

## A Few (More) Minutes With An Old Friend

Written by Jack Sparacino

Tuesday, 30 June 2015 13:18 - Last Updated Wednesday, 01 July 2015 05:01

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People tell me from time to time that my column is sometimes reminiscent of some written by the well-traveled if “cranky” (according to *The New York Times*) CBS correspondent, Andy Rooney. I’m not so sure about our writing styles being close, but Mr. Rooney and I were close *geographically* at one time.

We were neighbors in the charming Connecticut village called Rowayton. He lived at 254 Rowayton Avenue, while Jane and I and young son Jack were just a couple blocks away at 24 Thomes Street, across the street from the commuter train that took so many of the locals into New York City.

The rocking, rumbling rhythm of the train and the station stops as they were mechanically called out by a nameless Metro-North employee still echo in my mind . . . New Rochelle, Mamaroneck, Rye, Greenwich, Cos Cob, Stamford, Rowayton . . . Well, nameless to most of us. Imagine a man who hasn’t *ever* slept well announcing stations through a soup can megaphone inside an oil drum.

We lost the inimitable Mr. Rooney in 2011 at age 92, but only after he left a long trail of wonderful writing, dating back to his WWII work as reported in *Stars and Stripes*. I looked back on some of his most memorable observations from a distinguished career in journalism. Naturally I couldn’t resist adding a few comments of my own.

**“The best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person.”** How many of us anymore grew up in extended families that spanned several generations living under the same roof? Probably not nearly enough. Helping us all out, Pulitzer Prize winning author Jane Smiley writes beautifully of such a family working their farms in Iowa from the 1920’s until after

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the war in “Some Luck.”

The typical American family today is vastly different than it was a century ago, more split up and spread out—not just geographically — and the entire learning process is structured around peer and social media lattices overlaid on traditional schools. Maybe we should take more opportunities to go ‘off the grid’ and spend more time with older folks.

Who knows what you might even learn from your neighbor’s grandma Betsy visiting from Columbus or Portland. And is that a cardboard suitcase she’s lugging?

**“Just one person saying to me, ‘You’ve made my day!’ makes my day.”** There are few things in this world that I’d rather be able to say to someone and we should probably all look for more chances to do this. What a great investment all around!□ □

**“Having a child fall asleep in your arms is one of the most peaceful feelings in the world.”** Yes, as is the similar experience of having a puppy or kitten cuddle up in your lap and blissfully conk out. The big sigh they let out as they fall asleep is one of the best little sounds known to man.

**“Being kind is more important than being right.”** Gee that’s a tough call, given the havoc and suffering that can result from being wrong and then compounding that error with a bad decision or harmful behavior. How about we try to be kind  
and  
right.□ □

**“You should never say no to a gift from a child.”**We all receive assorted gifts over our lifetimes, but how can something unique and charming, complete with sticky fingerprints, be beaten? OK, tickets to a Stones concert or a new sports car would get some consideration. But a car is a car and what’s wrong with just lazing out with YouTube?□ □

**“No matter how serious your life requires you to be, everyone needs a friend to act goofy with.”** Another great reason to keep dogs in your life, they are hard wired to be goofy along

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with all their other unbeatable qualities. And let's not forget goofy cousins or friends named Skeeter or Weegee. Anyone for Brooke Trout? Constance Knoring?

***“Money doesn't buy class.”*** If celebrity focused publications and TV shows do anything, they probably prove this simple observation to seven or eight decimal points. Perhaps some of the so-called “real housewives” would like to weigh in on this. Or ridiculously overpaid Judge Judy (bup-bup-bup)?

□□ ***“It's those small daily happenings that make life so spectacular.”***□ After all, if you take them away, there often isn't much left. Waiting for the major headlines in one's life to blare the big stuff can be a very long wait. But how about finding a great little bargain by surprise? Or someone offering to bring you lunch and sit with you while you enjoy it?

***“The average dog is a nicer person than the average person.”***□ Truer than thick, rich mushroom and giblet gravy at Thanksgiving.

And dogs are nice enough to probably never suggest this to you.

***“To ignore the facts does not change the facts.”***□ History is paved with people and entire nations preferring to stick to their own version of reality. Countless disasters have been the price of intellectual rigidity and wrongheadedness.

***“The easiest way for me to grow as a person is to surround myself with people smarter than I am.”***□ I learned this the hard way many years ago and it turned into one of the most valuable realizations I could have tripped over. □□

***“Everyone you meet deserves to be greeted with a smile.”***□ Well, not everyone. Some of the criminal defendants and other creeps we see on TV deserve anything but a smile. Grrr.

***“A smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks.”***□ Indeed. Interesting how otherwise attractive models seem to have been coached to put on their best scowl. Maybe that's why so many people enjoy seeing them fall down trying to negotiate catwalks in ridiculous

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***“Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you’re climbing it.”*** Mega-rich people like Bill and Melinda Gates seem to have figured this out long ago and resist pouring their vast wealth into their kids’ laps in order not to rob them of the best that life has to offer them through their own initiative.