

Racked-Ridden Rainer

I feel like shit
- Matt Rainer

The title of this story refers the unfortunate circumstance that can render a boy or man powerless; that is, the blow that can bring him to a breathless state of excruciating pain - or least give cause for acting like it. Such a term as "racked" is chosen on account that it is the possibly the least offensive to some; but as for the "racked" male, the term does not matter as much as defensive measures that may preempt future occurrences.

My recent and infrequent visit to Myspace.com brought a much welcomed and memorable scene: a video containing a brief but brilliant portrayal of my eldest child experiencing a possibly benign blow to the crotch of his gym shorts. Yes, the image or scene may seem rather ridiculous to some of you but, on further reading, your opinion could change.

Without the means of capturing the final image or view of this video in still-shot, I chose to re-enact it myself...well, not the actual blow, but at least the costume and the expression albeit from a face many years older. Perhaps my eldest will see this effort and appreciate it if just for the fact that while I was able to see him on video, he is now able to know that I valued the moment so much that I took a picture and formed a thousand words around it.

What made this video so memorable was that I heard my eldest speak. You see, I have not spoke to my eldest in quite a few years and to hear his voice - as well as see him in motion - was just short of spectacular - whatever the image or scene.



His name is Matthew - but he evidently is called "Matt"; in the video, he is called "Rainer" - which is my name as well. Surrounded by two or more so-called friends, Matt is set-up for this short-take with some prepared camera-action focused on the gym shorts. An instant grazing or sweep from the hand of a friend - as friends can be - sends the boy reeling in a series of motions that finalized with a pose somewhat as I re-enact in the picture. Just before this pose, however, the question is interposed: "how do you feel Rainer?" The short but direct answer is, "I feel like shit!"

Having watched the video many times, I have come to cherish this scene. If I interacted with my child - as most parents do - the scene would have brought a much different impression. I probably would have passed it by as simply one of those pranks that kids do and said nothing about it; why, I may have even thrown some mild hazing of my own just to relish in the memories of my own similar experiences - now passed down to the next generation. But since our circumstances do not allow such interaction, my parental involvement is limited to images - such as this video - and any closeness that can be derived from such.

*... "how do
you feel
Rainer?" ...*

Imagine for a moment that a dear loved one had been lost - perhaps in foreign country or in some military duty. After years without much evidence of the wellness or even whereabouts, you see a video of them. A picture in motion with a voice to match; no, it is not much to go by, but it is at least something - if only the one thing that gives evidence of their existence, of their being, and of a relationship of some time ago.

In trying to absorb every ounce of this brief evidence of my eldest, I took full measure of every motion and every mention and every murmur. I looked at every detail with the sharpest eye of an investigator or one who understands and analyzes body language and the like; but more than that, I stared intently at a young man who, by last account, was a boy of ten or eleven but now is clearly much

more. Was he my child? - I thought for in an impulse; and then I thought, yes he was my child. Convinced of the fact that he was my child, I could move on to the now - *to the clearly much more.*

Matt is now seventeen; he is not the boy that I remember. At ten or eleven, we went to Scouts together; we visited parks and other outdoor events, and we did other things that parents and kids do. At this young age, Matt was interested in playing, running and doing the things that boys like to do. He had not yet taken an interest in girls - at least not like a teen - and was not struggling with the changes of adolescence and high school. He was just a kid and I was his dad.

Times have changed however, and change has come with time. The boy and the dad are only a distant memory followed by an indefinite period of alienation and estrangement. The Matthew that I raised to eleven is not the Matt observed so intently in the view or scene of this video - this much I know. What I don't know (about Matt) is much and what can be gleaned or surmised from the short-take is not enough. He has likely taken an interest in girls and is struggling with the changes of adolescence and high school. He is more than a kid and I am less than a dad...much less.

Yet in this dilemma comes solace that while I cannot change being *less than a dad* since Matthew, I can avail myself to Matt should he need me in the years to come. At seventeen, he cannot know or understand what has transpired in the alienation and estrangement; and he cannot be fully aware that the dad who loved Matthew as a boy continues to love Matt even now.

With this conviction, I turn back to the video to watch one more time. Matt is standing somewhere near the stadium at his school, then comes the grazing from a friend followed by his motion, and the final pose as I have re-enacted in the picture. Racked-ridden Rainer is doing alright...and so is his dad.

...Racked-ridden Rainer is doing alright...