

Substantial Disruption



Goodness Gracious

By Mike Tully

She's 17. ... I'm older than her father, can you believe that? I'm dating a girl, wherein, I can beat up her father.

- Woody Allen, "Manhattan" (1979)

[Jerry Lee Lewis](#) had a "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" by the time he was 22, including two marriages, several hits, fame and fortune, and a future bright as a flashbulb. Then along came [Myra Gale Brown](#) and everything changed. Instead of being paid \$10,000 per night for live performances, his fee dropped to \$250, and instead of large crowds, he played obscure beer joints. A concert tour was canceled and most radio stations refused to play his records, including his current hit at the time, "High School Confidential." That was irony at its tastiest, since Lewis' fall from grace was because Ms. Brown, his third wife, was also his 13-year-old cousin. The press denounced him as a "cradle robber" and "baby snatcher." Lewis was dumfounded, complaining to a reporter, "I plumb married the girl, didn't I?" Elvis Presley, one of the few entertainers whose star burned brighter than Lewis', said he had no problem with the marriage as long as Jerry Lee and Myra Gale were in love.

Presley had a unique perspective on relationships between adult males and juvenile females. He fell heavily for a 14-year-old military brat, Priscilla Beaulieu, when he was [stationed in Germany](#) in 1959. Most people know Priscilla by her married name: Priscilla Presley. She was not Presley's only 14-year-old crush; a [biography published in 2010](#) makes the case that "he preferred girls who were barely more than children" – just like no-longer-a-judge Roy Moore, the Republican candidate for U. S. Senator from Alabama with a history of dating female children, including one who accuses him of sexually assaulting her when she was 14 and another who said [he sexually assaulted](#) her when she was 16.

Moore has defenders, many of whom try to normalize his dating little girls by pointing to similar examples. The most [outrageous analogy](#) came from an Alabama politician who invoked the New Testament and observed that "Mary was a teenager and Joseph was an adult carpenter. They became the parents of Jesus." He also suggested a more recent example, stating, "Humphrey Bogart started dating Lauren Bacall when she was a teenager."

Is that the best they can do? How can they overlook The King and his pubescent posse? He's a lot more relevant to Southerners than Bogey. And why not invoke the memory of "The Killer," Lewis, who was from Louisiana? At least he plumb married the girl, didn't he? Why not cite a contemporary couple, Woody Allen and Soon-Yi Previn? He is 35 years her senior and began dating her when she was a teenager. They married in 1997 and are still together. Sure, he's a liberal, Jewish film-maker, but does that make him a bad analogy for Alabama? At least he plumb married the girl.

Roy “Who’s Your Daddy?” Moore was not supposed to be the Republican candidate. The designee was Luther Strange, a career politician, an incumbent without the benefit of an election who was appointed to the position by former Governor Robert Bentley. That’s a problem, because Strange was previously the Alabama Attorney General who had been investigating the Governor for sexual and financial improprieties. Strange had even talked the Alabama legislature out of pursuing impeachment proceedings, assuring them they could safely defer to his office and its investigative and prosecutorial expertise. The legislature screwed up: they trusted him. The Governor appointed Strange to the U. S. Senate seat vacated by Jefferson Beauregard Sessions and, almost as if by magic, the investigation went away. Strange and Bentley both denied a *quid pro quo*. Say what you will about Alabama Republicans, there is nothing deficient about their olfactory sense and they didn’t like the smell of the Strange-Bentley arrangement and voted for Moore over Strange. The Bentley scandal and Strange’s strange appointment have probably [ended the political careers](#) of both men.

Roy Moore’s political career has been built on [self-righteousness and public moralizing](#). He was twice removed as Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court for – first removal – refusing to take down a religious display in the courthouse, and – second removal – for refusing to honor judicial precedent regarding marriage equality. He has stated that [Muslims should not be allowed](#) to serve in Congress. He claims to support traditional marriage, believes homosexuals should be imprisoned and has no use for transgender individuals. He has been [embraced by Steve Bannon](#) as a candidate who will help Donald Trump drain the Washington swamp. But it would be wrong to interpret Moore’s support among certain voters as an endorsement of his radical social conservatism, or ratification of Trump’s anti-establishment posturing. Moore’s appeal likely comes from something else: nostalgia for an antediluvian South characterized by segregated lunch counters and child brides. His candidacy is the primal scream of a dying ethos.

If Moore is elected to the Senate, his chambers will require the following sign:

Office of Senator Roy Moore, Alabama WARNING: THIS IS A PAGE-FREE ZONE!

Will Alabama voters allow that to happen? Or will they send Roy Moore and his obsolete vision crashing to earth like a dying meteor? In other words, like a great ball of fire.