



Contemporaries

Today's story is perhaps going to be something a little bit different. It's about something that I realized today, and which affected me quite strongly, but I have to admit right at the beginning that this may not be something that you will find interesting at all. There is only one way to find out!

It starts with two 'data points'. First is that this year is the 60th anniversary of my parents' wedding, an event which led in due course to my own birth, so I myself will turn 60 next year. The second is an item which caught my ear while listening to the radio this afternoon, when the announcer happened to mention that "... this was written by Haydn in 1770".

What is the connection between these two things? Surely, there is none. One is a current event, concerned with my contemporary life, the other is something from the distant past.

Well, as it turns out, there is not as much 'distance' as you would think between these two events. Let's make a mental picture of the time span involved: let's jump back from 'today' in increments equal to my own life. We are here in 2010, and jumping back 60 years takes us to my birth. 60 years previous to that is 1890, 60 more years takes us to 1830, and just one more single leap the length of my life takes us to ... yes, 1770.

My own life extends a full 1/4 of the way back to the time that Haydn wrote that piece of music, and that was still early in his career! Haydn isn't somebody from the 'distant' past ... he and I are practically contemporaries!

And it gets worse! Instead of doing the calculation with *my* life data, let's try it with my parents' life as an example. They were born in 1927, but let's simplify this and use 1930, 80 years ago. Jumping back once takes us to 1850, and you only have to jump *once more* to get to 1770. My parents' lifespan extends 1/3 of the way back to Haydn. This is one of the most astonishing things that I have ever heard!

Let me try and describe the kind of image I have been carrying in my mind about historical events. I think that I have a pretty good idea of just how long ago most events of the 20th century took place. WWII was something that happened just a few years before I was born, and WWI was only 20-odd years previous to that. I think I can 'understand' when those things happened. Moving back into the 1800s, things get a bit more blurred, and an event like the US Civil war - from the middle of that century - is not something that I feel has much relevance to my life.

Once we go back any further than that, before the era of photography, and certainly into any date with a 17xx prefix, I no longer have any conception at all of 'how long ago' this happened. It is simply 'history', something that happened a very long time ago. 1700s ... 1400s ... Roman times ... it makes no difference. It is 'ancient'.

But as we have seen, this is not so! When I become 61, if I again play the same game of stepping back in increments of my own life, I will see that I was born a full 1/3 of the way back to the year that Beethoven died. Just two 'Davids' separate he and I.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this little story, you may not find this of interest at all, but I myself am just shaking my head in amazement at these figures. I feel that if I just reach out my arm and stretch a bit ... I will be able to touch those men. We are *that* close!

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