity to know him. I remember my reluctance to become a member of the Trustees, as I could not match their giving. In talking with Fulton that day, many years ago, I felt as if I were indeed the reincarnation of the biblical "Widow and her Mite." I was embarrassed. I wanted off, that is until Fulton put me at ease, and helped me to understand that giving goes far beyond our financial resources. I was left with a lesson about the philanthropy of heart.

And as a new member of the University of Tulsa's Board of Trustees, his conversation assured me that I had what it took to be a philanthropist-an unselfish heart. As did he, I cared about others. I loved sharing from what I had. Upon leaving our conversation that day, I realized that all the while I was watching the "*Millionaire*" on television... a real philanthropist lived in my house, my mother, Mary. Mother had so little, but shared so much. During Thanksgiving in the Delta, Mother would always cut up our one small baked turkey into seemingly a hundred pieces and with a little food added, she'd put it on paper plates in separate brown paper bags and my sisters, my brother and I would go into the neighborhood to share from the largess of her heart. Fulton not only eased my fears, but also awakened a precious memory and in so doing challenged the rest of my life.

Fulton, the smiling philanthropist in the khaki pants, his trademark bright yellow tie and the blue blazer passed away just the other day. I am sad. I'll miss his smile and our many conversations in the Tulsa International Airport. My only regret is that I never took advantage of the opportunity to invite the Philanthropist and his wife Susie to my house and share with them from the largess of my heart. For this newsletter, the 'take-away' is not from the Building Community Institute or myself, but from my memory of Fulton Collins and my mother...two great philanthropists.

"Look around you. Look inside of you and find reason to become like them. After all, Philanthropy is just a caring heart that has overflowed." Whether sharing baked turkey or donating a major college building, they were both unselfish givers. I have little choice other than to follow suit. What about each of you!

- Clifton L. Taulbert