



By Randall Kenneth Jones

I have often heard it said that art imitates life.

As I have already alleged through my candid musings on both of my editorial pages, RediscoverCourtesy.org and AttackBunnies.com, art and life can be quite indistinguishable from each other. And I prefer it stay that way.

As someone who makes his living being “creative,” throughout the years I have continued to stretch and challenge my creative muscles (and sometimes my physiological ones) by pursuing my childhood love of performing on stage.

I suppose this urge is no different than the former high school class president who now reigns supreme over the PTA or the college quarterback who still plays weekend football with his buddies.

As adults, all we want to do is stay in the game.

In January and February of this year, I had the pleasure of performing the role of 35-year-old David O. Selznick, producer of arguably the most famous movie of all time: *Gone with the Wind*. The play, *Moonlight & Magnolias* by Ron Hutchinson and produced by The Naples Players at

the Sugden Theatre, follows Selznick, director Victor Fleming and script-doctor Ben Hecht through a madcap period in 1938 as the haphazard trio attempts to rewrite the entire movie screenplay in just five days.

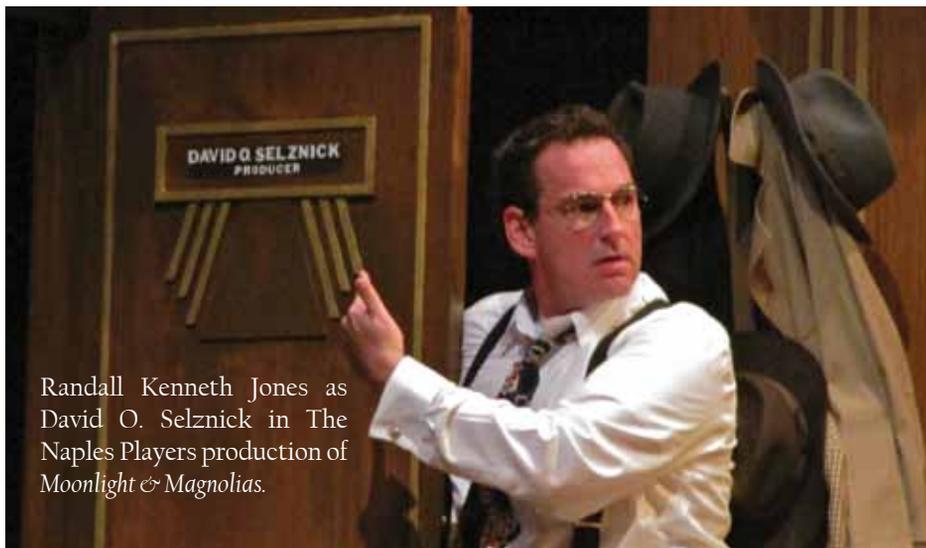
I certainly see the concept of multi-tasking in a brand new light now.

According to biographer David Thomson, “Selznick was the most charming, best-read, most insane workaholic (and most easily diverted), most talented, arrogant, hopeful, amorous, insecure, and self-destructive of all the geniuses of American movie-making.”

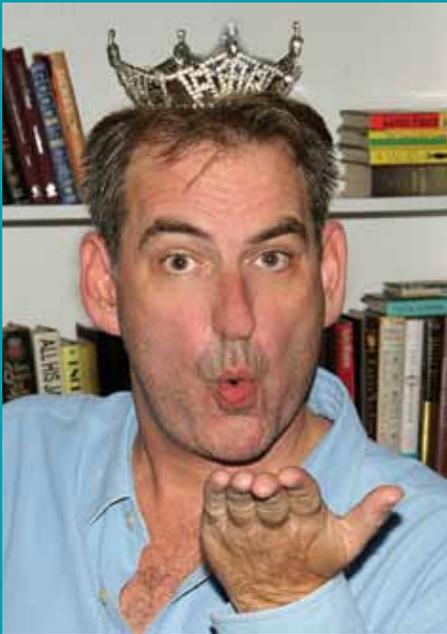
Yikes! They chose me to play this role? Were they aware that huge chunks of this description could easily have applied to me at age 35? Was I expected to be an “actor” in this production or did they simply want me to portray a variation of myself?

So, at age 49, as I focused part of each day sharing my honest (and often embarrassing) stories of “confessional development” on AttackBunnies.com and promoting professional courtesy on RediscoverCourtesy.org, I spent my nights portraying David O. Selznick: *the boss from hell*.

The irony was certainly not lost on me.



Randall Kenneth Jones as David O. Selznick in The Naples Players production of *Moonlight & Magnolias*.



READERS SOUND OFF...

On RediscoverCourtesy.org:

“Please, please, please send this to every elected official – especially those in the U.S. Congress.” – R.S., Naples, FL

“Younger people who have joined the workforce just a few years ago have missed out on civility and courtesy. The world is not meant to be -- nor does it have to be -- so cutthroat and mean.” – D.S., Atlanta GA

“You’re the new ‘Carrie Bradshaw’ of Facebook - love your style and your musings. ‘Thank you’ and ‘You’re Welcome’ are a lost courtesy, especially in professional situations.” – K.G., Kansas City, MO

On AttackBunnies.com:

“With Attack Bunnies you’ve proved you are the unknown ‘love child’ of Dale Carnegie and David Sedaris.” – D.Y., Kansas City, MO



“You speak to all of us who live through a lifetime of experiences in search of some meaning. Of course, the bonus is we all get to laugh at yours.” – K.F., Colorado Springs, CO

“The most unique, exciting, and ‘different’ (in a good way) writings I’ve ever come across. Love it!” – S.D., McLean, VA

But in this case, art wasn’t just imitating life, art was forcing me to look at the way I live my life.

Keep in mind, as an actor in Naples, I am considered “young.” The theory seems to be that tossing some Miss Clairol into my hair to return it to its original brown state would consequently make the audience believe I was Selznick at 35 as opposed to Randall Kenneth Jones at 49. Thankfully, my parent’s combined gene pool has also contributed significantly to this youthful (yet still somewhat inconceivable) illusion.

Of course, I was still attempting to portray a 35-year-old with my almost 50-year-old body. There’s no miracle cure for that disparity.

Though lifted from a late 19th century poem by English poet Ernest Dowson, *Gone with the Wind* author Margaret Mitchell would ultimately transform this (potentially forgotten) line of poetry into one of the most recognizable phrases in the world. An idiom so famous that the original meaning of these four simple words has been somewhat overshadowed by the fame of the book and movie.

But the small cloud which appeared in the northwest four months ago had blown up into a

mighty storm and then into a screaming tornado, sweeping away her world, whirling her out of her sheltered life, and dropping her down in the midst of this still, haunted desolation.

Was Tara still standing? Or was Tara also gone with the wind which had swept through Georgia?

Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (1936)

Each night on stage, as I stepped into the shoes of David O. Selznick, Mitchell’s 75-year-old book continued to almost haunt me on a number of levels.

As both “Selznick” and I would recite Ron Hutchinson’s line, “It’s about a nation torn in two, an entire civilization having to decide between the modern world and its past,” I would think to myself: Who is speaking now? Am I representing Selznick in 1938 or Randall Kenneth Jones in 2012? What’s more—do we really have to decide? Are we, as a society, expected to sit idly by as the passage of time forces our lifestyles to change course? For example, can’t technological advances simply enhance our lives without replacing face-to-face communication?

Of course, in my case, performing for an audience of over 300 theatergoers each night

would certainly be considered “face-to-face communication” on a pretty large scale.

Furthermore, does embracing the modern world mean we turn our backs on the best parts of the past: specifically in how we manage our relationships—both business and personal—as seen in the way we communicate, share, argue, compromise, collaborate, learn and grow?

I launched my first editorial page, AttackBunnies.com, intent to be the butt of the joke—if you can’t laugh at yourself and your own professional and personal missteps then, by all means, laugh at mine.

As I’m constantly asked why I named this series “Attack Bunnies,” I always offer this simple (if vague) answer: I was at work, I was attacked by a bunny, and I was naked.

You’ll simply have to read AttackBunnies.com to find out what this veiled response really means.

I also launched RediscoverCourtesy.org with a target on my back—since I am far from perfect, what gives me the right to get on my high horse about my perceived disintegration of professional courtesy?

Of course, the aforementioned target turned out to be much larger than

I anticipated. Within a week of the national launch of my *professional courtesy* project, I was lampooned on the home page of celebrity and media gossip site Gawker.com. Nevertheless, as there is no doubt that *controversy creates awareness*, and it's tough to make a concept as benign as professional courtesy seem controversial, I joyfully accepted the additional 18,000 hits I received as a result of this dubious (yet very helpful) attention.

But when it all comes down to it, the reason for the existence of both AttackBunnies.com and (especially) RediscoverCourtesy.org is simple: *somebody has to do it*. And as I was once described as the heretofore unknown "love child" of Dale Carnegie and David Sedaris, and I basically have no shame, why *not* me?

On stage each night, as "Selznick" (and I) verbally abused a 1930s-era secretary, I was reminded of my time spent working for the CEO of "Satan, Inc." in the 1990s.

If he had been a devotee of the color red perhaps I would have recognized his true identity sooner.

And as my stage alter-ego dismissed concerns over the presence of slavery in the book *Gone with the Wind*, I was reminded

of today's numerous minority groups who still have the courage to fight for equality and recognition—in the workplace and within society as a whole.

Finally, as I gleefully pranced around wreaking havoc on Rhett Butler, Ashley Wilkes, Melanie Hamilton, and the majority of Atlanta as an errant Scarlett O'Hara (it's true—I portrayed Scarlett too), I was reminded of any number of people who are willing to crush anyone who gets in their way. And yet, I can't argue, nor will I try, that Scarlett O'Hara is considered one of the great literary and screen *heroines* of all time.

After all, Scarlett does finally acknowledge (at least some of) her truth and manages to redeem herself. I suppose it's nice to know we are ultimately a very forgiving people.

Of course, Scarlett gets a pass for her "truth" while my "truth" landed me between Demi Moore and Ron Paul on a salacious nationwide website. Go figure.

Yes, art imitates life. All these years later, themes from 1936's *Gone with the Wind* continue to resonate with countless readers, moviegoers and at least one Southwest Florida, part-time actor/editorial writer.

True, I am also a somewhat irreverent and whimsical speaker on such topics as personal development, professional development, creative thinking and professional courtesy. However, to be honest, the skill set needed to execute these professional "performances" has actually been honed *on* a variety of stages—and during a variety of stages in my life.

Yet there are still those who don't seem to understand the importance of an arts education but don't get me started...

But my real fear? I just hope I don't look back in twenty-five years and think, "remember the way it used to be: the courtesy, the compassion, the communication—it all seems to be gone *with the wind*."

And afterwards, as I quietly sit down to attend the podcast of my granddaughter's wedding, I quietly say to myself, "this sucks." 🍌

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Joel Hawkins, Jones, Patti Caroli and Adam Shaver go bananas over *Gone with the Wind* in The Naples Players production of *Moonlight & Magnolias*.