

# Focus on the good

Last month the headlines were filled with terrible stories of murders and suicides, of fathers killing their own families. The front pages of the newspaper always seem to have the bad news. That's why I always turn to the good news in the back of the paper - the obituaries!

One obituary that caught my eye was that of Portia B. Pitts. She and her husband, David Augustus Pitts, raised 12 children in public housing in Baltimore City. He worked three jobs at one time so that the family would not go on welfare. In his entire working life, he never earned more than \$11,000 a year!

Their home life was simple: "Every day she made homemade biscuits and prepared a meal for 14. Then we all sat down together and when dinner was finished, then she'd help us with our homework," said daughter Carolyn Taylor.

Education was important for them. Seven of the children attended college.

Portia had very practical advice about marriage: "People who say they never fight are lying. You are going to fight a lot, but you also have to be willing to forgive and forget - can't hold grudges all your life or just walk away when things get rough."

Another daughter, Naon T. Harris, concluded: "What can you say of someone who never forgot birthdays, never failed to greet you with a smile, never sought anything for her own, but was always giving and taught you to be thankful for life."

About a week later, while the headlines continued to be filled with tragedy; another obituary appeared about another life of love - Mary Paige McGuirk. She had graduated from Bryn Mawr College in Philadelphia. In 1941, she had married her husband, William. On a farm in Bel Air, the two of them raised 15 children! In addition to their own children, they welcomed teenagers from as near as Baltimore and as far away as Iran, Ecuador and Russia. "She loved them all," said daughter Mary E. McGuirk, "and continued to provide love and support to many until her death."

Her son Hugh said: "The door at Marylea Farm was always open, and a spare bed

could be found somewhere, for only a night or, perhaps, for several years. Her only requirement was that you clean your plate and assist with things to be done either in the house or on the farm.”

That she was not afraid of work is an understatement. The family remembers back in the 1950s, when a farmhand quit, that Mary “milked 59 cows by hand at 4:30 a.m. daily.”

Mary was a daily communicant at St. Ignatius in Hickory. She was also a patron of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in southeast Baltimore, where a memorial fund has been established in her and her husband’s names.

What accounts for murder and mayhem? Obviously each case is different. Surely there is some mixture of mental illness, fear, panic and evil. Each tragedy reminds us of how much we stand in need of constant prayer, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. There but for the grace of God goes for any one of us.

What accounts for generous and good lives? Again, each case differs somewhat, but similarities exist – faith, church, prayer, family values, and sound mental health and character. Portia Pitts and Mary McGuirk lived at opposite extremes of the economic landscape. But each had a faith to practice, a church to pray in and a God to believe in. As noted, Mary attended St. Ignatius in Hickory, while Portia was a weekly attendee and active parishioner of Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The road is too long and the way is too hard to walk though life alone. We need a faith family as well as our personal family. Evil is real. But don’t let evil intimidate you. Always focus on the good. Good overwhelms evil millions of times each day because of the quiet goodness of life’s real saints, such as Portia Pitts and Mary Paige McGuirk.