

THE COMPARISON SCRIPT

Frank R. Morris

Herbie was five foot seven, dark-skinned, and thoroughly unremarkable. When we played softball, he could not hit the ball out of the infield; when we played basketball, he was an asset for the other team. Herbie was good in shooting marbles, but that's about it. He was a B student and, after not seeing him for forty-five years I had forgotten him. He never - not once - came to mind in four and a half decades.

Then he called. Identified himself. I remembered the name. My brain whirled to recall what he was like. After he talked for five minutes I remembered: it was typical of Herbie to think he was better than the rest of us kids - despite all reality. He hadn't changed.

In the course of a two hour soliloquy, I heard all his old themes. His parents were better than my parents, he grew up in a better neighborhood than mine, his father made more money than my father, he had more girl friends that I did, yada yada. He had no hesitation in telling me that he was rich, lived in the best neighborhood of our hometown, knew more about poetry and literature than me, his politics were superior to mine, etc. And so forth. And so forth. And so forth. For two hours.

I named his phone call a soliloquy. It was. How did he know so much about me? It was all based on erroneous comparisons he made long ago and faraway. I found myself growing irritated. What was this call all about? "Herbie, why did you call me?" I said with an objective voice. "Why?" he said in response, "Don't you want to talk?" "Talk to me means dialog. I can't get a word in edgewise as you tell me how well you have done."

"You sure have grown cranky in your old age" he says. Then another series of projective comments as he sought to switch discomfort to me. "Are you jealous, Frank?" "What do I have to be jealous about?" "You haven't done as well as me; I'm more successful." "How do you know that?" "I made twenty thousand dollars last month; did you do that?" "Herbie, I don't grade success by how much money someone makes." "That's fine for you to say, because you are not as rich."

Okay, my reader. How long would being polite and nice make you continue to listen?

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For me, not long. Why? Because the comparison script this started over a half decade ago hadn't changed. No matter what was said, he'd be self-assured that he'd be better, smarter, richer, happier, etc. The subject changed, the script did not. And would not.

I hung up.

Question: Is there a Napoleon script where an unremarkable person gets into proving himself for an entire lifetime? What do you think? Is it necessary? Why isn't just living life sufficient? Is it possible that Freud was right about grownup life being so influenced by a child's thinking and situation that he (or she) simple repeats the same themes over and over... until death do them part?