

Ode to Youthful Rock Stars

by Annie (Emerson)

Message to humanity;
message to humility;
message to a changing world.

Thank you – stop – you saved my life.
Thank you – stop – you looked ahead.

Thank you, *Cat*, you saved my life,
but didn't want the baby-girl
who fell beneath the waterfall
and had to be dragged out – by YOU.



Your lady-friend had tanned herself
from genie-bottle; *you* loved *her*, and
we were young ones – Yesterday.

Wild world; wide world; baby-girl
has learned how not to drown herself
in heavy waters. *Would* you love her
now? Today she'd be your Gran,
unless you too sing different now.

Annie says:

The inspiration for this poem was a near-death experience I had as a kayaker. I was about fifteen years old. My savior, the young man whose deck-lines helped me out of danger (but I was the one who had to grab onto them), looked like Cat Stevens – he of “Baby, Baby, it’s a Wild World.” Kayakers are taught never to go alone into dangerous waters, where they are much less likely to survive if they find themselves in trouble, alone.

Perhaps young people might find it helpful to learn to navigate the physical world – wind, water, clifftops, for example – before they try working with plants and animals, or playing team sports (i.e., live-thing games, where the other parties respond to what you do).

But – what was a baby-girl doing, to get stuck in the hydraulic (UK, stopper) at the bottom of a weir (man-made waterfall), in the first place? The youth leader could have chosen any one member of his flock, to be the first person over the edge. And, I hasten to add, he led me safely over. I was the dumb-ass who went back up to the top to shoot the weir all over again, on my own.

And why, when I was old enough, was I only invited “out on the river” with the guys one time? Well, the group found a really tough water hazard (a broken lock) and most of us had the brains to say no, we were not going to try it. But the group’s superstar paddled his kayak over the edge and

into the churning waters. We all stood on the lock's walls, above, and the guys were yelling down at him, "Keep paddling; keep paddling."

I was silent. I could see he was having a really, really hard time, and I knew that none of the minimal support systems available would save him if the water got the better of him. Plus, I thought he needed to stay away from the walls, toward which the water was driving him. "Keep paddling" was not going to be enough. I don't know whether my silence told him (for sure) he was on his own, but he made it out!



I would have drowned, NO doubt, had I tried it. And, sooner or later, I was going to try something that was physically too much for me, if I kept going out on the river with the guys. So, in my opinion, that is the reason I was not invited out on the river with them again. But I never asked them why. Perhaps none of them went out on the river like that, again.

All the rest of them would likely have drowned too, if they had tried that water hazard, "because it was there"!

Revised version (as the memory returns):

The guys told me to step away. I said, "Why? I'm not going to fall in." And I stayed, perhaps just a step or two farther from the edge, in deference to them. *Then* they started calling down to him, "Keep paddling; keep paddling."

Empath/Senior version (as the memory solidifies):

We all saw him about to give up, mentally, and *they* didn't want *me* to see him drown, so they asked me to step away. (What were *they* going to do? Help? There was no help. Watch? Why could they allow themselves to see it, but not I?) When I declined to step away, perhaps he realized there was no help, that I would watch him drown, and I would cry. Or, and here you would have to ask him – maybe *I* didn't think he was going to drown. None of them wanted me to cry, nor him to drown.

So he found the strength from somewhere, to keep going, and it didn't matter what they said – they could have said anything, just to tell him they were there with him. And he made it out! And he went on to become a world champion. (Silver medal, but most of us would be proud, with far less.)

What's in a name? Who survives a marathon?

My whitewater kayak was a green *wildcat*. It was a good design, in its day – light, quick, nimble. I named it "Jade Candle." The youth leader, who acquired it for me, used, purchased two paddles with it. When passing the sale on to me, he took one paddle as commission. So I became a left-handed kayaker, because he took the right-handed paddle.



But I was okay with that. I am pretty ambidextrous (a.k.a. dyslexic – things look the same to me, from all directions), but I would lean toward the left hand, in general, if I hadn't been made to use the right one when I was five years old. No wonder I never got any teacherly stars for good handwriting. (Photos of young Annie are from my mother's photo album.)

At the End of the Day

If you have watched the movie, “An Officer and a Gentleman,” how many of you saw yourselves in the shoes of that plucky female recruit? (Me neither!) And, for today's young ones, remember

there are many ways to fight. We don't all have to join the military. But those who do are putting their lives on the line, for which they have trained long and hard, like a kayaking world champion, and we should thank them. (And, we kayakers called our rockstar Bobby. Not Annie. Bobby lived in a caravan park by a river, with his mother. I didn't ask why. I lived in a fixer-upper, with a lovely but neglected garden that backed down to the same river. I had parents, brothers, and sisters.)

As for me, I didn't think there was a war on! I thought I was a village girl who likes pretty things and the great outdoors, who got sent to intellectual school because my teachers thought it would be a good idea. Even before kindergarten, I was being told, “You're so sharp you'll cut yourself.” So, I didn't really need anyone else to go around cutting me in little pieces, did I?

Yet, my excellent teachers had to deal with the consequences of World War II for marriage (or the loss of it), emotional wellbeing, home and the family. They wanted someone well-armed, educationally, for the next time, because most of them had been constrained to teaching, or nursing. So, Mrs. Dickey, Miss Allum, Miss Palmer, Miss Laurie, Mrs. Hills, Dr. Gazzard, Mr. Brown, Copper Harper, and all the rest of you, have I done good? May I enjoy my retirement now?

And, to you young ones – don't count us seniors out, we have danced with the devil; it's probably a good idea to learn how! (And, my twin sister grew up to be a world champion bridge player. She put the time in, and had sufficient guidance, that she learned how to do that.)



Annie and co. As far as I know, we all grew up and made other connections! Cows in the meadow behind us.