

Still

Written by Jack Sparacino
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“Children are not fragile. Their parents can screw up, lose their tempers, and sometimes ignore their children’s needs, and yet if the overall pattern of care is reliable, then their kids still feel secure in their presence. Another lesson is that there is no one right parenting style. Parents can deliver stern punishments, and as long as the child thinks the conversation is coherent and predictable, then the attachment will probably still be secure.”

– David Brooks, **The Social Animal** (Random House, 2011)

With the pace of change in our world accelerating ever faster, it’s good to know that some things just keep on keepin’ on. Instability is stressful, whereas predictability—sure, endurance—is often soothing and satisfying. Hence the enduring popularity of chain restaurants and hotels across the country. Traveling can be jarring enough, with the constant threat of being thrust outside our comfort zones, so why play Russian roulette with your hamburger, latte or bed? With this in mind, and especially after such a jarringly unpredictable election cycle, I thought it worthwhile to reflect for a moment on things that remain with us. Things that are *still* there,

still
anchoring our lives. Yes, for better or worse. Brooks’ brilliant book is full of such enduring entities, particularly as they involve the human mind and behavior. I’d like to travel a bit closer to earth today, though. Here are a dozen sample offerings.

1. American marketers still seem to believe that we consumers, at least regarding household goods, are either mostly deaf or hard of thinking. How else to explain the American

Freight furniture and mattress guy who keeps screaming throughout their TV ads, right down to their Savannah phone number, 912-232-2229. Other companies scream too, so it must be working.

2. Speaking of TV ads, am I the rare person who doesn't have psoriasis? The barrage from Stelara, Taltz, Humira and the like lead me to believe that after thousands of years, most humans still suffer from this scaly, flaky red mess of a skin condition. WebMd tells us: "Unpredictable and irritating, psoriasis is one of the most baffling and persistent of skin disorders. It's characterized by skin cells that multiply up to 10 times faster than normal." Still baffling after all these years, eh? And yet I have never known anyone who complained about it to me. Or even mentioned it. I must either radiate an anti-psoriasis force field or be too rash to even see it or hear of it. There's been a lot of talk about a certain extremely thin-skinned leader lately, one can only hope he never encounters this disease as the results might be incredible. UGE.

3. Speaking of diseases and medications to combat them, why do advertisers still need to tell people not to take a drug if they're allergic to it? Isn't that sort of obvious? Are companies just looking to cover their butts against pesky lawsuits? Leapin' lizards! I can only presume they're just still allergic to losing money.

4. I am still baffled by many celebrities and their soaring popularity. One example: Bob Dylan is considered a great . . . what? He's got an old hiking boot for a face, ok, but his sandpapery voice has been grating my entire life, he hasn't written any great books (as one reviewer of his recent memoir wrote, "I've read many musician's autobiographies and this book was just plain boring. I could not wait until it was over"), and interviews like boiled Wheaties but he won a Nobel Prize for literature. Huh. Well, maybe he's more of a song writer and poet than a singer or writer-writer. OK, I won't think twice, it's alright.

5. And I'm still flummoxed by some cultural trends. Sleeve tattoos, nose and lip rings, rap music, pickup trucks driven by suburbanites who rarely need to haul bales of hay or sacks of grain and who never go fishing or hunting. What gives, you guys? How about the ability to write in cursive, taught to my generation, a talent vanishing from the earth like invisible ink? Isn't longhand still an elegant way to communicate?

6. Thank heavens there are *always* great blues artists around. I can listen to Sonny Landreth's "Bound by the Blues" forever, starting with his searing "It Hurts Me Too."

7. Sixty-six years old and I STILL can't dance. It's worse than ever, folks. Even Captain William Bligh "always directed," per Caroline Alexander's **The Bounty**, that "the Evenings from 5 to 8' O'Clock to be spent in dancing, & that every Man should be Obligated to dance as I considered it conducive to their Health." At what point did I fall off the wagon (uh, boat) and miss the point of dancing entirely and are 30 lashes in store for me in the next world?

8. Nor can I sauté mushrooms without burning them or walk across a room in my house without tripping over dog toys. Or warm up to pink hair (sure, fire engine red is fine, even blue streaks).

9. I still can't fathom why perfect strangers keep calling me "Jack" when they cold call with a solicitation. How 'bout a polite mister or two before we get quite that chummy?

10. Can one really be as dumb (ok, uninformed) as a bag of hammers and still vote in this country? How about we appoint a commission to look into *that*!

11. Apparently it remains the case that only very attractive young models—none with psoriasis-- vacation at Sandals resorts. How's their longhand? Do they vote? Read Dylan?

12. The Greatest Generation is still, by far, hands down, the greatest. And will remain so. CBS recently reported that "For as long as he can remember, 19-year-old Rishi Sharma (above) has been fascinated with World War II. But it wasn't until recently that he realized that history is still living." Rishi observed that real superhero WWII veterans are still out there and he wanted to meet them. So in 2014, he began to do just that. He skipped school for days to conduct interviews. Took his bike and later drove to the local senior center. His goal is to meet one of these vets each day. He interviews them for hours and then gives the recordings to their families. He's done over 200 interviews so far and can't move fast enough—he believes we're losing over 400 WWII vets each day.

Like me and many others, Rishi is enamored by these veterans. He said to one vet over the phone, "It means a great deal to me that you were able to endure all that so that I could be here today." "Well, thank you very much," the vet answered. *Gulp*.

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A young man on a mission, much like the veterans he speaks with were at his age,

Rishi is delaying his college education. He started a GoFundMe campaign to branch out from California to the rest of America. The Greatest Generation lingers, yes, and perhaps is more likely than ever to remain a driving force in America.

Still, I wonder. Even at nineteen, like Rishi, is there ever enough time to do what feels right and carry the torch for those who might otherwise fade into history? Or feel neglected? Can the rest of us launch campaigns of our own, driven only by goodness . . . and Brooks' fragility be damned?

As always, perhaps there's still just no telling.