

## “There’s a man here who claims to be your father”

Ronald Bayne, MD

Oh wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
An’ foolish notion.

— Robert Burns, *To a Louse*

Perhaps Burns was right, but seeing ourselves through the eyes of our adult children can be even more painfully revealing. I’ll explain. My daughter had completed a course in health administration and was posted to a prestigious health planning organization, which had an office in Vancouver, to gain practical experience. Her partner had obtained a faculty position at a university there, so they purchased a house and decided to stay.

When I was invited to speak at a medical conference in Vancouver, I stayed with them for a night. My daughter left early in the morning for her office, but I dawdled over breakfast and then strolled outside to view their house. It was raining gently and I wore rubbers over my shoes, as well as a raincoat. The grass was wet, but I was intent on examining the fabric of the house. When her partner was ready, he gave me a lift downtown to visit my daughter’s workplace.

I was set down outside a sparkling building of chrome and glass that soared up into the clouds. A speedy elevator took me up. I stepped out and passed through a heavy glass door into a brightly lit and well-appointed foyer with a soft, pearl-grey carpet. In a far corner was a gorgeous young woman behind a desk.

My daughter had never approved of my choice of clothing — she considered a green tie with a purple shirt garish, and my trousers were usually rumped. I was conscious of this as I approached the desk, crossing the impeccable carpet in my raincoat and rubbers. The young woman regarded me rather distastefully and asked my business. She spoke to my daughter on the phone. “There’s a man here who claims to be your father,” she reported.

A few minutes later my daughter appeared, looking very trim in a white blouse, a grey suit and high heels. Her glance told me something was seriously wrong — it was something far beyond the glances my appearance usually elicited from her. I looked at my feet and discovered the reason: my rubbers were carrying a large load of, ahem, pale brown canine residue. The woman behind the desk could not see my feet, and perhaps she attributed the smell to an old man who had had an “accident.”

We retreated to the office, and I decided to wash off my rubbers in the toilet. The offices did not have private toi-

lets. These were around a service elevator at the back. I stepped out of the office and over to the toilets. Locked! I tried to re-enter the office but the door had locked automatically behind me.

Nothing for it but to descend to the ground floor, cross over to the main elevators, rise again to re-enter the foyer, and pass by the young woman

at the desk, sheepishly carrying my rubbers and their load in front of me.

Back in the office, my daughter sacrificed the plastic bag holding her lunch so I could put my rubbers in it. We had planned to visit the art gallery to see a special exhibit while she was on her way to a meeting at another location. As everyone knows, one cannot enter an art gallery carrying a bag. Yes, I had to check my parcel. The contents probably marked a first for the person at that check-in counter.

After leaving the art gallery, I headed for the hotel where a room had been reserved for me by the conference planners. My room was large, elegantly furnished and had a copious bathroom. I was able to wash off my rubbers at last. But my troubles were not over. When I flushed the toilet, it blocked. I had to call the front desk and explain.

At the time, I felt justified in using a term made popular by our prime minister at the time. *Merde!*

*Ronald Bayne is Emeritus Professor of Medicine, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont.*

---

**Her glance told me something  
was seriously wrong — it was  
something far beyond the glances  
my appearance usually  
elicited from her.**

---