

"Dad's Billfold"

We all know women's purses tend to be large and full of everything from band-aids and nail-clippers to coupons & chewing gum; all God-sends for men & children who carry far, far less with them. Men are usually limited to that billfold in their back left pocket. Some do bulge with more than a mere drivers' license and some money. These tend to be the men who never emptied that billfold since first getting it as a gift in high school. Thus you find locker combinations, 1997 receipts for a new car battery, an equally old sports event ticket and a spare key for a former home. Some men however tend to keep their billfolds more relevant to their current life. In any case, those billfolds can indeed be 'a window to the soul' of the owner - a sample, if you will, of what is truly important in their lives and how organized they are.

My Dad passed away on Memorial Day, 2 days past his 94th birthday. It was appropriate as he was one of those unassuming WWII hero's (Bronze star recipient, war-time commissioning, 5+ year enlistment including nearly 3 years in the Pacific). Among his many belongings of course was his billfold. We assume it was little changed in his last years as Dad was "active" until recently - still driving until he reached his 93rd birthday, mostly so he could squire Mom around as she suffered from dementia her last year. ("Helpful")

As I inventoried Dad's billfold for my two sisters, I realized it said a lot about our Dad, his outlook on life, his preparedness, etc. Dad was a 63 year Mason and a 77 year DeMolay, active in both regards. I view his billfold contents as evidence of some of the lessons he learned in Lodge halls as well as his time as a Boy Scout (reaching Eagle rank with 2 palms in the 1930's) and as a DeMolay (Legion of Honor recipient). So what did Dad deem important enough to fit into that billfold that was always in his hip pocket, whether in shorts, slacks or three-piece suit?

There was that prized gold-colored fifty year Iowa Masonic Dues Card ("Comradeship"). In addition there was his last Driver's license, a few dollar bills and hidden under other items, a carefully folded crisp \$20 bill. When I left for college years ago I recall Dad recommending that I keep a folded \$5 "hidden" in my billfold for emergency use (when gas and a meal at McDonalds were both less than a buck). Given the intervening years, a \$20 sounds about right in 2013. ("Be Prepared")

Both Scouts, DeMolay and Masonry teach about the rectitude of life. So in addition Dad had a very neatly hand-printed list of all his prescription meds on a tiny card (he had taken extra drafting courses in high school). There was also his vehicle insurance card, AAA membership, voter's registration card and Social Security card ("Citizenship"). Obviously having given up driving Dad could have removed the car-related items as indeed they were the only superfluous items in his billfold but I suspect after nearly 80 years of driving, they were hard to give up. Perhaps emotionally he was leaving the door open a crack as giving up driving was his choice; he had never made a claim in all the years our State Farm agent had known him.

Other measures of vital information included his medical insurance cards, prescription discount ("Thrifty") and preferred hospital cards, a bank card with account info & the receipt from his last withdrawal and a single credit card. There were also his last shopping list including Dove soap and Head & Shoulders shampoo and receipt for same ("Cleanness"). I know from having taken him to stores a couple times the past year his normal practice was to put the most current receipts in his billfold, placing the previous receipts in a old bank check box in his desk so he could reconcile them later. There was also a three-generational family photo, not a copy of any displayed in his living room or on his nightstand or atop his armoire. Indeed it was a photo I did not recall but obviously it was a favorite.

Lastly there were two more items that spoke of his organization and respect for others. The back of one card was used to note every medical 'fact' for emergency purposes including his birthdate and blood type, employer, Doctor, Social Security and Military ID numbers and every medical procedure he had experienced from an appendix removal in '48 to a new hearing aid in '05. Most were dated to the day! Lastly, possibly because his grandkids wanted more detail as to his military service, on a neatly trimmed index card were his exact dates of enlistment, embarking to the Pacific, commissioning, returning to America and his discharge ("Patriotism"). These were not just dates however, he showed the actual time spent such as time overseas (2 years, 10 months & 20 days). As an aside, he became a bit more open about his military service in recent years as he made it to D.C. on an "Honor Flight" and was very proud of a granddaughter becoming an Officer in the Navy Reserves.

Also on this card (amazing what good printing allows you to put into a two 2" x 3" space!) were his dates of becoming a Mason, his year as WM, his decade as Secretary and dates joining High-12 and the Scottish Rite and the times he participated in Grand Lodge trips to England and a Lutheran tour of the Holy Land ("Reverence"). Yes, here was a Mason proud of his membership and his participation, perhaps more mindful in recent years when both his son & a grandson would sit in Lodge or attend High-12 with him.

Lastly there was what was 'not' in Dad's billfold. No casino cards, liquor store receipts (Dad did enjoy a daily glass of a good wine), cigarette coupons, girl friends' phone numbers (a more devoted husband I have not known - 65 years of a solid marriage), notes of debts, off-color photos or jokes, etc. There were no 'skeletons' in Dad's closet whether literally in his apartment we emptied, in his bank box OR in his billfold. The outpouring of compliments at his visitation and Masonic & church services were genuine. Men he had hired as a plant manager 50

years ago, Lodge brothers, his Pastor, neighbors, organizations he had volunteered for, etc were united in words of praise for a man who gave far more than he ever took.

Dad indeed followed the Boy Scout Laws, the DeMolay Cardinal Virtures and the oaths of the Masonic fraternity. When his Masonic record was read, the words 'a just and upright Mason' were indeed 'not mere empty forms'. Thanks Dad for leaving a legacy both in deed and with what was in your billfold....further evidence of a man who loved his family, church, Country and fraternity.

So Brothers, "what's in your wallet"?

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