

Fathers and Sons: The Invisible Ladder

A Luncheon of Four Middle Age Friends Who have Known Each Other Since the Early 1970's.

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Theme: [History](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Act 1

A luncheon of four middle age friends who have known each other since their university days in the early 1970's.

Professor: Should we share a bottle of wine?

Lawyer: Why not! No time clock, clients or deadlines.

Social Worker: (smiles). We can afford it!

Doctor: No doubt ... we're drawing pensions, social security, annuities. Medicare covers medical bills. Mortgages are paid up.

Professor: Someone e-mailed me an announcement about a half century anniversary of the student strike back then and when.

Lawyer: Is it that long ago? Seems like only yesterday we were rabble rousing and doing all-nighters running off leaflets.

Doctor: For some folks that was the biggest moment of their lives. Their frozen in a time warp.

Social Worker: You'd be surprised how many activists stayed and made a career celebrating the past.

Lawyer: Yeah, past thirty they got seedy. Didn't know when to move on to the real world.

Professor: Best advice I ever got was from my dissertation director, who told me to

ice the polemical stuff and publish in the premier journals and presses and get in the big leagues ... "After you make it," he advised, "you can do whatever you want ... your endorsement of good causes will be sought and valued." He was right!

Lawyer: (cynical smile) Course after you climb the ladder, there's no looking back ... (quickly adds) but I still take pro-bono clients once in a while.

Social Worker: That's good insurance if you ever run into one of those wash-outs who went full-time and landed on their ass when the big lay-offs hit in the early 1980's. Now their full of envy and resentment of those of us that didn't burn our bridges.

Lawyer: I never run across those 'wash outs'. Not at work, none in my neighborhood, or around my summer house.

Professor: I used to see some of them. The smart ones got on the lecture circuit and cashed in for a while. But who knows what came afterward?

Doctor: By the way can I interest you guys in signing off on a single payer petition? It's circulating on the internet.

Lawyer: Send it to me. I'll look it over. It must be for the next generation. I'm covered across the board.

Social Worker: Lots of uncertainty out there. My kid resents paying social security. He claims it won't be around when it's time for him to collect.

Professor: He's got a point there but he's stretching it a bit (pause) Times are changing though... When I graduated, I had a dozen offers and I was still active. The Viet Nam war was still on and the blacks were rioting. But I kept away from the crazies carrying the Vietcong flag and provoking the cops with taunts. I published in the right journals, crunched the numbers. Got the grants. Promotions.

Lawyer: (yawns discreetly covering his mouth). It was a question of hooking up with the right people. I got an offer from a top law firm and worked past the clock and won my cases. I made senior partner in five years. Paid my mortgage in ten and bought my beach house when I was lead lawyer in the Holocaust law suit.

Doctor: It seems like there is no way going back or coming down, even when the

protestors disappeared and the right-wing came back to power.

Social Worker: I disagree. Some things changed for the worst. I mean social budgets were cut. Iraq was invaded .Yugoslavia was bombed. Public employee salaries were frozen and benefits cost skyrocketed.

Professor: Yeah. Times are changing for the worst. They hired three part-timers to fill my line when I retired.

Lawyer: I would say ... it's more competitive if you're starting. But once you make it to the top - it's never better!

(Addresses social worker) Can you pour me some more of that Rioja?

Doctor: My kids are making it. One's a financial adviser and the other finished his residency and became a partner in a major private medical group.

Professor: (somewhat riled by the Doctor's boasting.) Didn't you make a substantial annual contribution to the alumni fund of the medical school where he was admitted?

Doctor: (very dismissive, waves him off) It was his grades, letters of recommendations... but a little grease never hurts.

Social Worker: (snickers) No one gets ahead just on smarts ... (Pause. Tension around the table ... friendly faces start to fade. Professor looks for a way to bridge the differences).

Professor: Oh, by the way. I'm taking my sailboat out next month. If anybody's game let me know.

Lawyer: (casually non-committal) I might take you up on that. I'm shelving my tennis racket ... since my knee operation.

Doctor: (Looks at his watch). Should we finish up with a cognac?

Social Workers: I'll pass.

Lawyer: Make mine a Metaxa.

Professor: I'll have a double espresso.

Act Two Scene 1

(Social worker's son is hunched over a computer in a cubicle 'talking'.)

Voice: I'm listening. It's all I can do to catch up with the backlog and the new programs and the extra assignments.

Read: You're further behind on the new assignments!

Voice: (distracted). What extra assignments?

Read: Remember, the new contract, you're on 24/7 and responsible for any breakdown. Sign up or sign out.

Voice: (anguish, ambiguous) I'm on my way.

(Screen blank)

Scene 2

(Social worker's son walks through the office; cubicles half empty; employees walking in, out around. Some bent over computers, others packing brief cases. Everything is chaotic.)

(Inner Voice) Costs are down. Restructuring moves ahead. Employment is a revolving door.

New Employee: Hi

Old Employee: Good bye

Replacement: Are you coming in or going out?

Social Worker's Son: I've been working here five years ...

Replacement: Are you sure?

Son: No. I mean yes (an uncertain look).

(Walks to the Human Resources office, knocks and enters)

HR: (looks up) yes?

Son: I have some questions about the hours and added assignments

HR: Did you read the text?

Son: I have some questions about the hours and added assignments.

HR: Sign in or sign out...

Son: (anguished voice). What's this all about? I put in lots of time in expanding operations...

HR (interrupts him). The CEO doesn't think you're doing enough. We are cutting costs. Raising productivity. We need to show better numbers (looks at watch and shuffles papers). You really should be at your desk ... or in the street. (Son walks out. Looks across the office, notices several new faces. Only one familiar face: the receptionist. One hand holding the phone, the other plunking the computer, her head bobbing signals to a messenger, a loose finger tweaking something like 'good bye'. Son walks to the desk of the CEO's secretary who is on the phone.)

Secretary: He will be away. Hilton Head for the long week-end. Yes he's busy. Yes he's gotten his bonus- stock options...but don't call back. He'll call you. (She hangs up, looks with scorn at the son) You still around?

Son: I would like to discuss my new contract with the CEO?

Secretary: Nothing to discuss. It's a done deal.

Son: You could be next.

Secretary: I'll take my chances (phone rings). Yes. You're from Bloomberg's? We understand you want an interview ... now? The CEO is flying back tonight ... you want to talk now? Yes indeed. I will locate him and have him get in touch with you right away. I am terribly sorry to keep you waiting. He's on a conference call ... working up the reorganization. Hold it. I'll put him on.

(Dials CEO's cell phone).

Bloomberg's on the line. They want a meeting this morning.

CEO: (panic). Send the driver to the airport right away. Tell Bloomberg I'm sorry for the delay but I will be there in fifty minutes.

Act 3

(Lawyer and son having lunch in an upscale restaurant)

Lawyer: Environmental law can be a lucrative field if you don't get in deep with the tree huggers and owl lovers.

Son: C'mon dad you were doing pro bono for the homeless in Santa Monica a while back.

Lawyer: But that was after I was established and had a lucrative clientele. Anyway my work with the homeless attracted affluent liberals.

Son: I am not sure we are on the same wave length ... (pause). The fish we are having for lunch might come out of the water pre-cooked and radiated, after the Japanese nuclear disaster.

Lawyer: Well you got a point there. (Pause.) Anyway environmental law is a two-edged deal. One of my partners started out working with Greenpeace and learned the ropes and then made a pile defending BP in the Gulf.

Son: Switched sides?

Lawyer: You can't afford to do pro-bono if you don't have some cash cows to pay the bills. How do you think you got through law school without debt?

Son: (defensive). How did you graduate without debt?

Lawyer: Back then we didn't have tuition ... just student activity fees.

Son: And you had all those protests?

Lawyer: Why not? The better, the times the bigger the protests! (laughs.)

Son: Fewer jobs, high tuition and smaller protests?

Lawyer: (triumphant). That's why you should combine environmental and corporate law!

Son: Thanks for lunch. Waiter! The bill.

Lawyer: I got it.

Act 3 Scene 2

Professor: (On the phone). Hi Dave, haven't seen or heard from you for a while ...

Son: Been working on some big accounts. I'm, coming up for senior partner.

Professor: I hope we can at least have lunch sometime.

Son: Investment banking hours are not the same as professors. I'm in by seven and out by eleven - at night.

Professor: What kind of life is that? You live to work.

Son: (snarls). Cut the crap, Dad. Why don't you join the Occupy types in front of our building. You can catch me as I cross the picket line.

Professor: We once walked picket lines together.

Son: I remember being dragged along ... But look, I'm in the middle of preparing a brief for a big merger. We'll talk later. Bye.

Professor: (talks into a dead phone) (soliloquy). "I can't get through. Something went wrong or maybe it's just the changing times. Same energy level but chasing trades rather than facing injustice."

Act 3 Scene 3

(Doctor and son seated on a bench in a park)

Doctor: How goes your practice?

Son: So-so. We are doubling up on procedures to make-up for the drop in Medicare

re-imburement.

Doctor: How are the kids?

Son: Studying, basketball, video games ... texting.

Doctor: Taking any time off?

Son: Going to Washington for the AIPAC conference. It's all about Iran. We'll be banging Congressional heads and handing them a war agenda.

Doctor: So you have a political passion for Israel?

Son: What else?

Doctor: We got problems in this country.

Son: Let them take care of themselves. Trouble with you dad is you never looked after your own people. You never listened to grandpa ... remember "What's in it for the Jews?"

Doctor: (defensive) Look, I'm for Israel as much as anybody ... but not right or wrong. Take the illegal settlements.....

Son: (bursts out and cuts him off). We'll take them! They're ours! All of them! Only the Arabs and the anti-Semites say they're "illegal". Not our courts. Nor our judges!

Doctor: You mean the Supreme Court?

Son: Yes sir, (spells it out). The Israeli Supreme Court!

Doctor: Ever thought of emigrating?

Son: They got too many doctors. Anyway the Israeli's tell us to stay here. We are more valuable pushing our agenda in Washington.

Doctor: You know when I was active back in the 1960's we had big fights with the Communists for toeing the Soviet line! Russian bomb tests were progressive. The US's were a crime. Who would have thought I would have a son lining up with Israel, right or wrong.

Son: They were Stalinists, I'm a Zionist.

Doctor: Tell me the difference?

Son: (furious, in a bully mode shouting). You know if you weren't my father I would say you sound like an anti-Semite.

Doctor: (speechless, stares at son without recognition).

Son: (standing up facing father). Better keep your ideas to yourself, especially among your medical colleagues, and especially those on the Medical Executive Board.

Act 3 Scene 4

(Social Worker walks into son's bedroom who is hunched over his computer.)

Social Worker: How goes the job search?

Son: (looking straight ahead). Don't ask.

Social Worker: (pause) No luck?

Son: (Looks back, stares, angry) Entry level, short term contracts, on call ... overtime without pay (turns back to computer).

(Social Worker drifts out of the room).

Social Worker - Soliloquy: I was going to invite him to take a break. I forgot what it's like to be unemployed. Wonder what happened to the health department employees that go laid-off ...or the teachers? Can't worry about their issues ... the problem is here and now, in this house.

Son: looking at the screen and clicking the keyboard (Soliloquy)

Two hundred and fifty-one CVs circulating out there ... ten responses. All entry level or part time contracts. When did they install the revolving door? Who plans the restructuring? It doesn't matter. I can't figure out what happened to my unit. They're gone ... who knows where? Everyone for himself ... free-lance ... free fall ...

flexible labor...drop your pants, bend over here comes the CEO ... all pain - no gain
... more hours, complain and berate ... I'm going.

(Shuts down the computer: glances at blank screen. Rises and slowly walks out.
Enters a sunny room and notices his father reading a newspaper. No quip. No
comment.

Social Worker: How about lunch?

Son: (stares, tentative) Why not?

Act 3 Scene 5

(Lunch in a café) Social Worker and son.

Son: When I walked out of the office, it felt like I was walking out of prison ... a big
load lifted ... the buzz of the berating supervisor was still in my ear ... till I cleared
the office. Nobody even looked-up. No good byes. The Indian guy, my replacement,
smiled as if he would do it right. He's got a moat in his eye.

Social Worker: You did the right thing. Your health comes first. Stress kills.

Son: Yeah. Stay healthy ... because there's no health plan.

Social Worker: Lets pack it up for now

Son: Spoils the appetite doesn't it? I mean thinking about the work situation. The
friends I had, you know at work, they come and go.

Social Worker: You ever see them ?

Son : Where?

Social Worker: (Pensive. Soliloquy: No lunch with a bottle of wine). (They finish
eating and walk out. Father's hand on son's shoulder)

Act 4

Senior investment banker of hedge fund, relaxing with wife and small child in a
beach house in Martha's Vineyard.

Hedge Fund banker: This was a great idea buying a getaway house on the Island.

Wife: Well, I researched it: weather, airport, wind ,currents, sun, temperature ... and price.

Banker: The bonus on the acquisition and restructuring of the health industry came in handy.

Wife: You did well. Should we go for a walk? I love to hear the waves crashing on the breakers.

Banker: Give me five minutes. I got to send a message to headquarters. We are preparing a public offering and we go to get rid of a CEO who's screwing up a string of hospitals, Bloomberg put them in negative - sell.

Wife: Of course. Me and Rachel will meet you by the landing where you moor the boat.

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