

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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"A brother's a brother"

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I recently made each of my three brothers a gift, an irregularly shaped piece of three-quarter inch thick walnut about seven inches square, with a two-inch by six-inch brass plaque. In front of the plaque sits a metal scale model 1996 John Deere riding lawn mower and four small sticks tied in a bundle. I worried these were a bit too 'hokey' and each one might end up in the back of a closet. Instead, each brother has theirs sitting out. Well, at least they're sitting out when I visit.

The idea to build these began last spring when my second oldest brother (I am the youngest) sent me a Disney DVD, a 1999 movie based on a true story. He called saying this movie reminded him of the oldest brother and me, who had spent a substantial amount of time together the prior several months because he was critically ill, necessitating several trips to be with him while hospitalized in California. It was one of the most wonderful movies I have watched; with memories, tears, and perspective on life's real priorities.

The movie is about two brothers, both in their late 70s, who had "said some unforgivable things the last time (they) met." One brother learns the other had a stroke. He realizes "whatever it was that made me and Lyle so mad... don't matter anymore. I want to make peace." "My eyes are bad. I can't drive. I don't like someone else driving. And I've got to get out to my brother's." What does he do? He hooks up a tarp-covered trailer to his John Deere riding lawn mower and sets out on a

5 mile an hour journey through our country's heartland.

His journey, during the fall harvest, is about the people he meets, the advice he offers, and the memories he recalls, all the while heading to his big brother. He spends several days in a small community, awaiting repairs of his lawn mower. A man offers to drive him the rest of the way but he declines saying, "I appreciate that. But I wanna finish this one my own way." While waiting for the repairs, he offers unsolicited council to two bickering brothers explaining, "There's no one knows your life better than a brother . . . hope I'm not too late . . . A brother's a brother."

He also talks with a fellow World War II veteran, confessing the pain he has carried since the war. He was a forward sniper, often shooting at nothing more than a small blur of movement. He spotted one such German target, with ever so slight a movement in the grasses. He fired. The movement ceased. Later, as his unit pushed forward they found their scout shot in the head, everyone assuming a German sniper shot him, but they were wrong. The elderly man wept as he told his new friend of his permanent, painful regret. His friend, as only a fellow soldier who had seen the same war could do, offered him understanding and forgiveness. As he left this small farm community, he told his new friends, "I want to sit with Lyle, look up at the stars . . . like we used to do, so long ago."

One night, camping along the highway, a young woman runaway

comes into his camp, frightened and hungry. He feeds her and while they are talking he asks her how far along she is. She explains she ran away because if her family found out she was pregnant they would hate her. He told her he thought she was wrong and recounted how, when his children were "little . . . I'd give each one of them a stick and say, 'You break that.' Of course, they could real easy. Then I'd say, 'Tie them sticks in a bundle and try to break that.' Of course, they couldn't. Then I'd say, 'That bundle . . . that's family.'" This is the quote engraved on the brass plaque sitting behind the John Deere riding lawn mower and the four bundled sticks, representing my three brothers and me.

He finally coasts into his brother's yard after 250 miles and six weeks on the road. He gets off his lawn mower and heads towards the house using his two canes to walk. As he nears the house hollering his brother's name, he fears he may be too late. His brother comes out on the porch with his walker, dragging a barely useful right leg. As they stare at each other on the porch with tears in their eyes, the older brother says, "Alvin, did you ride that thing all the way out here to see me?" Alvin replies, "I did Lyle." No more words are necessary. They sit down in rocking chairs on the porch and look to the stars, speaking volumes in their silence. All is forgotten. All is forgiven. Family. Brothers. Unbreakable.