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Tucked away cozily in the corner of Purdue University's Chauncey Hill Mall is a small jewelry store. Unlike other stores of a similar nature it is not only a place where merchandise is sold and jewelry is repaired, but a place where friendships are made and companionship is sought. In this haven a man stands behind a waist high counter, waiting not so much for a customer but for an opportunity. What makes this store different is the philosophy of the owner.

From the day the doors were opened the intent of the owner was not so much to sell items of jewelry as to get to know his customers in a personal way. His view was that the business was not really an end in itself, but a means to an end. Each morning at 10:00 before the doors were opened he wondered to himself who it was that would be sent to him that day. He always felt that he was meant to be there to show compassion to the one person who might come through the door on any given day in need of some help or encouragement. The real question was not whether someone would come needing a listening ear, but whether he would be aware and open and be given the right words of comfort.

Most people think of a jewelry store as a happy place; of Valentines day's, anniversaries, birthdays, and Christmases. A lot of times – most of the time – he got to share in those happy times with his customers. He fondly remembers first promise rings that turned into engagements which lead to weddings and young families and gifts for baptisms and even to proms. It seemed a lot of times like the store just grew up along with the customers. There were even times when the jeweler remembered personally hand delivering gifts for husbands to wives in the hallways

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outside hospital delivery rooms or driving for miles to make sure a gift got delivered. He attended weddings and baptisms and birthdays and confirmations. He brought jewelry selections to the house on the evening of prom so mother and daughter could pick just the right item to fit the dress and the occasion.

More and more, as people came into the store over the years the jeweler found himself involved in the lives of his customers on more occasions than just the happy ones. Sometimes if he was there for the engagement he found himself called upon in times of divorce. He sat with couples trying to mend broken relationships, made crosses and wept with the mothers of lost newborns, refashioned wedding rings and mementos of deceased husbands and wives, and mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. Each piece of jewelry seemed to create new and deeper bonds between the jeweler and the families he was trying to serve. The store became a place of prayer for cancer, for automobile accidents, for rebellious children, for attempted suicides, for financial difficulties and for lost faith. He made hospital visits, held the hand of the hand of the customer in need of reassurance and stood with his friends at funerals. Relationship was what the store really conveyed to community.

One example of such a relationship began on a day when a confused Vietnam veteran, named Mike, walked through the door and began explaining how he had broken his ring in the aftermath of a seizure. After fixing Mike's ring the jeweler told him he would meet him for breakfast at the local coffee shop to deliver his ring, since Mike wasn't allowed to drive. The

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next morning he walked into the coffee shop and sat himself down in a booth in the back right corner of the restaurant. Since Mike was no where to be found, he placed his order, pulled out a commentary and began to read. After a page or two he felt a hand on his shoulder. Lowering his commentary, there stood Mike. After shaking hands the jeweler offered him a seat, Mike nodded his head, took off his jacket, and plopped himself down in the booth across from him.

Mike looked happy to have a companion, and began by asking what it was the jeweler was reading. The conversation quickly turned to matters of faith and family, his illness and his loneliness. That was seven years ago. Ever since Mike has enjoyed a place at our table at Christmas, Thanksgiving and birthdays; he joins us at family events and football games and calls just about every day to check up on the family. Mike is just one of the people for whom the jeweler has been there as a friend. This jeweler was there because someone wanted him to be there for all of those wives, husbands, moms, dads, brothers, and sisters – all the Mikes of the world who were hurting and looking for a friend or a person to talk to.

Now after twenty-five years the doors are closed, and the store is left dark. But though the doors of the store may be closed the meaning of the store, where friends were made and hurts were prayed for, continues in the lives of such as Mike. Every other day, the two still sit together in the same booth of the coffee shop, intent upon what Mike's day might have brought him. It has been a half of a year since the store closed and my Dad greeted and helped all those people through the tough times and struggles that confronted them in their lives. Even though his store is gone his friendly heart and warm smile greets his old customers wherever he goes in town. So

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if you find a hero like my Dad, a person who is willing to sit, and listen and share with you, whether the times are good or bad, I suggest you surround yourself with as much of their love as possible, because who knows when you might get the opportunity to meet a guy like Mike, and be someone's hero.