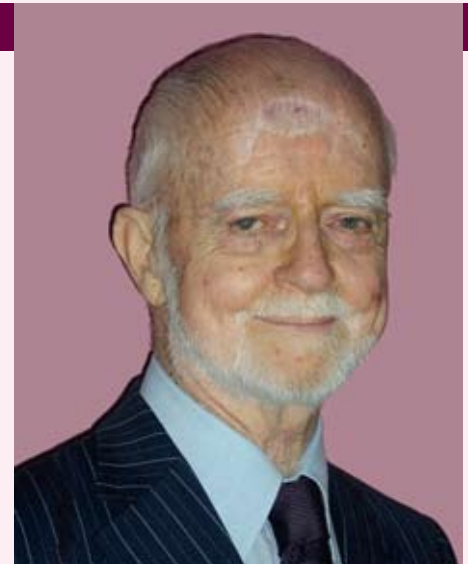


John Crawford



A Perspective on Achievement

For 2 weeks in August 2008, the world was inundated by Olympic excitement.

We witnessed elite athletes achieve lifetime performance goals—US swimmer Michael Phelps won 9 Gold medals; Jamaican sprinter Bolt became the fastest man alive with world records in 100 and 200 metres; Canadian equestrian Ian Miller got his first medal after 9 Olympics . . . at age 61!

We all know people whose accomplishments are not of Olympic proportions, nor do they appear on newspaper pages—sports or otherwise.

They are aptly described by the English poet Thomas Gray, in his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray.
Along the cool, sequestered vale of life,
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Musing over the headstones, Gray was reminding us of the achievements of ordinary people living everyday lives.

They include

- doing your job well and conscientiously;
- being the best spouse or partner you can be;

- taking the time to be courteous and kind;
- being a friend; and
- investing your time in volunteer work in your community.

Ordinary folks are doing extraordinary things everywhere.

There is no shortage of unsung heroes in today's society. Here are two examples.

Margaret

Despite working full-time as secretary/receptionist in her husband's solo medical practice in a mid-size town in BC, raising 2 teenagers and being a hockey/soccer Mom, and playing badminton to keep fit, Margaret finds time to volunteer delivering Meals-On-Wheels 3 days a week. In her late afternoon visits with seniors, Margaret says the need for conversation and companionship is even greater than the need for a nutritious dinner. Her lonely seniors cling to her visit time, while she worries about the food in the car getting cold before her next call. Margaret juggles the situation with delicacy and compassion.

June

June is a hardworking 50-year-old single mom who cleans and cooks for trawler crews when they are in dock. She is also friend to a couple in their mid-70s with significant health challenges—he has diabetes and heart problems; she has osteoporosis and Parkinson's disease. The couple is in the process of downsizing and moving into an assisted living home. June has spent evenings and days off organizing their move by staging their home for sale, running a garage sale, selling stuff on Craig's List, arranging movers, cooking meals, packing, and getting them settled in their new location. Her outstanding investment of time and effort has helped ease what otherwise would have been a very stressful transition for the couple.

There are countless examples in our communities of the type of activity described here. Ordinary folks are doing extraordinary things everywhere.

To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, a true measure of the character of any country can be found in the care and attention it provides for its less fortunate citizens.

While never becoming complacent and always recognizing the vast amount of work still to be done to improve the

lot of many in our society, perhaps we need to acknowledge the unheralded actions of our friends and neighbours. Without their efforts, our world would be a sadder and lonelier place.

Let's help promote the perspective that everyone's achievements have value. ▲

Dr. John Crawford is a former professor of Gerontology at SFU who, in retirement, was cofounder of the Canadian Academy of Senior Advisors in 2003. He continues to serve as its Vice President, Education.

In its 5 years of operation, the Canadian Academy of Senior Advisors has had the privilege of training over 3000 Canadian professionals to become CSAs (Certified Senior Advisors). They work with today's seniors and the seniors of tomorrow, the baby boomers.

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