

“Smell The Roses Along The Way”

By Jim Speta

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Just about this time every year, the high school choir at my church, of which I am a member, begins work on one of our most special projects of the year. Each spring, during the week-long break, we tour the country performing a musical.

We do all the singing, acting, and dancing it requires. Of course, we have some great adult help when we're putting it together, but, when it comes down to the actual show, we either make it or break it.

Ours is not a small project. We have 80 members, an acting troupe, dancing group, technical crew, our own lighting and sound systems - I think you get the picture.

We rehearse long and hard, too. We do about a dozen concerts and cover about 5,000 miles.

Yet, when I think about what makes this tour great for me it is not the actual performing. The reason I enjoy doing this is the relationships which form within the group.

As we tour we are no longer 80 people who just get together to sing. We become a family, one unit, working toward one goal.

And, being alone with your friends for so long a time with nothing to do as you travel but talk to each other, allows deep camaraderie to develop. By the end of the tour, everyone knows each other and everyone cares for each other.

Sometimes I feel that experiences like this are missing too much in our lives. I'm not speaking about the experience of doing a musical - the important experience is the meeting of people and the forming of relationships.

Too often we know people only because they sit "two rows over in our geometry class." Sure, we can (and do) say "Hi" to them in the halls every time we pass. Still, we don't really know that person.

Teenagers seem to be incredibly busy. Even my parents say we have lots more to do than when they were kids. We have an infinite number of ways to spend out time. At any moment, the average teen is exploiting about half of them.

There used to be a little plaque on our kitchen wall at home that said, "Don't hurry, don't worry, and don't forget to smell the flowers." That little plaque says much to me.

Sometimes we hurry so much from one activity to another, from one group of people to another, we really never get to know other people on more than just a surface level.

One thing going on this tour has taught me about people is that first impressions are always wrong. Always. When you start to get to know someone they are always much more than you originally thought.

The most important thing I want to say (you knew I'd get around to it sooner or later) is that a tour like I go on isn't necessary.

If we all just took a little more time to get to know the people with whom we are already acquainted, relationships would blossom. Relationships are what makes life interesting, indeed, worth living at all.

Starting friendships, true friendships, can lead to anything.

When there is a problem and you can't talk to anyone but you need to talk to someone, a true friendship gives you someone to talk to.

Another of those wise little plaques said, paraphrastically, "A true love starts with a true friend."

Everyday life is the key. Events such as my tour can start things out. But without the same attitude of communication and caring all the time - it is for naught.

Forming relationships isn't that hard. Granted it will take work and understanding in the long run, but as my final little plaque said:

"Be a friend and you'll have one."