

It's Elementary.

Anthony Element

Speaking of which...

A few years ago, as I began the long, steady approach towards my peak years, - I put that last bit in to alert you to the fact that I am on occasion prone to exaggeration, although those of you who knew me back when I wore those idiotic overalls that earned us all the dubious title of baggy arses might have already cottoned on to that fact - anyway, about then I decided to quit the corporate world to pursue more useful stuff, by which I mean things I was really interested in.

Around the same time, I had the disturbing epiphany that most us do eventually; I realized I wasn't as young as I once was. In fact, I'd become a good deal older than I used to be. Which, while being somewhat circular, leads me to the ups and down of this whole ageing process.

I've discovered there are things I can't do now that I used to be able to, like running around the block. Unfortunately, back when I could do them, I didn't, which is partly why I can't now. There's that whole circular thing going on again. I discussed it with my friend and neighbour, Harvey. I should tell you about Harvey. He's a Vietnam vet with the thousand yard stare, a receding hairline and majorly greying ponytail.

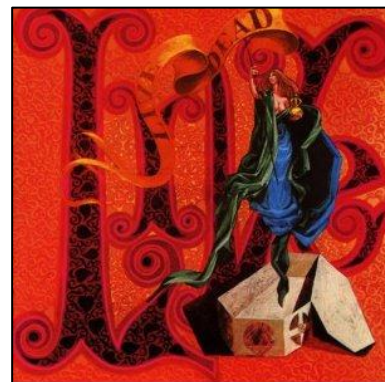
He spends a good deal of his time in his shed listening to the Grateful Dead at a volume that blisters paint. Harvey doesn't talk a huge amount but when he does it's because he has something to say. He waited for the end of the last track on his most precious possession, an original issue of the Live/Dead album, and murmured, "Yeah, doesn't do much for your sex life either."

Now I'm sure you all remember what sex is, er, was. It's when two or more people....Come on, we're not that old.

We agreed, Harvey and I, that there's a fair bit of debate as to what age one should become... well, less interested. Unfortunately this dispute seems to be split more or less along gender lines. When it comes to matters of the flesh, at least in our case the spirit is willing, but...

Enough about flesh already, this is a family publication.

One of the more pleasant yet unexpected aspects of - how shall I put this? - becoming less of a teenager, (about forty plus years less in my case), is that attractive young ladies now make eye contact with me. Some even smile. I rather enjoyed this development until I realized why it was happening.



Evidently, I'm now perceived as, well... harmless. I always was, mind you. But it didn't used to be that obvious. There's something indescribably ego deflating about being universally recognized as being harmless by those of the female persuasion.

How does it go, "You don't know what you've got 'til..." Ah, well.

Moving further north, anatomically speaking, Harvey and I agreed that another disturbing aspect of increasing age is our waistlines, which are following the same trend. Increasing, that is, not moving north.

There was a time, I'm pretty sure, when a six pack, a dozen satays and a Cha Kwai Teow was a mere snack. Now, if I put butter on my toast I get fatter.

Harvey mostly wears a tee shirt on the back of which is inscribed, *'24 hours in a day, 24 stubbies in a slab. Coincidence? I don't think so.'* Clearly, the less said about his waistline the better.

My grandchildren have somewhat unkindly observed that I'm beginning to talk about the good old days. Not a good sign, evidently. Pah, what would they know? I ask you. The Dead, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Stones, Queen, or... Rap? No bloody contest. Harvey pointed out that another consequence of, ahem, advancing years is that we spend more time at home now and we're expected to... well, do stuff around the place.

And we do.

But it's not as easy as I thought it would be.

Who knew there's a precise way in which knickers should be hung on the clothes line? And that failure to hang them properly risks being cast into the seventh level of hell, there to suffer for all eternity. Certainly not me. I do now. Such things make reversing an aircraft into the hangar using a tractor with a slipping clutch a breeze in comparison.



Which brings me, by no logical process whatsoever, to the issue of gardening.

It's inevitable that the aging male, and many females too, will, at some point, be forced to confront the prospect of tending a garden. I was surprised to discover so late in our marriage that I needed to make clear to my wife the difference between having a garden and being a gardener. A garden is place of peace, tranquility and colour; somewhere to go to escape the pressure of modern living.

Gardening, on the other hand, is when I get back ache and dirty hands, sweat excessively, and, as a general rule, kill a lot of stuff.

Well, you can see the difference.

The problem is how to have the former without having to do the latter. I'm working on that, but in the meantime it's getting hard to find the front gate. And don't even get me started on cooking.

It was no accident that some bright young thing stared at a stubby and a tin of baked beans and invented a food can with a ring pull. Almost halved the amount of time you have to spend in the kitchen. Sadly, our wives are unwilling to let us take maximum advantage of what should be obvious to all was a monumental technological breakthrough. So I cook... sometimes.

Which has led me to note an interesting culinary parallel. Those around me eat what I serve up with about the same amount of enthusiasm as I had in cooking it. Go figure.

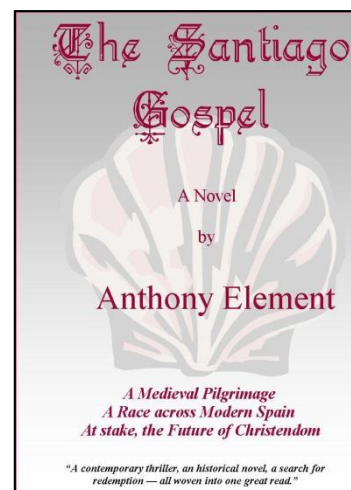
I even tried signing up for a Lite-n-Easy program; you know, where they deliver a week's worth of low cal food already prepared. Figured I'd save effort and lose weight at the same time. Well, let me tell you, that dog didn't hunt. On several levels.

Never mind. All in all, our situation could be worse. Harvey and I deal with the uncertainties of our stage in life by consoling ourselves with the fact that we're still a helluva lot younger than we're going to be.

At least, we hope so.

Anthony (Tony) Element is a veteran of 22 and 23 RMTs. (He would probably have been on 24, 25 and 26 RMTs as well if he hadn't gotten lucky and struck a series of exams where that old axiom, "When in doubt choose C", actually turned out to be true, allowing him to get his nose just past the finishing post. After doing his twenty, and then another fifteen years running engineering businesses for multinationals, in Australia, Hong Kong, China and Thailand, his inherent laziness got the better of him and he quit to concentrate on writing and music.

Two of his novels, The Santiago Gospel and Absence of Doubt have been published in the USA by DWPress and are available on Amazon in paperback and Kindle Ebook. His work has appeared in several magazines, including short fiction for Woman's Day, and he's a regular contributor to a number of emags.



Anthony publishes Observation Point, a satirical blog at <http://www.observationpoint.com.au>

Inside the Soviets' Secret Submarine Lair.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet is a large operational-strategic sub-unit of the Russian (and formerly Soviet) Navy, which has been operating in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea since the late 18th century and it is a fleet of enormous historical and political importance for

Russia. During the Russian Civil War (1917-22), the vast majority of the Black Sea Fleet was scuttled but in the 1930's, a large scale construction program of new vessels began.

In 1953, Joseph Stalin decided to build a top-secret nuclear submarine base that would become the operational home for the Fleet. He chose an area near the ancient fishing town of Balaklava, on the Black Sea. A wall was built around the area to completely close it off from the outside and almost all of the inhabitants of the town worked at the base at one time or another. Forty-five thousand cubic meters of stone were excavated to create the giant base which was situated some four hundred feet below ground.



The base had the capacity to hold up to nine submarines. The channel is twenty six feet deep and covers an area of about four acres. Hidden inside the base of a mountain the 153,000 square-foot facility took nine years to build with its entrance camouflaged from spy planes. It could survive a direct nuclear hit and at maximum capacity could hold 3,000 people with supplies to sustain them for a month. Best of all, the vast subs that slunk in and out of here between tours of duty could enter and leave underwater, keeping them from prying eyes at all times.



During a nuclear attack, the base could be completely closed off by bomb proof doors weighing one hundred tons and could remain self-sufficient and had enough supplies to maintain 3,000 people for thirty days. The base was equipped with its own water supply, generators and had kitchens, baths, housing for troops and even had its own hospital

Once the most sensitive and secretive of Soviet Cold War hotspots which operated for 40 years, today it is preserved as a museum. The cavernous entrance, carved into the heavy rock of the mountain, was pure James Bond, but the base that unfolds inside is a hard-hitting mix of superspy fantasy and the coarse reality of the Cold War world in which it played a key part.

The facility was split into two clear sections on either side of the huge submarine channel that ran through the centre, one side used for the operational running of the base and the other for arming and storing the nuclear warheads.

Every possible measure was taken to keep its existence unknown to the outside world. This included removing Balaklava from all maps in 1957 (it would be 1992 before it reared its head again) and employees' family members from neighbouring Sevastopol, itself a closed city that needed a heavy security clearance to gain access, were put through extensive vetting before visits to loved ones were allowed.



It contained a dry dock so large that it was capable of holding a 300 foot (91 meters) long submarine. Beside the dry dock was the huge submarine channel, with space for six such subs end to end. Curved to deflect any blast inside the base, the channel is lined with steel

gangways above head height. It would have provided a fearsome environment, with a hulking sub(s) sitting in the black water and the loud echoes of urgent footfalls, the clanking of tools, and the humming of generators.

Connecting tunnels from the operations side to the nuclear arming area are all curved for blast protection and in the arming area a massive steel roller door stands over a large room in which the actual missile arming bits and pieces were stored. In the centre of the whole complex is a large room that would have stored up to 50 armed and ready nuclear weapons.

It was still active during the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 but decommissioning began in 1993 with the last submarine leaving the facility in 1996. The complex is now an 'in demand' tourist centre and the bay is home to a glittering array of yachts from all over the world and at the water's edge instead of subs skulking in and out, throngs of locals indulged in a spot of fishing while shooting the breeze over a couple of beers.

An elderly man in Louisiana had owned a large farm for several years. He had a large pond in the back. It was properly shaped for swimming, so he fixed it up nice with picnic tables, horseshoe courts, and some apple and peach trees. One evening the old farmer decided to go down to the pond, as he hadn't been there for a while, and look it over. He grabbed a five-gallon bucket to bring back some fruit. As he neared the pond, he heard voices shouting and laughing with glee. As he came closer, he saw it was a bunch of young women skinny-dipping in his pond. He made the women aware of his presence and they all went to the deep end. One of the women shouted to him, 'we're not coming out until you leave!' The old man frowned, 'I didn't come down here to watch you ladies swim naked or make you get out of the pond naked. Holding the bucket up he said, 'I'm here to feed the alligator...'Some old men can still think fast!!.

Coke bottle.

There are a lot of stories about why the coke bottle is the shape it is. Some say the bottle is the most perfectly designed package in the world and that it was designed by/for the US Navy because with the two hips, the bottle should lay in the water horizontally and thus fill with water and sink – thus not leaving a trail in the ocean for the enemy to follow.

Dump that theory, quick time.

Another is it was shaped by a famed industrial designer, Raymond Loewy, to represent a Victorian hooped dress.

Nuh – dump that one too.

Here's the real reason.



Back in 1915, soft drink bottles were pretty much the same shape no matter what they contained. What differentiated one unopened softy from another was its label. That was a fair enough system, except for one problem: paper labels slid off when the bottles got wet. Back then, the most common way to keep softies cold was to dunk them in a bucket of ice water which ultimately caused all the labels to fall off. This led to confusion and frustration as customers blindly fished around in cold water for the drink they wanted. Finally, a light bulb went off over someone's head: what if Coca-Cola's bottle had an unusual shape? The days of brand confusion would be over, because a customer could easily pick out an ice-cold Coke by feel alone.

That's the why part, but what about the shape.

In 1915, Coke sponsored a design competition among its bottle suppliers. The contest listed only two requirements, the bottle had to be distinctive and had to fit existing equipment. The Root Glass Company was one of Coke's bottle suppliers and an Earl R Dean was the supervisor of the bottle moulding room. He thought there might be a design idea to be found in the look of either the cocoa plant or the kola nut (the two ingredients after which Coca-Cola was named). He couldn't find any information on either at their local library but he did find a photo of a cocoa pod and he thought he might be able to attach the 'corrugations' on the pod into a bottle design.



He sketched a copy of the pod, took it back to the plant, worked up a bottle design based upon it, presented it to the plant's owner, gained his approval, created a mould for the prototype bottle, and produced one. That bottle became the widely-recognized symbol of Coca-Cola.

The Mexican maid asked for a pay increase. The wife was very upset about this and decided to talk to her about the raise.

She asked: "Now Maria, why do you want a pay increase?"

Maria: "Well, Senora, there are three reasons why I wanna increase. "The first is that I iron better than you."

Wife: "Who said you iron better than me?"

Maria: "Jor huzban he say so."

Wife: "Oh yeah?"

Maria: "The second reason eez that I am a better cook than you."

Wife: "Nonsense, who said you were a better cook than me?"

Maria: "Jor hozban did"

Wife increasingly agitated: "Oh he did--- did he???"

Maria: "The third reason is that I am better at sex than you in the bed."

Wife, really boiling now and through gritted teeth. "And did my husband say that as well?"

Maria: "No Senora.....The gardener did."

Wife: "So how much do you want?"