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Tipping Turning Point

When did you first learn that you wouldn't live forever? This is a question about mortality. Can you recall and relate an incident where death meant what you know it to mean as an adult?

Growing up on Bilmington Drive shaped my world. Early on, my world consisted of a long upwards hill, stretching all the way from a valley to an open field sitting at the top of, what felt back then, to be a mountain. Halfway up this hill was a culdesac where I would eat, sleep, and spend most of my waking hours when I was not spending the rest of my time at a house just up the street. Halfway from my house to the field, there sat another street. Rarely would I find myself continuing up Bilmington Drive instead of making the right to this adjacent street beforehand. On one side of this street sat my friend's house, and just across, we could see his neighbor. An old WWII veteran. His name was Bill, and that name was known throughout the neighborhood. There were a ton of qualities that made Bill the neighborhood staple that he was. His massive WWII D-day commemorative belt buckle, his seemingly infinite amount of interesting stories to tell, and, of course, the huge whopper chocolates he always kept on hand. I would always see him driving up and down in this really long car that always flew an American flag out of the window. Oftentimes, on those cool summer nights growing up, you could find us, as well as my friends' mom and stepdad Clarence, sitting around the fire. Bill

always loved the company we brought him. Clarence would always make sure we understood what it meant for us to lend our time to help out a lonely old man like Bill. We occasionally helped out with the yard as well as groceries.

Arriving back at my friend's house after completing random activities that we'd come up with on the spot, Clarence was always there waiting for us in the living room, preparing himself for another one of his long-winded speeches on how the stuff we do will impact us or the people around us. It always went something like, "Guys, I know it's cool to try and harness the power of the sun for entertainment, but we can't be lighting pizza boxes on fire with a magnifying glass in the driveway." I never quite appreciated his talks enough. That and until years later, I never quite realized why he was always there waiting for us in the living room without fail.

Here we were again, gathered around the fire. I was too young to be interested in anything Bill would discuss with the older neighbors who would often come around. My friend and I were too focused on crafting the perfect golden brown marshmallow. As well as occasionally letting one become engulfed in flames and letting it melt away down into the pit. At this age, we spent most of our time experiencing life. We had yet to think much of the mortality of it. We can have our marshmallows in life, indulge in the flames, the energy of it all, until they're golden brown to perfection. I had yet to experience what it truly meant for life to melt away.

One afternoon, after a bout of our usual activities, we head back to my friend's house. My friend calls out to Clarence, this time much louder than our previous engagements. These days, it's often in vain. We still receive some talks, though they're often shorter and less often. And some months later, I wouldn't see my friend as often. Eventually, Clarence went from the living room to a memory. I was fortunate enough to

be spared of the worst of his inevitable deterioration. I was encouraged not to visit their house for a little. Even though it was apparent why, I still couldn't understand back then, I would still see that long red car with the American flag going up and down the hill. A few months later, my friend started coming down the street again.

“Yo, what's up you want to see the really big hole I dug in the backyard,” I say. “Ya sure. Oh, in a little. You want to come up to my house before we go to the field,” he replies. Of course, I said yes before we ventured off back up the street. At this point, I started to think, it's been a while since I've been to his house I start to wonder if Bills is outside again, and remember that I haven't seen his long red car with the flag waving up the street for a while. Walking down my friend's street, I realized that it wouldn't be the same as before. I realize people we interact with, have relationships with, and share experiences with can all melt away in time. Walking down the street, Bill's door was open, his driveway filled with unfamiliar cars. We walked into my friend's living room. It was only his mom and his little half-brother. The little dude was only about two years old now. I had a feeling I wouldn't be seeing those two again. It was an odd feeling.