

Don't Drag Old Glory through the Mud

My grandpa pretty much paid cash for everything he ever bought; except, of course, his house. I understand it took him nearly a year and a half and two bumper crops to pay that off.

If my Mimi needed a new Lincoln, Papa went and got a Continental; cash money. If the farm needed a new cotton picker, Papa went down to John Deere; with cash money. When it came time to pay his workers, Papa would dig in his britches and whip out a wad of bills thick enough to befuddle Ben Bernanke.

No, he wasn't rich. In fact, his folks had been poor immigrants from Italy. Papa was just smart enough to embrace the American way of working hard and staying out of debt. I never gave him much credit for it, at least not until the day he drove up with a brand new yellow three-wheeler in the back of his truck.

If he had intended it for 'Farm Use Only' he'd obviously failed to consider the nerve pounding pressure produced by the overwhelming whining wattage and pleading power of two bored toe-headed boys visiting on a summer break.

Yes, within hours my little brother Heath and I had not only talked him out of the keys, but run through his inaugural tank of gas. Naturally we were miles from home when it sputtered to a stop. Something told me we should've listened to Papa's instructions before peeling out on his foot and tearing off.

They were just shy of filing a missing persons report when we finally made it back to the house that night. Papa was hot. He yelled at us all the way back to the three-wheeler. Then again, when he realized we'd left the lights on and drained the battery. It was a good thing we didn't understand Italian.

Over the next few months we stirred up so many turn rows around town our dust clouds were starting to show up on local weather forecast. The townsfolk took to calling us the 'Dusty Duo'. Papa was even considering the police chief's suggestion about getting us helmets.

It was great. We'd never experienced such freedom. Other than the occasional bump or bruise suffered during minor altercations over whose turn it was to drive, life couldn't have been going any sweeter. Then the rains came.

For two days, big fat thunderheads sat upon us and pelted the parched little town. Finally, on the third day, the lightning abated somewhat and the rain slowed to a heavy sprinkle. We headed back out for ole' Yeller. We'd been cooped up in that house so long I'm not sure who was more excited, us or Papa.

Our attention swung immediately to the low swag in the side yard, which was now ankle deep. You could hardly tell Papa's best stand of Bermuda was under there.

I suggested it would be a good place to carve out a nice little figure eight track and start our own version the mud derbies. It turned out to be great fun, at least until Heath alleged that I was cheating as the official time keeper. The proceeding altercation caused tempers to flare, and greatly fueled the fierceness of our competition.

Soon we'd whipped that mud up into a froth, and the rpm's were revving right off the gauge. We were slipping and sliding like barefoot boweivels break-dancing in a bowl of buttered boiled okra!

We were so wrapped up in winning we didn't even notice how the water sizzled when splashed up on that overtaxed little engine, or how the clouds we were now riding under were not thunderheads at all. They had a much more oily smell.

Yes, we were blissfully, and perhaps, willfully ignorant of all the warning signs. We were still talking trash right up to the point ole' Yeller backfired and locked up on us. I don't recall a lot of our dialog after that, but I'm sure it included the phrase, "Uh-oh!"

Isn't that just the way it is most times? A new generation coming up doesn't take time to consider or appreciate the sacrifices and the struggles their forefathers endured to bring them the freedoms they now enjoy.

It sure happened with ole' Yeller that day. I just hope it doesn't happen here, with Old Glory. The Lord has blessed us so because of our forefather's determination to establish 'One Nation under God'. I just hate to see us drag it all through the mud now. *(Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. **Judges 2:17** NIV).*

Neither Heath nor I knew much about praying, but we suddenly felt compelled to learn. We called a truce and fell to our muddy knees together. From there we did what came natural. We begged. We pleaded with God to spare us from the great wrath of Papa!

We found the Lord to be most merciful. In nothing short of a miracle, ole' Yeller sputtered back to life and ran long enough for us to get her back to the barn. The rains revived and flooded over the muddy mess we had made, at least until we could call momma and have her come take us home!

But anyway- I learned a lot about stewardship that day, and how easy it can be to totally ruin an awesome blessing entrusted to you. I also learned the value of prayer and the power of repentance. Boy, if we could just get a hold of these things as a nation.

-Guy Sheffield

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