

* Bright College Years *

For most of us, life turns out to be an anthology of little, slightly larger and long stories. These are the stories that define us. This story started out as a Christmas Carol, my annual revelations of the past year (2015), to my family and friends.

Long letters, as this once was, are special stories that tell us about our kids, their accomplishments during the year, where the family vacationed, how great it was, our continuing happiness, our health, on occasion a relative's health, a picture of a grandchild (with his first teeth, maybe), from where he is graduating, reminding us who we once were or who we were becoming. With heartfelt wishes.

Last Christmas I found myself thinking it would be indecorous (not to mention boring) to write such a letter. Like in, "Don't ask and I won't tell." Instead, I will tell you how, when I was just a pup, I acquired the wisdom, not to mention the recognition, it probably took you a lifetime to acquire.

Decades before my appointed time, the wisdom that characterizes you now, radiated from me then. My knowledge was acknowledged. My Insights were on the lips of the cognoscenti. As might be expected empathy emanated from me. Many sought my counsel. I was the spiritual advisor to a lotta people. These things happened to me more than 50 years ago. Undoubtedly, before such things probably happened to you.

I kid you not.

I was recognized throughout the country as a revivifying, much sought after gerontologist. Surely, you remember. But if you do not, I swear to you this story is true. Cross my heart.

Gerontologist, one who specializes in gerontology (from the Greek – geron, "old man" and logia, "study of"--) coined by Ilya Ilyich Mechnikov in 1903. The study of the social, psychological, cognitive, and biological aspects of aging.

I have recently fallen from the throne I once occupied. However, and let's get this straight, I was once recognized as gifted, a verifiable master. Not unlike Ben Carson is to brain surgery or Freud to understanding human behavior. To contemporaries of your age now, I was to these old souls then. I enthralled my followers dispensing my discernments, guidance, counsel and help to those in need.

Each week literally hundreds sought my opinion in letters they wrote to me. Some weeks there were fewer letters if my advice the week before was weak or unsatisfying. Not infrequently responses told me that I had to change something.

My words were also sought by clergymen, social workers, psychologists. My gentle guidance was shared with loved ones. I was appreciated. I was (let's be honest here) one of the Illuminati.

My story is not unlike a tale by O. Henry whose recountings never end quite the way you thought they would. I became wise in the matter of how to grow old and live a happy, healthy, life of substance (how can this be said not unbecomingly) in old age. None of this twilight or sunset years or winter of our lives stuff. Senior citizen gets the point across.

My story begins in 1959. I was 21. I doubt that you were as misguided as I was, but life is the way it is. Maybe you were too.

In those days I had yet to hear "Time's winged chariot hurrying near" so maybe this reverie began to unfold when I only thought I heard it. (Or perhaps I heard something else. Hard to tell.) It wasn't until I was 22 when - as if by anointment, as if by Shazzam!!! - I was awakened from the slumber of my persevering ignorance.

I radiated serenity. I had been ordained. My skin glowed. Were you nearby, you would have sensed my allure as irresistible. It is as if those I knew suddenly realized that I had been, how shall I put it, consecrated.

You really should have been there.

The recognition and fame, of which you may have been unaware, transformed me. I was suffused. With insights, understanding, tranquility and, let's forget, wisdom. My cup was full. I knew this. Others knew this. I was no less inspired than, let's say Marco Rubio once was and, in a good way, not unlike the remarkable qualities of Donald Trump.

Trump does have some remarkable qualities, you know. Like his mastery of ad hominem demagoguery, his wicked inventiveness, his wickedness, his relentless narcissism, his ability to make everything illuminate and then shroud his ignorance. (At least so far.) His conviction that his pronouncements make whatever he says true. And if that doesn't work, repetition validates it and makes it real.

Although, taking a pause from immigration until screening procedures become infallible sounds needfully practical. With all due respect, of course, to the Constitution. He does seem to me to deserve the fate of the canary one sends down a mineshaft to test for poisonous fumes.

Life was great. It gleamed. It glittered. I had the assurance of my remarkable understanding of exactly how life could be made even better. Looking back, it was the time of my life.

Today, the average life expectancy of U. S. males is 79. I don't know about you, but arriving at 79 is a goal I have in sight.

Recall that the Bronze Age ended about the time of the Trojan War when life expectancy was 26 years. In Classical Greece and Classical Rome life expectancy averaged 26 to 28 years. Mind you, those are averages. Plutarch lived until he was 75. Plato bought the farm at 80. Those who survived a Roman childhood of 10 years might expect another 30 to 40 years. Caesar died (well, was assassinated) at age 54.

I had just graduated Yale. I was on my way to the Harvard Business School (HBS). The Dean and I first met a few months after my arrival. I was grateful beyond expression that he restrained himself and did not exercise his prerogative to expel me. Another Dean might not have been so indulgent.

I flunked several of my first term exams.

At Harvard you are not permitted to fail; and then proceed to the next level of accomplishment as an inner city child would be allowed. I expected to do (and was expected to expect to score) a lot better. There was unarguable proof that I was performing, but strikingly below the standards I set for myself and the school set for me. It occurred to me in the fall of 1959 that my career as a business school graduate might be finished before it had begun.

The Dean offered to exchange immediate expulsion for unnegotiable probation. By May 1960, had I not seriously improved my academic performance (subject to the Dean's unarticulated assessment of what he emphasized had to be my "serious improvement") I was on my way out.

Did the Dean know I considered myself (quietly and unarguably) destined for business success? Although the Dean had probably not yet figured out that I was oblivious to the size, shape, amount, meaning, likelihood or durability of success. I could not for the life of me define what success was. Then.

Part of it was making a lot of money, but that could not have been all there was. Was that all that there was? Money?

Remember Peggy Lee and her realizations in her unforgettable rendition of Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller's adaptation of a Thomas Mann short story? Or did her disillusionment come from her previous four failed marriages? How did she come to this conclusion? Was it uniquely her observation? Obviously not. I asked myself this question too. A lot.

On my first day at the Harvard Business School, the school paper announced that I had, only the week before, cornered the Mexican jumping bean market. The largest jumping bean market in the world! The entire world.

My classmates gave me spontaneous applause at dinner that evening. I was illustrious. You are not encouraged to consider how ludicrous it was to contemplate the Mexican jumping bean market, much less to have cornered it. In those days my accomplishment generated admiration – if not astonishment – and, applause which reverberated among those who were unaware of me. The affair was regarded as inspired, enterprising, a bit idiosyncratic (to be sure), but absolutely awesome for a 21 year old. As the St. Louis Post Dispatch reporter revealed in his Labor Day story about me, I was not even a business school graduate. Yet.

Certain adults seemed to think there was irony here. Who cornered a market before they understood what a market was? Others assessed me as raw and inexcusably unc cosmopolitan, but undeniably superior with my intuitive sense of business and mercantile triumph. As witnessed by what I had just done.

Incidentally, I believed this too.

My hardly contained enthusiasm lasted from September 1959 through January 1960, five full months. Later, at term's end, the Dean announced how unimpressed he was. As a graduate school student, your parents do not receive reports about your grades. I was the only one with whom the Dean communicated. I stood alone with what had suddenly become my reality. I had done the best I could. I learned my best was hardly sufficient.

The Day Before Labor Day 1959.

The St. Louis Post Dispatch reported my inspirational jumping bean story on the front page.

Labor Day 1959.

My story - and my picture - appeared in nearly every daily newspaper in the United States of America. How do I know? Because my father engaged a newspaper clipping service which supplied voluminous proof. 1,800 daily newspapers were being published in 1959. Without warning, I had experienced my 15 minutes of fame. I was not ready for it. My fame flashed by at a speed too fleetingly fast to either recognize or enjoy it.

Quickly fade to the Mexican pre drug lord days of poverty, pride and pelf such as you rarely see anymore. Imagine yourself in Nogales, Mexico. Where is that, you ask.

A Week Before Labor Day.

I was holed up in Nogales, Mexico in a flea bag hotel that cost zippos when compared with the hotel rates in Nogales, Arizona which was literally just a step over the Mexican – American

border. Nogales, Mexico was the miniature border community between Mexico and the US, where Mexican trains came to a complete stop. Mexican trains were/are not permitted to enter the US.

My endless supply of jumping beans was also not permitted to enter the United States. There was no customs code for such a product, commodity, toy, magic trick, agricultural pest or whatever US Customs thought it was. Therefore, my beans and I were detained until an official determination could be made. United States Customs regarded my treasure as if it were sand, sediment or silt. I thought I had just acquired The Treasure of the Sierra Madre.

I had ridden the rails from St. Louis, Missouri to Vera Cruz on the East Coast of Mexico to Paso del Macho in the Mexican North West; and then on to the Mexican/US border town of Nogales.

Three Days Before Labor Day.

Today the population of Nogales, Mexico is maybe 20,000. Then, it was an unmistakable fraction of 20,000. Not exactly bustling. St. Louis was a city of 1 million, where my beans and I were headed. I still lived in St. Louis and I had established there the headquarters of my inspired jumping bean business.

I employed whatever negotiating skills God had given me until I was granted permission from God knows who, located in God knows where to move the merchandise from one side of the border to the other. That took time. A week. Finally, I could transport legitimately my inventory from Nogales, Mexico to Nogales, Arizona.

Then the fun began.

In those days the Federal Customs Agent (in Washington, DC) responsible for jumping beans did not realize a critter in the early stages of gestation and metamorphosis resided in each bean. The critter bounces around inside its tiny apartment and causes the carpel (the proper name for the slice-like bean) to move, rock, roll, germinate and jump. The beans were lively enough to have become known as jumping beans.

The Day Before Labor Day.

In Nogales, Arizona the station master, who also managed the Railway Express Agency (REA) in the same diminutive railway station (on either side of the border), was excited about my cargo, which resided in ventilated 20 gallon drums on the back of his big REA truck. Lots and lots of ventilated drums. Gazillions of Mexican jumping beans.

Time out for a little background.

There really is a tiny creature inside each bean. Each bean looks like a tiny slice of a watermelon only brown instead of red. Each carpel is about as big as your smallest

digit's fingernail. The shell of a mature bean is hard, hard, hard when you first feel it, but soft, soft, soft when it begins its life cycle as fruit maturing on a branch. The creature inside the carpel, a tiny caterpillar-like thing, enters his temporary residence while the bean is still growing on a branch.

Once inside the bean, the critter metamorphoses into a butterfly that drills a perfectly cylindrical hole through its hard, hard, hard shell and emerges when it is ready to mate. Mating takes place on the bug's day of departure (nuptial flight) and the emergent butterfly (colloquially known as a moth) deposits its eggs into the soft, soft, soft underbelly of a new crop of beans. A bean jumps because that's what this species does - until sexual urges compel male and female to escape, express and release themselves through frenzied copulation.

The station master closed his railway station habitat (from which only two or three trains departed each week) and closed his Railway Express Agency because of his once-in-a-lifetime cargo, and personally drove me north 70 miles to the airport in Phoenix so I could begin my airborne journey to St. Louis. On the drive we talked only about jumping beans. I was rather proud of my expertise. I told him everything he wanted to know.

At the Phoenix airport during the night an unexpected event occurred. The airline cargo handlers – well known for their incorruptible probity - could not keep their hands off the beans. They stole a not insignificant number. The next morning I began to think like Jack of Beanstalk fame. There was something magic about my beans too. Others not only found them irresistible. Others could not keep their hands off them.

When the Dean announced my unnegotiable fate, his dictum resonated as familiar. I realized I was not the only member of my family to have faced a Harvard Dean.

The family story was that my uncle Sam had slept through his exams at the end of his senior year at Harvard and, accordingly, never graduated. Sometime in the 1920's. Upon reflection, I replaced that ridiculous explanation with the realization that my uncle had done some woefully unacceptable (read shameful) thing at the end of his final year at Harvard. What else would motivate an honors student to fail to collect his Harvard degree?

Quite obviously, Sam did not sleep through his exams. It would not be unreasonable to assume that failure was the family fate on either side of the bridge between the Business School and Harvard Square. The Dean's pronouncement reminded me that Sam's destiny would become mine if I did not shape up. Fast.

So, the very same guy who a few months before had appeared in practically every newspaper in the country with his picture, applauded for his business acumen, enterprise, enviable success, promise and predictable destiny was about to be recognized for his incontestable absence of promise, deserved humiliation, and inspiration to his classmates to let his failure not infect them.

Why was the story of my financial and mercantile conquest revealed on Labor Day in practically every newspaper in the United States? Good question.

The pilot of the DC 3 in which the beans and I travelled from Phoenix to St. Louis found the story of his unprecedented cargo – which had to be declared to American Airlines personnel for their cargo manifest as Mexican jumping beans – the pilot found the story “so delightful” that during the flight he announced over his intercom to all his passengers stories and jokes he made up about the beans. This is the kind of humor everyone from cargo handlers, to station masters, to ticket agents and now passengers found amusing. Lots of laughs. What kind of laughter was that? Think the end of the 50’s, Lucille Ball and *I Love Lucy*. Not unlike the laughter from a sitcom soundtrack. Canned laughter.

The pilot informed his passengers that the plane’s turbulent progress through the skies (remember this was not a jumbo jet, but a Douglas DC 3, the plane that revolutionized air transport in the 30s and 40s, not to mention being the workhorse of World War II) the plane’s turbulent behavior was the activity that excited my little beauties. In response, they had a jumping fest. The sudden drops in the plane’s altitude were caused by the beans leaping too high, then thudding down into the cargo hold which caused the plane to shiver and lose altitude. A particularly rough patch in the skies was made even worse because the beans were on board. The beans were overly stimulated and could not be calmed down. Humorous stuff. (Back in the 50’s, such claptrap was considered hilarious.)

The pilot bantered on throughout the flight which stopped every 100 miles or so in another city. By the time we arrived in Oklahoma City, ticket agents, cargo handlers, pilot, passengers, and baggage handlers (not to mention the Railway Express station master) had given me an idea.

From the airport I called my associates in St. Louis to tell them what was unexpectedly happening. My partners phoned the local newspaper, the St. Louis Post Dispatch. A reporter and photographer were sent to the airport to welcome me and my beans upon our arrival. The story would otherwise have been forgotten the day after it appeared. Really. Who cares about such a story? Except for this.

The Day Before Labor Day.

There used to be an unwritten rule in newspapering that there was scant news printed on Labor Day. Few newspaper reporters (except those who were young and therefore energetic and ambitious) few reporters worked diligently through this or any national holiday. It was the 50’s. Even reporters took time off. Under the concept of “relax,” “you only live once” and “you might as well enjoy yourself” even in high powered, prestigious jobs like newspapering. Even young reporters relaxed during holidays.

This is why the day before Labor Day the story and pictures of my conquest were not only published in St. Louis, but sent by facsimile from the Post Dispatch to the Associated Press and United Press International and then onto every newspaper in the country.

Every newspaper in the country.

Labor Day.

There was an unwritten rule of newspapering. Earth shaking news did not occur on Labor Day. Essentially all of the nation's newspapers published the Post Dispatch's (my) story.

The next week I entered HBS as the exemplar of an accomplished young man, destined for greatness and rightfully illustrious.

I certainly appeared to be.

Several Days Before Christmas. 1959.

On the day of my last exam of my first term at HBS, I exited the exam room and was walking down the corridor when I heard a racket coming from a different classroom. Each classroom was built for about 80 students.

In 1959 there were 600 students in the Business School. There were 599 men. There was one woman. Three years later there were eight women.

Today, there are 718 women. So, 1959 was a moment in time immediately before women's rights created a permanent sex change in the gender of chrysalitic business school graduate students. Now this information seems (or is) historic, wrinkled, aged, inappropriate, not the sort of thing we need to talk about.

But you might be interested in this - at the Harvard Club in New York, on West 45th Street - where I have actually been a member for more than 50 years - women were allowed in, of course, but had to enter through a separate entryway. An entryway exclusively for females.

Comingling was not allowed except as mandated. Women were allowed to enter the Club itself, of course, but were compelled to congregate in special, supervised, segregated rooms. There was a separate dining room for women accompanied by men. It was all very correct. Separate but equal. That system worked just fine.

In each HBS classroom students sat on semicircular, rising podia as if each classroom were half a Roman amphitheater. We would sit there waiting to be called to present a spot on (but no less than plausible) solution to the case we had analyzed the night before. It was a disturbing

experience for me. The secret to success at the B School then was to have been an engineering student, numerate, fluent in the language of numbers.

That cohort of successfuls did not include me. I was not numerate.

Having skipped the fourth grade and missed the fourth grade equivalent of Seal Team Six Math Boot Camp left me a 10 year old numerical castrato.

Why did I skip the fourth grade? I was considered an undeniably promising third grade student who did not live up to his potential because third grade was insufficiently stimulating. (Remember how uncontrollably excited you were about the third grade? I don't either.) Fourth grade, it turns out, is when one was taught heavy duty arithmetic exercises and begins to develop a feeling for numbers. Well, I never developed those feelings. Numbers became sort of like learning Latin. I never liked Latin although Latin resonates entirely favorably with me now. Go figure.

I was a big kid. In those days nobody messed with me. I went from third to fifth grade on an unmarked day in September 1946. I could manipulate numbers, of course, but never with the proficiency of a former fourth grader. I was seriously arithmetically retarded.

My natural competency was writing. Miss Rossi, the principal, had thrown me into the fifth grade equivalent of the sink or swim dilemma in which I found myself (13 years later) at the end of my first term in HBS.

The commotion coming from inside one of the practically empty classrooms was unexpected. There were two students typing away on portable typewriters, a product that no longer exists. Except in museums. The IBM Selectric typewriter was first introduced in 1961. It was emblematic of our nation's proud technological progress. The Selectric was electric and its letters and numbers were no longer at the end of slim, short rods but resided on a printball. No self respecting office of the '50s and 60's failed to employ Selectrics.

I was heavy duty into the technology of the 50's. My technology was a finger powered, portable Smith Corona. (That was a brand of manual, non electric, clackety clack typewriter.) No one told me I could type my exams. How had I missed that?

My Business School classmates were beginning to become my competitors. So I relied on the technology of the day to differentiate and distinguish myself. To improve myself I chose my typewriter.

Typing was my briar patch. I was a typist. An unrecognized, but world class typist. Some guys played football. Others go to typing school. I played football and went to typing school.

For everyone else exams were four hours each. My competitor/classmates received their exams, read and analyzed for a half hour, outlined for a half hour and wrote for three hours. Me? I was now able to play the game in a completely different way.

I read for 30 minutes. Analyzed and outlined for three hours. I typed for only 30 minutes.

BUT, BUT, BUT my typed exams were two to three times longer than my competitor/classmates' handwritten work. I was such a competent typist. The work product was entirely legible (hand writing - not so much). There was clarity to my thoughts, their progression and their presentation. I had risen to the level of my never diminished, but thoroughly trounced expectations.

I had significantly extended the time available to take my exams. In that surplus time, (available to only three of us students) I was able to think through and write my exams at my leisure. I was not pressured to finish on time. I luxuriated in my academic briar patch.

I had discovered my competitive advantage. Before the concept was even introduced at HBS in 1985 by Michael Porter. This discovery has since been memorialized in every business school in the world. Three of us were recognized because of the superior analytical insights of our typed exams. To be known as an academic champion at HBS felt pretty good to me even though I was well aware of the reason why. I too was deficient, but not unlike Oscar Pistorious, the South African sprinter, who has no legs. Oscar is a world class sprinter. His secret to success is his pair of artificial legs. Typewriter = artificial legs.

After my final exams in the spring of 1960, the Dean met with me, just as he had threatened to do. This meeting took place in September 1960. The Dean asked how my summer was working in Germany, which I was really excited about. However, he did not wait for an answer. He did not really care. Instead, he asked if I might like to join the faculty.

Not as a professor, of course. As the lowest possible human person on the faculty totem pole. Of course. But.....hey! I was the guy. I had mastered arithmetic. After years of demonstrably proven inadequacies, it was now proven that I could think. I had also become numerate.

Mission accomplished. I said, "Yes." The Dean shook my hand. I breathed a sigh of relief. My second year at the B School was as stellar as the Dean and I predicted. Except for one course in which I got a B.

Before graduation my classmates were awarded jobs with glittering futures. Some few were going to earn as much as \$20,000 a year. Me? Given the distinction of my new title, I had traded money for what I thought of as recognition and prestige. That was sufficient then. I needed this positive reinforcement.

I was offered \$6,000 a year. Now what?

The Spring of 1961.

I have no idea of who I am, where in life I was, what my new employer expected of me, what I was capable of. I had focused a portion of my graduate academic energies on selling; and I was going to teach Sales Management.

I had been selling things to people since I was 12. Really. At 12, I sold magazines door to door. At age 12, I was earning \$20 a day. Selling magazines. No kidding. My team leader (these were three man teams with certain lost souls on my team beyond their high school years) my team leader was Mr. Buckle. "My name is Buckle. Just like the buckle on your belt."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index reveals that in 1950, the year I was 12, \$20 would be valued in 2015 at ten times as much: "\$198.99." I certainly did not know this then. I hardly believe it now. Anyway, at age 12, Ben Franklins' understanding of how to live life was all that I knew about such matters. I thought money was for saving. So I saved. It never occurred to me how much \$20 a day actually was. How could I know? I never bought anything at age 12.

It wasn't teenage sports that turned me on. It was sales. Later I learned salesmen were regarded as some form of lowlife. Manufacturing. That was ok. Investment banking. That was simultaneously both better and best. Sales was a place smart guys did not go. Manufacturing management (any kind of management) and finance were where smart guys went.

Sales did not have the cache of manufacturing or finance. As usual, I was unaware of this. I liked sales. The way I looked at it, selling was fun. I liked fun. In the back of my mind I also figured sales might take me into my future. I have no idea how I figured this out. I just knew I tended to be right about a lot of things important to me. Then.

On the Relationship Between Sales and Finance.

To understand this part you must be able to read a balance sheet. So if you do not find balance sheets scintillating, skip this part.

As Sales Manager, once you have figured out how to effectively and rapidly increase company sales, the company's balance sheet begins to glitter.

Given the rapid expansion of sales for several consecutive years, say two to four times the predictable yearly sales increase over the customary fraction of this amount, new machinery and maybe new factories will be needed. Inventory will increase. Receivables swell. More cash required.

Short term bank loans increase. There is probably a need to increase long term debt. If the Sales Manager has performed really well, new equity will have to be issued. That's

how I understood sales. Such a perception would transport any sales manager into the more respectable world of finance. Dynamite salesmen often – at least in those days – earned more than presidents. Check it out.

But I was only going to earn \$6,000 a year. I had already fallen behind in my expectations for myself. Although I drove a second hand, white two seater MG convertible with red leather seats and was the envy of not a few, \$6,000 a year did not become me.

How was I going to handle this?

In 1961 in Washington there was an emerging movement such as we now have concerning global warming. Back then the concern was for Aging. There was the first White House Conference on Aging in the fall of 1961. In 1958 a retired high school principal (a woman) founded the AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons. Retired, retiring, retiree, older, elder, unemployed, what do you call these people? The English call them pensioners. Many of us are, but we do not refer to ourselves this way.) Anyway, I came away from this conference with an idea.

If retirees were a new market, why not stir up some enthusiasm for this demographic. What should we call those in this new market? Golden Agers, folks from the Twilight Zone, Elders, retirees, old timers? Certainly not geezers. Senior Citizens would work perfectly.

I could leave the risible world of jumping beans and become the King of this new market no one knew much (if anything) about. I could become like Peachey Carnahan, the British adventurer in Kipling's *The Man Who Would be King*. There wasn't much excitement in age, aging, the elderly and so on, but, hey, I could manage sales to this market. My field was Sales Management. I was a salesman. I could become King of this market. Really! Why not?

But how?

I was 23. I hardly knew myself. How was I going to conquer this market? Everyone in graduate school was older than I was. Not only earning considerably more than I was, but more mature too. One could be young as a "scholar," but no one was ever going to believe me as mature at my age and with my looks, even though as a Sophomore at Yale, I had grown a British officer's moustache. At that time, I wore the only moustache at Yale.

I also began to wear a Borsolino, a famous Italian fedora, which I wear to this day. This is the kind of hat Humphrey Bogart used to wear. Stylish but also a bit sinister. (James Dean would have worn a Borsolino had he ever lived to grow up.) I bought my Borsolino to celebrate my not being thrown out of Yale during Freshman week.

The Yale Dean was going to throw me out for starting a riot during Freshman Week. Yalies fought the Townies. I think we won, but it really doesn't matter any more. Because Townies

had insulted a classmate of mine from St. Louis. That was impermissible! The Townies had to respect us. At least that's what everyone told themselves.

My resident counselor saved my ass that time. During Freshman Week. Yale had not even started yet. My counselor did not even know me, but he stood up for me. (Who does that?)

The effect of this ridiculous situation was this: everyone in the Freshman Class knew my name before school even started. When I was showing off my mastery of Yoga breath control in a brick faced hallway one afternoon early on in Freshman Week, I managed to make myself pass out. I slammed my head against a brick wall, then bounced it on the cement floor. They rushed me to the infirmary.

"Have you heard about the guy who made himself pass out, slammed his head against the cement floor and wound up in the infirmary? Same guy who started the riot." It didn't take much to become infamous. However, in the rarified atmosphere of Yale's Old Campus, infamy was fame.

In those days absolutely no one had a moustache. Not even firemen. Not even me. Not yet.

Having just graduated high school and as a rising Freshman, the summer after high school graduation, I enrolled in the University of Mexico in Mexico City.

No Mexican did not have a moustache.

In the summer before Sophomore year I got myself a job at J. Walter Thompson (JWT) in Mexico City. JWT was the world's largest advertising agency at the time. No one at JWT did not have a moustache. Except me.

I grew my moustache then. The one I still have.

Wait a minute! That moustache gave me a certain solid, established, older, commanding, not so bad looking demeanor. If I styled the moustache a bit more, I could augment the impression everyone would have of me. I would look older and as dignified as a 23 year old could look.

A remarkably good looking and well shaped older woman who worked on Boylston Street in Cambridge (she was in her 30's) had made it clear she liked me (in the days when "liked" had some real meaning baked into it) and she owned a photographic studio. I entered the studio and asked her to, "Make me look as old as you can. Make me look 40." (In my mind 40 was as old as you got.) She was delighted. She went to work.

She did a really good job. My photograph made me look like I actually was 40. I even felt older. Now what? Well, I could write. Why not write a newspaper column for older folks. Like Ann Landers, the newspaper advice columnist who appeared daily in 1,000 newspapers all over the

country. She was the most widely published columnist there was. She was rich. I would become the Ann Landers of the newly discovered Senior Citizen demographic. Why not?

I could do this. I just had to enlist the enthusiastic support of the best newspapers in the country. I was in my last semester at the B School. I took a class in Management of New Enterprises figuring I could outshine everyone. My classmate/competitors were building steel mills in India and creating companies that manufactured every conceivable thing, sold tastier coffee, opened stores like Dunkin' Donuts and posh places like Tiffany's, envisioned manufacturing plants for auto parts. On paper of course. They didn't actually do these things. They just wrote about them.

I soldiered on. I wrote on HBS stationary to the editors of the 100 largest newspapers in the country that published Ann Landers. I typed each letter by hand. I asked why each editor bought and published Ann Landers. I got 94 responses. In a direct mail marketing effort that sort of response is considered astonishing, if not unbelievable. No two editors had the same reason to answer me except that they wouldn't/couldn't not publish Ann Landers. She was that popular. Irresistible.

In those days HBS was something like the CIA, the Pentagon and the White House all rolled into one. To receive a letter from HBS meant you would be better off reading it. Of course the editors read my letter. They answered it because they wanted to know what my survey revealed.

When I went to sell my column to a newspaper syndicate, I told the president of each syndicate the story about the newspaper editors and the response rate of my mailing. I even admitted no editor gave the same reason for buying Ann Landers. In each newspaper's market, however, (meaning all the females alive in a given city) these women expected to read Ann Landers' column daily. That was the kind of acceptance I was looking for.

I was published three times a week.

I created my syndicated Q and A newspaper column patterned after (who else but) Ann Landers, sold it during the wintery Christmas holidays of 1960 - 1961, started writing while I was still a student, but not publishing until I was considered faculty.

But who was I? I hardly knew me. I was a self proclaimed gerontologist and an expert on aging. Who was this guy who knew so much?

It was then that the sweet angel of American enterprise snuggled up with me one night, kissed me, (ardently), wrapped her lovely arms around me and while lightly stroking me with particularly warm hands, seductively whispered in my ear, "You can be whoever you want to be."

She did not have to say this twice. If typing was my briar patch, well, I had another favorite play ground too: research.

I loved to learn new things. To look things up, find out, expand myself (as it were). I became an inspiration for Google long before there was a Google. If only I could have applied my enthusiasm to computers. I am as computer confused today as I was when I ordered my first \$50,000 Hewlett Packard mini in 1980 for my organization (at that time) of two. I immediately relinquished the machine to someone else to operate, program, and manage. I certainly could not. That machine, however, was the engine of whatever success I ever subsequently had.

The Wintery New Year Holidays of 1961.

I became a gerontologist. I engaged others who actually were practicing gerontologists to advise me. I asked questions. I followed my consultants to universities, conferences, pharmaceutical companies, cocktail parties, coffee with other gerontologists, read papers on the subject of aging. Did investigative research. Read books. Got acquainted with my specialty. Began to learn things about aging at 23 (going on 40) that relatively few others in those days knew. Or cared about.

Gerontology was then in its unheard of infancy. I had gotten in on the ground floor. There weren't any well known gerontologists.

I had to anoint myself. This I did with a girlfriend named G A. That's for Gladys Ann. I have I have long since forgotten GA (or have I?) while that celebration remains an incandescent memory. Pretty important moment. There were no certificates of competency I had to qualify for, no licensing boards, no gerontology degrees in those days. However, I was going to be an oligarch, if not the king, of my demographic. GA had a way of persuading me I was not wrong. I persuaded myself GA was not wrong.

This has been done before. Trump is doing this today.

I wanted to make myself an amalgam of powerful preachers past and present. Think Joel Osteen, Mary Baker Edie and Norman Vincent Peale of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York City. All were/are ministers. Each with a God working for him – or her. In 1952 Peale wrote the "Bible" of positivism and self determination, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. It lives on not only in Trump's personality, but in others as well.

Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* was on the New York Times best seller list for 186 consecutive weeks. Peale also wrote: *You Can if You Think You Can*. Peale was not unlike the Dale Carnegie of the ecclesiastical set. Or Trump of emerging political fame.

Of course, in 1924 the Italian playwright Pirandello wrote *Right You are if You Think You Are*. Actually, this approach to life and living is essentially one of the defining messages of many of God's official messengers.

Trump finds Peale and his works indispensable. These works make understanding Trump accessible. Not knowing where Trump comes from makes it unnecessarily difficult to understand Trump. Trump thinks the way he does because Trumps' parents and Trump himself were weaned on Peale's beliefs and approach to life. Check it out.

I began to think of myself as not unlike a disciple of these remarkable men: a merchant of hope, a minister of the possible, a servant of the subservient.

I thought of myself (pardon the expression) as a super salesman promoting the joys of being and staying alive, making the most of what whatever one had, "accentuating the positive" as used to be said back in the day. I became a super enthusiast who came to believe his own words. Positivism is not just a ditty. It works. Try it.

Time of Your Life.

My syndicated newspaper column –with the picture of me as a 40 year old_ - was called *Time of Your Life*. It was published in 180 of the country's 1,800 daily newspapers. Everyone else in *Management of New Enterprises* wrote splendid papers on brand new businesses. Most of them got A's. In this class, having actually sold my idea, actually started my business and beginning to earn what was then considered big money, I got a B.

Life is the way it is.

I enjoyed my role. After a while it was no longer a role. The role grew into me or, who knows, I grew into the role. I took my ministry seriously. I had to. Otherwise it would be a sham. It wasn't a sham. It was the best advice I could get from distinguished and dedicated persons who really knew and cared about the problems of aging and dispensed my sage insights to those who beseeched me for my help.

In other words I tried my best to take an unlikely personage and transform him into a credible (although fictional) person.

Arthur Lord.

I called myself Arthur Lord. Onomatopoeitic. Perfect.

When I was ministering to my demographic, I really was Arthur Lord. Once the column got going, I received more than a hundred letters week. Reading them catapulted me into adulthood.

The column evoked two sorts of questions. Those that you would expect Ann Landers would answer were she me. Everyday stuff that happens to everybody every once in a while. Problems that could be related to. Goofy and pedestrian stuff that just happened to happen to

people who just happened to be at a certain advancing stage of life. Think goodhearted questions from the kind of people who shop at Walmart.

Sam Walton opened his first store on July 2, 1962. I started writing early in 1961 and began to publish later that year. This coincidence is anecdotal, and of no possible significance other than the people who wrote to me were the kind of folks you would expect to find in the town where Sam opened his first store in Bentonville, Arkansas. Such people lived everywhere in this country. They were as someone used to call them, "the salt of the earth." Unpretentious people wrote to Arthur Lord. Needful people wrote to Arthur Lord. Sad people wrote to Arthur Lord.

What kind of questions did they ask?

Answerable questions.

Well, half of the letters were answerable.

Then, there were the other letters. Also written by the same kind of folk who shopped at Walmart, but depressing, dispirited, disillusioned, desperate unhappy, troubling letters :

Why have our children abandoned us? They do not even speak to us any more. Much less visit. Please help us.

I was devout. I lost my faith. Honestly, I am a good person. I just lost my faith. Will God still allow me in heaven? Please answer me.

I used to be on drugs. I couldn't stop myself. I tried. Believe me I have tried to stop. I am killing myself. You don't have to tell me to stop. Please help me.

My husband talks of suicide? Suicide? Has he gone crazy? Who talks of suicide? How do I restrain him? Stop him. Please help me.

I loved my wife so much. She used to be so beautiful. She still is the most beautiful person I ever knew. She was my best friend. I loved her. I wish I had loved her more. Now she is gone. I can't do this. Life is meaningless. I am lonely. Please help me.

I was an actress. My allure is now gone. I would like to think my allure is still alive, but it is complicated. You can help me. I can't go on. Please help me.

I don't feel well anymore. I'm not sick. My doctor says so. He makes it clear there is nothing wrong with me. There *is* something wrong with me. I know this. Anyone who knows me knows this. Please help me.

Social Security has refused to help. Social Security! That's their job. They are supposed to help. They are not helping. Please help me.

My friends have died. I had such wonderful friends. You would like them. They understood me. I understood them. Now they are gone. It's like the leaves have fallen off the trees. The light of the afternoon is turning into night. What do I do? Please help me.

My doctor says I am now on the road to Alzheimer's. I have maybe 4 to 6 years before my mind melts. I will become completely dependent. Apparently, this is now inevitable. I know you cannot help me, but please, please help me.

These letters were all written by hand. Some went on for pages. Some writers sent their pictures. Some asked for money. Each asked for help.

Help I did not know how to give.

Think about it. Who writes to an unknown newspaper columnist? About anything? Much less the most important things in life?

Who writes to an unknown newspaper columnist about problems like these?

Who?

Disillusioned people writing about their inescapably desperate lives. They had open, suppurating, emotional wounds I knew nothing about. I became acquainted fast. I was horrified.

I sort of became the twin of Miss Lonelyhearts, who is the protagonist of Nathaniel West's 1933 novel, referred to in the book only as Miss Lonelyhearts. Miss Lonelyhearts was written in the depths of the Depression to her/his always depressed, desperate congregation of readers. Miss Lonelyhearts is a – not so fictional - young man writing his Q & A column as a woman. Miss Lonelyhearts' job was to deliver workable advice. He couldn't do it. There are no solutions to some problems. No way to ease the pains from which his suppliants suffered. He was overwhelmed.

I was overwhelmed.

Some questions just do not have answers. At least not workable answers. Certainly I did not have the answers. There are disillusioned, depressed, desperate souls out there neither Miss Lonelyhearts nor I could help.

Every time I opened another of the letters to Arthur Lord, Peggy Lee's lament sung itself to me. "Is That All There Is? Is That All There Is? Then let's keep dancing." (If you don't know this tune, give it a whirl on You Tube.)

I quickly figured out what the gerontologists of the 60's had begun to learn. When a sampling of the aging population is done with run of the mill, good old folks over 50, 60, 70, or even 80, most of them were just fine, if not dandy. Poll them in hospitals and (surprise!) they are all ill. Change the venue and both reality and perceptions change. Answers change. Not all older people are slow, forgetful, perseverative or sick. Unless they are in a hospital. Actually just being in a hospital can and often does engender another stay in a hospital, especially for older folk.

The game changer in the final years – year – month – or week is Death.

Death tells this story of a merchant's servant in Bagdad. Somerset Maugham recounts this exemplary tale in his *Appointment in Samarra*.

There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to the market to buy provisions. In a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, "Just now when I was in the marketplace, I was jostled by a woman. When I turned, I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. "Master, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me."

The merchant lent his servant his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and departed as fast as the horse could gallop he went.

Then the merchant went down to the marketplace. The merchant saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?"

"That was not a threatening gesture," Death said, "It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see your servant in Bagdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

No two sets of economic statistics were (or ever are) the same, but something like 1 in 4 Medicare dollars is now spent on the last year of life. Some think more. A great deal of whatever the sum is, is spent in the last extended moments of a loved one's life.

Two years after graduation, I left the Business School. It's always called "the Business School." No emphasis whatsoever on the *the*. No B school graduate ever calls the place the Harvard Business School. Only a rube would do that.

So, I went to Arthur's funeral and buried him. I wept. For maybe 30 seconds. What 25 year old needs a life surrounded by the kind of people who would open the newspaper and read letters written to Arthur Lord? Worse: write letters to Arthur Lord. Tell me. Who?

Well, now I knew.

I needed to live *my* life.

I returned from the funeral.

I sold my newspaper column.

I kept my moustache.

I began to muddle through.

Kirby Westheimer