

The Story Behind by Rob Swanson

Teddy Roosevelt really wasn't a very good president, or so he would say. Oddly, though, it was through his very "weakness" as the country's leader that he performed his greatest service to America.

You could blame his childhood, I suppose. Teddy was a sickly child, missing more days of school than he attended. Horrible asthma and a bum ticker put an otherwise unruly child into bed rather than on a playground. His mother called him a "turtle" and everyone else, "Teedie"; an inauspicious beginning for the 20th Century's greatest visionary.

What he lacked in childhood was quickly made up for in early adulthood. Nitro for his heart and the asthma outgrown, Teddy – a brilliant man – became a supremely physical man, taking up wrestling and street fighting. What better place for such a man than the Army? To no one's surprise, he shot up through the ranks by taking on near-suicidal tasks, culminating in the Rough Rider's charge up San Juan Hill.

Now a war-hero, and blessed with manic energy, he was carried bodily into the gubernatorial seat of New York, where in customary fashion he began sweeping up crime (sometimes with just himself and his own knuckles). He was so good at it that he threatened the corrupt party officials of the Big Apple, so they arranged a promotion to President McKinley's VP. A bullet later, he became the Chief Executive himself.

He wasn't dubbed "The Maniac President" for nothing. For such a vibrant man, the Presidency was little more than a prison. While he got more completed than any three presidents at a time, being trapped in the White House – despite daily walks and nude swims across the Potomac – was more than he could bear. So he left a lot. In a time where communication was... primitive, he didn't escape to Europe or the known South, but the uncharted realms of the West.

Between starting an illegal war in Columbia and the construction of the Panama Canal, Teddy would board a train, and then a horse, and then on-foot to explore some of God's most creative efforts. It was there, in unspoiled parts of California, and north in what would soon be called Yellowstone, that the Maniac President found rest.

In running away from his office, Teddy discovered the wilderness of America. And gifted with far reaching vision, he realized that the world was going to become as manic as he was and would need places of peace.

It wasn't the Anti-Trust legislation, the sweeping reforms, or the Panama Canal that earned him a place on Mt. Rushmore (nor was it the fact that he funded much of the work); it was the millions of acres he set aside as National Parks and Monuments – it was the preservation of our heritage – that assured him immortality in granite.

Having stood at the Upper Falls of Yellowstone and being changed, I offer thanks to old Turtle-backed Teedie. And so should you.