



Article Title— "There was this Stranger..."

Article Category— 1950s Nostalgia



While my siblings and I were still quite young, our dad met a stranger who was new to our small town. Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer from the beginning. Although our mom was initially very uncomfortable with Dad's decision to invite that stranger to come and live with us, her discomfort gradually subsided. It never completely went away, though, and it sometimes escalated. My siblings and I enjoyed his company. He became a part of our family.

In my young mind, he had a special niche. Yes, I noticed the concurrent change in the roles our parents played. Mom had always taught us good from evil. Dad had taught us where the behavioral boundaries were and what would always happen each time we'd step outside them. But the stranger was our storyteller! He'd keep us spellbound for hours on end with adventures and mysteries and really funny stuff. In lots of ways, what we were learning from him were in stark contrast to things Mom and Dad were hoping we'd learn. Most of what they'd hoped we'd learn were things they had learned in church. Yes, they took us to church every Sunday, but we were always anxious to get back home to our new friend.

He appeared to always know how to satisfy our occasional juvenile curiosity about politics, history and science. He knew stuff about the past, understood the present and even seemed able to predict the future! He took my family to our first major league ball game. He made us laugh and he made us cry. He never stopped talking, but Dad didn't seem to mind. That look of quiet concern on Mom's face sometimes really bothered me, though. She'd often get up and move gracefully into the kitchen. I wonder, now, if she went there to pray for that resident stranger to leave. He never left...and that bittersweet "strangeness" never really left us, either.

Dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions, but the stranger never felt obligated to honor them. Profanity, for example, had never been allowed in our home—not from us, our friends or any visitors. Our new resident, however, got away with four-letter words that burned my ears and made my dad squirm and my mom blush.

My Dad didn't approve of the liberal use of alcohol, but the stranger regularly encouraged us to be sure and try it when we were older. He made cigarettes look cool, cigars manly and pipes distinguished. He talked freely (much too freely!) about sex. At least my mom kept reminding my dad that he did. His comments were sometimes blatant, typically suggestive, and generally embarrassing.

I now know that my early concepts about relationships were influenced strongly by that stranger. Time after time, he opposed the values of my parents, yet he was seldom rebuked. And NEVER asked to leave. Now, as a parent, I understand the rationale – actually the rationalizing – for that non-decision. Yeah, I know: I should kick him out of my house, too. Later, maybe.

More than a few years have passed since that stranger moved in with our family. He eventually blended right in! Now, with my young family, he's not nearly as fascinating as he was when I was still young. If you were to walk into my parents' den today, you'd still find a colorful descendant of that same stranger sitting comfortably, waiting for someone to listen to him talk and watch him draw his pictures and tell off-color jokes and stuff.



I was a successful Bible teacher for a LOT of years—big sanctuary classes.  
I knew what my denomination believed and that's what I taught.  
Yes, I should've checked it out to make sure it was true.

So why didn't I do that? Well, maybe I didn't do that for the same reason that you haven't really checked out what your denomination teaches.

"In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second hand, and without examination." —Samuel Clemens



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His name? He's known by his initials: "TV." The strangers in my friends' homes have multiple new offspring. They're even more invasive than their predecessors had been. Bet you've met'em. Their most common names are Windows and Apple and Android and such.

Recalling, now, that some of our visiting evangelists used to tell us that our resident strangers were "of the devil!" Were their words prophetic, or were those revivalists just boldly objective observers? Your call...


The original author of this piece is unknown to me. I have edited it substantially, hoping that that'll be to your benefit.

—T. C. Newsome 

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