

ONE OF HORN POND'S MANY TRAILS CAN BECOME THE ROAD TO IMMORTALITY

by Marie Coady

Immortality is just around the corner, at least according to some prognosticators. Seems the 21st century promises new breakthroughs that guarantee many of us will live to become centenarians. In fact, they say living into your hundreds will be the norm and dying before one hundred and fifty will merely be the result of poor planning. This presents problems for the children of some potential centenarians as well as some enthusiasm that they may also inherit the genes that keep their parents, uncles and aunts healthy into the next millennium.

Since my husband's grandmother died only a few years ago at age 101 and my dad is still going strong at 90, my husband and I are beginning to entertain the idea that we may also live long, productive lives. Forever is indeed a long time, but we are determined to give it a try. We also help nature out by eating healthy and walking often. We are mainly inspired by my father's relentless walking.

Not too long ago my husband was on his way back from his walk around Horn Pond when he spotted my dad sitting on the stone wall in front of the Sons of Italy on Lexington Street. Naturally, he turned around to see if he wanted a ride. My dad hesitated a minute, then reluctantly settled in the cab of the truck beside him. When my husband asked how he came to be so far from home, he answered, "Oh! I just needed a new battery for my watch, so I decided to walk to the center and get one. I'm on my way back now."

His choice of walking came naturally after forty-seven years delivering the U. S. Mail. He even walked back and forth to work all those years while his children passed him on the bus or elevated train, rolling our eyes at his stubbornness. He would always claim it was "...a good stretch of the legs."

Since the sign at Four Corners says that Woburn Center is two miles, and Dad's house is at least a mile from there, that meant he had walked at least five miles. That was when my quest for immortality began. With my genes, I began to think I might just be the one to break the immortality barrier and walking may be the key. So why not give it a shot. Now, in my personal quest for immortality, I hike the trails of Horn Pond. Along with a parade of other immortals, I trek onward in huffing, puffing denial, taking the steep trails to a rapid heartbeat.

Occasionally, I nod politely or exchange a self-conscious hello with other immortals, because like the Highlander, who feels mysterious vibes when a fellow immortal approaches, we have a kind of radar to recognize each other. Our goal is immortality, and we cannot be deterred.

While I trudge those wooded and rocky paths in solitary delight, I drink in the rebirth of Spring or the mercurial colors of Autumn, revel in the bird song, delight in the baby ducklings and marvel at the frogs, turtles, chipmunks and bunnies. Every now and then, I pass parents with small children and experience a grateful nostalgia upon hearing the parents plead, "Jeffrey, get over here!", and "Jessica, wait for mommy!", while Jeff and Jess become conveniently deaf. But no matter how adorable small children and animals are, I must not stop. I must keep focused on my goal.

Then, while walking one day, it occurred to me that if too many of us succeed in our quest for immortality, our numbers will proliferate. Hundreds of thousands of us will become eligible for the Denny's discount, causing Denny's stock to take a nose-dive. But I try to keep focused. There is no room for sentimentality here. Immortality is the name of the game, no matter who gets hurt. Sometimes, the future flashes in front of me with great clarity. I see immortals becoming a new minority and producing the inevitable backlash. In my vision, Generation X, has come to power with latent memories of being trapped in a parade of traffic led by one of us hunched over the wheel of an Olds 98, going 15 in a 35 mph zone. They harbor a guilty resentment and refuse to answer our Life Call alarms.

Yes! Immortality could be a mistake. Like the "Highlander", we will endlessly regenerate, experiencing flashbacks to former lives, while we search for "The Ring of Thoth", which holds the potion that will release us from exhausting, relentless immortality. I don't want to die, but when I consider the alternatives---I think I'll skip my walk today.

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