

LUCK
By James Collins

"These stories are great, you know. They're better than the ones my dad told because you paint a better picture, you know, and go into the details," said young Kelly," but we are at a disadvantage, you know, to the times you lived in. All your buddies are great successes because of the experiences you had, you know."

"Ha, ha," I said "not because of our experiences but in spite of them."

"Look at you, Mr. O'Mara- a big Hollywood writer and producer. Then we have 'Bomber' Foley - war hero, winner of combat medals, state senator and talked about for running for president. Two of your friends own their own businesses, you know, and others are police inspectors, captains, and chiefs of the fire department. That's nothing to say of the number who made it big in Wall Street. You guys had it made; we don't have the same chances. We were born at the wrong time."

"Richie, hold your tongue, that's no way to be talking to Mr. O'Mara."

"No, let your son speak, Kevin. He has a right to his opinion, but I would like to answer his points one at a time. First, I'm Tommy, not Mr. O'Mara. That's my father's name; he's old." That generated a laugh. "Second, not all our crowd made it big; most are regular honest hard-working people."

"You can't tell that from the ones who made it, you know."

"All you young people see are the successes. The real heroes, the ones who fight to survive, the ones who struggle every day to feed their families, pass you in the streets, but you don't see them."

"What did they do wrong?"

"Nothing, this was a neighborhood of nearly a hundred thousand people. Granted, the district was bigger than most towns in the country and not a few cities, but we had the same number of people who went to work, married, and raised their kids without making the papers. They struggled and had to get the rent or the mortgage money like everyone else. They had sickness and trouble; life after all, is a struggle. The fact that they didn't get publicity or notoriety doesn't take away from them. Quite the contrary, they are the heroes in life."

"Sure every kid wants to grow up and be a bus driver, you know. You hear them teaching that to the kids in school and on television all the time." Young Kelly delivered this with the sarcasm dripping off each word.

Tommy smiled an enigmatic smile and raised his hand, palm out, signaling for a halt. "The ones who take the hard knocks, and keep coming back are the real winners in life. Don't let anyone tell you different. Medals are given for people like that in warfare, but only if someone who cares enough to make an issue of the event, notices them, and if the person who witnessed the event survived. Many heroes performed deeds that were never recorded because they lost, were captured or died. History after all is written by the winners."

"We all want to be winners, you know, but you have to get the breaks," continued Kelly as he rose to the discussion.

"You think that the success we were lucky enough to acquire was all due to breaks? I'm sure your dad told you different. Sure, everybody benefits at one time or another by being in the right place at the right time. Everyone here, at one time or another, found money in the streets. Right?"

"Sure, I found a twenty, six years ago at the entrance to the subway," chimed in 'Bull'.

"That was a lucky break, right?"

"Sure was. I took my wife out to dinner that Saturday. It was great."

"And you looked around every time you went near that spot again, right?"

"Sure, I hoped I'd find another."

"Did you?"

"No. never again, only the one time."

"Did you quit your job and plan to hang around that subway entrance to pick up twenties every hour?"

"Of course not. I told you I never found another."

"Right; a prudent man doesn't expect to fall into free money on a regular basis. The same with any other business. Sometimes you get lucky, but you do much better in the long run if you plan to work hard at your job on a regular basis. It pays much better."

"If you want to make money, that's a goal. Now figure out a plan to make it happen. Offer to do more for your boss and your company. You benefit and they benefit. You also get noticed. When an opportunity arises, they will consider you. If you don't get the job, don't sulk. Sit down and ask yourself some hard questions. Why were you passed over? Will another opportunity arise? Should you go some place else? And don't lie to yourself. Be brutally honest. If you screwed up you're at fault and it's your own fault. If the other person has better credentials, what do you have to do to surpass them the next time? Plan your next move. Work hard. Be tenacious, go back again and again. If they knock you down get up and go back after them. Remember the saying attributed to Frederick the Great 'L'Audace, L'Audace, Toujours L'Audace'. For those of you who don't speak French I'll translate, 'be bold, be bold always be bold'. Do the unexpected. Take that extra risk. Don't be afraid to fail, and you will invariably succeed. As our ancestors were fond of saying 'Keep the Faith'.

THE END

"OK, I get the point, you know. Well then, if luck isn't a major factor, what can we do to succeed like your generation did?"

"Remember, the times we lived in were not all that different from the present. Think of all the new technologies that you have at your finger tips that were barely dreamed about when we were your age. You've seen men go into outer space, and land on the moon, computers that put undreamed of capability in your hands can be purchased for a few thousand dollars. In our day they cost millions and only a few large firms could afford them. Automobiles choke our streets - after WWII only the rich were able to afford them."

"Tommy, remember when as kids we could play stickball in the streets without any cars and if a geezer wanted to park where we were playing we'd tell him to move his car, and he would." 'Bull' chuckled at his own memory.

" Trust me," Tommy continued, "the Depression was not a time to fondly reminisce about, and war always causes heart break and sorrow. There is an old Chinese blessing that says,'May you live in interesting times.' From my perspective you young people not only live in interesting times, you live in the best country in the world at one of the greatest times in history."

"Tommy remember the old chinese who ran the laundry on the corner. He was always bringing those Chinese girls in there on Saturday nights. I always wondered where they came from. There weren't any in the neighborhood."

"I remember that always interested you 'Bull', but nobody ever figured that one out. But let me get back to Kevin here. You have opportunity unlimited. Nobody says you can't get a higher education because your father worked as a longshoreman therefore you are expected to perform the same job. Don't get me wrong, I'm not putting down any one who does that for a living, I'm just pointing out that you have choices that people in other lands don't. All my generation proved was that you can do any thing you want if you want it bad enough."

"I hear what you say, you know, and my dad echoes the same sentiments. In fact we fight about it all the time. What made the difference between you, one of the big successes and those who as you just described 'didn't make it into the papers'?"

"Some say luck, and we already discussed this imaginary element, but I think it was a combination of things. Planning when I was a kid, and tenacity. Most people don't plan and if there was anything my parents showed me it was that you have to have a plan for what you are going to do in life. Set down goals and then ask yourself what you need to have to make them happen."

"Did you do everything you set out to do ?" asked 'Bull'.

" Originally, I wanted to be a journalist. 'Bull' remembers when I went to work in the old Herald Tribune as a copy boy one summer."

"Yeah, Tommy came home every night luggin' three or four papers under his arm. Did you really read them all, every night?"

"I sure did, and it didn't take long to find out that you needed a degree to make it in

that profession, so I planned to go to college. When I came out, I got a job in television as a writer, and then an opportunity took me into Hollywood, where things just seemed to break right."

"So it was mostly luck." Kelly stepped his fingers as he returned to his point.

"Trust me the answer to that is definitely no! Sure there was an element of that, one, maybe two incidents, but hard work and tenacity were more important. People hire you to do a job. That doesn't mean just show up and collect a pay check. You are expected to do what you contracted for, but that just gives you the paycheck."

"Just give me a couple of your paychecks, you know, and watch my dust," laughed Kevin.

CUTS

and there is an element of that in everything that happens to us