

## Sample of Commentary

### *The Real Monster is in Your Head* (Produced at Agora Publishing)

Thoughts of a madman: *I beg you my friend, how can something so beautiful become a beast, and myself an abhorrent wretch! Oh for the sake of mercy...for the sake of mankind...leave me!*

All Hallows Eve, a single night where children dress up like goblins and ghouls and then become them, literally. My nine-year old will be a witch tomorrow night and she'll be cute. We'll take all the necessary pictures. But when she finds out her hair looks dumb or her hat keeps blowing off, she'll indeed become a red-faced torrent of evil energy, pointing her wavy finger at me in the street. "You knew it would be windy tonight...DAD!" And then she'll swoosh her plastic Wal-Mart broom in the air as a signal to her faithful legions to abandon the "Dumb Dad." They'll seek refuge with the nearest mom with a flashlight. I know the drill.

But still we go through with traditions because life is, after all, a series of events—one upon the other. We take it as it comes. And the trick to staying young is to face these events with a good spirit and take a few chances. For example, about two months ago I decided to take Aikido lessons. Aikido is a comparatively gentle martial art that stresses defensive moves. Ah...defensive moves. That sounds perfect, no chance of some student bruiser kicking me south of main street "by mistake." Plus, there's the spiritual side with lots of respect and bowing and talking about the "chi" energy. Within weeks I pictured myself walking around like Chuck Norris.

Well, after just two months in the dojo I had broken one toe and been thrown around like a bean bag in day-care play room. (They have to teach you how to fall, you see.) I had just about reached my limit when last night, lined up before the instructor, or "master", I was pointed to and asked if I knew the first five moves.

"Oh yes," I said, completely lying, mostly out of embarrassment. The master then pointed to a twelve-year old yellow belt to conduct the moves with me. I didn't expect this. The young sprite bolted over, ready to spar with the mysterious older man of wisdom. I could read his thoughts—*Oh yeah, Kung fu was skinny, just like this guy. And Kung Fu's blind master was bald, just like this guy too. Oh yeah, this will be good.*

So there we were, touching hands, ready to engage in mortal combat. Then the young student said, "Okay, do the first move."

I paused. "I don't remember the first move."

"*What?* You don't remember the first move?" His young face became blank.

“No,” I said, lightly under my breath. “And I don’t remember moves two, three, and four and ah...I *kind* of know five....”

The kid was obviously disgusted and as I stood there impotent, flush with memories of my own awkward adolescence, he became this sort of trollish soothsayer taunting me with the reality of my complicated life. What was worse, he kept pushing the point, moving his feet and hands around like some evil shrunken jester on Red Bull... “*You just do this and this and I study every night and I’ve mastered all ten moves and I’ve only been here three weeks...*” This went on to the point where I wanted to pull out a hidden Wal-Mart broom and aggressively clean the pop tart out of his Invisalign clear braces, but he’d probably pull some video-game samurai crap and lay me out. Don’t get me wrong, all kids are beautiful, but at that one moment something just snapped. I lost my parental Buddha mind and I actually tried to rationalize with him.

“Look,” I said. “I work all day and I’m up at 6.00 a.m.and it’s not easy to just *study* every night.”

“Then why’d you say you knew the moves?” He said this so bluntly that I really didn’t have an answer. Luckily the master came back, so I was relieved of explaining the impossible logic of adult ego and middle-aged angst.

At first I thought...forget it; I just don’t have time for this stuff. I could study my one hour a week for five years and that young troll will probably still knock me down and steal my iPod one day. But then I decided that it really doesn’t matter. One bad experience shouldn’t stop me from striving to improve myself, at any age. Life is full of good and bad experiences. Halloween may be about monsters and ghosts, but the only real monster is in your head. It’s the monster that says forget it, just give up, have a tantrum and allow yourself to give in. My advice, don’t listen to it!

So I’ll be ready with this speech tomorrow night when my two daughters purposefully over-stimulate themselves and become possessed. And I’ll remember it next week when I face my own little monster, alone, poised and ready...for move number six.

*Bowing from the back of the line (behind the twelve-year old)...*

John Probst  
[ejprobst@gwzouck.com](mailto:ejprobst@gwzouck.com)  
443-996-5555