

Lighthearted Confessions of a Deadliner

1 Thessalonians 5:14

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

In sharp and unflattering contrast to myself, my lovely spouse is a hard worker. Now that she is retired from a career as a professional nurse, she no longer labors for wages. Her days, however, remain full. Moreover, she has an agenda. Just this morning she filled some of my idle time in lecturing me about my lack of same. She is concerned that I greet each day with a sense of lethargic innocence. The fact that I do not lie awake each night riddled with guilt because I have no plan for the coming day bothers her. Feeling some obligation to myself and those like me the world over, I mumbled (I am a mumbler) that I do what is required but am not obsessed with looking for obligations and similar stuff. She thought my excuses weak, but she saw an opening and moved swiftly to exploit it. “Your problem is, then”, she said in a brilliant but very subjective summary of my rationale, “that you do not have enough to do.” (I cannot walk and think at the same time. I made a mental note not to attempt this again in the future.) “I will help you (I could not contain my feeling of thanksgiving)” she cooed sweetly (as problem solvers will), “You can work on my reunion.”

Now one, having listened to our conversation, would think that she had plenty to do just with my rehabilitation. How does a person with such grating marital problems find the time to concern herself with the triviality of college reunions? Still, each month for the past six she has found the time to rendezvous with equally intense classmates to plan the reunion of the class of 1960.

It happens that we were married on the eve of her graduation. I remember my parents warning me not to tie the knot until she had demonstrated that she could support me. Thinking back, I now read that as a certain want of parental confidence. They had a horror, I suppose, of my returning home to live again on their tab. Their greatest and surest defense, they felt, was that I should forge a union with a real wage earner.

Now I am roped into this reunion thing. She has assigned me the task of writing the blurb that will be the cover page of a brochure commemorating the event. I suppose I ought to have a better attitude about it. What fills my work-dodging soul with dread is that this will be the kind of thing that will cause her to go into her militaristic status checking mode. “Checking” will proceed on a regular and frequent basis. I am familiar with the pattern of this monitoring. She will ask probing questions. Each of these is designed with a dual purpose: (1.) to embarrass me, and (2.) to cut me off from excuse or maneuver.

Now, there are those that will say (probably women), “Why don’t you just do the task and end your torture?” Obviously, these folks do not understand! I do not perform until I am pressed by the deadline. If a deadline is not provided, then I never finish the job. If one is decreed, I delay until I feel the crimp. My wife understands this flaw in my nature,

yet she does not accommodate it. She has no circuitry that will allow her to do that. In her school days she was the kind of person that would corner the professor after the first day of class and press to know the term requirements (including dates). Then she would go immediately to the library and begin to assemble the materials. I, in contrast, never asked requirements. I knew that they would come. To know about them too far in advance was to take on unneeded pressure.

There are lots of human characteristics that induce tension in this world. My theory is that if we were all segregated into groups with similar failings, much of the stress would be eliminated. The rub comes when there is a need on the part of the “agenda” people to depend on the deadliner people. This relationship can never be entirely healthy. All of the angst will be felt by one side. The lives of the agenda folks will be shortened. They will inevitably waste the time required to harbor hard feelings against folks who will never actually set aside the time to feel guilt.

In about three months, Jacquelynne and I will have been married sixty-four years. She has been patient with me, she has admonished me, she has encouraged me. We are working things out.

George Moore
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