

Communique: If's, And's and Butt's

Contributed by Bill Norris
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Subject : Communique: If's and's and butts … I have to wonder just how far we have come in our ability to communicate with each other. It is amazing that, at every possible moment, we can view, call, fax, text message and IM, our closest friends and associates in an immediate time frame -- yet there are serious gaps in our understanding of each other. Has there ever been so much effort, with so little true meaning? Or, are we falling for the wondrously superficial. Is this good enough? We sure receive an answer quite directly. Do we buy the trade off. Get Immediacy. Give up true depth of meaning? Is this fair? Honest? Let's try another perspective. If we could reach God Himself, would we try for an immediate response -- or would one, could one, wait for a reasonable time for processing? I must admit, I would want to indulge my usual impatience -- although, I'm old school, a land line would be more comfortable. I've IM 'd for years -- sorry AT&T. Consider the way it was once. The following is from an unfinished novel, “IN THIS DEEP CALM”. On Tuesday nights I would attend CCD classes; our church would have lay instructors conduct these very low key gatherings, opening our minds, and, hopefully, our souls, to the teachings of our church. We’d kid ourselves that it would be a ‘waste’ and some felt that it would be better to be home watching “Get Smart”. But I knew that it would be like our classes in high school, you had to bring yourself to it; nothing, in this world, or the next, would be just given to you. On that mild October evening, we’d walk the mile or so to the south side of town, where our church would be; our classes were held right next door, in the grammar school. That night, there’d be but one topic on our minds. Don Bastyr, who’d live a block over, would walk with me and some other friends. We would communicate by feats of whatever imagined accomplishment and cigarettes. We’d plan our lives around smoking – who’d smoke whatever brand; who’d always have smokes and, maybe most important, who’d ‘borrow’ you a ‘butt’. Don smoked Luckies. I would smoke Camels. If you smoked filtered, you’d be considered some kind of weakling – or worse. “So, you think if they let them get to Cuba, then we start a war with Russia?” Don drew another puff of his cigarette, which would be within millimeters of causing second degree burns. “No, no. We can’t even let them get there. That’s the whole point, Don.” I grew frustrated. “If they bring their ships across the Atlantic, we’re not going to let them through.” “What’s to stop them, then?” “We have a naval blockade. They try moving through that, it might mean we go to war. He’s not going to back down.” Don made some snicker of doubt. “He might just.” “Well, he can’t. He won’t.” I knew that he would not understand. Don had a funny look that betrayed basic logic. “I think that it’ll blow over. Khrushchev’s shooting off his mouth.” Lou Pascente understood. “That’s right. This time, he can eat his damn shoe, too.” Lou lit another Camel, as we would be a block from our class. “Just want my first car, don’t need some damn war,” Don said. Lou drew in a galvanizing drag, which seemingly shrank his cigarette by an inch. “No, Donny, this won’t be that kind of war. No combat boots, stuff like that. This’ll be big stuff. Over quick.” Don continued, “I’m part time in school next year. Work 28, 30 hours a week. That’s all that I want.” He would not like these discussions, being more comfortable working at the Gulf station on Roosevelt Road, just so that he could be around cars being worked on and the older guys telling stories, as they’d stir their coffee with screw drivers and usually agreed with each other in most matters, whether in the present or some future. “Hey Kennedy’s going to make them back down. Watch,” I said. “How do you know?,” a kid from behind me blurted out. I turned around to face this kid from Dover Street, who’d smoke L & M ’s. “Two things to remember: They’re coming up on our door step. We’re not going to let them get that close. And, you know what? We’ve used the bomb before – these Russians haven’t.” The kid would not see what Lou and I knew. That night, Lou and I sat across from each other. Mr. Lorenz would talk about how philosophers would view the soul and how this concept evolved through time, and how, some day, we’d be, all of us, ‘born into eternity …’ Lou leaned over, “But not this week, anyway,” he would say for my ears only. I’d nearly laugh. ‘Yeah, right,” I said, concluding our discussion of the Cuban Missi'e Crisis, my eyes taking in the tobacco stained fingers of Lou’s right hand