

Nuggets of Fun and Nostalgia for Treasure Valley Golden-Agers

We Left the Light on For You



My name is Thomas Miller. I am 46 years old, and though I have no mugshot and no rap sheet, I am a thief. I have spent years committing a quiet, bloodless robbery against the only two people who would trade their last breath to keep me breathing.

My father, Arthur, is a man whose skeleton seems to be made of iron and North Carolina red clay. He spent forty-two years in the heat of a furniture factory, his lungs coated in finish and his fingers scarred by saws. Today, he sits in a recliner, defeated by the complexity of a TV remote.

My mother, Evelyn, is the woman who once managed to make a single chicken and a bag of potatoes feel like a Sunday feast for six. Her laughter used to be the heartbeat of our home. Today, she loses her breath just navigating the walk to the mailbox to see if the mailman brought anything other than bills.

And me? I am the one stealing their last remaining hours.

I don't do it out of cruelty; I do it out of "success." I live two states away in a city of glass and granite, where being "slammed" is a status symbol we wear like a designer watch. I have a huge mortgage, two teenagers who only look up from their screens to ask for gas money, and a digital calendar that looks like a game of Tetris.

I convince myself I'm a "good son" because I call every Sunday at 6:00 PM (usually while checking my work email on a second screen). I send the "Grand Deluxe" gift basket for birthdays (ordered on my phone while waiting for coffee). I pay a local kid to plow their driveway so Arthur doesn't have to touch a shovel.

But I know the truth. I give them the crumbs of my life—rushed voice notes and "likes" on Mother's blurry photos of her garden. I've tricked myself into thinking that providing for them is a substitute for being with them. I was dead wrong.

Last month, a conference in Columbus was cut short. Suddenly, I had a dead afternoon, a rental car, and no obligations. My parents live ninety minutes south, in one of those Appalachian towns where the coal dust has settled and the clocks seem to have stopped in 1994.

I didn't call. I just drove. I pulled onto their gravel drive around 3:00 PM. It was a Monday. The autumn sky was that bruised, beautiful purple-grey. The sun was still high.

And that's when I saw it...

(Continued on page 2)

A Hazardous Shot

I had a couple of hours to kill the other day, so I headed over to the golf course to play a quick nine.

An older gentleman walked up and asked if he could join me since we were both playing solo.

I figured he might slow things down a bit, but I said sure. Turns out, he was a great partner.

He wasn't fast, but he kept a steady pace and never held me up. Plus, he'd been playing that course for decades and had a helpful tip for just about every hole.

When we got to the ninth, I ran into trouble. My tee shot sliced off to the side and landed near the edge of the course. Between me and the green stood a towering oak tree, just a few yards ahead.

I stood there staring at it, trying to figure out my next move.

The old-timer nodded and said, "You know, I was in that exact spot about thirty years ago. I just hit it right over the top of that tree and landed on the green."

"Seriously?" I asked. "Seriously," he said with a confident grin.

So I grabbed my iron, took a big swing, and sent the ball straight up.



It smacked the tree halfway up and dropped right back down—four feet behind me.

He chuckled and said, "Well now... thirty years ago, that tree was only about three feet tall."



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The Best Gift of All

Four brothers left home for college — one became a lawyer, one a doctor, one a scientist, and one an entertainer. They all went on to be very successful.

When their elderly mother was living alone, each son decided to give her a special gift.

Years later, the brothers were talking about what they had done for her.

The first said, "I had a beautiful, large house built for Mama."

The second said, "I installed a state-of-the-art home theater — cost a small fortune."

The third said, "I bought her a brand-new luxury car with a chauffeur."

The fourth smiled and said, "You know how Mama loves reading the Bible — and you know her eyesight isn't what it used to be. I sent her a parrot that can recite the entire Bible from memory. It took 12 scholars and 20 years to teach him. It cost me \$100,000 a year for 20 years, but it was worth it. All Mama has to do is name the book, chapter, and verse."

A few weeks later, Mom sent out her thank-you notes.

To the first son, she wrote: "The house you built is enormous but I live in just one room. Thank you, dear."

To the second son, she wrote: "The theater is lovely, but I don't see or hear well anymore. Thank you anyway."

To the third son, she wrote: "The car is beautiful, but I rarely go anywhere.

Thank you all the same."

And to the fourth son, she wrote: "You truly put thought into your gift. The chicken was delicious."



(We Left the Light On For You—Continued from Page 1)

There, on the porch of the house where I once crashed my first bike, the light was burning. Not a sleek LED or a smart-bulb. It was the old, amber bug-light in the frosted glass housing. It was glowing—defiant, warm, and utterly unnecessary in the bright afternoon glare.

I sat there, my hands gripping the leather steering wheel, feeling a surge of "modern" annoyance. The efficiency expert in my brain started doing the math. "Dad, do you know what the utility rates are doing? Why are you wasting juice?" I could hear my own condescending logic.

I didn't get out right away. I just stared at that stubborn yellow glow.

I'm 46. Dad is 82. Mom is 80. Their world, which once encompassed PTA meetings, union halls, and neighborhood card games, has folded inward. It has shrunk to the dimensions of that small ranchhouse. The hunting trips are over. Most of their friends are names on headstones now. Their universe is now the kitchen table, the pharmacy, and that porch.

When I walked in, the TV was blaring—some game show host shouting over canned applause. Mom gasped, nearly dropping her knitting, looking at me as if I were a hallucination. Dad tried to haul himself out of his chair, his joints popping like dry kindling. A flash of genuine physical pain crossed his face, but he buried it under a grin.

"Well, look at this," he rasped, his eyes turning glassy. "The big shot finally ran out of gas in our neighborhood."

We spent five hours doing nothing. And it was the most productive five hours of my decade.

I ate a piece of dry pound cake I didn't want. I listened to Dad explain the territorial disputes between the local blue jays as if it were a front-page scandal. I updated the software on Mom's phone.

As the sun dipped below the hills, the house grew still. The silence in an old couple's home has a weight to it. It's a physical thing, made of ticking grandfather clocks and the low hum of the chest freezer.

I stood at the sink with Mom while she rinsed the coffee mugs. Through the window, I saw the porch light, finally making sense in the gathering dark.

"Mom," I said softly. "When I got here today... it was the middle of the afternoon. Why was the porch light already on?"

She stopped scrubbing. She looked out at the yellow beam, her expression one of tired, infinite grace. "Because, Thomas," she whispered, "we never know when someone might need to find that door."

The wind was knocked out of me.

She didn't say, "We knew you were coming," because they had no clue.

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Older Than Dirt Quote of the Day:

I went to see 'ol Doc Winslow the other day.
Told him I broke my arm in several places.
He told me, "Stop going to those places!"



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For All the Mothers Who Give So Much

The cutest little girl and her mom were at my yard sale today. I happened to be selling a Pink Disney Princess TV, and I overheard the little girl very politely ask her mom if there was anything she could do to earn the money to buy the TV. She did not just ask if she could have it. She asked if she could earn the money herself. She was about six years old.

Her mom told her she could not afford it right now, then kissed her forehead. The girl replied, "It's okay mommy," and grabbed mom's hand.

I watched them carefully pick out items they needed and count their money to the penny as they did. At one point they were picking out some dishes and the little girl said how nice it will be having more than one cup and one bowl at their new place.

I could tell this mom and daughter had gone through something and the interactions between them were so genuine, so precious.

I saw the little girl look over at the TV every so often. My heart was mush.

As the mom brought her items up to pay, I said, "I would like you to have these things, no charge."

Tears filled her eyes as she thanked me, told me how much it meant to her, and that I had no idea how much I was helping her right now. Then she asked, "But why?"

I said, "I sense that you are going through something right now. But you obviously have not let it deter you from being an amazing mom, and you are raising a wonderful, beautiful, joyful, polite, little girl."

She confided that they had fled an abusive situation with only what she could fit into a duffle bag for them both. She had saved just enough money to get them into a small one room apartment. She felt blessed, lucky. They were safe.

I gave her some pillows, blankets, a blow up camping bed, and a box of food. She hesitated at first and seemed almost ashamed.

I told her, "We all go through hard times. When this season passes for you, you can 'pay it forward' to someone else." And then, yes... I quietly asked her if I could give her little girl the Disney Princess TV.

I wish everyone could have seen the look on that beautiful little girl's face when my husband carried that TV to her car. I will never forget it.

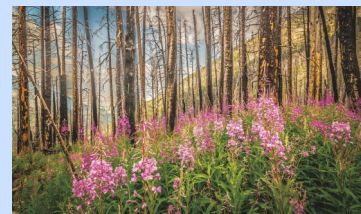
My heart is full knowing that precious little girl and her mom have full tummies, clean pajamas to put on, a "bed" to sleep in, pillows under their heads, and blankets to snuggle into.

What they probably don't realize is that they blessed me far more than I blessed them.

God's Creation

We live on a planet full of fascinating things:

- ◆ Where trees warn each other of danger through under-ground networks;
- ◆ Where octopuses dream;
- ◆ Where elephants return to the bones of their dead and stand over them in silence;
- ◆ Where bees communicate through dance, showing each other where to fly where the flowers are blooming;
- ◆ Where crows remember human faces—especially those who were cruel to them—and pass that memory on to their young;
- ◆ Where ants build entire cities;
- ◆ Where cats purr at a frequency that can help heal their bones;
- ◆ And where forests—after fires—grow flowers first.



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She Can't Bear It

A couple was vacationing in Yosemite Park. The wife expressed concern about camping because of bears, and told her husband she would be more comfortable in a motel.

To calm her concerns, he suggested they talk to the park ranger to see what the likelihood of a bear encounter would be.

The ranger told them, "Well, we haven't seen any grizzlies so far this year, or black bears, either, for that matter."

The wife shrieked, "There are TWO types of bears out here? How do you tell the difference?"

The ranger replied, "Well, that's easy. See, if the bear chases you up a tree and it comes up after you, it's a black bear. If it shakes the tree until you fall out, it's a grizzly."



The motel room was quite nice.

He's More Than a Piano Player

An old scruffy guy walks into a very classy restaurant and orders a steak. The waitress says: "I'm sorry, but I don't think you can pay for your meal."

The guy admits, "You're right. I don't have any money, but if I show you something you haven't seen before, will you give me my dinner?"

The waitress, both curious and compassionate, says, "Only if what you show me is something really amazing."

"Deal!" says the old guy and reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a hamster. He puts the hamster on the ground and it runs across the room, directly to a piano. The hamster then proceeds to climb up the piano and starts playing honky-tonk tunes.

The waitress is amazed and says, "You're right. I've never seen anything like that before. That hamster is really good on the piano."

The guy puts the hamster back in his pocket, sits back and enjoys a fine steak supper with all the trimmings.

Shortly thereafter, he asks the waitress, "Can I have a piece of that fine blueberry pie I see on the dessert cart over there?"

"Only if you got another miracle up your sleeve," says the waitress.

The old guy reaches into another coat pocket and pulls out a frog. He puts the frog on the table, and the frog starts to sing up a storm!

A stranger from a nearby table runs over to the guy and offers him \$500 for the frog.

The old guy says "It's a deal." He takes the five hundred and gives the stranger the frog.

The stranger runs out of the restaurant with dollar signs in his eyes and a big smile on his face.

The waitress says to the old guy, "Are you nuts? You sold a singing frog for \$500? It must have been worth millions!"

"No, not really", says the guy. "He doesn't know the hamster is also a ventriloquist."



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(We Left the Light On For You—Continued from page 2)

She wasn't just talking about me. She was talking about my brother in Seattle who is "scaling his business." She was talking about the grandkids who haven't called since Christmas. She was talking about the world that had outpaced them.

That light wasn't an electrical waste. It was a lighthouse. It was a signal fire burning on the edge of a forgotten coast, screaming to the darkness: "We are still here. We are waiting. We haven't locked up the heart of this house yet."

I realized then that my parents aren't just "getting older." They are navigating a loneliness that my "connected" generation cannot fathom. We have ten-thousand followers on Facebook, but we have left the people who gave us life stranded on a silent island.

I stayed the night. I slept in my old room, surrounded by trophies for sports I no longer play. The next morning, I watched them. I saw how they both flinched with hope every time car tires crunched on the gravel outside. I saw how Dad, a man who once stood up to corporate giants, now checks his phone every ten minutes hoping for a text from a grandson that will never come.

They don't want my "Premium Flower Arrangements." They don't want the fancy gadgets. They don't want me to "fix" their lives. They just want me.

They want the sound of my laughter in the kitchen. They want to hear me complain about my boss. They want to sit in the same air, watching the news, and feeling the quiet reassurance that they haven't been erased yet.

The truth is, parents never retire from their job. Their knees give out, their eyes fail, but the job description stays the same: They wait. They keep the light on. They hold the fort until we decide to come home.

Our only job is to show up.

If you are lucky enough to still have them—those slow, analog, sometimes frustrating people who gave you everything—do not wait.

Don't wait for the holiday. Don't wait for a "gap in your schedule." There is no such thing as a good time. There is only this time.

And please, do not wait until you are standing at a casket.

Go to them. Go on a random Monday. Drive the extra hours. Cancel the meeting. Just walk through the door. Sit on the faded sofa. Eat the stale crackers. Listen to the story you've heard thirty times before, and listen to it like it's a sacred text.

Look at their faces. Note the new wrinkles. Memorize the rhythm of their breathing.

(Continued on page 6)

That Barbie is Expensive!

A father is driving home from work when he suddenly remembers it's his daughter's birthday. He quickly pulls into a toy store and asks the clerk: "How much for one of those Barbie dolls in the window?"

The clerk replies: "Which one, sir? We have:

- Workout Barbie – \$19.95
- Shopping Barbie – \$19.95
- Beach Barbie – \$19.95
- Disco Barbie – \$19.95
- Ballerina Barbie – \$19.95
- Astronaut Barbie – \$19.95
- Skater Barbie – \$19.95
- And... Divorced Barbie – \$265.95."

The father says, "Wait—what? Why is Divorced Barbie \$265.95

when the others are only \$19.95?"

The clerk sighs and says: "Because Divorced Barbie comes with Ken's car, Ken's house, Ken's boat, Ken's furniture, and Ken's computer."





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**"Pre-" means before,
and "Post-" means after.
To use both would be
"Preposterous"!**

"Hyphenated" does not
have a hyphen,
But "non-hyphenated"
does.

And "verb" is a noun.

*(We Left the Light On For You -
Continued from page 5)*

Because a day is coming—sooner
than your ego wants to admit—when
you will pull onto that street, and the
porch will be dark. The house will be
silent.

And you will realize, standing on
that cold driveway, that you are no
longer a child. You are an orphan. You
will look at that dark window and you
would give every promotion, every
stock option, and every dollar in your
retirement fund just to see that
"wasteful" yellow light flicker on one
more time.

You will beg
the universe
for sixty
seconds to
walk through
that door and
say, "I'm
here."

Don't be a
thief. Go home
while the light is still burning.



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