

OLD SCHOOL

Life in the Sane Lane

Bill O'Reilly
and **Bruce Feirstein**

Henry Holt and Company
New York

Greetings from 1973

Man, it was a long, hot ride. It was June, and O'Reilly had just finished up his second year of teaching English and history at Pace High School, in Opa-locka, Florida, just north of Miami. Please don't consider vacationing there. It's known as the crack capital of Dade County. No beaches, plenty of home invasions.

Teaching working-class kids suited me well. I liked most of my pupils and tried to steer the kids toward success. The student body was a fascinating mixture of Cuban Americans, whites, and a few African Americans.

I used discipline and honesty in the classroom, forcing the urchins to do their assignments and pointing out to the slackers that if they avoided college, things could get very dicey in the real world.

One time, I put on a slide show of ghetto life to get my point across, but, really, all these kids had to do was look out the window.

In 1973, I was twenty-four years old and had not really developed a consistent philosophy of life. But I was raised in a traditional Irish-Catholic home and embraced the decency found in it.

In history classes, I promoted traditional thought in a year when the U.S. government was falling apart. President Richard Nixon would be gone in two months, the victim of his own dishonesty. Daily, the press barbecued him over the Watergate mess, and the entire two-year-long tragedy fascinated me.

So, I decided to do something about it. I applied to and was accepted at Boston University's broadcast journalism master's degree program. Coincidentally, my mother had graduated from BU three decades before, studying physical therapy.

The summer ride from South Florida to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is hot. Not tepid, but torrid. The dead bugs on my windshield loved it, right up until they became oatmeal.

My old car was not air-conditioned. Sweat poured off me like Albert Brooks in *Broadcast News* as I zoomed past Jacksonville, Savannah, a tourist trap called South of the Border, Richmond, and on up into the Northeast. I don't remember whining about the incessant heat, and to this day, folks who constantly tell the world about their personal temperature situation annoy me.

Stop. Life is not climate-controlled, people. Accept it. Don't be a Snowflake, a condition we will soon describe.

Little did I know that my eighteen-month tenure at Boston U would not only lay the groundwork for my journalism career, but would also begin my new life in another school: Old School.

In the following pages, that Old School journey will be laid out

with the help of a fellow Old School traveler. I met Bruce Feirstein at BU, and there the Old School legend was made.

As the Hollies once warbled, “The road is long / with many a winding turn.”

Feirstein and I are glad you’re along for the ride. It’s air-conditioned this time.

1

Preschool

Take Your Seat

My father, Bill O'Reilly Sr., bought his pants through the mail. Toward the end of his life, retired and always looking to save a few bucks, he'd order polyester trousers from a catalog. I think the price was \$29.95.

\$32.50 in today's dollars.

Problem was the pants were always too short, as my dad was six foot three. But he didn't care. Children of the Great Depression, Old School people who survived economic Armageddon, had strict priorities: if you could save a dollar, you saved a dollar.

One day, I blew in to visit my folks from somewhere and encountered my father wearing mustard-colored pants held up by red suspenders. After the initial greeting, this back-and-forth took place:

"Dad, your pants are too short."

2 • Bill O'Reilly and Bruce Feirstein

“Who are you, Oleg Cassini now?”*

“And what color is that?”

“They’re yellow. Do you have astigmatism?”

“Come on, Dad, this is not a good presentation. You don’t leave the house wearing those things, do you?”

My father paused, giving me a look. He knew I was jazzing him, but his sense of humor overrode any offense.

“Don’t remember you checking out my wardrobe when I was paying for your college.”

“Yeah, but you didn’t look like one of the Village People back then.”

My father actually laughed and walked into the kitchen. He wore those pants for years.

We are all products of our upbringing, and it used to be that Old School philosophy, which we’ll define throughout this book, ruled, at least in working-class homes throughout the country.

No longer.

Now there is an ongoing battle between traditional Americans and those who want a kinder, gentler landscape full of “conversations” and group hugs, folks who believe that life must be fair and that, if it is not, there has to be a “safe space” available where they can cry things out.

I cringe when I see this kind of stuff and immediately time-travel back to my Levittown, New York, neighborhood in the 1960s, where my pal Clement would have definitely said, “Hey, I’ve got your safe space *right here!*”

A physical flourish would have accompanied Clem’s remark.

The bedrock truth is that life is hard, especially if you have to

* An American playboy fashion designer of Russian descent who created First Lady Jackie Kennedy’s pillbox hat.

compete for prosperity. Rather than major in whining, Old School folks tough it out, developing skills to overcome the inevitable obstacles every human being faces.

We all know Snowflakes: the people who blame everyone else for their failures, who look to others to solve their problems, who are sooooo sensitive to every slight.

Boring. And stupid. Don't be that person. Absorb the lessons we are about to impart.

When I looked around for someone with whom to write this book, my friend Bruce Feirstein emerged as the perfect choice. Biggest advantage: he is not like me.

Diplomatic and somewhat cerebral, Feirstein had huge early career success with a book called *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche*, which was actually a humorous warning about Snowflake culture long before it existed. Then Bruce went on to write Hollywood scripts along with articles for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Vanity Fair*, among others. He lives in Los Angeles, so he's enmeshed in Snowflake culture; it affects him every day.

While I embrace an East Coast swagger, Feirstein does not immediately alienate half the universe as I have a tendency to do, but we are both Old School guys, as you will soon see. However, we take different buses to the school, which makes things interesting.

I will concede that America will never go back to the Old School curriculum that many Baby Boomers experienced. Not gonna happen with so many lawyers running wild.

Here's what I'm talking about.

If I'd worn a bicycle helmet when I was a kid, I would have been mocked beyond belief, and the helmet would immediately have been taken off my head and placed somewhere far away. Maybe Rhode Island.

4 • Bill O'Reilly and Bruce Feirstein

If my mom had defended me after a kid-on-kid altercation, I could never have left the house again.

If my dad had yelled at the Little League coach, air might have left the tires of our family car.

If I'd borrowed money from another kid to buy a Three Musketeers and didn't pay it back, no one would have played with me.

If a kid kicked someone in a fight, he was blacklisted. Only fists, and no hitting when someone was down.

If a girl cursed, silence ensued. For a long time. And boys *never* bothered girls because of the "Brother and His Large Friends" rule.

When Feirstein and I were growing up, Mom and Dad were not told everything. In fact, they were told nothing unless the police or fire department arrived at the house.

Most parents seemed to like it that way.

And then there was prevailing wisdom.

Anybody who sold drugs in the neighborhood was scum, the lowest. Irredeemable.

Kids who were different were generally okay, unless they flaunted the situation. There was some bullying, but my crew didn't like it, and sometimes confronted it.

However, there was a kid nicknamed Eggy who got hammered. One day, his father told my father about it. Later, I was called into the living room—never a good thing.

"Why are you bothering Eddie? You're calling him 'Eggy.' Why?"

"He's a dope."

"And you're a genius?"

I could see this wasn't heading in a good direction.

"Uh, we don't like him."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

“And you’re calling him a dope? No more. Don’t bother the kid anymore. Got it? And tell your dim pals to knock it off, too.”

“Okay.”

So, we knocked it off. My Old School father was not to be trifled with.

“How mad was he?” one of my moronic friends asked.

“One step away from pain,” I answered.

So “Eddie” replaced “Eggy” in a classic case of Old School justice.

It is not Old School to live in the past, but remembering how things were as opposed to how things are now is a required course.

So, let’s get started.

Are You Old School, or Are You a Snowflake?

A Pop Quiz

If you're unsure of exactly where you stand in the Old School curriculum, the following questions may help clarify things:

- 1) Do you still have a landline telephone?
 - a) Yes. b) No. c) What's a landline?
- 2) Do you still balance your checking account every month?
 - a) Yes. b) No. c) I don't know because my parents are still paying for everything.
- 3) If someone wishes you "Merry Christmas," what's your immediate response?
 - a) Return the greeting, adding "And a Happy New Year."
 - b) Call the ACLU or Human Resources to launch a formal complaint that it's an exclusionary and divisive micro-aggression that can only be remedied with either the greeter being fired or a multimillion-dollar legal settlement for your pain and suffering.
- 4) Which best reflects your view on dealing with terrorists?
 - a) "There is only one 'retirement plan' for terrorists" (U.S. secretary of defense and former U.S. Marine general James "Mad Dog" Mattis).
 - b) "Our most effective response to terror and to hatred is compassion, it's unity, and it's love" (former U.S. attorney general Loretta Lynch).
- 5) If you happen upon a raging warehouse fire late at night, do you:
 - a) Hope the firefighters are safe and express concern for the people who work there during the day.
 - b) Get out of your car and take a selfie with the fire in the background?

If you *are* Old School, the answers should be obvious. Otherwise, read on.