

Are we Victims of Retirement, or, Victorious VIP's in Retirement?

I have no embedded memory of ever fretting about the unavoidable retirement day, my own essentially, the precise date of which was listed in the diary as merely another occurrence which I had to subserviently address at a specific point-in-time, over the course of another working year, and in keeping with all other entries contained within my crammed chronicle of things to do, and 'things' to quite possibly, not do!

One's scheduled, enforced withdrawal from the employment arena was not an optional inducement; it didn't allow for personal preference, nor for my natural instincts to unflappably kick-in to swiftly ascertain the best set of circumstances available to me on a given day, thus; 'would I attend, or, would I choose, not to attend?'

My soon-to-be rendezvous with impending retirement could not be masked, obliterated or covered-up with a thick, inky black-line of rejection running through it. I had a blind date with destiny, one that I would irreversibly honour, and ultimately come to venerate with gleeful endorsement- and near-erotic delectation. AKA, having a blast during the years of one's irreversible dotage!

Now, let me be clear, I did not harbour an inkling as to how I intended to profitably exhaust the remnants of later-life accreditation, the leather-bound almanac which previously controlled my professional and military actuality, had, for several months, heralded the irrevocable release date, alas, it was not accompanied with an inventory of instructions, nor that of an indispensable *aide-memoire* on how to adequately survive life in a retiree world of which I knew nothing.

Hitherto, I had no issues with age, or that of the ageing process as a whole, physically, financially and socially too, I was, and remain so, a pretty secure and satisfied individual, semi-comfortable in the knowledge that I indeed shall, one unfortunate day, ferry myself towards the shores of Valhalla, but be cheerily unburdened and wholly bereft of the weighty baggage of near-posthumous remorse, and/or that of un-man-like regret to screw-up the concluding chapter of an otherwise, stable and rewarding prolongation on Mother Earth.

Once emancipated from the shackles of employment stipulation and punitive rigour, someone abruptly and entirely unexpectedly, came along and placed me in the loathsome league of elderly gentleman – I shuddered at this galling assertion, up until this deplorable instant, one had obliviously and unhurriedly been paddling towards a far-distant ‘Avalon’, without a care in the world, yet, within a fraction of a second, my peace of mind and inherent equanimity was mercilessly shattered.

On taking receipt of this unpleasant, newly acquired and loathsome 'status', I endured the inner psychotic symptoms which are comparable to that of a fretful passenger on-board a doomed nautical craft, shortly after being informed that the ship was going 'down', and that no life-jacket provision had been made for me. Age would harshly, and all too soon, consign me to the freezing, (or fiery) depths of mortal insignificance, in a contemporary, societal sense.

The cretinous culprit who innocuously accused' me of, "having-seen-better-days", was but a slip of a lad; one of no more than twenty-summers tucked under his loose, 'Tommy Hilfiger' T-shirt and flesh-clinging, tight-fitting, garishly yellow Chinos. They were of the same sartorial 'elegance' which people in Germany used to comically refer to as, '*Dickenhammockers*'. They may still do, who knows?

In truth, when I originally caught sight of him on the main street of town, along with his all-too prominent, bureaucratic clipboard, and that of the exhibitionist contours of his near-suffocating manhood, I defiantly strove to give him a wide berth. Failed!

For me, to be stopped in a bustling thoroughfare, in whatever urban metropolis, and then quizzed on one's political views by a misinformed, wet-behind-the-ears, left-leaning, prodigy of Trotsky, Lenin, Marx, Mao Zedong, with a bit of Ho Chi Minh thrown in for added radical spice, this is not an amusing interlude to excruciatingly experience, nor that of being

ruthlessly charged with the heinous crime of achieving a healthy, much-deserved longevity!

I would vigorously contest that the act of murder, when faced with personal assaults on this Herculean scale, should not be [obtusely] judged as a Capital Offence under such callous, intimidating circumstances; it must be irrefutably condoned, and for the senior victim, or victims of such a malevolent, verbal berating, to be found, 'Not Guilty', in one's humble, antiquated, somewhat jaundiced opinion, of course.

Nonetheless, in the interests of common decency and mature politeness, I grudgingly agreed to answer ten questions, thus adding my opinions to a Communist Party UK census, one in place to gauge the current political mood of the great British public. We made it to question two! His date of birth query, and the 'cheeky', misplaced remark which sprang when establishing my age, brought to an abrupt end, our short-lived and mildly patronizing association.

For some inexplicable reason, my out-of-character riposte was bemusing, I momentarily considered myself to be a victim, a victim of false assumption, a victim of intolerance, a victim of ageism. Furthermore, I was a trifle shell-shocked that this near-adolescent, socialist inquisitor, saw fit to don clothing merchandise that was, irrefutably, a cotton/denim endorsement of 'brand name', capitalist manipulation? The mind boggled at his politically incorrect, garment contradiction.

Should I have possessed, at that irritating moment, the surreal capacity to perform a quantum leap into the past, and thus restored to an era when I was a young man of around his age, there is little doubt that my attitude towards the 'old and bold' members of society who belonged to that unique epoch, would have unambiguously mirrored his indifferent thoughts on human antiquity, and of those cloistered in the global, richly seasoned, retirement cluster.

It is entirely feasible that the 'blame' for senior citizen intolerance, or pubescent misunderstanding of advanced age, lies not solely with the younger generation, but that of us. We are members of a massive, worldwide regiment of disgruntled, obstinate and ever-moaning retirees. In real-time, however, what exactly the majority of us have to grumble about, modern-day, in effect, represents the square root of absolutely nothing!

Let's look at the big picture and place under the observation bowl, exactly who we are, who we think we are, and what we have become. For those who have not undergone the unimaginable dreadfulness and hellish misfortune of personal hardship, economically or otherwise, nor had their mobility, physically or psychologically impaired through illness or injury, it is pragmatically safe to say, that more than a few of us, have never had it so good, and for several reasons.

We can, despite these turbulent, testing circumstances, choose to drain our respective pensions on the finer joys of life, if we so wish, (Covid rules permitting). Or, we can contentedly stultify on a favoured piece of wicker furniture, within the confines of the conservatory, perhaps, and listen to the birds chirping-away in our verdant, embroidered back gardens, and that of the welcome rustling of our gilt-edged assets.

It's not the most positive advertisement for post-employment prosperity, hey ho, no matter if we opt to languish in front of the PC or television each day, (and night) or engage in healthier lifestyle options, we are reassured that human actuality is being significantly extended, all thanks to the phenomenal advances of modern, medical science.

Vast legions of retirees, particularly those comfortably perched in the middle-class spectrum, can and do attend their state-of-the-art gyms, play regularly on resplendent golf courses, and ardently swing their synthetic, gut-stringed, tennis racquets at whatever illustrious club they decide to enroll.

Yippee, lifelong prudence reaps its own rewards, but, *boo-hoo*, personal dissatisfaction continues to reign supreme across the international retiree topography. It may be that no amount of long-term, social or domestic pastimes have quelled the onset of retirement blues, and the list is long, ergo: Ball games, Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi, Callanetics, crochet, stamp-collecting, bee-keeping, gardening, theological subservience, children,

grandchildren, step-children, step-grandchildren, lovers, clandestine mistresses, restaurant visitations, anti-depressants, copious quantities of Viagra and female enhancing libido aids, the catalogue of 'extra-mural' distractions could go on forever, but we retirees, sure as hell, will not!

If these occasionally brief, but well-intentioned distractions fail to hit our respective, sapient G-spots', retirement shall become an ever-growing malady that will incontestably affect more people than that of the global virus. Should the ubiquitous missives of misery be anything to go by, it's a racing certainty that we will continue to take looming or current retirement, somewhat badly, or worse!

Some ground for happiness exists, however. As we gradually emerge from the crippling devastation of the 'virus', and with the retail industry, *et al*, embarking on the relentless pursuit of recouping revenue lost over the last 18 months of pandemic purgatory, this allows for a more cheering disposition to radiate from the faces of dismayed retirees, those, amongst others, who perpetually reach out to 'Mother' figures or 'Agony Aunt's on retirement websites, each stressing that they are at the clotted edge of irreplaceable loss as they don't have a job anymore.

Better days to come, folks, summer and winter holiday brochures for 2022 can now be enthusiastically scanned with salivating positivity. We can also shop once more and visit the many gaudy boutiques and national chain stores of pre-infection days, and inexhaustibly strive to enhance our

neglected wardrobes, in the hope that we avoid calamitous, dressy malfunction errors from the hasty choices we may [irrationally] decide to make. Well, it's been so long, after all, judgmental issues could be a problem.

The same can be said for other items or services which may instill a feel-good factor: jewellery, perchance a new watch or equally, some sparkling earrings, or a long-awaited jaunt to the hairdresser or, hairstylist, all of which may just do the restorative trick.

A longer look in the post-Covid mirror will suggest to some, that their once attractive facial radiance, requires a little, surgical attention, a more costly undertaking to arrest and firm-up the entrenched creases and folds which are, in squatter-like phraseology, unwelcomingly resident on respective chins, necks and eyes. Nothing to do with Covid, however, Mother Nature holds the cards here. But these facial imperfections undermine further the flagging spirits of those who view themselves to be in dire straits, as they stand, or sit, or lay, confusingly locked deep within a retirement abyss or catacomb of incredulity and individual dissatisfaction.

Hey ho, (once again), a few pricks with a Botox-laden syringe, could, or maybe could, conceivably reverse the fleshy horrors that the mirror pitilessly reflects each morning. Buyer beware alert here, time to consider the disfiguring consequences of ultimately appearing as a very aged-looking, ten-year-old child.

How times have changed. When I was but a slip of a lad, numerous neighbourhood women used to pile on the foundation cream and extravagantly apply perfumed powder to their, [perceived] flagging features, from hairline to larynx. To stay further connected with feminine youthfulness and Aphrodite-like appeal, they would stringently pull their hair back tightly and wrap it in a small coil, affixed to the centre rear of their womanly craniums.

As kids, we referred to this customary means of Saturday night, 'mane' adjustment, as 'The Caledonian Facelift': Cheap as chips to perfect, very little effort involved, and it met with the desired, skin-straightening objective, that being, a rigid, death-mask-like appearance, with each lady hopelessly incapable of laughing or smiling, and eventually emanating the skin pallor of a seriously smacked backside.

I recall my mother regularly uttering a comment about a female neighbour in our Edinburgh locality, a fastidious lady who was well into her fifties, but going on twenty-five in her own mind, no bad thing, let us be frank. *"That woman has so much foundation on her face, you could build a house on top of it,"* she cuttingly whispered to her giggling brood.

It's rather odd, just by re-telling this simple tale, it makes me realise that everyone was considerably happier during that Scottish, Spartan era of mine. Happier, I believe, than most folks today, no matter age, employment category, monetary income or retirement status, they each possessed

significantly less than that of their 21st-century counterparts, but, they had, in massive quantity, so much more, irrespective of their frugal existences as Edinburgh tenement dwellers during the 1950s and 60s. Oh well, it's time now to return to the plight of mainstream, contemporary folk, just like me, and you.

Other in-town, retiree activities to consider, present time, could include shopping excursions for pandemic-blighted, estranged offspring, and that of their infant or adolescent descendants, ergo, the grandchildren. This form of retail adventure is never a straightforward task, and may even heighten melancholic, retirement desolation. Any fiscal outlay spent a child over the age of ten these days, brings its own woes, best eased by partaking in a midday glass of Beaujolais, *per se*, or maybe three.

The more you dwell on your choice of gift for fast-developing, worldly children, the more it becomes crudely evident that we have moved on from Lego sets and plastic effigies of Ken and Barbie, *"Oh hell, just pass me the bottle, waiter, and when you are at it, kindly explain, very slowly please, what is the precise function of an, '1TB, Canvio Portable External Hard Drive for Gamers. USB 3.0, HDTB410EK3AA!?"*

Should anyone fail to unravel the X-factor mysteries and complexities of computer technology during a liquid lunch, one thing is assured. When staring down the empty glass flagon in telescopic fashion, the one that earlier contained a 0.75L quantity of 15% Vol, French vino, a hint of a smile

may develop, and, before too long, this unfamiliar upward curve, located just south of your cheeks and nostrils, could evolve into lengthy intervals of unbridled, inexplicable laughter. This is, without question, the best facelift one could ever wish to experience.

But alcohol is a short-term solution, taken in sufficient quantity, it can and does bring about the effects of drunkenness, (Apologies to Oscar Wilde). With it comes an interruption to normal, rational, brain activity, replete with a morning-after hangover, a cerebral indicator of excess which errs in promoting even a modicum of laughter in us all, in any shape or form.

Not recommended on a regular basis, therefore! If I should presuppose that the afore-mentioned proposals are not deemed to be beneficial or practical solutions in the hearts and minds of the 'victims' of retirement woe, what other alternatives are up for consideration? Well, not too many in all honesty.

The famed Scottish bard, namely; Robert Burns, once scribed, "*Oh, would some Power give us the gift, to see ourselves as others see us!*"

It is this classic extract from poetic literature that may have more significance than any word or phrase that I could possibly hope to compose or manufacture, in respect of this critical topic, writer or not, I continually genuflect in rightful, honourable respect of all virtuoso wordsmiths, Burns is no exception.

If we are not prepared to help ourselves and seek out the route to happier days during our retirement years, what will become of us, and indeed, how will others ultimately come to see us? For most, the problem is largely attitudinal. Nevertheless, as time moves on and we become more entrenched in erroneous negativity about the world, and its social/professional rejection of us, we have to face up to the incontestable verity; that we have become old, and someone younger has fittingly taken over. It's all connected to the natural order of life.

So, what are we going to do? Are our attitudinal issues going to develop into a permanent, psychotic 'condition', or do we re-write the 'conditions' relating to our retirement years and begin to once again live?. Are we to be eventually viewed by those near and dear, as archaic, disposable people who are living staggeringly useless lives? Are we becoming more and more mean-spirited as bigoted beasts of burden, living in a home that someone else could change in a flash, not simply with bright décor, but with effervescence, gusto, spark and meaning?

Are we now programmed to just exist in antiquity? Will we forget to revel in the splendour of life, just waiting to die? Do we expect to spend our last days in an out-of-the-way hospital or nursing home environment, and be categorized as anonymous bed-blockers, one of many whom no longer has any association with the real world? "*Been the same since he/she retired a few years back*" being a common mantra, shortly before the Grim Reaper eventually removes our incapacitated, skeletal frame from an environment

that could have delivered so much more, if we had seized on the opportunity to clutch at it.

We are not victims; we are victorious combatants from another age, our retirement years are our victory parade, not a funeral cortege, age is but a number, best linked to fine wine and mature cheeses. We are neither of these commodities, but let us live to enjoy them, and all other rewards of a life lived, and truly lived by those retirees who insatiably desire it.

In summary, this intimate and cordial retiree analysis of mine, may fall well-short of securing a positive, long-term effect in the respective psyche's of the ROL readership, it matters not a jot to me, on the other hand, should it prompt even a nano-second of smiling elation, my literary goal today has been conclusively achieved.

Keep smiling do.

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