

SAY IT AIN'T SO

by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Once upon a time, I looked forward to my birthday. As a child I did so because my mother would invariably prepare a huge three-layered cake for me and, from time to time, I would also receive gifts.

As I approached adolescence, I looked forward to my birthday because each signaled a step closer to adulthood. And, you know, once you became an adult you can be as rude as you want to be without anyone referring to you as being "manish" or "fast."

On and on it went — this romance I had with birthdays. I know I was becoming wiser because that is what happens as one grows older and older and older — wiser and wiser and wiser.

I graduated from high school — older and wiser. I graduated from college — older and wiser. I taught high school — older and wiser and, finally, up to that point, I attended graduate school — older and wiser.

Oh, —for a youngster from Natchez, Mississippi, I was doing pretty good. Reading, writing, learning, demon-

strating and boycotting and more reading, writing and learning, demonstrating and boycotting and more reading, writing and learning, demonstrating and boycotting and more and more and more. That is what life had been like for me for so many years — learning and struggling. You know the story. You've been in it, too.

I was looking forward to my next birthday and it was indeed imminent. I had no great plans for that day, but, in a way, it would serve as a milestone for me. You see, I wanted to be at a certain stage in my development by a certain age and, as far as I could tell, I was right on target and right on schedule. I suppose that is one of the results of becoming older and wiser and, if nothing else, I was that.

How easy it is to prematurely pat oneself on the back. I admit it. I was proud of my accomplishments. I had to be. I got no feedback from any one else. Had I not given it to myself, I would not have gotten it. So I said to myself, from time to time as the circumstances



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warranted: "Good job, Fitzgerald," "outstanding work, Fitzgerald," "keep it up, Fitzgerald" and other such superlatives. Had I waited around for such acknowledgement from others, except for rare instances, I would still be waiting.

I should say, in defense of my behavior, that the line of people who were waiting and biting at the bit to criticize me went well beyond the horizon. Have you ever noticed how quickly some people are to condemn and how slowly they are to compliment? There you go. Anyway, who needs it? Right?

I was at Notre Dame for three birthdays. You remember, we started off talking about birthdays. I want to tell you about the first one. I was feeling pretty good about just about everything that day. I remember it as clearly as though it were today. I had just left one class and was walking through the corridor of O'Shaunessy Hall, on the second floor, headed to my next class. I was in a kind of euphoric state of mind. I remember I was smiling as I walked with a kind of bounce in my step.

I passed a group of students who had been involved in quite animated conversation but who "shushed" as I approached. I thought: "what is this?" I went on my way and I entered my next class just in time to hear the word "shot." Someone else stated a name — "Martin Luther King."

My chest filled and I had to struggle to breathe. My eyes began to tear up. I had not heard much but I was internalizing that which I had heard and already my computer was saying to me: "Martin is dead," "Martin is dead," "Martin is dead." My mind rejected those

thoughts. My mind said: "no." A resounding "NO." My intellect seized control. It told me: "you don't have enough data," "you don't have all of the facts," "you're jumping to conclusions." "Check it out." "Check it out." "Check it out."

Almost like a zombie, I entered the room. You see, all of those other mental transactions had happened in a flash — almost as though time had stood still. I opened my mouth to inquire of my classmates and nothing came out. I cleared my throat and finally was able to speak. The voice I heard was alien to me. It scared me. It was deep and crackly, slow and timed, anxious and tentative, searching but not wanting to discover.

Whatever the source, the voice asked: "What did you say about Martin — Luther — King?" I'll never forget the look of anguish on the face of my mate to whom I had spoken. Such grief. Such reluctance. Such horror. Such helplessness. In a tone which was akin to my own except for a nuance of pleading he said: "Martin — Luther — King — is dead."

My birthday, up to that time had been on April 4. When he told me what he told me, my birthday ceased to exist. Suddenly, I became a man without a birthday — a man who would never get older — a man who would be frozen in time. Just moments before, I had jauntily and smilingly strolled the corridor of O'Shaunessy Hall at Notre Dame. Just moments before I had been in a euphoric state of mind. Just moments before I had been marvelously, magnificently and monumentally happy and then, in what seems like simultaneously an instant and a lifetime, I was shaken and thrown bodily, mentally and spiritually out of my

revelry. WAIT. WAIT. YOU'RE MAKING A MISTAKE. WAIT! WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THIS WORLD?

I wish I could forget some things. I've tried but I cannot. I don't want you to forget either. I want you to remember as fervently as some Texans remember the Alamo or some sailors remember the Maine. I don't want to forget, really. Maybe what I want is two things — not to remember but not to forget.

No one can ever accuse me of having been estatic. A little silly, maybe. Sometimes I'm easy going, but never estatic. Whatever small remainder of a glow of innocence I might have had left over from an earlier childhood died on that day. My birthday.

I unconsciously walked out of the room to the hallway and stood there with my back against the wall with the sound of that one word reverberating in my mind — "WAIT." "WAIT." "WAIT."

A thousand stories coursed through my mind. Stories I had heard as a child or had read or had told. Stories, in effect, for all occasions. I think I was looking for something to grab a hold of. Something which would make that brutal reality a dream. Something which would make me wake up.

I saw rolling hills and green fields and a little house with a chimney with a plume of smoke. I saw fluffy clouds, blue birds, little children skipping down a path in a friendly forest. I heard babbling brooks and chipmunks. I saw blue skies, rainbows and baby chicks scurrying after a clucking hen.

I saw and heard all kinds of things during those fleeting moments in the corridor of O'Shaunessy Hall at Notre Dame. The one story which kept recurring — over

and over and I know that's redundant — had to do with a baseball team.

The Chicago Black Sox. You remember the scandal. One of the stars, Joe Jackson, had been accused of somehow either fixing or throwing a ballgame. Well, Joe had a lot of admirers. A lot of people who idealized him couldn't believe that he could do such a thing. You know how those true sports fans are about their sports heroes. One of Joe's fans was a little boy. We'll call him Joey.

Joey attended every game he could. He always rooted for Joe. He had baseball cards and all sorts of memorabilia to remind him of Joe. Joe was his hero. Joe was charged in the scandal and, during the proceeding at the courthouse, daily the little boy could be seen outside the steps.

Joe was found guilty and the reporters who had been covering the rearings, rushed out to make their deadlines. Joey heard the verdict from them. By and by, Joe exited the Hall of Justice and the kid approached his hero. He took Joe's hand in his and looked up at him with tears in his eyes and in the soulful kind of choked-up voice one would expect from a ten-year-old, he said: "Say it ain't so, Joe. Say it ain't so."

Joe could not. I stood in the corridor of the second floor of O'Shaunessy Hall at Notre Dame that fateful day in early April and pondered. I could hear birds chirping. I could see apple blossoms blossoming, and the trees were unfolding brand spanking new leaves. I looked across the way through another window and gazed upon the Golden Dome and uttered, in what had to have been a voice similar to Joey's, "Say it ain't so, God. Say it ain't so." God could not.

Assemblyman Williams Highlighted In New Book

Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams has been highlighted in a new book which has just been published. The book, "The Essential Immigrant" written by Dan Lacey, discusses the importance of immigrants to this country.

The author cited and lauds Assemblyman Williams for his stand on the importance of choosing textbooks that extol the contributions of Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

In his book the author says: "It must be noted that there was one politician in America of the 1980s who was willing to stand fearlessly and take an iconoclastic position in support of the economic contributions of immigrants. Ironically, ... he was, at this writing, only a state assemblyman. But in 1989 he did something that is likely to affect America's racial and ethnic image of itself for generations to come.

"On May 11, 1989, Representative Wendell P. Williams introduced in the Nevada Legislature Assembly Bill 759 which simply amends an existing law that gives the state board of education the right to choose

textbooks to be used in Nevada's public schools. The new language that he proposed is, however, profound in its simplicity:

A textbook may not be selected for use in the public schools in classes in literature, history, or social sciences unless it accurately portrays the cultural and racial diversity of our society, including lessons on the contributions made to our society by men and women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Assemblyman Williams is to be praised for his courage and foresightedness, and for the leadership that he continues to bring, not only to our community, but also to the nation at large.

Dan Lacey's book, "The Essential Immigrant" is a fascinating piece of writing which is well worth the reading. It is published by Hippocrene Books, New York, and will be in your local bookstores soon.

Keep Hope Alive!
STOP THE VIOLENCE!

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