

Friday Lite



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Pecos Bill

...is a clown. Or shall I say,
the man behind the clown.

He is 90 years of age.

The phone rings with another
request and out comes the
makeup and the outfit and of
course his trusty companion,
'Ole Paint – the pony on the
stick.

But Pecos Bill is far more
than just a clown in a suit. He
is a summation of several
pages of history - as one would
be in so vast a lifetime - and
that makes him extraordinary.

As a decorated soldier
honored by the country of
France; -

As a participant in man's first
encounter with space as an
active member of the early
Apollo Program team; -

As a family man of six
children, countless
grandchildren and great
grandchildren; -

Pecos filled pages of history
as a man who personified a
singular principle – to be his
best in all things, always, and
to do so with devout human
kindness.

Find this set of character traits
today and you find the real
meaning behind the clown.

Add to this his wife of 68
years who helps him into the
clown outfit that she sewed for
him and you have an a-typical
couple in a modern world that
rarely takes pause to notice
him get into his car and drive to
yet another nursing home for
the purpose of putting a smile
on someone *else's* face.

There are perhaps other
clowns in other cities; perhaps
other volunteers who do similar
things as Pecos; but there is
only one man who can wear
his shoes and herein lies the
value of human life – we are
each unique in the midst of our
being common and ordinary.

Dubbed *the great generation*,
Pecos is one of those great
citizens of its era. But ask him
about it and he perhaps takes
it in stride, shrugs the notoriety
and quietly states that he
considers it his duty and his
honor to serve others.

What Pecos may fail to
realize perhaps is that his life is
a fish bowl of sorts, a mirror, a
symbol to those who stand in
his shadow and watch and
learn and absorb and then try
to live out his legacy with that
same duty and honor.

If what makes Pecos unique
is not his age,

nor the fact that he volunteers
as a clown,

nor the fact that he served his
country honorably,

then it is the fact that he has
withstood the test of time and
all that life threw at him. It is
the fact that he is still able to
put on clown makeup, tell a
joke, laugh at adversity and
shoulder all the pain life may
have brought to him, with
dignity.

How does one stay married to
someone for 68 years and still
learn something new about
them nearly every day?
Perhaps that answer can be
found in the man behind the
clown and in his lifetime work.

As the country of France
awarded him their medal of
honor, The National de la
Legion d'Honneur and pinned it
to the lapel of the man behind
Pecos recently, he stood on
the platform holding hands with
his wife as if they were
newlyweds and I was reminded

that love is timeless

and boundless

and forgiving;

..and that they are examples of virtuous living *that they* wove within the common and the ordinary, by choice.

Although I think it tragic that so many of his time took their story to the grave – he alone stood - not as a clown, but as a WWII Soldier, a First Lieutenant, in a room filled with the young soldiers of today - as *their* symbol - that through sacrifice, they help provide the hope and freedom that make a better world.

As a mixed crowd of uniforms and non-uniforms, young and old applauded Pecos and his wife that day, it struck me how they, in part, bear witness that although we don't control the circumstances of our lives, we do control our approach to them and that perhaps one key to a long life is to begin and end each day hand in hand.

Therein lie lessons from *their* fish bowl:

Honor is taught by action;

love is taught by more give than take;

honesty is taught by consistency;

...and a gentleman still opens the door for his wife every time,

every day, no matter how old he becomes and

...he takes her hand in his own whether someone else is watching or not.

Ninety years is something to ponder and perhaps Pecos and his wife would shrug off the fact that they have lived so long. Having buried most of their friends and siblings, they too perhaps wonder why they remain.

It makes one consider the fact that the Creator takes us home when our work is done and not a day sooner.

It got me thinking ...

A man in his eighties once said to me, "when the past looks better than the present, you are done living." So how are we ever to know when the last heart is to be touched,

the last joke to be told,

the last clown appointment to be scheduled?

Ask Pecos and his wife where all the time has gone and most likely they would shrug and get on with the events of the day just as they have done every day for the past 90 years. It is doubtful that they give much thought to the fact that they've had more days to live than most.

What they do focus on is people. They have spent a lifetime engaged in other peoples' lives.

Pecos can recall many events in history;

his wife can tell you nearly every name of the members of their extended family and a lot about them;

together they both embrace the modern technologies to keep in touch;

and yet, if you are in the room with them, you are the center of their focus.

The television is off.

The radio is off.

The PC is off.

Their day is wrapped around you.

Find that in this modern world, and you have the key to a long life and its priceless gifts.

Perhaps this is what they learned early in their lives together. Perhaps this is what they consciously decided was the most important value in life – that they would *make* time for people however inconvenient that may be.

Or perhaps it was never a conscious decision at all but just an extension of who they are as people.

Regardless, some virtues in life take work and whether conscious or not,

we choose our friends;

choose what to do with our time;

choose how we will live;

choose how we will serve our God and His people;

..and in doing so we refresh the pages of our lives every day and start anew.

This is what Pecos and his wife represent and in 90 years of it they have indeed touched a lot of lives.

An astronaut recently returned from space. He said he took nearly 80,000 pictures of the earth looking out from his little window on the space station. As some of those spectacular and awesome pictures were shared while he spoke, I was impressed by their dimension and perspective:

each dot of light on the surface of the earth

represented a home;

a life;

perhaps a family;

but at minimum, a unique human story.

One of those specs comes from the light on the front porch of a clown and his wife of 90 years.

One spec.

We make a difference when we choose to do so. This is what 90 years means to me. This is the lesson I have learned from it.

Love is timeless. Virtues never change. Principles withstand the test of time.

But none of it means anything without the spec.

Living 90 years does not make us saints or perfect or extraordinary. Living 90 years makes us examples.

As the phone rings for yet another clown request, Pecos pencils the time on his calendar, walks to the closet for his outfit, puts on his makeup and reaches for "Ole Paint. Perhaps he wonders if it is his last time.

As his wife of 68 years kisses him as he departs, perhaps she wonders if it is her last time.

But I think about that astronaut in space looking out and taking his photographs from a space flight that he

knows is his last time, yet totally unaware that one of the specs he captures with his lens represents a single clown and his wife who have done so much for so many.

It gives me pause to realize that time is not something to waste.

...this is what 90 years has taught me.



Pecos Bill and 'Ole Paint