

We're Always Glad You Asked, Even If You Aren't

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 24 January 2013 13:00

When there are more years behind than ahead, contemplative stewing and meditative mulling is the operative daily mode. That process clicks into place and idles away unaided. It's sneaky, this mental program, having automatically installed itself at some point or other, perhaps when a certain number of breaths has been taken, or something similar.

It's very much like a perpetual motion machine you never knew you had -- one that kicks into gear suddenly and without warning, slipping any and all restraints, unexpectedly pattering and pottering around all by itself. This latent skill is an intriguing discovery at any age, but especially when you think you've already got yourself fairly well figured out. By now, you've sort of thought of yourself as pretty well knowing how to be -- and being -- *you*.

Sharing the results of those windfall thoughts, I've noticed, is the written equivalent of "You kids get off my lawn!" for many recipients completely uninterested in such musings. I can't say I blame them. Plain-old observations are a dime a dozen, and are the purview of those who are understudying to someday be card-carrying, fully-fledged, *official* Old Farts.

However, it certainly seems to be true that those who are looking in their rearview mirrors at that mythic Hill -- that infamous Hill that people in our society so dread going over -- also come equipped with a sense that they offer much more than just knowing observation: They also offer professional *interpretation*. It is, after all, what old farts *do*: They hold forth in various manners and strengths, and make assorted, well-reasoned pronouncements.

Bim, Bam, Boom.

Or else they simply grouse, crouching on the couch, complaining, if their Holding Forth program did not install correctly, or if the Humorous Perspective reservoirs were allowed to go dry.

Anyone who's lived long enough has gained some sort of experience. This is true even for people who have, by default, done everything they could, and have done all of it completely wrong. The observer-interpreter's motto: *Experience is experience, by golly, and it should not be allowed to go to waste, no matter how irrelevant or currently useless.*

To really make our day, I dare you to ask the opinion, on purpose, of a Holding-Forther, and

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then try to follow the response. At least for a polite little while. We'll all try to return the favor of your curiosity and attention by not making it a total waste of your time. (Although, to be fair, you may be exposed to some metaphoric mentions that are outside your own time and space; those of us who are truly ancient even remember the 60s -- sort of, as they said even back then. At least, I think so.)

We'll be very glad you took the time out of your day and your life to seek the counsel of an elder. We'll try not to make you too regretful for your respect. After all, seeking the wisdom of someone older can make some of feel as if we're vacationing in Japan, where such outlandish things are done all the time -- so, *thanks!*

If you're cringing right now, waiting for the other shoe to drop, holding your breath, braced for waves of cantankerous, old-codger-consciousness to come crashing down around you, you can relax. You're safe. By the same miracle of evolution, or genetics, or whatever, the very same triggers for the involuntary, automatic ruminations and subsequent auto-sharing about Life, have a balancing counter-weight: These practitioners don't expect to be taken seriously or even fully heard out. It would be nice, but it's not really expected.

These are experienced people, remember, so they have had a lot of practice with People, Life, and Civilization blowing them off. Holding-Forthers simply have the urgent imperative to say *so mething* about the hashed-up, mashed-up trash heap that Life can become while under someone else's stewardship.

Like sufferers of St. Vitus Dance tremors and quakes, or like recipients of ball lightning and plasma discharges from St. Elmo's Fire, it's the doing that's the thing -- the speaking up and giving voice to those observations and interpretations -- not about the way others might feel about hearing it all.

However, by *virtue* of the release provided (as in the function of steam valves) in a period of yammering-on about one's opinions, and by *order* of the Curmudgeon General, it is not only unlawful to offer more than one hundred long-and-involved opinions in any 24-hour period, but, almost impossible. Most yammerers would find such a pace extremely difficult to achieve and maintain, even if they could come up with that many extensive, well-thought-out, footnoted opinions into which must then be blown a huge amount of hot air to boot.

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Nature giveth strong voice to some, and Nature provideth some rest for the weary ear, too. If you please, some modest amount of sympathy is requested for this malady of later human life. Just because the need to yammer like a steam trumpet might descend unexpectedly on a person of some acquired age is not a sign that an ear trumpet, say, may soon be required as well.

If you missed the fine print on your Human Warranty: *Not all parts expire at once, nor in any predictable order or pattern of sequence.* ☐ *Good luck.*

(In the meantime, just let me say that *Steam Trumpet* would make a pretty good name for an indie band, as would *Weary Ear* -- maybe even *Hu man Warranty*, I suppose.)

Where was I? Oh, right, right: Prefacing the main point -- which, if I remember correctly, was trying hard to be about how difficult, mysterious, and complex Life appears to be at first. This impression picks up steam all throughout one's life and one's own complications. That sense of impossible complexity finally starts to drop off somewhere after 40 or so. Some would say this dip or drop is done *mercifully* so by Nature, while others would vow and mutter such a thing is done *mercilessly* so.

For the former, it is an opportunity to see Life in a clear and entirely whole construct, providing some clarity and context regarding the length and even purpose of one's years. Those who believe the latter obviously have someone in their lives who are steady yammerers, and are seeking a silent reprieve.

If nothing else, things become markedly simpler when the latest *hotnew* fad -- or song, movie, book, web site, download, or yadda-yadda -- carries less weight with you than a bottlecap filled with fruit flies or a cup of dandelion fluff. Given time, everyone slips into Dante's descending circle of consumer demographics, in which one's pattern of consumption matters less and less to behemoth, multinational corporations, and, ultimately, matters not at all.

(Finally, and at long last. ☐ Ahh -- peace.)

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Such is Life. And, you know: There were a lot of observations and interpretations I was going to use here as examples, but I see you politely suffocating a number of yawns under your hands, forearms, and hat, disguising them all as various facial ticks -- or are those real? -- and so, will be happy to exercise some perceptive, empathetic, and kind self-restraint.

I must have received a better-than-average, factory-installed Holding Forth governor -- but it cuts in and out sometimes and cannot be trusted for very long. Which reminds me of the time...

No matter. It can wait. This time, you lucked out.

[Steam trumpet: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Train_whistle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Train_whistle)

Today's Bonus: Slipping off the consumption cliff at 50: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/krulwich/2013/01/08/168868571/no-thank-you-the-mysterious-transformation-of-50-year-olds>