

The Meat of Life

I'm one of the few holdouts I know who hasn't succumbed to social media. There are a lot of reasons why I've made this decision (a LOT!) but one of the first was that I had better things to do with my time than read mundane posts about what various people had for dinner the night before. I'm being a little facetious, but that sentiment is echoed by Lacklan Patterson, a stand-up comic (who is a Millennial, by the way). He has a bit where he talks about how the next generation of senior citizens is going to be terrible. Rather than the stories *our* grandparents told us while going through the photo album—"Oh, here's a picture of your grandfather taking flying lessons with Charles Lindbergh ... and that's when I marched with Susan B. Anthony"—the next round of grandkids will have archived pictures explained by their elders like this: "Oh, that's a picture of a Taylor Swift T-shirt I considered buying ... And that's a cookie I once ate ..."

All kidding aside, I *am* aware that social media posts consist of more "meat," shall we say, than that. In fact, the opposite problem is also prevalent: only posting the most extreme excitement and drama of one's life so that readers either become depressed with envy because their lives are so boring by comparison, or exhausted by the seemingly never-ending travails of the neediest among us. I'll admit, I'd much rather spend my free time online consuming other "meatier" things.

But it does beg the question: What really IS the meat of life? Catch any of us at any given moment in time and there are things that are, in that moment, what stick out as newsworthy, a current highlight, even all-consuming. But let a few years pass, a few months or weeks, even a few days, and much of that news may not only seem irrelevant or mundane, it may even be forgotten. A couple week ago, I had a meeting in Orlando. I had pre-paid for airport parking at BWI but about 20 minutes before leaving my house, the electricity went out. One of the many texts I almost immediately started to receive from my co-op management, BGE, and Comcast mentioned something about a fallen tree. No, no, no ...! Don't tell me that rotten old tree out back by all the parked cars had finally fallen, like I knew it eventually would. I raced to my back porch to check it out. The good news is that the tree hadn't hit my car. (Actually, it hadn't hit *any* cars, miraculously.) But it *had* fallen across numerous wires that were now dangling all over numerous cars, including mine. The yellow tape was already up, and a firetruck blocked the end of the alley. I was not going to be able to drive my car to the airport.

I have a friend who drives for Lyft and he was, thankfully, available to take me to the airport, (as well as to pick me up three days later) so there was no real issue with me missing my flight. My nonrefundable airport parking reservation is extendable for a year so that money isn't (necessarily) lost. By the time I returned from Orlando, all wires had been repaired and the fallen tree sawed up and carted away. Life returned to normal and I've all but forgotten the incident. But it was pretty much all I told anyone who would listen for the first few days! Was that a life-changing event? Not even close. Was it important? Not really, especially in the big picture. Is it even an interesting story? Probably only to those of us who parked within falling distance of the rotted tree. But in the moment, it felt like a big deal. Does it make up the meat of my life, or even a morsel? I'm not sure that it does. But maybe ...

Recently, I zoomed with one of my college roommates. We reconnected through a chance encounter with a mutual friend and finally cleared our calendars for an online visit. We tried to remember the last time we'd seen each other. Best we could recollect, it had been 2008 when she and her husband came to DC. 16 years later ...

Obviously a LOT has happened to both of us in those ensuing years. So ... where to start? What should be focused on? What makes the cut and what doesn't? On the one hand, it forced us to leave out the minute details that, in real time, had seemed important or all-consuming. It even seemed like a blessing of sorts to not have to "bore" each other with the potentially uninteresting facts that had filled the past 16 years of our lives. But was it? Perhaps it's exactly those supposedly mundane daily details that actually make up the real meat of one's life, the sharing of which creates the most important bonding of relationships because they are what provide the context for the totality of our beings, allowing us to better understand what makes the other tick and providing patience and compassion when their "tickers" are annoyingly different from our own. I mean, which is more important: getting to spend a month in Europe or serving as a Meals on Wheels driver every week for a decade? Getting a promotion is great but what were the endless steps and tireless hours needed to achieve that? You've successfully launched your youngest child. Great! Help us understand the frustrations, sacrifices, and joys all of that required.

Think about it this way: If you look up a meatloaf recipe online, you're likely to get many, many versions. They're all meatloaf, with most recognizable as such. But the process of getting to each recipe's finished product can be radically different from each other and involve a wildly varied array of ingredients.

Well, each one of us is a meatloaf (not to be confused with a Meathead, thank you Archie Bunker!), with our own distinct blend of life experiences (i.e. ingredients) that make up the essence of our unique "finished product." We could simply share with others that finished product, and those doing the sampling might be able to guess at some of the individual ingredients, but I find that the more interesting approach is to hear about the *specific* way to grind the nutmeg, how cardamon is the real secret ingredient, that using anything other than Grey Poupon is a waste of time. It's often the indecipherable, smaller ingredients that really "make" the meatloaf rather than the actual meat itself. Knowing those details allows me to take in the whole meatloaf experience more completely.



To be honest, I'm not exactly sure how this metaphor practically translates into real life. Clearly, my recent Zoom session wouldn't have allowed both of us to go into *all* the details, or even most, from the past 16 years. But if we had been more intentional about being in more frequent contact with each other during that time, all this would be a moot point. Post-COVID, we're all used to, and comfortable with, Zoom so maybe I need to schedule more of those sessions with

friends and family. I am pretty good about using driving time to get some phone calls in so perhaps I could step up my game in that way.

And ... there's social media, of course. I'm still not convinced that jumping into that vortex is the right answer for me at this time but I'm closer to considering it than ever before. That said, I would have to insist on drawing the time at sharing clothing considerations and cookies eaten!