

Something of value



BY AMOS
ARTHUR HOLMES

My grandson, Bobby Redmond, lost his father about three years ago in a tragic automobile accident. Since that awful day this little eight year old boy has kind of leaned on me. I have become many things to Bobby. I am camp counselor, confidant, teacher, pal and hero.

I achieved hero status by feeding the boy outlandish lies. But what else could I do? I am probably the world's greatest blob. I am mediocre, small, and the very essence of zilch. And so to make the boy look up to me, and respect me, I told him tiny white lies. Like the time I stuck my finger in the dike and saved Holland from total destruction. Like the time I parachuted into Germany, captured Hitler and ended World War Two. Like the time I killed the dragon over near Hughesville and received the CHARLES COUNTY MEDAL OF VALOR.

And for the past three years Bobby has simply adored me. I am, to him, a composite of Superman and Thor. I am capable, and noble and that little boy has never once suspected I am the world's greatest farce.

Until yesterday.

We were sitting at the dining room table, when Bobby said, "Grammy, are you as good as the Six Million Dollar

Man?"

"Of course", I replied.

"Mrs. Peterson, whose husband is the same age as you, says that men 53 years of age aren't worth a damn."

"Bobby, watch your language. And your Mrs. Peterson is most emphatically deficient in her reasoning. I do not know about other 53-year-old men... but I do know that I still am a super-colossal human being."

"That's what I thought," replied Bobby, "And that's why I told Mrs. Peterson that you would camp with me overnight in the woods across the road. Mrs. Peterson laughed and laughed. She said you couldn't last ten minutes in this cold weather."

Right then I had the opportunity to admit my weakness. Right then I could have explained about my arthritis. I could have owned up to the fact that I was merely a handsome, lovable mortal and that spectacular feats were but bits and pieces from a decayed imagination.

Instead, I replied, "Bobby, I could camp out in the woods for months. All I would need is a rifle and a pound of salt and I could exist in the forest forever. Lordy, Bobby am I not the same man who shot down Baron Von Richthofen?"

"Oh, Grammy, I just knew Mrs. Peterson was wrong. I knew that you were as good as the Six Million Dollar

Man. I will get the tent and we'll start our camping trip immediately."

I bundled up as well as I could and Bobby and myself entered the woods. As we moved past a bush I would say, "Bobby, this is the Poraxis Fidilie, known to this world long before the beginning of civilization. It's leaves were often used as medicine by the Okachookie Indians." Of course I didn't know what I was talking about but it did sound like I was very knowledgeable and I could see Bobby look at me with great respect. "And there... there is the Gigantic California Blue Sequoia." Bobby thought the Gigantic California Blue Sequoia looked a lot like an ordinary pine tree but he didn't say anything.

I imagine the temperature was hovering around ten above zero. The wind was howling and icy blasts swooped down the collar of my coat and circulated joyfully around my vital organs. Tiny icicles were forming on my nose and dangling from my ears. I wanted to turn around and flee. I wanted to rush home and throw myself into the fireplace. But Bobby was looking at me with such a magnificent respect that I pushed on.

Strange sounds were coming from the woods. Eerie sounds like ghosts wailing or banshees screaming.

"Don't be afraid, Bobby, there aren't such things as Banshees or ghosts."

"I'm not afraid, Grammy, as long as you're here."

The boy was demented. I was demented. Of course there were ghosts. And, by golly, wasn't that a huge banshee sitting twenty yards ahead of us?

I turned around and started running toward my house as fast as my frozen legs would carry me. I burst through the front door, ran through the dining room, and hurled myself into the fireplace. Several minutes later Bobby got home and stood looking at me roasting amongst the embers. I can't describe the look in his eyes. His hero was dead. This snivelling, frozen coward before him didn't resemble in the least the man who went over Mt. Everest on a skateboard.

"Grammy," he said, "Don't think that I don't love you. I think you're swell. But from now on I am going to refer to you as the Six Dollar Man."

My wife took me and put me to bed. She got my electric blanket and my hot water bottle. My Vicks and Ben-Gay. I thought of myself as the Six Dollar Man... and really... that wasn't so bad. I could live with the knowledge that I was worth at least six doillars.

But just as my wife left the room, she turned around and sneered, "Amos, you aren't worth two cents."

I cuddled my hot water bottle and cried myself to sleep.