

Death from a Distance

499

By James Collins

In 1982, Father's Day came upon us with a flourish. The family went all out. The kids bought me handkerchiefs and my wife got me shirts, underwear and the traditional socks. All was well with the world.

Next day after a hectic Father's Day, I had to board a plane to fly out to the west Coast to deal with Lockheed Martin in Sunnyvale, California, dressed in all my new Father's Day paraphernalia.

At Logan, the boarding went in the traditional slipshod fashion and my buddy Ray Walsh and myself got on the plane and settled down for a five hour flight to the West Coast. They served dinner, supplied drinks and snacks but I was uncomfortable. I did not know why. I couldn't sleep. I kept getting up and walking around because I was uneasy. I felt strange.

We arrived at the West Coast, deplaned, picked up our luggage, and went to the local hotel. Now I definitely felt unwell. I was hot and sweaty for no apparent reason. I felt clammy. I thought I was getting some kind of virus but I had not encountered anything at home or with the kids or the office so I did not know what caused my condition. I went into the bathroom and decided to take a shower. As I took my socks off, I was astounded. My feet, from the tip of the socks to the top of where the sock contacted my leg, were flaming red,... fire engine red. I could not figure out what happened. All of a sudden, I am standing there with red feet with the design of the sock imprinted on my skin.

What was interesting was that I could see, in detail, the pattern of the sock superimposed on my leg. Where the threads touched my skin, the lines were a brighter red than where the threads did not touch. I took the socks off and jumped into a hastily poured bath. I scrubbed. I washed. I applied cold water, which did ease the heat and pain, but no matter what I did, I could not get the color to leave. I still felt uneasy, feverish, and sweaty. I called Ray and he came over. I showed him the patterns on my feet. We could not figure where this could have come from in such a short period. The pattern told it all. Somehow, the new socks gave me an allergic reaction.

We went to dinner. I was not well. I ate lightly. Our conversation focused on the strange effect of the socks. I went to bed.

Next morning we had to meet our customer. We went over to Lockheed in Sunnyvale. We were chatting with the customer, and I mentioned the strange happenings from the previous day. They recommended I immediately go to their medical department. I did. I spoke to the nurse, related my story and after examining my feet, she told me that I had chemical burns on my feet. The Medical team applied Cortisone, which offered some relief and advised me to go to the local hospital as soon as I completed our meeting.

We went to the medical hospital at the Marina Del Rey in California and spent four miserable hours at that location. Without a doubt that was the poorest medical staff, I had ever encountered. However, the events that occurred there are worthwhile for a separate story.

Finally I returned home to good medical care in Nashua New Hampshire. Apparently, the socks bought for me on Father's Day had missed a step in manufacture. After the socks are dyed, they add sizing to prevent the color from running. Then the socks are rinsed, packaged, and prepared for delivery to customers. The socks my wife bought for me did not have the sizing removed and that generated the chemical burns on my feet. Eventually the manufacturer reimbursed all my medical bills.

My brother-in-law, in jest, told my wife she almost completed the perfect crime. She had bought me the socks on Father's Day which he felt was ironic. I then got on a plane and flew 3000 miles to the other side of the country. If I died there, my brother-in-law stated, my wife had a perfect alibi. They could not charge her with murder. Every Father's Day he brought that up.

The family acquired a couple of customs from this event. Any new clothing is washed before a family member can use it. We never again encountered chemical burns. To this day, it is my preference to wear white socks unless I am going to a wake, a funeral, or a business meeting. I do not want death to be able to sneak up behind me again because I bought the wrong colored socks.

THE END