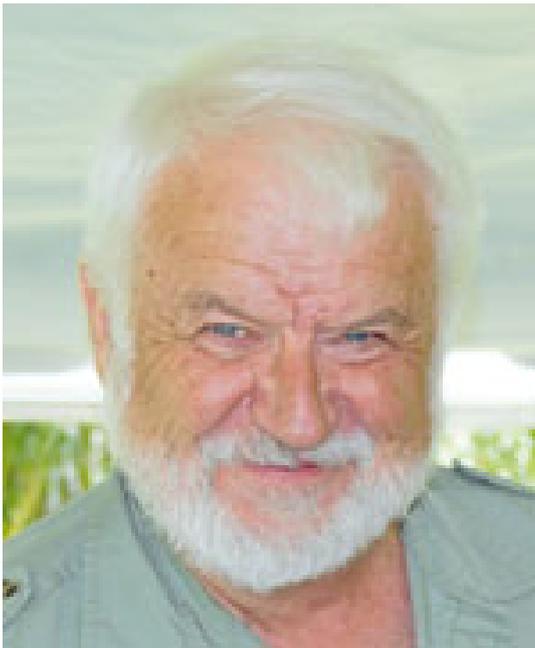


Hearts at Work

A Column by James Tipton

“...the people most important to you”



Anyone born in the United States in the first half of the 20th century learned a lot about how to live from western cinema heroes like Tom Mix (a movie star who actually served as a pall bearer at the funeral of real western hero, Wyatt Earp), Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Red Ryder, Gene Autry, Guy Madison, John Wayne, and The Lone Ranger, and later from the stars of television serials like *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Gunslinger*, *Gunsmoke*, and *Bonanza*.

I was born with a cap gun in each chubby little hand, and only a few short years later I scrunched down into a maroon seat at the Schines Theater in Ashland, Ohio and watched Saturday morning westerns (for a quarter) with my sisters Nancy and Peggy, and my cousins, David, Joe, and Danny. All of us were destined to become, after the movie ended, western heroes in our own back yards, at least until supper. A couple of years later I began to devour novels by authors like Zane Grey, Luke Short, Joseph Altsheller, and Max Brand. Only a few decades ago, living in Colorado and in my forties, one lonely evening, tired of more 'sophisticated' literature, I succumbed to subscribing to the Louis L'Amour Western Collection, receiving and reading about a book a month for several years.

Last week at the American Legion in Chapala I picked up a previously well-loved copy of Louis L'Amour's *Ride the River*; I was swept up into the simple L'Amour plot and the basically romantic but deeply held values of the characters. In *Ride the River*, a wise old lawyer named Mr. Finian Chantry tells our young heroine—several of his novels have strong and independent women as protagonists—Miss Echo Sackett:

“Do not let yourself be bothered by the inconsequential. One has only so much time in the world, so devote it to the work and the people most important to you, to those you love and things that matter. One can waste half a lifetime with people one doesn't really like.”

Amen.

The message is a simple one. If you are in relationships that complicate your life get out of them. Avoid self-serving people. Avoid people who are not thankful for the gifts of life. Avoid people who disguise their arrogance under the pretence of humility. Avoid people whose self-destructive behaviors want to take you down with them. Don't let those strangers in the dark bar seduce you to their table.

In his commentary on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (from *Life Surrendered in God*), Roy Eugene Davis cautions us to “be attentive to the relationships you cultivate or allow to be formed. An old axiom is, ‘A man is known by the company he keeps.’ We can easily know our sense of self-worth and self-esteem by examining our relationships of choice. If we choose to regularly associate with negative and self-serving people, or those who are provincial and grounded in conditioned consciousness, it reveals our own lack of self-worth and self-esteem.

If we choose to frequent places where discordant and destructive influences prevail, it reveals our uncaring attitude about the usefulness of purity. When necessary to mingle with people who are self-centered and self-defeating in their attitudes and behavior, remain inwardly centered in soul awareness and depart from them at the earliest convenient moment.”

Well, Pard, there's a lesson to be learned in the commentary by that Indian fellow named Patanjali, and also in those words so well spoke by Mr. Louis L'Amour.

Until next time, Happy Trails to you. And may you walk softly toward that sweet old cabin still waiting in that gentle wilderness deep inside of you.