

Eric Seiley
Bridges Burned Along the Way
6 February 2023
1, 121 Words

Talking in the Library

"There ain't much new under the sun, that's all I have to say," commented Quigly the old technician.

"What's that?" asked Tommy, the new apprentice.

"I was quoting from the bible in reference to this place. I said there ain't much new under the sun. Ecclesiastes."

"The Bible huh?"

"Yeah, smart book. Way ahead of its time. We surely have gathered and experienced nearly everything in human existence right here in this library that's for sure. Ain't nothing much new under the sun anymore. Ain't much sun left either."

"So how do you cope? How do you stay in business?"

"We get along. You gotta understand people and psychology is all. People don't want something new so much as something new *to them*."

"How so?"

"Well, take this fella here. All the money in the world. Job, wife, kids. Big house over in the Dell Way section of town. Plenty of food and drink. Friends who will come over and share it with him if he were to call. Not much need for him to wander. His life pretty much being the gold standard most folk dream about. But here he is just like the rest of them. Only, they want to experience what he got, but all he wants is something he don't. Something HE hasn't experienced yet. Something new. New to HIM anyways. It ain't his fault really. It's just human nature. They all come to experience something new to them."

"Why not just go out and experience it for themselves then? There's factory towns and such that specialize in that kinda tourism. History re-creation and what not. That's what most people do. And it's far less expensive."

"Like I told you, psychology. Even if he was to experience something new in one of those places, it would be his old self experiencin' it. In his own body. Pretending. Nothing new there. And if they was to do so in real life, than what they experience could possibly damage or change them. They don't want to damage what they got, nor change really. They just want to experience something new for a spell. Something that won't harm who or where they are in life. This way, they get to BE somebody new while experiencing something new in the process. Afterward, they go back to their safe existence without having lost anything. Understand?"

"I see."

"Do you?"

"I do. And this place runs on those profits?"

"It do. Enough to keep a family fed, a roof over our heads, and something new to enjoy just about every day. Enough for you too if you play your cards right and learn well."

"I fully intend to. Thank you again for the opportunity, Mr. Quigly."

"No need to thank me twice. Once is enough. But I am glad to give you the chance. I ain't never had an library apprentice before. It's been interesting. See what I mean, something new. It wakes you up to the enjoyable things we have each day in our lives. Otherwise we'd lose interest and take everything for granted. Even the bad stuff, though we prefer the good of course. Psychology, like I said. "

"Yes sir. Psychology."

Well, I suppose we better give this gentleman his something new then. He's paying a good price for it. Now hand me that porter wrench and hold on to the hexa-twist while I turn the handle."

"What new experience did he select if you don't mind my asking."

"Not at all. Ohh, he went old school. Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry. Western. Wonderful book. Good story. A lot of these rich bander type folk like to start with westerns - here hold this wrench a sec while I hand tighten the headline cable – though they mostly like to experience the book through the Augustus character. He has a livelier story arc. But, for my money, Captain Call is the worthier enigma. The better character in the series."

"*Lonesome Dove*. I heard of it. I watched *Dead Man's Walk* when it streamed over the Falahee last year for Past Century Celebrations. I even saved it to my SeraCore, *Dead Man's Walk* that is. But I can't afford any direct cortex streaming."

"Well, now that you work in a library, you can. Cortex stream all you want. Just do so after hours and not while you're working. It's actually good to stream since it helps to be knowledgeable when advising the clients on content choices."

"Cool beans."

"You know it is. You're too young to remember, but I actually read all the *Lonesome Dove* books, including *Dead Man's Walk*, on paper when I was young. Really young."

"You did?"

"Yes sir, I did. A long, long time ago of course. It was quite the experience. Stays with you, you know."

"No, not really. Paper was completely gone by the time I got to school. I don't read. I mean I do, but it's mostly, you know, digital stuff; self-help technical books and the likes."

"Sure, sure."

"So what was it like reading something on paper?"

“Well, you needed an external light source cause paper books didn’t have any glow built into the paper you know. And it took longer when you read. You had to concentrate more. But it was also more direct somehow. More intimate. Which isn’t to say SeraCore streaming isn’t great on its own. Loads of people love it.”

“I know I do. That’s why I’m here.”

“Well, cool beans then. Here now, this gentleman is ready. Let’s send ‘em off on his way. Hey, before you stream direct into the any client’s cerebellum, make sure all the lights along the control panel here are green, right? Then press the go button here. Don’t send them unless they’re all green. Green for go. Got it?”

“Got it.”

“Well then, he’s ready. Press the go button and off we go. Off into the wild blue yonder as they used to say.”

“Got it. Pressed and done. Now what’s this you say about the child who wanders?”

The End.

Post-script: I like how this piece came together in one long take though I don’t believe it to be that original. I can recognize the influences of sci fi writer Harlan Ellison all over it. The inspiration came when my daughter Grace asked why I liked to read so much. And I tried to explain to her how, when you read a good book, you lose yourself in the story. This story was my

attempt at exploring how a good story can not only be lived in but stay with you after. Or something to that effect.