

ORVILLE BAUMGARDNER

AND

WORDS (!)

TO LIVE BY... ..

(IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD)

By

James Hanna

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... James Hanna's, "Orville Baumgardner and Words to Live By," is one of those satirical pieces that you can truly sink your teeth into.*

Not to dissuade you, but the history of our titular character is based off of the real Orville Baumgardner as public figure who killed himself after being sentenced to ten years for sexual predation. A true piece of shit, and not one I would have known about had it not been for this work nor one that I would have gone out of my way to remember, research, or care about (which I did not and do not). A dead piece of garbage is simply garbage gone – good riddance.

*It sounds weird to say, but therein lies one of the greatest strengths of Hanna's piece. He has taken a character out of history and, dare I say it, placed him in the culture of our current political times and – letting him wax poetic about advice offered to those who seemingly have no inclination to denounce him for offenses committed *cough* – lets him use all of the goodies of philosophy and religion to turn their bullshit on their heads.*

(I'm not the biggest students of politics, but this lambasting of Republican politics makes me chuckle. Oh, if you are Republican by the way – there was your trigger warning snowflake.)

That is the power of satire. Despicable character to be sure, but the irony runs so deep within this piece that you can taste it in the air. You can hear it in the charm of Baumgardner's speech. You can feel it when your blood boils over that someone so heinous fits in with an entire other group of heinous assholes.

Orville Baumgardner and Words to Live By/Hanna

Hanna, here, has something to say. Perhaps you should read and listen.

Five stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLE *(for the love of language...)*

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Orville Baumgardner and Words to Live By

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“Good gentlemen of the beloved Knights of Columbus, thank you all for inviting me to speak here today. As a lifelong resident of Putnam County, the jewel of Indiana, I had long hoped the time would come when I might address so distinguished a group. I did not think I would do so as an accused sex offender, but I hope you will suspend your judgment until I have had my day in court.

“Ah, I can tell by your friendly faces that you have already made this concession—that you already know that precocious girl fibbed when she told the police I groped her. So I apologize for making a plea for what you have already granted—I do not wish to appear redundant as I stand before you today. No, my mission is to enlighten you with the words by

which I live—words that have helped me gain inner repose and perhaps a berth in heaven.

Words that have even given me the strength to forgive that impetuous child.

“But first a bit more about myself. Like most of you, I have lived my life in the blessed Hoosier state. As a youth, I delivered newspapers and sang in my local choir. No adolescent rebellion for me, no pot smoking for me—I was content to fill what free time I had with stamp collecting and chess. After graduating from Butler University with a bachelor’s degree in marketing, I challenged the Democratic incumbent in House District 54. To my amazement, I won the seat in a landslide, not because I expressed any new ideas but because, as a stalwart Republican, I expressed no ideas at all. Is it not better to let things evolve at their natural, God-given pace than to waste precious time on short-sighted schemes that can only make a mess of things? And so, I did not champion a single bill during my thirty years in state congress; instead, I immersed myself in great books and allowed my mind to expand. “Where the bee sucks, there suck I.” The Bard never wrote wiser words. And so, like the bee, I’ve buzzed gently about and sucked the honey from life.

“To those who might scorn my sweet tooth and think me a puppet to sloth, I must ask if there is one among you who would willingly flee his hive. And if there be one among you who would cast his lot to the wind, I would also like to refer you to *The Sermon on the Mount*. ‘Consider the lilies of the field—they toil not nor do they spin. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.’ At the risk of upstaging our Savior, I would like to add something more. ‘Cherish your blessings and rise not too high lest the fall should prove too great.’ My father, an assistant manager at McDonald’s, instilled this saying in me, and in honor of his memory, I have made this motto my own. Now if there still be one among you

who would rather court the abyss, may I also refer you to a passage from the glorious *Book of Sirach*? ‘What is beyond your capacity, seek not.’ Just what does this mean, my friends. I would venture to say it means cherish the Lord and revel in His gifts, for ours is not to fathom His complexities and grace. No, whoever might challenge God’s wisdom, which goes before all things, will surely suffer a mighty fall and bring havoc upon himself. So live your lives like ponies, my friends. Go gambol about in meadows and leave the riddles of life to He who authored them.

“Ah, I suspect my weakness for metaphors has left some of you confused. So, practically speaking, how might one apply a spry pony to himself? Since the yoke I offer is easy, my instructions are patently simple. First, one must get himself born—a good woman will help with that. Secondly, one must find himself a compatible career—not a headstrong crusade, mind you, but an agreeable occupation, one that will allow time to sniff the roses and kiss a baby or two. In my case, I found my nest in the hallowed Republican party—a clique that demanded nothing of me but my pledge to stay out of God’s way. And so I have lived my life as a damper to blind ambition—a moat to those who would foolishly rip the lilies from the field. And lest you should think me diminished by the shakers of history, may I say that, despite my reticence, I have performed a good deed every day. A kind word to a neighbor, a guiding hand to a child, will surely bring one closer to God than arrogant reforms. And so, throughout my life, I have dispensed small charities—deeds whose aggregate weight may afford me a cottage in paradise.

“Ah, I suppose that for some of you my recipe is too spare—that you need something more to protect you from blasphemous despair. In deference to Voltaire, I suggest that you

tend to your personal gardens, that you till the earth and cast out the weeds so your roses will fully bloom. There I go with another metaphor, so what does this actually mean? It means you should seek a hobby that will keep you from soiling God's plans—that will sweep the conceit from your soul and make you a vessel to all of His gifts. In my case, I found my avocation in my passion for great books, but I also pursued a diversion that good people might frown upon. The hobby I chose was poker, but I played it with great restraint. I limited it to friendly games, which I enjoyed with my prudent friends. The dollar limit we placed on our bets ensured good fellowship, for no one was placed in a position where he might win or lose a house. If the cards fell my way, I would have a few dollars to buy a fifth of scotch. If the cards fell poorly, I would shrug off my losses and pour myself a beer. Yes, life is ever a gamble—we must resign ourselves to that—but the odds are more in our favor if we wisely limit our bets.

“Now then, have I said it all or is there more to be said? If you will indulge me for another minute, my friends, I have one last comment to make. At times, those that feed on our failings will pilfer God's bounty as well, so if your cards should ever fall poorly, you had best cut your losses at once. What is an example of this, you might ask? Who has best thwarted defeat? Well, the mightiest of shuffles, the cleverest of retreats, was performed by our forty-second president: William Jefferson Clinton. When facing an endless impeachment for cavorting with a nymph, he immediately seized the initiative with a pithy mea culpa. A disembowelment that may have lasted for weeks, he reduced to a couple of minutes, and thereby was able to starve the vultures that hovered over his head. Now I do not endorse this man's politics nor embrace his weakness for tramps, but his skill at cutting his losses was too

artful to deny. May I add that when charged with an indiscretion myself, I was no less proactive, my friends. Yes, I was once a mentoring light to that confused and exploited young girl, and, yes, I wiped the tears from her face when she apologized to me. But I had no hesitation in severing our ties—even though I miss her dear laughter, I have unbound her from my life.

So there you have it, gentlemen: the words by which I live. Soar not too high, nurture your garden, and cut your losses at once. If you follow this modest plan and refrain from heretical flights, God will smile upon you and you will live a blessed life.

Author's Note

After being convicted of sex with a minor, for which he received ten years in state prison, Orville Baumgardner took his own life in the Putnam County Jail. The guards, while taking the morning count, found him lifeless in his cell—he had tightened a sheet around his neck and he looked like an old marionette. In anticipation of his burial, Orville had placed a note on his chest, a message that most efficiently defined his legacy. It read: Here lies Orville Baumgardner, philanthropist and sage, for whom the cards fell poorly one day. May he rest in eternal peace.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Republican Party in America today has morphed into the party of abdication. Or, to be more precise, the party of fear: fear of nonwhite cultures, fear of the National Rifle Association, and fear of its demagogic leader—a petulant man-child with a personality disorder. Should not such a culture at least have a manifesto? I wondered. Yes, I decided, at least it should define itself honestly instead of hiding behind the polemics of distraction. With this in mind, I created Orville Baumgardner, Republican Party hack and lecturer extraordinaire. Although ultimately a coward, Orville boldly articulates a philosophy for inaction and, in doing so, is perhaps a little braver than his GOP colleagues. This story was influenced by the crippled humanity depicted in 1984, Brave*

Orville Baumgardner and Words to Live By/Hanna

New World, and The Handmaid's Tale. It was also influenced by "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," a classic tale of surrender.

AUTHOR BIO: James Hanna is a retired probation officer and a former fiction editor. His work has appeared in over thirty journals, including Sixfold, Crack the Spine, and The Literary Review. He is also a prior contributor to Fleas on the Dog. James' books, all of which have won awards, are available on Amazon.