

The Hobo Corner: Wrong Way Kauppila



By Jack Kauppila

Hey Everyone - It's Jack here, from the Hobo Bakery in Vernonia, my new hometown.

Please tell me someone else remembers Wrong Way Feldman from Gilligan's Island: Our boy Gilligan, doping around the island, comes across ol' man Feldman (played by Hans Conried who made a fortune over-emoting in children's shows) hanging from a palm tree in his busted ol' bi-plane. Gilligan tells him he missed WWII to which Feldman muses that he wondered what all the noise was. And then much comedy ensues.

There's a point... it's about family... buckle up...

Family was always another f-word for me growing up. My one memory of my biological father is being picked up from visitation at his house (formerly our house) and watching him escort his new wife and a new redheaded son, about my age, into our old house. "Oh," I thought, "that's who Dad replaced me with."

That's the memory I grew up with. Mom drove my sisters and I home to our new Daddy that day, and I never saw or heard from him again. Mom would drive us home to 8 or 9 new daddies (she married one of them twice) through years of violence and addiction, neglect, homelessness, foster care, and welfare housing.

See, I was born a Way. The family mythology is that bio-dad's new wife wouldn't let him have any contact with us, so Daddy#2 adopted us and that's how I got this amazing compendium of consonants and vowels that is my name - Kauppila - pronounced like, whatever! No, I'm not Hawaiian! Do I LOOK Hawaiian??? It's Finnish. I'm not. Explain that every day for 50 years... Maybe it would have been easier to grow up Way.

And that was it for 50 years, until we moved to our new hometown, Vernonia! Literally, the day we moved into our cute little house in V-Town a blast from the Way past (punny) showed up at the bakery!

And I wasn't there! I had just left the bakery for my long commute home (3 minutes, walking) when someone flagged me down and said "Hey are you Jack from the bakery?"

"Yeah that's me! What can I bake for you?"

"Some guy was just there looking for you but you're closed. He says he's your cousin and hasn't seen you for 50 years."

I quickly did the math - 50 years from today, carry the 6, I was 4. None of my cousins were born yet. This was perplexing... I was perplexed... but Sweet Sweet Mary has the Facebook, so she got to digging and lo and behold it was a long-lost Way cousin!

I had no interest. Bio-daddy Way had no interest in me, so why should I care about his brother's kid?

I went on baking. Christmas came and Santa Jack's! It finally snowed. Spring came, shamrock cookies and an invitation to my sister's surprise birthday party!

Whaaaaat?

My sister and I lived radically different versions of my childhood. The stuff I saw through the eyes of a kid less than 10 years old, she saw through the

eyes of a girl entering her teen years. So our particular dysfunctions don't always jibe. We've never been close; this was as much a surprise to me as it would be to her.

My only question was, 'can I bake the cake?'

It was a Grande Affair! I put an 'e' on it because the party was at a chicken wings joint most of the way to Canada and I think they do that up there. I may be thinking of Farrell's Ice Cream Shoppe. Or Shakey's. Either way I had a carrot cake to deliver and 5 hours in a hot car on I-5 to worry about whether it would thaw gently or melt itself into a puddle of carrot and cream cheese goo.

We made it there, got the cake in a fridge, and prepared to leap out in surprise; me, Sweet Sweet Mary, Shane, a couple of aunts and uncles, and a bunch of cousins I haven't seen in decades. Including my blast-from-the-past, stalker-ey cousin Way!

It was amazing! My sister was furious that we went to all the trouble (of course) and when she saw me she turned around and slugged her husband - uh oh, I thought, this could go either way...

She started crying and wrapped me in her arms. "I can't believe you're here!" she sobbed. Years of distance and misunderstanding melted away and we were family again.

And the beautiful carrot cake survived the journey and was a big big hit! Yes!

And then it all went Way Wrong.

Turns out Cousin Way (Cuz') is a bit of a family history nut. He and my sis had run into each other at a cemetery where they were each digging up old ancestors. Years of distance and misunderstanding melted away and THEY were family again.

Nothing melted for me when me and Cuz' sat down to talk. He told me all about my Way family lineage and showed me a picture of us at 4 years old playing Parcheesi. What two four-year-olds were doing with a game like that I don't know, but it got my attention.

I have had no interest in the Way side of my bloodline. I grew up thinking that I was the Wrong Way so Bio-d replaced me with a better redhead. Then I learned that the Way clan had been on the wrong side of everything since Plymouth Rock!

Some truly Wrong

Way:

- We were on the wrong side of the Salem witch trials - sorry ladies
- We fought on the wrong side of the Revolutionary War
- I wasn't even supposed to have my name! Cuz' was born first by 5 days and he was supposed to be 'John Way' after 'our' grandfather, but Kennedy had just been killed and Mom somehow

swooped in and stole it.

• And finally, I learned Bio-d worked his whole life to keep my sisters and I out of the family history and was furious when he saw us included in a Way family tree.

That name thing stung a bit. I didn't get to keep my family name, but I wasn't even supposed to have my first name! I offered to give it back - Cuz' could be Jack, I definitely didn't want the karmic consequences of stealing someone's name!

But Cuz' didn't want to change all his credit cards or sit in the DMV that long, so he just kept on telling me about 'my dad' and 'our grandpa' and my half-sister who only learned about us recently, we were such a deep secret. I started to get a feeling that I was part of a larger family whether I knew it or not.

I have two sons that I love and adore with all my heart. I can't imagine cutting them out of my life - I'd sooner give up breathing, and I breathe a lot! I hope I've earned a place in their hearts and I hope they know I am always here for them.

Sweet Sweet Mary is my soulmate and we're in this together, forever. Her family has welcomed me and given me a new understanding of what family means.

And there is the amazing family of friends we've served through the Hobo Bakery and I want you all to know I'm here for you and I'm not going anywhere.

I think family is a verb. It's the actions I take that make me a part of it, not some accident of genealogy that ties us together.

Even though the castaways welcomed Ol' Wrong Way with open arms and the professor fixed his plane, he still flew off in the wrong direction. And if he ever made it back to the island I'm sure Gilligan would have welcomed him like a long-lost cousin and they would fix his plane again, load him up with bananas, and send him off again. That seems like family to me.

That's all I have from the Hobo Corner this month. Thank you all for your time and patience.

Peace and happy, happy Toasting.



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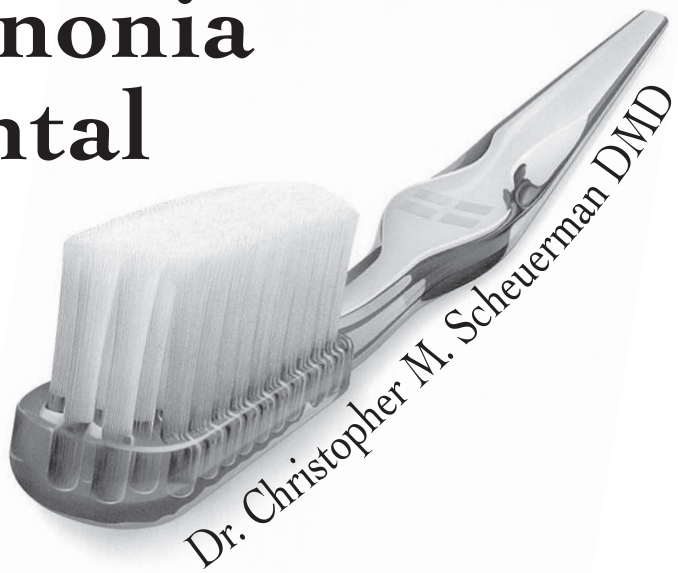
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