Saturday Mornings: Grandpa’s Cents and Sense

Grandpa was special. My brother Leo and I looked forward to the trip into town with Grandpa. Going to the movies on Saturday was an adventure.

We lived on a citrus ranch in the early 1940s. The family included Grandma and Grandpa, my uncle, mom, my older brother and me. My folks had split not long after my arrival. My memory of my father is limited to visits he made while in uniform during WWII. My uncle also came home a couple of times before he was wounded. The doctors never removed all of the grenade shrapnel so my poor uncle has lived with his souvenirs since.

Grandpa, the man of the house, was effectively my dad although I always called him Grandpa. Grandpa, a WWI veteran, was in his late fifties. He did work in the orchards though quite old for the job. Picking lemons and oranges is demanding physical work and definitely more suited for the young. He showed his patience and generosity toward me and my brother in the evenings telling us tales of fact, fancy or fantasy, or a combination and, of course, by taking us into town on the weekend.

Whenever going into town we walked part of the two miles or so along the railroad track. We took the shortcut rather than the road the half mile or so from the house to the tracks. The shortcut, a well worn a path, wound through an open field of boulders, high grass and sagebrush. Nearly everyone on the ranch used the path. The company that owned the ranch had built about 80 houses for worker families. The dormitories built for single men were usually empty or nearly so until the picking season began. Our house, located at the end of the first row of homes, sat on a corner or bend in the road.
The Tower Theater featured serials and cowboy movies during Saturday matinees. Our favorite serials often included a young hero. We liked the Red Ryder adventures with Little Beaver and Batman with his ward, Robin. Cowboy movies were great. The heroes preferred their horses over girls. The good guys always won and rode off at the movie’s end towards another adventure.

The many serial heroes are easily confused as to whether remembered from the comics, radio shows, movies, early TV, or a combination. Some old favorites; like Jack Armstrong, All-American Boy, Mandrake the Magician, The Phantom and Brenda Starr-Reporter are gone now.

The feature films, westerns, mostly B-rated, low budget and without big name stars were still enjoyed and anticipated by my brother and me. We eagerly waited for Saturday and the trek into town with Grandpa.

Off we would go headed to the show. We walked along the railroad with my brother and me, arms extended, trying to balance ourselves on the rails. Oops! I’d slip and quickly get on again, over and over. Grandpa always began with a chuckle, “¡Esperen! ¡Siento algo! Wait! I sense something! Look! Search until you find it.” Sure enough, one of us would find a coin, usually a dime or a nickel. The discovery put us on alert. Then Grandpa would “sense” something again. By the time we left the tracks, we had our popcorn and cola money. It was truly amazing.

A lucky thing for us that Grandpa had that sixth sense.

Years later my brother and I realized Grandpa had ‘salted’ the tracks. It seems Grandpa had a habit of going into town on Friday to play handball or as he called it, rebote, followed by a few drinks with his buddies. He planted the coins, often in the dark, on his way home. So, Grandpa had a good memory, a good plan and some cents, or maybe he did have a sixth sense.