

Henry Five
By Matthew DeMizio

He drew me aside from the crowd, and told me this: “Pass this along, whenever you have the chance...but especially when you’re a senior.”

He was slightly drunk, but still very much in control. He was a senior himself, having completed four hard years of study. Ready to graduate, and perhaps while reflecting on the joy he had over his past quatrain of years, decided to pass this along to me.

“Henry Five, that’s it, just Henry five, say it like you’re in the theater, like you know what you’re talking about. Henry Five, Act 4. Henry Five, Act Four, Scene Three.”

He said that with an air of authority and I knew the quotation was forthcoming. However he paused for a second and took a drag on his cigarette. In short time he spoke:

*We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.*

That’s the actual quotation, straight out of Shakespeare. He didn’t hit the exact words correctly, but it was damn close. It was the plainest and the most powerful interpretation of Shakespeare that I had ever heard: simple, direct, and to the point. The only embellishment was his flourishing a cut on his finger in a joyous fashion when he hit the “whoever sheds his blood with me” part.

I didn’t know what was coming next, and stood there waiting. He just took another drag on his cigarette.

“Remember this. Pass this along. When you’re doing lights for that stage, remember: You are in control of a world that did not exist before those lights came up. You control the sun, the moon, the sunrise, and the sunset. It’s a connection you share with the people in that green room, those guys on the fly rail, those guys on the stage – that world did not exist before you were there.”

With that he took another puff on his cigarette, and the smoke cloud mysteriously hovered for a second about his head, adding to the air he conducted about him.

I knew what he was talking about. Henry Five. We are a brotherhood, those of us who toil on and off the stage, creating a small slice of reality where before there was emptiness: a vast expanse, ready for cultivation. For whatever time we dedicate to that expanse, we are gods: creation our mantra, beauty our goal. Imagine: a world that did not exist before you were there, and will cease to exist when you leave.

Except it never truly will cease to exist, for it will live on in the hearts and minds of the brotherhood for all eternity, each member still individually connected to this made-up world, reverently remembering the good times shared in that world.

I will pass this on. I must. For I am one of the brotherhood, and this is my life.