

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 63 – Richard Pinder – Truth and Consequence

Two Men Walk into a Bar

And now a personal word,

In *The Wire*, the landmark show about street life in Baltimore, there are two police detectives: Jimmy McNulty and Bunk Moreland. Jimmy and Bunk are partners. Jimmy is white. Bunk is black. Jimmy is the younger one, smart and driven. Bunk is more seasoned. He's learned hard lessons and a trick or two about police work. Together, they do their job, changing lives.

There is this scene in Season 1 of *The Wire* where Jimmy and Bunk are having drinks at a bar. At the end of a long day, after sitting in unmarked cars, chasing down leads, interviewing witnesses, confronting drug dealers, filling out reports, and battling the chain of command, they are getting drunk. Jimmy is worried that his boss is out to get him. Bunk has his eye on a woman in the bar. They banter about what they hate. They banter about what they love. There is this affection and bond between them. Not they would ever say it to each other.

Richard Pinder and I worked side by side in the College of Arts & Sciences at Johnson & Wales University for 10 years. His desk was three feet away from mine. Term and after term, year after year, he taught his classes. I taught mine. We would come back to our cubicles after a long day of teaching and the conversation would begin.

We talked about our first cars, his fire-engine red 1967 Ford Fairlane, my rusted blue 1976 Chevy Impala. We talked about baseball, comparing the Cincinnati Reds (Johnny Bench, Tony Perez, Joe Morgan, Dave Concepcion, Pete Rose, George Foster, Cesar Geronimo and Ken Griffey) to the New York Yankees (Thurman Munson, Chris Chambliss, Willie Randolph, Bucky Dent, Greg Nettles, Roy White, Micky Rivers and Reggie Jackson). His favorite: Hank Aaron. My favorite: Catfish Hunter. We talked about looks back in the day: afros, bell bottom jeans and black leather jackets. We talked about movies like *Shaft* and *Foxy Brown*. I pinned pictures of Pam Grier on his cubicle wall. We talked about soul music. I put a playlist together of Earth, Wind & Fire, Al Green and Marvin Gaye and played it loud from our corner of the office in the middle of the work day. *Mercy Mercy Me*. We talked about religion, Christianity, and believing in God when it didn't make any sense. We talked about civil rights, the March on Washington, about Lyndon Johnson and Martin King. We talked about race. What black folks were like. What white folks were like. Law and order, the shooting of

Michael Brown, and inviting company to dinner. And most of all we talked politics. George W. Bush. Barack Obama. Hilary Clinton. Donald Trump. We would break down the news cycle, each Republican and Democrat twist and turn. We had the highest hopes for Democrats and it was the Democrats that frustrated us the most.

We talked about a few other things too. Students performance, the administration on campus, teacher evaluations. Here is the thing. Richard and I agreed on most things. But not everything. And sometimes it would get quiet between us. Then the next day would come. And the conversation would begin again.

Richard retired two years ago. I said a few words at his retirement party. I told him I would miss him on campus. And I do.

I'm several episodes into the first season of *The Wire*. The show ran from 2002 to 2008. I never saw it during its original run. All the characters are new to me: Avon Barksdale, Stringer Bell, Omar Little, Bubbles, Cedric Daniels, Kima Greggs. I can't wait to find out what happens. But I'm thinking at the heart of the show is the partnership between Jimmy McNulty and Bunk Moreland. I'm thinking they're going to have many more nights at the bar.

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