

13th November 2021

Advice

“Fools need advice most, but wise men only are the better for it.”

Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanac

The other day I came across a photograph of myself when I was eighteen. I'd just left home in the highlands of Scotland to come to Edinburgh, the “big city”, to begin what would be six years in university. There, looking back at me, was a skinny, unshaven, wide-lapel-jacketed, fresh-faced, wide-eyed youngster whom I vaguely recognised from all these years ago. What kind of conversation could I have with that eighteen-year-old? What advice could I give him, and what might be his response?

Let's begin with the advice. Simple! My advice would be “take some risks”. The eighteen-year-old me, with a loving and supportive upbringing, was conditioned to “play it safe”, and to continue to look for security and predictability when I left home. Through the years, and reinforced by my personality, that's meant that I've never been a risk-taker in any real sense in any facet of my life. It's not that I regret the choices I've made, or that I'm disappointed by the way such choices have worked out. But, if “life is for the living”, then it might have been worthwhile – and interesting – to take a few more risks along the way.

And what would the eighteen-year-old say to this aging individual? Simple! His reassurance would be “You've done OK!” Whatever you decided *not* to do, whatever risk-taking you've ducked, look back at who you are and what you've done, and be satisfied. You couldn't have done it any other way. Know now that “you've done OK”.

I'm not one of Benjamin Franklin's fools, and neither is that eighteen-year-old staring back at me. But both of us, in our own way and in our own time, are wise enough to listen to what's being said. It may, indeed, be worth taking risks from time to time. For, after all, you only ever have one chance at things. But, whatever you decide, be happy that you're doing your best, and, when that's been completed, hear the affirmation, “you've done OK” in it all.

Thank you for the conversation, young man. I think we know that, as wise men, we're both the better for it.

A prayer for today

Learning never stops; loving never ends; serving never ceases – thank God!