



Sometimes the best things in life come wrapped in the most unexpected packages.

I woke up one Wednesday morning in May to a sound you just don't expect to hear in your motel room - a diesel engine and the occasional creaking of steel tracks punctuated with periodic crashing noises like heavy objects falling into a steel box. At first I thought the TV must have come on all by itself, to a rerun of Kelly's Heroes. What I discovered was far more entertaining.





I soon wound up with my coffee in a little gazebo on the Howard Johnson grounds watching a man work his craft with a Cat 320 trackhoe, demolishing and loading the rubble of one of the three buildings. This turned out to be the best show in town, by far the best entertainment I found in a week-long trip. I had to laugh at myself because I had flown all the way from Texas to New York to see some sights and visit a few friends but here I was spending as much time as possible watching a man I didn't know tear down part of my motel.



The little boy in many of us is enchanted with the old notion of peeking through the cracks of the construction zone to watch the steam shovel, you know? But this was far more than that. I was witnessing the perfect melding of man and machine to such an extent that the trackhoe almost became a living organic thing, diving into the pile of concrete & scooping up chunks of rock, sifting out the dirt and then swinging around to smooth the load across the length of the dump truck so delicately you would have thought he might be spreading butter on a slice of bread. Then without any noticeable pause the towering boom would sweep 180° back to the target, flexing and swooping back down to pluck a random stick of twisted pipe aside before selecting the next slab to spin into the waiting truck. All this was done with a rhythm and precision that was both captivating and deceiving; Larry made it all look so natural and easy that I began to feel that I should be able to do it myself; he sat back in his chair, completely absorbed but relaxed and smiling, a happy warrior in full command of his forces and the trackhoe was truly an extension of his will. He worked at a pace that was fast but unhurried; there was a sense of deliberate unruffled urgency but never any sense of strain. He made me think that he could pluck a quarter from the pile and hand me two dimes and five pennies. When he was done, the building site was so clean and neat you could imagine there was never a building there - as the ad says - "like it never even happened."





So I rushed to the gazebo with coffee and camera every morning; I brought lunch to the gazebo at noon, I watched as the light dwindled in the evening. I hesitate to use some of the words that came to my mind for fear of sounding silly but it truly was exhilarating and uplifting to watch the performance of Larry Pierce at work. Sometimes I wanted to cheer. The show went on for 4 days and I spent more time watching it than I did doing anything else. I felt inspired in a way - not to rush out to the Cat dealer to price out a 320 or anything quite that foolish - but I did feel moved to try harder to become a little bit better at the ordinary things that I usually do. I'm sure it will probably wear off pretty soon but I was gladdened and grateful to just be on the sidelines of this game. It was a jaw dropping exhibition of skill, a joyous symphony of demolition. It was performance art done in a medium where most men would struggle and falter. The pace and the grace of it was almost unthinkable to me but then I never knew that a trackhoe could dance. In the hands of a master, it can also sing. And watching it can make me feel happy.