



Jan. 8, 2013

An End of Summer Little Adventure or A Path to Family Renewal

It was Monday morning and I had decided to go to our Kids 'n' Dad office early. At 10:00 I spoke by phone to my daughter who informed me that she was going to take the youngest children to her mother's cottage. She wondered if I wanted to see the boys- 18 months and nearly three. An offer I can never resist.

The oldest child upon my arrival moved quickly to get his sandals in anticipation of an adventure. The 18 month old was quietly observing his brother; soon his tears demanded that he be included in the outing. He didn't need to worry!

Our adventure was to return to Waterloo Park; a place for this writer of so many fond memories as a father and grandfather. My thoughts about our park and family made me smile and laugh. Today my adult kids are likely to remind me through verbal digs of their childhood pleas of 'please no more Waterloo Park dad'. 'We are too old for the swings and those animals have had better days'. The words 'better days' hurt as I reflected that like the park's black bear of olden days I too had likely lived my better days.

As I set out I realized that I was indeed a fortunate grandpa to have a new, eager, 'more grateful generation' of children to mould to the joys of our family park. So off we went with my almost 3 year old identifying every construction vehicle ever built by Caterpillar. His little brother squealed and hummed to a selection of Itsy, Bitsy Spider.

We soon arrived at our destination and the ducks gathered around our car, impatiently waiting grandpa's freeing of their young friends from the shackles of the car seats.

It was a beautiful morning, perfect temperature, and our Park was alive with family sounds from every direction. The oldest grandchild scurried down the winding path toward the peacocks and their rooster friends. He found them sunning themselves and preparing to entertain their little admirers. But for us this is a momentary stop along the way to our prime target, feeding the deer and the Emus. Is that the plural for Emu anyway? Oh well, my grandson knew the routine well. He tore at the longer strands of grass and carefully positioned each so the Emus that he calls camels would be satisfied and return for more.

This exercise is always a little unnerving even for an experienced grandpa. My daughter for an unintended outcome- could revoke my day pass with the little ones i.e. animal teeth marks on his feeding hand would be considered a just cause.

These outings have a certain rhythm. The stops include visiting our different friends, the miniature horses, goats and the fishpond. The return of the piglets this day provided an additional, scented delight to our journey as the path turned in front of the well-stocked mini pond and waterfall.

Soon we retraced our steps with warm farewells to each of our animal friends. I was in particularly good spirits for we had escaped a scolding for feeding the deer/emus-camels. The youthful park staff had adopted what I call the pity rule for the old kid who had seen better days. They did point at the sign with a gentle shake of their head:

DO NOT FEED THE EMU (S?)

sometimes known as CAMELS

I didn't appreciate their posting of a picture of the old kid and the innocent little ones.

To celebrate a good outing I decided that ice cream was required. We soon became three spoons competing selfishly over a giant mound of vanilla ice cream. Finding the target for each spoonful seemed less important to the combatants than securing the biggest payload on our spoons. Soon that mound was reduced to a few melted drops to be licked from the container. I leave the rest to your imagination.

It soon was time for the short trip home. The little ones were locked safely into their seats. It has been a joyful experience, a gift that was not always a certainty in our family's life.

I was unexpectedly reminded of that truth as I slowly initiated our departure toward the park's ring road. Passing in front of me were two friends. They are wonderful and loving parents and grandparents; yet they were pushed aside- turned into invisible grandparents by the separating process in this country. They and their grandchildren became lifelong victims as all lost the daily love and support of each other in their lives.

The riches of my day embarrassed me at that moment. I knew that I too could have suffered a similar fate just as thousands of other grandparents and grandchildren who have yet been unable to find their way home to each other.

In a few short moments we knew that the conversation needed to end, each for our own reasons. As I departed our Park, I noted that the littlest one had already fallen asleep and that the three year old was singing his own rendition of Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.

As we approached the children's home I remembered wavering on whether to reveal that pre-lunch, celebratory ice cream thing to my daughter. I quickly recognized that secrecy was unavailable when I spotted that grandpa's post ice cream cleanup had failed miserably.

As the children ran to their mom with arms outstretched and evidence of their outing on their jerseys, I detected from my daughter's half smile that she was fondly recalling those same outings to our same family park and zoo ...and that vanilla ice cream was always, dad's final way to conclude a wonderful outing. I knew that I was forgiven.

This 'little adventure' at the end of summer at what I call our Family Park is about the most common of family events and the bonds built between generations of my family as we journey imperfectly through the struggles, joys and changes of family life.

It is about the universal love that exists within each parent for their child and their child's child that endures in every family. That love must always be cherished and valued as the greatest of gifts. This past year I have been constantly reminded of parents' capacity to love their children and grandchildren forever, through whatever.

Every child, parent and grandparent, whatever their family circumstance, deserves to walk hand in hand through the best and worst of times, and everything in between.

From: Grandpa and the Little Ones. (By the way Emu(s?) do look like camels)