

Hebrews 11:5-6
June 17, '18
Father's Day

“WHAT MATTERS MOST”

LAST YEAR, WE SPENT THE SUMMER MONTHS OF JUNE, JULY & AUGUST FOCUSING ON BOOKS, MOVIES AND SONGS THAT CONVEY A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE WITHOUT NECESSARILY BEING RELIGIOUS.

THIS YEAR, WE'LL BE DOING SOMEWHAT THE SAME THING IN AN ABBREVIATED FORMAT AND WE'LL BEGIN TODAY WITH A MOVIE THAT IS FITTING FOR A FATHER'S DAY SERMON.

I WILL SAY AT THE OUTSET, THOUGH, THAT THE FOCUS OF THE SERMON WILL BE OTHER THAN THE REASON WE ORDINARILY ASSOCIATE “FIELD OF DREAMS” WITH FATHER'S DAY.

IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE MOVIE – WELL, YOU NEED TO.

AND IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT IN A FEW YEARS, YOU NEED TO SEE IT AGAIN.

IN FACT, I THINK IT SHOULD BE SEEN AT LEAST EVERY FIVE YEARS – BY EVERYONE.

THAT'S WHAT I THINK – THOUGH I KNOW THE FEELINGS ABOUT THIS MOVIE VARY WIDELY.

ONE REVIEWER CLAIMS THAT IT IS PERHAPS THE WORST BASEBALL MOVIE EVER MADE.

OTHERS WAS SAY IT'S THE BEST.

IT WAS INCLUDED IN A LIST OF THE 20 MOST OVERRATED MOVIES OF ALL TIME.

BUT ON THE OTHER SIDE, A THEOLOGIAN SAID *“IF SOMEONE WERE TO ASK ME HOW GOD SPEAKS – HOW HE GUIDES AND LEADS HIS FOLLOWERS – I WOULDN'T TRY TO EXEGETE SCRIPTURE, UNPACK*

THEOLOGY, OR EVEN OFFER UP MY OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. INSTEAD, THE BEST ANSWER I COULD GIVE IS FOUR SIMPLE WORDS – WATCH FIELD OF DREAMS.”

FOR THOSE WHO – HEAVEN FORBID – *HAVEN’T* SEEN IT OR THOSE WHO DON’T REMEMBER IT – “FIELD OF DREAMS” IS THE STORY OF RAY KINSELLA, A HUMBLE IOWA FARMER WITH A LOVING WIFE & YOUNG DAUGHTER.

ONE EVENING WHILE STROLLING THROUGH HIS CORNFIELD, RAY HEARS A WHISPER FROM OUT OF NOWHERE – “*IF YOU BUILD IT, HE WILL COME.*”

THE VOICE REPEATS ITSELF, QUIETLY YET FIRMLY CONFIRMING ITS PRESENCE.

RAY LATER SEES A VISION OF A BASEBALL FIELD IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS CORN & DECIDES THAT’S WHAT IT IS HE’S SUPPOSED TO BUILD.

HE ALSO DECIDES THAT HE’S SUPPOSED TO BUILD IT FOR SHOELESS JOE JACKSON WHO WAS BANNED FROM BASEBALL AFTER HE & SEVEN OF HIS CHICAGO WHITE SOX TEAMMATES WERE ACCUSED OF THROWING THE 1919 WORLD SERIES.

THE STORY GOES ON FROM THERE WITH A SERIES OF IMPOSSIBLE ADVENTURES THAT EVENTUALLY LEAD TO A CONCLUSION THAT HAS MADE PEOPLE CALL THIS FILM THE CONSUMMATE FATHER’S DAY MOVIE & EVEN DUB IT “*THE NOTEBOOK FOR GUYS.*”

HAVING NEVER SEEN “THE NOTEBOOK,” I CAN ONLY ASSUME IT’S A TEARJERKER FOR WOMEN THE WAY “FIELD OF DREAMS” IS A TEARJERKER FOR MEN.

WHAT I FIND MOST COMPELLING ABOUT THIS MOVIE, THOUGH, ISN'T THE MOVIE ITSELF.

THE STORY WITHIN THE STORY IS FAR MORE COMPELLING THAN THE STORY ITSELF – OR, TO BE MORE ACCURATE – THE *STORIES* WITHIN THE STORY BECAUSE THERE ARE PLENTY OF THEM.

TO BEGIN WITH, THE MOVIE IS BASED ON A NOVEL BY W. P. KINSELLA ENTITLED SHOELESS JOE JACKSON.

THE LOGICAL CONCLUSION ONE WOULD DRAW IS THAT SINCE THE AUTHOR'S LAST NAME IS THE SAME AS THAT OF THE FARMER IN THE BOOK –KINSELLA – HE'S GIVEN THE CHARACTER HIS OWN NAME.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THAT'S NOT THE CASE.

THE NAME “KINSELLA” IS TAKEN FROM CHARACTERS FROM OTHER BOOKS.

BUT HERE'S SOMETHING EVEN MORE FASCINATING – THE “KINSELLA” CHARACTERS ARE FOUND IN NOVELS OF J.D. SALINGER, ONE OF THEM BEING IN HIS CLASSIC CATCHER IN THE RYE.

IN THE MOVIE, THE RECLUSIVE WRITER THAT RAY BASICALLY KIDNAPS IS NAMED TERRENCE MANN.

IN THE BOOK, IT'S ACTUALLY J. D. SALINGER BUT THEY COULDN'T USE HIM IN THE MOVIE FOR FEAR OF BEING SUED BY SALINGER.

I SAID I DIDN'T WANT TO FOCUS ON THE TRADITIONAL FATHER'S DAY THEME THAT'S FOUND IN THE MOVIE BUT THERE'S A FASCINATING “STORY WITHIN THE STORY” RELATED TO THAT.

IN THE MOVIE'S FATHER-SON MOMENT – THE VERY MOVING CLIMAX – RAY KINSELLA'S DAD IS PLAYED BY ACTOR DWIER BROWN.

AS IF THE SCENE WASN'T EMOTIONAL ENOUGH, BROWN ARRIVED ON THE SET FOR FILMING IMMEDIATELY AFTER ATTENDING A FUNERAL – THE FUNERAL OF HIS OWN FATHER.

ANY EMOTION YOU SEE EXPRESSED IN THAT FATHER-SON SCENE WAS COMPLETELY GENUINE.

AND THEN THERE'S THE STORY WITHIN THE STORY REGARDING THE LOCATION OF THE FILMING OF THE MOVIE – A FARM OUTSIDE DYERSVILLE, IOWA.

A RECENT AERIAL PHOTO SHOT OF THE FARM IS ON THE COVER OF YOUR BULLETIN THIS MORNING.

IT HAD BEEN A FAMILY FARM FOR MORE THAN A HUNDRED YEARS & THE ONE WHO WAS RUNNING THE FARM AT THE TIME WAS A SINGLE MAN NAMED DON LANSING.

HE ANSWERED A KNOCK ON HIS DOOR ONE DAY TO BE ASKED IF HE'D CONSIDER HAVING HIS HOUSE & PART OF HIS FARM USED FOR A MOVIE.

HE ASKED WHAT THE MOVIE WAS ABOUT & WHEN HE WAS TOLD IT WOULD BE A MOVIE ABOUT BASEBALL, HE IMMEDIATELY SAID, "YES."

SIX YEARS AFTER THE FILM WAS RELEASED, DON LANSING MET HIS FUTURE WIFE, BECKY, ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, WHEN SHE WAS ON A PILGRIMAGE TO VISIT THE BASEBALL FIELD FROM "*FIELD OF DREAMS*."

WHEN HE PROPOSED TO BECKY, HE DID SO – APPROPRIATELY – ON FIRST BASE.

AS A "STORY WITHIN THE STORY," THE REAL LIFE FIELD OF DREAMS OF THE MOVIE "FIELD OF DREAMS" IS STILL A FIELD OF DREAMS TO THIS DAY.

WE HEAR JAMES EARL JONES SAY IN HIS ICONIC BASEBALL SPEECH IN THE MOVIE, “PEOPLE WILL COME, RAY. PEOPLE MOST DEFINITELY WILL COME.”

IN A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF LIFE IMITATING ART, 30 YEARS LATER, PEOPLE STILL COME EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR.

WE VISITED THERE JUST 3 YEARS AFTER THE MOVIE WAS MADE & WE HAVE VIDEO OF THREE-YEAR-OLD DAVID BEING CHEERED (EVEN CALLING HIM BY NAME I MIGHT ADD) BY EVERYONE IN THE STANDS AS HE RAN THE BASES IN THE NEVER-ENDING GAME THAT TAKES PLACE ON THE FIELD.

WE MET DON & BECKY LANSING BECAUSE, AT THE TIME, THEY WERE THE ONLY ONES THERE TO SELL WHATEVER MEMORABILIA THEY HAD.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD OF THE FIELD BEING DAMAGED EARLIER THIS YEAR & DOZENS OF VOLUNTEERS ARRIVED TO LOVINGLY MAKE REPAIRS.

SUCH IS THE CONTINUING MAGIC OF THE PLACE.

THERE IS ANOTHER “STORY WITHIN THE STORY” THOUGH THAT I FIND EVEN MORE COMPELLING THAN ANY OF THOSE.

IT’S A STORY THAT I THINK CAN BE A GOOD ONE FOR FATHERS FOR FATHER’S DAY – OR FOR ANYONE FOR ANY DAY.

IT’S A STORY THAT FITS WELL WITH THE SCRIPTURE PASSAGE WE’VE READ THIS MORNING FROM THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS.

THIS PASSAGE REALLY FINDS ITS ORIGIN IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS WHEN WE’RE TOLD OF THE DESCENDANTS OF NOAH.

THE ONE PERSON ABOUT WHOM SOMETHING IS SAID, OTHER THAN SIMPLY HIS NAME, IS ENOCH.

THE WRITER OF GENESIS TELLS US THAT ENOCH “WALKED WITH GOD.”

THE WRITER OF HEBREWS PICKS UP ON THAT DESCRIPTION AND SAYS THAT ENOCH “PLEASED GOD.”

THAT’S REALLY ALL WE KNOW ABOUT ENOCH – THAT & THE FACT THAT IT IS SAID HE DIDN’T DIE BUT WAS SIMPLY “TAKEN BY GOD.”

AND DOESN’T THE KNOWLEDGE THAT ENOCH “WALKED WITH GOD” AND “PLEASED GOD” TELL US EVERYTHING WE COULD POSSIBLY WANT TO KNOW?

YOU SEE, ENOCH WON’T BE FOUND IN A “WHO’S WHO” LIST OF THE MOST MEMORABLE CHARACTERS IN THE BIBLE.

HE WASN’T AN ABRAHAM OR MOSES OR ISAIAH OR DAVID OR SOLOMON IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

HE WASN’T PETER, PAUL OR EVEN TIMOTHY OR SILAS IN THE NEW.

HE WAS SIMPLY A MAN WHO “WALKED WITH GOD” & “PLEASED GOD.”

A MAN DOESN’T HAVE TO BE LISTED IN A NATIONAL “WHO’S WHO” TO BE A GOOD DAD.

NONE OF US HAS TO GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS A PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD.

IT’S SIMPLY A MATTER OF MAKING A COMMITMENT TO WALK WITH GOD THAT ENABLES US TO TOUCH LIVES IN A PROFOUND FASHION.

THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF THINGS THAT BECKON TO US – THAT APPEAL TO US – THAT INTEREST US.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO KNOWING & COMMITTING OURSELVES TO “WHAT MATTERS MOST.”

THE STORY WITHIN THE STORY IN “FIELD OF DREAMS” THAT RELATES TO ENOCH’S STORY IS THE STORY OF ARCHIBALD “MOONLIGHT” GRAHAM.

IF YOU REMEMBER THE MOVIE, MOONLIGHT GRAHAM WAS THE BASEBALL PLAYER WHO ONLY PLAYED IN ONE GAME IN HIS ENTIRE CAREER.

HE PLAYED ONE INNING IN THE FIELD, NEVER BATTED & WAS IMMEDIATELY SENT TO THE MINORS AFTER PLAYING ONE INNING IN RIGHT FIELD.

THROUGH THE MAGIC OF THE MOVIE, RAY KINSELLA & TERENCE MANN ENCOUNTER MOONLIGHT GRAHAM, FIRST AS AN OLDER DOCTOR IN CHISHOLM, MINNESOTA AND THEN AS A YOUNG BASEBALL PLAYER WHO’S HITCHING A RIDE TO FIND A PLACE TO PLAY BALL.

IF THAT DOESN’T SEEM TO MAKE SENSE, IT’S NOT SUPPOSED TO. IT’S ALL FABRICATED.

WE ALL KNOW SOME OF THE MORE FAMILIAR LINES OF THE MOVIE –

“IF YOU BUILD IT, HE WILL COME,”

“GO THE DISTANCE,”

***“EASE HIS PAIN,”* ALL OF THEM UTTERED BY “THE VOICE” THAT RAY KINSELLA HEARS SPEAKING TO HIM.**

AND THEN THERE’S THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN SHOELESS JOE JACKSON & RAY WHEN JACKSON ASKS, *“IS THIS HEAVEN?”* AND RAY CHUCKLES AND SAYS, *“NO...IT’S IOWA.”*

BUT TO ME, THE MOST COMPELLING LINE IS DELIVERED BY THE OLDER GRAHAM – NO LONGER “MOONLIGHT” GRAHAM THE BASEBALL PLAYER, BUT DOC GRAHAM, THE TOWN’S PHYSICIAN.

RAY IS TRYING TO CONVINCING DOC GRAHAM TO COME BACK TO THE FIELD OF DREAMS WITH HIM AND SAYS, “50 YEARS AGO FOR 5 MINUTES, YOU CAME THIS CLOSE. I MEAN IT WOULD KILL SOME MEN TO GET THAT CLOSE TO THEIR DREAM & NOT TOUCH IT. THEY’D CONSIDER IT A TRAGEDY!”

TO WHICH DOC GRAHAM RESPONDS – “SON, IF I’D ONLY GOTTEN TO BE A DOCTOR FOR 5 MINUTES – NOW THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A TRAGEDY.”

NOW, IF THAT LINE SEEMS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE – IF THE ENTIRE CHARACTER OF DOC GRAHAM CREATED IN THE MOVIE SEEMS TO BE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE – WE NEED TO REMEMBER HOW SILLY & CONTRIVED & MAKE BELIEVE THE WHOLE THING IS.

BUT GUESS WHAT?

THE ONE PART OF THE MOVIE THAT’S REAL – THE ONE PART THAT *ISN’T* MAKE BELIEVE – THE ONE PART WHERE VIRTUALLY EVERY WORD OF IT IS TRUE – IS THE CHARACTER OF “MOONLIGHT” GRAHAM.

IN FACT, “FIELD OF DREAMS” ISN’T ABOUT RAY KINSELLA.

IT ISN’T ABOUT SHOELESS JOE JACKSON.

IT ISN’T EVEN REALLY ABOUT WHAT SEEMS TO BE A GREAT EMOTIONAL FATHER-SON REUNION.

IT’S REALLY ABOUT A MAN WHO “WALKED WITH GOD” – A MAN WHO “PLEASED GOD” – A MAN WHO HAD DISCOVERED “WHAT MATTERS MOST” – AND THAT’S ARCHIBALD “MOONLIGHT” GRAHAM.

W. P. KINSELLA – THE WRITER OF THE NOVEL – STUMBLED UPON THE FASCINATING NAME OF “MOONLIGHT” GRAHAM WHILE LOOKING THROUGH A BASEBALL ENCYCLOPEDIA.

WHEN HE DISCOVERED THE FACT THAT HE HAD ONLY PLAYED IN ONE GAME – TWO INNINGS (NOT ONE AS WE’RE TOLD IN THE MOVIE) - AND NEVER HAD AN AT-BAT IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES, HE DECIDED TO TRACK HIM DOWN.

WHAT HE DISCOVERED WAS A STORY THAT WAS MORE COMPELLING THAN ANY MOVIE.

THE REAL ARCHIE GRAHAM WAS BENCHED BY THE FAMOUS MANAGER OF THE NEW YORK GIANTS, JOHN McGRAW, BECAUSE McGRAW THOUGHT GRAHAM WAS SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME ON MEDICAL SCHOOL & NOT ENOUGH ON BASEBALL.

THE REAL ARCHIE GRAHAM REALLY DID MOVE TO CHISHOLM, MINNESOTA AFTER READING AN AD IN A NEWSPAPER ASKING FOR A TOWN PHYSICIAN.

HE ARRIVED SHORTLY AFTER CHISHOLM HAD BEEN VIRTUALLY DESTROYED BY A FIRE THAT SWEEPED THROUGH THE ENTIRE TOWN.

ANY NORMAL PERSON WOULD HAVE MADE A HASTY GETAWAY AS HE LOOKED AROUND AT BURNED-OUT BUSINESSES, DILAPIDATED HOMES & CRUMBLING BUILDINGS – AN ENTIRE TOWN ON THE VERGE OF EXTINCTION.

BUT NOT ARCHIBALD GRAHAM.

HE WENT STRAIGHT TO THAT MAKESHIFT DOCTOR’S OFFICE THAT HAD PLACE THE AD & SAID, “I’M YOUR NEW DOCTOR” AND THERE HE STAYED FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS, BECOMING THE MOST BELOVED CITIZEN OF CHISHOLM, MINNESOTA.

HE PLAYED SEMI-PRO BALL IN CHISHOLM AND WAS OFFERED A CONTRACT BY THE BOSTON RED SOX.

HE TURNED IT DOWN BECAUSE HE HAD COMMITTED HIS LIFE TO THE PEOPLE OF CHISHOLM.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS, HE MADE A PROPOSAL TO THE SCHOOL BOARD THAT THEY HIRE HIM AS THE PUBLIC SCHOOL DOCTOR & FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS, DOC GRAHAM CARED FOR EVERY CHILD IN CHISHOLM.

HE INSTITUTED DENTAL HYGIENE PROGRAMS, HE INOCULATED EVERY CHILD AGAINST DISEASES THAT HAD BEEN TAKING LIVES & VISITED EVERY SICK CHILD IN THEIR HOME & NEVER CHARGED FOR HIS SERVICES.

ONE MAN IN CHISHOLM REMEMBERED A TIME WHEN, AS A CHILD, HE NEEDED GLASSES.

DOC GRAHAM CAME TO SEE HIM, GAVE HIM AN EXAM & TOLD HIS FATHER HE'D ORDER GLASSES FOR HIM.

WHEN HIS DAD SAID HE COULDN'T AFFORD THEM, DOC GRAHAM TOLD HIM NOT TO WORRY – HE'D PAY FOR THEM HIMSELF.

THE DOCTOR THEN LOOKED AT THE BOY'S FATHER & ASKED HOW LONG IT HAD BEEN SINCE HE HAD NEW GLASSES HIMSELF & HE PROCEEDED TO ORDER GLASSES FOR HIM AS WELL – AT NO COST.

AT THE END OF THEIR TIME TOGETHER, DOC GRAHAM ASKED IF HE COULD TAKE THEM TO LUNCH.

THE EMBARRASSED FATHER SAID, “NO, YOU'VE ALREADY DONE TOO MUCH.”

DOC GRAHAM SAID, “NONSENSE. BESIDES, I DON'T LIKE TO EAT ALONE” AND HE TOOK THE MAN AND HIS SON TO A FANCY RESTAURANT.

YES, THE MOONLIGHT GRAHAM PORTRAYED IN “FIELD OF DREAMS” IS THE ONE PERFECTLY FACTUAL PART OF THE ENTIRE MOVIE!

THE REAL DOC GRAHAM’S WIFE WAS NAMED ALECIA – JUST LIKE HIS WIFE IN THE MOVIE.

THE REAL DOC GRAHAM ALWAYS CARRIED AN UMBRELLA – JUST LIKE IN THE MOVIE.

THE REAL DOC GRAHAM ALSO PUBLISHED GROUNDBREAKING WORK IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MAYO CLINIC REGARDING BLOOD PRESSURE IN CHILDREN – RESEARCH THAT WAS USED ALL OVER THE WORLD.

ARCHIE & ALECIA NEVER HAD CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN AND YET HE SERVED AS FATHER FIGURE TO EVERY CHILD IN CHISHOLM, MINNESOTA FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS.

ARCHIBALD “MOONLIGHT” GRAHAM WAS A MAN WHO KNEW WHAT IT MEANT TO “WALK WITH GOD.”

IN EVERY ASPECT OF HIS LIFE HE “PLEASED GOD.”

HE HAD LOOKED AT OTHER PATHS TO FOLLOW & HE DISCOVERED “WHAT MATTERS MOST.”

HE NEVER MADE IT IN BASEBALL.

HE’S LITTLE MORE THAN A FOOTNOTE IN THE ANNALS OF BASEBALL HISTORY.

AND IF HE HADN’T HAD A NICKNAME AS FASCINATING AS “MOONLIGHT,” THE WRITER W. P. KINSELLA NEVER WOULD HAVE NOTICED HIM & NONE OF US WOULD HAVE EVER HEARD OF HIM.

KNOWING ALL THAT YOU NOW KNOW, THERE’S A PARTICULARLY MOVING SCENE IN THE MOVIE THAT TAKES ON GREATER SIGNIFICANCE.

WHEN RAY'S DAUGHTER FALLS FROM THE BLEACHERS & ISN'T BREATHING, IT'S MOONLIGHT GRAHAM WHO STEPS OVER THE BASE LINE – EVEN THOUGH HE KNOWS HE CAN NEVER GO BACK – AND IS IMMEDIATELY TRANSFORMED FROM A TEEN-AGE BASEBALL PLAYER INTO AN AGING DOCTOR TO SAVE THE LITTLE GIRL'S LIFE.

HE DOES IT WITHOUT A MOMENT'S HESITATION – SOMETHING THE REAL DOC GRAHAM OF CHISHOLM, MINNESOTA WOULD SURELY HAVE DONE IF FACED WITH SUCH A DECISION.

HE WALKED WITH GOD & KNEW WHAT MATTERS MOST IN LIFE.

THERE'S ONE OTHER LITTLE FASCINATING “STORY WITHIN THE STORY” IN “FIELD OF DREAMS.”

FOLLOWING THAT SCENE, DOC GRAHAM – PLAYED BY BURT LANCASTER – WALKS SLOWLY TOWARD THE CORNFIELD.

DOC GRAHAM DISAPPEARS INTO THAT CORN.

IT WAS THE LAST MOVIE SCENE BURT LANCASTER FILMED BEFORE HIS DEATH – WALKING OFF INTO ETERNITY.

THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE ABOUT ENOCH ARE EVER SO BRIEF & YET THEY TELL US EVERYTHING WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT A TRULY REMARKABLE MAN.

HE CAN SERVE AS A ROLE MODEL FOR ALL FATHERS – AND ALL THE REST OF US AS WELL.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE RICH OR POWERFUL OR FAMOUS.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A CANDIDATE FOR “WHO'S WHO” OR A PILLAR OF THE COMMUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE.

YOU NEED ONLY – LIKE ENOCH – LIKE DOC GRAHAM – “WALK WITH GOD” AND BE CLEAR ABOUT “WHAT MATTERS MOST.”

**ONE FINAL ASTOUNDING “STORY WITHIN THE STORY”
REGARDING ARCHIBALD GRAHAM.**

**THE INSCRIPTION UNDER HIS NAME IN HIS HIGH SCHOOL
YEARBOOK READS – “*THE WORLD KNOWS NOTHING OF ITS GREATEST
MEN.*”**

**YOU CAN BE ONE OF THOSE “GREATEST” MEN (OR WOMEN) AS
YOU SIMPLY – YET COMPLETELY “WALK WITH GOD,” KNOWING
“WHAT MATTERS MOST” IN LIFE. AMEN.**

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