
Brigitte Bardot and Major A.T. Ferguson

by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
Dean of the Cathedral

I learned today that Brigitte Bardot has died. My mind immediately returned to eighth grade Latin classes with Major A.T. Ferguson. Fewer and fewer people remember Major Ferguson these days, but I do my best to keep him alive. He taught at Woodward Academy, which at that time had only recently changed its name from Georgia Military Academy. Hence many teachers still carried some sort of military title, though I never knew how those titles might have been earned.

Major Ferguson was simply a major character, though he was a curious recluse, living by himself in a small school apartment on campus. Over my six years there, he was variously my Latin teacher, then my French teacher, and then my piano teacher.

But, back to Brigitte Bardot, about whom I have never known much at all. May God rest her soul. *The New York Times* associates her with being a sex symbol, of which I was vaguely aware in my eighth grade class. We learned Latin from Major Ferguson in one of the only campus classrooms that had no window (surely no longer a thing).

We were trapped in that windowless room, while we declined nouns and conjugated verbs, endlessly, over and over again. With a twinkle in his eye, Major Ferguson kept our attention focused on him; and he rocked his chair back and forth as he recited (it was not a rocking chair). He also smoked cigarettes. In the classroom. The one with no windows. Surely that is no longer a thing, either.

Somehow, the teaching of Major Ferguson worked. He had pet names for each student. He titled me, a wannabe pianist, Monsieur Horowitz. In the French classes, he often delivered exams as "Vrai Ou Faux?" tests. "True or False?" On the written page would be such sentences as, "I have twenty-seven dollars in my wallet." Each of us, when we came to that question, had to approach him at his desk and ask, in French, if we might examine his wallet. He would feign offense, and then grudgingly show us his wallet. There would be twenty-eight dollars in the wallet. "Faux" would be the correct response.

Major Ferguson kept to himself. But he would mention the Friday night football game each week, especially if Woodward had won. If they had won, he said, he would have drunk a King-Sized Coke, his favorite manner of celebration. "That's all I have in my refrigerator," he claimed. A few years later, when he allowed me to practice piano in his little apartment during my free periods, I peeked into his refrigerator; there was nothing in it except King-Sized Cokes.

Well, anyway, back to Brigitte Bardot. In that windowless, smoke-laden, eighth grade Latin classroom, there was nothing hung on the walls. The walls were bare, except for two posters, one on each side of the classroom. (Behind the students was a bare wall; behind the teacher was a blackboard.) One of the posters was some sort of chart, showing how around ninety per cent of the English language was derived from Latin. Sometimes our eyes would gaze at that.

On the other side wall, there was nothing, except for a large poster of Brigitte Bardot on a motorcycle. Sometimes our eyes would gaze at that.

In our complicated and sometimes confusing lives, good teachers come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. I am thankful for them all, however curious or outlandish they might be. Somehow, good teaching is a kind of miracle. A major miracle. Good teaching draws us away from personality to the subject at hand. Or maybe good teaching draws us through personality to the subject at hand. Either way, I love good teaching when it

works. I am glad to be reminded of Major Ferguson, and to be reminded of Latin, French, and piano, whenever I hear of Brigitte Bardot. May God rest her soul. May God rest the soul of Major A.T. Ferguson. Bless his heart.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
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