

WHEN TIME PAYS OUT HER DIVIDENDS

As we passed through downtown Farmerville (Louisiana) this past weekend, I silently scoured the storefronts. Then from a memory reaching back about 20 years, I recognized the object of my surveillance. "There's where we saw Santa Claus in the rocking chair!"

This peculiar scene has endured not because of Santa (a December fixture), nor because of the rocker (a venerable southern symbol). But sweltering in the unseasonable heat in red suit and fluffy beard, Santa cooled himself with a huge bamboo fan in one hand as he waved his cap to passersby with the other.

Farmerville lies on our most direct route to Point, a smaller town that's "just a dot on the map" a few miles southeast across Lake D'Arbonne. Our friend Linda Hammett lives there.

Linda and her daughters, Kelly (9) and Kim (6), moved in across the street from us in 1975, and Mary watched the girls after school until Linda could get home from work. Kelly and Kim loved playing with our "Baby Jenny" (as they called her), treating her with utmost tenderness.

After about two years, they moved to Point to be nearer to family. Succeeding years found us regularly trekking to Point, taking our new son to see his "Aunt Winda." Kelly and Kim babied him, too, as he numerous "firsts" with their encouragement.

At Linda's house he picked his first flower and ate his first ice cream cone. And in the nearby woods, he first "hunted" bears with a wooden gun.

This trip to Point, the first in a decade, spawned vivid reminiscences from the "old days."

I remembered when Kim, through gritted teeth, concluded that my fishing worms looked like "pusketti." And when Mary questioned Kelly, who had mysteriously strolled over to our house to loiter in our kitchen, why she had left Kim at home, she airily explained. "I think there's a man in the house, but I didn't tell Kim so it wouldn't scare her."

And to Linda, our son enthusiastically paid the highest "compliment" in his repertoire. "Aunt Winda, I wuv ju more than goat's milk!"

Kelly gulped upon realizing that Mary and I had been married only 10 years when they had moved. "But I've been married 15 years myself! I thought you were so old back then!"

Though not unique to this phase of life, a mental evaluation constantly plays in my mind. Significant plans haven't yet materialized, and certain glorious dreams remain unfulfilled. Though Jesus emphasized that even a cup of cold water given in His name would bring reward, what activities have been truly worthwhile in the elapsed decades?

Watching Kelly and Kim interact with their own children, some older than they themselves when they tenderly handled our babies, unraveled one strand of this enigma.

Time does not squander the simple investments of kindness and love we make in each other, but instead pays out her dividends in a later season when we will more fully appreciate and understand them.