



If you are eighty-four years old and have driven cars since the Model T era, you have traveled many roads and have seen many signs. Nowadays road signs are designed to tell you where you are, where you can eat and sleep and fill your gas tank. Hopefully, the result will get you back home safely.

When thirty miles an hour was a common speed there was more time to gaze around and it was fun to look at ads on old barns. The big joy of sign gazing was the Burma Shave signs, which offered sage advice on a series of fence posts.

In recent years I had noticed "Adopt A Highway" signs, but until VFW Post 3830 of Pahoa, Hawaii accepted parental responsibility for a couple of miles it had no real significance. At first I thought volunteering meant joining and helping the other Veterans pick up roadside trash, but I was to find it quite different and it would evoke some interesting events and thinking on my part.

Our gang consisted of Veterans of both sexes who had served in all the conflicts since WWII. However, as I look at my photo on my driver's license it might go back to the Civil War.

Veterans are generally known to keep things clean and neat. As a matter of fact, some soldier humor has it that when the burial details went out to do their work, they could tell if the deceased had taken his training at Camp Roberts, California because the area around him would be policed up for ten feet in all directions.

Working in the bright uniforms, which protected us from road traffic, provoked some interesting incidents. One day some youngsters walking home from school gave us some searching looks. One of them remarked that it was a shame to make those old prisoners work like that in the hot sun. Based upon the uniforms and upon the looks of some of us old-timers, it could easily appear that we were on a work-release program. When I suggested that we did indeed appear that way, it provoked a quick laugh. I then suggested we could enlarge upon that perception by getting some light plastic chain and wrap it around our persons. Cooler heads, which under the tropic sun, is an oxymoron, prevailed and my suggestion was quickly tabled.

One day, a woman in a big car stopped and asked me if I did swimming pools? With the sweat pouring off my face, I was tempted to tell her I could start immediately.

When I first left the starting point with several garbage bags, I thought picking things up would be great exercise. And, to a point it was correct. But prior to this enlistment, which meant bending and retrieving about a thousand times, my only genuflection had been in obeisance to wifely wishes. When I would relate my newly acquired aches and pains to her she assured me that I soon would be back in shape, and in

the meantime I should not overlook small objects in my work because one of them might be a large diamond ring. I didn't think it would be a good thing to tell her there was an abundance of hub caps readily available.

After hours in the hot sun the routine of bending and straightening would become somewhat robotic, and my thoughts would take on a hazy vagueness. The areas where I worked were full of every kind of debris. Amongst the more interesting items were old cigarette wrappers. Some had been hidden in the vegetation for years. I harbored the hope that one of them would be a Lucky Strike Green that had not gone to war.

Newsprint we found everywhere. Some had survived for years despite the Hawaiian elements of sun and rain. Some newspapers were old but still legible. I looked them over for dates and whatever was readable. I fantasized that I might find one announcing that Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were planning a visit to Sarajevo in 1914. Bosnia must be pretty in June.

Some of the debris is far off the road and was either blown there by trade winds or thrown there by hand. I found beer bottles so far from the highway that one wonders why NFL scouts are not looking for the guy who can throw a bottle that far.

At the day's end, we would drag ourselves back to the starting point and see what the beverage coolers had to offer. We would look at full bags left along the road and make a silent count. There was always a discussion about anything unused that was found. Mostly, the items were related to auto traffic such as hub caps, tires, fan belts, Styrofoam and odds and ends tossed out of cars. When we departed for the day, we took with us a sense that our efforts had made a difference.

One day on the way home I had a thought that made me chuckle. When General Douglas MacArthur addressed the Congress, and later the cadets of West Point, he stated he was resigning after 52 years of service and that "old soldiers do not die, they just fade away."

Who knows, had General MacArthur found a similar organization such as VFW Post 3830, he might have had a second career.