

Wanting Things

by Roland Foster

When I was about twelve years old I coveted a pocket knife that someone had given to my dad. It was smaller than the usual Barlow or Buck knife that he always carried. It only had two blades, and the sides were covered with a plastic that looked like mother-of-pearl. It was not a practical knife for a plumber, which he was. But it was very beautiful in my eyes.

I don't remember the words I said to my dad on that occasion, but I remember making a nuisance of myself and making it very clear that I sure would like to have that knife. He was reluctant to give it to me, and I don't know, or at least I don't remember, the reason. It may be that he wanted to keep the knife for himself, or perhaps he just thought I wasn't ready for the responsibility of owning a pocket knife. At any rate, he finally gave it to me.

You know, I have always felt ashamed of the way I got that knife. It almost seems that I was not supposed to have it, but somehow I subverted the good that God intended so I could have my own way. Oh, I used the knife, and I still have it, even after all these years, but after the initial gratification, I can't say I ever truly enjoyed it.

I remember another occasion when I resorted to begging. This time I was sixteen or seventeen, and there was a leather jacket for sale at Guy Barden's men's store for something like twenty dollars. I wanted Mother to let me buy it, but she said we just didn't have the money. I went into my act, which was not at all like me, but I wanted that jacket really badly. I wheedled and cajoled. I reminded her of the fact that I worked hard and (mostly) behaved myself. I reminded her that I didn't ask for much. She allowed as how that was all true, but I still couldn't have the jacket because she simply didn't have the money to spend on it.

I don't remember how that conversation ended. I suppose I sulked away somewhere and felt sorry for myself. At any rate, I didn't get the jacket. I do remember telling her later on that she was right, it was sort of a frivolous thing to buy and I was glad she had said no.

It's funny how that worked out, isn't it? I remember two things that I really wanted during my childhood. I got one of them, and having it gave me no great pleasure; I did not get the other, and in the end I was glad of it.

I wonder if there is a lesson in there somewhere.