

Life Begins At 62½

By George B. Russ

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Miss Madie had been burped, whipped by her parents, falsely accused, stood up, kicked in the chins, ignored, cheated, and turned out of church during the 62 years of her life time, but she had never been punched in the face by a man; sick or well. She had heard that some men beat their wives and girl friends: break their limbs, take their money, and do all manner of cruel things to them, however, "the ax had never been applied to the root of her tree." Her first impulse was to crush Ben Pratt into a "trillion pieces;" then, upon second thought, she decided that "satisfaction of going to jail for smashing in the face of a sick, toothless, speechless man's face wasn't worth the time she would have to serve for giving vent to her feelings, therefore, she quietly left the "babbling, old coot" to enjoy his tantrums alone.

Inside her own sticky-warm room, she realized another first time, in a long time, experience: she cried. A torrent of unused tears burst through their ducts and flowed down her cheeks. At first she allowed the well to fill and overflow unheeded. The novelty of being able to cry abated the stigma of her humiliation of being wantonly attacked by one whom she had respected for a long while. Actually, too many years to enumerate at a time like this. Minutes passed and the excitement of this recent discovery held her spell-bound but, the novelty wore off and self-pity began creeping into the salt of her tears. As nice as she had been to "Mister Ben, how could he have mustered enough disrespect to deliberately strike her? She was a free woman to go and come as she pleased; sleep late or rise early; walk the streets of Bayborough or "pick her nose"

to the tempo of a rocking chair. And she might be up to her neck to passing the time of day doing nothing if she hadn't let her heart run away with her head. She sniffed and snorted until her nose was sore and her head ached something awful. The more she thought of all the things she had given up to come here and nurse Ben Pratt, the more woe-begone she became and the less she cared whether he lived or died. She could discern his croaking noises above the whirling sound of the window-fan but she made no move to inquire of his needs, even when she realized that the fan was too cold for his marrowless bones.

The Little-Ben alarm clock on her bedside table reminded her that she was still up and wide awake long past her bedtime. She had to go to bed with the chickens after waiting on a worry-wart like Ben Pratt; he was old and sick but he could think of more ways of getting attention than a monkey on a greasy pole.

The urge to read a few passages of scripture from her thumb worn Bible, pray over the matter and leave the whole sordid business to her Creator was uppermost in her mind but she decided that she wanted to mull the matter and stir up as much wrath as she could while it was fresh in her mind. There was a consolation of sorts in assembling a pile of abuses and whispering them to the darkness that filled her room. The night light had been left off because she would have no need to leave the room tonight; "dog-gone the rascal in the other room!" She might need him before he needed her, but, for now she wasn't caring how the cookie crumbled.

For hours she wrestled with her better judgement, so much so, that she forgot the field day satan was having with her ungarded Pan Dora Box and forgot to go to sleep. Therefore

when the hour of midnight came she was too exhausted to toss 'n turn like a worm in hot ashes, so, she just lay still staring at the ceiling. Suddenly, she saw the waving fingers of a man dancing before her eyes; and, she did a strange thing, she waved back. Then, she broke into wild laughter; surely to God she must be "touched in the head." Again, the hand waved to her but she didn't return the compliment with a friendly wave, however, she sat up in bed and reached her hands out to the "arkness as though she expected the hand to grasp her own and she would tug with it until she was able to bring the whole man out of hiding into the open where she could see him.

"Tomorrow," she decided emphatically, "I will keep a sharp lookout for Deal's blue and white sausage van. Who is able to say that dancing fingers is not the answer to just what I need at this time in my life? A woman with my looks 'n intelligence 'n worldly goods don't need no mill stone about her neck. Companionship is what I need; somebody to talk to, go places with. Mister Ben may have done me a greater favor than either of us realize at this time." Miss Madie smiled up to the ceiling, closed her eyes thinking of how to begin her tomorrow... Continued.

Veterans who were discharged as much as 18 years ago could still be eligible for G.I. education benefits. Veterans Administration can provide details on certain benefits that do not expire until August 30, 1975.

ENOUGH

I wish I were big enough to honestly admit all my shortcomings. Brilliant enough to accept flattery without it making me arrogant. Tall enough to tower above deceit. Strong enough to welcome criticism. Compassionate enough to understand human frailties. Wise enough to recognize my mistakes. Humble enough to appreciate greatness. Staunch enough to stand by my friends. Human enough to be thoughtful of my neighbors. Righteous enough to be devoted to the love of God. —Paul Dorton.

Veterans Questions & Answers

EDITOR'S NOTE: Veterans and their families are asking thousands of questions concerning the benefits their Government provides for them through the Veterans Administration. Below are some representative queries. Additional information may be obtained at any VA office.

Q — My husband died of service connected disabilities while in military service. Am I eligible for Veterans Administration assistance to take correspondence courses or on-the-job training?

A — Yes. Public Law 92-540 (Oct. 24, 1972) extended these benefits to wives and widows of veterans whose permanent total disabilities or deaths were service connected.

Q — I still carry my World War II "V" — prefixed National Service Life Insurance. Can I get additional coverage?

A — Yes. Public Law 92-188, enacted in December 1971, allows veterans with these policies to use their insurance dividends to buy additional paid-up life insurance protection.

Q — The Veterans Administration guaranteed \$7,500 of my home loan, based on my World War II service. Since VA now guarantees more, do I have more entitlement coming?

A — Yes. VA currently guarantees up to 60 percent up to a maximum of \$12,500 of home loans. Since you received a loan guarantee of only \$7,500, you are eligible to apply for an additional \$5,000 in loan benefits.

While veterans with nonservice connected disabilities are eligible for Veterans Administration hospital treatment on a bed available basis, beds are always available to veterans with service connected disabilities.

DROP PRACTICE

Tobacco stalks are "bad news" for pregnant sows and should not be spread on fields where hogs have access to them. Animal health experts report that deformed pigs have resulted where sows get to the stalks during the early stages of pregnancy. The practice

STORAGE TIP

Dry beans, peas and lentils should be kept in tightly covered containers and stored in a dry, cool place, according to extension food specialists, North Carolina State University. Stored in this manner, they will keep their quality for several months.

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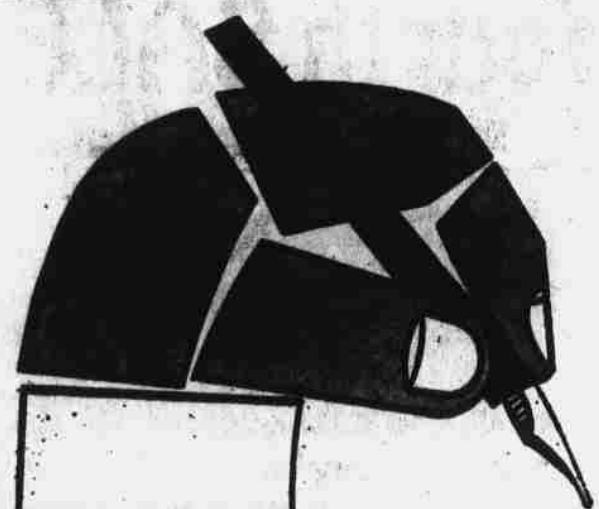
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