



Carneys *and* Baby Dolls

To the best of my memory, it was around the early 1960s I had been transported by train along with my brothers Garth, and Larry to Lander Wyoming to spend the summer with our grandparents. My father being a single parent would send us to the Midwest once school was over so he could have a break and get things done. We loved going to Wyoming, the Popo Agie river ran through the middle of town, and in those days children were allowed to roam free so my brothers Garth, Larry and I would spend our days exploring every bend and flow, Lander was a small one main street town that “rolled up the sidewalks” at 5pm and after that in a very Norman Rockwell sense everyone headed home to claim their seat at the dinner table. My grandfather was a rockhound and we spent many many hours out on the high prairies in Wyoming looking for moss agates and Apache tears which he would then make into jewelry. I still have most of those adornments to this day.

In the summer, the carnival and rodeo would come through giving this small town a few nights of excitement.

One particular summer that I remember my grandfather took us to the carnival. I adored my grandfather, he stood for everything that was right and just, with a hundred years of law enforcement in our lineage. Some of our ancestors capturing the popular bandits of the wild west. And I say popular because even back then journalism was creatively exploitive, trying to create hero's out of common killers and criminals. One of our ancestors was a lawman, James Butler Hickock “Wild Bill Hickok” and that legacy followed our family to my dad who was a policeman and eventually a volunteer for the Sherriff's Aero Squadron. My dad Grady Gaylord received three medals of valor from the state of California for saving lives at the risk of his own life.

But back to my story, the Lander Wyoming night was full of the Miller moths, a common visitor. When I was young, I would hear the elders speaking of so many Millers in Lander! I thought it was a family that visited in the town, it was years later that I realized that it was a moth infestation that happened almost yearly. This warm comfortable night my grandfather took myself and my two brothers to the carnival which usually preceded the rodeo. I loved the carnival, I loved the rides and the people that worked them, they seemed unorthodox, a little bit frightening and alluring at the same time. I wondered at their world, traveling constantly, every day an adventure. Of course, I had not a clue to the underside of their world, people that due to many things couldn't conform to a "normal" life. On this night we entered the fairgrounds as usual eager for the fun and excitement ahead of us. My grandfather bestowed upon me a \$20 dollar bill to go buy tickets for the rides. I eagerly looked around for the nearest ticket booth. In those days, the ticket booths were about a five-by-five small wood booth with a window and bars coming about halfway down. I gingerly gave the man behind the bars a \$20 bill and asked for twelve rides, which at \$0.25 apiece would have been \$2.50. I took the change and ran back to my grandfather and gave it to him. He looked at it and asked me how many rides I had procured. And I told him twelve. He noted that the change that he received was \$10 short, so he proceeded to go over to the ticket booth and asked the man behind the bars for the rest of his change. The man behind the bars said that he had given me the right change but my grandfather knowing that this was not true again asked the man to give him back the correct change at which point the man refused. My grandfather then reached his hand through the open window of the ticket booth grabbed the man by the scruff of his neck and pulled him through the small opening and I am not sure exactly what was said but my grandfather ended up with the correct change.

My grandfather then explained to me that people were not always honest or mindful and that I should always check my change. Soon the drama was forgotten, my brothers and I raced around to the rides, ate cotton candy, and enjoyed a loving memory in the making all under my grandfather's watchful eye.

My grandfather was an honest straightforward sensible man, unless it came to blue baby doll pajamas. When my father drove out to spend a week and then drive us home my grandmother told him that I needed pajamas. So as my grandfather had intended and going downtown anyway, he accompanied us to the department store on Main Street. We went in and perused the options for sleeping wear for young ladies. My dad found a pedestrian, unflattering pair of full coverage warm pajamas, which I am sure were very sensible. But my eyes had fallen on a pair of baby blue baby doll pajamas consisting mostly of sheer blue heaven and ruffles. These baby blue baby doll pajamas were every young girl's dream, totally not sensible not warm but you could sleep like a Princess. My dad immediately vetoed them, and I was heartbroken and then an amazing thing happened. My grandfather stepped forward pulled my dad aside and had a quiet conversation with him. The next thing I knew the salesperson was wrapping up the baby blue baby doll pajamas. Here was my gruff sensible grandfather who probably fought every evil there was out there and yet he could still envision a young girl's dreams. I loved him for that day not just because I slept every night in those baby blue pajamas until they were mere rags. How could someone be that old and know a young girl's heart. It has stuck with me my whole life. Because I was a child, I really did not know him that well, but I knew that he loved me, and that I lived in a world of my dad and my brothers, the feminine input was not there, and he gave me that one small thing that meant so much to me.

In later years I learned that my grandfather was a gambler, he was solely responsible for calling out a cheater in the Lander card room which erupted into a fight that broke out every picture window of the room facing main street, old west style. Joshua Gaylord was not a man to let dishonest behavior go un-reckoned with. Grandfather would drive to Riverton a few miles away to gamble and on one of those evenings he suffered an accident and was paralyzed from the waist down. He could not bear a being a burden to my grandmother so one day he wheeled his wheelchair out into the yard and shot himself. I remember my dad took me to Ann Taylors in Mission Valley before we left for Lander and bought me a Navy-blue dress with a white collar, white gloves, and white "Mary Janes" decorated with eyelets to wear to the funeral. When we arrived home after the funeral I remember going out into the yard, looking at the dead spot of grass where his life had flowed out and he had taken his last breath, thinking I not only lost my grandfather but an ally, someone good who made the world a better place.

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