

How I Got To Be 28 Years Old And All My Friends Are A Success Except Me

On Sunday mornings I read the Times Book Section and am gloomy as hell by page 9. There is always some guy I went to school with who majored in Engineering and had a hole in his handkerchief who just had a masterpiece published.

Which is generally enough to keep my gloom alive until the Monday mail comes and a friend writes from the U. of Kansas where he teaches Rural Agriculture And Why You Should that he spent his last few weekends knocking out a novel and just got his first royalty check from Random House and the second printing is due any day.

This letter is usually accompanied by a small vial of tears from an editor who regrettably returns the three best poems I ever wrote. Stapled together.

And then I read that the National Book Award went to this kid I met three years ago and who shook my hand like he was meeting a bigshot and is only 25. That one hurts I have to admit. (I think he was the one whose stuff I read and told him he'd never even carry Bobby Frost's Jock.)

To boot there is always John who writes science fiction and has a jazz band and he's hiding out in Oregon for fear the Bomb might get him. He says my stuff is great and any day now ... I think he's lying but I can't afford to say so. I need the pity.

Not that I mind. After all there is room at the top as they say and naturally I want my friends to be successful. Too.

But I figure I am doing ok because I wrote about 400 poems and had all but 16 published and once got a \$10 check from the San Francisco Review. Then I meet this little anthologist who straightens his tie and says he had 1200 published and I should keep in there swinging. (Later, in the locker room, he asks me why I'm still using that greasy kid stuff in my hair. So I switch to Vitalis and my eyebrows fall out.)

Remember it took that dirty-minded southerner 14 years to get the glass menagerie produced my mother writes from California but I am no playwright and Keats died at 26.

Understand I'm not crying in my beer and I appreciate all the helpful hints I've gotten. I keep cheerful. Smilers always win. But what do you do when your wife says why dont you take up building model boats?

-- Carl Larsen

New York, New York

Larsen's Decameron

On the way to work this morning I read where one out of every four people in Manhattan has a serious mental problem. That is not exactly great reading matter if you're on a crowded subway, but I came through unscathed.

Then on the way home, I got to thinking that there are 24 apartments in our building, with at least two people living in every one. Which figures out to when we go to bed at night there are a minimum of 12 people around us who are criminally insane. It makes you wonder.

The guy upstairs is one, definitely. Twice a week he practices his two-cushion shot on his wife, banking her neatly off the wall and the refrigerator. Sometimes she even gets up. Then he beats hell out of her.