

OUT WITH THE OLD
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Ezr 3:11-13 ... And all the people shouted with a great shout ... because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many ... who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people:

Though I have them, the memories did not draw me. I remember Red Ball Jet shoes and rubber boots from the second hand store. The freely given scraps of Naugahide I kept for years till I finally admitted I was not going to turn them into a work of art. My mother met my father while working in the cafeteria, setting in motion the events to which I owe my existence. I remember using the ice covered trestles behind the power plant for a shortcut to Junior High. Yet, none of these drew me to watch the demolition of the Uniroyal plant in Mishawaka, IN.

I came because I was curious. How would the community react to the loss of a landmark? How close would onlookers be allowed to the site and how many would gather to watch? What would the town look like from my former neighborhood without the factory blocking the view? I especially wondered how they would demolish the smokestack. With a background in architecture, I could envision the procedure for the main buildings. The smokestack was another matter. Within seconds of the first blast, I had the answers to my questions.

The actual process was incredible for both power and brevity involved. Even with the river as a shock absorber, the series of concussions shattering the building shook the ground I stood on. Like hammer blows, they destroyed sections of the stack as each section neared the ground. Within seconds, the structures involved had disappeared in a cloud of rising dust. Within seconds, the pride of the founders, the granter of dreams of thousands of workers, and the source of a living for generations of Mishawaka families had vanished into history.

The crowd began cheering wildly, but the elation was not unanimous. As I watched them, a curious phenomenon began to manifest itself. I noticed those who cheered, those who were the most excited, were of my generation or younger. The elderly who stood near were not smiling. I watched one woman weeping. I saw the grief on the face of the gentlemen next to me. And I listened.

First I listened to the young. The buildings had been eyesores needing removed. They had detracted from the new community grown up around them. No longer relevant, they could now be replaced with something new. They were of a bygone era of pollution, but the clean up had begun. Though many had worked there, they could not imagine working in a factory, given better ways to make a living. It was sad, but it was necessary for progress.

I eavesdropped on the opinions of the older generation. A reporter began interviewing the crowd on their reactions to the demolition. He asked whether the old gentleman near me had memories associated with the building. The man replied his father had worked there all his life and died at work from a heart, three months from retirement. That's when time stopped for me for a moment.

I had also come to honor my Dad on Father's Day and the sacrifices he had made for his children. I knew the moment I heard that man, I was just one of many whose fathers had given part of their lives in such factories. Every minute, every hour spent at jobs they disliked to buy food for their children, was time lost from their allotted life span. Yet, they spent their lives willingly. What dreams went on hold while months turned to years and years to decades? Dad never spoke of them, and I doubt the others did either. It simply did not matter. They were fathers, and the needs of their children came before their own. Day after day, sick or well, tired or not, they fulfilled that role.

Like the places they worked, fathers like mine are now outdated. Amassing wealth at the expense of relationships and mentoring seems to be the measure of success. Promises and obligations acquired at an altar count for little. Honestly earning every penny doesn't compare well with sudden wealth from stock acquisitions, game shows, and lotteries. Concepts of honor are outdated. Personal fulfillment and gratification are of prime importance. Beaver is dead and the family does nothing together. But before the landmarks are gone, I want to remember.

Like Uniroyal, my Dad's generation will soon vanish. As we all will, he is crumbling under the successive blasts of time. Some would argue nature dictates the old make way for the new. It is time for new perspectives. The elderly disturb us with their daily reminder of mortality. They no longer seem to be productive or useful. The cost of maintenance seems to increasingly escalate. Worse, they remind us of old ways of life, old values, and old virtues that make ours seem tarnished. In various ways, some choose to remove this discomfort from their lives

I choose to remember. I remember Dad's admonition that the measure of a man is his word and his name. I remember Dad coming home, covered with grime from work and smelling like love. I remember time that wasn't "quality time," just every moment Dad could free up to spend with us. I remember him thanking God for a good job to provide for his family. I remember his pride in every accomplishment of his children. He never complained, so I did not know till much later, he never had a job he enjoyed. He was just buying our dreams with his life.

So I came to honor Dad and watch the passing of a landmark. I know within a few short years, one living monument to the dreams of his children, the source of a living for one Mishawaka family, will vanish from the earth. His generation will make way for the new, but when gone, they will not be forgotten. Their values will endure far beyond their passing. Then those who loved them will come back, for one more look, one last goodbye.