

# Remember the Past, Look to the Future, but Live Today



**G**rowing up on my granddad's farm was idyllic, like living in an 800-acre playground. My family lived there all year round, but in the summer, cousins would come. Rod and I always seemed to have deep red stains on our white tee shirts from all the cherries we ate right off the trees in the orchard.

We spent hours playing on the hill behind my house, where we named all the landmarks. The lone pine stood a short distance from the house at the top of the first slope. Mosquito Palace was to the south, where the bushes were big enough that their branches grew up and bent over to the ground making an umbrella-shaped fort all our own. It was cool and moist inside, a respite from the summer heat. It was a wonderfully secluded hideaway, but the mosquitoes ate us alive. Just outside the

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Mosquito Palace was one row of old junk cars. Over the previous decades, people would use a car until it was completely worn out and then drag it to the edge of the brush row. Sixty years have passed, and I can still remember the smell of the rotten tires and upholstery; it makes me smile.

The watering trough was down the hill on the other side of the house. It was a rectangular concrete tank about four by six feet and three feet deep; there was always water around the base, and we could feel the mud oozing through our toes. We could go into the barnyard from there—it was only a few yards away—but there were Canadian thistles and other stickers. So, we usually changed into long pants and put on shoes if that was our destination.

The barn was always fun. There was a small grain bin, big enough to play in but not deep enough for us to get buried and suffocate. It was like the ball pits you see in the playrooms of McDonald's. There were horse collars and harnesses left over from the wagon days. I remember, in the winter, riding in a horse-drawn sleigh when one of my uncles harnessed a horse to it. The other end of the barn had a manger with stanchions where the cows had previously stood. There were even parts of the old milking machine from the dairy days.

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Below the barn was the lower pasture we called the island. It bordered the river, but there was a fence to keep cows, horses, and grandkids out of danger. We could climb the willow trees and walk through the tall grass. There was a little pond in the far corner where we made a raft one summer. Luckily, the water was only waist deep because our shipbuilding skills were somewhat lacking. It may not have been sea—even pond—worthy, but it was great fun.

Our mine was a short walk back up the hill, a bank of dry clay where we could see gold. We told our parents, and they said it wasn't real gold, but we were pretty sure they were wrong.

With all these pleasant memories, there is only one I can definitively place in time. I was walking out of our old church building. I had come out of the sanctuary into the vestibule, passing pictures of pastors going back to the 1890s. As I walked toward the exit, I remember thinking, "I'm four years old, and in only two years, I'll be six. Then I can go to school!" Somehow it didn't occur to me that two years was half of my lifetime. I just knew that two was a small number, and it shouldn't be long to wait.

I had all sorts of experiences when I was four, some that made me laugh and others that made me cry. Yet, I can't remember them; it's ironic that the one memory I can tie to that year is

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about wanting to be in another year. I wanted to be two years older.

There is nothing wrong with looking forward. Anticipation can be a wonderful thing. But don't lose today while you are looking for tomorrow.

Little boys can get lost in their dreams of the future—old men in dreams of the past. I find myself thinking of my youth, my old friends, and the insane things we used to do—bittersweet memories of people I loved but who have passed. One can easily be trapped in the past with its joys and sadness, but there is a life to be lived today. There are young people who need mentors, and little children who need to know that not all old men aren't grumpy and stodgy.

We had some people over this week, and after dinner, I talked to their six-year-old daughter and eight-year-old son. Their dad had introduced them to me, but we hadn't spent much time getting to know each other. I said, "I know your dad called me Mr. Hulse, and you can call me that if you really want to, but my name is Jesse. You can call me Jesse."

The boy asked, "Can we call you Mr. Jesse?"

I smiled. "Of course. You can call me whatever you want."

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I now spend each Tuesday evening with Junior High students in our church's youth group. Just thinking of those kids makes me smile.

I sometimes hang out with older people. Monday nights I go to the Senior Center, where we have an orchestra. I'll never be a virtuoso. I tell people, "I don't so much play the violin as play with it." We play concerts occasionally; sometimes, we outnumber the audience, but it is still a joy.

Memories are wonderful things, as are anticipations, but I don't want to get lost in either. We each have a heritage, the people and experiences that have shaped us. Each person we have known left us with something that is wrapped up in who we are. We have all had experiences we like to recall and others that make us wince when they cross our minds, but they all helped shape us into the people we are now. We also have a legacy, what we leave to other people. When we interact with others, we leave a mark on their lives. Our life is a process of repackaging our heritage (the things that have shaped us) into our legacy (what we give to others). I try to live at that inflection point, the place where my heritage becomes my legacy.

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." Ecclesiastes 3:11.