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Scene From Top O' The Hill

By: Jack Kelly

All of us at the start of a new year doubtless reminisce. Somehow or other, when we recall the past, we remember only the pleasant or the comical things that happened. I suppose if you insisted upon recalling the miserable experiences, you would go nuts. In any event, sitting in the living room on New Year's Day, Blanche and I talked about many things, and since she is a good listener, I love to talk with her (some folks claim I should say "at" her). Somewhere along the line we recalled the birthday party for her father when the old Judge reached 92. That brought out some conversation about her nephew, Thomas Patrick O'Brien, who is an Assistant Attorney General up in West Virginia. That part about Tommy is relatively unimportant. The important facets about this lad are that he is a handsome man, must be in his early thirties, has a splendid personality, and has a wife who is out of this world. Tommy is almost as fortunate as I am in the wife-department. What I mean is that if I were awarding four prizes for relatives with fine wives, Tommy would get the fourth prize. I would award the first three to myself.

This wife of Tommy's has only one defect. It is not considered a major one by some people. I probably won't keep her from going to heaven when she dies because the Lord, I understand, is broad-minded. However, the fact remains that this beautiful, lovely, personable girl is not, I repeat, not Irish. She is French. She met her husband when he served with the JAG's office in Paris, as a Captain. Of course Tommy, being a young man, assumed he had gotten his Commission on merit and I never bothered to explain to him that his Pappy and his Grand-Pappy used a little influence to get it for him because I feared it might hurt his ego a bit. Anyway, the important thing about him is that he met this gal Anne Marie, who speaks delightfully in broken English and looks terrific in mini-skirts. Also she can cook out of this world. Also she has produced a beautiful boy-child who is handsome enough to be Irish and who was named Thomas Patrick O'Brien the 4th or 5th or whatever. When you watch that kid burbling and crawling about, you sort of feel good all over. You know you are looking at the future and it looks pretty good.

During the Judge's party, this gal kidded with Blanche about my having been in Charleston some months before when I had taken herself and Tommy out to dinner. Her remarks were highly complimentary about me. Tommy cut in and stated I had ruined him at the Club because of acting like the last of the big spenders. That expression rang

a bell with me, and then I remembered why.

I recalled a long time ago after a similar dinner where I had taken a gentleman and his wife and I had grabbed the check. It frightened me no end because the total read \$520.65. That dinner came about due to my being on a plane en route to Rio de Janeiro, during the War. Among the passengers on board were an opera singer named Mary Kirk and her husband. She was a huge, heavy gal with lots of talent while he was a shortish sort of a chap with temperament. He had a good thing going for him. I think he was her manager or something like that. Finally we landed in Rio and I suggested that they be my guests at dinner. Since we all stopped at the same hotel, it was no problem.

South American dinners start much later than we are accustomed to start. In any event, we cabbed to dinner at whatever place was the prevalent spot to go. Naturally, since I was young and thought stupid things were important, I let the head waiter or the Maitre d' know that the lady was an important opera singer from the United States who had come to Rio to perform for the "Season". It received the effect I desired. We got too much attention at our table from the hired hands. People from other tables came over and got autographs from Miss Kirk. A few of them, to be on the safe side I guess, even requested one from me. Matter of fact I signed "John L. Sullivan" no less than a half a dozen times.

The dinner was terrific. No one held back. Least of all — me.

Eventually, the moment of truth arrived. The waiter brought the bill. I looked at it, as is customary. Again, as is customary, I had a general idea of the top limit that it should be which was, roughly, about fifty bucks. Anything around that and I wouldn't bother to tote up the items. Brother! When I saw that tote of \$520.65 I began to sweat as I added the items. Amazingly, they were correct. My face must have betrayed my feelings because this singing lady enquired "What's the matter Irishman? Bigger than you thought?" I turned the sheet to her. She busted out laughing at what I thought was a most un-funny circumstance. As I stared at her she suggested "Divide it by 20. You're dealing in lucky-bucks down here." Then I remembered. Brazil used regular figures but their dollar was a Cruzeiro, and our dollar, thank God, was 20 Cruzeiros. Thus the bill was only some \$26.00. I had it made. I pulled out my lucky-guicks and put a 1,000 cruzeiro note on the bill, gestured that the waiter, the mine steward, and the other hired hands should have a ball, and we left amidst the smiles that people always bestow upon idiots.

IT NEVER FAILS



A HERITAGE FOR THE WORTHY

Above all else, 1967 appeared to be a year when the verities were questioned — in politics, in economics, in religion and in virtually every other element of the structure of present-day society. What does it all mean? No one today seems to know. Some claim the tearing down of old standards reflects what might be called a healthy renaissance of advanced thought. Others view with foreboding a trend they feel is leading to a moral breakdown and anarchy. The experts are the most confused lot of all. Sometimes their judgments of coming events are ludicrous. Typical of their inability to assess the future was the recent statement of one of this country's leading financial authorities that devaluation of the British pound was unlikely because the English program of austerity was so fundamentally reassuring as to make a crisis improbable. By the time this particular forecast was in print, the British pound had been devalued, and no one knows what the future holds for the monetary systems of the world.

Out of all the confusion of 1967, one fact has become clearly obvious — self-government itself is on trial. This is so because the very truths which are the mainstay of self-government are being altered or swept away one after another — truths that were once called "self-evident." These truths have to do with financial responsibility, the integrity of the family, the inviolate rights of persons and property under the law and concepts of individual self-reliance and initiative that are inseparable from freedom under representative government. A gradual decline in respect for these prerequisites of liberty was never more apparent in the observation of many people than during the crucial months of 1967.

Outwardly, the United States is invincible. But, the founding fathers warned nearly 200 years ago that the greatest danger to the American experiment in free government could well come from within. A debauched currency, a weakening pride in individual independence and the gradual ascendancy of state authority are undeniably changing the outlook for constitutional government as we have known it in the United States. Few now living have the capacity to view the present area as it will be recorded in the history books at some distant time in the future. Our present civilization, and more specifically our own coun-

try, measured by material progress and the potential for future progress, opens a vista that staggers the imagination. The precepts under which civilization has advanced to this point, and which have brought a greater measure of well-being to more people than has ever been known in the world before, must have a validity that the hippies, the malcontents and the anti-American demonstrators have failed to perceive.

No political party, no single group of citizens is solely to blame for the dismal drift that has put self-government on trial, and as the elections of 1968 approach, we should expect no miracles from our elected representatives. They but reflect the temper and attitudes of the electorate. The signs became abundant during 1967 that a turning point has been reached in the affairs of the world and of our country. As we enter 1968, everyone of us should resolve to be worthy of the heritage of self-government — a heritage for which 500,000 men in Viet Nam are laying their lives on the line.

Social Security News

By: D. C. Nichols

Q. I think I read somewhere that since 1949 the maximum Social Security retirement benefits have scarcely more than doubled, lagging behind the tax increases. Also, I believe that with every tax hike the worker under age 40 is at a further disadvantage. Is this right?

A. No — it's wrong.

To begin with, in the last 18 years Social Security has grown into a broad, comprehensive social insurance system that can hardly be compared with the small and very limited program existing in 1949.

But even if we consider just the retirement benefits (and at that only the maximum benefit, which of course has increased less than have the lower benefits) — the maximum monthly benefit payable to a worker retiring at age 65 has increased

from \$45.60 in 1949 to \$160.50 in 1967. So we see that the present maximum is nearer to four than to three times the 1949 maximum retirement benefit.

However, it's a serious mistake to think of the present Social Security program as simply a retirement system, overlooking the other vitally protective provisions added mostly since 1950. For instance a young family nowadays has survivors protection under Social Security that can be worth up to \$75,000, \$80,000, or even \$100,000 — in return for a modest total paid by the worker in payroll taxes during his lifetime and equally valuable disability insurance protection. This should be reassuring to younger workers who may question what their social security tax dollars are "buying." (In last week's column we gave examples illustrating what people who pay the maximum in taxes can get back in the "average lifetime." The fact is, though, that since the examples of future benefits had to be figured on a "static" basis — assuming no further rises in wage levels, benefit increases, etc., even after the workers' retirement or death — the future benefits paid would assuredly be higher than the figures given.)

Social Security is a dynamic system that undoubtedly will be improved in the future — as in the past — as our dynamic nation's economy grows. There's no real doubt that, in the natural democratic process, workers will in future get more protection relative to their overall tax contributions than any calculation based on a "static assumption" would indicate.

The original Social Security Act passed in 1935 provided for a 1% tax rate, for the employee and the employer, on a wage base of \$3,000. (The wage base is the maximum yearly amount taxable and creditable under this program.)

The same 1% tax rate and the same \$3,000 wage base were still in the law in 1949 as the last year that both applied. Since 1949 the tax rate has increased to its present 44%, which will continue until 1969, and is scheduled to go up gradually in future years. Also since 1950 the taxable earnings base has risen gradually to its present \$6,600, and will rise to \$7,800 next year. Congress has felt it necessary to raise the taxable base now and then, in view of rising wage levels and to keep this tax contributory system wage-related and essentially geared to the free enterprise system.

(Next week's column will continue clarifying the background and provisions of the new Amendments.)