

A Life Journey

One's life journey is met with challenges, joy, sadness, frustrations and hopefully lots of humor. Separated by decades are three memoirs of my personal journey.

Bob Fontaine

A Precious Gift

It was Christmas eve, 1952, and my family's final Christmas in our McCall home. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were among extended family members gathered with my parents and my sister, Rosemary.

Although I was only five, I recalled the language of the Old Country, Finnish, being spoken among the older relatives.

McCall was covered in a deep snow which was the norm for this time of year. There was never a question of snow being present at Christmas. The only question was the amount. I remember viewing through the open door a tunnel entryway with huge mounds of snow climbing seemingly to the rooftop.

Dad was dressed as Santa Claus, handing out gifts; first to the children. My sister's name was called and then my cousin, Don, and then I heard my name.

"Bobo, Santa yelled, "It's for you!"

"Thank you, Daddy," I responded.

I recall mom sharing years later that Dad was surprised and disappointed that I recognized him in his Santa outfit.

Having received my gift, I rapidly tore the paper off discovering that the box contained a "Happy Time" electric train. I was thrilled.

Memories passed are often precious and remembered always. I still have my electric train. It is now 73 years old and surrounds the Christmas tree each year for our grandchildren (and me) to enjoy.

My train remains a precious gift symbolic of the gift of happy childhood years and the simplicity of life in a small central Idaho town which always seemed a little closer to heaven.

First Date

“What are we supposed to do with these?” Toni asked holding the hot, damp towel.

“I don’t know,” I responded humbly acknowledging that I had never been in a fancy restaurant.

Switching back to the Gamekeeper Restaurant’s menu I continued to review prices I hadn’t initially considered prior to our first date. The reality was that my monthly elementary teacher’s pittance was going to take a significant hit.

But on this crisp mid-March Saturday evening in 1973 I wanted to impress a beautiful young lady. We had met two weeks earlier when she visited my sixth-grade classroom at Longfellow School as part of a Boise State University assignment for her nursing studies.

The dining experience was followed by a walk down Main Street to the Ada Theatre where we watched “Jeremiah Johnson,” a movie which had continued playing at the Ada following its world premiere at that same theatre four months earlier.

And with no desire in having the evening come to an end another walk followed down Ninth Street to Longfellow where we tossed a frisbee in the gymnasium into the early hours of Sunday morning.

The evening concluded with awkward mutual laughter at my date’s front door apartment as our first kiss resulted in the clashing of spectacles delaying what was meant to be a romantic moment.

I don’t recall what we ate or even if we had dessert. But I do remember the hot damp towel and the shock of examining a menu probably not intended for an Idaho elementary teacher.

Most important, I recall that it wasn’t necessary to impress my date with an expensive dining experience as we were simply meant to be together far beyond that memorable evening over 52 years ago.

Consequences

“You know you will face the consequences if you tease me! My four-year-old grandson, River, glared at me emphasizing the word “consequences” as he had had enough of Papa’s teasing.

Reeling back from the threat I asked, “What are the consequences?”

“Nana gets more hugs, and you only get one hug!” shouted River.

“OK, River. You win. I won’t unscrew your belly button anymore and I won’t call you Knothead.”

“What about my nose?” asks River.

“OK, I won’t borrow your nose anymore. But is it ok to tease you with your permission?” I pleaded.

“If I give permission then it’s ok,” agreed River. “And now you get a hug, but Nana still gets more hugs.”

As our grandson hugged me, I considered this moment and the lighthearted fun which River shared with a vocabulary beyond his four years. It is these moments I put in a memory bank never to be forgotten.

But I remain fearful for River and all our grandchildren thinking of a world which in their play they now encounter.

Climate change, constant war, the ramifications of artificial intelligence, the death of expertise, and refusal to accept facts linger among a lengthy list with no easy solutions; a list exacerbated by my generation and now faced by our grandchildren, where consequences are imminent.

River looks up at me with his warm and forgiving smile. “Papa, you don’t have to face the consequences. You get just as many hugs as Nana.”