

On the 12th May 2009,
My partner and I attended a Silent Dinner Party

Organic wine and sparkling mineral water in hand, we approached the doorway of the great Hibernian village-in-a-building where we were greeted by an ocean of the beauty, Anna.

Whoa, hang on, back track a split second.

Is that my phone? Oh, it's mum, she'd called on her mobile from her home again (a consistently lousy signal).

Now when mum can't hear someone on the phone, she increases the volume and force in her voice. This choice of remedy puzzles me, it also tends to lift the temperature within my arteries.

“Son, y'know the cupboard you have been designing for your father over the last month?
Well... your father has decided that he doesn't need it. Sorry son, that's all.”

Well, combining this news with the turmoil of a weak-signaled mobile phone conversation, one (being I) could well find themselves in slight state of nausea.

Smile, greet Anna (silently) go through the door and up to 405.

My last words to Tilly, my partner (gorgeous and irresistible cutey wootey chicky mumma), prior to entering were “do you think Anna was part of it?”

If “der!” had a facial expression, that was the reply I received.

Enter 405,

Work my way to the dinner table, remove jacket, proceed to shake hands and acknowledge all at the table. Bottles momentarily vanished to receive the treatment (labels covered with white paper so as to cancel words from view).

For some reason, Tilly's organic wine managed to escape the initial bottle silencing sweep. I witnessed the bottle maneuver around her person (coincidentally) in such a way that it managed to, on a number of occasions, slip from Honi's visual spectrum. I found this funny. Until I dobed Tilly in and the bottle was finally silenced.

Shortly following this moment, I decided to open the bottle of Sparkling mineral water. For some reason, the stillness around the dinner table influenced me to, very cautiously, unscrew the lid in such a way that the releasing gas wouldn't make a sound. My cautious endeavours were then pointed out to be unnecessary as Honi lit a cigarette, using the sound of the flint to suggest it was ok to open the bottle in normal fashion. Though I persevered out of interest, and did well up to the point where the lid was to break from the last perforation holding it to the ring around the rim.

Next, was a thumb wrestle with a gentlemen (in every sense of the word) with the most incredible ability to gather everyone's attention and maintain their interest in his demonstrations (more on this later). Well, the thumb wrestles ended and of course, I won. Well.. I have a double jointed one y'see.

Meanwhile, in my peripherals I was witnessing a master at work in the culinary department. My eyes would drift over and I would sneak a glimpse of her flowing, graceful dance around the kitchen as she checked this and placed that. It was here that I came to appreciate the wealth of communication that takes place without words.

Not too long after this, more folk arrived with gleeful smiles, with the same excited feelings in their eyes and little knowledge of what to expect.

The wine was quaffed and conversations continued.

Our thumb wrestling opponent, mentioned earlier, then proceeded to introduced with the most exhausting (I can only assume it would have been for him) pursuit and determination, a game which consisted of sliding the palms of the hands across one another in a fashion that would not exposed the palm towards the center of the table.

This action of swiping the palms was to be done in a fashion that would essentially 'pass' the action to the person sitting in the next immediate seat. The direction could be changed, but it was a strict rule that the palm of the hand could not be exposed towards the center of the table. If the palm were to be exposed, then the next person in the chain of action and all thereafter had to close their hands above their head at once.

The game was started by everyone jiggling their fingers with arms stretched towards the center of the table, then brought in towards the chest, fingers still jiggling, then continuing to do this until a person started with a swoosh of the palms towards the person to their left or right. Until, this one time, where a person at the end of the table decided to swoosh their palm to a random person sitting across from them. Not to a person who was sitting immediately next to them. This was protested for a split second by our gentlemen friend, though the protest was not strong, nor was it of serious concern. So the game continued with modified rules.

Then the food came.

The most amazing banquet drifted onto the table, a variety of dishes ranging from scrumptious to detectible. We ate, all wanting to repeatedly bless the fine creator with words, however, gestures managed to get the point across effectively. During dinner, I found it very difficult to communicate and it became evident to me that a silent dinner can be pretty exhausting. A lot more energy is required to convey information but the interesting thing for me was the lack of inhibitions that resulted.

When in a situation where people could talk, the chances of me sitting by myself in a corner is high (just my natural tendency). Though when in such a context where no-one can talk, a desire to communicate and have exchanges with people kicks in.

After dinner, there was moonwalking, interpretive dance and much laughter, Silent!

The Slip-Up

It was probably two hours into the night and a number of folk arrived that were quite inebriated. This reduced the focus on quietness. Laughter became louder and a sense of ease washed over.

It was at this point that I accidentally bumped into someone, I looked down and smiled and said "sorry man". Well, I was caught out.

I spent so much energy focusing on keeping silent. But I slipped up! And I got caught.

This kept me occupied for a while, thinking about the fact that I slipped up. I mean, damn... I SLIPPED UP

But hen I did a brief analysis and worked out that for about 99.982% of the time I didn't talk.

So that's pretty good.

I was happy again.

The two points I walked away with were these.

- Words allow us to create a mask
- Keeping quiet is very exhausting