

Why, Soitenly!

By Dan Farkas

The character was named “Officer Joe Bolton.” The actor who portrayed him wore a perfect replica of a NYC “cop on the beat” uniform but his TV job had nothing to do with law and order; quite the opposite. Each weekday afternoon, Officer Joe spoke to the kids in his audience in soothing tones and introduced the comedic disorder of “The Three Stooges.” The Stooges’ shorts played in black and white on channel 11, a station only good for syndicated reruns and watching the lousy NY Yankees. I was a young boy in the late sixties and early seventies and the Yankees were awful which helped forge my lifelong love of the rival Mets (channel 9) who would miraculously win a World Series in 1969 when I was eleven.

I would get home from school around 4 pm. Dinner wasn’t until around 7 and the homework was always quick and easy for me so I watched the Stooges. Religiously. There were only seven channels in those days in the greatest city in the world but I like to think these decades later, even if given more choices, I still would have opted for Moe, Larry, and Curly, as often as not. That last bit is important. One never knew if it would be Curly (by far the best) or Shemp (tolerable) or, worst of all, Joe Besser. If a Curly short came on, I was fully engaged; if either of the other two clowns, Shemp or Joe, were that day’s stars I watched out of obligation, habit and HOPE. Maybe the second half of the 30 minute program would feature a Curly short.

It’s half a century later. I’ve called up the occasional Stooges YouTube video, I’ve seen the documentaries and biopics. I’ve even taken to responding with Curly’s catchphrase, “Why, soitenly!” when colleagues thank me for something I’ve provided help for a task at hand. Stupidly, strangely, curiously, Curly stuck with me.

Over the years, the Stooges might come up in conversation. Many, particularly those with

a Y chromosome, would amp up in remembrance of their comedic skill. These gentlemen also, I have found, seem to like Curly the best.

Once upon a recent time, while traveling in SoCal, it was with disappointment but pragmatic rationality that I accepted my wife's admonition of "are you crazy?" when I declared that I wanted to buy a piece of art (unrelated to the Stooges) I saw in a La Jolla gallery that I loved, but cost an unjustifiable, indulgent, absurd eleven thousand dollars. Still, I yearned for a meaningful piece for a wall in my study. Perusing the web, I found and ordered the perfect object d'art; one important to me.

Returning from another trip, I was giddy with anticipation, having been alerted by e-mail that the painting had arrived at my home. I fulfilled my duties: kissed and greeted my wife and daughter, played with the overexcited dogs a bit, dealt with the mail. Now, with no tasks hanging over me, I could unpack the piece and drink it in.

Curly bursts out in vivid color on a large, framed canvas mimicking candidate Obama's campaign HOPE poster. Beneath Curly's wide-eyed staring visage is the exclamation: SOITENLY! I'm happy. Curly makes me smile tonight as he did every afternoon those many years ago (and he cost only 2% of that gaudy piece at the La Jolla gallery).

I show it first to my wife, then my daughter. Their look, though they are in separate rooms and see Curly independently, is identical; one of pity. They are almost sad for me that I could be enthusiastic over such a thing. They register an embarrassment that, thankfully, is masked (they think) with love that allows them to say in a hollow way, "very nice." They do not mean it. I think about showing it to the dogs, gentlemen both, but remember that they are both without balls.

Mr. Curly Howard is added to a wall he will dominate, in a room becoming overfilled

with things that make me happy. He hangs in full view through the glass window of my study, greeting me several times a day. Do I love that Curly is now part of my present and not just my past? “Why, SOITENLY!”

