

One Penny: My Friend Dr. Maxwell

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His hand was outstretched, and I was on my tippy toes to see. "Now," he said, "If these are your ten pennies, this one belongs to God." I can remember thinking, "This guy talks neat!" This is one of my first memories of Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell, telling stories and answering questions.

Dr. Maxwell was a fun person. I remember him sharing with us what happened when his son, Stanley, moved back home. Father and son would visit at their kitchen table and discuss words. Then they would get into heated discussions over meaning. Finally, they would break out the dictionary. And, as Dr. Maxwell said, "Sometimes Mr. Webster was right, and sometimes he wasn't."

Whenever I needed help on a paper, Dr. Maxwell was my first resource. When I lacked funds for my school bill, he always found a way to get them. When my sister was not helping out, he called her a "lazy wench." (He later assured her it was not an inhuman characteristic.) That was his style: saying something a person would not be offended by so he could get the message across. This is probably why I always came to him.

Even though I already had two grandpas, he was a grandpa to me. When I was little, he acted out stories. When I was older, he gave me advice (whether I wanted it or not). I can still see his face when I dyed my hair red. "I lived through the fingernail polish," he said. "But I don't know about the hair." There was always a clever remark ready whenever he spoke. He had a dry sense of humor, which was something I would not expect from a pillar of the Adventist church. We would have long telephone conversations when he would talk about my Mom, then me, and then my sister. Sometimes—I hate to admit—it would be difficult for me to get him off the phone!

I remember the last time we talked. He called after my grandfather had had a stroke. Dr. Maxwell expressed how he had "enjoyed watching [me] blossom into a beautiful servant of God." He went on to say how he was so proud of me

TILLY: ONE PENNY: MY FRIEND DR. MAXWELL

and that he felt that his prayers for me had been answered. He always knew the right thing to say.

Four days later I received another phone call, a call I was not expecting. When the phone rang, I was lounging in front of the television, vegetating like a piece of broccoli. By the way my mother jumped after she said hello, I knew something was wrong. She hung up and said, "That was Grandma. He died. Dr. Maxwell died." I froze. It took the longest three seconds of my life for me to begin crying. My stomach knotted up so tight I couldn't breathe. This couldn't be possible. My grandmother must have misunderstood. (She is, after all, getting old!) Dr. Maxwell can't die! He's doing too much for God to die. I needed someone to call, but Dr. Maxwell was the one I would have called.

I then faced the task of calling a mutual friend, Steve Beatty. I dreaded it for half an hour, staring at the phone as if it would tell me what I should say. Finally I got up the nerve and called. It rang twice—answering machine. I left the shortest message I have ever made: "Dr. Maxwell died."

The next night I was sitting in my mother's room crying when Steve stopped by. We sat by the fishpond. I can still hear the gentle trickling of the waterfall in the background. I was wearing my pajamas, but that was okay. He just wanted to sit. There are really no words for a situation like that. But once we found them, it was hard to stop. We relived stories about Dr. Maxwell. I recalled when he taught me how to throw an egg without breaking it—something every little girl needs to know. Some of the stories were funny, but most made me cry.

It was when I was standing outside the Youth Chapel at Pioneer Memorial Church, dreading going in for the viewing, that it really hit me. Steve was with me and sensed what I was going through. He hugged me and then I let it out, saying, "What am I going to do now that he is gone? Who am I going to talk to about my problems?" I felt very alone.

I made it through the funeral. It was long, with humor sprinkled here and there. The hardest part was seeing Mrs. Maxwell hold her granddaughter, Roxy, over the casket and say, "See, Granddaddy is sleeping." The body looked nothing like him. I felt like breaking down right there. Roxy just smiled. I had no one to talk to. I didn't know what to do.

About a month after the funeral, I realized something. He wouldn't want me to cry and moan for him. And he sure wouldn't want me to feel alone, or like I had no one to talk to. He wouldn't want me to continue thinking that way. The entire time I knew him, he always reinforced one thing—take it to God.

When I was little, he taught me about tithe. He showed how we are to give to God what is His. Well, God has claims on everything—including our problems. I had grown up relying on Dr. Maxwell to handle my predicaments. When I thought about it, it occurred to me that he had handled them by taking them to God. I think he would be proud if he knew I have finally gotten what he always tried to show me: Take it to God. God is the *only* one who will *always* be there

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to handle my problems. It is painful for me to think that it took his death for me to fully comprehend this.

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