
MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

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Open doors-----Open hearts

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Carl's Garden

Carl didn't talk much but would always greet you with a big smile and a firm handshake. When he saw the flyer at our local church asking for volunteers for caring for the gardens he just signed up. He was well into his 87th year when three gang members approached him. Ignoring their attempt to intimidate him, he simply asked, "Would you like a drink from the hose?" The tallest and toughest-looking of the three stole his retirement watch and his wallet, and then fled. The minister came running to help him. "Carl, are you okay? Are you hurt?" the minister kept asking as he helped Carl to his feet. Carl just passed a hand over his brow and sighed, shaking his head. "Just some punk kids. I hope they'll wise-up someday."

A few weeks later the three returned. Carl again offered them a drink from his hose. This time they didn't rob him. They wrenched the hose from his hand and drenched him head to foot in the cold water. Carl just watched them. Then he turned toward the warm giving sun, picked up his hose, and went on with his watering.

The summer was quickly fading into fall. Carl was doing some tilling when he was startled by the sudden approach of someone behind him. He braced himself for the expected attack. "Don't worry old man, I'm not gonna hurt you this time." The young man spoke softly, offering his tattooed and scarred hand to Carl. The man pulled a crumpled bag from his pocket and handed it to Carl. "It's your stuff," the man explained. "Even the money in your wallet." "I don't understand," Carl said. "Why would you help me now?" "I learned something from you," he said. "I ran with that gang and hurt people like you. But every time we came and did something to you, instead of yelling and fighting back, you tried to give us a drink. You didn't hate us for hating you. You kept showing love against our hate." He stopped for a moment. "I couldn't sleep after we stole your stuff, so here it is back." He paused for another awkward moment, not knowing what more there was to say. "That bag's my way of saying thanks for straightening me out."

He died one cold day after Christmas that winter. Many people attended his funeral in spite of the weather. In particular the minister noticed a tall young man that he didn't know sitting quietly in a distant corner of the church. The minister spoke of Carl's garden as a lesson in life. The following spring another flyer went up. It read: "Person needed to care for Carl's garden." The flyer went unnoticed by the busy parishioners until one day a knock was heard at the minister's office door. Opening the door, the minister saw a pair of scarred and tattooed hands holding the flyer. "I believe this is my job, if you'll have me," the young man said. The minister recognized him as the same young man who had returned the stolen watch and wallet to Carl. He knew that Carl's kindness had turned this man's life around. As the minister handed him the keys to the garden shed, he said, "Yes, go take care of Carl's garden and honor him." The man went to work and, over the next several years, he tended the flowers and vegetables just as Carl had done. In that time, he went to college, got married, and became a prominent member of the community. But he never forgot his promise to Carl's memory and kept the garden as beautiful as he thought Carl would have kept it. One day he approached the minister and told him that he couldn't care for the garden any longer. He explained with a shy and happy smile, "My wife just had a baby boy last night, and she's bringing him home on Saturday." "Well, congratulations!" said the minister, as he was handed the garden shed keys. "That's wonderful! What's the baby's name?" "Carl," he replied.

(author unknown)

In Christian Love

George Harris