How I Spent My Birthday (2018 05)

by Ed McDonald

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From the Editor: Ed McDonald is a long-time member of the Federation whose active service has included time as the president of the National Federation of the Blind of West Virginia. Ed and his wife Karen both love radio, celebrating, and taking stock of the good things that have come into their lives. They believe in the true integration of blind people, and what Ed did on his birthday shows how he makes it real in his life. Here’s what he has to say about how he celebrated another year of living:

Turning sixty-eight is not one of those landmark birthdays like forty or fifty, sixty-five or seventy-five, so it really doesn't lend itself to a big party or other special celebration. On the other hand, this birthday has turned out to be an interesting snapshot of the life of a blind guy growing older and "living the life he wants" in a small town.

The day began with a reminder that birthdays are indeed about growing older. Karen and I rode the local senior citizens' van to the doctor's office for the semiannual bloodletting which precedes next week's fall physical check-ups. Since the blood work required overnight fasting, the driver agreed on the way home to drop us at Denny's for a leisurely birthday breakfast. When the server brought the first plate to the "lady," Karen declared that she should have served me first because it was my birthday. The server, in turn, asked to look at my ID card which determined me to be eligible for a free birthday meal. This was not what we had in mind when we decided to go out for breakfast, but it was an unexpected nice touch.

Back home safely, we caught up on the morning's mail, messages, and phone calls. Then it was off to downtown Keyser for a visit to the bank—one of the few remaining businesses that I can still walk to. I deposited checks, withdrew cash, ordered new checks, and signed some financial paperwork for our local historical society.

On the way home, I stopped at the Main Street Bakery to pick up some doughnuts. I knew that would make my wife happy, so it seemed like an appropriate thing to do for a happy birthday. Unfortunately, the bewitching hour of 2:00 PM had arrived while I was dealing in high finance, and the bakery doors were locked up tight. However, as I turned to walk home with an empty backpack, the door opened and Marla—the baker and sole proprietor—invited me to come in. She was happy to sell me her last two doughnuts, a dozen cookies, two homemade pop tarts, and a pair of pepperoni rolls. On top of all that—since I am a "nice guy" and it was my birthday—she gave me a fresh cupcake with caramel icing and maple drizzles on top.

Earlier in the day I had decided to make a bold public statement on the condition of society by wearing an old, old sweatshirt which displays the question across my chest, "If ignorance is bliss, why aren't more people happy?" Well, the only person who noticed was the waitress at Denny's, and by the time I walked home from the bakery, the shirt was a little too warm for a seventy-degree October day.

Back home once again, we enjoyed lunch of pepperoni rolls and pastries. Then came an afternoon of domestic chores and a little studio work. A week or so ago we decided to try stocking up on wintertime provisions by ordering from Amazon, rather than dragging home soap, shampoo, toothpaste, napkins, and chicken broth from the local Wal-Mart. Well, several of those items arrived that day, so I actually had birthday packages to open. I also had to look for space in the basement to store the stuff.

Speaking of the basement, I took the little vacuum cleaner in hand and swept up the path from the back door to the studio. Over the next few days we have a few people scheduled to come to the studio to record spots for the radio station, and I wanted the place to be reasonably presentable.

The studio work involved taking an old LP (remember those big records with the little holes?) by West Virginia musician Billy Edd Wheeler and converting it to digital files to play on the radio. That called for using some recently-acquired production and editing skills.

By then it was supper time. Often we walk to the nearby Candlewyck for birthday dinners, but this time we decided to stay home and enjoy a wholesome meal of black-eyed peas which Karen prepared in the crockpot. While we were away earlier in the day, a friend left at our front door a bag full of homegrown turnips and homemade rolls. I cut up the turnips and roasted them with a little olive oil, sea salt, and ground pepper. Needless to say, it was a hardy and enjoyable dinner.

Along with all of the other activity, I was grateful for so many kind and thoughtful wishes by phone and by email. So as the day draws to a close, I sit there in my favorite rocking chair with Mountain Streams Radio playing in the background. Across the room sits my wife in her favorite chair, each of us has a lapful of BrailleNote, and I was wrapping up this little summary of the day's events.

You ask how I spent my birthday—well, there you have it! What more could I ask for, and it even left me with these few thoughts to share with my "Federation Family."

Thanks again for the good wishes. Number sixty-eight has indeed been a fine birthday.