

The innocuous encounter of acquaintance – to most, mundanes, The Norm. To some, too few perhaps, it is the most tiresome of impositions of appearance over substance. A ritual abhorrent to creative sensibilities in any independent mind, its mandated superficialness is dogmatically enforced... in any, and every, circumstance.

In weather wet or blue sky dry, whether met on surface skritchd concrete sidewalk; or by manicured, pruned trim, weed whackered, postage plot of golf-green round each tic-tacky-tok box with slopey roof in sub-cerebrum-burbia; or on pounded hard black pillow asphalt paths, or rolled out sheets of road gridded through the flat-topped, rigid-shafted canyons of the Plague Of Plaid imprinting every homogen-un-genius-ized human zoo we call a city.

It is that backed-up back-story, which prompted the following brief exchange between two persons anywhere...

How u r doing these days

"So... how old *are* you?" asked The First character from behind his saloned and name-fashion edged persona-bana-lity mask.

"Which part?" replied The Other character, uncoiffed grey-haired freebearded and comfortable in the worn-in generic everything.

"What?" stumpstuck the spa-facial-sporting first character, deciding that this unlasered un-dishevel-kempt no logo-label anywhere, could not possibly have 'Had Anything Done'.

"My physical age," said the other, leaning a bit on a scratched up cane, "is 20 years older than my chronological age. Some days even older."

"Oh that's too bad." affected the one who had the new 8 bedroom 5 bath built-in jacuzzi-soaker tubs, live-in closets, and 2 kitchens with all the latest web-surfing appliances. (with plans to redo the interior, 4 fireplaces, 3 bars, enclose the diving pool and terrazzo the split-level quad garage.)

The other, still in the same old hasn't been repainted in decades, no dishwasher, bungalow behind the pre-war never-been-pruned trees, said, "Intellectual age – as old as the sum of experience of all the elders I've learned from."

"Oh, really...um, that would be..." the first absently replied—having not caught most of it and feigning interest in the rest—reflecting on, and in, his new pristine custom finish, computerized satellite integrated talking power everything, 4 climate-zone surround-sound video-screens, stealth-fighter windshield display, thumbprint locks, anti-theft taser steering wheel, (you'd have to dismantle both engines to change a faulty chip, so it's better to buy a new model) car.

"Over 300." answered the other, content with that used rain washed, still-runs-o.k., no-alarm-no-sweat-about-door-dings, (brakes-pull-left-a-bit-but-reliably-steering) old thing... and then quietly, "Spiritual age – old enough to remember why the cave wall was painted."

"Um...wait..." emerged from behind a glazed over expression, the beep-bing vibrating ring-a-jingling walking arsenal of vid-e-i-phone text mess pod-people razzberry shuffle, (anti-mutational-viral insecticide updated infinitely) with tactical-display watch and strategically deployed accessorizings, blinging.

Comfortable with notebook and pencil, no computer, and one unlisted landline number, marketing-immune and disposable-gadget-free, finished up:

"Emotional age - 5."

"Uh - yeah." smirked manicured waxed polished pretense, neon-teethed corporate gameplay, moneyspeak fluent, continuous fashion status display mode pose, one.

The other, with the hand that never wore a watch, proffered a calligraphied card listing... a websited photo-archive of handmade works, cyber-voice-mail number and checked once a fortnight e-mail... all arranged for the sake of those unable to think outside the electronic box.

Like this one...

"This is what I do. You can see examples there."

The one, accomplished at strategically maneuvering in social circles of cocktailings and wine-ings and dinings, dishing toxic rumors and secrets, hookings and clubbings, meeting and breeding with always respectable veneering, took the card but did not reciprocate it. Glanced at it - puzzled on it - reglimpsed it, and said, "That's effective..."

The other nodded "...mmhm." expecting that effectiveness to vanish in the next increment of this consumption-addict's attention span - which had evaporated long before you read to the end of this sentence.

Weighed down wired up tubed in, multipli-reverse-mortgaged, free hemorrhaging pay-direct intravenous banks' accounts, financially byzantine architected, gothically legal-documented, negative feedback-loop billed, mutually ponzied alphabet-soup brier patch hedged poxied funds...fidgeted...then said tautly, "Nice seeing you. I have to go."

Relaxed, no mortgage, no credit card, no programmable flat-big-wide-screen payments on anything, yardsale fax-machine still worked...smiled knowingly and said, "Yes...you do."