

2014-03 Hobbs – The Close Call

THE CLOSE CALL

by Fred Hobbs

As the years fly by, it's astonishing how those annual birthdays stack up. The song, "Sunrise, Sunset" from the Broadway show and subsequent movie portrayed that phenomenon when considering in a person's life the birthdays of children. Tevye, the bemused father in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," describes it in these words: "Is that the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play? I don't remember growing older, when did they?"

So it was when it occurred to me that this very year, my oldest son, Larry will celebrate his 50th birthday; his sister Jennifer will follow in two years and his younger brother Fred Jr. in four. When did they grow older? As one would expect, the birth of a first-born is usually the most memorable, a fact that the youngest and the one or ones in the middle most likely don't appreciate. In unfolding this tale, however, the first-born scenario is undeniably the most memorable.

This is not just a birthday story. It is an actual birth day story. November 26, 1964 was Thanksgiving Day. My wife's due date was supposedly five or six days away. So when a group of our "still single" friends invited us for a holiday dinner, it seemed safe for us to accept. Mary Ellen was fairly nonchalant during her pregnancy. She had worked as a nurse and knew "the drill." Also, she suffered no complications. Unlike the skits in the TV sit-coms, we had not packed a suitcase three weeks in advance. I was not sleeping with my coat and hat on to ensure a quick getaway when the time arrived.

We had a wonderful time at the Thanksgiving feast. Turkey with all the trimmings, two kinds of pies with whipped cream and, of course, wine (perhaps we both drank a bit too much, but this was the 60s; pregnant women drinking alcohol was not as predominant a medical issue as it is today.) In any case, Mary Ellen consumed a hearty meal and seemed to enjoy every minute of it.

Shortly after we returned home, however, she became sick to her stomach and sadly and quickly headed to the bathroom and left the partially digested goodies behind. As she was about to prepare to go to bed, she calmly turned to me and announced, "I'm pretty sure it's time." We checked with the doctor on the phone and he concurred. Having never experienced this event before, I remained at least outwardly calm.

We drove to the hospital at normal speed. Upon arriving at the front entrance, however, a nurse was waiting there with a wheel chair. She whisked my wife away quickly. In those days men were not expected or allowed to witness an actual birth, so I proceeded to the "soon to be father's lounge" where I expected to wait for hours and hours, judging from many stories I had heard. Two or three other men were slouching in leather chairs, looking somewhat disheveled.

Mere moments later, as I was reaching for an outdated magazine, the nurse appeared, motioned to me, smiled and said simply: "It's a boy." That's when the blood drained from my face and tiny beads of sweat collected on my brow.

A close call...you bet!

P.S. For the births of children two and three, my wife made an appointment with the doctor for a convenient and medically sound time for the babies to be induced.