

John McGuire Chinn is a name that I doubt means much to anyone here but me.

John McGuire Chinn was better known as Johnny Mac, Mac or Macy. He was my mother's younger brother, my uncle. He died a few days after his birthday in early September of this year at the age of 82. He loved the neighborhood of his birth, White Oak in Stafford County. He loved his wife Harriet, and he had special affection for all of his nieces and nephews. He loved and took in stray cats and dogs. He loved all wild creatures and the changing faces of nature. He could write poetically of the coming of autumn, the bursting forth of spring, the heat of summer and the apparent barrenness of winter.

He loved to tell stories about people and their foibles. He also loved regaling anyone who would listen about the rough and tumble times of his childhood in the country, the characters of the area with names like Puddinhead, Gene Autry, Indian Joe and more. But when he told stories about his family his tone of voice always turned reverential. He loved and respected his parents and forebears.

He was eighteen years old when I was born. I was his first nephew. To me as much as he was my uncle, I admired him and idolized him like a big brother. When he got a flat top haircut I begged and begged my mother for the same, but she would not relent. When he got a gray, white and black striped cardigan I wanted one too. When my parents bought me a sweater similar to his I was beside myself with joy, "It is just like Johnny Macs," I exclaimed.

Johnny Mac, like so many in that family, was a great teacher. My dad labored day after day trying to teach me how to tie my shoes. In five minutes with Johnny Mac I was tying my shoes perfectly. My Dad also struggled to teach me how to throw a football. After just a few minutes with my uncle I was passing like a pro.

When I was in fifth grade I almost lost my right foot in a tractor accident. It was my fault, but when my uncle found out he was furious with my father. His was so protective of me that he almost got in a fistfight with my father.

There are many other ways in which my uncle was a mentor and idol for me. However, in recent years we had grown apart. I found it difficult to have a conversation with him on most any topic. It was very sad.

It was even more sad for me when, in his last days, he distanced himself from his family, especially my mother and us children. I wanted to help. I reached out, but I was not able to get through. The uncle that I loved and admired so much had become an enigma.

So I go back to the early days. I remember the haircut, sweater, shoelaces, football, and a hundred other gifts he gave me out of the generosity of his heart. A heart that God loved and that loved God back in its own idiosyncratic way.

I thank God for his life and for all of the lives listed in our bulletin today. For how each of them showed us an aspect of God unique to that person and our relationship with them. Life is like that. We catch glimpses of God in the people we love. Like an infinitely faceted diamond or sapphire that reflects God's light out into the world stunning us with its unique beauty. That light penetrates us and becomes part of us. Then it shines back out into the world that needs it so.