

NEWS FROM THE FRONT 6.0

It has been several months since I have been able to write one of these. Thanks always for reading and thinking the occasional good thought in my direction. Some random thoughts on life and whatnot follow:

6.1 SOMEWHERE BETWEEN "TOO YOUNG TO KNOW BETTER" AND "TOO OLD TO CHANGE"

So it finally happened today.

I was walking out of the gym, where I go several times a week to get all sweaty and work out, and the young man working at the desk said, "Have a good evening, Mr. Dault."

It is the first time, to my recollection, that I have heard my name spoken to me with a "Mr." in front of it.

Now this may seem strange. Of course I have had situations where I've been waited on, or in a classroom when I've worked as a teacher, where my last name has been used in this manner. But to some extent these are studied and calculated formalities, not to be taken quite seriously; they are theater. The theatrics go a long way towards making things seem - on some level, to me - less than completely serious. But what happened today, that was serious.

What happened today - that's a life-changing thing that happened today. It changes my life. It changes my life because suddenly I have to admit, at least in a limited way, that I'm not a kid anymore.

Right - I know - I'm 33 years old, more than halfway to 34, and by the time that my folks were my age I was a bouncing seven-year-old in their midst. I don't have kids, and it's been rare in my life that I've held a steady job. I spend a great deal of my time reading books and watching movies: I am hardly an adult.

When you are a kid, there is this strange conflation of two, directly-opposed themes at work in your life. On the one hand, you feel invincible and like you can change the world. But at the same time, on the other hand, you have this strange sense that your actions don't really matter; that you're anonymous, and what you do will not have real consequences.

And suddenly, strangely, in that one moment of that college student addressing me as "Mr. Dault," I was confronted with the fact that what I do in the world, on a day-to-day-basis, gets noticed. And not only does it get noticed, but it has impact, because people (or, at least I assume, people younger than myself) think that I'm old enough to know what I'm doing.

Now that, I have to admit, strikes me as a little strange; from the view inside my skull I know that, a great deal of the time, I have no idea at all what's going on and I'm just winging it. So maybe I need to rethink what I'm doing - this happy-go-lucky attitude that I've had. Maybe I need to think in terms of my actions having consequences in the world.

This young man - he doesn't know me, but he knows my habits, or at least a couple of them. Whether I need a large or small towel, roughly what time I come in to work out, what time I leave. What else does he notice about me? What pieces do I present to the various people I interact with to take up and collect? What consequences do I leave, even unintentionally, in my wake?

You have a good evening, too, young fella. You've given me a lot to think about.

6.2 THE BOURNE PROXIMITY

If you have seen the recent action sequel, "The Bourne Supremacy," then you know that a good third of it takes place in Berlin. What you may not be aware of is that just about all the Berlin portions seem to have been filmed in and around my old neighborhood just south of the Tiergarten (cf NTF 1.0 and 3.0) - Potsdamer Platz, several of the U-Bahn stations I frequented, and the BOSCH parts building (literally around the corner from the apartment on Pohlstrasse I lived in) all make prominent appearances. Very cool, and it made me quite homesick (if one can be homesick for a foreign land).

One other note - for those who will see the movie (for the first time or again after reading this): the chase sequence where Bourne ends up on a boat and hiding under a bridge - if it were done in real-time, with actual Berlin geography - would have required Bourne to sprint the couple miles from Nollendorfplatz station (where he first starts running) to Hallesches Tor station (where he jumps on the boat) in addition to all the other running he did. It was a bit surreal for me to see these places I had walked in every day for months last year flashed before me on the screen - but at the same time it was so good to see them again I didn't mind the liberties taken with reality.

My friend Alec would probably chasten me, as well, that playing "spot the geography reference" in a film is a sure sign that postmodernism has taken hold of me like a skin rash.

6.3 MARATHON MAN

I was born with a slight congenital deformity in my legs, such that my feet (particularly my right one) roll inwards when I move around.

A couple years ago, this became a problem when my foot decided to go entirely kaput. Walking became excruciatingly painful - and I was walking quite a bit, seeing as I was a grad student trying to live on the cheap. Through the kind attentions of some folks at the Vanderbilt Sports Medicine Clinic (and several months of physical therapy) I got to where I was walking without pain again - and even more: running.

Now all my life I've been a heavy kid. "Husky," if the tags on my blue jeans were to be trusted. As-such, I was never very good at moving fast. But about four years ago, I got ambitious. I started huffing and puffing my way up and down the street in front of my house. The next day a little farther. The next day, a bit farther. I got past the wheezing, and managed to run -at least a bit.

Then, with my bum foot, that all came to a halt.

What I missed most about running was the sense that I was getting away from them "Husky" jeans. Not being able to run - it felt like being trapped in my own body. A strange sensation. I think I wanted to run because it was itself such an alien activity, given my tubbiness and usual lethargy. It felt virtuous.

Now that things are working again, foot-wise, I haven't forgotten what it felt like - that trapped feeling. I'm running about three miles a pop these days, and my body has begun to take this alien activity and integrate it into "who I am" - Husky jeans be damned. And what's educational for me, what I'm learning, is that the triumph of it is not distance, or speed, or the way my body looks. The payoff is consistency - just doing it, and wanting to do it, consistently. Sticking with it is the payoff, perverse as it may sound.

So, here's my joy: the other day I walked outside, heading for the pizza joint behind my apartment building. I got outside and it was a beautiful, mild, spring-like day - quite a surprise for the dog days of August. And - whoa - something inside me said (first time I ever had this happen): "Hm. Good day for a run. Hold the pizza."

Husky jeans be damned.

6.4 ALMOST FAMOUS, REDUX

If any of you have been keeping up with the reality TV show "Nashville Star" - you might be interested to know that it is filmed in my back yard, literally. The house they appropriated for this round of shootings is right up the alley from my apartment. I don't have a TV, so I can't compare what I saw "in the raw" from day-to-day with what made it to the final episodes. All I know is that life around people-who-are-not-yet-famous-(even-though-they-are-famous-because-they-are-on-TV)-but-want-desperately-to-be-famous-(in-a-different-way-than-just-being-on-TV-makes-you-famous) isn't much different than what would pass for normal, day-to-day life here in Nashville: weird, with more than your average share of Stetsons.

6.5 HAIL AND FAREWELL, FOR NOW

The Summer has been s l o w, and that's been mighty fine. I've got a lot of reading done, and I feel ready for what portends to be the most grueling year of my academic "career." Qualifying exams and a dissertation proposal are just some of the delights that await. If anything funny happens, I'll be sure to write and tell you about it.

Meantime, you are loved and thought of here in Nashville - The City that Never Cheaps.

this is your correspondent, signing off,

David