

Age from Folly By Dorian Dale

One piece I wrote for a column when I was the editor-in-chief of my high school newspaper was entitled 'Age from Folly' could not deliver me, nod to the original Bard. In his feathered, measured voice an elderly teacher assured me I would see things his way when I was his age. The well-worn conservative mantra, 'If you're not a liberal when you're 25, you have no heart. If you're not a conservative by the time you're 35, you have no brain,' falsely attributed to Churchill.

He went by René, though scuttlebutt had his actual name as Joe. When "Walk Away Renée" hit the charts, it would be blasted from dorm windows whenever René was spied walking across the quad. He was a very systematic French teacher, instructing in units such as cathedrals, castles, and Paris, all illustrated with posters and his own professional-caliber photography. We read Camus' 'The Stranger' in the French original, *L'Étranger*.

But René had the bad habit of using the classroom, as well as the chapel, as a bully pulpit for his right-wing ideology. When the Naval spy ship, the USS Pueblo, violated North Korean territorial waters and was captured, René proposed bombing half their cities to force its release, and if the North Koreans remained resistant, bomb the other half. His solution for the 'China problem' was equally brutal: pre-emptively decimate every man, woman, and child! {Over 50yrs later this call to annihilation was eerily echoed by the Capitol insurrectionists: "Why don't we just kill them? Every last Democrat, down to the last man, woman, and child?"}

The 'Age from Folly' column never cited René by name. It didn't have to. Everyone knew. Including the headmaster who was obliged to call me on the carpet, along with the paper's faculty advisor. It resembled the famous scene in Casablanca: "Major Strasser has been shot! Round up the usual suspects!" It was the first of many affirmations of speaking truth to power. In fact, it became something of a badge of honor for me over time. I've been expected and respected for it, though not always heeded.

Bold & ballsy I was early on. As an only child, usually the only child in a room full of adults, I had a formula for asserting equality. Part entertaining; part precocious. Both drawing from a deep reservoir of self-delusion, aka self-confidence or, its latest iteration, 'mindfulness.' A portion springs from the pretend world we inhabit as children, some from what-the-hell, nothing ventured/nothing gained.

When my father suffered a career-ending stroke at the end of freshman year in college, I came up with a half-cocked scheme for retaining his IBM consultancy. I set up a meet with him at the Armonk executive offices, explaining that while my father's playback might now be defective, he retained the CPU enabling him to type out his advice. To their credit, they didn't challenge this contrivance. Rather, owing to old school decency and respect for my father, they continued to pay his basic stipend for the next five years. While I can't take credit for this result, my Quixotic quest conceivably engendered sympathy. Something ventured. something gained.

There was nothing and no one I felt I couldn't take on. That comes with a qualification: I've always been a qualified hedonist. If I couldn't accommodate myself to something, however meaningful or menial as circumstances dictated, I'd cut & run. I sensed early on that life is too short, our time here finite.

My predominant influence was borne of a Manichean upbringing. Picture Stalin marrying the Dalai Lama. I had two very instructive role models: one the way you'd wish to live your life; the other the way you definitely would not. For my father, the glass was always half full; for my mother, not only was it half empty, she demanded to know who drank the other half! My father's strength in face of adversity was communicable; my mother's fixations for ferocity, theatrics, seduction, and manipulation consuming.

In effect, my core characteristics were mostly locked & loaded before my college days, even as the crucible of those four years further forged my persona. The twenty-something me keeps informing the aging me. It's really all been a matter of staying the course, with indicated course corrections along the way.

Age from the folly of this Age has not delivered me. Noting that young fools, in most cases, have aged to be old fools. We are surrounded by millions of adults in appearance who act out like juvenile delinquents. As a certified paranoid schizophrenic, my mother might have been shocked into normalcy had she stuck around to see the vast multitude that manifest paranoid ideation. She loathed conformity.

While I was going to grad school, I had a boss who clearly appreciated my rebellious individuality, as he probably saw himself in me. I went to visit him in hospice 15yrs ago, and he paid me a high compliment: "Durian, Durian, you were always a stand-up guy." As I won't have a gravestone, I'll have that added to my cremation and smoke it.

