

February 9, 2003

Dear Dad,

One of my earliest memories is a birthday memory. I was 3 when I received a red Radio Flyer wagon as the first birthday gift I remember. The reason I remember it was that, to underscore the surprise, you assembled the wagon and gave it to me at Grandpa's home on Hancock Street; then you and Grandpa put me in the wagon and I rode majestically all the way home to Post Avenue. It was probably the furthest I had ever traveled on foot to that point.

Amazingly I remember a lot about that trip now more than 55 years ago. I remember the clunk-click-clunk of the wheels crossing the sidewalk cracks. I remember a section of row homes where people sat on their steps and meager porches and watched us pass. They seemed to be living a strange and unfamiliar life-style, which evidently made me a little nervous, because years later, those houses still show up in my dreams when I am feeling anxious about finding my way home. I remember passing the school where I would later attend nursery school – the playground was as big as football field. I remember it was a long, long way. Such are the birthday memories of a 3 year-old.

In later years I retraced that trip, running the whole distance in 20 or 30 minutes at the most. The playhouse on the playground now looked like a doll-house. The row-homes were simply a low-income section, now far less alien than some of the places I have lived. But one thing had not changed, and still has not changed. At the age of 3, at the age of 20, and now at 58, my Dad is still pulling my wagon home. Now, of course, I have a few wagons of my own – and you, like my Grandpa on that long-ago day, are right there with me, keeping me company, giving me advice on the best route to take. If you look behind you, there is quite a parade of wagons in your footsteps.

I know you probably think that, having reached 90, you ought to get a rest, but I'm afraid you still have a job to do. Your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are still depending on you to help us get home. Hopefully, the strength and energy for most of the pulling has passed down the generations, but you still know more about where home is than any of us can.

We've learned a lot. We know that Home is loving Mom and all of us. We know that Home is trusting God. Home is seeing every person you meet as a friend, a child of God, someone special and beautiful. We know that Home is taking care of yourself as much as possible. We know that Home is always safe. But there is still more for all of us to learn and we would appreciate your sticking around for many more years to give us the chance to do so.

So, Happy 90th birthday, Dad, and Grandpa, and Great-Grandpa. We love you and promise to come back for your 100th if Plantation Village can find a room big enough to hold the whole family by then.

With all our love,
Allan.