Keith (Shemp) Tindall

Patriot – Father- Grandfather- Husband
And Cherished Extended Family "Brother"

By
Doug Pearson

It was not that long ago when someone advised that it was OK to go ahead and plan your future and outline an agenda for your life. Just do it in pencil, and rest in the knowledge that the Lord has the eraser. We all have our agendas and hopes for the future and, as best we can, we use them for our road-maps to life's endeavors. But usually, things come up where the Lord has other plans.

Our friend, brother and well-established member of our Sun Wheeler Family, had his life well laid out long before he ever was introduced to us. But, as with many, the Lord took out his eraser and helped to re-define that course occasionally.

When I first met Keith, he was a dedicated, career military man, in charge of a contingency of U.S. Air Force personnel, temporarily assigned to Jacksonville Air Traffic Control Center. They were there to learn all they could about FAA Air Traffic Control, and its operations, so that sort of experience would be on hand should it need to be exploited for future use. In that capacity, Keith was so good he excelled and qualified, in minimum time, as a journeyman ATC Specialist, in accordance with FAA Standards. However, mid-way through his USAF career, his temporary immediate supervisors wanted him to be employed. The Air Force, on the other hand, had other ideas as did the FAA. He was too old to meet FAA regulations for employment and the Air Force had an investment to protect.

Keith was very satisfied that his agenda, as previously planned, was his USAF career. But circumstances intervened and the Lord used his eraser. With some efforts, and some 'common sense' reasoning, the rules were waived. The Air Force released Keith from his obligation and the FAA offered him a career position. His agenda had been altered.

Along this road, he met the love of his life. Vivian Ritsma! Both had adventures with previous relationships and, as a result, had established families. But their mutual respect and love for each other triumphed over the pitfalls of the adventure. Another eraser of the 'penciled-in' agenda which was meant to be. They married and began to enjoy life more and more with each passing year, even with the occasional hurdle that needed to be surmounted.

A mutual interest in travel, brought them both into the motorhome experience as they began to stick their toes into the waters of this mode of travel. Ensuing experiences brought them to our Sun Wheeler (Chapter) family of FMCA (FRVA). Jumping in with everything they had, they were not only welcomed but they actively became involved on committees and holding elected offices. In addition, they joyously demonstrated just what the experiences should be, with the love and enthusiasm for this new "Extended Family". It was another instance of erasers and 'penciling-in' of another plan for their agenda.

A bit over a year ago, the Lord used his eraser again, as Vivian lost her battle with cancer. The Sun Wheeler family was devastated to lose such a vibrant lady, as was Keith who lost his new partner in life. But at the time, at Vivian's direction, he made a promise that he would stay involved and active with our family.

Now, Keith has lost his own battle with the dreaded “C”. After a valiant fight, all during which he continued his activity and love for his Sun Wheeler family, Keith was a light on the hill for continuing humor and love. But like so many, his life’s plan had been altered by someone who needed him more, for other plans.

The Sun Wheelers, and I, have lost a dear friend who was a compassionate, dedicated, loyal and a very bright way forward in the face of adversity. The nation, as well, has lost a skilled, dedicated and patriotic professional, whose bullseye on the horizon was always on target. Even when God exercised the use of his eraser. His final words to me, when I was able to have some time during his final days, was to “Keep your eyes in the rear-view mirror, as I’ll be coming up behind you very soon.” I loved the phrase, but I hope he doesn’t mind if I keep my eye on the road in front of me. I only hope I’m equally as qualified, in all my endeavors, to be honored to follow the same highway.

But then I am reminded, and I do, to rest in the knowledge that I don’t have the eraser. I do trust in the one who does.

Keith (Shemp) Tindall (L) and the author