

Every day is a miracle

Samuel Ray

As songbirds tweeted and chirped outside his bedroom window, Tanner Wilson arose to a new day – a day he'd been dreading.

He could put it off no longer. He'd promised himself that today would be the day that he'd have the dreaded talk with his father, the talk about moving him from the only home he'd known for the past 57 years to the assisted living center in town.

Tanner had 17 miles to think as he drove the narrow, twisted roads that wound through dense forests and cedar swamps. The final five miles would take him up and down several steep hills, through a valley and across a narrow bridge barely wide enough to accommodate his Silverado pickup truck. Tanner regarded the remoteness of the Wilson homestead as a both blessing and a curse. The lovely little spread of 22 acres stretched out along the Popple River, and an original two-room log cabin built at the turn of the 20th century had been enlarged and renovated into a rustic but charming three-bedroom home. Tanner's mother, Lois, had been the driving force behind the modernization of the Wilson estate. She'd been the one to insist on indoor plumbing, a sturdy garage, proper electrical, propane heat and a little patch of grassy lawn. Before she died three years ago, she even had satellite Internet installed. The place possessed an almost magical quality.

At least that's what Cam and Barbara Tomlin had said about it when they came up for summer visits from Milwaukee. Barbara and Lois had been best of friends since grade school, and Cam and Carl, Tanner's dad, developed a close friendship of their own.

"This place is like a slice of Heaven," Tanner recalled old Cam Tomlin saying.

"Yeah, but come winter, it's more like the place a little south of there," he heard his dad, Carl Wilson, reply with a laugh.

Soon enough, winter would be here again, Tanner thought as he walked to the front door, already knowing how the

conversation would go. He'd insist it was time for Dad to move into town for his own safety and wellbeing. He'd tell him the roads were always the last to be plowed and the county intended to replace the bridge next year, taking the river crossing out for three months. Dad would insist he was going nowhere – that he was fine. That his mortgage was paid off. That it would be supreme stupidity for him or anyone else to pay a king's ransom every month just so he could be a few miles closer to a hospital. "I'm not costing anyone a dime, and I'm not going anywhere!," his father would say defiantly.

Tanner walked to the front door and turned the doorknob. The door was locked. Odd, he thought, Dad never locked his doors. He knocked but nobody answered. A sense of dread swept over him as he went to fetch a spare key hidden nearby.

Tanner opened the door and scanned the room. "Dad!" he shouted. "Dad! Are you home?"

Soon it became evident that Carl Wilson was not home.

Tanner checked the garage and saw that his father's 1992 Volvo was still parked inside. He walked up and down the trails that snaked through the woods and down to the river. His search turned up nothing. His father had no cell phone and there were no neighbors nearby. A combination of perplexity and fear washed over him. Where the hell was his father!

Tanner waited four hours before calling the Sheriff's Office. Deputy Patrick Summers arrived 30 minutes later and peppered Tanner with questions. Had he been acting unusual lately? Was he on any medication? Did Tanner know of any friends or relatives whom his father might have gone with? Did his father show any signs of memory loss or dementia?

Tanner answered no to them all.

Summers spotted a dusty laptop computer atop a kitchen counter.

"You mind if I take this back and look through it? Might have some clues," Summers said.

"Sure, go ahead. But I doubt if he ever used that thing. My mother tried showing him once how to get online, and he said he had no use for it. I think they kept the passwords in a notebook in that top drawer."

Laptop in hand, Summers left, saying he'd keep Tanner in the loop. "And if you think of anything, call me at this number," said the deputy as he handed Tanner a card.

His old childhood home now eerily quiet and empty, Tanner sat and contemplated this strange turn of events.

He thought of how his dad had just not been the same since his wife, Tanner's mother, died three years ago. Dad seldom smiled any more. He seldom fished or hiked or took daylong excursions to the newest flea markets to pop up along Hwy. 70. Without the love of his life, he seemed like a man just going through the motions, just waiting to die.

He remembered the time they canned Dad from his Forest Service job when about 1,500 acres of evergreens went up like a match head during the drought of '89 – started when a railroad spark flew into a bed of baked-out pine straw. Thing was, he wasn't at his post that night because he tried to sneak away for thirty minutes to get Tanner to a ballgame. Nobody wanted to hear excuses though, and Dad paid the price.

He stayed angry for a long time after that, grouching about this and that. He'd piss and moan about the government, about living in such a crappy place, about getting screwed by life. He was a real asshole to be around.

Tanner remembered one day in particular, after another round of his dad's one-man pity parties. His mom was fed up.

"So after you're finished with your afternoon cry, you intend to start looking for new employment, right?" his mother said matter-of-factly to his dad, who appeared stunned by the comment. Lois Wilson was not the combative type. It

was hardly in her nature to launch frontal attacks on her husband's manhood.

"What the hell do you mean by that?!" Carl snapped. "What, now you're against me too, Lois?"

"Oh Carl, please. Spare me the woe-is-me, I'm-an-innocent-victim act. Here's a newsflash Carl, life isn't always fair. Bad things happen to good people – all the time. Life isn't always joyful, and it isn't always easy. Sometimes things are hard, even brutal. But here's the thing about life, Carl. Each and every day of it is a miracle, a day filled with endless possibilities. You're trapped by your own bruised ego. Open yourself up again to life's possibilities, Carl."

The best Tanner could recall, things around the Wilson house started getting better after his mother's intervention. Dad found a new job as a log grader and moved up the company ladder. He became a bigwig in the company and a man of means. That gave Mom the cash she needed to make her improvements. He became a better, happier man in general, at least up until three years ago.

Tanner heard nothing of his father's whereabouts for the next two days. He decided to call Deputy Summers.

"No, we haven't turned up any leads," Summers said. "I'm about to go through that laptop. In fact, I was just turning it on when you called. But, if like you say, and he hardly touched it..."

Tanner held no hope Summers would find anything of value.

He got the call just after 11 a.m. as he stepped into the parking lot of a Family Dollar. It was Summers.

"I think we found him."

The news was both joyous and terrifying.

"Is he okay!? Where is he!?"

"We think he's in Las Vegas."

"Las Vegas!?"

Summers explained that the laptop was indeed useless; however, someone saw Carl at the county library. The librarian said she helped him get online and navigate a little until he got the hang of it. They sifted through the computer

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