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ENGH 0990

24 December 2010

The Flying, Ass-Kicking Scotsman

In life, many things transpire which inform our actions, our decisions, and our ways of being. I remember one fateful day, when I was young, which changed my perspectives on life, heroism, and courage. My family and I lived in New Orleans, Louisiana. The year I cannot remember, but I remember that it was during the early 1980s. I was grocery shopping with my parents on a late Saturday evening as we often did. We were stuffing the cart full of vegetables, fruits, cleaning products, breads, meats, cheeses, and other assorted things following a bitterly organized shopping list.

For once, my father told me to put any desserts that I wanted in the cart. For me, this opportunity was unusual. To put this instance into perspective, my father was a military man, a lieutenant colonel. He was not a man of leisure but a man of discipline. He was an army soldier and a nurse, and then a hospital supervisor. He lived most of his life eating three square meals a day, shining his shoes, and cutting his hair short (even during the 1960s). Moreover, my father was a tall, lean and dry humored Scotsman. For years, he fought the war of common sense with stupid people and the curse of alcoholism with himself, a curse which he would eventually win meritoriously and with honor.

Regardless of his cultural ways, he was, by everyone's account, often correct in his assumptions, practical in his thinking, and a hard yet respectable man. And, naturally, his habituated practices as a military man and his cultural virtues through generations of being a W.A.S.P. translated greatly into raising his children. So, dessert was a luxury which was not often permitted in our family. Offering to purchase cakes and pudding was a wonderful thing to me. In addition to the spoils, I shared a wonderful bonding moment with my mother and father throughout our shopping experience, joking about the

names of products and considering how easy it might be to slip minty EXLax into a chocolate cake for some unsuspecting victim. We were having a wonderful time.

As we arrived at the checkout line, my mother was reading the tabloids and as I looked at the covers, trying to make sense of how an alien was present in the same frame with Princess Diana. At that point, I looked up at my father. He seemed troubled yet with that face between concern and deeply contemplative aggression. He grabbed me by my coat and forced me into my mother's arms. Then, he said in a serious tone: "Take him and yourself to the car, start it up, and lock the doors...." My mother looked at him somewhat puzzled. Then, he yelled at her, "Go!" And, suddenly, he took off in a fast stride with his long thin frame. I admit that I had never seen a grown man run that fast or that deliberate ever. But, he did. He ran straight to a particular aisle, and then proceeded down the aisle even faster than before.

As my mother brought me down from the checkout line, the customer service person looked puzzled at how we could just leave our cart full of groceries. I was not too concerned. I was a bit puzzled myself and concerned for my spoils. Then, I heard a gasp from my mother as she ran peering deep into the same aisle that my father ran down. As I looked between the checkout stands, I saw my father down the aisle. He appeared to be wrestling with a large black man (much bigger than him) negotiating a very large knife. On the ground beside the two of them lay a grocery store clerk, covered in blood clutching his chest.

My mother moved quickly away from the scene. She was almost in a gallop with me closely following. In the midst of running, she was bursting into tears and sobbing uncontrollably. The entire time, my young mind was trying to comprehend what was happening, yet I could not. My mother followed my father's instructions: starting the car, locking the doors, and waiting patiently for my father. At that point, she drove slightly away from the store and angled the car towards the exit of the store, I asked concerned, "Where is Daddy?" At that point she cried more profusely.

Over the course of about twenty minutes, we waited. My mother dried her tears and put on a grave look of concern, staring intently into the fluorescently-lit store. I waited as well, playing a game with my G.I.Joe figures that I had left on the floor of my father's car. Within the span of those twenty minutes, I saw the police arrive. They walked slowly from their cars, almost casually, until one of the officers spotted a clerk yelling and motioning for them to come into the store. Then, quickly, they ran their fat donut-eating asses into the store and down the aisle.

We both waited about thirty more minutes. In that span of time, an ambulance arrived. The EMTs pulled out their gurney, and they ran briskly into the store. My mother again began to cry again, possibly fearing for my father's demise. But, I sat in the back of the car, innocently playing with my G.I.Joes making Flint kick Destro repeatedly into the ground. I had always loved Flint, as he resembled my father more than any other character. He seemed real to me. Oftentimes, I would imagine my father as Flint, a leader with heroic and albeit practical qualities. Of course, Flint was just a warrant officer. My father was a colonel.

Within minutes, my father emerged. His shirt was covered in blood and ripped, and his head slightly bruised. My mother sobbed as he surprised us with his sudden entry into the car, to which he touched her leg compassionately and quietly said, "Take me home." On the drive back, he said nothing. My mother focused intently on driving home; then, when we pulled into our driveway, he said nothing. He quietly and carefully moved out of the car and into our house.

I ran into my bedroom to pick up some additional G.I.Joes for play, and my mother sat at the kitchen table. My father opened a bottle of twenty-year old Scotch, he paused (as if to let it breathe), then he poured a tall glass of the dark, dense distilment. He stood in the kitchen looking at my mother, and he told her, "I love you." Then, he drank the Scotch, sat in his favorite chair in the living room, took a breath, and then turned on the television.

The following morning, when I awoke, I heard my older brother laughing and my Dad fully animated. I went to the kitchen to see what was happening. My father appeared to be telling the whole story to my brother. He told us that the clerk had caught a shoplifter attempting to steal some items. As the clerk confronted the man, the man pulled a knife and attacked the clerk, stabbing him multiple times in the chest. Luckily, with criminal incompetence, he managed to miss every vital organ with the exception of the lungs. My father continued telling us, how he almost achieved flight in tackling the large man. Then, he told us how he controlled the assailant's knife carefully and aggressively. He explained that the man was huge and that he knew no one was going to come to help him soon, so he, using his military training, freed the knife from the large man's hand and subdued him in a wrestling hold until the police came in with guns blaring. My father further explained that it took four or five police officers to hold the guy down just to put handcuffs on him. And, as the police took care of the large man, my father began to take care of the bloody clerk. My father explained how he applied direct pressure on the wounds and coached the clerk to breathe. He explained other procedures he took in order to keep the clerk alive, but alas, I was too young to comprehend his insightful and complicated terminology. My brother was genuinely interested, but not very surprised that our father was able to take on the larger man or save the dying clerk. After all, our father was scary when he had to be; he was a consummate medical professional; and, after all, he was our father.

In the weeks that followed, a few things happened. My father received flowers from the clerk who had made a full recovery, and he received a letter from the store manager thanking him for his heroic efforts and courage. I am not sure if my father ever had to testify against the assailant (who probably pled guilty with so many witnesses), but I am sure that our father commanded just as much respect in the grocery store than he did on an army base. In my eyes, our father will always be the most courageous person that I know, but to my brother and me, we will always recognize him as the flying, ass-kicking Scotsman.