

Ass Story

Don Rogan

“Do you know what it is about you, Rogan?”

It was moments before the bell signaling the start of class. The question was posed to me rather loudly by Heather, an attractive sixteen-year-old female student in my most challenging U.S. history class. Several of the gathering and chattering students turned some attention to my anticipated response.

I acknowledge harboring some curiosity about how I was being perceived by students in those first years of teaching at that large public school. My previous classroom experience had been in an all male, testosterone and discipline-laden private school where teachers were given the guidance of “Don’t smile ‘til Christmas,” and “Illegitimi non carborundum.”

Words of wisdom had been abundant in the months before my change to a more open and coed teaching environment—from the unctuous (be nice), to the challenging and unanswered—what will you do when a female student cries over her test grade? This question came from my wife who knew my weaknesses and wondered if I would succeed with what was then (the late 60s) known as the “fairer sex.” So when Heather asked her question, I willingly lobbed the ball back into her court.

“No, Heather, what is it about me?”

The room seemed to hush as she appraised me and answered for all to hear.

“You don’t have any ass.”

No wisdom or advice had prepared me for this stunningly public anatomical analysis. Heads swiveled and eyes narrowed to see my reaction—perhaps anger or a reprimand, admonishment, or even a further discussion of prominent or not so prominent body parts. (“Do too!”, “No, you don’t!”) The natives were poised and curious, and what was ahead I knew not.

Mother-wit took possession of me. There is no other rational explanation for what followed. I just went with the first reaction that popped into my consciousness.

I slowly turned in a circle, wondering if my teaching career lay in the balance, and said with slight bewilderment, “Well, I don’t know, I had it when I came in.”

A large collective sigh and some chuckles. Heather smiled and seemed satisfied and the classroom situation returned to the usual pre-bell banter. Situation defused—but what was I dealing with?

What should I do? Report Heather for disciplinary action? It was years before the term “sexual harassment” had made its appearance in the brave new politically correct world in which we currently dwell. What sort of a test was I dealing with here? I did seek out Heather’s faculty adviser, but she was a substitute for the regular adviser. She looked at me blankly when I described the incident and asked, “Heather who?”

Through the remainder of that school year, Heather made no further references to my anatomy, at least that I overheard. The class did seem more open, relaxed and successful than before her public appraisal of my form. All’s well that ends well, I reasoned, and my wife’s response (“See—what did I tell you?”) led her to refer to me occasionally from that time on as her “husband who has no ass.” I came to smile at the description—what choice did I have? Heather, my colleagues and wife came to agree, had made a very accurate assessment. Truth became its own defense.

Flash forward twenty years. I am waiting for a prescription at a crowded local pharmacy, and the clerk calls my name when my order is ready. While paying for the item, I turn to leave and come face-to-face with a mature young woman who asks, “Are you the Mr. Rogan who taught at North High School in 1970?”

“Yes,” I respond, unsure who is asking.

“I’m Heather—remember me? I was in your U.S. History class.”

Oh, yes—you bet I remember. Here was the Heather, adolescent appraiser of my ass, a memory I had kept in my Not-To-Be-Forgotten file of teaching moments. Here she was as an adult, waiting for a prescription, as she explained, for one of her daughters.

Much had happened in Heather’s life since that year we had shared in high school. College, law school, a move to California, a marriage with two children, then a divorce and a return to the parental home to regroup. Currently, she holds a teaching position in a local junior high school and is planning a return to California at school year’s end to re-launch her law career. I debate whether to share my memory of her remark. I decide to do so because I think she will enjoy the humor from her present perspective as a teacher.

She is silent for a moment after I recount the memory. She says she had no memory of the comment, but she finally laughs and says, “Yes, that sounds like something I’d say. See, my father had no ass, and that is something I always notice about men.”

Heather’s name is called, she retrieves her child’s medicine, and thanks me for my efforts in the class. Although she didn’t remember the comment, she did remember my name. Now she had some of her own experience with the puzzlements and enjoyments of teaching young people.

I am quite sure we will never meet again.