

Forces

Volume 2000

Article 16

5-1-2000

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Recommended Citation

Whetten, Loraine (2000) "More Is Better," *Forces*: Vol. 2000 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces/vol2000/iss1/16>

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More Is Better

Lorraine Whetten

The other day I asked my friends what they hated about being eighteen. I was surprised when they admitted to enjoying that time of their lives. Not me! I hated it! I always say, "The further I get from eighteen, the happier I am." High school was boring, and I hated many of my classmates. At the time, I looked forward to the day when I would be the age of my mother and her friends. I learned early, that age is a state of mind, and the more years you have behind you, the more skills you have to enjoy life.

My high school years were short, but the days were long. Dull, boring lectures filled each day of endless school hours. We laughed at the home economics teacher when she drawled the word "sex-yew-awl in-tour-course." Her discussion of the subject sounded similar to an aristocratic discussion of "Math-a-maw-teeks." She spent class time berating the women's liberation movement and expounding upon the virtues of a 280 thread-count, white sheet. I hated many of my classmates. The basketball players had lockers across the hall from mine. Their only occupation in life, besides playing ball, seemed to be harassing the girls. Some of the girls in my history class told me they had never traveled outside the county we lived in. In contrast to these classmates, my girlfriend and I spent a summer exploring New York City, Washington D.C., and Chicago. We thought of those poor little girls as stunted. I hated those years, but I persisted and learned courage from facing difficult and boring times.

While in high school, I liked my mother and her friends. Because of them, I thought forty would be a fun age, and looked forward to that time in my life. My mother and her friends were rebels in an era when June Cleaver stereotypes really existed. Single, they slaughtered the image of poor, miserable divorcees. I remember going out

with them at ten o'clock one morning for ice cream. When my sister got into the car, the top of her sundae was missing. Taking a cue from the adult women, we laughed uproariously when we discovered the missing ice cream smeared across the interior roof of my mother's black Chevy Bel Air. There was another story I heard these women tell. Locked theater doors barred them from a play when they were late one evening. Undaunted, they went around back to the stage players' entrance. As they climbed the stairs, their spiked heels caught in the iron-meshed steps, causing them to repeatedly trip and nearly fall backwards. These women had fun together. They liked their jobs. When I looked at their lives, I looked forward to aging. It seemed they were having more fun at forty than I was at eighteen.

For my twentieth high school reunion, I coined the phrase, "The further I get from eighteen, the happier I am." It was a great time to be with my former classmates. I realized they were no longer boring or obnoxious. Age cast a wonderful spell on them. The sleazy basketball forward married one of our classmates. Together, they moved to Chicago and lived as happy Yankees. Matt changed into Michelle. We laughed hysterically at her stories of growing up among us. "If you remember the 60's, you weren't really there;" that describes Mike who survived on drugs every day of high school. Now he is the head of the psychotherapy department at Valley Drug Rehabilitation. Frank, who had been a "homophobe," attended with his boyfriend. I enjoyed approaching and speaking to the basketball players, now fathers of teenage girls.

With glee, I noticed they ducked their heads in embarrassment, and lowered their eyes before reaching out to shake my hand. I enjoyed the last laugh. Our handshake was an informal but important "peace treaty" between us.

I have survived the springtime of my life - puberty; made it through summer - marriage, childbirth, teenagers, and tragedies; and look forward to the beauties of fall - courage, joy, wisdom, and serenity. Age improves life, and I say, "The more years, the better."