

RESOURCES

Generational Changes - A New Year's Message from John Braden

My grandfather Wilson died in 1951 at the age of 83. He and my grandmother still lived on the farm where they raised their six children. My grandfather had been a "well off" farmer. My mother told me he served as an election judge and she sometimes went with him to try to help neighbors who had ill family members. The difference between life then and life now is so vast that even we old folks sometimes forget.

Their house, which was built before my mom was born in 1909, was wired for electricity during the late 1930's. There was electricity and a propane gas tank which provided gas to a heater in the master bedroom and to the kitchen stove. Plumbing was something else, however. Water in the kitchen came from a cistern that collected rain water. There was a well, but the pump no longer worked. Instead, there was a bucket on a pulley that would bring up water which stayed in the bucket even though the bottom was open and was released by pulling up a little gizmo on the top. My brother and I always went first to the well and pulled up some water. It took several bucketfuls before we got clean, clear, cool water.

Toilet facilities were about 50 yards out the back door. I don't remember any door but the entrance opened away from the house. The only processing of the material deposited into this "two-seater" was by the chickens that could get to the bottom. My parents would bring toilet paper because the outhouse usually had only the Sears and Roebuck catalogue.



My grandfather's whole life was spent farming. At the time of this death, he had cut back and only had a few cows. As best I remember, the back pasture sometimes was planted in watermelons and sometimes sweet potatoes. But I think by the time of his passing, that acreage was being rented to someone down the road. We could not pick anything from that field until the renter got in his crop. I remember some very big sweet potatoes we found there that had been passed over as part of the regular harvest. My older cousins tell (and even have pictures) of pigs, geese and other animals, but those were gone by my time. My grandmother, who was ten years younger than my grandfather, lived almost another ten years in that home. She still kept a garden, chickens, and cows.

The meals I remember are chicken and dumplings and mustard greens. The chicken would be one of the unfortunate denizens of the back yard. I'm sure that was not the only menu, because I also remember going with my grandmother to take fresh eggs from nests and getting veggies from the garden. Somehow the chicken and dumplings and the chocolate cake with divinity icing are all I remember.

There was an old truck in the garage, but I am pretty sure my grandmother never learned to drive. I think by the time my grandfather died, it had not moved in years. We kids never knew what happened to it. Since the truck did not run, the fact that strikes me most in 2010 is that they had no way to get to a store even if they had money to spend.

As far as I know, my grandfather never had a “job” where he worked for wages. I’m pretty sure my grandfather never had a social security number, paid any social security taxes, nor collected any benefits. They sold cattle, eggs, and perhaps some produce to pay for necessities that could not be raised or grown on the farm. This was the era where the flour sacks were designed to be dish towels and may have even had designs for shirts on them. The phone was one of those crank phones, with a party line and an actual operator on it when you picked it up. Important messages such as births or deaths were delivered by a telegraph delivery boy and you paid for those by the letter or by the word.

Think about how the times have changed in the years since 1951. In 60 years we have gone from casual self sufficiency to our internet age. Every child gets a social security number at birth. Every grandparent can see baby pictures within minutes on facebook. Most of us have a whole array of medical specialists whose classifications did not exist in 1951.

Doctors came to your house and usually sons of doctors became doctors themselves. My great grandfather had been a physician and even taught at a medical school. Family legend is that he told my grandfather it was a better career move to become a farmer because the income would be better. Farmers rarely get called in the middle of the night out to a place with a bunch of sick kids.

I know there is a certain amount of romance among many younger people to the idea of being self sufficient, raising your own food on your own land, even being organic. I have seen self sufficiency and believe me, I would prefer not to be killing and cleaning our own chickens or worrying if there will be enough rain for the seeds you planted to come up. Nowadays, those chickens that had the run of the yard and nibbled on their own poop would be not just organic but “free range”. My mother told stories about long days in the fields and I’m sure at least some of those were true. I’ve seen where the school was located, so I know that the stories my uncle told about “walking 2 miles both ways uphill in the snow” were exaggerations.

Today everyone assumes their social security benefit will at least pay the electric bill and Medicare means we not only have doctors, we have a whole list of “-ologists” for every different part of our bodies. As a group, even after the market crashes and the continuing business slump, we are still just about the most well off generation in history. I don’t intend to downplay the challenges we face in our current economy. However, we need to keep things in perspective, remember what our ancestors went through and accomplished. What the most affluent experienced as part of daily life then is vastly different from average life today.

Going into the new year, let’s all count our blessings and be thankful for what we have.

Quote of the Quarter

If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time - a tremendous whack.

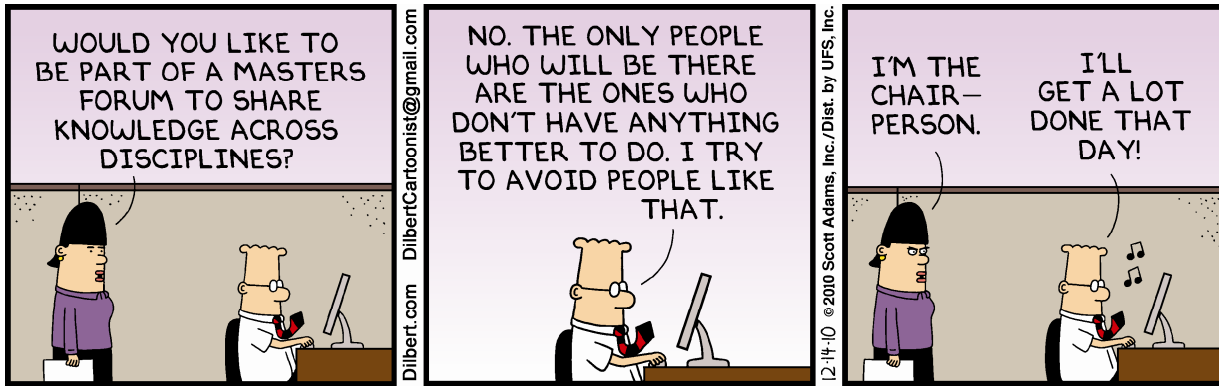
- Winston Churchill

Thought of the Month

The chief danger in life is that you may take too many precautions.

- Alfred Alder

Wisdom from the Funny Pages



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If you have never worked in an office, you may not appreciate the Dilbert cartoon strips. It takes some real life experience in similar situations to really appreciate the wisdom included in these. If you have not had the painful experience of pointless meetings you may not be able to understand. However, my advice is that this is kind of like a toothache...if you have never had one, it is best to just remain ignorant of the pain.

OK, You Are On The Transplant List. So What Now?

In previous communications I have told you I have been accepted on the kidney transplant list. So what does that mean? The approval process involves 4 days of extensive medical tests to make sure I am healthy enough to be a successful transplant recipient. It puts me on a local and national list of potential recipients. We are waiting for someone to die who has a matching kidney, signed up to donate, and everyone above us on the list has been taken care of. The last I was told was that the wait was about two and a half years.

The alternative is for someone to donate a kidney directly for me. We all have two, so people with healthy kidneys, can live full, healthy lives with only one. Anyone can volunteer and my insurance pays all the cost of being tested. This is an amazing factor of how insurance works. Want a stress test paid for? Volunteer to donate for someone. The donation screening involves the same 4 days of medical testing as the recipient testing. What is even possible is the possibility of multiple matching. There are cases where a donation which does not match up with the intended recipient, but does match up with another recipient, who happens to have a potential donor who matches up with potential recipient one.

If you are interested in finding out more about either living donation or donation at death, more information is available at <http://www.methodisthealth.com/mtc.cfm?id=35471>.

<u>Company Directory</u>		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Email Address</u>
John A. Braden, CPA/PFS	President	jbraden@jbraden.com
Suzanne Barnett-Villarreal, CPA	Audit Manager	svillarreal@jbraden.com
Kimberly Scott	Tax Manager	kscott@jbraden.com
Meredith Watmough	Office Manager	mwatmough@jbraden.com
Nancy Roberts	Administrative Asst.	nroberts@jbraden.com

Alternative History **by John A. Braden**

I've mentioned it before, but I'll say it again, I like to read. All my life I have been a reader. My early choices were science fiction and I believe some classic science fiction should be required of every educated person. There are some people who will try to impress you by saying they never read fiction or spend their time reading business related books. Business related books are ok and should be included on everybody's menu. However, if that is all you read, you are either a very slow reader, very boring or you are doing a lot more activities of an athletic nature than I do, which is obviously better for your overall health.

As I get older, I find history interesting. However, what is the most intriguing to me these days is alternative history. I'm guessing most of people don't know what that genre is. Alternative history starts with the basic premise of "what if?" These are stories about what might have happened differently had things changed. For example, what if the South had won the civil war? What if Lincoln had not been assassinated? What if Hitler had died as a child? The possibilities are almost endless and it becomes a serious thought experiment. The best science fiction authors were scientists. The work had to be scientifically credible and only real scientists could do that. The good authors of alternative history are legitimate historians. If Custer is going to survive the Little Big Horn and go on to lead the whole US army, who are his other officers? If you have never explored this area of literature, I recommend it highly.

