

Keeping life bearable (08, 09, 12)

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Of course, being human, we all certainly need a good dose of interpersonal relationships at regular intervals, perhaps a few times each day and for sure, several times in a week. By this, I do not mean “hanky panky” which is an entirely different kind of interpersonal need that I would rather not get into at the moment, but rather, those short yet close personal relationships with other people wherein you exchange some interesting information such as how much you recently lost on the TSX or what’s little Johnny doing in school these days or perhaps, did you ever manage to get rid of that old, ugly chesterfield that languished in your living room because it was a wedding present and you couldn’t possibly pitch it out for fear of offending your parents who are still alive some forty years later?



Yes, we all need stimulating, positive social encounters to help make life bearable if not exciting. This is why we leave the radio on all day or turn on the TV set as soon as we get home from the dentist. The sound of other people talking is a balm that soothes our social conscience and helps make us feel connected, that indeed we are tuned into our world and capable of making meaningful decisions, such as when to turn the TV off in the bedroom each night before falling asleep.

Along these communication lines, I’m developing a pet peeve. Has this been happening a lot to you lately? You meet a friend, and you decide to enjoy a chat simply to catch up with him or her and find out what he or she has been doing, so you say to the other person, “So, tell me what you have been doing,” and thus encouraged by your apparent sincerity and trust, he or she immediately relates to you every minute detail imaginable concerning their latest health problem, which is excruciating in itself and might constitute a health hazard to you in that your innards eventually start to rumble and your brain suddenly checks in and says quietly but firmly to you, “How long should we hang in with all this nonsense?”

And it gets worse. After you have been brought up to speed with each entry in the Standard Medical Encyclopedia, your friend then says, “Now tell me if I’ve told you this story before,” but without waiting for any input by you, even the slightest nod of your head, quickly proceeds to relate to you in great detail the very same story that he or she told you the last time that you met.

The story will involve a friend of a friend, and your brain aptly asks you, “Why is this relevant? I don’t know this person and why should I care?” The story will always involve a calamity to the other person or a serious flaw in the other’s character such as binge drinking, membership in a political party or a passion for following the Toronto Maple Leafs.

You find yourself nodding your head aimlessly back and forth to display ritual astonishment as your friend relates this complex tale, even as your friend’s voice magically diminishes and your brain rescues you and transports you to some faraway beach where there are three beautiful mermaids beckoning you to join them in the water, and you are just about to throw caution to the winds and enthusiastically jump in when your brain suddenly senses a change in your friend’s tone, hinting at a conclusion, so you wave your head even harder in astonishment, say goodbye to the mermaids, and you blurt out what you always blurt out after each verbal Inquisition, “Imagine that!”



Don’t you wish you could follow up and say something brilliant like, “I asked you what was new, not what’s old!” Or, “What’s this boring trivia got to do with me?” Or, “Did you ever figure out how much time we waste, repeating things over and over again; I mean, repeating things over and over again? Well, did you?”