



When you take a trip or holiday, what do you get out of it? What memories or souvenirs do you bring home?

Whether you eat at a Howard Johnson's, McDonald's, Lum's, or a local diner, is your meal-stop a part of the pleasure you get from being away from your own familiar kitchen, or is it no more than a necessary interruption en route from one place to another?

A purchase at a roadside stand or a shop offering area specialties is one way to bring home something tangible to commemorate the day.

Reaching out to others is another way to make your holiday unforgettable. Giving something of yourself is a way to turn "just average" into Adventure. It has the advantage of costing no money, as well.

A short time ago while enjoying a routine restaurant meal, I realized a little girl, about five years old, was with her mother in the booth behind me.

Nearby were a couple, probably in their 60's, waiting for their dinner. The man quite casually left his table, crossed the room to the child, spoke a few words to her, and returned to his seat.

The little girl laughed with delight and, although her mother attempted to quiet her, insisted on sharing with me what pleased her so greatly.

Turning, I found she was playing with a cardboard puppet, about 15" tall with jointed arms, hands, legs and feet, and that could be manipulated by pulling a string attached to its back.

It was a simple-looking toy, obviously handmade, its clownlike smile painted on, its blue eyes slanting in a friendly fashion, its arms and legs flapping like a Jumping Jack.

"His name is Stanovitch Humperdinkle," the child told me, "and he eats wheaties for breakfast."

A smile to the older couple conveyed my "What a thoughtful thing to do!" feeling; my smile was returned.

Moments later the man brought me a similar toy -- this one, a sleeve of paper with a face drawn on the front and holes where the eyes should have been.

Another longer length of card stock slipped into the sleeve and, as it was moved up and down, eyes appeared in the holes -- different colors, sleeping, wide awake, winking. Simple -- but clever and entertaining.

When they finished their meal, the man went to pay the check and his wife stopped a moment as she passed our table. "He has made and given away thousands of them," she responded to my thanks.

The man joined us then, and we all talked a few more minutes, during which time he promised to send me a puppet; I supplied my name and address so he could. Off he went with his wife, into the night.

It was one of those gladsome moments when humanity shows itself full of goodness and friendliness.

I'd almost forgotten the incident when, the following week, a puppet arrived in the mail; his name and return address were on the envelope. Of course I wrote to thank him and to ask about the puppets.

In return he sent me a tape recording of his background and puppet-making. It's a story well-worth knowing. To share it with you, I've transcribed the recording just as he taped it.

He began:

To understand how the Puppet Man started making these things for children, let's go back to the very beginning.

His mother came from Sweden at the age of 12, alone, to live with an aunt in Massachusetts. She spent fifteen days on the water. Before she was married, she worked in a hospital; she was a domestic; she was a Salvation Army Lassie.

She was a deeply religious woman, but not fanatical. She used to take her son -- not to "church" on the Sabbath Day -- but to the Sanctuary of The Lord. She did not let her son slur a prayer, a response, or a hymn.

He couldn't say, "Our-Father-who-art-in-Heaven-hallowed-by-thy-name...", No! He had to say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed by thy name...."

When he grew older she told her son, "If you ever go onto the pulpit of a church, remember, in the congregation there are those who are hungry, lonely, suffering, sorrowing, or troubled. Your purpose on the

pulpit is to comfort them, to give them strength, to make them feel that life is worth living."

She taught her son his first economic lesson and, at the same time, concerned for other people. Just before Christmas, 65 years ago, he would have to earn a penny or two, and bring them home to his mother.

On Christmas Eve, they would lay the pennies under the Christmas tree. They would then go into midnight Christmas service and when they came home Santa Claus had taken those pennies to hire more workers so all children in the world could have a toy; and there were toys, left by Santa, for the boy.

This constant reminder of out-reach to other people was always prevalent in his mother's mind.

As for his father, his father's parents died when he was very young; he went to live with an aunt and uncle. The uncle was a captain in the Prussian Army, a strict disciplinarian. At the age of 14, his father left that home in Germany and was around the world by the time he was 17.

When his own son was seven years old, his father decided it was time for him to learn the facts of life. From the time he was seven until he was 14, his father took him every place he could legally take him.

He was in museums, cathedrals, art galleries, churches, synagogues, theatres, parks, and up along where the rich people lived.

Then he was also taken into flop-houses and to gin mills. He was in his first gin mill at the age of seven, with his foot on a brass rail, a root beef and free-lunch sandwich in his hand.

And each time they went into a saloon, the father would take him out the rear way (what was then known as the family way), and he would tell his son those people were not bad or evil -- they were sick -- and someday society would do something for them.

The father would take the boy to the East Side of New York to the ghettos, walk up two and three flights of stairs, making believe they were looking for somebody so that the son could see how some people lived.

He was taken into police stations on Saturday night. One night when the boy was nine years old they were in the police station when some gals were brought in; his father explained what they were, and all about sex. There were no punches pulled at any time.

He was in cheap lodging houses, everywhere that he could learn what it was all about; how people lived good and how people lived bad; the evil -- the good.

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(This is part one of a two-part article. To be continued next week.)