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LIFESTYLE

Of Greek gods and the modern major-general

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The song says, “It’s summertime, and the living is easy.”

Driving around in my car, enjoying the summer sights, gives me some solitude to think. Lately, I’ve been wondering if I’m over the hill. I don’t mean out of sight down the 10th fairway. I mean out of touch. Tapped. Obtuse, like the warden in the “The Shawshank Redemption.” Detached. Not hip. Living in the past.

I’m probably not the only one around here who has these thoughts.

But, then, like the denouement in a Greek play, the *deus ex machina* kind, I get pulled out of my thoughts of “he’s all done” with “see, someone else still cares about that.”

I don’t remember the first time I saw Gilbert & Sullivan’s “The Pirates of Penzance” performed. A standard of community theater and high school and college productions, it’s not the rave on Broadway today, that’s for sure. But it’s a classic, especially the solo performance by the actor playing Major-General Stanley, who sings what I believe may be the most difficult and “I want to do that, too” set of lyrics in all of theater. “I am the very model of a modern major-general ...”

This summer, the College Light Opera Company’s terrific performance of “The Pirates of Penzance” at Highfield Hall did not disappoint this wannabe major-general.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the College Light Opera Company is a Cape Cod treasure staffed by a group of young performers with promising careers. You’ve still got all this month to catch their last four performances before the close of the season. There may be a generational disagreement as to what is more difficult — the lyrics to Billy Joel’s “We Didn’t Start the Fire” or the “Major-General’s Song” — but I’d argue you’re not obtuse if you know the latter. Just ask those “kids” at Highfield Hall.

When the dictionary adds new words that have become part of the lexicon, I pay attention. Passing the Cape Cod Fairgrounds and seeing the crowds filing into the Barnstable County Fair, another Greek god prods my thoughts with the word “roustabout.” I ask myself, would anyone today know what that word means?

In 1964, Elvis Presley starred in a movie titled “Roustabout.” Say it out loud — *roustabout* — what’s not to like? Even Disney included a tune in the 1941 film “Dumbo” about the roustabouts. Imagine if your teenager in the back seat asks as you drive along on vacation, “Hey, dad, what’s a roustabout?” Because you’re a smart dad, you’d answer, “That’s the guy who erects the tent in the circus and puts together the rides on the midway.”

To this day, every carnival, county fair or circus has a gang of roustabouts who do all those backbreaking jobs behind the scenes that make the summer carnivals and fairs so memorable. But they also leave their mark on so many other things we take for granted every day. The roustabouts helped build the bridges on the Cape, dig the Cape Cod Canal and clear the land for the bike paths. They also haul in the fishing nets, dig up the clams and pave the beach parking lots.

Let's tip our hats to those roustabouts; they surely deserve our thanks.

— *James Carroll lives in East Falmouth.*