

Title Intentionally Omitted

November, 2000

In spite of the fact that I was already well into my third glass of McCallan, I hailed the bartender over to deliver my fourth and final blow in this one ring, one contestant match. John peered over asymmetrical wire rimmed glasses, resting upon a nose that was clearly the final resting place for more than its share of clenched fists. His quiet rebuke was unmistakable - yet he yielded to my request. A foregone tip or simple pity, John was happy to sauce me up as the effects of the smoky, amber liquor ensnared my mind, unleashing my tongue. Not the sacred transformation of turning water into wine, my savior John was effectively turning scotch into soup – loud mouth soup to be precise. Our social contract established John would listen to me rant....and I would handsomely reward him for his tolerance. Our moves were well choreographed, the stage was worn.

Ordinarily in the company of many, tonight was different. John and I were alone. Odd. The room was normally bustling with activity, frivolity, and yes of course, feigned interest. Phrases like “you don’t say....” “I had no idea...” “That’s a real shame...” Phrases offered in the spirit of conviviality, cordiality, but certainly not of concern. After all, concern could be messy. There was no place for messy here...this was a place where the cities business leaders went to be seen and heard and not a place where human connections were deeply forged. John had seen this dance thousands of times – under the watchful eyes of the storied club leaders now long past.

Row upon row of faded black and white photos (skin tone most notably - exclusively) the images of past presidents leered at the lowly mere member – quietly gazing vigilant over the cracked leather chairs, burgundy walls, the neatly ordered hand polished rock glasses. They seemed to stare in quiet judgment, indifferent to the trials and tribulations of the day - for theirs was a more genteel time when business would never be conducted in such an openly shameful way.

The “men’s grill” was a sanctified place - sanctity without soul. Many had walked through these doors with John ever present to discreetly salve their wounds. Liberally administering a liquid antidote for the ails presented, John’s thirty years of service, watchful eyes and consigliere’s discretion made him perfectly qualified for this work. His craft gave him access to titans and climbers, winners and losers, the proud and pathetic. He never traded on a secret. He went about his tasks with the quiet confidence that came from knowing where darkness lurked, where power and ambition had stolen another soul. I slouched in my chair, hoping that my quixotic quest for power and realized ambition weren’t obvious to my long time friend. Funny, yes – an employee that was a true friend. Unheard of and yet my fraternization was as natural and open as if John were a dear family member. This place may not be good for me but like a moth drawn to fire, I was drawn to this place, a place where the caste system promised an exclusive experience in the company of other like minded, well educated, maybe

even accomplished Cincinnatians. That sounded great in theory – in practice, I longed for the fellowship that came from something deeper than “shared accomplishments” – something that took me back to my childhood. John was a big part of my childhood having helped guide me years before, treating me almost like a son. Ironically, our relationship long predated this unforgettable evening in this very same forgettable room.

Like John, I too had a decade’s long affiliation with the men’s grill. In fact, I was often an unwelcome guest in this very same place over two decades before – then a mere boy. At the insistence of my employer I stayed, long past the round’s conclusion – watching him drink martini after martini, listening to stories of his professional embellishments, his serial personal infidelities – knowing my day’s service would end as it had many times before. I would drive him home, quietly turn the front door key, help circumnavigate those pesky entryway stairs, and ultimately make the phone call to his mistress to come and “aid” him for the evening. With the wife conveniently away for the summer, my role was to keep my mouth shut, smile appreciatively at the humorless jokes, and preserve the confidences of a man deserving no such fidelity. First person witness to disappointingly dark behavior at both a formidable and tender age the misdeeds of this one man would haunt me for years. He shook my confidence in the decency of man. Contrasted against other men, my faith in man would be redeemed. In fact, I would learn to never confuse money and attainment of power as in and of themselves decent. Decency was in the man...not what the man had acquired. That was 25 years ago...I snapped back to the present.

Now, having the “privilege” of being a dues paying member...I felt only slightly better than I had as the wide eyed impressionable young man that had been here long ago. And while long ago, I remember as if yesterday how intensely I wanted to be a part of this privileged “club set.” How deeply I wished to escape my very Spartan upbringing. Yes...I would do everything in my level set power to join the ranks of this room. I ultimately realized my dream only to realize that in spite of this achievement I still felt vaguely ill at ease – wondering almost aloud why I was even here. Neither a king nor a king maker – I felt out of place in this all male bastion. Perhaps with John’s hands firmly on the wheel it would all be ok. He knew his role. He stuck to his lines.

My lines blurring I went back to the task at hand. Anesthesia.

Deeply, even singularly focused on the pressing issue vexing me, I noted disappointingly that global warming was having no dissipating effect on the ice cubes now competing for space better occupied with another stiff pour. Gore must be wrong I declared. The earth’s heating was a political fabrication. John was bemused. The conversation careened to the big news of the day. It was election day - November 7th, 2000.

You will recall the facts.

With 270 Electoral College votes needed to win the Presidency, the election hinged upon several pivotal states including Ohio, Florida, California, Texas, New York, and

Pennsylvania. With Democratic victories in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Illinois, Gore demonstrated his formidableness as an opponent and political operative. And while a somewhat stilted, even wooden speaker his message seemed to resonate with the popular electorate as he brought in the winning popular vote – evidence that he effectively distanced himself from the Presidential mischief characterizing not one but many others before him. However, his victory as yet unsecured, Florida teetered, Floridians taunted him. A former senator's son, Gore's seeming birthright was being jeopardized by another political dynasty – the Bush Family.

Governor George W. Bush was an early frontrunner achieving the Republican endorsement through best in class fundraising and of course the political heft brought about by political powerhouses like James Baker and George Shultz. It was helpful, maybe prescient that he was also successful in securing his brother Jeb's support in the State of Florida. As the midnight hour passed, pundits on both sides of the political aisle see-sawed back and forth with predictions on which candidate would ultimately be victorious.

Of course we all recall the outcome of that fateful election night. With the competing camps coming to within 300 votes of one another, and no Joe Kennedy graveyard votes left unaccounted, the race was a dead heat. The Country's direction, leadership, global presence would all be determined by the efficacy of voting machines. Bush was ultimately declared the victor by just over 500 votes – and further by the ruling of the US Supreme Court.

\$649mm dollars later, Bush was declared President of the United States. Forgive my yawn. He won the title...though not that evening. In fact, my hangover came and went long before the presidential title was firmly placed before George Bush's name. Would the title change the man? Would the title make the man? Hard to say....although I've considered that day's events innumerable times in the decade and a half since then. That day's events were the inspiration for tonight's paper. Title.

Perhaps part of a natural maturation process, I've questioned why so much human energy is expended in securing this particular position. Why so much time and energy is spent securing the title - President of the United States. Is there something inherently valuable about this title versus the thousands of other titles one may rent? Why do some seek this title while others prudently if not more modestly focus their efforts elsewhere? Regardless of which title one pursues is one more valuable than the next? What's in a title after all? Which titles matter? How long have we used titles to confer power and authority? Maybe the answer is obvious to all of you. It's not to me. I suppose some titles have value. Consider this.

We have used titles to confer power and authority for as long as man has walked upright – something which I couldn't quite muster this particular evening. It's intriguing if you think about it...if title ascribes value, power, authority, ownership – is that the explanation as to why we slavishly seek them out? Like any investigation, like most well planned journeys – let's start with the end in mind.

What is a title?

The word “title” is derived from the Latin word “titulus” further derived from the Greek word “Titlos.” At its essence, the word title is further derived from the Greek verb “Tiw” which means to honor. At its most core meaning – in accord with the Webster’s common use – a title is defined as -

“An inscription put over a thing as the name by which it is to be known; the inscription at the beginning of a book intimating the subject of the work, and usually the author’s and publisher’s names; a general head containing particulars; a name; an appellation; a name of honor or dignity; a claim of right; that which is the foundation of ownership; the written document that proves a right.”

That said....why do we assign such value to a mere title? Why do we seemingly spend the better part of our productive lives seeking titles? I humbly offer a few untitled pedigree-less opinions.

Self-preservation –

Arguably our most basic, pre-Cambrian motivator is self-preservation. Putting aside the temporary but very potent post pubescent drive to practice pro-creation, self-preservation is plausibly most central to our behavior. Scarcity drives our desire.

In a scarce world where resources can be divided, sub-divided, allocated, immense power is held by one with the title and power to allocate, apportion scarce resources. This isn’t a presidential phenomenon – we only need look back to history – the history of virtually every nation to see the potency of title and its economic power. King, duke, serf, landed gentry, monarch, pope, plantation owner, slave, it is clear that the one holding title seemingly holds the power. Economic power, religious freedom, all of this can be lorded over those holding lesser position. The power of title extends far broader than pure economic power. Consider the power held by religious leaders offering clemency and absolution for the mortal versus venial – eternal damnation avoided, the occasional genuflect, seems a modest accommodation.

Control -

Our society left to its own devices would be chaotic without title. Who would be the “decider” if not for Bush’s self proclaimed, assumptive leadership. We need someone to organize, exert, even to declare that the way we manage our daily affairs requires supervision. Is it that simple – We need a leader, powers conferred by the majority on the few to help sort through our daily competing interests? I would like to think that we aren’t so mindless, so unsophisticated that we need a central figure to organize our daily efforts. Toqueville had it right when he declared the risks associated with Democracy in America. Tyranny of the few. No. Tyranny of the majority. Do we really need a leader to set priorities around how we invest our daily efforts, how we conduct our routine affairs, how we comport with social mores.

Ego and Ambition -

If title equals power, why do some seek power legally while others forsake law earning a different type of title? In the underbelly of society, some titles are as sought after as those lawfully earned.

Compare President with Outlaw -

Federico

Take the case of Federico. Federico was born in a place where lawlessness was celebrated. At a time when the tiny Mediterranean sea town of Catania was recoiling from another assault on its dignity, another infestation of outsiders seeking to control, possess, perhaps even maraud and exploit the limited natural resources of this peasant town, the philosophical niceties of morality, natural law, even ecclesiastical law were cast aside for the far more basic need to survive. Federico was truly a survivor.

The incidental middle child, having neither birth order nor being the pampered caboose of the family to gain his share of the meager advantages of his siblings, Federico was left with only one choice - to exact his disproportionate share through guile and cunning. Raw, naked, murderous ambition would be his ticket out of poverty. He pursued his escape agenda with zeal, drive, and purpose. Textbooks were unnecessary for this form of escape. In fact,

Formal education was out of the question – irrelevant for that matter. History, law, philosophy, language arts were for the rich and privileged. Investigating the inglorious days of rape, pillage, opportunism were simply painful reminders that no one outside of the immediate family could be trusted. Deeply suspicious of outsiders, and a self proclaimed individualist, the promise of a bountiful future characterized by wealth, ease, peace could only be ensured by the toil of his own bare hands. His bare hands were perfectly suited for deliverance – materially and otherwise. But Federico's passions were more than material.

A voracious appetite for the company of women, for the red hot passion that seemingly came from random infidelities commonplace in that part of Italy he pursued potential conquests openly and notoriously – earning him the disrepute of many and the affordable love of countless mistresses. His lust satisfied, dawn invariably brought the stark reminder that physical conquests were prurient, not economic....so back to the quarry for another day of stonecutting. Something must change. Post WWI Italy was marked by hyper inflation, record unemployment, and international humiliation that plunged the country into a state of

inescapable poverty. Nationalism gave way to socialism, with poverty spawning a cottage industry of gain via extortion and murder for hire. Seizing upon his opportunity, Federico earned the notoriety and acclaim most often reserved for an outlaw. He capitalized on the chaos, he became a hired gun, feared by many, respected by more. His notoriety and acclaim would be short-lived.

Achieving greatness as an outlaw was bound to capture the attention of the authorities and with the kind of surgical precision Federico used to castrate his last enemy, the Italian government deployed similar precision, providing him a one-way deportation ticket to America. Life as an outlaw was exciting – life in America would prove to be far less “inspirational.” Federico resigned himself to a humble artisan’s existence, his stone carvings still adorning famous buildings around the Country. But the real mark he left on our culture wouldn’t be felt for a generation later with the birth of his second grandchild.

Before journeying on....lets take a step back. Maybe some of you are thinking – I can’t relate to a “President.” I can’t relate to an “outlaw.” Some of you may be confusing the two titles. I’m not getting the importance of these titles. They seem inapt. OK – Let’s try something closer to home...a more basic title – Father.

Fathers –

For those of you in this esteemed group that are fathers - congratulations. You are part of a fraternity coming without a secret handshake, a pledge pin, an occasional paddle. You are part of a fraternity coming with its share of hazing. And if you’re like most fathers, you’ve given much, taken little. I propose that the gifts you’ve received extend far further than the obligatory father’s day tie. No, you come armed tonight with a bundle of precious memories – the ultimate gift. Close your eyes for just a second if you will and think about the time Christmas gratitude far outweighed the value of the gifts exchanged. Consider the family vacation where family dinners were shared – voluntarily. There are more moments...and of course they are within your exclusive providence. These fleeting but fond memories are precious. The memories were the bi-product of something you may have said or done. I suspect they weren’t motivated by self-preservation, control, or ego and ambition. Consider the motivation as to why you brought a son or daughter into this world. Maybe you did so because your own upbringing suggested the inevitability, the inescapability of your destiny title. You were expected to be a father – and you therefore took the traditional route – finding a suitable spouse in a suitable neighborhood, with suitable schools, securing a suitable job. More altruistic, did you choose to raise a family thinking the world would be a better place for the arrival of your son or daughter. In the guidance you provided, would your children’s impact make the world a better place? I’m not sure the motivation matters. You earned the title, presumably you wear it proudly.

And what of you having other titles – a title that doesn't include father – are they important? Because while it's true that the protagonist/and in some cases the antagonist of tonight's paper are fathers – the ultimate question is whether titles matter.

For those of you in this esteemed group that aren't fathers but having been responsible for leading other men and women, be they co-workers, direct reports, even students you've helped shepherd through the years, you earned titles too. They may be every bit as important as the title "father." It's not for me to decide which is most important to you. You decide. I've brooded over this topic for 15 years. My introspection, my eureka moment came late but mercifully not too late. My delayed introspection, my unwillingness to come to terms with my personal quest for title came at a cost – a cost I'm still accounting for. I would suggest that the cost you are about to bear is merely listening to me for another 17 minutes. That seems nominal.

The Title Father -

As you've likely surmised, my father has been on my mind an awful lot lately. I'm unsure why. Perhaps I've reached the age where the wisdom of those older and shall I say more "sage" is now credible to me – resonating as relevant. That seems plausible enough. Right? Maybe it's as random as the fact that I live alone in Lincoln, NE having little to distract my quiet thoughts other than the rustle of the late summer cornstalks. The persistent purr of another John Deere combine, the crackle of a felled cottonwood as another fall fire invites me to forget today's worries and go back to a time of safety, a time of security. Linus' warm blanket without Lucy's carping. My father's advice (and no my mother's name is not Lucy) was unspoken, delivered in his actions. Uneducated, professionally indistinguishable, slightly built, sometimes painfully insecure, my father nonetheless embodied certitude and truth – at least as it related to how one treats another.

Who was my father?

Ronald Patrick Barone (likely the first time you've heard that name) was the second child of Pasquale and Gail Barone. Frail as a young man, somewhat of a momma's boy – he did little to draw attention to himself, to distinguish himself amongst his peers. Jet black hair, dark brown eyes, a joker's wry smile at the corner of his mouth, Ron would watch the action. He was the center of no stage.

A student but not graduate of Deer Park HS – he found pleasure in cars, all things mechanical, and molding his world through his hands. He had too. He lacked the money, power, political influence to advance his lot in life through these traditional methods. Like his

grandfather he had no interest in a mortar board. He had a passing interest in school. School was only an opportunity to flirt, drive his car down Sycamore street, to showcase his “success.” A bright sports car was emblematic of his success. By traditional standards it may have ended there. But that’s where his real genius lay. His real success was in people. Material success evaded him.

In fact, most of the things he sought to do outside of developing relationships with family and friends were unsuccessful. An early release from the Air Force due to chronic hives brought on by screeching airplanes represented one of his last serious attempts at escaping his modest existence. In so many respects, I’m glad he never escaped. He was an exemplary teacher – having neither a class plan nor a syllabus to guide his lessons. No. He taught through his actions, delivered on his promises, stingy with his words. He was a very private man with little to say but much to teach. Funny enough, I recall few meaningful interactions with him. Sure, we communicated with one another, their simply wasn’t much said. That was OK with me as I believed I knew far more than him anyway. What could a Greeting Card print press mechanic teach one as learned as I for that matter as learned as you?

Much.

This will be off-putting to many of you but I boastfully share the fact that I turned 50 this year. Why do I delight in that? It’s obvious. Look around the room. I’m celebrating the fact that I’m surrounded by a group of wise (for the most part), learned men exceeding my age by varying degrees. A decade, two decades, dare I say maybe even more. Yes....I can see with my disappointingly....and increasingly failing eyesight that some of you may be thirty or even 40 years my senior. I revel....

My revelry is short lived. For while I may have slightly more “discretionary” years at my disposal – dare I say, I stand here tonight very much humbled, very much awed by the lessons I’ve yet to learn – lessons which so many of you have not only experienced, endured, but also prevailed over. It’s funny, maybe ironic to some that what you have I want...and what I have you may want as earnestly. I would give much to have the collective experiences of this room and perhaps you would give much to relive or maybe even avoid some of the experiences you’ve had. Nonetheless, we have a certain mutual obligation to one another don’t we. We are actively at best, unwitting at worst, part of a collective experience – a social contract. We come armed with “tools of the trade.” Here are a few sharp tools.

Youth is a tool. A tool that can be dulled. For youth provides a potent reminder of that which is hopeful. In contrast, age and experience provide a sobering reminder that chasing fleeting and illusory pleasures is a frolic punished with emptiness and a gnawing, unavoidable wistfulness. I’m neither wistful nor empty. No. Rather, tonight’s reflection is about lessons

learned from a surprising font of inspiration. Lessons which only come when we set aside the ego that is hallmark of the youthful “know it alls.” I was an honor student “know it all” for longer than I care to admit. Those days largely past, it’s unfair to shoulder our inexperienced youth with this mantle.

Knowledge is a tool....but “knowing it all” is a contra-indicated use of the tool. I suppose we’ve all been guilty of this from time to time but where does this wrongheaded belief come from. Omnipotence isn’t taught in schools. Arrogance 101 isn’t taught on college and university campuses. It reproduces, germinates at home. BF Skinner might argue that all knowing is simply a reaction, a response to what we reward as a society. That our all knowing façade is simply a way to achieve reward or avoid punishment.

Is it that simple? Did we become what we are because of a desire to find pleasure, peace, material comfort or did we evolve to what we’ve become because of a hard wired, instinctive desire to self-preserve? I suppose the cognitivists would argue that as feeling thinking human beings we simply reflect and in so doing we actualize to our natural state. Impossible to answer, I argue for something in between. Senatorial in its lack of a clear answer – I fall on the side of neither position is right....we became what we are because of a potent combination of something innate, something in our spinal fluid, and something that was heavily influenced by our upbringing, our experiences, our desire to please or our simple desire to avoid the judgmental glances of our family, friends, peers, lovers, co-workers. We place value on things that may not matter – like title. And in some extreme cases, I suppose we confuse the noun with the adjective – the title versus the man. Consider in your own life, have you confused the antecedent with the modified noun. Did the descriptor become the defining term? I’m not chiding. I’m not criticizing. I’m simply asking you to carefully consider whether the titles amassed were more important than what you stood for as a man? Did you give up something to get the title that may have mattered the least? It’s for you to consider. I’m clearly no authority.

And while no authority on the distinction between what title bestows, what title entails, what a title requires, I was asked to deliver an important presentation on the topic. It was the most important speech of my life. Here’s my recollection.

As I walked to the podium to deliver my presentation, the crowd was hushed. Anticipation of a brilliantly delivered speech was the audience’s expectation. I was well prepared having ample time to think about and rehearse. Better than my preparation, I had amassed a lifetime of experiences that would now be the structure upon which I built this presentation. Incredibly, literally as I walked to the podium I changed my mind...I cast aside the preparation, the fretting over the small details. I had so carefully prepared, every single word and now as I straightened my jacket, cleared my throat, gazed appreciatively at the hushed crowd I was aborting every memorized phrase in favor of a more ad hoc presentation. The

inspiration came out of nowhere. Now at the podium, gazing nervously into the eyes of hundreds of colleagues, friends, and family, I began my presentation.

I opened my mouth. Crickets. I regained my composure and began.

“Today is election day...and what a day it is....for arguably the most important title in the world is up for grabs – President of the United States of America.” Whether George Bush or Al Gore wins is of no concern to me. The burden these men endured, the indignities bestowed on their families – all in search of the Presidency I’m unmoved by. You will forgive my indifference to their journey for THE title. The title means nothing to me. The title means nothing to most. In fact, the title doesn’t make the man...its simply a temporary garment, no longer lasting than the raincoat I’m wearing today. It’s as incidental as the cloudburst that greeted us all as we walked into church this morning. I can tell you with 100% certainty the title means nothing to my family, my mother, my father. No, they aren’t avowed socialists they are not rabid republicans or liberal leaning democrats. No...they simply are apathetic to title because after all – the value of most titles are fleeting.

I share my parent’s disdain. In fact, I feel a certain degree of antipathy for most titles. My father liked it that way. In fact, nothing could matter less to me right now as I lay my father to rest. The only titles that matter to me are the same titles that mattered to my father – they included many. Father, best friend, devoted husband, trusted colleague, teacher and student. The titles that really matter are not those we earn through political prowess, through corporate ladder climbing. The titles that really matter are those granted generously, without preconditions by friends, lovers, partners. They are granted privately, in the repose of one another’s company, a quiet whisper, a knowing glance.

I made a few more comments....then found my seat in the pew. Satisfied that I had made my point, satisfied that my father’s title-less existence was truly what made him such a great man.

Let me ask all of you the rhetorical question – as there are many “titles” in this room – Doctor X, Professor Y, Dean of Z, President ofchief marketing officer, the titles are truly endless – oh, and may I say impressive? But wouldn’t you conclude that the one’s that have really mattered were almost effortlessly earned, bestowed without condition.

The Title that Matters Most –

My father – the ultimate title holder, the king of the Weber grill off – in which the only threat for him reigning as king of the backyard was the cheap cut of meat that would invariably be declared unfit for his investment was the most inspirational influence of my life. The inspiration did not come from his achievement. No, in fact I idolized him for his rejection of societal title. The grandson of Federico was neither a president nor an outlaw. He was a very

simple man you've now met. As I reflected on the title of tonight's paper I could think of nothing more important to write about than the impact my father had on me.

As I've considered that rainy morning where I was asked to deliver the presentation of my life, my father's eulogy, I have had the better part of nearly two decades to reflect upon the influence my father had on my life. With three daughters now seeking their place in the world I've carefully considered the lessons I deliver in my own actions. Imperfect but well intended my actions have now merged with my father's. I recognize my professional ambitions have been a poor substitute for the most important titles I believe we all share. Consider one last thing as I bring this paper to a close -

Having the opportunity to convene at a prescribed time, exchanging diverse ideas, in the warm comfort of a bequested home where the diversity of ideas is as varied as the Cincinnati forecast, we are privileged to be members of a society that values freedom of thought and expression. We can debate the great, the incidental with equal ease and fervor. But perhaps that's the real point of our time here...we needn't get hung up on title. President, father, outlaw, maybe the only title that really matters is that used in the present...the here and now.

Whether you place value in other titles – banker, lawyer, doctor, professor, rabbi, maybe even literarian – I suggest that truly the titles mattering the most are those we all share – teacher, confidant, best friend, trusted ally, brother, cousin, partner, and yes father. Yes....In this very rare moment, the only title worth wearing is the one held dear in this moment of sharing together.

Thank you dear friends.