

## “LET EACH BECOME ALL HE WAS CREATED CAPABLE OF BEING”

I first encountered Thomas Carlyle’s inspiring quotation on the wrought iron entry gate of the State Teachers College in Albany when I was an impressionable eighteen-year old freshman. And the challenge implicit in his words has remained with me all of my adult life.

Mr. Carlyle, I’m happy to report that I finally did it—after eighty-eight years of dutifully following your advice, I have finally become all that I am capable of being. So tell me, old buddy, what in the hell do I do now?

Before you answer me with another of your Victorian exhortations, I have to forewarn you that, in the course of my quest, my get up and go has got up and went. I’m truly tired and worn out. Whatever or whoever created me, clearly did not make me from a pattern that is still capable of becoming. Hey, eighty-eight years is a long time. And furthermore, my left hip hurts — all the time.

Could it be that there comes a time when it’s OK to sit back and watch the stream of life flow by instead of figuring out ways of bridging it, damming it or diverting it? There’s an old Italian peasant adage that claims, “*Il dolce far niente*”—*It’s sweet to do nothing*. Shouldn’t we all eventually reach a point when we can guiltlessly put down the bocce ball, pick up a wine glass, and cheer the young folks as they take their turn wearing themselves out? Or must we continue hedging our obligations by adding a corollary to that adage—*it’s sweet to do nothing but only after you’ve done something*.

Well, I have done something, several somethings for that matter--and now, I want to stop. My bones, my muscles and my heart agree with me but that small, soft voice inside my head keeps reminding me that’s there’s still work to be done. Lot’s of work. Just look out the window at all those fallen leaves, look at the TV and see all those bloviating politicians, look around you and see all those lonely people, thumb through our sea of newspapers, magazines and books and bear witness to a culture that has lost its way and is desperately searching for a new path. Or worse yet, get on the Internet, click on the social media sites and watch our democracy disintegrate.

I’ve tried to cop out by apologizing to my children and my grandchildren for the mess my generation has left them and then glibly tell them that this well-worn, weather-beaten geezer is now passing them the torch. But, they don’t seem to want it. They have their own fish to fry and they don’t need the fire from **my** fading torch to cook exploratory meals in **their** own kitchens.

So Thomas Carlyle, as an old codger who thrived and prospered despite the contradictions and complexities of your volatile and dynamic Victorian age, what would you suggest this generation of old codgers and old codgerettes do about our role in contemporary America? I could offer you some carefully reasoned possibilities but I’m too tired to assemble a set that would be appropriate to your status as a philosopher/historian. Instead, to keep with the superficiality of the tweets and the binary choices that are so popular today, I hereby present you with a commonplace rhetorical question.

Now that us old timers who followed your advice have become all that we are capable of being, do we “*Build back better*,” do we “*Take back our country*” or do we simply say,

**“Arrivederci, *il dolce far niente*.”**



December 3, 2021

Dear Times-Union Editor:

Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, marks the 226<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Scottish polymath, Thomas Carlyle. Although I have often found myself in strong disagreement with many of the writings of this controversial and iconoclastic philosopher, satirist and historian, I must confess that a simple quotation of his offered advice that has been the polestar of my adult life.

I am submitting a light-hearted 675 word essay, "**Let Each Become All He Was Created Capable Of Being.**" In it, I explain why this eighty-eight year old retired professional woodcarver sees his polestar flickering and fading and once more feels impelled to ask that old curmudgeon for some life-affirming counsel.

I offer it to you in the hope that you would share it with your readers.

I have included a very brief bio. An Internet search of Gerry Holzman and/or Empire State Carousel will provide a great deal of additional information about my activities. Thank you for considering this submission.

Gerry Holzman

[gerrygoodguy1@gmail.com](mailto:gerrygoodguy1@gmail.com)

[207] 844-8821....28 Birch Meadow Road, Brunswick ME 04011

[N.B.: Gerry Holzman is a member of the Class of 1954 at then New York State College for Teachers at Albany and a member of Potter Club. He is the creator of the Empire Sate Carousel now at Famers' Museum at Cooperstown and hosted the 2007 Potter Club Annual Reunion in Cooperstown.

A link to the Carousel web site follows: <https://www.farmersmuseum.org/empire-state-carousel/> ]