

Danville News Column  
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"Something for Nothing"  
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The closest I've been to being kept was back at Seminary. Elaine's job at Gallup Poll kept me in funds. She worked; I attended graduate school, which mostly meant softball, souvlaki, beer, and cartoons. Those were sweet lazy days. I've been trying to reinvent them ever since. I want to be kept. Which maybe is why I keep praying for one of my novels to become a best seller. Of course, it would help if I stopped editing, stopped trusting luck, and actually tried a hand at marketing.

Still, imagine not having to earn an income anymore. Sometimes I can lean back in the cushions and daydream about all my debts paid off in full, with plenty left over for souvlaki. Keep me, please.

Maybe I should play the lottery. Haven't yet. Never have put a dollar down. I guess I haven't gotten so stupid as to imagine that winning the lottery is my ticket to a life of indolence. Yet, their groundhog spokesperson suggests it is my civic duty to gamble and daydream. The Pennsylvania Lottery boasts of their benevolent public service, contributing \$910 million dollars to senior programs last year. Fact is, we'd raise more money if we simply assessed a \$10 per capita tax on each resident. You also wouldn't need to fund the bureaucracy or hire watchdogs to watch the watchdogs of this gaming industry. Don't you love how they avoid calling it what it is? As if casinos, lotteries, and poker machines are fun and games. There is little about it that is playful. It's gambling! Assess the tax and free our legislature from being in the business of cheating and defrauding us citizens with false hopes. Wouldn't it be worth it to simultaneously trim government waste and have clean hands? What is government doing in the gambling business anyway? We should leave that to the experts, like the Mafia.

I want something for nothing. It's nice to have a goal. I should work at that. But that doesn't make sense. Bit of a paradox. So if I have to work hard at getting something for nothing, I might as well just work. Darn it all.

There's too much of my dad in me. His nickname at work is 'Zoomer.' He's 85 years old and still unloads cartons of paint cans from the delivery trucks. I should blame him for the curse. I remember spending three weeks of vacation in Maine, mooching off my brother's house on Lake Sebago. The first week was fine. The second week I read four books. By the end of the third week I went stir crazy from relaxing and ended up making him a driveway and walkway, lugging up rocks from the lake.

The fortunate find what they're good at and work at it. The really fortunate get a job at what they're good at. The really, really fortunate love the job in which they do what they're good at. It also helps to realize you aren't going to be good at everything, but you can work at what you can. Want to know the secret to being kept? Work. Want to know how to be successful at school? Work. Want to know the secret to being lucky? Work. Something for something.

Now, not everyone is capable of doing the job of a being a pastor. It requires listening more than talking and that's an uncommon trait (someday I'll learn how). Nor can everyone become doctor. Or painter. Or journalist. Or plumber. Or truck-driver. I might yearn to be a cellist in the Philharmonic Symphony, but since I'm tone deaf, it isn't likely no matter how hard I try. You can't always become what you want to become, but you can be the best that you are.

It's Labor Day weekend after all. Yes, we celebrate the end of summer and the start of the fall sports season. Doubly yes, this holiday celebrates the value of hard work, especially when the hard work and productivity goes unrewarded and unappreciated. What? Flip open the history books. Labor Day was made an official holiday to recognize the unrecognized, the government appeasing the labors unions after they busted the Pullman strike with Federal troops. I mean real unions, not some professor at Bloomsburg University in a tweed jacket comparing his working conditions to his coal miner grandfather.

So let's work at honoring Labor Day. I raise my glass to all who do their job well, whether they like their job or not.