

Belated Rejuvenation

In a weak moment some months ago, I responded favorably to a request from *MRS Bulletin*. And so I find myself trying to write a POSTERMINARIES piece that isn't a labor to write or, worse yet, to read. Edgar Allan Poe is credited with saying,

In one case out of a hundred
a point is excessively discussed because it is obscure;
in the ninety-nine remaining
it is obscure because it has been excessively discussed.

I fear that much of what I have to say within the traditional MRS landscape would fall into the latter. I was searching for inspiration among the leaves I was raking when Brandon, my neighbor's 10-year-old son, threw a small package into the leaves. A modest amount of smoke escaped and then that foul sulfur compound odor that anyone who took high school chemistry (back in the years when high school students were actually allowed to do laboratory experiments) would immediately recognize. I gave him a piece of my mind and he laughed and told me he had just "fart-bombed" me. These were the latest commercial craze among adolescent boys as Halloween was approaching. He also volunteered that whoever invented these must have made a pile of money. After the wildly successful introduction of tobacco products to England, Queen Elizabeth I is credited with complimenting Sir Walter Raleigh,

I have seen many a man
turn his gold into smoke,
but you are the first who
has turned smoke into gold.

Better that boys Brandon's age be fascinated with compounds of sulfur than Sir Walter Raleigh's legacy. I told Brandon that when I was in high school we used to make these in chemistry all the time. We used to stink up the entire school, and we didn't even get in trouble doing it. This led to a protracted interruption in the leaf raking as I continued to try and convince him that doing cool things at school didn't always have to be associated with getting into trouble. Before I knew it, I was trying to answer questions about how come I had never invented anything really cool like "fart bombs."

A little over a year ago, I opted to retire from Bell Labs the day my age-plus-service reached the magic total. With the exception of two brief assignments (both experiments in "target costing" separated by about a decade), I have had the distinct pleasure of a career focused in materials research—much of it very applied—and always present was the caveat

that it needed to improve manufacturing. A career "connected to" our manufacturing arm served me well when I decided it was time to finally part ways with the remnants of the Bell System I had spent the best years of my scientific life within. Now I am one of just over a hundred people at Sensors Unlimited Inc. We manufacture InGaAs discrete devices and linear and two-dimensional arrays. Near-infrared camera expertise established the company, while being in the right technology at the right time put us on the map during the telecom/Internet photonics spending frenzy. Most of my fellow employees are younger than either my son or daughter—without a doubt, that is the single biggest night-and-day difference between pre- and post-"retirement" careers. The best advice I've given them so far is

Never let a fool kiss you
X
or a kiss fool you,

which also happens to be the title of a treasure trove of chiasmic quotations assembled by Dr. Mardy Grothe and published in 1999 by Viking. The *chi* in the word chiasmus comes from the letter X of the Greek alphabet, and the simple word-reversal between the two parallel phrases in the clever example above can be diagrammed by literally marking the sentence with an X.

Chiasmic sentence structure can also be pictured by borrowing the atomic layer notation used in introductory crystal-structure chapters. Here is a Bernard Baruch comment on "relativity" restructured as an example:

A Those who mind
B don't matter
B' and those who matter
A' don't mind.

We have to forgive those who enjoy wordplay for their faults stacking the lines as in the midst of beautiful symmetry they prefer inversion.

I started out hoping I could somehow be somewhat entertaining, or if not entertaining, at least curiously distracting. Someone with a screw loose at the MRS Headquarters thought they were providing a forum for a loose screw to rattle on about the good old days of Bell Labs materials research and the beginnings of interdisciplinary MRS symposia popularity. That was before I opted for early retirement.

CLIF DRAPER

