

## The Swelling Leaf Buds



I have been fortunate to meet a few renown people in my life; David McCullough, the author, twice; Aaron Copeland, the composer, twice; Richard Lugar, the statesman more than twice. Once I was in the same small room with Ronald Reagan and observed his genuine and unpretentious nature; and there is now Phil Gulley, author and Quaker pastor who is a friend to all..including me. Every March for more than past half century I am reminded of yet another person on my list of distinguished folks. It is spring sap rising and resulting swelling of the tree buds that does it.

In March of 1962, I was a freshman at Indiana University--- a struggling freshman I might add. I had read in the Daily Student that there was to be an "open house" at the office of the President, Herman B. Wells. Never shy where there might be cookies and punch, I put on my best sport coat and tie....both were a green...like me... and hiked over to the President's office on the far side of the campus. When I entered, the secretary inquired if I was there for the open house. Cheerfully acknowledging that indeed was the reason for my presence, I was a bit surprised and chagrined when she replied, "Dr. Wells will be with you in a few minutes." Well, that was NOT what I thought an open house was all about. I was thinking more like a line of students...a shake of hand...a grab of cookie or two ...a glass of punch and then retire to a corner and see if I could spy a cute looking coed who would wink and we'd be off to chat and walk across the street to the Sugar Shack. I would have successfully found another reason to avoid Dr. Heath's Chemistry text...to have it replaced with another study of chemistry.

Those pleasant reveries were interrupted by having the pleasantly rotund Dr. Wells opened the door and ask for me join him in his office. One of his first

questions was "What year in school are you?" I replied, "Just a Freshman," to which he gently scolded, "Do not say, JUST a Freshman. Everyone must be a freshman at one point in their lives." There was an immediate connection with the man. I liked him. We shared stories-- found common ground between this President of the University and this now not so lowly freshman. Both of our mothers had been school teachers. He still had his mother's class room hand bell on his desk with a globe that had been there as well. At one point, I commented on the beauty of the view from his office window. That view was of the woodsy walking paths in that part of IU's beautiful campus. It was with this inquiry that that gentle engaging man made a simple and yet profound comment that has been with me every Spring since our visit. "Yes," he said, "It is quite beautiful and this time of year I can see the thickening of the woods from the swelling of the buds every day." The thought that the buds swelling would thicken a woods viewing had never occurred to me. As I have processed that small truth over the years, I have come to appreciate a very special quality of the man. There he was--charged with the Presidential duties of a great university and yet he took time to observe these swellings of tree buds. Perhaps it was this trait of noticing the small things..the small and yet so significant things that structured his wonderful leadership-- that skill that enabled him to appreciate the now while clarifying the vision of the yet to be. It was a life long lesson from a 20 minute encounter with that great man and educator.

One such of those "small things" was yet to happen to me personally. The following Autumn, during parents' weekend, I chanced to be walking on campus with my mother and father who had come to visit on Homecoming Weekend. We met Dr. Wells, affectionately known as Hermie to the students, lumbering on the walk headed our way. "Hello, Dr. Wells," I said upon meeting. "Well, Adams" he smiled. "How have you been?" I think I was as taken back as were my parents. The only adult on the entire IU campus that knew my name was Dr. Herman B. Wells, the President. He will ever be dear in my memory.... especially at the season of buds swelling. It was not so much for what he did, but for what he was...the caring giving man who found worth in the small things...the significances of the seemingly insignificant. What a lesson... a life long lesson from a twenty minute "open house" with him.

Don...Sunday afternoon, March 16, 2014