

THE OLD WAY WHERE THE BEAVERS LIVE

The Beavers seldom penetrate my consciousness. But once upon a time in the not-too-distant past, they would invariably--and predictably, I might add--burst upon us at a certain spot--the very same spot, I might point out--along our daily route.

I truly doubt The Beavers were there each and every one of the 10,000 times we made that trip, but we imagined they were. Yet in all of the 10,000 exclamations announcing their supposed presence, we never actually saw them. Not even once. But their mysterious invisibility didn't diminish their contribution to our routine one whit. Oh, they weren't the flat-tailed, toothy mammals our young son conjured in his mind, but people in a secluded house whose mailbox simple read "The Beavers."

Two significant landmarks sandwiched The Beavers on either side like slabs of rye around a hunk of corned beef. The first, at the peculiar and frequently frustrating confluence of Tyler, Donaghey and the railroad tracks, could prove himself an obnoxious, clamorous fellow. With slender, stripy, quavering arms that occasionally fell to halt traffic, his blinking red eyes warned of approaching trains. And whenever we caught him bellowing and clanging, mimicry of his raucous ding-ding-ding- would ring-ring-ring in our car until a little boy's shout--"Look! The Beavers!"--banished the ding-ding-ding into tomorrow's anticipation.

The Fat Cat lived--perhaps I should say "slept" for precision--a ways east of The Beavers after a short dogleg south onto Washington, then back east onto Winfield. But unlike the elusive beavers, The Fat Cat often passed in review, surveying not only the street, but also Hendrix College, from the porch's commanding vantagepoint. He assumed varied manifestations: sometimes a seat cushion, sometimes a rug, other times a king on parade, but always an agreeable-looking friend and furry companion.

Assurance of The Fat Cat's well being would elicit another shout from the back seat: "Fat Cat Alert!" Then a dash to the far side of Hendrix would thrust us near the bulk of a tall crane busied in constructing a building. This elephantine beast engaged his long trunk in a game of pick-put, pick-put, pick-put--picking up a load from one place and putting it down in another.

And around the corner, our eyes would riffle swaying stalks, searching for the floppy hat and faded overalls disguising our friend standing guard duty near the tracks. His weather-beaten face testified of many summer suns spent scaring crows out of the corn. Another shout: "Scarecrow!"

Last week, a car problem compelled a shortcut by the old way. Excepting the railroad signal, all the once-oh-so-exciting landmarks of our daily routine had slipped into that shadowy mist where memory and forgetfulness collide. It now also enfolds our babies, our youth and our health, reminding us that each phase of life brings pleasures and delights that do not endure.

But sunny memories are worthy investments, deposits made in the todays of yesteryear--and paying dividends on tomorrow's dreary days, when we need them the most.