

An Act of Kindness, Long Remembered

No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted. Aesop

It is more than 35 years since I first walked into St. Michael and All Angels' Church, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. Having moved to the West Island a few years earlier, I had attended another church, but did not feel "connected" to it. That changed the Sunday when I walked, somewhat apprehensively, into St. Mike's. But, I was happy that I had found it as Jacques Bizard was not yet open and there were a many twists and turns along several streets before finally arriving at Cabot Street from Oakwood!

As I walked into the church, I was greeted by a smiling lady who immediately said: "you must be new here!" She proceeded to give me one of the warmest hugs I had ever received! I was very impressed, as indeed, that was the first Sunday that I was in that church. I had been there before, but for a Girl Guide service to accompany my daughter, Natasha whose guide leader was Marian McCreath and who had made me aware of this hidden jewel of a church.

My greeter introduced herself to me, wished me blessings, and invited me to join her and others after the service for fellowship during coffee time. As I went into the sanctuary, I could not help but feel "warm and fuzzy" - a feeling left by the warm welcome and kind words.

I also thought that the person who welcomed me was very special as she had a remarkable sense of observation and really knew how to make a stranger feel at home.

I do not remember much about the service, except that Reverend Murray Henderson was the priest and that he would be ending his tenure at St. Mike's in the near future. But, I do remember that after the service my greeter sought me out and took me around to introduce me a several parishioners. More warmth and friendliness! By the time I left the church, I felt as if I was on a cloud, just floating away with joy! It was the first such experience I had ever had in a church setting, as incredible as that may sound.

Needless to say, I decided that I would return to St. Mike's and that is exactly what I did, inviting my family to join me. Both Natasha and Tamara were confirmed there and Maya was baptised and confirmed there. After some years, I became a member of the choir when it was under the direction of Brian Hammond and I was also a reader and a greeter, having been inspired years earlier by that special lady. As well, I participated in some Bible study sessions and remember being led in the study of *The Purpose Driven Life* by

Louise Young. Remarkable experiences, all!

However, the most remarkable thing that happened is when I participated in a *World Day of Prayer* with other parishioners in downtown Montreal. In a group discussion that day my greeter was there and spoke of some of the experiences of her years in South Africa where Apartheid was still raging. It was a system which I had worked hard locally to eradicate by participating in boycotts. On that day, at that moment, I realized that she originated in South Africa (previously, I thought she was British) and realized in that moment that we cannot judge a book by its cover. Nor should we judge at all, as Jesus said! There she was, a white South African woman, welcoming me - a Black Caribbean woman - in the warmest way possible.

Needless to say, this lady and I became quite friendly and began to learn more about each other and the paths which brought each of us to Canada and to St. Mike's. One important thing that I remember is that she always had something to give, no matter how small. I still have in my possession a special letter opener with a mallard at the top which she gave to me and which I keep on my desk at work. This is only one of many gifts to me, or my daughter, over the course of our friendship.

Years later, this lady would help me with child care for Maya, driving to my

home and being there to welcome Maya at lunch time and after school, when I was not there. As a result of her warm, friendly ways, Maya developed a special attachment to her and remembers her fondly to this very day.

In the spring of this year, Maya and I had the privilege of visiting her at the long-term care residence where she has resided for some time. Although she no longer has the vim and vitality of her former years and now has memory challenges, I was happy to be in her presence and to spend time with this remarkable lady - **Audrey Hill** - who welcomed me to St. Mike's in a most unforgettable way almost 40 years ago!

I will always remember that welcome and with it, the Biblical admonition to:

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
(Matthew 5:16)

Veronica Johnson



This is Audrey today.
She just celebrated her 94th birthday