

The University of Life and the Art of Aging

By Bob Taylor

The University of Life is never overcrowded. It has the world for a campus and offers classes in every subject, but specializes in the humanities. Everything that happens at any other university happens here. There is binge drinking, promiscuous sex, cheating, rioting and classes taught by unqualified instructors. There are classes in hypocrisy, integrity, the sciences, and religions. There are classes in painting with mountains, meadows, and miracles for subjects. Some of us learn about jealousy, hatred, and guilt at this university, while others study love, peace and harmony. But all students are free to choose the courses they wish to study.

We may choose to major in misery and malevolence, or happiness and harmony. The professors are more than competent in those fields. A very old woman named Madame LaFarge heads the department of misery and malevolence. She was a memorable character in A Tale of Two Cities. Madame LaFarge reveled in the misery of others. Her character enjoyed watching the cart carrying victims to the guillotine. Watching heads roll after the beheadings also seemed to give her special pleasure.

I think Victor Borge would be a great choice for the leader of the department of Happiness, Harmony and Humor. He made beautiful harmony on the piano until he fell off the stool and that generated laughter and happiness. His entire life seemed to be in harmony with everyone he met.

Pediatricians, professors and politicians staff the office of admissions. As new babies enter our world, they are automatically enrolled in school. There are no exceptions - everyone becomes a student. Companions, parents, relatives and friends become teachers and instructors. The words and deeds of these people establish the curriculum. The student's mind is inundated with information.

The University of Life is the largest school in the world and each student pays his or her way through. The school includes grades kindergarten through college. No postgraduate studies are offered, no grades are issued and students can drop out any time they choose. But there is no return, no second chance. When we stop learning, life, as we know it, is finished and those we love leave us behind. Our final lesson teaches us to say goodbye. It also teaches us that life is short, but...life is good.

Those of us who choose to drop out are generally assigned jobs such as cleaning rest rooms and porta-potties, taking in laundry and other menial tasks. But, we may re-enroll any time we choose, perhaps a little older and a little wiser. Better students have learned that life is short but...life is good.