

These 'Fringe Benefits' Give One Pause to Consider

Some stories need to be told. Some are difficult to tell, but, I want you to remember Artie, not this writer's poor attempt in the telling.

This summer I was standing near a golf course shop marking time until someone from the crew came by. An old, battered station wagon pulled in and stopped. The driver's door opened slowly, and a cane preceded a gimped-up leg out the door. A weary voice came next. It said to me, "Hey, Mac, how's it going?" The face cracked a grin, but because of a stroke, it smiled only from the right. It was Artie, a long-time crew member, retired, looking tired and looking old.

Lately I've run into a lot of "Arties." I'll bet you know them, too. They're the guys who worked on golf course crews. They were the stayers, faceless to the members, even though a lot of them worked at the same course all their working lives. Sometimes they stayed on the same job, doing the job well, and, well, mostly just staying. Over the years I often wondered why they stayed in the low-paying, dead-end jobs.

After Artie gets out of the car, we start sharing remember whens. I wonder why he stayed as we talk. He talks of the days when he cut straight lines on dew-covered greens, of early morning light and of the sun breaking through. He talks of the sun making rainbows through irrigation mist before it is folded into night.

Sometimes the Arties talk about the cycle of the day, sometimes about the cycle of the year, the overcoming of yesterday's winter night by sun-stirred crocus. They always talk about the spring and the smell of new-mown grass. They talk about this year's battle will be won. They talk of summer twilight and fall and falling leaves and crickets or some such thing. One more winter, one more spring. The cycle of the day, the cycle of the year are different than the cycle of life. Artie's life is in late December. He has no hope for another spring.

Artie tells me, "You know Mac, I really do miss the golf course. It's tough now, but I loved it." (He grins again, and again he grins only from the right.)

We finish our fond remembering whens. I say to Artie, "It's so great to have seen you again. How's life really treating you? His grin is gone. He is quiet. He looks at me; I look at the ground and make a feeble effort to fill his emptiness with more remember whens, cliches and a touch of Irish wit.

Artie rescues me at last from my monologue. He says, "Mac, would you give me a hand?" We walk over to his wagon and start taking empty, gallon milk jugs from the back. We take them over to the water spigot and fill them, then load them

back into his spent station wagon. He opens his door, gets in the car, pulls in his cane, rolls down the driver's window and says to me, "It's been real tough, Mac. I can't afford even, to get my pump at home fixed. It's been down for two weeks. You know, though, I still miss the golf course." He looks at me, I look back at the ground. Again, he rescues me; with a wave he pulls off and drives down the road.

I think I know why they stay at the job until the winter of their lives. They are bonded to the land. Bonded to cutting straight lines on dew-covered greens in the early morning light.

I wonder of members here who remember Artie. I wonder if Artie remembers them while reading their postcards from sunny climes, while digging through club trash for empty milk jugs and other small favors. I wonder if they remember Artie was the one who cut straight lines on dew-covered greens and could see rainbows in irrigation mist at twilight. I would tell them he drags a leg and smiles only from the right. And he drinks water from their empty milk jugs at night.

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