

Dear Family,

Many of you know that last week Chris and I flew up to Toronto and spent a wonderful 2 days with Sherrill, Heather, Mel, and their families, and most importantly, with Don. We watched CNN together, ordered dinner in so we could be together both evenings. Drake, Jordan, and Josh joined us, and we caught up on family news. Wednesday afternoon we were treated to the must-see show "Come From Away" at the Elgin theater in downtown Toronto. We replaced our imaginings of 4226 Bloor St. W. and Westpark Health center with the real thing. But most of our visit we just talked about old times, new times, and future times. We immersed ourselves in Meeks Land, or tried to, so that we would have things to remember and love. For the last few weeks I have been remembering, revisiting, and savoring our visit. I knew I had experienced something important, but it has taken me awhile to see through the turmoil of our goodbyes to the beauty in the background. Whether I can express it remains to be seen.

Don Meeks is by all measures a remarkable man. I found this written to introduce an article describing his recovery from his stroke in 2008:

*"Dr. Donald Meeks dedicated his life to helping people with addictions, building a distinguished reputation as a Professor at the University of Toronto and the Associate Director of the Clinical Institute at the Centre for Mental Health and Addiction (CAMH). His work took him around the world as a special consultant to the United Nations and the World Health Organization. In 2006, he was awarded one of the country's highest distinctions – the Order of Canada – for his outstanding contribution to the Addiction field in Canada."*



Wow! But it doesn't begin to tell the full story – it fails to mention his lively and daunting intellect, wry sense of humor, passion for justice, social conscience, generosity of spirit, his acute perception, the breadth of his compassion. But for me, his wife's annoying younger brother, his signature accomplishment was marrying Sherrill. He was the only guy she ever brought home who I thought might stand a chance of keeping up with her, the man whose opinions I came to both respect and seek out, the man who has loved my adored sister these 55 years and who has been loved back by her, the father of cherished nieces and their families, an example in courage and perseverance, a brother and a friend. I have even bragged about him from time to time, as if there were some status to being his brother-in-law.

Like me, Don is an old man now. He is living at Westpark in the harvest of love he and Sherrill sowed in their family and his caregivers. He was never garrulous, but these days (at least with us) he preferred to sit, and watch, and smile, and listen to the ebb and flow of the conversation around him. It is a mistake to assume he is not listening because from time to time he will ask for clarification on something. But his main pleasure, it seemed to me during those two days was seeing all of us loving each other, and him. This is the man I tried to say "good-bye" to that Wednesday evening, and words failed me. He is a man walking the path I will soon walk, in dignity, in grace, and to all appearances, in peace. I don't want to say Good-bye. I want to walk it with him.

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