

It would be pretty rare for us to go out to eat on a Father's day. We would have a cook out at our house or one of my grandparents. My PapPap, my dad's dad, was the old school gentleman cook, with an subject matter expertise in the art of the BBQ. He had a mustard yellow - Yellow 22 - Weber charcoal grill. He was meticulous with the ritual of the BBQ. The Kingston charcoal and the lighter fluid. A single roast of prime rib that he would season on a wooden butcher block cutting board. And once in the Webber - you left it be. I learned from him the art of letting food cook. He would open the Webber on once only to flip the meat, season it with salt and pepper and close the lid again until he knew it'd be ready. It was Pappap review, when I had my first job as working as a line cook at a Truck Stop, I was most anxious about and to hear . In his travels away from Youngstown, Ohio, he would go out of his way to stop at the same roadside diner in Hancock Maryland, not for a meal, but to get 5 pounds of sliced salt cured ham.

His brother's nickname for him was PFC after his rank in the army. Private First Class. My great uncle Bob would laugh when he would explain why they called him PFC. My assumption is that Pappap had problems with authority, and didn't have the desire to advance in rank while he served in World War II. I honestly don't know if my Pappap saw action in the war, but I know he was commissioned to the South Pacific, and there, having run into "trouble" they put him on kitchen duty and he remained a Private First Class until he was discharged. He would tell me many times, that after the army, he never wanted to peel another potato. I don't think it was for lack of self discipline. He was a hard worker. He was an expert woodworker, and made clocks as a hobby and into retirement. He was an insurance agent and ran his own agency until he retired. Before that he worked in a furniture factory and manned molten furnaces of a steel mill in Youngstown, Ohio. Before that he was a carpenter, and before that he sold chickens, and before that he worked on a dairy farm where he met my Grammy, and before that, before he ended up in Ohio, at the age of 14 he decided to leave his birth home of Bedford, Pa and walked away with nothing but himself from his four brothers and sisters, his mother, the family homestead, and away from his dad, my great great grandfather, who was an alcoholic and either abused my grandfather enough, or my grandfather witnessed enough abuse to make him walk away to find a new home. That is the story of my grandfather, with his new beginning, a self exile from his birth home, that sent him on a journey into the open road that took him to Ohio.

Today's scripture reading from Proverbs gives us words from Wisdom, and in these words, it resonated connections for me to three men: King Solomon, the author of Proverbs, my grandfather, and Walt Whitman, who we celebrated his 200th birthday in May this year. In coincidence, 100 years separated my grandfather, born in 1919, to Whitman, born in 1819. There are a lot of similarities to this passage in Proverbs to Whitman's Leaves of Grass, and have been noted as an inspiration. In the first lines of Proverb, we have our setting:

*Does not wisdom call out?
Does not understanding raise her voice?
At the highest point along the way,
Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;*

At the highest point along a journey - after the climb, where the road up meets the road down, this is where Wisdom calls out and describes all the places she is, and has been, from the beginning: in the water, the mountains, the field, dust, clouds, the sea, the earth and the heavens.

It's in this organic and atomic proclamation that I hear echoed in Whitman's writings where we find Wisdom in our world, always and forever. Whitman takes this one step further in the same vein, but finding our self in the world, and treats this discovery like a song, like Solomon in his writings.

Whitman's Song of Myself opens with these famous lines:

“I celebrate myself and what I assume you shall assume, for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air...” (1)

Always a writer, Whitman also worked a variety of jobs including printer, political campaigner, editor, house builder, newspaper publisher, hospital volunteer, office clerk, lecturer, and official in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.” Whitman is sometimes called the “father of free verse” and created a voice that sang of a new American ethos of majestic and connected outdoors and resourceful, hard-working people.

How he did this, at the time, was with fresh, organic language in a creative exploration of himself.

Also from Song of Myself he writes:

**Stop this day and night with me, and you shall possess the origin of all poems;
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun—(there are millions of suns left);
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books;
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me:
You shall listen to all sides, and filter them from your self. (2)**

It's a treatise of self discovery, but Whitman's specifically identifies the natural world as the catalyst in this discovery, found also in his poem, Song of the Open Road:

**“Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons,
It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth.**

**Here is a test of wisdom,
Wisdom cannot be pass'd from one having it to another not having it. Wisdom is of the soul, is not susceptible of proof, is its own proof...”**

Whitman identifies the very “Making of best persons” from within, but also through the connection with the earth, and through that connection you'll find Wisdom. This coming from Whitman - in 1855, is very modern, very earthly and very American. Actually, he's writing the instructions to be modern American. He's also writing this right as America, as a republic, is less than a hundreds year old, still trying to find it's identity in terms of races and abolition, peaking towards the Civil War just a few years away, from which Whitman will become an even more

important voice for America. Whitman was a progressive and subversive, he was prolific and self-promoting, he held ideals and carried flaws. Future American poet prophets followed his blueprint - from Alan Ginsburg, Bob Dylan, Mya Angelou, and Chance the Rapper to name a few. Lastly, a big part of that blueprint is the exuberance and wonder of being human with an unknown in front of us, and in awe and joy to be experiencing the known and unknown.

Remember in Proverbs that Wisdom was speaking at the peak of the climb to the mountain, and I equate Whitman also at that junction, at an opening in a pilgrimage into the wilderness. I also think of my grandfather, leaving home at 14 and finding a new home 160 miles away. He did not know it at the time, but he too was following a wisdom that was already there, and Whitman's path to forge a new life for himself, discovering and exploring, tasting and sweating, feeling and thinking, lucky to be alive, and more so, happy to be living.

I'll conclude with these lines from Whitman:

**I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself.**

**I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars and the [ant] is equally perfect and the grain of the sand and the egg of a wren and a tree toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest and the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven and the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery.
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.**