

41st Storyworth: What Do You Miss Most About Being A Child?

As I watch my Granddaughter Ainsley, I am reminded how childhood was a time of innocence. Not that there were not consequences for your actions, but they were used as teaching opportunities, whereas being an adult is more like punishment or reward for whatever you do. Yet, until my dying day, I am certain I will still be learning something EVERY day, and sometimes those lessons must be repeated for the full understanding of the lesson to sink in, which means I sometimes have to suffer consequences first before I even start to understand.

A concrete example has just occurred which points that out clearly. Since June, which was three months ago, my 2003 Subaru Outback, which I loan to my friend Mickie in return for her maintaining it plus storing my Porsche Cabrio in her garage, the Outback has had a problem which defied attempts to diagnose and repair. A little background is worthwhile here; I bought the car cheap in August 2019 used with 245K on the clock. But it ran well and was in excellent shape as it had no rust because it was from TN. Even the AC was good, and it was reasonably well equipped. Unfortunately, soon thereafter it boiled over, prompting Dawn to believe I had been snookered. But it had given NO indication beforehand of any problem, except that we'd had to replace the tires, which I HAD expected, as well as a bunch of wheel studs which I had not, to pass NYSI.

Again unfortunately, because we were rapidly approaching the dates for some travel – to visit my Daughter in New Haven CT, and then to join Dawn in FL at her sister's place there for my first "snowbird experience", I did not have time to do a proper diagnosis. But I did not simply want to junk the car. So we parked it on Dawn's lawn until we returned in spring. You know, AFTER Covid had begun to ravage pretty much everything. As an aside, at the time Mickie was using my Tahoe2, because we had scrapped the prior Tahoe1, which was also a 1995, but very similarly appointed even to coloring. Just less miles and in better shape. But I was forced to replace the Outback with a 2008 Forester, which the seller assured me would be able to do the CT and Florida trips reliably. Thankfully, that proved to be true, except its exhaust system was noisier than Dawn wanted, so that was replaced in FL. And its 6 CD changer stopped while we were there also, which was annoying.

However, Tahoe2 had a transmission problem, which left Mickie with no transport in summer 2020 about two months after we had returned from having found our Florida home JUST before Covid hit, but I had not had any opportunity to look at the Outback, since we were only back in NYS about a month at that time. So I explained the situation with it to Mickie and offered her the use of the Outback while she waited for the repair on the Tahoe2, with no assurance she would not also have the overheat issue which was intermittent, even after I had installed a pump to makeup overheated coolant with fresh to overcome a "dreaded head gasket leak".

Fast forward to her efforts with that, detailed elsewhere, and the episode with the idiots who replaced its radiator and took out the coolant replacement pump, without actually solving ANYTHING. So after chewing them a new asshole, they agreed to diagnose MY way, which would reflect on HOW and WHY could we have the evidence we had, so they put shop air pressure into each cylinder in turn, and found no leaks in the head gasket. So all it COULD be was a blockage by the return line to the radiator top, ultimately because the inner wall of that hose collapsed, and it has NEVER overheated since that was replaced with a new radiator hose.

But FINDING those sorts of issues is NOT for the "swap parts until it works" of MOST shops. In fact, Jeff Black, who has a good reputation with me, decided the recent cause of the misfire was the age of the engine. And I had all but resigned myself to replacing THAT before I decided to get more eyes on the problem. And started poring over the shop manual, which I acquire for EVERY vehicle I own. And I noticed an odd reality; because the Outback has a "Boxer" engine, as with a 911, it fires on opposite pistons simultaneously. So only TWO triggers occur for each rev of the engine, vs the four expected. And THAT pointed to the ECM or the COIL, the latter of which was replaced and that fixed the problem, allowing NYSI this morning FINALLY!

Kids don't have to deal with such issues. Mommy and Daddy are presumed to keep them safe and get them where they are going, so kids never worry about such stuff. Hopefully, along the way, their parents have taught them a little about thinking logically so they are equipped to question the why of things, instead of just the what. But most kids get to high school, by which time they believe their parents know NOTHING, without really having to learn critical review. And it shows all too well when you hear some of the absurd reasoning for avoiding masks, vaccines and personal responsibility. Unfortunately, those are ALSO evidence of having never learned about "Natural Consequences", something which all too few children today really understand.

I DO miss the carefree days of my childhood, maybe because we tend to block our memory of the bad things, like Mom chasing me with a whiffle ball bat (try it a few times and you'll see why that matters ;-)) or a wooden hangar. I did NOT always behave – except within my parent's arm's reach. But I was not a persecuted kid, although my sisters beg to differ, but I have no real recall of same. Maybe because I was already thinking differently than many of my peers anyway. I was going to become an engineer, and those type of people simply think way outside the normality box.

I watch Ainsley today and I can see that she is learning. But I know she has no more been struck by her parents than MY daughter was struck by HERS. We both were Master's prepared, and Jess became a PhD. If the smartest response WE could come up with was physical violence, then maybe WE need to re-examine how WE think, not our children. That is NOT to suggest that discipline is missing – just that we learned to apply it in a way which educated even when we were nowhere in sight. So that meant our understanding what motivated our child and where deprivation of such rewards, or timely provision thereof, would result in Pavlov's salivating dogs so to speak. And that is what parenting was really all about; providing good examples for both expectation and reward, and consequences which were both dependable and meaningful.

But THE most important concept, and the most difficult to teach, is that we could never hope to provide EVERY example of everything life would ever throw at her, but instead that life was about establishing principles, and adhering to those principles. I have stated before that my daughter became an Ethicist. So it was never possible to not expect her to point out when my speedometer showed I was exceeding the posted limit. But I made sure, as with my promise to provide for her vehicular needs so long as she stayed in school and stayed out of trouble, to EXCLUDE in the measurement of the latter of those any speeding tickets. Honesty about yourself is the only way your kid will be honest with you about her.

And that is something I dearly miss about my childhood that I fear we might never see widespread again; a sense of community with shared sense of responsibility, ALONG WITH humility. The recent episode with the misfire showed my skills were not PERFECT. But my adherence to the practice of insisting that contrarian data nonetheless be accepted as empirical and factored into the analysis for WHY, along with personal integrity to keep trying to find the issue instead of simply tossing in the towel, is how real issues get resolved for real.

And why I believe that my advanced age over 70 years is still no match for my enthusiasm for life, where I am still like a 13 year old boy, and is based on never having lost that curiosity and eagerness to understand. And I see that in Ainsley's eyes every time I see her, whether in person or via the weekly video chat we are so lucky to be able to share despite Covid and the miles between us, for which I can only thank technology which never existed when I was a mere boy. So while I look back fondly with regards to SOME things, there is still not a lot I miss about my childhood. Because I'm still in it ;-)

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