

The Lecture

"No phones, no tablets, no notepads. There will be nothing recorded or transcribed except that which you chose to retain in your mind. And trust me, today's lecture yearns to be recorded in our memory...our bones...our skin. It has to exist inside of us to be effective. Not like a thought you hashtag or headline you share. Anyone can do that and everyone does it.

In just a few short years we've killed the potential of social media with thoughtless overuse. We've saturated our preferred communication. No one gives a shit that you shared a despicable headline because those who you are trying to reach have shared their own despicable headline. You're looking at your own likes, comments, reactions. You're talking to yourself. And they are talking to themselves. Or... we do something worse. We troll or we are trolled with unimaginative ideas and words. We spew useless trash or close our app covered in rot. No one's invested in why something happened, but would rather perpetuate the happening. This does not lead us to a mediation. This sends us running from a nuclear wave.

It's no secret that I am a Dylan fan, so this may come as shock to all of you. But we need to look back. Not just ten, twenty, fifty years. We need to look at all of history, back to the so-called Book and then forward."

She checked her Swatch. *47 minutes.*

She stepped out from behind the podium and walked the rows of the classroom. This is her post-monologue style. She'll allow energy to pull her towards a student, stop, cup their shoulder, and ask for their follow-up by voicing their name. *For example: "John?"* But today she took a different approach.

"Today, we investigate history. Today, we figure out a way to stop fucking things up."

This was the lecture that had propelled her into academics almost five decades prior. She had witnessed 67 rounds fired in 13 seconds on her alma mater's lawn by hands who were there to quell, not kill. *4 dead in Ohio*. She was going to be the change. The professor your parents didn't want you to have.

This was the lecture that carried her back every Fall to face a new group of young and eager minds who had yet to dismiss the idea of follow-through. It's very conception was intended to be her signature, what filled the seats in her *History is Perspective* 300 level course. But in her thirty-nine years of teaching she never brought it into the classroom.

Instead, the lecture had worn many miles into her kitchen floor. She'd smoke, think, pace, spill wine while debating herself. It was not practiced on her scores of lovers who had smoked and spilled with her. Nor was it recited for a colleague in the form of a debate or recorded in ink or saved on a drive. The analogies would change to reflect the times, along with the wine, she matured to a dry red, and her hair color, a natural gray she embraced. But her message never wavered.

In '84 when the Doomsday Clock hit *3 minutes until midnight* with US-Russian relations provoking a new arms race she prepared to present the lecture. She paced the kitchen through sleepless nights for a week but couldn't come up with how the lecture would end.

She would come back to it time and again, tweak it, but never believed it would be delivered. If we got any closer to midnight, what would be the point? We'd be too far past to turn around. But there's something intrinsically magical about the human will to survive. One could be hanging from their fingertips on the edge of a roof, fifty stories high, and still possess hope. That hope could be straight up denial, but it's still hope.

"I came across an analogy of conflict years ago when I dabbled in law that one semester I decided to please my parents. Which on a side note, is hysterical in hindsight. The what made my parents happy part, that is. Tacitus, way back in AD 70-ish, told us about law - *the more corrupt the state, the more numerous the laws* - right? And now in 1970 my parents think me studying law is a positive thing. That's how easily corruption is accepted. Anyhow, I got out of law fast, it was just too dark. But I learned about this cupcake analogy that has stuck with me all of these years. It's simplistic in nature but there's an answer in it that is both practical and effective. A philosopher's stone. I haven't found it, but I have not stopped searching. And neither should you.

The accepted thought is that the only time conflict must be addressed is when it causes a problem. But conflict needs a problem to exist in the first place. And conflict that causes a problem for just one side, still causes a problem. Consider this -

There are two kids who want the same, lone cupcake sitting on the kitchen table. This is a conflict, right? One kid grabs the cupcake and claims full ownership. This conflict has now created a problem, but for only one of them. The kid holding the cupcake would deny that a problem exists. He has what he wants, right? Take a minute and think about how you would mediate this conflict. Don't discuss with your neighbor, don't discuss with me. Just think."

She took a sip of water, chased it with a hard swallow. How many times had she tried to split that cupcake over the years? *Hundreds.*

34 minutes.

"All right. So you all should have some resolve you're mulling over, or dismissing, maybe accepting. Perhaps you think the cupcake could be split. Down the middle, even Stevens. Too easy and doesn't address the problem. You dig a little deeper into the psyche of the owner. You help him realize that he only wants the icing and that his sister is more interested in the

cake. They each can get what they want. Let's add another layer to this conflict. Their big brother comes downstairs and now he wants part of the cupcake. His interests lie neither in the icing nor the cake.

Now that a third party has entered the conflict, he cannot be ignored. If you involve only the first two kids in the mediation, the solution they arrive at will likely not meet the needs of the big brother. As a result the big brother will not feel bound to the decision reached in the mediation. And then what happens when the mom comes downstairs, then the father, and they too feel entitled to the cupcake.

The mediation can become very confusing to sort out, to identify all needs, to satisfy all parties. What we all fail to realize - you, me, the cupcake family - is that we all want to answer the same question, *how could we have prevented this from happening?* The only answer I've come up with in forty some years is that the family should've bought more cupcakes. I'm pretty sure I'm wrong."

She had her students attention. They wore long faces, but they were long, interested faces. No one had checked their phones. In fact, no one had taken their eyes off of her. Their eyes swayed left to right, right to left, in the meter of her pace. Her kitchen lectures had prepared her for opposition. There was always that one imagined student acting with provocation. Years of practiced dialogue taught her not to react with emotion but with grace. But today, this dialogue did not seem to be needed.

27 minutes.

"If you've taken my *Elizabethan History* course, you'll recall The Wars of the Roses, which had done a fine job of destroying England's nationhood in the fifteenth century. You had two opposing groups who wanted the same thing, control of the throne. The groups are identified

by a colored rose. The Yorkists would bear a white rose and the Lancastrians a red rose. But the livery badges were not worn by all people. Not everyone wanted to profess an allegiance to a lord and that's exactly what the livery was. It meant you were okay with bastard feudalism. You were with one or the other, you didn't have to think as you had a lord to do that for you.

I learned about this period of conflict not from a history textbook but rather through the arts. After I witnessed the shootings at Kent I dove into Shakespeare, starting with the first play - *Henry VI, Part One*. "

"I'm going to pass on some wisdom," she laughed, "when you're looking for an escape from reality, Shakespeare is not your answer."

22 minutes.

"But if you find yourself looking for an explanation of reality, then he's your man. A century after the Wars of the Roses he unveils this play to the Elizabethans - who by the way, were still strife with patriotic excitement and were by no means a changed people. They were desperate for perspective, starved for answers. The ones who refuse to listen will tell you that with Shakespeare came the innovation of entertainment - a distracting art. I'm here to tell you that Elizabethans did not flock to the theatre to be entertained. They went to see *Henry VI, Part One* to learn how these wars had begun. The commoners, like yourself, myself, had had enough. As long as they allowed lords to rule, conflict would exist.

It's a weird riddle. One I can't figure out. One that I challenge you to figure out. The popular belief is that there are power in numbers. So why is it that there are far less leaders than there are citizens yet we allow the one percent to rule?

Do not misconstrue my context - I am not calling for anarchy. But the foundation of hierarchy needs examined. Our leaders are to work for us. At some point in our history that truth

got flipped around, and worse yet, we accepted that oppression as the norm. It is what it is, we say."

17 minutes.

"We were talking about the Doomsday Clock last class. Remember that it took the world 44 years to gain 10 minutes and 26 years to lose 14 1/2 minutes on the Clock? I hope that scared you. It takes a lot longer to repair than it does to undo. That is a verified fact, record it to memory.

A successful mediation gifted the world *17 minutes* in 1991 with the Strategic of Arms Reduction Treaty. I call this mediation *The Smile*. Trite, perhaps, but hear me out. Prior to Gorbachev, I don't recall ever seeing a Soviet smile. We had been in a war for years that would go stale and reheat and then stale again. The Soviets were our enemies and enemies don't smile.

But when I look back at iconic still frames of Gorbachev and Bush, the elder, before they signed the treaty, they are smiling at each other. I'm talking about in '88, '89, during White House visits and summits. Look back even further to '85 and you'll find Gorbachev smiling with Reagan. It took six years from the first civil meeting of Cold War participants to draw it to a close, but that simple, initial smile earned us *17 minutes*.

She sat down. No one spoke. They all watched the clock on the wall. Tick. Tick...

She checked her Swatch.

"We're left with 2 1/2 minutes. This is the closest we've been to midnight since 1953. We got within 2 minutes by way of hydrogen. And now here we are, no hydrogen, just good old fashioned ignorance this time. It's almost unfathomable. I want to blame the world, but I can only blame myself. Every one of us has had a hand in this mess.

Maybe if I had smiled at the Guardsmen instead of looking away in fear they wouldn't have killed four of my classmates. I once sat in your seat and not just thought, but believed, I had the answers. So I became a teacher. I was going to change the world with my beliefs. What I didn't understand is that I first had to let the world's beliefs change me. Impact me. Make me sad...angry...optimistic...pessimistic. The pendulum only has a few more swings. Get sad, get angry. Read Shakespeare. Study the Cold War. Pay attention to the Clock. Take note of what's been repeated and end the repetition. Stop sharing every god damn thing that pisses you off on Facebook. Find a way for all to enjoy the cupcake... and then hand it over. And lastly, do not presume that those with different needs than yours are the enemy. In fact, abolish the idea of an enemy. They are not something we are born with, so stop creating them."