

Go the Distance

by

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So... I let this one speak to me and it said, 'I am a life from birth to death. I am the road everyone must travel from first breath to last.'

Here now is a collection of random thoughts from my childhood. These are flash images or expressions from years gone by. They might mean something to you or they might mean nothing at all... but they did happen.

My grandmother raking leaves in the yard. When their house on E. Smith street became too large for them, my father convinced them to purchase the little cinderblock house right behind ours so they could be within walking distance of our backdoor. She is wearing a long white overcoat and when she coughs she spits into an old handkerchief, looks at what she spit, then folds up the hanky and tucks it back into her pocket.

My father is just about to step out the front door. I ask, 'Where ya going?' He replies, 'Crazy, you wanna come?'

My father's other favorite expression is, 'You must have rocks in your head!'

He had much in his heart that he kept hidden from the world; especially his children.

I was taught from the beginning to address my elders as Mr. or Mrs. One day an old friend of my father's was visiting. This was a fellow who shared some wild times with him and he always called him 'Coopie'. His actual last name was Day. I walked in and said, 'Hello Mr. Coopie!'

My father almost fell out of his chair he laughed so hard. Apparently the name had some sort of 'special' meaning. The last I ever heard of Mr. Day he bumped into my little sister years and years later when she was working in a restaurant somewhere. He tried to pick her up not ever realizing who she was.

My Uncle Jerry, who was not really my uncle but a friend of my Grandfather's was funny and smoked cigars. Aunt May, who was his wife, was some ten to fifteen years older than he was. They loved each other very much. I visited their house once which was just behind Monument Park and like all old houses of that time there was no noise within but for the ticking of a mantle clock.

These were the post war years and the nation was a kaleidoscope of an entire nation trying to do the same. It even went back to war but in a different part of the world just because they could. At that time about all they knew was fighting somewhere. The country kept chugging along, right, wrong, or indifferent.

My father changed over the years. Before I was born and when I was very little he worked at many jobs trying to find himself. He was known as the condom king of the local area as he purchased condom vending machines and then went around to the different filling stations (today known as gas stations), installing them in men's restrooms. He also had a second hand clothing store primarily run by my mother and her mother. We then moved to the next city over where he worked for a finance company downtown.

We lived in a small house on Chautauqua Blvd. right on the edge of Lake Erie.

That year I remember him taking me sled riding down the street on a steel runner sled. I lay on his back as he lay on his belly like one of those Olympic Spider riders. He was so absolutely large under my little body it was all I could do just to hang on. It was such a thrill. On another day my mother took me to a small hill where all the local children were sledding and had me slide down in an old wash tub. The 'flying saucer' sled had not yet been invented.

Peterpan made its television debut while simulcast on the radio for those people who did not yet have a television. We watched some on the TV then piled into the car to go visit friends, listening to it on the radio, and then finished watching it at their apartment. Children did not rule in these days. If father said get into the car you got into the car.

So many memories come flying back when you do this sort of thing, just like the toy airplane belonging to a neighbor that I threw down the basement steps because I wanted to see it fly. It had cool folding wings, a canopy that opened, and landing gear that folded up... at least it did until I launched it. Gravity took care of the rest.

My father worked in this big building downtown that had an actual escalator. My sister and I called it an alligator and it was great fun to go and visit my father at work just for this reason.

I think this is the fork in the road where my father changed. He discovered the secret of making a lot of money while not actually having to work. Within a year we moved home again and he

opened his own finance company. This was all before the credit card was ever invented. He would do signature loans to people the bank turned down as not having enough collateral. I'm thinking this placed him one above those he loaned the money to and after being there for so many years and also climbing to the top of humanity's social pile, his own humanity hardened just a bit; though he was still charitable in his own ways. I remember him delivering some bags of groceries to a poor family, leaving them anonymously on the front steps.

My mother, still wishing to have her own business (in a time when women were not supposed to work) started a yarn shop. She ran it out of the house until my father got tired of it and she moved it to the old filling station at the foot of our hill which I can only assume my father purchased for that purpose. Of that place I think of instant hot chocolate after getting off the school bus and the most beautiful Iris flowers every spring.

My grandfather and all of his friends smoked cigars, chewed tobacco, and drank a shot and a beer, which was called a boiler maker. His generation was the last of the man's man. My father's generation tried to parody them but ended drinking whiskey sours. I remember peeking at one of their cocktail parties they had at the house. They played a drunken game where they all lined up man woman man woman. The ladies stuffed their hands in the pockets of the men's trousers and then passed a pie tin from one end of the line to the other. I was too young to understand why they might do this.

I could go on and on and on just like anyone else of an age but my time is up. I have puppies to tend to and must get ready for work.

My advice to anyone who reads this; Go the Distance.

Life is not bland. It gives us tremendous highs and tremendous lows. Coming from the generation of my time, we were taught to pick ourselves up by the boot straps and keep on marching. That's hard to do sometimes and yet we must.

You might ask, 'Why must we?'

I would answer, 'Because it is our nature to do so.'

Observe history and understand that humanity adapts to change. There is no right, wrong, or indifference to this... it simply is a fact.