



Carpe Momentum!

I don't receive a *huge* amount of feedback on these weekly stories, but now and again, somebody does write to me with their comments, and so it was this week; after reading the previous story about my professional 'debut' as a saxophone player, one of the regular readers wrote to me asking about that episode. It didn't seem to 'ring true'. After all, on many previous occasions I have written about how very shy I was when I was younger, but surely a shy boy wouldn't possibly be able to do such a 'courageous' thing as head off to a musical job without even knowing how to play the instrument! Or to stand up on stage in front of an audience ... to attempt to play an adlib solo, without ever in his life having even *tried* such a thing before. Surely this is the kind of behaviour we would expect of somebody who is supremely confident, not shy!

Well, you may think so, but actually it is the other way around. This whole episode just goes to demonstrate just how shy I really was! When the man who was testing my playing assumed that I could play the sax, without even hearing me play, I was too shy to correct him. It was 'easier' to say nothing. When we were on the bandstand that first evening, and I saw that I had a solo in my part, I was too shy - far too shy - to say something to the bandleader, perhaps a suggestion that it would be better if one of the other musicians took the solo. I was simply too shy to speak directly to people. I could answer questions, I could have a conversation, but I could never *initiate* anything other than basic pleasantries.

Some years back, I was thinking that I could 'blame this' behaviour on the way I was brought up. In the English tradition under which I was raised, children weren't really encouraged much to join conversations with the adults around them. My parents and grandparents, for example, were brought up in an environment where the phrase 'Children should be seen and not heard!' was commonplace, and in Victorian times, this must have been strictly applied.

Before my parents get angry at me for suggesting that my shyness was 'their fault', I should hastily add that of course there was no such 'keep quiet' philosophy applied in our home. If I had shown any interest in 'speaking up', then of course I would have been allowed/encouraged to do so. No, I don't really think this was much to do with 'environment', but was just something 'built in'. Some people are gregarious and thus easily interact with others, and some are not. And I - at least in those years - was most definitely not.

So this hotel episode - which seems at first glance to be an act of supreme confidence - was exactly the reverse; I had become 'trapped' in such a ridiculous situation because I didn't even have the confidence to have a normal conversation with those men.

But do you know the funny thing about all this? As a result of being in that situation - being forced to stand on that stage, and to learn (very quickly!) how to play a new musical instrument - I started to really *develop* some self confidence! Even though I horribly spoiled the solo that first night, I did manage to hang onto the job, and grew to be a more capable performer day by day. It's the old cliché about being tossed into the deep end of a pool - you sink, or you swim.

I basically managed to keep my nose above water, and coming through such a 'trial by fire' (if I can mix my metaphors) really did help that young man grow up!

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This hotel episode wasn't the only such example. Quite a number of times in my life I have found myself in a situation where I end up thinking to myself, 'What on earth am I doing here? This is going to be an absolute disaster!'

And sometimes it goes well, and sometimes it doesn't. But there is another old hackneyed phrase that one has to remember at such times ... 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained!'

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