

Old Timer

Always in my pocket is Grandpa's Old Timer pocket knife. It was a gift from my Mother. By any stretch, it's not an expensive knife. I like to reach into my pocket and wrap my hand around it. There's comfort in knowing something from the past can ground you in the present with memories of times and people.

Growing up in Southern West Virginia, pocket knives were common. There's much to be said about the calming effects of whittling. Whether carving a masterpiece or simply shaving curls off a piece of wood it's a great contemplative aid. It also fills up time between catfish bites. Shoes off sitting on the riverbank bare feet enjoying the coolness of the shoreline, hook freshly baited, a cloudless sky, birds singing, whittling on a stick. It doesn't get better than that. From such scenes, the world long since moved on. Probably not enticing to today's overly stimulated. There's a lot of value in God's calm and creation. The sounds of flowing stream, a fish jumping out of the water, birds chirping, even a bullfrog croaking. I sat there on the bank of the Guyandotte fantasizing rafting down the river like Huck Finn. It amounted to some unsuccessful tries and was replaced by the modern technology of the inner tube. With all of the world's newfound technology and gizmos, humans cannot recreate that environment. Even with the best virtual reality goggles we cannot.

For boys of my generation, if you were fortunate enough to have a pocket knife it was always in your pocket. I don't know what sort of ruckus it may cause these days if a boy carried his pocket knife to school. But we all did. At recess, we'd gather up in the school yard. We played marbles, always for keeps, or root-the-peg. It's also called mumbly peg among other names. Root-the-peg can be simple or complicated. With the time constraints of school yard recess,

we played the simple version. With feet spread, you stand facing your opponent. You throw the knife trying to stick it into the ground as close to your own foot as possible. Whoever gets closest to his foot wins. The winner gets to pound the peg (we used match sticks, horrors, we carried them too) into the ground and the loser rooted the peg out with his teeth. Sticking the knife in one's foot was rare and not recommended, but it was a winner.

We interacted with other kids and nature. Nowadays, kids interact with their smart phones and indirectly with others. Many of us adults do it too. Seems like we are giving up the natural for imitation. Could be I'm just hanging on to the past. The internet and rapidly expanding technology sort of put nature on the back burner. Interestingly, people who claim we are destroying our planet do so sitting inside air-conditioned cafes, mooching free WIFI, and sipping designer coffee. It's hard to have real concern for something you've never experienced. When your forest is concrete, it's difficult to accept your appreciation for nature and God's creation. Viewing the world through a smartphone is like drinking diet pop. It appears the same. It may fool the taste buds. But it brings less satisfaction than a glass of chemically treated tap water. What the body craves and doesn't get from the diet drink is gained by eating a biggie sized order of cheese fries. Diet this, lite that, low fat this... We didn't have that when we were kids and we were not obese. Maybe put down the phone get outside and exercise something besides our thumbs and have a bottle of real pop. Maybe toss in a moon pie. Maybe go out into the nature you're convinced cannot survive the cancer of humankind.

It isn't just smart phones. We've given our private lives over to cameras, microphones, and the tech masters of the universe. Our electronic assistant plays music for us, gives us the weather, sets the thermostat, locks the doors, starts the car, and opens the garage door. And listens to every

word, belch and fart happening in range of the microphone. Ever have a neighbor that couldn't get out of their garage because the electricity was out? The neighbor that had no idea you can unlatch the door from the motor and open it manually. Guess they could have found a video showing them how.

We've taken the natural out of everything. Now we strive to dehumanize relationships. Sex robots. Never gets a headache, I guess.

I believe I'll just hold on to Grandpa's Old Timer. Time is not passing me by. Natural doesn't change. God's creation and God never change. And if you risk a game of root-the-peg, you might get dirt in your teeth.

As we approach America's Independence Day, let's focus on what is real. What endures. What only has a 1.0 version. God Bless the United States of America.

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