

Confidence

"There is no deeper principle in human nature than the craving to be appreciated" ~ William James, 19th Century Psychologist

Any dead hero will tell you that youthful overconfidence and a craving for appreciation can be fatal. I find myself overjoyed to have muddled through my younger years without anyone killing me, although a few friends and relatives may have given it a thought from time to time. Unrestrained and unwarranted self-certainty happily leveled off a half century ago at the end of my teen years. Had it followed a natural arc of ascending absurdity, I would have been impossible to live with today. As it is, I'm only annoying.

I've always had opinions on just about everything, and began voicing them early. I remember at age four asking my mother to help me write a letter to the editor. "About what?" she said. "You can't even read." "I wanted to introduce myself," I said.

All I ever wanted to be was a man. My earliest memories as a child are filled with instances where I tried to be a man, long before I was able. As I grew older, I stumbled forward on the narrow boards of my ego.

My grandmother once told me the doctor broke my arm while delivering me because I argued with him about how best to do the job. Otherwise, she seldom mentioned my conceit. My father, on the other hand, often said I "had a bump" on myself, and he certainly had ample evidence provided to him. At age 13, I was convinced I would conquer the world. And I often remarked on it. That was the year I spoke in a whisper almost constantly, and slept with the windows open in February to strengthen and deepen my voice, hoping to become a radio personality. When I wasn't whispering, I responded to every imaginable advertiser in the back of numerous magazines. Half of the realtors in the state of Arizona were calling our house, because of all the coupons I cut out and mailed, mostly during those long upstate New York winters. My mother stopped answering the phone. No problem, I used my voice deepening practice to play my father and explain that "young David had left for Africa."

In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, I thought I was the world's next genius. But I failed tests at school, thinking I knew the material well and not bothering to study. A quick tempered insolence got me into trouble with neighbors, alienated teachers and often caused my father embarrassment when I would mouth off in front of his friends. My mojo knew no bounds. I was almost arrested when I walked past a cop writing a parking ticket and put a nickel in

the meter. He nearly tore my head off while he was tearing up the ticket. If Dad introduced me to an adult on the street, I'd grab the man's hand and say, "Hi, I'm Dave Griffin. You've probably heard of me." Some of his friends laughed. I'm sure the others wished he would put me in my place, but one can tell a 16 year old very little.

My driving was particularly irksome to Dad. It's safe to say he feared for his life while riding with me, so it is to his eternal credit that he even allowed me to drive his car. From his point of view, I needed to learn the rules of the road and I required a high degree of supervision behind the wheel. To me, I was chauffeuring an old fuddy around town, regaling him with solid driving tips while the poor man thought he was teaching me to drive. Had he been a mean person, he might have told me what an old girl friend once said to me: "You may not be much, Dave, but you're all you ever think about." And in fact that was the key. There was nothing more important to me than Dave. But Dave wasn't doing so well.

I remember myself as a teenager, sitting lonely in the center of my own universe, writing the script so my future would turn out the way I wanted. But in the staging of the scenes, I was a second-rate actor who often forgot his lines or stumbled while crossing the stage. And in playing the main character, I was just trying to become someone I had invented. I could act my heart out, impersonating the successful bon vivant I wanted to be, but I was unable to master the real roles in my life ... student, son, brother, friend. I risked failing to become a real person because I was trying to be someone I wasn't.

The cock-sureness of my youth masked my natural feelings of inferiority. As I stumbled through my high school years, I began to know the disappointing truth that like many other teens I had never really accomplished anything, had never formed a truly selfless relationship with another and never stood up to honestly take my own measure. Since I was too young to admit it, I was left to cover my confusion with a blanket of arrogance. That covering wouldn't last forever. Eventually it would shred away, and underneath would be found either a boy simply getting older or a man in the making.

I don't remember how it happened. I know the process wasn't clean and precise. A woman played a significant part in it, spending most of her life with me on the path. For her, maturity was inevitable. For me, it was a long road with uncertain directions and a changing landscape. But I eventually got here, and today I can say with confidence that I am indeed a man. But I am only a man. And although I will sometimes sit in the center of my own universe, I seldom set up camp there. It's too lonely a place. In the wider universe ... the real one ... I am not alone, I am not in charge and I am no more important than anyone else.

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The Press at Windswept Farm
Saugerties, NY
www.windsweptpress.com