

Angel

Not so many years ago my younger brother took on the task of having all of Dad's 8 millimeter movies converted to video tape, complete with a musical background of light classics that made for hilarious viewing when the musical tone didn't match the action on the screen. The VHS format went out of style, so I sent the tapes away to be converted to DVDs. From time to time I have spun the two jam-packed disks and been whisked back to my days of growing up.

Yesterday I watched as Dad cast his little boys in the role of prizefighters for a short movie. I was barely out of diapers, but Dad contrived his filmmaking so that I won the fight. A year or two later at Christmas my older brother Paul, who died two years ago, played the lead cowboy in a short epic. He wore the cowboy suit he'd found under the brightly trimmed tree that morning. Since I had no cowboy clothes, Dad stopped the camera and dressed me in Paul's suit and pistol for the reaction shots, where I was supposed to grip my chest and fall over dead. Just like in the movies. Hey, it was the 1950's and bullet crazed cowboys were in vogue.



The shoot-em-up was silent, except for Franz Lehar's Merry Widow Waltz, but I could tell by my older brother's face exactly when Dad gave him the off-stage order to shoot me. There stood the boy on Christmas

afternoon dressed in his new cowboy suit, pistol pointed at his little brother, when Dad said, "OK, Shoot him." As the film rolled on Paul looked up at his father with real doubt in his eyes. He knew it was a movie and the gun was a fake. But with much more sense than even the adults of that period in our social history, he was reluctant to fire upon the little guy he normally took great care to protect. After a few seconds, he brought his hand up as if to salute me, but instead covered his eyes. With his other hand holding the gun, he shot me dead on, succumbing to a spirit of cinematic excess he was evidently unable to watch. After one more change

of costume, I enthusiastically fell dead on top of Grandma's hassock.

Watching the films of me and my big brother when we were so young spoke of a time I can't find anywhere in my memory, probably because I was too young to remember. Mostly I recall the two of us not getting along. But that was when we were older, maybe beginning around ten years of age. The gift from the film was a set of memories I'd forgotten or in any case could never recover.

In many of the clips and photos of Paul and me before we reached the age of 7 or 8, he was often a guardian angel, always making sure I was safe. I have to admit discovering his care of me in the films at that early age caused me to wonder if he might assume that role again, now that he's once more an angel.

In one film clip he ran after me down a snow covered hill when my sleigh flipped over and I went flying off

into the brambles by the side of the path. Dad kept filming and the camera lens rose



and followed the action down the slope. I wasn't hurt, but one could see the look of real concern on Paul's face as he pulled me from the bushes and brushed the snow off me.

And there's a clip of us where he's probably four years and I'm 18 months. I sat in his lap and he was smiling. We played on the floor in our living room and he pulled me up and away from interfering with the mechanical train as it traveled around a circle of track. Not annoyed with me, he was instead protective as he saved me from getting hit in the face with a tin locomotive. Dad's film was testimony to our brotherhood, shown anew three quarters of a century later.

Paul took care of his little brother. There's no question he was an angel to me. I wonder if he is now.

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