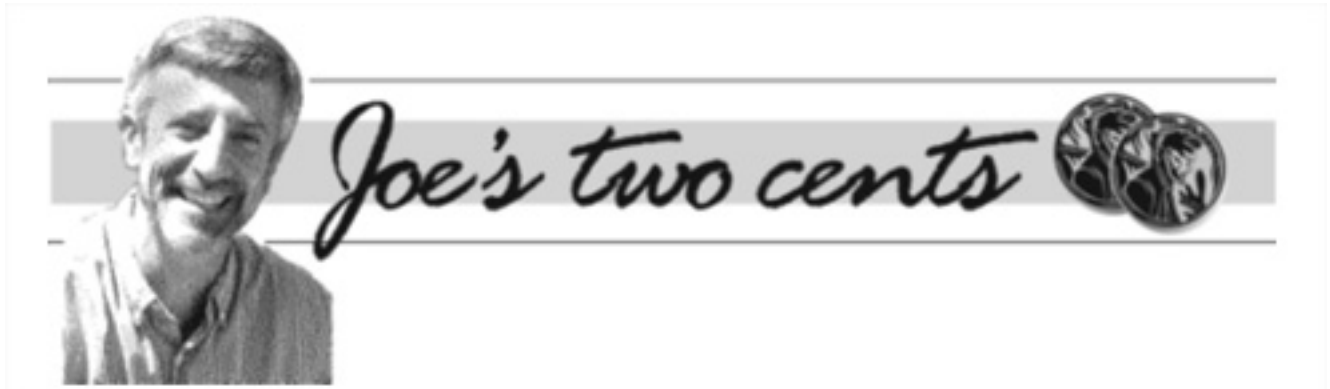


08/07/12 - Through the Back Door



We saw him pull up the driveway ? or more precisely, we heard him. Sounded like a new muffler was going to be part of his auto inspection today. But we never saw my brother climb the dozen front steps to our house ? we call that our "twelve step" program. You've really gotta work to climb them ? and we always have plenty of notice that someone's taking the challenge.

Then we saw him come through the back door. Which no one ever uses. I don't think our kids ever even knew we had a back door.

"Why'd you come in the back door?" I asked him as we did the guy hug thing ? a natural reaction since we hadn't seen in each in months.

"Oh...I dunno. We always use the back door at our house. Remember how we always did when we were kids too?"

And he was right. We spent our childhood growing up in two houses before I joined the Air Force in 1974. The first was a two-story home and we lived on the second floor. All of our business was done by the back door. Around the right side of the house, through the backyard gate, up a dozen back porch steps, then up a flight of 20 back hall steps. We got lots of exercise in that house.

We were rarely allowed to use the front door. That was reserved for unknowing people and strangers who rang the doorbell ? a sound that always confounded us, because we heard it so rarely. Except around 10 o'clock, Monday through Saturday, when the mailman came. At that time, if we were home, the four of us kids would scramble down those 16 steps to grab the mail that had been pushed through the mail slot of that great oaken door with the lead glass

window. But the door remained shut.

We were only allowed to pass through the front doorway on Halloween, to help hand out candy to the three thousand kids that lived in our neighborhood ? after we had collected our own trick or treat booty, of course.

We moved to a single family house in 1968, as I started high school. The first thing my Dad did was to buy a wrought iron black eagle and secure it above the front door. He always wanted to have one of those ? maybe because he was very patriotic. Or maybe to ward off the evil spirits of the front door. I don't know.

No one ever used that front door either, except for the neighbors on New Year's Eve, who were allowed to exit that way so us kids didn't see them stumbling back to their home after imbibing a few martinis while watching the ball fall in Times Square. As if teenagers never saw that kind of thing...

We actually didn't mind not using the front door, because our back door this time was on the side of the house and we had to bound up 30 steps less than in our last abode. As a bonus, those two steps landed us right in the kitchen, ten feet from the refrigerator. An important consideration for teenagers. And none of us was ever graced with a front door key anyhow. I think I crawled in my second floor bedroom window over the back porch more times than I walked through the front door. Many more times actually...

I always wondered where this back door tradition came from and narrowed it down to my Mom's side of the family. We never entered her Dad's house either, except by the back door ? we never even knew he had a front door. My Dad's folks on the other hand, let all 22 of their grandchildren tear up and down their front steps, apparently unconcerned with every slam of their heavy front door.

So when my brother came bounding through our back door last week ? well...bounding as much as a 56-year old husky guy can muster ? he was just adhering to his upbringing. Until I told him to take his shoes off, something my mother never required us to do. That's our own tradition, one I picked up while stationed in Korea, and one my own kids adhere to. And we don't care if they come through the front door or the back...

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