

New Year's journey: Forks in the road

While taking a hike down a country road near dusk in my teens, an old farmer, plodding along with his walking stick, abruptly stopped me. His wrinkled-weathered skin did not diminish the energy in his clear blue eyes. Silver locks flowed from his wide-brimmed hat while his peppered beard gave him a majestic air of wisdom.

"Where you goin' sonny?" he asked.

"Just taking a walk to catch a few fire-flies when the night settles in on us," I said. "They seem to show their magic just as the sun goes down, but before the stars come out. I like the way they turn the long grass into street lamps, but none of the city noise to go with it."

"Should be a lot of them out this evening as soon as the red-winged black birds fall silent," he said. "So, if you don't mind my asking, where are you going with your life?"

"My mom wants me to go to college," I said. "She said it will give me a leg-up on living as well as make me a better educated man."

"Good for you," he said. "But what do you want to do with your life?"

"After I graduate from college," I said, "I want to travel the world before settling down to a job. I want to figure out some things about this life."

"Do you mind a bit of advice?" he asked.

"My dad told me to listen to my elders to learn their wisdom," I said.

"The path to your destiny has forks in the road that require the imperfect ability to discern the difference between opportunity and pitfalls," he said. "You will make mistakes in judgment. You will fail often. But remember to make those failures into stepping-stones toward your ultimate success. Never get down on yourself. None of it comes easy, but it gets easier as you travel the path with a good attitude, application by work and your ingenuity."

"My dad said something like that," I said.

"Smart dad," he said. "In addition to forks there will be cul de sac's or dead-end's, where you rest and re-evaluate the route you have taken. Everyone comes to these markers at some point. You will become wiser. Experience is the best teacher. So, if you find yourself going down the wrong road, or the road isn't working for you, turn around and go back. When you return to your original location, strike out in a new direction with the wisdom you learned while you traveled along the wrong road."

"That works for me," I said.

"As a young man, you are heading toward your destiny," he said. "To me the term "destiny" implies a pre-ordained purpose by some higher power. This implies a personal belief in that higher power. That may or may not work for you. It also implies that one's destiny answers the question, "Why am I here?" You will find out on your journey."

"Another thing," he said. "Your mom is right...choose your friends carefully. You will adopt some of their characteristics into your personality. When you hang with the smarter, more responsible folks in your school, you become more like them and succeed like them.

"Additionally, memories of your experiences are what come to you in those future quiet times with yourself. Make sure you accept yourself at all times. Even if you are not sure, assume

a sense of confidence in your own talents whatever they might be or come to be.

“Some memories will be filled with regret and some will be joyous. You will have both in your life. You get to choose the number of each by the way you live. And, one final thought from my days of meditation on hay bales and sitting beside a quiet pond with dragon flies, turtles, snakes and muskrats: everything you become, you chose. And, everything you chose, you wanted.”

As the fireflies lit the long grass, the old man tipped his hat before continuing on into the gathering darkness.

“Thank you, sir,” I said, as I walked through the magic of fireflies and stars twinkling in the sky.

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