

April 7, 2019

# Growing Pains

Last weekend I stepped lazily into my backyard just as the sun was beginning to set. The soft blue of the evening sky faded into oranges and reds along the western horizon. I gazed happily at the greenery making its spring entrance like the lead actor in a new stage production.

Then I stepped directly onto a fresh pile of cat poop, a byproduct of God's creation. A very stinky byproduct, but a byproduct just the same.

I tried to continue to marvel at the beautiful sky, the newly minted leaves and grass, but I kept being interrupted with thoughts of, "Whew, that really stinks!" and, "I wish I wasn't wearing my shoes with the waffle tread."

Finally, I sat down on the step leading from my back porch and grabbed a stick. As I wiped off the cat poop, I counted my blessings.

"Where else can my wife and I walk for 10 minutes in any direction and find ourselves on the edge of the open prairie, nary a man- or woman-made object in sight, unless you count the windmills, which encircle Spearville like a giant cheese grater?" I asked Mr. Grey, one of the feral cats that lived on our back porch, as he watched me clean my shoe.

"I use the litter box," he said. "Seriously. Don't blame me."

"I won't," I told him as I gave him a quick scratch of his neck.

"Do the windmills really protect us from alien attack?" Mr. Grey asked. Oops. Did I really tell him that? Yeah, that sounds like me.

"How many times has Spearville been attacked by Martians since the windmills went up?" I replied.

Mr. Grey nodded. "Yeah, I guess."

"You know, the closeness of the open countryside is one those gems of small-town country living that makes my mom—living in an assisted living apartment on the edge of downtown Denver—green with envy," I said. "Or it could be the lunch they just served. Anyway, she's green with something."

Mr. Grey chuckled politely.

"Mom grew up on a farm, a life she misses greatly, and a life that echoes some of our lives now in Spearville," I said. "Whereas Mom milked a cow every morning before heading off to school, here in Spearville my wife happily milks our small herd of possums. As you know, possum milk is filled with electrolytes, omega-3 fatty acids, and bunches and bunches of possumy goodness. *Mmmmmm.*"

"What?!" Mr. Grey said, rolling his eyes. "Charlene doesn't milk possums!"

I felt bad about the "alien" fib, so I said, "Just a little joke!"

"Seriously though, you wanna hear another gem of small-town country living? It was at our 4 p.m. Mass last Saturday (March 23). You should have seen it, Mr. Grey! Several young couples who would be attending the Spearville High School prom later that evening came to Mass dressed in their prom finery. The girls looked beautiful, the guys like James Bond ready for Goldfinger's gala."

"I miss the old Bond," Mr. Grey said. "That blond guy is so serious. No fun at all."

"I totally agree," I said. "But the point is, it was so cool seeing these kids beginning their prom celebration with Mass!"

"I was also happy to see that the guys' sense of style has improved by leaps and bounds over the decades. At my senior prom nearly 40 years ago, rental tuxes came in shades of pastel reds, blues and greens. We looked like we'd been dipped in Easter egg dye.

"Each had an oversized, velvet bow tie under which a cascade of lasagna-like rivulets streamed down the front. You could also rent a top hat and cane, which was the height of coolness. We measured coolness much differently back then."

"I've seen the pictures. *(Shudder).*"

"Yeah," I acknowledged. "If you were wealthy enough to rent a limo, the large 'Ed's Limo Rental' sign on the driver's side door kind of ruined the effect. Yet, we who couldn't afford such opulence looked on with envy as Joe Cool with his top hat and cane got out of Ed's Limo with his lucky date."

"Dave, where you goin' with this?" asked Mr. Grey.

"With what?"

"Well, you started out talking about how beautiful Spearville was, then you stepped in poop, now you're talking about a prom. What's up?"

I looked down at my shoes. I thought about how fertilizer looks and smells so gross, but yet it helps things to grow. Life had handed us a big chunk of fertilizer lately. Two deaths, Father Marvin and a priest in Denver I knew, Msgr. Michael Glenn.

I wish I could tell Father Marvin how much he moved me that day, years ago, when I watched him work a massive crowd of youth into a Christ-filled frenzy, engaging them, encountering them, encouraging them to allow the Loving Lord to fill their heart. *You planted seeds, that day, Father Marvin. You moved so many to God. You saved lives. For what you did just on that one day alone (and I'm sure there were many others like it), I don't think it's too much to say, Mission Accomplished.*

Then there was the news about our columnist. *All forgiven, Sister. I sure can't throw the first stone. Rest well.*

Perhaps all the news had left me needing time to focus. Perhaps I need a little time to understand, to grow.

As devotees of a Loving Lord, our lives sometimes take patience. We have to allow ourselves time to grasp God's design. It isn't always easy to do. It can take time, effort, and prayer.

"Growing pains," I said. "Just growing pains."