



THE GIRL

John Farewell | State Circuit Rider II

Once upon a time (for this is how all stories should begin) there were 2 monks returning to their monastery after a day of work in a distant field. As they walked along, the sky began to turn black. Soon rain began pouring down transforming the dirt road on which they traveled into a mud pit. While passing through a small village, the elder monk noticed a young girl standing on the steps to her porch. She had just received a new dress and was anxious to show her grandmother, who lives just across the street. She dared not cross for fear that her new dress would get soiled. The elder monk, seeing the girl's dilemma, walked over to her, picked her up and carried her over to her grandmother's house. She kindly thanked him as he turned and walked away.

Now mind ya, in this story, monks were bound by 2 vows. One, a vow of silence and the other a vow of solitude. In no way were they to communicate with those outside the monastery and speaking, even to each other, was forbidden. The younger monk seeing his elder carry this girl across the road was appalled. How dare he break his vow of separation and accommodate this young girl. He felt the need to address the matter nevertheless, being vowed to silence himself, he could say nothing.

Hours went by as they walked along in silence. Finally, the younger monk couldn't take it anymore and shouted out, "Why did you carry that girl across the road?" The elder of the two simply turned and said, "I set that girl down hours ago, why are you still carrying her around?"

I can remember a time in my childhood when the first grandchild was born to my parents, I was 11 years old at the time. Visits to my older brother Mark's house were common as we all welcomed the addition of his new daughter, Gretchen, to the family. Upon one occasion Gretchen was wearing an outfit that was a little big for her, as infants normally do. Not really meaning anything, I casually mentioned it. My brother snapped at me, something he had never done before. I'm sure he meant nothing by it, probably had a bad day at work, nevertheless, it scared me. I quietly left the room and pushed this event to the back of mind and never mentioned it to anyone, until now.

As the years went on Mark, his wife Stef, and family moved to Virginia where he worked as a contractor doing home repairs. The 10 hour ride made those once common visits rare, usually centering around the holidays, weddings, funerals or other major family event.

It wasn't long before I too left the nest and began my own life. As the years passed by, Mark and I seldom saw each other. That's

why I was so pleasantly surprised this past July 2018 when, right out of the blue, I received a call from Mark. He started the conversation by saying that he gets the feeling that I'm afraid of him. Of course, I responded by saying, "Don't be silly, why would I be afraid of you?" (After all it had been over 43 years since that faithful day) We went on to have a great conversation and catching up on old times. By the time we hung up, I felt like a million bucks. My big brother called me, and I was finally able to put that "girl" down. The one that held me prisoner for over 43 years.

It was only a few short months later that I again heard Mark's name. Though this time it wasn't his voice, it was that of my oldest sister who informed me that Mark was in the hospital. He had been having difficulty breathing and after several trips to the doctors, ended up in the emergency room. An onslaught of testing over the next several weeks left him with a diagnosed Mesothelioma and he was given only short time to live. I, as well as my two other brothers and one sister traveled to Virginia to say our goodbyes. I will never forget the things Mark said to me in his last days nor will I forget that phone call just a few months earlier. He was a strong man who accepting his fate, thanking the doctors for all they had done and never once complained. He left behind his childhood sweetheart and wife of over 43 years, two wonderful daughters and 5 grandchildren.

If there's one lesson I have learned through all of this is that you never know what tomorrow has for you. Life has a way of throwing curve balls at us and it's times like this that we realize what really matters in life. Those hidden secrets, "or girls", that many of us carry with us throughout our lives, are nothing but the bars of the prison cell that we have created in our minds. What "girl" have you been carrying around with you? It's time to let her go and free yourself. Life's too short. I'm sure Mark never even remembered that day, and yet I carried it with me for years. How silly. In the end, it's family and friends that matters and I'm glad to have had the opportunity to say goodbye. Rest in peace my brother, see ya soon. 💧💧

