

The Toadster Goes to Washington . . . and Survives

Written by Jack Sparacino

Tuesday, 09 January 2018 13:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 10 January 2018 07:10



"□□ And people say it all the time: 'You're a celebrity.' No, I'm an actor. I'm a producer. I'm a director. I'm a toad. I'm roadkill. I'm anything but a celebrity." - Drew Barrymore

Happy New Year, everyone. As you may recall, Mr. Toad is a central character in *The Wind in The Willows*,

a novel

by Kenneth Grahame. He's self-centered, narcissistic, flighty (hmm, imagine a flighty toad), petty, and a dollar short on common sense.

Toad is also rich, jovial, friendly and kind-hearted, if a bit aimless and conceited.

I, on the other hand, am temporarily assuming the mantle of "□□ The Toadster."□□ My alter ego, if you will. He's physically slow but eclectic, curious, determined and, like regular toads, favors trees, driveways and bugs. He's a little lumpy but his heart is in the right place and did I mention he likes to debug his surroundings?

No guts, no glory, they say. This ancient theme was hammered into my head again last week as I finished Ron Chernow's magnificent *Grant*, a sprawling biography of our 18th president, General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant battled the monster issues of his day, head on, with all the guts needed to get the jobs done: winning the civil war, pushing reconstruction, and defeating the Klan and a lifelong alcohol problem. While he was a perpetually terrible businessman and trusted people to a disastrous fault, he was faithful to his friends and causes, honest to his core, and unshakably steadfast under pressure.

Thus inspired, I did (for me) the almost unthinkable . . . I pulled my Ph.D. dissertation down off

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the shelf, literally dusted it off and peered back in time into young Jack the budding Toadster's thinking process 40 years ago. Context of the verdict? Well, I was concerned that this would be an exercise in embarrassment. Me, the kid researcher and writer, trying mightily to *finally* finish school. The reality? My one and only "book" is just fine. It reads well, tells a "story," and addressed important health issues. Would I do it differently today? Of course. The Toadster can still learn a thing or two as he approaches 70 and maps out his remaining toadster years.

Here's a partial list of associated mile markers and issues, starting with my motivation to go to Washington and turn the place upside down. I know, I know, you can't just bust into that self-absorbed town and start flexing your muscles. You need creds. Aha! I've got my official "Resistance" card, member #377005470689. Take that, swamp creatures!

My goal is to empty out congress and the white house and start over. Don, Mike, John, Mitch, Paul . . . scam and get real jobs, maybe in sales since you never stop trying to sell us. That goes double for you, Scotty at EPA. Of the agency employees who have quit, retired or taken buyout packages this year, over 200 are scientists. Of the 129 new employees taken on, only 7 are scientists. What the heck are you running there, Scotty boy? Have you ever been camping even? Met toads in the forest? Or visited a bee farm? The Toadster is the new sheriff in town and he's too old for any more nonsense. My crack team of young bioengineers is nearly finished with their assignment to clone FDR and take this country back to all its 1941 greatness - minus the racism and impending war, of course. They will all be on my squad.

Fast forward two weeks. OK, three, since the D.C. mess was even bigger than we thought. But gosh that was fun. So now that The Toadster is back in the Lowcountry, he has a few to-do's as we begin the new year, along with a few lessons learned.

First, **keep a wide age range of friends in your life**. Older folks are often great, but sprinkle in some Millennials and some even younger, say some Generation Z's. Especially if you ever expect to need help with your modern electronics. Our son Jack took only five minutes to reprogram Alexis for us after the phone company and yours truly struggled mightily to do it. And failed three times. Yep, geezers and kids, mix 'em up.

At least twice a year, **go to your favorite restaurant and order something different**. The Toadster has been known to order his same favorite entrees 10 straight times. But maybe you could try to avoid ordering anything really gross, like frog legs for instance.

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Third, **try at least one new task or journey every year that really gets you out of your comfort zone**. Nothing too dangerous or terribly risky, but doable and ultimately rewarding. I promise yourself not to brag about it to anyone for at least another year. Our loudmouth 'Cic' (aka Captain Cheeseburger) brags enough for all of us. Go on, be a mensch.

Make a significant contribution to a great charity, one with low overhead costs so the money goes where it should and has some leverage. Or, often better yet, volunteer. It feels great and you'll go home smiling. And if you smile too much and start getting laugh lines, please don't resort to Botox. The whole idea is gross and your real friends love you the way you are. A little wrinkled is just fine. Take it from a toad.

Avoid eating canned vegetables. They're droopy and sad. Go grow something or help out somewhere where you'll have access to plenty of fresh stuff. I know about this all too well. Canned green beans nearly did me in as a kid.

Well, maybe we can cut a little slack here. A recent report in the journal *Nutrition & Food Sciences* determined that canned may top fresh relative to price, prep time and wasted food. And remember, we good guys like scientists. (Eh, Scotty?)

Fish whenever you can and don't forget to release anything you don't plan to eat right away. Even if you get rained on or run into gnats, you'll feel positively invigorated when you get back.

Oh, and try to **never scrimp on your shoes or mattress**. You need happy feet and a good night's sleep. In fact, they go hand in glove or foot in blanket or, you know.

Another thing. **No more than an hour a day of cable news or extremist talk radio**, speaking of swamps. Watch a movie, a ballgame, play with your kids, take your wonderful dog for an extra walk, bake some brownies for someone having a tough time.

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Read a book about toads, while you're at it. You could try ***Toad Rage*** by Australian author Morris Gleitzman. (Random House, 2004)

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Finally, make a point to **sing with your kids in the car**. Son Jack and I were so delighted with our new Beautyrest mattresses that we started singing "I Feel Pretty" from *West Side Story*. We so impressed second son Greg that he sat quietly in the back seat, awe stricken. Surely he'll join in the next time we're out together.

OK, that's it for now. You're welcome!

Yours truly,

The Toadster (look for me driving my new, um, roadster)