

A Whisky and Milk, Please! by Leon Moss

The bar was full with dozens of rowdy men standing in front of the counter. I shuffled forward patiently through the noise and finally the barman looked at me and said, "What'll it be, young feller?"

"A double scotch whisky please. White Label if you have it."

"We do indeed!" He reached for the bottle, poured the tots and said, "Anything to go with this?"

"Milk, please." Did I imagine it or did the huge room suddenly go very quiet?

"What was that? You want milk with your whisky?" Why did he have to say it so loudly?

"Yes please."

The room wasn't quiet. It was soundless. "Say when," he said as he carefully poured milk from a quart bottle into the glass. The bar erupted in laughter.

It was in 1949 that I became my grandfather's driver. I was 16, too young to have a driver's license but no one seemed to mind. Grandfather was then about 75 years old, a little wavery in his manner and peering at the world through thick lenses and watery blue eyes. He probably had class 7 cataracts. And he probably drove by memory. He was also very hesitant behind the wheel of his Dodge Fluid Drive. He bought the latest Dodge Fluid Drive model every year, always in Sky Blue. Pop was about five four in his socks and when he was behind the wheel of the Dodge you couldn't see him unless you peered over the sill, a frightening moment until you realized there was a driver after all. His daughters, including my mother, decided he should not drive any longer and I was promoted to the job.

My day went like this: In the morning I would catch a bus from where I lived with my parents to grandfather's house in the suburbs. I would get a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice while he slowly ate his breakfast. When he was ready, I would reverse the car out of the garage into the traffic and drive him to his office downtown. I would leave him at the building entrance and park the car in the lot nearby. From there I would walk a couple of blocks and catch a bus to the

college where I would spend the day. I would go back to his office at about five and drive him home. And that's where my whisky-drinking sessions started.

He would always invite me to come in and have a drink before I caught the bus home. He drank White Label scotch and he drank it neat. "I would offer you a drink too, my boy, but its powerful stuff. How old are you? Sixteen? All right, but you have to drink yours with milk." So every evening, sometime between five-thirty and six, depending on the traffic, I drank a whisky and milk. It took a bit of getting used to before I began to enjoy it. The months passed and we graduated to drinking seconds or doubles. I would then stagger off to the bus stop and go home.

This arrangement went on for the five years that I was at college, when his health declined and he no longer went into the office. To my disappointment my driving duties came to an end. But whenever I called in to see how he was doing, we drank whisky together. Mine always came with milk.

I never drank whisky anywhere else. I was a recently qualified engineer and I drank beer. Pop passed on in 1959 and I stopped going to the house. By then I was fully qualified with my own small practice and making a fair living. My drinking was confined to a beer here and there and occasionally two beers with a colleague or a client.

It was on the third anniversary of grandpa's death on April 1st, that I made a promise to myself that I would celebrate Pop's memory regularly. He had left an indelible mark on my personality and on my lifestyle. These days I drink whisky with a couple of cubes of ice and a drop of water, or if it's a single malt, I drink it neat.

But once year on the anniversary of grandpa's passing, the first day of spring, I order a double whisky and milk. And raise a round of raucous laughter.

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