

"AVANTI!"

Curly Marsh

Foreword: The above title, "AVANTI!" (FORWARD) was the title of a romance about the liberation of Sicily written by my grandfather, James M. Ludlow who was the oldest living graduate when we were in Princeton whereby he becomes in my mind a post mortem honorary member of the class. I borrow his title as an appropriate command to the class and quote his wisdom several times in the text that follows.

As the old new President of the Class of '33, I feel moved to say a few words of advice and encouragement to the remaining troops as we move on in our long campaign. If you aspire to be president of our class (and I hope that you do) all you need is to live long enough—and eventually you will be tapped for the job. Later on you will have a second shot at it when you become the lone survivor. Not interested? I don't blame you because then you also become Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, Class Agent and Chairman of the Reunion Committee! My grandfather became all of those things in the class of 1861. My brother, who just turned 91, is President of the class of '29 and is still trying to shuck off several of those inherited jobs.

As we approach the unknown, I suppose that few of us are really ready. Some of us are unhealthy, unhappy and almost ready to try something different. Another group is still fairly healthy, reasonably happy, but waiting for the other shoe to drop as their physical energy sags and memories play annoying tricks. A third group remains physically and mentally unimpaired and carries on with little concern about the shortening future.

In all of these groups are those who are spiritually supported by a strong religious faith which carries them serenely along no matter what, assured of salvation here and hereafter. The rest of us, doubters, of whom I am one, lacking in faith believe, nevertheless, that Christian teachings are the finest set of ethics by which to live, and we strive, with various degrees of success, to live by them.

The question of reincarnation, Paradise or Hell, may become a more immediate and burdensome concern to our class if we let it be so. Fear of the unknown has always been a normal reaction at age 5 or 85 for brainy animals like humans, who can think about the future and remember the past.

Grandfather Ludlow, a Presbyterian minister, had a recipe for life after 80 which minimized fear, at least for

the faithful. On his eightieth birthday he wrote: "If we cannot play our part down on the gridiron or diamond, we can sit in the bleachers, watch the game and cheer the champions of what we believe in. In this sense I hope to be a sport until the call 'Times up' rings out for me. And then? Well, there are doubtless bigger problems and ventures out there. The Valley of the Shadow does not frighten me; for there are clearly revealed though dimly outlined heights on the other side."



The New President, Curly Marsh, with the new Elsie he constructed in his basement.

Grandfather had a ready response to those who worried because the "heights on the other side" were not so clearly revealed to them. He would say, "What's so fearful about a long sleep"? The other day in church using the Episcopal Prayer Book we prayed that the departed would find "eternal rest", which seems to suggest that given a choice in Paradise many souls might opt for the "rest", or so thought the prayer writer.

We live in three worlds—remembering the past, coping with the present, and thinking (worrying?) about the future. As for the past Grandfather said, "The retrospect of life is a happy pastime,—that is, when I am wise enough to forget some things. Why should I not forget them since the good book assures me that He no longer remembers them against me?"

Having admitted to being a "doubter", I can hardly invoke Grandfather's source of absolution from sins. Instead, having done all I could to atone for mine rather than be forgiven, I agree with the poet who tells me to "Let the dead Past bury its dead." I find that dealing with the here and now (the poet's "everlasting now") is so filled with things I must do, things I want to do, and things I don't want to do, that it is impossible for me to give more than occasional attention to the past and the future.

Now I will tell you about some of the things I do in the "everlasting now", realizing that your interest in my

problems is about as strong as mine in my golf partner's extended explanation of why he missed the putt he just missed. (I'm much more interested in my own problems on the golf course than in his.)

I'll start with the 'must do' things like health care. For some reason at our age we find something therapeutic in dumping the gory details of our present health status on anyone who will listen. Hence I must tell you about my new pacemaker which the doctor installed several months ago to control my diagnosed atrial fibrillation. All went well until I read in the literature which came with the device a warning to avoid alcohol. Concerned, I asked Dr. Grecos if that meant what it said. "Not exactly," he replied, "that means to do what you've always done." Thus I consider the doctor a very wise and competent man, even though his predictions for golfers that pacemaker installations frequently result in holes in one and in shooting one's age is suspect. I complained when nothing happened and he said, "Be patient." While the pacemaker takes none of my time, keeping track of supporting medications, remembering which, when and how many and being careful not to take too much (or too little) of the scary rat poison medicine with the fancy name is another matter.

My on-going battle with the IRS is a real time consumer. For some years past, by assessing penalties for minor infractions, small errors in my returns, inadequate estimating of income, misunderstanding changes in the complicated tax code, the IRS has been trying to force me to go to a professional tax man to prepare my returns. I fight back because I feel that everyone with a high school education should be able to do their returns under any sensible tax system. Penalties are for tax cheaters, not for people who make mistakes under the present complex system. To give in without a fight will kill the cause of tax simplification. So I fight on.

As an ex-banker my next item on the list of what's wrong with the world is the trend in banking toward super-banks through mergers where communication with customers is reduced to a computer domain in which you are allowed to speak to a living person only as a last resort. Letters written to the chief executive of my own bank remain unanswered as did Trust Department promises to call back on urgent tax problems. At the same time they have ceased returning my cancelled checks. Beyond these serious problems of customer service, the concentration of economic power in a few large banks motivated by executives who command huge salaries and stock options and use their power to further broaden their control of non-banking financial companies may well lead to the same banking problems that devastated the economy in the early thirties. My battles in this area are puny and unproductive but I hate to say, "Well, you can't win 'em all."

I've been active as a hospital volunteer in Morristown for a good many years and in Naples for four years, starting as a courier in both hospitals. Several years ago my knee, lacking cartilage, threatened to end my walking on the golf course so I switched to desk work at both hospitals so that, with the occasional aid of advil, I can still walk a few miles. On returning from Florida in April, I found that the entire computer system on which patient information at the front desk was contained had been completely changed and I had to relearn a whole new system. I'm getting there but the learning is slow—as it is on my own computer where I'm working into the Email and internet thing. I enjoy the hospital associations as a volunteer and knowing of the critical reliance of all hospitals on volunteer support, I must stay with that as long as I can. (One lady volunteer aged 100 at Morristown Memorial keeps us all in a "can do" mode.)

When I retired in 1977. I had accumulated a lifetime of archival material from both sides of my parents' families—old everything—photo albums, letters, books, bibles, diaries, etc. I had always said that some day I would spruce up the family tree by putting the materials in order and distributing the result to the members of my family. So I created a genealogical periodical called LOOSE LEAVES which delved into family history as far back as I could trace it. This once-a-year production averaging 34 pages a year has continued for 21 years. As time went on and the genealogical material diminished while the families grew, each issue contained less material about ancestors and more about the living. So while the first issue talked about Samuel Marsh, b. 1620, and William Ludlam b 1610, the latest issue (last year) featured graduations of young Marshs from Princeton, Haverford, Middlebury and Cornell, as well as a Ludlow descendant who adopted a little girl from Vietnam. The preparation of LOOSE LEAVES is a lesson in research, composition, photography and production which is its own reward supplemented by the warm appreciation of those who receive it and contribute to its content. But it's a time burner!

Now we come to Princeton. Back in 1989 our new class President, Bob Keidel, a good friend from sailing days and an especially persuasive fellow, prevailed upon me to become your Class Agent in spite of my resolution at retirement to avoid fund raising jobs of which I had had a snootful during my banking years in Newark. Shortly thereafter in the Class's first Summer Newsletter, which Bob Keidel produced singlehandedly, I reported that, "I'm not sure that I'm a very good money raiser for Princeton...I have no problem urging all classmates to participate, but I have complete respect for their reasons for limited or non-participation. To me it seems presumptuous at this point to suggest how much others should give—but perhaps I'm chicken." I soon found that a very substantial majority of our class (74% gave in '88 and 80% in '93) were strongly committed to the class

and to Princeton. The job was work and time consuming but it was a real pleasure keeping in touch with so many Princeton friends, old and new.

It wasn't long before Bob asked if I would join him in producing the Summer Newsletter, to which I was unable to say "no". This was coming closer to my real interest as a frustrated writer, having, luckily I guess, been denied a newspaper job when our class graduated in the depth of the depression. Since then the class gets credit for such success as we have had in Annual Giving and Bob gets credit for 90% of the work and brains that goes into the Newsletter. The rest of the credit goes to our many classmates and associates who provided essential copy.

Turning to the family there is a problem of maintaining appropriate communications with my children and grandchildren. As I have 36 children, step children, grandchildren and step grandchildren, I once thought of setting up an automatic birthday, Valentine and Christmas present and card sending system but gave it up when I figured the postage. Instead I decided to concentrate on my own children because I am responsible for telling them how to run their lives: The oldest is only 50+ and the youngest 40+. This last young son and his wife a few months ago decided to raise a family the easy way and adopted a little girl from Russia. But that was their own idea—I had nothing to do with it. As far as I can tell all of the "Steps" are doing well without my advice, which I reluctantly withhold.

As long as I am leveling with the class I must confess to some marital problems in my nearly four years-old third marriage. A daily ritual of ours is to work together

through two crossword puzzles, a cryptoquote, and the daily bridge puzzlement. Minsi, my wife, is so attached to the crossword puzzles that she likes to slow the whole process down by deliberately moving to a new location in the puzzle when she gets a word, rather than using the letters in the solved word to pick up the cross words. She also saves the easy three letter words until last, which is unheard of! Another problem with Minsi was her regularly beating me at golf, but this was solved by teaching her only the rudiments of gin rummy, at which I can now generally recover the money I lost on the golf course.

From Minsi's point of view my most serious character defect lies in my inability to put on my golf cap without ruffling up the remaining hair on the back of my head. Fortunately her constant concern about this shortcoming blinds her to my many other more grievous faults (like table manners for instance) so I am careful not to correct my cap technique.

In spite of the friction described above Minsi and I are very happy together. She is a cheerful, loving, humorous, beautiful, caring, athletic, stubborn person and we love each other very much.

That seems to have said it all in the "everlasting now", so it's time to say that it's been fun visiting with you and time to get back to the business of the class, which at the moment is FINDING A CLASSMATE WHO IS DYING TO VOLUNTEER (OR WHOSE ARM CAN BE TWISTED) TO BECOME CLASS AGENT.

Cheers
Curly

LIFE BEGINS AT EIGHTY

Anon

I have good news for you. The first eighty years are the hardest. The second eighty years, so far as my experience goes, is a succession of birthday parties.

Everybody wants to carry your baggage and help you up the steps. If you forget anyone's name, or forget to fulfill an appointment, or promise to be in two or three places at the same time, or spell words wrong, you can explain that you are eighty.

If you spill soup on your necktie or fail to shave one side of your face, or if your shoes don't match, or you take another man's hat by mistake, or carry a letter around in your pocket for a week before you read it, you are eighty.

Nobody expects much of you. If you act silly it is your second childhood. Everybody is looking for symptoms of softening of the brain.

It is a great deal better than being 65 or 70. At that time they expect you to retire to a little house in Florida and become a discontented, grumbling, limping has-been. But, if you survive till you are eighty, everybody is surprised that you are alive, surprised that you can walk, surprised that you can talk above a whisper, surprised if you reveal signs of lucid intervals.

At 70 people are mad at you for everything. At 80 they forgive anything. If you ask me, life begins at eighty.