

I Just Have **1** Question

Remember Me?



by Doug Carpenter

Using the built-in sound studio that our human imaginations come with, we *should* be able to mentally “hear” that question being asked any number of different ways. Expectantly. Hopefully. Playfully. Even a little *ominously*. [...accompanied by a dastardly twirl of your moustache, should you happen to have one.]

Go ahead. Try it. I’ll be happy to wait while you rewind your short-term memory [...or what’s *left* of it — and trust me, I feel your pain...] and hit the playback button on your brain’s prefrontal cortex.

O.K. Now listen closely. If the tone of what you hear coming out of your mind’s virtual cassette tape player [...I haven’t upgraded to digital yet...] has that “expectant”

quality, you’re probably imagining yourself encountering an old acquaintance you haven’t seen in a long time.

Like the high school friends I recently spent a sentimental evening with trading recollections of our occasionally-misspent youth at our class’s 50-year reunion. [Fifty-two years, actually. We had to drag our feet for a while there because of, well — *you know*.]

But even with those extra two years tacked on, the event turned out about as successfully as we could’ve hoped. [And lucky for our Planning Committee that it *didn’t* tank. Because if it *had*, we could’ve kissed any chance of *ever* sitting at the “cool kids” lunch table goodbye forever.]

Yet for every Senior Class member who dusted off their old school spirit and gamely showed up ready to rock, roll and remember, there was another who was equally content to simply lean back and bask in the glow of once again being among old, *good* friends.

Because once you’ve said to everyone everything you were meant to say and done for others all that you were put here to do, what *will* be remembered? Poet Maya Angelou knew.

“People,” she told us, “will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.” Or, by that same measure, you.



And as I heard, one after another, the sometimes borderline-crazy but often very moving stories of my classmates’ eventful lives unfold in the conversations taking place all around me, I was struck by an unexpected realization.

And that was how ironic it was that a Baby Boomer like me — whose generation was notorious for not wanting to hear *anything* from *anybody* — would discover that listening was, in fact, the best way to understand and appreciate the lives he and others have lived.

And in that particular situation, my fortunately still-properly-operating ears came in very handy. Because, truth be told, you couldn’t always count on your eyes to readily

identify exactly who you were waxing nostalgic with — especially when the fellow Senior you were talking to looked a lot *more* “senior” than they used to.

Their *voices*, though. That was entirely different. *Those* hadn’t really changed. Because on the *inside* — at the heart of who we truly are — I don’t think we ever really *do*. And *that’s* where the memories and emotions you *share* at times like these *come* from. They’re the things that meant *enough* to you to *remember*.

In fact, if there was *one* thing I heard more than anything else — one *question* I sensed was earnestly

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“Beautifully Maintained”
- Louise, a resident

Remember Me?

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being asked more than *any other* — it had to be “Do you remember me?”

Asked *hopefully*, because *no one* wants to feel that they were forgettable. And *playfully*, I suspect, when they remembered something perhaps ever-so-slightly *delicious* [...or maybe even a bit scandalous...] about the one-time close friend with whom they were currently reminiscing.

And yes — *occasionally* even ominously. After all, no matter how much we may [...ahem...] *mature* with the passage of years, there are always social scores to *settle* and *wrongs* to set *right* — as well as *slights* to set *aside*, if just for one night.

Hmmm. “For one night.” Now *there’s* a tempting thought. Imagine how amazing it would feel to have the chance to be *the person you might’ve been*, if only for one night. [One all-too-fleeting night.]

Then again, I suppose it would depend on *whose expectations* that version of “you” would have to *live up to*, wouldn’t it? And as we all know, *rising* to expectations can be a pretty steep climb.

Although high schools have largely moved away from the once-hallowed tradition of awarding “Senior Superlative” status to select graduating students, some have still exited their beloved alma maters with just such a dubious honor/burden tucked heavily under their arm, where many continued to carry it *well* into their uncertain adulthoods.

Whether officially recognized or lurking as far beneath the radar as they can manage, there are invariably at least a few “recovering” overachievers out there in the crowd at every reunion. [Pocket protectors

are usually a dead giveaway.]

You’ll find once-celebrated *Mr. Touchdowns*, who peaked early and never *scored big* again. Then there are the *Homecoming Queens* who never reigned over anything worth coming home to *brag* about, so they never *did*.

And there’s always the one-time standout classmate who was voted “Most Likely to Succeed” long before they were old enough to have the slightest idea what “*succeeding*” would actually *mean* — not to their peers, or their teachers, or their bordering-on-embarrassingly-proud family and hometown fans. But to *them*, the one who would ultimately be *judged* — subjectively — by their wins and, inevitably, their losses.

Of course, any time you ask someone if they remember you, their response is *rarely* a simple “yes” or “no,” since it will almost certainly also include [...whether you want to hear it or not...] the answer to the other just-as-important but insidiously-*unspoken* part of the question — “How?”

And even if you’re the type who steers permanently clear of reunions or any other social situation where who you *are* and what you’ve *done* might be reflected back to you in the metaphorical mirror of life, you *know* that sooner or later you’re *still* going ask yourself “How *will* people remember me?”

This is where it gets tricky. Because you can’t really answer *that* question without first answering two *others*: “How would you *like* them to?” and “How are you afraid they *might*?”

The good news is that, no matter how hard the world and everyone in it try to tell *us* who we are, it doesn’t alter the fact that the only truly *definitive* answer to that question is the one that *we* provide. And for most of us — the *lucky* ones, at least — it has been a *verrrrry* long answer. *Decades*, in fact.

Over the course of a lifetime, you’ve answered it with the work you’ve chosen to give your time and

talents to. Through the succeeding generations you’ve helped bring along to join humanity’s quest to *be* better, *do* better and make the world a better *place*. And by every kindness and consideration you’ve ever shown another person.

Because once you’ve said to everyone everything you were meant to say and done for others all that you were put here to do, what *will* be remembered? Poet Maya Angelou knew.

“*People*,” she told us, “*will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.*” Or, by that same measure, *you*.

And the best part is how many opportunities every one of us still has to *do* that, and how many people’s hearts we still can *touch*, regardless of what point we’re at in our lives.

They won’t *ask* us to do it, of course. But as surely as we understand just how hard *our* lives can sometimes be, we know that, like *us*, they would all welcome it gratefully — the same way we should embrace any opportunity that comes our way to make a lasting difference in *theirs*.

Which is why that *title* up at the beginning of this column isn’t *really* a question. It’s a *request*.

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Throughout *After 50’s* first 16 years, veteran WNY writer and columnist Doug Carpenter regularly shared his wry generational observations with readers as *Everyboomer*. He has now returned to write a uniquely-named new monthly humor/opinion column called *I Just Have 1 Question* — which he says he’ll ask and then bravely try to answer... without, he fervently hopes, looking excessively foolish in the process. [We wish him luck.]



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