

When the Streetlights Come On

When I was a kid growing up in the '70s and '80s, there was a simple rule that governed the end of every summer night: be home when the streetlights came on. It wasn't an official decree, but it was law; passed down from the front porch, muttered by dads flipping burgers, and yelled from screen doors by moms with curlers in their hair. When the streetlights came on, you'd better get back home. End of story.

Back then, evenings were sacred. They smelled like fresh-cut grass and sounded like baseballs smacking leather gloves. We tore through the streets on BMX bikes, yelling over the hum of cicadas, chasing something we couldn't define. We lived like time was a rumor, until that quiet click overhead broke the spell. That sudden flicker of amber light that brought us back to reality. One by one, the streetlights woke up, and we knew what it meant. Game over. Time to head back home.

Lately, I've been thinking about those feelings, and wondered where I was on the clock of life. That celestial clock where a lifetime is compressed into a 24 hour day. That curiosity led me to do the math. I'm 59 now, and if the average man lives to be about 76, that puts me at 6:38 p.m. The sun's still up, but the shadows are getting longer. The air is cooling, and the sky has that golden glow that you only notice when you stop and really look around. I can almost hear that familiar hum of the old sodium lamps buzzing back to life.

There were years when I didn't notice time at all; maybe decades. You get busy building careers, chasing money, juggling expectations, trying to become the man you promised yourself you'd be. You measure success in square footage, titles earned, and bank accounts. Somewhere along the way, you forget to look up. You stop hearing the birds sing. You stop feeling the breeze—unless it turns into a storm. And all the while, the clock keeps ticking.

But something happens when you reach this part of the day: Now, I pay attention to everything. The way the flowers turn toward the sun at

sunrise. The stillness just before evening settles in, and the sound of my own breath when everything else is quiet. The day isn't endless anymore—and maybe that's the point. Maybe it never was.

I don't dread the streetlights—not anymore. They don't mark the end of fun. They're just a reminder: it's time to slow down. Time to pay attention. Time to put the phone down and let the moment wrap around you like a warm blanket. It's time to tell people what they really mean to you—and mean it.

There's still time for one more ride around the block, or one more game of tag. But I can feel it in my bones—that low hum in the wires, warming up overhead. The streetlights are about to come on. And it's almost time to head back home.