

Dylan Moran: Musings from the flip side of youth

Comedian and actor Dylan Moran takes the challenge to pen a letter of advice to his 16-year-old self. The letters are part of a series by Street Roots' sister paper, the Big Issue UK.

BY DYLAN MORAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I'd tell my 16-year-old self not to take everything so seriously. I'm stunned when I look back at how monumentally important I thought everything was. I was incredibly intense, ridiculously up myself. I was the lone horseman. It was all about me, and books and poetry. Not that those things aren't important to me any more but in those days it felt like do or die. Now I want to say to my younger self, if you think of life as a play, you're the bumbling forgetful character who appears in Scene 7 looking for his keys.

I had a terrible time at school. I wasn't academic, and I just didn't get on with school. But I read a lot — postwar American fiction like John Cheever, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, those big names who had the status of demigods then, and a lot of theater, Chekhov and Kenneth Tynan. I also wrote a lot. I thought a lot about what I might go on to do because it didn't seem like I'd end up a dentist or an accountant like a lot of the people around me had planned.

Was I an angsty teenager? Yeah, I'll accept angsty. Fatalistic, doomy ... You get to 40 and you're a million shades of gray. But as a teenager, it's all in black and white. That is the adolescent condition. I didn't grow up in a city; we were out in the sticks, 30 miles from Dublin. I was desperate to get to the city. My friends and I spent our time in the acres of dullness around us, making each other laugh, getting quite rococo with our verbal wits. In retrospect, it feels very innocent. I knew nothing really, but I had a bunch of decent friends, and we did have fun. I was always drawn to people who were good at telling funny stories.

Being an Irish Catholic — that stuff enters the bloodstream when you're very young, no matter how you feel about it.

When I was growing up, we were the only family I knew who didn't go to church. It wasn't a passive rejection; it was a passionate, violent rejection. I loathe the church. I'm always amazed when people go on about what a progressive forward-looking guy Pope

Francis is — he's just another 500-year-old man in a dress, talking about other people's business, issuing edicts from a system based on the sayings of a political revolutionary from 2,000 years ago. In the last few years, I've been obsessed with East Germany. Because I think that was the parallel experience in Europe. East Germany under Honecker and the rest of the gang, I think that was very similar to Ireland under the church.

When I was about 19, I went to a comedy club and asked if I could go on-stage for five minutes. And then that was it. There was a lot of anxiety — I sure hope this works, what if I make a fool of myself? But there's obviously some pull; there's something attractive about taking that chance. It's adrenaline junkie-ism, really. It's not courage. There's a typical arc story for stand-ups; they

"I want to say to my younger self, if you think of life as a play, you're the bumbling forgetful character who appears in Scene 7 looking for his keys."



Dylan Moran is an Irish comedian, writer, actor and filmmaker.

PHOTO:
KARONMASKILLPR

tend to have a lot of self-pity, whether they're tragic or not. There's generally a mix of high self-regard and feeling sorry for themselves. Because constantly trying to cause laughter — that's a suspect activity really, constantly trying to defuse bombs other people don't even see. I wonder more and more what that's about. You sometime see very sad situations with people who are always "on," always joking — that person is basically a fucking disaster. They're full of tension, and they use laughter as a kind of hiccup.

I think if the teenage me met the 43-year-old me, then the first thing he'd think would be, how did you get so fat? What happened to you? But he'd be pleased he got out and did something he really wanted to do. I really didn't cope well with the idea of trying to make a living doing something I didn't want to do. I didn't think I would last. Put me in an office and I'd end up in jail. I spent my whole time thinking about writing. I draw parallels between people who do this kind of thing and people who do sports. The same obsession. My eyes open first thing in the morning, and my first thought, every day, is about work.

I'm on the road now, back to doing stand-up. I'm getting used to it again. Your material depends completely on where you are in your life. I was talking the other night about how I've reached that point in my life when I see something lying around the house,

something stupid like a burned-out candle or a piece of rope, and I put it in my pocket and think, that might come in handy. What sort of apocalyptic scene am I awaiting the arrival of, in which this old piece of candle will become essential? What's going on in my brain?

I am still having the shock moment of realizing I'm not young anymore. I am living in a tsunami of those shock moments. The second half of your life just feels like a huge conspiracy theory. All this stuff happens to you that no one told you about. It makes me glad I didn't value athleticism and good looks when I was growing up because you search in vain for it when you get older; that's for sure. In my day, we used to wake up with a pie in our hand. And then we'd smoke a cigarette. Now everyone is suddenly Jane Fonda. I don't worry about my health, but I do worry about dying.

When I look back, there's never been a time when I was standing on a mountain of gold, screaming at the sky. I'm a very ordinary person who hangs out with my wife and children. That's who I am. But there were nights early on when I walked offstage and I'd just done something I didn't know I could do, like the funny equivalent of a triple salchow. The first time that happens, you think, oh right, so I am a God. I should adjust. I'd better get myself some really nice trousers.

Reprinted from the Big Issue UK. www.streetnewsservice.org