

# The next phase doesn't look promising

Occasionally, we take a moment to evaluate where we are in the great cycle of life. We usually don't consciously plan these evaluations; they just happen, inspired by something innocent, like overhearing a conversation at a nearby table while waiting for breakfast.



**You can't beat a system you can't understand**

By Sam Bari

I am definitely well into that phase of my life where I am set in my ways. I don't like a lot of drastic change. I eat breakfast at the same place every morning, and the waitress makes note if I change my usual order.

"You want hot chocolate?" she asked. "What happened to the tea?"

"Winter's coming. I sometimes have hot chocolate when it's cold," I replied.

"Don't worry, I'll give you plenty of whipped cream. I'm sure you like whipped cream," she said smiling.

"You know my sweet tooth all too well," I said affectionately.

"And the rest stays the same," she said knowingly. "Two scrambled, crisp bacon, white toast and jelly, and some day I'll make you some grits."

"I look forward to it," I said. Grits are a small delicacy that I miss from all the years that I lived in the South.

I perused the morning newspaper as I waited for my order, another habit. Two gentlemen at the next table were having a loud conversation. They looked older than me but not by much. I assumed that one or both of them were hard of hearing. Without trying to eavesdrop, I listened to their conversation along with everyone else in the little eatery.

"I think it's depression. It's definitely depression," one said loudly.

"It's not a depression. It's a cold front. That's all it is," the other replied at equal volume.

"It's not a cold. A cold doesn't cause depression," the first man said.

"How do you know?" the other man asked. "Do you know what

causes a depression?"

"I don't know exactly. Lots of things could cause depression," the first man replied.

"It's easy," the other man said. "When heat tries to rise and conflicts with the cold on the way down, you get the right conditions and you get a depression."

"When you get a cold, you get a fever, and it works its way down from your head. That's why they call it a head cold," the first man said.

"I thought we were talking about a depression," the other man said, looking confused.

Then the conversation subsided. They both realized that they were talking about two different subjects because their hearing was not what it once was. They were old enough to be kind, so neither mentioned the ineptitude of the other. They were silent for a few moments before one of them changed the subject and started talking about something unrelated to their nonsensical exchange.

I noticed people at other tables. They were smiling. They too realized what had just happened. Nobody wanted to embarrass the men, so everybody just sat quietly and tried not to laugh.

I hate to admit that keeping a straight face was not easy. I tried to appear as if I were laughing at something I was reading in the newspaper that I conspicuously held in front of my face.

The incident made me think: Wow - that's the next step. First the eyesight, then the hearing goes. I guess it's all downhill from here.

I was about ready to accept enter-

ing my dotage when I remembered a similar conversation when I was about 7 years old. My friends Chilly Mac and Kinky Boswell from my boyhood gang were talking about the weather.

"My dad said he's worried about a depression that's coming our way," Chilly Mac said.

"Why? Are we all going to be sad?" Kinky Boswell asked.

"What are you talking about?" Chilly asked, looking confused.

"Didn't you say that your dad was worried about depression coming our way?" Kinky asked. "Depression is when you're sad, isn't it?"

"Yeah. But I think this has something to do with the weather, not our mood," Chilly said.

"Well, maybe it's bad weather," Kinky suggested.

"Yeah. I think it is," Chilly said. "Do you think the weather gets sad?"

"Probably. Maybe that's why they call it a depression. The weather gets sad," Kinky mused.

"My mom says that rain is what happens when the angels cry," Chilly Mac said.

"Makes sense," Kinky replied. "Angels probably cry when they are sad and depressed."

"Do you believe in that?" Chilly asked.

"What? In angels?" Kinky questioned.

"Yeah. Do you believe in angels?" Chilly asked.

"I think so," Kinky answered. "But I don't know if they get sad and cry," he said pensively.

Both conversations were quite revealing. They are living proof that age has little influence on our wisdom or understanding. Whether you are young or old, you will occasionally be confused. Confusion is something you have to learn to accept when you live in a system you can't understand.

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