

The Long Commute Home

Pete the Greek

My father, being in the Irish-American generation that he is, is HORRIBLE at pronouncing any name that is NOT of Irish extraction. Forget about it if your name is Italian, Polish, German...or heaven forbid, Greek! For all of you non-Irish, just KNOW that your name will NEVER be pronounced correctly by Bill Hickey; it's just a fact of life, accept it and move on.

A lovely old neighbor woman of ours, who has long since passed, used to call out to people as they walked by her house, saying "YooHoo. YooHoo." So of course, to Dad, she became, Mrs. YooHoo.

For years, there was a man of Greek-American decent, who worked with my father at the Lawrence Post Office. Around the dinner table each night, Dad would tell us stories about his day, walking his mail route in Lawrence or in North Andover. He often mentioned his Swingman – that's the guy who fills in and delivers the mail for you, on your day off. We all knew that Dad's Swingman was this particular Greek-American, known to us only as, Pete the Greek.

You can imagine my surprise years ago, when my husband Jerry and I first started seeing one another, when he innocently mentioned that his father worked as a mailman. I told Jerry that my father worked as a mailman too. Upon further questioning we soon found that our father's worked at the same Post Office. We were amazed - what a small world.

We each went home and asked our fathers if they knew of the other person who was working at their Post Office. You could have knocked me over with a feather when my father told me that Jerry's father turned out to be, none other than Pete the Greek!

It was VERY interesting to hear Pete the Greek's version, of those mailman stories that my father used to tell us.

Pete used to say, that my father could stretch a dollar farther than any man he knew. My father used to joke and say, "Hey Pete, I've got some sand for sale if you need some." Pete knew full well that my father lived on Plum Island and that he had mounds and mounds of sand dunes in his backyard. Pete used to say, "Leave it to that crafty Irishman to come up with a way to make a buck, by trying to sell beach sand!"

Pete used to curse my father whenever it was time to deliver the big magazines at the Post Office. That meant that their mailbags would be very weighted down, with the delivery of hundreds of large Sears & Roebucks catalogs and such. My father used to "conveniently"

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take these days off...or so says Pete...just so that he wouldn't have to walk the route with such a heavy bag. Pete used to complain about getting stuck with all of Hickey's heavy mail. To this day, my father still has a good chuckle over this.

It always amazed Pete that my father was never caught "detouring" the delivery of all free-samples on his route. When new products were being marketed, free samples were often sent to the Post Offices, to be delivered to each house along a mail route. Instead of taking a few of the free samples, my father used to take ALL of the free samples from his route, home with him, for us.

We LOVED free samples. Are you kidding? Kids who only knew no-name brands, day-old bread and rejects to FINALLY be treated with an actual name brand product! I can't even begin to describe for you the shouts of joy at such a luxury in our house! It was free sample day at the Hickey household! What joy!

I can still picture the little, free-sample bottle of Pert shampoo, when it first came out. What a thrill! My own personal bottle of shampoo...for the 7th of 9 children to have something (anything) of her very own...Wow, now THAT was something! I had REAL shampoo for the first time in my life. And it was in a little bottle, just for me. I didn't have to add water to the last remnants of what started out as a no-name, watered-down brand of shampoo. To merely squeeze out a little dab of Pert shampoo and actually find that it lathers! You just don't know how good that was. And the perfume scent...heaven! Unless you grew up poor, you have no idea what joy, one little free sample could bring!

And if the free sample turned out to be food...Hallelujah!...it would ALL be gobbled up an hour after Dad brought them home...no matter how many free samples there were, or what kind of food it even was! It was devoured instantly.

Pete would comment, that at least my father was smart enough to realize that he either needed to have a free sample for every house on his route, or he'd better hand out none at all. People would talk amongst themselves and if one neighbor got a free sample and another didn't, then complaints might have been made. But if no one got a free sample, they would be none the wiser.

Think of all the happiness that was brought to 9 little kids who just happened to be related to the mailman!

All I've got to say is.....thank God for free samples!