

ONE RICH, ONE NOT SO RICH

One was rich, one not so much. Both were young. One attended a large, private, expensive, urban university; one attended a local state university. Both were the same build with infectious smiles. Their eyes were azul, their complexions reflected a pale moonlight, their lips sensually curved, their walks worth watching. Only one had to carry a 20-hr-a-week job to get by. They both smoked.

Ah, was it the smoking that attracted me? I still dreamed about sneaking a smoke every once in a while. Months, sometimes years, without falling to temptation, and then it happened. It could happen right now. Except I don't know how to climb inside the frames of their photos and join one or both in a smoke. I would be more than happy to bring the bourbon or champagne or beer – I would need help choosing the beer since I haven't a clue.

Similarly I know very little about cigarettes anymore. Some of the brands of my youth are still around but then there are all those new brands with junk added to safe tobacco wrapped in harmless tissue-like paper. How many among my youthful friend rolled their own. Eddie Schultz, e. g., who wrote his math-class equations on his rolled cigarettes and then smoked the evidence away during the exam. Yes, we could smoke in class then. Eddie, a New Yorker, taught me a lot about the world I never knew and would come to love.

Haunted though I was by the smoking/ the not smoking, that was not the most haunting in my life. The most was why am I I? What made me me and not someone else? I-ness, me-ness has grown with age, not because I willed it but because I succumbed to it. Why aren't we all just a mass of particles? What accounts for individualization, a term I learned when I was by-passing a mid-life crisis. I have lived with so much individualization, or would it be individuality, that I have lived in virtual exile. How does that happen? Why should it happen? Particle physicists tell us huge space can separate one particle from another. Life can imitate particle physics.

Living is suffering – allowing and feeling the pain from allowing. Reality is not magic, it's trudge until that unexpected intrusion by another particle that used to be light-years away.

Climbing inside the frame with the rich one and the not so rich one for a cigarette – nothing more, even though in advanced cultures all old men are viewed as lechers. Enticements are tangos. Climbing inside might challenge and mollify the trudge. Don't count on it.

A Roberto Bolaño character doesn't cling to the edge of the abyss but plunges into it, while sitting in a chair no less. Trudging avoids clinging and plunging, which sound just too abysmal. I'll remain a trudger. I'll never have a smoke with the rich one or the not so rich one but I'll always regret I can't fulfill the temptation.