

Wisdom of the Ages (350 words)

I don't subscribe to the "If I had known then what I know now" philosophy.

It's a catchy tune. It certainly sounds like a sensible saying. At first blush, it even has an intuitive ring of truth to it. But let's use what we know now to analyze it a bit further.

Am I especially stupid now? Maybe, but that's irrelevant. At best the saying implies more wisdom than I currently possess. I can't think of a thing that I know now that I would have used to good advantage in years gone by. Other than the results of a few Super Bowls or the occasional winning lottery number, I fail to see what information would have served me any better in my youth than it does now.

That is not to say I didn't make mistakes in my youth. I can recall more than a few that were real humdingers. But the fact is, even with all I know now, I keep right on making them. That's the other fallacy in this old saw – the implication that I would have translated that hard-won knowledge of mine into appropriate action. I don't do that now. What makes anyone think I would have done it then?

I don't think I'm alone in this inability to think things through, weigh the likely consequences, and make an astute decision. My course of action is more regularly dictated by sloth, convenience, hedonism, and a (rather charming) optimism that borders on obtuseness.

I used to believe that those older than I had gained some mental acuity that I too would acquire, given a few more years and a few more experiences under my belt. That's one common bubble that bursts for most of us when we arrive at majority.

And then there are countless nuggets of information that certainly would not have benefited us in our callow youth. Ask anyone over 50 and I guarantee they'll provide an impressive list of realities that would scare the youngsters into sheer debilitation.

If anything, I'm delighted I didn't know all I know now when I was younger.