

Our City

ORIGINAL VERSION

The Guy in the Glass

When you get what you want in your struggle for self,
And the world makes you King for a day,
Then go to the mirror and look at yourself,
And see what that guy has to say.

For it isn't your Father, or Mother, or Wife,
Who judgement upon you must pass.
The feller whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the guy staring back from the glass.

He's the feller to please, never mind all the rest,
For he's with you clear up to the end,
And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test
If the guy in the glass is your friend.

You may be like Jack Horner and "chisel" a plum,
And think you're a wonderful guy,
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you can't look him straight in the eye.

You can fool the whole world down the pathway of years,
And get pats on the back as you pass,
But your final reward will be heartaches and tears
If you've cheated the guy in the glass.

Dale Wimbrow (c) 1934
1895-1954

I tend to be very introspective during the short days of the seasons. I met a person last week who has me looking in the mirror. And, honestly I am not comfortable with who I see. I wouldn't go so far as to say I am brooding; but I am certainly contemplative. I have written a few times about pumping sunshine and admittedly it is easier to do for me than dwelling on the negative. Yet, in the end the guy in the glass makes me look at both sides of the same coin.

Last week I met J Doe and at first J appeared as normal as any of us can be but then my heart sank. I came to find out that now, at 40+ years of age, J could neither read nor write. J told me that while growing up in a community in Idaho where everyone did what their family had always done, reading and writing was never a priority for students coming from a certain "class" of family. While J's family never expected more is a sad commentary, that the school in which J attended perpetuated the normal in my mind is disgraceful and doubly so since a High School diploma was conferred. Now J finds that the family's livelihood has dwindled and all but died where those formative years were spent; and where the basic life skills of reading, writing and math should have been taught to everyone regardless of social standing. Today J finds that being void of our society's basic skills raises road blocks and barriers at every turn. Employment in most occupations above minimum wage is only a phantom of reality in J's life.

And, as I look in the glass I wonder how many students I have failed. Looking back I have to say I have failed to get through to a few; but hopefully not to the extent that J was failed. J never had a choice. J's teachers never tried and it was acceptable! I asked if returning to school or getting a tutor was an option. With head bowed J responded, "No, I have to work too many hours to make ends meet." My heart broke, tears welled and fury built. And I found it difficult to look in the mirror as I was ashamed to call myself a teacher as faces materialized of the students I could have done more for.

As you read this, you may be asking in what context does this have anything to do with being Mayor or with the City of American Falls. I submit it has everything to do with it as I met J while official City business was being conducted and J was a part of that business. I wanted desperately to help J but my hands were tied and I struggle still with that reality. I struggle mentally and emotionally with the student I cannot reach, with the family months behind on their City services payment finding themselves on the City shutoff list with temperatures below zero. I struggle as the plight of J haunts my thoughts and forges something different within me. It is nothing as frivolous or trite as a New Year's resolution; that would be too easy. This feels like anything but easy.

As I look back on 2015 successes within the City are quickly remembered and often highlighted by others, as are those achieved at school. Yet, for whatever reason, my shortcomings and failures after meeting J stand paramount in my thoughts. That I have learned from each would be the desired outcome and I believe that I have; however, the future will present new challenges and opportunities for mistakes as nothing remains the same. My wish for each of us for the coming year is that we find the best way to meet our challenges and arrive at the preferred outcome the first time. And, while you know I believe most mistakes only persist if allowed to, I hope that I make fewer. I would like to say I won't make any but we both know how realistic that would be.

As Monday began a new calendar year, Kylie Shaul joined the American Falls Ag Program as a student teacher from the University of Idaho; and I am sure she will be teaching me as much as I teach her. Monday also saw the first day of work as a new City employee for Abel Aguilar in our Street Department. I very much enjoyed meeting Abel and believe he is an excellent fit within the department and a welcome addition to our City staff. Wednesday will see the swearing in of City Councilmembers Kristen Jensen, Stuart Pankratz and Terrell Sorenson at our first Council meeting of 2016. I want to take this opportunity to thank Susan Love for her years of service on the American Falls City Council. I found her insight and judgment thoughtful and valuable; as citizens of American Falls you were well served by her efforts.

"Life is what you make of it. Always has been. Always will be (Grandma Moses)." It is certainly simple enough in the saying of it, but when you get down to the nitty gritty of it, it comes down to the decisions and choices we make. In the case of J Doe, very poor decisions and choices made by others formed a very difficult life, but J has chosen not to let those decisions define what is possible. J greets each new day with optimism and hope; working constantly to make each better than the last. Is less acceptable from each of us? I choose to say "no" and will do what I can so that I smile back at the guy in the glass each night before I go to sleep.

Until next week...