



Cecil Abarr was a special man. A friend of this magazine and a friend of mine. He died on October 22, at age 93. Many will miss Cecil; most profoundly, perhaps, his beloved wife, Lou.

Countless Skidaway Islanders, especially those of recent vintage, are unaware of Cecil's lasting impact on their lives. In the 1970s, Union Camp tapped Cecil to move to Savannah as president of its Branigar development division and nurture The Landings through its growing pains. Cecil accepted the challenge, and he fell in love with his new home. He stayed for the remainder of his life, nearly half a century more.

I don't exactly remember when or where I met Cecil – I think it might have been at what is now my coffee shop, Cutters Point. We were both regulars then, Cecil often enjoying his morning beverage and conversation with his now-deceased buddy, Earl. Cecil was friendly and outgoing – more so than I, for sure – and it's probable that he initiated our first dialogue even though I tried hard to keep to myself.

I learned much from Cecil, most of it subtly. He was kind and pleasant, never noticeably in a foul mood. He always stopped as he walked by me to say more than a passing "hello." The thing that sticks with me above all else, the thing that has shaped my life significantly: Cecil was tirelessly committed to his community and service to others. He never stopped caring for people – those known to him or complete strangers...it mattered not. He didn't measure success in dollars; compassion, human connection, and social impact were his precious currencies of choice.

He saw something in me that I hadn't previously explored myself. Cecil recruited me to join the board of directors of MedBank, an organization that secures crucial medicines for the un- and underinsured. I had zero previous healthcare experience other than fumbling through my own family's doctor visits and having a disproportionate number of physicians among my core group of friends. I had never served on a social enterprise board before, having instead focused on conventional achievements, recreation and pleasurable pursuits. Soon, I would become chair

of MedBank's board and, because of its close ties to St. Joseph's/Candler, where – incidentally - Cecil once served as chair of the board, I joined the SJC Foundations boards, of which I would eventually become chair.

Cecil modeled for me the importance of a life of purpose. Through service, he remained intellectually curious, busy, connected and fulfilled. And he did a tremendous amount of good for a lot of people without asking for anything in return. For 20 years now, I have done as much unpaid work as I have labored for monetary reward...and I have loved it. Cecil opened that door for me.

Just as they had with me, Cecil and Lou befriended my parents, and I am grateful for that, too.

Cecil once – perhaps, more than once – described his childhood while we sipped coffees. He was born in rural Iowa without many comforts other than a mother's unflinching love. As in the oft-told tale, he walked, a long way, usually along dirt roads, to school and other places he needed to go, either for his own purposes or to fetch something for his family. His circumstances were both difficult and splendid as he recalled them. He was a hardscrabble, farm-fed manifestation of the American Dream.

I don't casually profess admiration. I am more likely to withhold praise than shower someone with it. But I admired Cecil. I admire Cecil. He packed a tremendous amount of living into his 93 years. Rest in peace.

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