

long, long time ago in a land far, far away (a small town in Connecticut sometime during the first Reagan Administration), I worked as a part-time supervisor at my home town supermarket. I started working at the store in the late 70's and continued there through college. During my more than six year tenure, I'd say a few hundred employees came and went through the doors. Now, many years later, there are few people from the store I remember as vividly as my friend, Dan.

Dan was little more than 5 feet tall with short stubby arms and short stubby fingers. He had unkept dirty blonde hair and a face that only a mother might grow to love. I guess the best way to describe Dan is as the person you'd get if you mixed the personality of a sedate James Cagney with the physical characteristics of a modern-day Barney Rubble. Dan was my friend. Or, as he put it, I was his friend. Dan's friends were important to him and a more loyal buddy would be tough to come by.

Dan and I were an unlikely pair. He, from what would have been the wrong side of the tracks (if we had tracks) and me, the son of an ambitious first generation American intent of realizing the American Dream. Dan's dad was a resident caretaker on a nearby estate. He was afforded free housing for his family in a run-down cottage on an adjoining property as part of his modest compensation. I don't recall ever meeting Dan's mom, but his younger brother, Aaron, was my age. I remember him as one of the "bad boys" of my eight grade class. It may have been the last year of formal education successfully completed by Aaron, because I don't recall seeing much of him in high school.

Dan was hired to sweep the floors, collect the carts and help with bagging groceries during the early morning shift at the supermarket. I sometimes supervised the early morning shift on the weekdays I didn't have college classes. I was asked to keep a close eye on him. His reputation as a stubborn, combative young man had preceded him to the job. I was suspicious of him at first but over time we warmed up to one another. I soon realized there was a lot more to Dan than I initially allowed myself to see. The experience taught me something about prejudging others.

I grew to respect Dan as a man who lived what he believed. While his views on many matters might have been considered "more than one standard deviation from the norm," the sincerity with which he lived his life impressed me. His matter-of-fact style and his sometimes "in your face" approach to things would lead some to call him belligerent. But the store's floors were never cleaner and the carts hardly ever straighter.

I remember seeing Dan one early morning as he was nursing a black-eye. Actually, it was more purplish than black. According to informal reports, his opponents the prior evening (and there were apparently more than one) fared no better in the melee. Dan spoke his

mind. Although I had come to know him as someone who would give anyone a fair hearing, in places where alcohol freely flows his verbal candor about things was not as well accepted. If push literally came to shove, Dan would speak with his fists with equal candor.

I remember hearing a story about Dan that illustrated both his respect for life and his lack of reticence in speaking his mind. One evening he was out with his brother and a couple of friends. He overheard a man talking (more like bragging) about the people he had killed in war. After a few minutes of hearing the man speak, Dan rose from his chair, walked over to the man and said "Mister, I don't know who you are or where you're from. What I do know is that my father and my uncles were in World War II. I know my uncles killed some people. It's not something they talk about. It seems to me, the people who have had to kill other people don't talk about it. I don't know why you'd want to talk about it." Dan walked away. The man shut-up. Another night the same statements might have started a fight. That night it only meant a few moments of deafening quiet as Dan turned his back and walked to his chair.

Dan was happy to have me as a friend though I never really understood why. Perhaps it's because I lived in a vastly different world than he and made an effort to find common ground between us. I genuinely enjoyed our friendship. Dan liked to take me out for a beer or spend time cruising his favorite haunts and saying hello to his pals. He introduced me to everyone he knew. It was as if I were "family." One night I got an idea of just what "family" meant to Dan...It meant loyalty and a whole lot more. He saw more in me than I might ever see in myself.

On a cold winter's night Dan stopped by the store and asked if I wouldn't mind waiting for him after work. It was my normal evening shift and he had worked the early part of the day. He wanted to go out for a beer or two and "hang out." It was a time in my life when I did that kind of thing and Dan was my "pal" (I was still too young to regret the foolish mistakes of youth). In the middle of the first or second round, Dan asked if I'd mind taking a short road trip. He wanted to take a ride. There wasn't much else to do on this cold Connecticut night. I was game and he was driving.

We piled into his old, beat-up green station wagon and headed toward the New York State line. The roads were mostly clear and the little patches of ice didn't stop Dan from speeding his way through parts of upstate New York. The small gaps in the windows whistled and howled as we sped our way into farm country.

The drive came to an abrupt end when Dan pulled the car into a parking space in front of an old country tavern. Dan turned off the car, jumped out, slammed the door and said "I'm looking for someone. Back me up." Yep. In Dan's view I was "family." By the looks of things, it wouldn't have mattered to anyone on the inside of this tavern if I had just been adopted. By walking in behind him, I was his "kinfolk."

On stage at this local establishment were four or five middle-aged, pot-bellied men playing a mix of country and western music. They had a Confederate flag as a back-drop. They had big, shiny belt buckles and close-cropped hair. I don't recall for sure, but I think they were playing the theme song to the 1952 Gary Cooper film "High Noon" as we entered the place. This wasn't just "Think Different." This place was different!

Much to my relief, Dan didn't find his man. It's a good thing, because his car wouldn't start, at least not right away. Had he needed to leave in a hurry (with me in tow) it wouldn't have been quick nor easy. He told me he wasn't concerned. He said he had cousins who lived in the area. For whatever reason, Dan trusted me. I guess I had been "adopted" into a rather large extended family. I don't know. I wasn't around to attend a reunion. But I was Dan's friend and that night it's all that seemed to matter, especially to him.

From what Dan told me afterwards (I was a little more than just curious) it seems he had a friend of the opposite sex. Not a romantic interest, but a friend. She was a person Dan respected and, in his special way, probably loved. The man Dan was looking for had apparently questioned her "reputation" in public. Dan wanted to talk to the man about it, give him a fair hearing and try to set the record straight. That's Dan. Had push come to shove, like I said, Dan would speak with his fists with equal candor. It wasn't his desire to start a fight, but he had something to say to somebody and he knew they might not like what it was he had to say.

Back at home I could giggle in relief and laugh to myself about what happened. Although I was way out of my element, I was flattered (now that the danger had passed) that my friend thought so much of me. Dan and I remained friends but I was much more apt to ask questions before going places with him. He'd just smile.

A little while later I left my home town and headed to Washington. I'd think of Dan from time-to-time. In a town like Washington where many people change allegiances depending on which way the political winds are blowing, I'd think admiringly of my friend who would stick by what he believed, even when it was costly.

There wasn't anything particularly eloquent about my friend Dan, but he had an honest outlook on things. He told you what he thought and he'd listen to you before responding. He stuck up for what he believed and he respected others. He wanted to be respected, too. There was a depth to Dan that I don't often see in people. A more loyal friend I may never find.

I now live in a different world than I did back then. My ambitions are of a different nature than they were years ago and my views on many things have changed. Today's world is run by personal computers that use an operating system that I don't prefer. Some people think I have to "get with the times" and stop being so "stubborn" about my affinity for the Mac. They think my OS preferences are "more than one standard deviation form the norm ."

I dare to speak my mind on the matter, though I hope I'm not considered belligerent, just adamant about my OS of choice. These days I hardly ever have a drink, but I don't mind sharing my views over a rousing mug of iced tea. I'm loyal to my OS and I tend to be loyal to my friends. In some very strange ways, I feel a little like my old friend Dan.

I've heard a lot of people bash the Mac the past few years. Some have gone so far as to question the product's "reputation." I don't mind setting them straight. I think everyone is entitled to be heard, but I don't mind fighting for what I believe. Mac users have a way of looking out for each other. Maybe that's one reason we're willing to speak our minds so readily and defend our OS of choice. Sometimes I feel like I'm part of a large extended family.

I have only one question: Steve, Larry, back us up...would ya?

My friend Dan could never have said it better...The G3s and new ads are very good start!

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