

Gentlemen of a Certain Age

I'm 63. Because I live in the mid-south, summer starts along the time Easter comes along. Summer lasts here until Mid-October, give or take. I live in a semi-rural county next to a major metropolitan city. For the last eight years, I have worked for myself from home. Working for myself and from home requires only a 43-step walk from one side of the house to the other, leaving me the time to once a week in the summer months drive to a nearby high school track, the closest one that is open to the public.

Along my route I travel along a windy, hilly road, a popular alternative to the main highways leading to the Interstate. I also find myself on this road on Saturday mornings year round when I am heading to meet up with the running kids for a double-digit mile run. I also travel this road when I head to the post office, to the gas stations clumped at the Interstate, to the outdoor retail center, to the big town, or anytime I head due west. I digress.

The first summer in the early morning for track workouts, I passed him walking powerfully across the road from me. He's a man of certain stature earned for being of a man of a certain age. he powerfully jaunts along the edge of the rolling road with a practiced pedestrian stride, always crossing over well in advance of a passing car so that he can be safely on the opposite side of the road when the car passes. When I come upon him walking in the same direction I'm driving, his back to me, he raises his right arm high in the air, waving once vigorously. When he is striding the other direction from me, he looks at my car, raises his left arm, giving a powerful wave for my benefit. Depending on the timing of his early morning walk, he may be wearing a safety vest so that he is better seen by all who pass. When the sun rises early, he wears a shirt of a bright yellow hue.

The first couple of years, I didn't wave back. In the early morning semi-sun, I wasn't certain as to whether he could see me. In the middle of the third summer, a hot, muggy Monday morning, I saw him well ahead and walking with my direction. Before he heard me, I hit the button causing the driver's side window to go down. Thrusting my left arm out the open window, I waved my own version of hello, acknowledging his existence. Looking back in my rearview mirror, I caught a surprised expression on his face while he waved back.

What followed were several more seasons of our passing in the dawn, sometimes face to face, sometimes only the waves being seen. When we see each other going in the opposite direction of each other, we grin to one another; a moment expressed merely by taking the time to share a slice of life otherwise unknown to anyone else.

It wasn't until this past late winter that I changed to a newer version of my favorite driving car. Same make, same model, different color. Sure enough, on my first Monday drive to the track, I saw him walking on the opposite side towards me. Down came the window and up went my arm, moving quickly into the royal forearm side to side movement. I am certain he knows the wave as soon as he sees it. Everyone's wave is unique. He showed his surprise in his smile accompanying his wave, straight up with a slight twist. I smiled back. He also now knows of my new ride.

The morning's morning workout remains upbeat when his walking doesn't coincide with my early morning travel. The unplanned meet up, albeit brief, is a part of the event. Just like stopping for coffee on the way to work, reading the latest information on the digital sign along your routine route, or seeing the same huge heron every time you pass the pond on your usual run route, the shared wave equates to those.

Our days are overstocked with such seemingly inconsequential moments from the time we awaken in the morning until we close our eyes in the evening. How many daily passages do we encounter that we never think to share? The shared wave is one of those. These unspoken events tweak our day, one way or another. Nothing more than sharing an unspoken sharing of a meeting point on a road early morning before either of us get about going about the rest of the majority of our day.

Everything given and nothing expected in return.