

Two Porches

When I came home from serving my time in the service, I wanted to use my VA benefits to further my education. And during one of the summers when I was off from school, I went to work for a Mr. Knopf. He was a master mason, and I worked the summer with him on a few projects. I remember this one project in particular. We spent the better part of a week building a red brick porch on the front of a house. And on the last day, I think it was about four days on the job or so, after everything was cleaned up, all the tools were cleaned up and put back on the truck, and all the debris was picked up from the job site. He called me over. I wanted to follow him as he was walking across the street. So I walked across the street, and he had turned around once he got to the sidewalk across the street, and he was looking back at the job site. So I walked over and turned around and stood beside him. And he put his arm up around my shoulder, and he said, 20 years from now, I want you to come back. And I want you to look at that porch, and I want you to remember that you helped build it. And I was up in my hometown of Baltimore one time. I had a rental years later, and I remembered what Mr. Knopf said. So I actually took a ride down the street and looked at the porch that him and I had built together. And, you know, there is a... satisfaction, a fulfillment from a job well done. And the porch looked as good as the day we had built it. Maybe a little dirtier because of time, but it was still there, solid, just like we left it. So I think that phrase, you know, just remember you helped build it. That had stuck with me. And it made me appreciate, reflecting back on it, craftsmanship. You know, it's a crafting practice. You know, I've often said a doctor and a lawyer, when they graduate from school and they pass the bar, they're granted a license to practice. And that's really what it's about. You know, it's... You may not start out with the

great... The greatest amount of skill, but through practice, you get better. You refine your skills. And so what I realized was, in some respects, this is a command performance. Most especially for Mr. Knopf, who was the master mason. And during my studies, one of the things I ran across, was master masons, there's, I think there's an organization, they refer to it as the free masons. But what I didn't realize was, in antiquity, some of the first, what you could call free men, were masons. They were stone... They were stone masons. Basically, they had that skill that they had learned the craft, and they were highly coveted by kings and emperors. And so they would travel site to site and work on these huge projects, sometimes taking, you know, years upon years to complete. I always, you know, I found that to be, you know, kind of insightful, that they were free. They were free because of their craft. They were free because of their highly skilled gifts that were coveted by the rulers and leaders of the different nations at the time. So, years later, I reflected back on that, and I was in a conversation with a small group of individuals, and they were talking about people freeloading on the government, you know, entitlement programs and things like that. And I don't know why, but for some reason, Mr. Knopf and that red brick porch came to mind. And all of a sudden, I just kind of blurted out, they're being cheated. And of course, a few of the people in the group looked at me like, you know, what do you mean they're being cheated? And I said, you know, the thing is, they're never going to know, perhaps, they'll never know what it's like to stand back and look at a job well done and know they helped build it. They helped create it. And that's what I meant. You know, yeah, I can, I get that part that they're, you know, kind of riding for free, so to speak, in their entitlement programs. But I guess I never really had considered before that how they were also being cheated at joint fulfillment of performance, of a command performance. So the other story I want to share is about another

porch. But it was the front porch on my parents' house that I was staying while I was in school. This one morning, it had been a pretty, um, cold, somewhat brutal winter. And as I often would do, I would slip my robe on and I would step out on the porch to greet the day, just to see what kind of day we were having. And this particular morning, I stepped out and I don't, it was like, all of a sudden, it felt like spring. And I was just like, wow. And just in that moment of, of immersion, in that moment of immersion in this spring morning, something came over me. It was an extraordinary experience. It was a presence. And I guess, you know, I wrote a little phrase down, life springs eternal and then eternal awakening. It's an ever expanding consciousness, something in that moment, that presence being present. And that moment, it was a peak experience. And the reason I put these two stories together is command performances, peak experiences, they couple. And I really, again, these, this was what I call a cardinal awakening, a pivotal moment. I grew that ever expanding consciousness. I grew in that moment and I began to understand the even deeper meanings of that presence. I say, kind of express it this way that I have a different view of heaven and hell. I think they're both a state of being a presence of mind. And in that moment, I had a moment of heaven. And I know that sounds corny, but it's what I felt. Smelling the spring smells and enjoying the warmth, but still a little cold. A little crispness in the air that is so typical of a spring. One of the early spring mornings. So I guess in closing, I just want to share a thought about cultivating and anticipation. I think that's the best approach. We can have to every waking moment of every day, because you never know when this command performance, that opportunity is going to present itself to you. And you never know when you're going to have that peak experience. And I think in that anticipation, it's kind of like. Expecting it to happen. Having that childlike anticipation of another day's play. And know that it's going to wash over

you, just like the previous experience did. So again, just don't want anyone to get cheated. Signing off.