



Getting to Know You

It's Birthday Day here again at A Story A Week! And this one has to start off with an apology - regular readers know that whenever a family member of mine has a birthday falling on a Sunday, I have to feature that person in the story somehow, but in the case of my son-in-law loan, I completely missed him last time around! In my defense I can only say that back then, nobody had actually told me what his birthday was, but after that experience I prepared a family birthday list for my reference, so I no longer have an excuse for missing anybody!

Another aspect to this son-in-law thing is that in modern times, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain when such status is to be granted. (I say this with no intent at sarcasm, as my own personal history will attest!). Living arrangements that begin quite casually can over time morph into something more permanent, but just when that transition takes place is sometimes not easy to decipher, especially when the participants live an ocean away from me. But in loan's case, the situation was clarified quite some years ago when he and my daughter Himi married (something they have done twice, once in her home country, and again in his.)

The relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law is of course pretty shaky at first; the elder man is naturally very interested in finding out what kind of young man his daughter has chosen, and yet knows that he must keep a distance, and must certainly not allow his own preferences or prejudices to come into play. The young man, for his part, is usually trying to create the impression that he is quite capable of caring for, and protecting, the daughter. And over all this, colouring every aspect of the relationship, is the generation gap. Back in 'the old days' any such gap was simply temporal - the older man could have been looking at a younger version of himself, with similar points of view and life expectations. These days though, the generation gap is a very real thing; a thirty year difference in ages can put two people on opposite sides of a canyon of differences.

In the case of loan and I though, a very interesting factor comes into play - we basically have no generation gap. I grew up in England and Canada in the immediate post-war period (pre Rock-'n-Roll to perhaps encapsulate it most simply) when a certain type of ethic and family structure was common, while loan - despite being a literal generation younger than I - was born in Eastern Europe in the Soviet era - a time and place that also definitely qualifies as pre Rock-'n-Roll!

To put it most simply, this young man has a work ethic easily the equivalent of mine, and a set of 'family values' that puts mine to shame. If I had been hunting to try and find the best possible partner to 'provide for' my daughter and their young family, I can't imagine how I could have chosen better than she did!

When you look at things the other way around though - how loan sees his father-in-law - I know that he wouldn't be giving me a 'score' of anywhere near 100%. (Again, I say these things without any trace of sarcasm or criticism ...) Relationships between family and friends in his Romanian culture are warm and open, not to say noisy! And he now finds himself attached to an English / Japanese hybrid family that is the polar opposite. Emotions? Felt, presumably, but never expressed. When he and Himi married over there, the party that evening probably kept half the town awake all night; when they married over in Vancouver, the 'celebration' must have seemed to him hardly worthy of the term.

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Well, any bi-cultural couple has to wrestle with such issues; it's simply the name of the game when you choose a partner from a different country. I hope Ioan can understand intellectually that even though I and my parents may not be very 'demonstrative' toward him in the way that he might prefer, we - in our own way - love him, and are full of respect at the way that he is filling his responsibilities towards his family, our family.

Ioan, as you know, it's been a long-time tradition that each time I'm over in Vancouver, I have a father/daughter dinner alone with my two girls. From the next visit - it'll be later this year - let's start our own such tradition. See you then!

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