

Questionin' That:

2007: Toxic Waste in the Commons & An All White Davidson?

It is the year 2007, and students from the year 1991 and 1992 gather for a school reunion. We join our two pontificants, J. and A., little older, a little wiser, and more attuned to the simpler pleasures of life, at the Vail Commons which is now a nuclear waste facility.

A: So, we're back at the old "D." My how things have changed. Seems like yesterday when we were dining in this now defunct cafeteria, although the green beans always did seem fluorescent.

J: I knew there had to be some reason that those green bean cans were made out of lead. This place is almost totally different than I remember it, although Dean Terry doesn't look a day older.

A: Hey, let's go to the Dean's office to look up some of the current African American students. It is hard to imagine that there were only 65 black people at Davidson when we were here. There must be at least a hundred or more now.

J: Yeah, the Dean's office is a strong move. Let's do it.

(Five to ten minutes later in the Dean's office).

J: I'm glad to see that they finally made Mrs. Archie a Dean. She was the coolest person in the office.

A: There's John Eaves in the same office, and he still has a TWA

(Teenie-Weenie-Afro for those who don't know the time). Let's look up some of these students; I'm interested to see what things are like today.

J: Well, here's the student directory, but now that I think about it, how are we supposed to know which of these students is black? Let's ask Mr. Eaves.

A: Dean Eaves! Hey, remember us, 1992 and 1993, *Davidsonian* column "Questionin' That?" It's J. and A.: We're looking for some current black students to talk to. When we left, black students were making an indelible mark on Davidson and its future. We want to know what's going on.

J: Uh-uh.... Uh-huh.... You don't say! Dean Eaves, you've got to be putting me on. Do you expect me to believe that there is not one single black student on this entire campus? I mean, this is 2007, for crying out loud! Black student enrollment and graduation rates have been on the rise for the last ten years! What's wrong with this picture?

A: Come to think of it, there was another development taking place as we left. The attrition rate for black students increased for the same reason that the numbers of black students stayed consistently low: Davidson adjusted; but it didn't change. The school seemed

perfectly willing to allow students to initiate things, but it never extended beyond itself to meet the demands of a burgeoning, diverse group of students. As a conse-



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quence, it never changed.

J: Yeah, yeah, I know what you're saying. One thing that would have pleased many of the black students that were here then was for there to have been more blacks in positions of authority at Davidson. I recognize that, at that time, the competition for black administrators and faculty was heavy. However, Davidson made no ef-

fort to hold onto the quality people that it already had.

When I think of black faculty and administration members that were wronged, names like Savander Parker and Arnold James come to mind. And when the college wronged them, it simultaneously wronged all of the students that depended upon them for guidance and support. Losing people like that really hurt my feelings, and it sensed that I wasn't alone in that sentiment.

A: No you weren't. Those developments hurt us and the school. I couldn't help feeling a little strange walking across the stage at graduation. I was glad to be walking, to be sure. But I also felt like one day I would return and find no more black people and no diversity, and I have!

J: With the benefit of hindsight, it's clear that there were numerous things that could have been done to avoid what we're seeing now. But then again, many of us knew then what needed to happen. We knew that diversity in numbers did not directly translate into a diverse environment. We knew that action needed to be taken to ensure that the mainstream would reach out and engulf students that were outside of it, instead of forcing them to compro-

mise their character in order to fit in. I guess nobody listened until it was too late.

A: Hey, J., did we ever compromise our characters being here for four years?

J: My answer to that question is that there was no other way for students like us to survive at a place like this. What a pity.

A: Yeah, that is a pity, and you know what else is a pity, I have a date with Lisa Cooley, so I'll have to break out on you.

J: If that's a pity, I need more sympathy in my life. Peace.

A: Peace

(A message from the year 2007: The black student exodus depicted in this column has already begun. The scenario presented here is very possible and perhaps even very likely. If diversity is our goal, assimilation is NOT the answer. Only true integration will make things work. That means everybody giving a little, so that we can all gain a lot. But we've got to start today.)

P.S., The Dean John Eaves depicted in this column is purely fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or working in Room 104 Chambers, is entirely coincidental.

Finally, a special shout! out to Sterling Freeman, who provided the inspiration for this column.

Beyond Birkenstock: J. Kyle Kinner & Seth J. McLaughlin

In Memory of the Fine Lost Art of Gentle Conversation

When, at a dinner party somewhere, later in your life, you are asked to confirm someone else's opinion with your own on a subject of which you know not, think back to this moment and this column, for we are about to tell you how.

How what?

Why, how to come up with totally brainless, yet apparently sensible judgments that no one could possibly disagree with. Recall that only insensitive boors possess the audacity to make a comfortable conversation "strained" by vocal disagreement. So, the ultimate aim of any "conversationalist" must necessarily be to repackage what you've just heard in a slightly different, but still recognizable form, and return it for your audience's consumption. Think of it as sort of like the tennis your grandparents played. And if your grandparents didn't play tennis, or perform any other non-farm related activity, then you probably don't get invited to many parties anyway (Second Law of Kennedy-namics).

No, of course we're going to explain this metaphor. Our grandparents didn't play tennis either. But just take our word that in the "good" ole days (as opposed to the "bad" ole days in which we currently reside), our forefathers and foremothers wore white tennis "togs" from Abercrombie & Fitch, including a sweater and blazer. Women really have come a long way... baby. Go try wearing a

white, ankle-length wool skirt in July for an hour or so and say hello to Mr. Heat-Stroke for us while you're at it.

Now the point. Because of this medieval sportswear, the game of tennis itself tended to be more stately and decorous (or ponderous and dull, depending on who you ask); the game was slow, and your grandmother could still play that version out at the home. People would feed one another a series of lobs with roughly the excitement level of the Seventies computer classic "Pong."

What, you may still be asking yourselves, does this infinite digression have to do with my ability to dither away the hours in futile conversation, anyway?

A lot.

Grandmother's tennis partner represents the person who you, as an imbecile, would ideally want to attract in some post-buffet, pre-Cappacino conversation. Imagine yourself, suitably attired (though you always did dress a little flashy) and strategically situated to the rear of that potted rubber tree, hoping against hope that the bar stays open another hour, or barring that, someone will stagger over and talk to you.

Oh, look... over there in that knot of intelligent and vivacious people, it's Henry Kissinger (the perennial dinner guest). Is that great statesman really coming towards you? Does he truly want to hear your opinions on foreign

policy or the Nixon years? Can this be happening to you?

Of course not, don't be stupid. Henry wouldn't budge from that clump of shiny, happy people if Mikhail Gorbachev walked through the door. They're sycophants, silly. Hosts pay those people by the hour to surround and flatter the formerly famous. Why else do you think anyone would invite Robin Leach into their home?

Meanwhile, back at the potted plant, someone appears willing to talk to you. Quick, purse your lips and knot your brow in a semblance of intelligence. Try holding your wine glass up to your nose and sniffing. With any luck, he'll think you're a connoisseur or a vintner. Whatever you do, don't compare the wine's bouquet to "Mad Dog" or "Thunderbird" no matter how much it reminds you of skid row. He might be the caterer and attempt to kill you.

In fact, it isn't the caterer at all, but someone you actually know. The great coincidence machine of life being what it is, you are just as likely to meet your remedial teacher from fourth grade as you are to meet a peer who lives in the same city. Better safe than sorry, we'll state the four laws of social contact governing strangers you know (they carry the same weight as those governing the physical universe).

1) Whenever you meet someone who you don't even vaguely recall, the other party will invari-

ably address you by your first name.

2) Upon perceiving that you do not remember them, the offended party will immediately begin to rub it in, alluding to your age or other infirmity that would cause you to forget "the good times we had together."

3) Nine times out of ten, you will leave these conversations without having a clear understanding of who you were speaking to.

4) The other person, who for some reason still knows folks from the same forgotten era, will now proceed to tell these people that you have apparently contracted Parkinson's, since who could possibly forget those "good times" otherwise.

For the sake of argument, however, we will assume that the person now addressing you has been so loosened by drink as to ignore the normally inviable social laws. Why, what a surprise, it's your dad's insurance agent from when you were ten, who has moved up to selling commercial coverage and would like very much to show you some literature.

You make some small excuse about having to take your Prozac and move away quickly.

Good, you're learning a good lesson: choose your victim. A woman near the bar wearing only one shoe looks promising. She might be too tanked to protest a good conversation. You sidle up, prepared for her to belch in your face. Instead, you find her quite

sober and willing to talk. It seems she threw her shoe to ward off the aforementioned insurance salesman. Quite a mind, that.

You talk. She lobs an easy one your way. "Isn't this economy dreadful? Can you believe how Reagan and his cronies screwed this nation... spend, spend, spend." (Here, she clucks disapprovingly and eyes you squarely.)

Now we've reached the proverbial fork in your decision tree. The ball (pardon the mixed-metaphor) is in your court. Your heart, and whatever's left of your mind after all those Fuzzy Navels is telling you that, wait a minute, Reagan ONLY SPENT THE MONEY THAT THOSE DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS APPROPRIATED. And, my goodness, WINNING THE COLD WAR was no mean feat... cheap at half the price!

Do you stand up for the truth and defend Ronald Reagan? Do you cite the impressive statistics from that period and remind her that recessions are an unavoidable correction in the business cycle that was statistically worse under CARTER? Are you HONEST?

Of course not. This is social conversation, you fool. Ultimately, your goal is to be perceived to be just as intelligent, and just as "sensitive" to the victims of Reagan as she is. Swallow the truth whole if you have to. But, for goodness sake, appear sensible.

You nod and say, "Terrible, isn't it?"