

## THE PREDATOR'S WALTZ

As children we were taught to mind our manners, to speak only when spoken to and do what we were told. We were to respect our elders and expected to work hard, so that we could earn our place at the dinner table. We were told to be kind, to share and help without being asked, and God forbid, we were never to ask for or expect anything in return.

We were told never to question authority and to always be polite. My brothers and I were taught that real men, young or old never cry, and that once you had made your bed, you had to sleep in it. These were our guiding principles and sadly they were strictly enforced.

Heavy, wet snow continues to fall; so much weight has come to rest on the roof tops of many homes and buildings. Our old house creaks and groans day and night, as the heavy snow continues to settle. With more snow on the way most roofs should be cleared off very soon. My brother and I cleared off our house and out buildings Thursday night after school.

As usual on Saturday mornings once the cartoons on television have ended, We've all been sent outside and are playing with the neighbor kids in the snow. He turns off into our drive way in his new car, slowly and carefully. The opportunity he's been patiently waiting for has finally presented itself.

He asks my mother politely yet anxiously if I could clear the snow off his roof today. Who could have guessed what his true intentions really were? Not my hard working, trusting parents and certainly not me at twelve years old.

When there is work to be done, work hard, don't rest until the job is completed. You have shoveled many roofs in the past for many people, So go then and remove this terrible weight before disaster strikes.

My parents trust me to be polite, to work hard and do a good job. In the past the outcome for me would be the satisfaction of a job well done, And with a little luck maybe fifty cents or a dollar to spend as I wish.

"You work so hard and you are so strong even though you are young."

"Yet you seem so grown up."

"Would you like a beer and perhaps a cigarette?"

"Well, yes I would, thank you."

I've never been talked to or treated this way before in my whole life.

I accept his offer as my parents trust and respect him, a man of position and authority.

After all he is the principal of the local Catholic Elementary School.

I've worked hard, I've been polite,

I am respecting my elders so then all should be fine?

All is good, life is great.

"When it snows again you should come back and shovel out my driveway."

"If time allows I will let you drive my snowmobile."

"For now, here is five dollars for all the hard work you have done. "

I feel proud, grateful and so grown up.

I must have done a good job to be invited back.

I have never been on a snowmobile before much less driven one.

I'm excited, happy and feel incredibly alive.  
Life is great and I have so much money to spend.  
Work hard and be polite, respect your elders and all will be good.

There are seven of us kids along with my parents that live in our three bedroom house.  
Everyone works hard and we exist together.  
Life is happening all around us.  
Some things I understand and there are lots of things that I don't.  
My parents argue constantly over money, even more so when my dad has been drinking.  
My mother worries over having enough for everyone, except for love.  
There seems to be plenty to go around, then again, how do you know?  
We are never hungry for too long as our neighbors have always shared with us.  
My mother shares right back again when the tables are turned.

He is back again, two Saturdays later needing more work to be done.  
I am sent without question.  
I am warned to work hard and respect my elders, to do as I am told.  
I am cautioned not to question or to ask for anything,  
Also to mind my manners and then all will be fine.

"You work so hard and are so strong, yet you are so young."  
"Would you like a beer or perhaps some wine and a cigarette?"  
"I would like that very much, thank you."  
"Would you like another?"  
"Well, yes I would, thank you."  
"Could you stay the night, my neighbors called and they have work for you as well?"  
"You can make even more money."  
"I guess that would be alright."

He calls my mother and asks if I could stay the night because,  
All the new snow today has made the roads very slippery for driving.  
Then he explains that his neighbors have work for me to do tomorrow.  
My mother agrees and she is proud when he tells her that I have worked hard,  
I have been respectful of my elders, that I've been polite and that all was well.  
His careful planning and patience has worked out so very, very well.  
The music had been playing all along but soon the waltz will begin.

"Would you like some more wine and another cigarette?"  
"You work so hard, you are so strong, yet you are so young."  
"Yes---, I would, thank you."

I wake the next morning, lying naked, on a bed in a room I'd never been before.  
What has happened to me, my God what has happened?  
I try to piece together what has happened but my head is pounding terribly,  
My mouth is so dry and my mind is spinning out of control.  
Oh God, what has happened, I feel like dying,  
Spears of fear jab at my heart and through to my very soul.  
I still can't remember anything or even where I am, I'm so very afraid.

Sounds come from the next room.  
He glances around the corner,

I lay there numb and speechless and I close my eyes immediately as he has nothing on.  
He quickly disappears and returns with a bath robe on.  
I lay motionless in my body and my mind is racing.  
He says that I will feel better after I have something to eat.  
He watches me as I get dressed, I don't understand.  
I don't question, my mind seems to snap when I try to make sense of things.  
I can't remember anything but I know something has happened.

He makes toast that I eat quietly then I'm told to go shovel the neighbor's driveway.  
Once outside I welcome the cold, fresh morning air deep into my lungs.  
My head is still pounding and I begin to feel sick, dizzy and confused.  
Vomit rushes up from my stomach and pours out through my mouth and nose,  
As I fall to my knees clutching my stomach, I see him watching me from the window.  
He continues to watch calmly as if he had witnessed this happen before,  
And he knows I will feel better soon.

My childhood ended that morning  
The twelve year old boy I was the day before had died sometime in the night.  
I sensed that my life would never be the same again and I was right.  
Life as I knew it had been altered forever and a different person was now living within.  
My mom used to say, "Whatever doesn't kill you, will only make you stronger."  
And God rest her soul, after many years of silent torture, she was right.

Respect your elders, do as you are told and work hard.  
Don't question, be polite and all will be well.

From that morning on and for the next four years of my life I remained caught in his trap. I am fifty four years old now and have lived with profound guilt, shame, loneliness and self hatred. I quickly became addicted to drugs and alcohol and began to use them constantly to induce the temporary reprieve they would provide. For many, many years I did not fall asleep, I passed out, I didn't wake up I came to. So many times I just wanted to die and should have died, but didn't. I finally understood and accepted that this happened to me and that it wasn't my fault. I forgave him for his trespasses against me. I desperately hope and pray that anyone I've hurt physically or emotionally throughout my addictive life might have forgiven me as well. It has been such a long and winding road to this point in my life. Today with help, I am finally starting to love myself and I am beginning to enjoy a long sought after peacefulness that fills my heart and soul with resounding joy and happiness. Although the Waltz ended many decades ago, now only faint echoes of its music lingers.

Time it was, it was a time it was, it was a lonely time,  
It was a time of innocence, and a time of consequences.

Ron Courte