

Athenaeum Society

May 7, 2015

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Floating Down the River

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Adams, members of the Society and honored guests. It is a pleasure to be on the program tonight. I believe this is my second opportunity to address an audience at the annual Open Meeting, the previous one on the subject of Ham Radio. As you know, presenting a paper is a serious matter, free of frivolity, and the Society demands a certain degree of intellectual stimulation but free from the taint of politics or religion, so we will begin by citing Jacques' monologue in Act II, Scene VII of "As You Like It". Now halfway through my 85th year, and with 44 years plus of membership behind me, I am currently performing in the 6th act of the drama of life. Sixteen years ago my Athenaeum paper was entitled "Can An Old Dog Learn New Tricks?" and a brief answer at that time was "Yes". As a 68 year old partially-retired Physician with 42 years of Medical practice behind me and in good health then, The Golden Age had finally arrived. The last child had graduated from College and grad school, had married, and nine grandchildren's pictures graced the kitchen wall. "Willie" my 91 year old mother advised me, "You'd better travel while you can before age 75." It wasn't like we hadn't logged a few thousand miles traveling on Medical Mission trips all over the world with a few interesting stops along the way but Marilyn remarked "We really haven't seen a lot of North America. Victoria Falls was impressive but we haven't been to Niagara Falls. We'd flown around Mt. Everest but not Mt. McKinley. Heeding the clarion call, we corrected the oversight by taking tours of Canyonlands USA, Western Canada, Eastern Canada, Hawaii, Alaska and in 2005 to England-Wales-Scotland to celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary. But Mom was right - various ailments began to appear with back surgery heading the list and limiting more vigorous physical activity. No longer did we take the 2 mile walks and the garden became smaller. Working out at the YMCA was out and climbs up the Ham Radio tower were nixed. Things got a little worse when the 80th year rolled around and more pills added to the daily regimen. The hearing aids became more of a necessity, and golf was no longer playable due to loss of balance. We do not adapt as well to changing circumstance or adjust to newer technology. Who wants to look at a Selfie anyway? Why do they keep changing the Home page when I just learned to navigate the old one? Why change the password when I can't even remember the one I already have? To a grandchild - Will you please quit twittering and look me in the eye when we talk? Why should I add a friend of a friend of a friend on

Facebook when I already have 279 and don't know who half of them are? You may condescendingly laugh and consider these thoughts as being expressed by a crusty old codger – and by gum you'd probably be right! However – when the sands of time in your hour glass start dribbling down with the bottom pile rising and the top diminishing, remember that I warned you it would happen.

So how do older people – I prefer OP to “The Elderly” - approach life? First we accent the positive and appreciate the everyday small things the Lord does for us. He protects us from traffic crashes, helps us find misplaced objects like hearing aids, glasses and keys. We find joy in reading the Bible and books together, side by side. We can visit older friends who are not as mobile as we and Marilyn has the reputation of being the Muffin Woman of her Sunday school class. They say it's almost worth it to get sick so she will bring over a dozen right out of the oven. We have full confidence in the Lord Jesus. Having a family to the 4th generation nearby is absolutely fantastic and we have been privileged to watch the older grandchildren grow up, advancing through childhood, adolescence, higher education and entering the job market. Last but not least are the four children you gave us to raise. We are more on equal standing now than on a parent-child basis, and before our roles are reversed. At the height of their careers and physical abilities, we are proud of the way they face life's challenges and the support they give their children. We couldn't have selected better In-laws. Marilyn and I have a great relationship and just being together makes life worthwhile. She is busy shopping, cooking, cleaning and keeping us well-fed. It takes more effort to accomplish the routine tasks and a couple of naps a day are a help. Our combined short-term memories are still a few short of a full dozen but passable. My schedule sounds fairly busy with preparing to teach a Sunday School Class, participating in a Jail Ministry, leading a Prayer Group, volunteering at the Hospital each Wednesday and meeting with a group at Arby's three or four days a week. Ham Radio is still on the agenda and garden time is upon us. We no longer have future goals or ambitions, realizing that Act Seven will be coming up in a few short years. Hopefully we can still be a blessing to others and hopefully won't be too big a burden on the family. Having stated all that, I can see some affirmative nods in the audience from those who are likewise experiencing some of the symptoms.

However, all is not gloom and doom. In a WSJ article of December 1, 2014 Anne Tergesen points out that a growing body of scientific research shows in many ways, life gets better and better! She wrote in "Why Everything You Know About Aging Is Wrong" that only 10% of us are cranky, depressed, irritable and obsessed with our alimentary canal. She proceeds to dispell six prevalent myths about aging. Myth No. 1 Depression is more prevalent with age. A 2014 study by Stanford University researchers revealed that emotional well-being actually improves until age 70 and then levels off. Even Centenarians report overall high

levels of well-being. Myth No.2 Cognitive decline is inevitable. Sure, our brains do undergo structural changes such as thinning of the pre-frontal cortex and shrinking of the hippocampus. Concentration and memory slip a bit - Hey, that starts at age 30, not 70! Like an older computer, our older brain takes longer to process and retrieve information. Why shouldn't it - you have more memory stored away. Cognitive tests don't tell everything and people actually perform better in the real world than tests would indicate. Myth No.3 Older Workers are less productive. The vast majority of academic studies show "virtually no relationship between age and job performance". A Max Planck Institute study reported that over a four year period of time, older workers actually made fewer errors than younger ones. Myth No.5 Creativity Declines with age. This might be true in math and theoretical physics but in fields that require accumulated knowledge, peaks occur later, like in historians and philosophers who are often in their 60's or older. Myth No. 6. More Exercise is better. Exercise in moderation does have life-extending benefits but in a Copenhagen City Heart Study, those who jogged from one to 2.4 hours a week at a moderate pace with a couple of days off, did better than those who ran more than 4 hours a week at a faster pace.

Having endured the above and before my memory blurs I would like to recall some enjoyable moments in my 44 years in the Athenaeum. After all, it might be time to evacuate the premises and make room for a fresh younger face.

One of the strengths of Athenaeum is the composition of its membership drawn from a wide variety of professions, businesses, and occupations. It is not a Good Ole Boys Club drawn from the elite of Hopkinsville and newcomers are welcome. I was privileged to be invited to join as newcomer in town with Graham Duncan being the catalyst. We do have William Turner around to remind us of past events in county history and staples such as the Nightriders, Edgar Cayce, and the Latham Hotel re-emerge at from time to time. Although there have been a number of memorable programs, some of which I will refer to later, the personalities of the members really stand out more than anything and the interchanges between them, point and counter point, humorous and serious. When I first joined around 1971, our Secretary was Mr. Charles Petrie, former Principal of Hopkinsville High School and his approach was rather authoritarian. You almost sensed that he was presiding in Chapel over an unruly bunch of High School boys and didn't tolerate foolishness. Perhaps he recognized a few names and faces in the crowd who once had fit into that category. One of my favorites was Dr. Leslie Crane, a Presbyterian Minister who was very erudite, serious about his job, a master of articulation, and his minutes were fastidiously organized. When he read the minutes of the preceding month's meeting every

ear was tuned to hear a concise, beautifully organized summary of what the presenters had attempted to communicate, sometimes less effectively than his own analysis. Mr. Gladstone Major was also dignified and a literary personage of note who served as Secretary from 1984 until 1987. Each summer, he would take his grandchildren to Stratford, Ontario to attend the Shakespeare festival. In one programs, he recited about 30 minutes of original poetry and I don't recall him even consulting his notes one time. Our present pencil-wielder, David Cavanaugh, formerly filled the post from 1990 until 1993, then after a 17 year hiatus returned to action in 2011. I say he, even though all of the correspondence seems to originate from Sandy. Hal King and I believe Frank Nash also were elected to split terms of service. One of the more innovative parts of the agenda has always been excuses for missed meetings. No one has yet claimed they were in London to see the Queen but some border on the rather dubious. A simple statement like "I forgot" would be greeted with derision. There have been a number of memorable programs and probably each member has his own favorite set. What about the one on Chicken Racing given by George Byars? It does sounds rather unlikely. As a graduate student he was running an experiment on how chickens behavior could be modified by a set of rewards and penalties in reaching the end of the course, set up in the apartment where he lived. Another paper George produced was about amaze he had planted in his back yard out on James Lyn drive. Wendell Rorie, our Senior member in terms of longetity of membership could be depended onto give a Travelogue and the mere presence of a projector and screen when we entered the meeting room was enough to suspect he would be the lead speaker of the night. Then it happened. One night I saw a wooden box and Wendell was sitting behind it at the speaker's table. It turned out to be a Rabbit trap and he gave a step by step plan on how to build one. Who says our meetings are all esoteric and not practical? Charles Tilley was one of our more likeable members and had a gleam in his eye, even when feeling poorly. His last paper I believe was about Limericks and he recited a few that could even be repeated in mixed company. This opened the door at discussion time for Dr. Terry Fuqua to add a dozen more. This makes the point that on any selected topic you pick there is likely to be someone else present who is better acquainted with the subject than the presenter. Mark Sweitzer even presented an original Opera and recruited some musicians to sing the various roles. Just imagine, the debut of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" on the world's music scene occured at an Athenaeum meeting! Because we have limited time available, papers are generally expected to last no longer than 30 minutes but that dictum was brazenly ignored one Thursday evening by Dr. Jack Amis who expostulated for one hour and three minutes non-stop! Senior member Mr. Frank Yost, not to be transcended, spared no words in pointing out the breach of decorum. Mr. Yost also commented on papers in a singular way. In fact, he granted Dr. Bob Sivley and I a superlative, I think it was a superlative or rather unpresidented. "Those are the two worst papers back to

back I have ever heard in 50 years of Athenaeum." Wow. I don't recall the subject of Bob's paper but mine was entitled "The Scourge of God" and was an introduction and explanation of the AIDS epidemic which had just begun to plague the country. I might have been a little heavy on the epidemiology aspects. To Mr. Yost's credit, he called me on the phone about 3 months later and apologized. There must have been a big spread in the Wall Street Journal and he remembered having heard about it first from me. That leaves Bob Sivley as being the author of the worst paper ever given. Sorry about that Bob.

After the second paper has been presented and a wee-wee break, the real fun begins. It's discussion time and comments from the floor are solicited. As a general rule they begin : "These were two good papers but..." We have some real practioneers of the art of reparte and have had for years. Bob Sivley is definitely one of the best and with a straight face and solemn mien he begins his spiel bringing insights which start out in a serious vein before the thinly disguised humor shines through. Likewise our beloved Secretary has mastered the art of deadpan expression. It wasn't always so in the past and even Bud Hudson could put a sharp edge on his comments, particularly when the UHA Principal was involved and responded with vigor. The late Jim Love was never for a loss for words and after about ten minutes of monologue needed to be corraled after his comments became unrelated to the subject matter of the paper and took on a life of their own. Perhaps his years of experience on WHOP with Dink Embry had influenced him. Rebuttal time was next and each speaker was given a chance to answer questions or contradict the comments profured. At least he got in the last word. After the last speaker has had his say, the Secretary announced the speakers for the next program, handshakes were extended and another pleasurable evening spent by friends is over.

Yes, it's been a good ride to be a member for all these years, to make friends with people you wouldn't ordinarily associate with on a daily basis, and broaden horizons and knowledge. Its even been a pleasant surprise to learn that lawyers, of which we seem to have a plethora, are down deep nice people - out of Court. I had really planned to use this occasion to say Sayonara, Dolsedanya, Shalom, A Salaama, Au revior, Hasta Luego, Guten Nacht, Boa Noche etc. but have had so much fun trying to compose this paper that I won't tie up my boat just yet and hope to Float down the River a while longer. See ya in September, the Lord willing, if the crick don't rise. Happy Athenaeum to all and to all a Good Night.