

# **WHY GOD GAVE US GUNS**

by  
Darryl Mockridge

Sleep is a beautiful thing, and the most natural thing in the world. And, when it comes to politics, most of us prefer dreaming to almost anything reality might offer.

*Charles, Dark Cloud, Bellwether*

If you're not cynical about the situation, then obviously you're not very well informed about the situation.

*Frank Zappa*



ESTUARY PUBLICATIONS

ISBN: 9781091315556

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**REVISED EDITION**

When Gandhi visited the United States for the first time, they took him all around New York City to show him the sights. After the tour, they asked him, "Well, now that you've seen New York City, what do you think about Western Civilization?" Gandhi replied, "I think that would be a good idea."

## **CONTENTS**

A COUNTRY DIVIDED	9
A PERSONAL NOTE on OPINION vs. FACT	14
ONE TIME, FOR A WHILE THERE	16
LET'S VOTE on BREAKFAST!	22
A PERSONAL NOTE on EVERY VOTE COUNTS	25
The TROUBLE WITH BUMPY's ELECTION	27
A PERSONAL NOTE on WHAT DIFFERENCE IT MAKES	29

## **GUNS**

WHY GOD GAVE US GUNS	32
THE REAL DANGER OUT THERE	37
A LOOK INTO THE "CONSERVATIVE" MIND	39
A PERSONAL NOTE ON GUNS	42
On the Other HAND	50

## **NEOCULTURE**

THE PRECISE MOMENT THINGS WENT WRONG	55
THE NEW UP AND DOWN	57
THE SWEDES' IRRATIONAL FEAR	61
VIDEO PROOF	62
A DELIGHTFUL DAY by Jackson Lee	69
RATS IN THE BASEMENT	75
THE INTERVIEW THAT CHANGED THINGS	77
KFB-37b MAKES IT BIG on EARTH	81
I WALK ALONE	83
THE FUTURE LOOKED SO BRIGHT	89
ONE	90
A PERSONAL NOTE on The Neo-INSATIABLES	93

## **THE STATE OF AMERICAN EDU.**

SEVEN	96
A PERSONAL NOTE on the Number SEVEN	100
WELCOME TO HAPPYLAND	104
GRADE SCHOOL VISIT	109
MY INTERVIEW	116
LEFT SPEECHLESS	122
WOMEN'S STUDIES	125
The DANGERS OF RATIONAL SPEECH	127
THE DREAM	133
WHAT SOCIALISM IS	134
SOCIALISM 101	135
A PERSONAL NOTE on HIGHER EDUCATION	143

SOCIALISM 101 (continued)	145
IT ALL BEGINS HERE	149
SOCIALISM 101 (continued, again)	151
A PERSONAL NOTE on TEACHING MY FIRST CLASS	154
RESIST WHAT?	158
THE MAKING OF A SHEEP-PUPPET	159
A VISIT TO A PRIVATE SCHOOL	169

## **GOVERNMENT and POLITICS**

THE BIG STUPID COUNTRY	175
A PERSONAL NOTE on CONGRESS and DOPE	181
MEET <i>YOUR</i> REPRESENTATIVE!	183
A PERSONAL NOTE to POLITICAL HOUNDS	187
A PERSONAL NOTE on CONGRESS and COCAINE	191
The QUEEN REVEAL; a prediction	193
LET'S PAY FOR STUFF!	196
The BAD ELECTION	199
The POLITICIAN, the SURPLUS, and the PAGE	202
A PERSONAL NOTE on POLITICS and POLITICIANS	204
THE CORNERSTONE OF MY THINKING ON POLITICS	205

## **THE BUMPY PRESIDENCY**

A LOOK BACK AT THE BUMPY PRESIDENCY	211
BUMPY'S ENEMIES	216
HOBNOBBING WITH PUTIN	220
THE BRIDGE	226
APPLE PIE	230
The SECRET ROOM	234
BRINGING DOWN BUMPY IN THE NEWS ROOM	243
A PERSONAL NOTE on BUMPY's IMPEACHMENT	246
THOMAS BUMPY DANGEROUS MAN	248
BUMPY AND TWITTER	251
THOMAS BUMPY, IDIOT SAVANT?	254
A PERSONAL NOTE on CRUDE REMARKS	256
BUMPY'S UNPROVOKED ASSAULT ON MS13	258
GRANDE OPERA	261
A PERSONAL NOTE on THE WALL	268
HOW I KNOW BUMPY WILL NEVER CHANGE	269
A PERSONAL NOTE on SYMPATHY	271
A PERSONAL NOTE on TWITTER	274
A FINAL NOTE:	277
Something about Climate Change	278

## AUTHOR'S NOTE [you can probably just skip this]

I am not convinced that anyone has ever changed another person's mind about politics through reason. So, I am not going to attempt to do that here. Sadly, as far as I can see, all reasonable approaches have proven to be ineffective. So, I will be beating many of the same old dead horses, but employing a variety of new techniques... while considering what a more reasonable person might have done instead.

Recently, I read somewhere that Calvin Trillin once said (something like): 'The problem with writing satire in America, is that it's difficult to invent something so completely bizarre that it might not actually occur before what you've written is published.' (I'm sure there's a little scrap of paper marking that page in a book somewhere around here.) And, that fear has haunted me since the day I began work on this piece. (Though, clearly, whoever is grinding out the idiocy these days doesn't need any suggestions from me.)

It's a changing world and, admittedly, I'm not adjusting to it very well. I seem to be having particular difficulty accepting the extinction of *independent thought*. In my mind, it is so closely linked to the concept of *Liberty* that I hate to see it go. Foolishly, I still cling to archaic, occasionally even rational, ideas, and find it too easy to criticize things which are stupid, ridiculous, absurd, or just plain goddamned wrong. It has become a difficult world for honesty.

It seems likely that—unless those of us who have taken to whispering the truth amongst ourselves begin to jeer at the ever-emerging proliferation of mindlessness, openly—the world will soon become absolutely unbearable.

My hope is that these stories will add, in some very small way, to the prevention of that.

With that in place, let us begin:

What is the difference between a kindergartener and a college student? The kindergartener is tougher, more composed, less whiny, far better educated, a lot more open minded, and knows how to take a joke.

It is in allowing that last trait—the ability to take a joke—to be beaten out of them, that we have most let down posterity.

Emerging sheltered generations have always taken a strange delight in playing revolutionary; eagerly taking part in nasty, popular, occasionally prolonged, campaigns against the very principles that sustain their belligerence. This is nothing new. What is new is the almost immediate collapse of reasonable resistance to this current crop of nonsense; the cowering silence of the older, experienced, and rational among us, and the refusal to call unfathomable idiocy what it is.

Worse yet, we've allowed it to go on for so long that it has now become dangerous.

Trained to be ever vigilant—on the lookout for any offense, intended, unintended, real, imagined, or created anew by themselves on the spot—our successors are so very sensitive that any opposing thought can trigger an immediate violent response. (Set aside, for the moment, the fact that there is a difference between sensitivity and knee-jerk stupidity.) Where these kids got such sensitivity I cannot even guess.

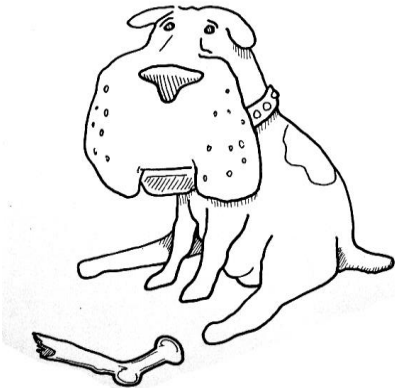
I can assure you of this much however: it wasn't from us.

When we were in college (50 years ago, for me), we had no *safe place*, where we could go to hole up with our sniveling political compatriots in bitter, defensive little circles, and trace every failure and frustration in our tiny lives back to evil old white heterosexual males in badly-fitting suits.

Destined to become evil old white heterosexual males in suits ourselves, the option never really occurred to us.

It's kind of funny the way life works itself out though. Because, now that I have become a respectable guy, you know; married, clean shaven, decent job that requires a tie, payin' my taxes—a civilized, normalized, contributing member of society—that's the most despicable thing a man can be. Now that I finally am one, respectable guys are, apparently, the source of everybody else's problems. The poor, the crazy, the lazy, the moronic, the perverted, the lame, petty criminals and career politicians (if such a fine line can be drawn) are all of one belief: without us—the respectable guys—they'd be better off. If things go their way, they may soon have the opportunity to test that theory.

Going in, I knew writing this would be no easy task but, still, I've had to ride the brakes pretty hard at times, in order to produce the pleasant little jaunt that I had originally imagined. Fortunately, when you have the most ravenous consumers in the entire history of mankind out on the streets, marching around in throngs, demanding Socialism, it's almost impossible to ignore the humor in that, dark as it may be.



## A COUNTRY DIVIDED

Once there was a land called Crux, where there were basically only two political parties; the Party of Reality and the Party of Perception. The two parties were supposed to work together to represent the people, but those two parties did not see eye to eye (and so, there's a bit of a problem right there).

Though both parties ruled with their heads, their way of seeing things was quite different. One party saw things in a concrete way, the other party saw things in a perceived way. Those distinctly different ways of seeing things seemed to come naturally, and were instilled at an early age.

(Note: There seemed to be some bitterness here, because the Party of Reality thought that more kids would have had a shot at growing up to see things their way IF the Party of Perception didn't grab all those kids and start filling their heads with crap as soon as they could get their hands on them—but we won't get into that now.)

Here then, is an example of those naturally occurring different views, as they emerged at an early age.

The Reality kids (called Real kids, for short)—if verbally assailed—would chant, in a snide, irritating, sing-songy sneer: *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me*. Then, they'd snort, spit on the ground, turn, and walk away. The Perception kids (the Percys)—if verbally assailed—would begin to whimper and cry, and after being surrounded by their comforting friends, get their defenses up and scream, "Your words are hurting me! I'm gonna tell the teacher!" To which the Reality kids would insert one thumb into each ear, waggled their palms, stick out their tongues and say, Nyah-nyah-nyah!—causing the Percys to cower, shiver, shake, and stumble off, grievously disheartened.

If, after reading that, you asked yourself, ‘What kind of a cruel world was that?’ I can—fairly safely, I think—predict which party you might be likely to join, should you ever find yourself in the land of Crux. But, in answer to your question, I can tell you this: It was a cruel world for all, but much more so for the Percys, who perceived it so, both young and old.

If, on the other hand, after reading that, you turn to your wife and ask, ‘Do you want to go try that new Thai place this evening?’ I have no doubt which party you’d fit nicely into.

So, where was I? Oh... so, here’s another good example of the division between the Real people and the Percys, concerning the sovereignty of Crux.

The Real people thought that Crux should have real borders. That concept was based on the fact that every other country in the world had real borders. So, this is what we might call a matter of fact or, in this case, the fact of the matter. And whenever any fact, or fact of any matter, collided with the Percys’ perceptual way of thinking, the fact frequently lost; because the Percys’ way of thinking was kind of nebulous—soft and dreamy and foggy and vague and, well—I hate to use words like stupid, baseless uninformed and unreal, so I won’t.

Consequently—and I believe there is a lesson in here somewhere for someone—the Real approach, of countering perceived thinking by offering reason and good solid, meat and potatoes facts, was utterly ineffectual. Facts, in the land of Crux, were useless. Countering perception with facts is kinda like driving golf balls into the side of a circus tent—it disturbs the animals inside, some clowns take umbrage, it doesn’t really accomplish much, and the show goes on anyway.

Nonetheless, the Party of Reality persisted in pointing out a very long list of historically-sound, universally understood, commonly recognized, and generally accepted reasons why a country should have real borders; including, customarily, to separate itself from other countries; but also to define its citizenry. Basically, every government needs to know who's in and who's out, in order to know who to tax, so that they can continue raking in the funds necessary to further the great governmental process of shoveling all that tax money out the window and into—what they called in Crux—the huge dark pit of needless waste.

The Party of Perception agreed that a country should have borders—and for those very same reasons—but they thought those borders shouldn't be so strictly defined and seriously defended that they might offend anyone beyond those borders, who might like to come in, pocket a little of that needless waste for themselves and, as a small token of thanks, vote for the Party of Perception, whenever called upon to do so.

The Real people rudely called such people “people from other countries” (an offensive term, according to the Percys) and the Percys called them—more caringly—Future Perception Party Voters of Crux. Consequently, they thought that anyone who wanted to cross the border into Crux should just sorta wander on in, pitch a tent and declare themselves there.

“Are we there yet?”

“Yes, we're here, my love; we're finally here; right in the Crux of the matter. AND, here's some good news; we'll be getting our benefits soon.”

“Well, then I think the arduous trek was worth it.”

“WELL worth it, I'd say, my love.”

“Oh, I'm so glad we came...”

That is all fine, of course, because everybody must come from somewhere to get to Crux; even the people who lived in Crux had, I suppose, come from somewhere. The problem the Real people had with that was that it seemed to be a one way street. People were coming in from somewhere, but nobody was really leaving to go to somewhere, and (more to the point, as they say) the tax money available for shoveling out the window and into the huge gaping pit of needless waste was limited. That's why most of those people were coming from somewhere to begin with—wherever they'd come from had run out of money to shovel into their own dark gaping pit of needless waste. There was barely enough to keep their leaders living in luxury.

So, you know, that idea—that a border should not be actual in any sense—nagged the Real politicians. They knew that if they went over that border in the other direction, with the idea of taxing people down there, that line would become pretty precisely defined, and pretty well defended, and pretty damned quickly. Same goes for just plain people idling on over that border, taking up residence and expecting benefits for having done so. But, as said, few were headed that way. It was like that with everything. You name it and there was that conflict between the cold hard reality of the Real people and somewhat saggy obstructive perception of the Percys.

Take the old goats of the Party of Perception. (I am NOT going to get into the hypocrisy thing—I don't have the patience.) But, take the old goats of the Party of Perception. They were getting older and, though they acted like they didn't know it, they knew it alright. Believe me, they were well aware of the fact that their time was limited. "Say, Congressman Glugg doesn't look too good these days."

“Well, at least he’s alive...”

“Yeah, but for how long?”

“It doesn’t matter; alive is good; ask anyone who’s not.”

“I think you and I’ll both soon have that opportunity.”

“In the meantime, we could ask Blaggart, I think he’s been dead for several sessions, but they just keep reelecting him.”

The old goats of the Perception Party knew that their time was past. For them, politics was no longer the simple shameless game of deceiving the electorate; it had become the shameful game of continually deceiving themselves. Desperate to slap a snazzy ending on a long and illustrious career, they were all trying to convince themselves that what they really wished for was to take their last few shuffling steps upon this planet dancing to whatever idiotic tune the loudest mob of potential emerging voters had decided to play.

Meanwhile, the President of Crux, a Realist, refused to dance. So, somewhat predictably, the Percys all resented him.

Many Real people, though shocked and dismayed by what was going on in Crux, were not disheartened entirely. They had a more distant view of things. They knew that there is only so much anyone can do when their drunken uncle decides to wade out into on-coming traffic. And, sad as it may be, they also knew that if the kids finally managed to scuttle their own cruise ship, they’d find themselves clinging desperately to pink horsey life preservers in the middle of the angry, unforgiving sea they’d demanded.

And, only then would some of them begin to see things more clearly.

## *A PERSONAL NOTE* on **OPINION vs. FACT**

A little exemplary tale.

One time I said something to my old friend, Bruce—I forget the specific matter, but it was a commonly understood, long accepted, scientifically-proven fact—and he responded, “I don’t believe that.”

Because this was not the first time he’d responded in that peculiar way, I was not surprised. But, because it was not the first time he’d responded in that peculiar way, it was also not the first time I considered strangulation as one option for bringing him around to a clearer way of thinking.

“Bruce,” I said, “this is not my personal opinion, it’s a fact; it’s universally recognized, commonly accepted, fact.”

“Well, I don’t choose to believe it,” he repeated.

“You have no choice in the matter, Bruce,” I said. “This is a fact. You can’t NOT believe it. It’s a fact. It exists. That’s the way it is. It’s out there. It’s undeniable. It’s real. There is no other option. It remains the same from any point of view. Personal opinion does not enter into it.”

He looked me in the eye, shrugged and said, “Well, I don’t choose to believe it.”

So, here’s a little guessing game for you.

Which one of us—Bruce or the surly guy—is what they still insist upon calling a ‘liberal’, and which a conservative?

“It’s plain, goddamned undeniable, FACT, Bruce!” I shouted at his back as he walked away.

“Well, I don’t choose to believe it,” he muttered from a safe but cowardly distance.

That is the kind of thing people who attempt to apply rational thought to politics today are continually up against.

A dear old friend of mine, a person who has known me for years—and continues to hang around with me despite that—seemed to be purposefully infuriating me, and there was nothing I could do about it. He was sure that I was wrong; I was dead-certain that he was. I had fact on my side; he had his unshakable opinion.

The question is:

Are those who are convinced that their personal opinion overrides fact honestly unaware of how irritating they are? I hope so. For the sake of my own sanity, I really need to believe that they are all just needling us. I find the alternative—that they could all be that goddamned stupid—to be a nearly unbearable thought.

Of course most people find it impossible to see themselves for what they truly are; or hear what they are actually saying, but the idea that this nation is awash in idiots is frightening to me. It is also, at this point, nearly undeniable.

My very dear wife laughs when I say that I am beginning to believe that people have scrambled their own brains with the incessant unrestrained 24 hour use of those stupid goddamned phones and all that other useless electronic crap.

Unfortunately, that's the most reasonable explanation for the masses of people of all ages who are not only incapable of, but adamantly resistant to, anything that might be reasonable.

That some of them are old friends and truly wonderful people (otherwise), only adds to the frustration.

## ONE TIME, FOR A WHILE THERE

One time, for a while there, there was a normal little place with a normal little way of doing things; which was, of course, unacceptable. Inside their gates, the rich did whatever such people do to continue getting unnecessarily richer; while the poor poor-folk were penned off in little areas where the government fed them, housed them, patted them on the back and cooed—‘You’re helpless, and there’s nothing you can do about that. But, don’t worry; we’ll do everything we can to make sure you never drift too far from that thought.’

Most people—the great majority, who were neither rich nor poor—worked hard all their lives at one meaningless job or another, while in a steady semi-senseless state and, with the help of beer and football, lived reasonably happy lives. They accepted their situation, were thankful and amiable and, historically speaking, relatively comfortable.

For some reason, I do not really know why, the government would, from time to time, arm young men and send them out beyond the gates of that normal little world, to insert themselves into some other people’s senseless ancient squabble, to kill and be killed. Some of that was honorable of course and absolutely necessary, but it always went on far too long. Importantly, it was those young men’s willingness to take up arms and go to those places and fight that allowed that normal little place to go on with its normal little way of life.

So, then, along the merry way, a lot of good women got divorced and their former husbands all moved into condos with ex-strippers named Destiny, leaving the former wives with a child or two to raise alone.

And even those good women, whose husbands did not take that final selfish step, felt the same as if they either had or might soon. So, they dwelt continually in a kind of lost and abandoned state, stuck at home with those kids and haunted by the thought: Well, gees, you know, is this all there is?

Many of those wives, and former or future-former wives turned their full attention on the kids—unwittingly, I think—and wishing for a better life for their offspring (as mothers naturally do), began filling the kids' heads with the idea that they were each god-like creatures and the very center of the universe. And, surprisingly, the kids bought it.

I don't know how long this went on... but long enough that the hum of it began to reverberate quietly throughout the little normal way of doing things, in that normal little place. Until, one day, these kids—having grown up believing that they were indeed god-like creatures—looked around and asked themselves: Why, if I am a god-like creature, am I working here in the kitchen of this fast-food joint, waiting on fat, badly dressed, soup slurping old bastards and not out there, either skateboarding or driving around in my new convertible with a lot of chicks in bikinis giggling in the back seat?

That was one question they asked themselves. Another was: If government can feed and house those poor people—and pat them on the back while cooing, 'Don't worry, we'll do what we can for you'—why can't they do that for us god-like creatures too? (So, see... now we're getting somewhere.)

Now, don't quote me; I think it may have started out as a joke but, somewhere along the way their teachers overheard those questions, saw the opportunity, and—to win their little hearts

—answered, “It can! Government CAN feed and house all of you center of the universe beings. And those teachers discovered that it was a winner. Instead of setting teachers on fire, the kids started listening. Why? Because it was what they wanted to hear—things were exactly as Mommy had told them all along! ‘Education’ was like mother’s milk to them.

Some of those teachers got so involved in bringing the good news that they went the added distance, saying, “Would any of you young girls like to, you know, maybe, kinda slip on over to my place, where I can offer you further, much more personally directed, and far more meaningful, insight of the philosophically in-depth sort, that only a man of my vast experience may be able to convey...?”

So, then one day, a decade or so later maybe, there arrived, just outside the gates, a few of these, now properly informed, center of the universe god-like beings on stilts, with big megaphones, alternately demanding things and spewing nonsense. The demands they were making were all couched in, what is now typical vicious, threatening and vulgar terms, which, reduced, really amounted to this: We want stuff! Basically, what they wanted was lead boots for everybody.

They wanted more government and bigger government and a much more generous government. Above all, they wanted a caring government. They wanted a government that taxed everybody but themselves—which was pretty much the system already in place, though they didn’t seem to recognize it. They wanted a new government which would finally throw open the floodgates, so that the money that trickled in could spill out in endless gushing torrents, flooding their world with insta-wealth for all. Oh, and they wanted electric cars.

But most of all, they wanted to put an end to the foul and crude and cruel act of *misgendering*. For who were we to say that someone should be referred to as *he* or *she* when *they* may have not yet decided that, that day, for themselves?

[Note: At this stage in the development of mankind the centuries-old method of just reaching down there with one hand and seeing what you've got, was no longer considered reliable]... and so, even if we knew for sure, as undeniable fact, that the person we were referring to was actually a *he*—and willing to admit it—or a *she*—but humbly refusing any awards that might come naturally with the title—and wished to be referred to as a *he* or a *she*, and was willing to go into a court of law and place his or her hand on a Bible—or any other holy book of choice or, defiantly and proudly, upon no holy book at all, and swear that they wished to be called *he* or *she*, the all-powerful *they* declared, by edict, under penalty of law, that they themselves must refer to any other person as 'they' or 'them'...which is the equivalent of 'it', which anyone of any gender would admit is much more respectful. It just made so much sense.

So, here's how that might work, in a court of law:

"And, then, what did Mr. Wilson say?"

"He... I mean, *they* said, 'Get the fuck off my lawn!'"

"And, when they said that, what did you do?"

"Uh... is it still OK for me to say 'I'?"

"For the moment, yes."

"Oh, OK; so, then I said, 'It's not your lawn, it belongs to the people.'"

"And what did they say to that?"

"They said, 'Well the people are gonna get an ass-full of bird shot if the people don't get off my goddamned lawn!'"

So, anyway, that was the big battle: replacing a rational, easily understood, ages-old, syntactical system of grammar—which could only be interpreted as offensive by an extremely tiny handful of hyper-sensitive lamebrains, looking for any possible offense in everything on earth—with one that made no sense whatsoever except to those same lamebrains, who had somehow gotten themselves in the position where what they said was taken seriously rather than ridiculed loudly, laughed at openly, dismissed and quickly forgotten.

That was the big one: screw around with grammar so that nobody who self-identified as something that they were not, were not also subject to the horrible crushing insult of anyone, who might be incapable of reading their mind, calling *them* a *he* when *they* were feeling like a *she*, at the moment. It was a most noble cause.

Inside, within the hallowed walls of Government, the old goats, recognizing new voters when they smelled them, and wishing to remain comfortably seated, all, without cracking even the hint of a smile, declared that misgendering/pronoun thing to be the most important thing they had ever voted on.

And the rich—seeing this as yet another opportunity to rake in a few more bucks—publicly agreed.

But, now see, here's the problem; most people, never having attended an Ivy League institution—therefore deprived of proper political indoctrination, and still dependent upon personally directed thought—when asked what they thought of all that, rolled their weary eyes a bit and said, “Hand me that  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch crescent wrench...” or maybe, “Man, I hope I remembered to turn off the oven.”

BUT, after giving it additional thought, some had changed their minds and said, “Actually, I’ve got this adjustable right here; I’ll give that a try first.” Or shrugged and said, “Well, I guess that’s why we have fire insurance.”

And, since this is a happy tale, I feel I should tell you that, in time, the megaphones of those more properly informed, center of the universe, god-like creatures on stilts, began to sputter; and the next generation came along—every bit as self-centered as the last—and, out of that evil spirit that inhabits those who follow us in our paths, kicked the goddamned stilts out from under them.

And when those god-like creatures came crashing down the young victors all laughed and stuck out their tongues. Then, they picked up the megaphones and started marching around in circles, spewing a little nonsense of their own.

If I recall correctly, the first thing they wanted was to shed those lead boots.

## LET'S VOTE on BREAKFAST!

One time, not here but somewhere else, but not so very long ago, all good citizens were encouraged to vote for politicians to represent them in a place far away, where they could be kept a close eye on, and easily reached.

Those same good citizens were also encouraged to vote on open-source data mining, brain surgery techniques, and the defusing of bombs; because—just like things are here—they probably knew every bit as much about those things as they did about the politicians they voted for. But, the turn-out at elections was never very hot; because, most of them probably cared more about *personal matters*.

You might ask, what could anyone possibly care about more than politicians, data analysis, brain surgery and which wire to cut with seconds ticking? Well, they cared about things like family, friends, health, happiness; the list was almost endless. But, more than any of that, they cared about breakfast.

And, when those very same good citizens were encouraged to vote on breakfast, the turn-out was great. So, why don't *we* try that; let's vote on breakfast, shall we?

For our purposes, let's say your opinion is that a good breakfast would consist of eggs, a slice of ham, grits, toast, a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice and a cup of good coffee. Now, let's take a look and see what's on the menu.

The menu reads: GOOD MORNING! What a wonderful world! Today we're going to vote on BREAKFAST! You may choose ONE of the following items:

1. Corn flakes.
  2. A stale old muffin of indeterminate nature.
- So, what'll YOU have?  
Remember, EVERY VOTE COUNTS!

Looking at that menu, you may realize, once again, that this is not a perfect world. But, breakfast is an important meal, and you feel strongly about it. Additionally, you know that a lot of others would agree with you; so, you want to do what you can to persuade the kitchen that eggs, a slice of ham, grits, toast, a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice and a cup of good coffee is the way to go.

When the waitress slinks on over, grins unconvincingly and chirps, "What'll y' have?", you say cheerfully: "I'll have eggs, a slice of ham, grits, toast, a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice and a cup of good coffee."  
And you smile.

In response, she throws her entire weight onto one hip, sighs loudly, rolls her weary eyes toward heaven, stares at you as if exhausted by the endless stupidity she must endure every nagging minute of every endless day of her life, and says, "We've got corn flakes or an old muffin."

You say, "Wouldn't it be a better world if we could all just sit down to a nice big breakfast of eggs, a slice of ham, grits, a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice and a cup of good coffee?"

She sighs, taps her foot a bit while staring at the ceiling, and repeats, "We've got *corn flakes* or an old muffin. Those are your choices." She places her pencil upon a pad. She waits. "Which is it?" she asks.

That's the situation.

Later, when she drops a stale old muffin of indeterminate nature on a greasy plate before you, she says, "Enjoy your breakfast." Her tone is as stale as the muffin, but far from indeterminate.

So, you can either make a big deal about this, or you can eat what's set down before you and be glad you don't live under some other system in which you'd have no choice.

While you're chewing on that, you might chew on this: Why do so many people always choose the damned corn flakes?

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on EVERY VOTE COUNTS

My very dear wife and I have an on-going disagreement. And, apparently, from her point of view, I have an on-going disagreement with every rational person on earth when it comes to this matter. (Others matters as well, but let's talk about this one for now.)

The thing came up again, most recently, when the Iowa caucuses came very close to a tie. By the original official count the two leaders were separated by 8 votes (I think), but by a later *revised* official count the candidates were separated by only *a single vote*.

On TV that day Piers Morgan and some idiot actor—who on that occasion was playing the part of someone with deep political insight—both agreed that *that situation* in Iowa *proves, once again*, that every vote counts.

*THIS*, they agreed, is the perfect response to *anyone* who has *ever* thought that their vote doesn't count. They could hardly gush enough. Even with their chiseled jaws (well, Morgan not so much anymore) on the ground and their eyes bugging out, and their hair standing on end, they could not gush enough. *One* vote separated these two guys, they kept saying with escalating astonishment. ONE VOTE! And it just proves—once again—how every vote counts.

They must have repeated it a thousand times.  
(Not that it bothered me.)

But, for me it raised the eternal question, “Does it?” Does this event prove that every vote counts? Is that what it proves?

Here's my idiotic take.

What it actually proves is that you can have an impressive number of people who agree with you and who vote the same way you do, and *none of your votes will count*.

IF what we mean by your vote 'counting' is that you get something akin to what you were hoping for, if 200,001 votes were cast in a *one-vote* election, 100,000 of those votes didn't count. In that case, 100,000 people did not get the results they'd hoped for; their votes meant nothing, carried no weight whatsoever. Their guy lost.

(I'm trying to think of a way to state that more clearly.)

You *could* say that proves—once again—that every vote counts, or you could say that, in the end, once again, many people's commitment to fulfilling their patriotic duty was wasted effort, accomplishing nothing; their voices not only went unheard, they were stifled.

It's not just that their candidate didn't win; it's that the candidate they specifically did not want in office did.

When is the last time you heard any newly-elected official say, "It's important to me that I represent those who voted against me."? Even if every goddamned last one of 'em said that, which of 'em would you believe?

My very dear wife tells me that there are all kinds of problems with my thinking on this matter, and I have no reason to doubt her. Still, I can't seem to convince myself that the guy I voted *against* is just as good for me as the guy I voted *for*, when it comes to represen... Oh. Wait. Actually, now I can.

## The TROUBLE WITH BUMPY's ELECTION

Nobody thought Bumpy would win. Everybody laughed at the idea. It was an idea so absurd that some people thought that Bumpy himself didn't even—honestly—think he would win. But, you know, there really wasn't much of a choice.

The choice was between two miserable candidates; one of which had proven herself to be... well, let's not get into that. As she herself famously snapped, "What difference, at this point, does it make?"

So, you know, close your eyes, hold your nose, and choose.

At any rate, Bumpy won—rant all you want—Bumpy won.

The Buddha once suggested that the only problem with expectation is the disappointment that is bound to follow. He didn't say anything at all about the endless, nagging, irrational rant that was bound to follow. Nor did he mention a losing Presidential candidate's refusal to just shut up and go away.

*Nor* did he say anything about her acolytes, who apparently believed that it would be far better to have an old, defiant, somewhat unstable, white female god-zillionaire, with no genuine sense of decorum in office, rather than an old, defiant somewhat unstable, white male god-zillionaire, with no sense of decorum in there.

Nonetheless, when it was all over, where there should have been a completely self-serving, power hungry, insatiable, money grubbing female megalomaniac—jealously preserving and protecting those things which served her purpose—there was Bumpy, who harbored those very same delightful traits

—each and all of which you might expect to find in any politician—but who had never before been on the *receiving* end of the political game.

At any rate (again), after everybody who swore in public that they would leave the United States forever if Bumpy was elected, didn't leave, and the stock market—which those same keen observers declared would crash—didn't crash, Bumpy did the unheard of and completely unacceptable; he started getting things done, in a surprisingly American manner.

***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on WHAT DIFFERENCE IT MAKES

Dear Ms. *What difference, at this point, does it make,*

I'll tell you what difference it makes; it makes all the difference in the world.

The citizens of this country deserve better than to have anyone in any position of authority who might even ask that question... at this point or any other.

Military personnel, diplomats; the good and dedicated people who work under that person's authority, deserve better than to work under anyone who could ever ask that question.

They deserve someone who knows damned well what difference it makes; someone who is capable of responding, when necessary, at this point or any previous point or any point in the future, with certainty and without pause.

It makes all the difference in the world that the people who have *the responsibility to represent this country*—our country—also have what it takes to stand up to anyone, at any point, who might take it upon themselves to threaten our sovereignty as a nation.

It makes all the difference in the world whether we confront those who declare themselves our enemy, or kowtow to them; whether we do what we can to crush them, or deliver pallets overflowing with cash to them in the middle of the night.

It makes a difference to every country that deals with us.

It makes a difference to each and every citizen in this country, even those who cannot, for whatever reason, see, recognize, or appreciate that difference.

It makes every difference.

It makes a difference to our history as a nation, our liberty as a people, and our future as both.

It makes crucial, vital, and lasting difference.

It makes permanent, on-going, steady, reliable, unchanging, stubborn, defiant, proud, imperishable, noble and inspiring difference.

It makes every possible difference.

That is what difference it makes.

It can certainly make a difference in a Presidential election.

# GUNS

## WHY GOD GAVE US GUNS

Dejected, without the ham sandwich I had hoped for in hand, I sat down the other day, with a bag of stale chips, and turned on a political talk-show in progress.

The host was saying, “So, last week, one of *our guys* was caught jay walking, in blackface, without any pants on, and the dogs of ideology were let loose throughout social media, and he was torn to shreds a thousand particularly vile, vicious, and vulgar ways.”

“That’s because jay walking, in blackface, without pants is wrong,” replied the guest. “Our party has zero tolerance for such behavior.”

“It’s not strictly illegal though,” observed the host.

“Well, it may not be specifically illegal, but, if you get caught on video doing it, one must expect to pay the penalty.”

“I agree. Would you say that jay walking, in blackface, without any pants on is clearly, irrefutably, wrong?”

“Yes.”

“It’s not just wrong for *our guys*, it’s also wrong for others?”

“Yes. Well, I mean, probably... it might be.”

“I sense some hesitancy.”

“Well, things are never as simple as they appear.”

“That’s funny; do you remember, three months ago, when one of *your guys* was caught jay walking, in blackface, without any pants on, it was just ignored—entirely ignored; you just shrugged it off. It didn’t even make mention in the news.”

“Ha-ha, it’s not that simple.”

“Well, is jay walking, in blackface, without wearing pants wrong or not?”

“It’s not that simple.”

“IS jay walking, in blackface, without pants wrong?”

“You’re comparing apples to apricots.”

“Let me try it again. Is jay walking, in blackface, without pants, acceptable, or is it unacceptable?”

“I can see what you’re trying to do.”

“What’s that? What am I trying to do?”

“Oh, I know what you’re trying to do.”

“Yes, and I can see that you won’t do it.”

“Most matters are just not that simple. There are a wide range of things which need to be taken into consideration.”

“You mean that when *our guy* gets caught jay walking, in blackface, without pants, it’s an obvious crime; its plastered all over the news, and he’s hounded by vicious media coverage for weeks, until his life is in ruins; but, when *your guy* gets caught doing the same thing—the same exact thing—there are other factors that need to be taken into consideration, and we should all be careful not to rush to judgement, it’s not worth mentioning, it gets quickly swept under the rug and almost as quickly forgotten. The next day, he’s right back there on the tube, in his regular spot, grinning at us. How does that work? Is there, or is there not such a thing as principle?”

“It’s not a matter of principle. And, again, I can see what you’re trying to do.”

“Yes, you’ve said that before. So, let’s talk about that. What do you think I’m trying to do?”

“You’re trying to get me to say what *you* want to hear...”

“Yes, I want to hear you tell the truth for a change. And you either won’t or you can’t, which is it?”

“Ha-ha, nice try. I’m not going to fall into that trap.”

“What trap is that?”

“You’re trying to get me to say what’s wrong in one case is universally wrong. But, the likelihood of getting me to say that is less than un.”

“I know that; but, that is not what I’m trying to do...”

“Oh, really?”

“I’m *trying* to get YOU to ADMIT that YOU KNOW that what is wrong for some is also wrong for others. Can you do that? Can you admit to me, right here and right now, that if jay walking, in blackface, without any pants on is wrong for *our* guy, it is also wrong for *your* guy; and, in fact then, by matter of principle, it’s wrong for everyone?”

The guest just looked at the host and smiled sheepishly.

The host waited, but only got the smile in response.

“OK. So, even though you know that,” said the host calmly, “I can see it in your eyes—you *know* that’s true—that’s why you have that little awkward smile on your lips right now—you know that there is a principle here but, you stubbornly refuse to admit it. Your blind dedication to a weird ideology won’t allow you to admit the truth. Why are you laughing?”

“It is just *not* that simple.”

“Oh, my god, THAT’s sure as hell an understatement. So, OK, let’s switch topics,” he said, “let’s go to this. A judge—appointed by a particular political party, which I will not mention—just gave a 50-something year-old man—a large contributor to that same, unmentioned, political party—3 months’ probation for raping a 3 year-old child. Do you think that is wrong?”

“Well... you have a peculiar way of looking at things.”

“I have a peculiar way of looking at things? OK, forget that. I’m going to ask you a direct question. Forget the fact that the rapist and the judge were both from the same political party; I’m asking you, as a principle, if YOU think it would be wrong for *any* judge to give *any* 50-something year-old man 3 months’ probation for raping a 3 year-old child? This has nothing to do with which political party is involved.”

“Well, you have to consider....”

“Stop. Stop that. I’m asking you, a third time, if YOU think it is *wrong* for a judge to give a 50-something year-old man 3 months’ probation for *raping* a 3 year-old child?”

“Well you really need to take certain facts into ...”

And, at that point, something truly wonderful occurred.

The host of the show rose up from his chair, walked over to his guest, grabbed him by the hair, yanked his head back and snarled into his ear, “Listen to me, Jackass,” he said. “We’re talking about a **principle** here. I am asking YOU, if YOU think that it is **WRONG** for *any* judge to give *any* 50-something year-old man 3 months’ probation for raping any child; no matter what the rapist’s political persuasion; no matter the judge’s political affiliation or the political affiliation of the man who appointed him; is it **wrong**—this is a Yes or No question, and I want you to think carefully and give me a one-word answer, yes or no—**IS IT WRONG** ...for a judge... to give a 50-something year-old man... 3 months’ probation ...for *raping* a child?”

And although the guest turned pure white, uh-mediatly (as the kids say) broke into a sweat, and trembled in absolute fear for his life, he either could not or would not abandon his ideology to answer that simple question. It went against the very nature of his politically ingrained stupidity.

At that point, the screen went blank for a second and a notice came up: “Please Check Your Connection, be sure that...” which I hadn’t finished reading before another replaced it saying: “Due to Normally Scheduled Maintenance, this channel is Temporarily Unavailable. Give us a few moments.”

That sign stayed up long enough for me to read it several times, during which time what we heard, but did not see, was loud commotion. There was some shouting—“Get the gun! Get the gun!”—what sounded like a scuffle, a light stand crashing onto the floor, and the host declaring, “It’s a squirt gun! Hey, relax; it’s a *squirt* gun! Wait—look, let me show you.” We didn’t get to see him place the squirt gun into his own mouth, and squeezing off a few shots. We did however hear him say, “See, it’s just lemonade!”

When the *Normally Scheduled Maintenance* sign was yanked we joined the widely and wildly acclaimed, Independent Spirit Awards winning film, *Reservoir Dogs*, in mid-violence.

In the all-media firestorm that uh-mediately followed, *the universal everyone* demanded that the host be fired, jailed, and either strung up by the heels and gutted, or (as is their strange way with things) shot. But nowhere, in all of that coverage was it mentioned where that ‘gun’ had come from—personally, I never saw the thing—or that it was a squirt gun loaded with pink lemonade.

As an additional little irritant—for those of us who still cling to the archaic concept that there are things called facts—in clips of the occurrence, the only sound you’ll hear, once the ‘Normally Scheduled Maintenance’ sign pops up, is Beethoven’s Ode to Joy.

## THE REAL DANGER OUT THERE

Just recently I read that a child of 5 was sent home from school for pointing an *imaginary* gun at another child. Initially, I laughed at that story but, after giving it some thought, I came to see the point of it.

Good Heavens, imagine all the harm that child might have done to other children had that imaginary gun gone off. An imaginary gun is NOT a plaything.

On the other hand, I take comfort in knowing that no clear-thinking American mother would ever send her child off to school, the way things are these days, without checking to see that they have on their imaginary bullet-proof vest.

Still, now, quite naturally I suppose, I'm concerned about whether or not our teachers are properly trained to handle any imaginary guns which may show up in the classroom.

In the article, there was no mention of what that teacher did with that imaginary gun, after confiscating it. Did she just carelessly drop it in an unlocked desk drawer, where curious minds might discover it, and little hands might pick it up?

I hope she did the right thing and took a big imaginary hammer to the thing, smashing it into tiny little bits of useless imaginary metal.

Even as someone who has never raised a child, I am deeply concerned, and I'm really sorry that our teachers should have to worry about such things as imaginary guns, when they should be solely focused on teaching our children imaginary

politics, and filling their little heads with ideas about gender, racism, inequality, and victimhood.

How on earth did it ever come to this?

Of course, I am ashamed to admit that I'm equally concerned that somewhere out there, on the other side of the world, there are truly wonderful people training *their* five-year olds to use *real* assault weapons; and they are instilling in the hearts of those little moist-eyed tykes a very real hatred for others.

But, that's the sort of thing that decent people don't really talk about.

## A LOOK INTO THE “CONSERVATIVE” MIND

“Welcome to *A Look into the Conservative Mind*. As I warned in the syllabus, this is not a course for the weak in spirit. If words like... well, conservative, or Constitution upset you; or concepts like limited government, the free market, liberty, American values, and a strong national defense offend you—this would certainly be a good test, but a cruel one—or, if hearing the name of our so-called President pronounced with anything other than derision triggers you, overwhelming you with feelings of discomfort, then perhaps you should leave this room right now, and consider taking another course.”

“Is that you on that screen, Professor?”

“Yes.”

“And those were your words?”

“Yes, but...”

“No! No, Professor... those were your words?”

“Yes.”

“OK, and what exactly did you think you were doing?”

“My *intention* was only to give the scholars in my class a look at the distorted views that they were likely to find themselves confronting once they had gone off, taken leave of this institution, and found themselves in the world beyond these hallowed protective walls, where they might find themselves vulnerable to distorted so-called conservative views. This course was submitted, and approved.”

“Let’s not try to push your responsibilities onto others, Professor. Let’s try to be more honest than that. It’s clear that when your course was approved that someone had made a mistake, but YOU are responsible for carrying this atrocity through to the point where you’ve offended our students.”

“But, I never had any intention to actually expose these young minds to so-called rational ideas; I only hoped to reveal the fact that such ideas exist. To that end, the course listed a few typically conservative concepts, in a general sense, without getting into detail, and *only* in order to refute them.”

“You threatened your students by suggesting that you would be mentioning ‘the President’ by name.”

“I did not. I only stated that I knew how cruel that might be.”

“So, you considered their frailty in that instance, when the overall thrust of the course itself was blatant intellectualized terrorism. And how long did you expect to get away with it?”

“Get away with..?”

“Did you really expect that you would be allowed to complete a full semester of covert indoctrination? How long did you expect to get away with it?”

“If you mean did I expect you to kick down the door to my classroom, clear the room of students, throw me up against the chalkboard, and humiliate me by having me physically searched and dragged out of my classroom within minutes of my opening remarks—I did not.”

“Tell me something, Professor; did you once say to your wife, ‘I was surprised to discover that my parents both voted Democrat in the last election, they’d voted Republican for as long as they were alive.’ Did you say that to them?”

“Who is *them*?”

“Them, sir, is your wife.”

“Well, I’m surprised that she would tell anyone I said that, but, yes, I did repeat that joke to her. I found it funny.”

“And, did they find it funny?”

“Who is *they*? I believe I only said that one time, and to my wife. Who is *they*?”

“So, did they find it funny?”

“WHO, please tell me, is this they you keep referring to?”

“Your wife.”

“Yes, I suppose she found it funny. I recall her laughing.”

“So, they found it funny?”

“Why do you keep referring to my wife as they?”

“Good Heavens, PROFESSOR, are you unaware that in this institution we have chosen to no longer use divisive pronouns such as he and she?”

“My wife is a she, and why would that be divisive? Who finds the pronouns he and she divisive?”

“Well, for one, the scholars of this institution; it is a decision that is fully supported by the administration, the teacher’s union, the LGBTQ community, Black Lives Matter, Antifa, WIFC, and the mighty AWMMD.Org.”

“All those wonderfully inclusive groups find the pronouns he and she to be divisive?”

“And offensive.”

“What, if you don’t mind me asking, is WIFC?”

“Women In Fear of Cats.”

“And, I’m sorry but what is *the mighty* AWMMD.org?”

“It is a fully-sanctioned college club: All White Males Must Die; they find the pronoun ‘he’ particularly offensive.”

“They find...? Look, I’ve had enough of this; may I borrow your gun? It’ll be just for a moment, and I’ll need only one bullet, if things go well. Please tell *them*, when you see her, that I love *them*.”

“What makes you think I have a gun?”

“Well, unless you have a gun, why would you expect me to put up with this absurdity? Furthermore, until you get a gun and you’re pointing it directly at my head, there is no way I will cooperate with such obtuse featherheaded ideas. So, if you’re through playing Inquisition, I’ll go home now and ask *them* if she thinks we should maybe get a gun to fend off the growing threat of rampant mindlessness.”

## *A PERSONAL NOTE* on GUN CONTROL

Sometime in the summer of 1968, I was standing on an 18 inch-wide catwalk, 35 feet in the air, spray painting structural steel, when a pickup truck came speeding into the building below, horn blaring. Billy stopped what he was doing and looked down. I looked down and almost fell.

Below, a couple of guys jumped from the truck, ran over to Ken-tuck and talked with him for a few seconds, before he looked up at us and hollered, “SHUT it DOWN!” “Why? What’s happening?” we shouted back. “Kerik is folding,” they all shouted.

We let down our equipment with ropes, tied off the catwalks, made our way down to the mill floor, piled into our trucks and sped off back to the warehouse.

One of the informants rode with us and, on the way there, explained that he’d seen some tax people go into the offices, along with Kerik accountants and lawyers. And, when they emerged a few minutes later, they were talking quietly among themselves. The gist of what he’d overheard was that Kerik would be paying off all the big guys they owed money to first.

When we arrived out front, there were pickup trucks all over the place, and good honest, trusting, hardworking, salt of the earth fellows gathering in clumps and talking animatedly. Billy told the guy who rode with us to go over and sit on the boss’ Buick and to not let ANYONE drive off with it. Then he went to his own truck in the parking lot and leaned in and took something from the glove compartment, which he shoved inside his overalls, under his belt.

Then Billy and Ken-tuck and ‘Guitar’—that’s what they called me, because of my long hair—went right into the office. The secretary seemed surprised to see us. “What’s this we hear about Kerik folding?” asked Billy. “Oh, that’s just...” she looked around behind herself, nodded ‘Yes’ emphatically, and continued loudly, “That’s just a rumor.” “Well,” said Billy, “we’d like to get paid.”

Right then a guy in an ill-fitting suit with a huge pot belly emerged from the inner offices and demanded, “What’s going on out here! I thought I told you to lock that door.” “We’d like to get paid,” said Billy. “Don’t you worry,” said the pregnant fellow, “everybody’s going to get paid.” “We want paid right now.” “You’ll be paid on the 15<sup>th</sup>, just like always,” he said calmly. “We want paid now,” said Ken-tuck, moving forward in a threatening manner.

The guy in the suit eyed him for a bit then said, “OK. I’ll go in and write you guys a check right now.” He asked the secretary, in a courteous whisper, to go over and lock the door; while she did that, he, smiling nicely, backed into the offices.

Ken-tuck sat on the secretary’s desk and I sat down in one of the chairs reserved for clients, and Billy paced around in front of the office door the guy had disappeared into.

After what felt like a very long time, the guy emerged with two checks and gave them to Billy and Ken-tuck.

“Here you go, fellahs,” he said, “everything we owe you.”

“Guitar too,” said Billy.

“What? I’m afraid I’m not sure I und...”

“Guitar,” said Billy, pointing to me. “He’s gonna want to be paid today too.”

“Oh. OK,” said the guy, “I see no reason why we can’t do that.” Smiling nicely again, he slipped back into the offices.

Shortly after, my former manager, Garret, appeared out of those offices, eyed us critically, spit on the carpet, and walked out through another door.

When the pregnant guy came out again he handed me a check; but when he started to go back into the office again, Ken-tuck blocked the door.

“Now,” said Billy, standing up and walking over to the man, “You’re gonna cash ‘em.”

“Now, boys, there’s no reason for that. Just take your checks to the bank in the morning and they’ll be glad to cash them for you.”

Billy looked at the guy; the guy looked at him. Ken-tuck stood there with his arm across the door, blocking his retreat.

“These checks are perfectly good. I assure you.”

Billy reached inside his overalls and revealed something to the guy. Only later did I learn it was the handle of a gun.

The guy in the suit, borrowed a pen from the secretary, asked us each to sign the back of our check, and went back into the offices. Shortly after, the boss’ son emerged, leaned against a wall with his hands behind his back, and stared at us.

After several minutes of loud voices from within, the guy came out again, said, "There's really no need for this," and counted out what was due to each of us, in cash, on the secretary's desk. "Lock that door again after they leave," he instructed someone, and stormed back into the inner offices.

We went outside and everybody in the parking lot looked to us. They wanted to know what had gone on in there. We said not a word. Ken-tuck made a gesture declaring, *It's every man for himself, boys*. Billy said to me, "Get your car, Guitar, and folly us, we gonna go spend some of this money while IT'S still good."

So, that's what I know about guns, from personal experience.

My father told me that after the liberation of Paris, the soldiers of his division were each given, in turn, a day off to go into town and try to forget about things for a brief moment. When it was his turn, my father went into the city and found a little bistro, walked straight up to the bar and ordered a beer.

When the beer was placed before him, he placed a single note on the counter. It was the smallest thing he had, the only thing he had, the equivalent of about one month's pay.

The French gentleman behind the bar made much of the fact that it was a big note, gesticulating wildly, rolling his eyes heavenward for help, and opening the till to reveal its lamentable emptiness. My father demonstrated that it was the only thing he had. So, the barkeep shrugged and, making a gesture suggesting that he might find change in the back, took the note and disappeared behind some curtains.

After finishing his beer, my father spoke to the guy behind the counter in his best French, asking for his change. Oh, but, he was sorry, this French gentleman, but he could not understand what the good American soldier was trying to say. Did he want another beer? Non? Well what could it be then? What could he possibly want?

My father, first in French and then in English, asked once again, politely, for the change. Oh, but, he did not understand, this poor French fellow; he could not decipher my father's French and, unfortunately, he did not speak English. He was sorry. Regret was written deeply into his sincerely furled face. He was very sorry, but he could not even guess what this American soldier was trying to communicate. Perhaps it was one of those small mysteries that must, alas, remain a mystery. He shrugged. He smiled. He began to walk away.

My father, having just been through months of unrelenting Hell, was wearing a side arm at the time, a 45 automatic. So, "just to clarify things" he thought he would take his side arm and lay it *gently* on the bar...a mere suggestion.

Of course, whatever your intentions, two pounds of cold steel hitting a marble countertop can make what my father called "a substantial clunk"—Clack!, as the French might say—and it raised a few eyebrows. Suddenly the place went dead silent.

As suddenly the barkeep remembered that Monsieur had not yet received his change. Oh la-la la-la! How could he have forgotten? He ran through the curtains and, returning as quickly as he departed, laid the change, apologetically, upon the counter.

That poor French man could not understand my father's French and, unfortunately, he did not understand English, but that handgun spoke a language he understood perfectly.

My father was 19 years old at the time, about the same age I was when the butt of Billy's handgun spoke on my behalf.

In both of those cases, no shots were fired, no one was injured, but justice was served. Without the presence of those handguns, decent men would have been screwed by people they had honestly served.

My father, of course, learned what he knew about gun control from *his* mother.

The only advice I can recall ever receiving from that excellent woman was as a little boy. I don't know what I was doing or what I had said, but she took me aside, placed a firm hand on my shoulder, bend down to look me in the eye, and told me sternly, "Say what you mean, and mean what you say."

Ever since that day, I have tried.

Concerning that advice, my father told me, "And she lived by that too; and, everybody knew it."

Then he told me this story:

"There was an 'Animal Control Officer'—a dog catcher—one time in our back yard. That was one of those appointed positions—he'd done somebody a political favor—and that gave him license to go around catching dogs and hauling them off to the pound. Then, the owner was forced to come in and bribe the scoundrel to get their dog back.

So, one time, my mother looked out the kitchen window and there was a man in a suit dragging our dog, by the collar, toward the alley. In the alley was a panel truck with the back doors wide open.

My mother went out onto the back step and said, ‘What are you doing with my dog?’ The man showed a badge and said, ‘I’m taking him in. So-and-so, down the street said your dog was on his property and tried to bite him.’

My mother said, ‘That dog has never left this property, and you’re not taking him anywhere.’

See, our dog had a long chain to his collar, and it didn’t reach beyond the edge of our property line.

‘Well, he’s going with me,’ said the man.

‘Wait, just a minute, please,’ said my mother, and she went back into the house. The man waited willingly of course, thinking he was about to be paid off.

When my mother emerged again she had a double aught six—a shotgun—cradled in her arms.”

I asked Dad, “Was that a single barrel or a double barrel shotgun?”

“No, it was double barrel,” he said.

“Oh, one of those things with two barrels side by side?”

“No,” he said, “over and under.”

Picturing my little old Grandmother standing on the back porch of her little house with that shotgun, I could not help but feel proud.

“So,” Dad continued, “my mother said, ‘You’re gonna chain that dog up just like you found him, and then you’re gonna get off my property.’ And the man did just that.

He had no doubt whatsoever that my mother meant every word she spoke. She'd always been that way."

"You're certainly that way," I observed.

"We're all that way," said my father.

So, what I've learned is that the mere presence of a gun can change things in a positive way. Years later, when I worked with an ex-Marine, in Del Mar, I learned something more.

Mike was a tough guy, who many people, for some reason, seemed to think was rude. On weekends, when the place where we worked was open until 2 AM, Mike would stick a handgun in his belt, in the center of his back. And, whenever someone came in who might mean trouble, he'd emerge from his office with his right hand tucked behind his back, resting upon the butt of that gun.

One time, a loud belligerent drunk came in and, thinking I was there alone, started to become threatening. From inside, Mike heard what was going on and, when he thought it had gone far enough, he came bursting out of his office with his hand tucked behind his back. The drunk looked at Mike, noted the hand behind his back and, guessing what that might mean, bowed, apologized to me, smiled at Mike, and quickly backed out the door.

"Mike," I said, "I don't think a gun was really necessary."

Mike said, "Me neither." As he turned to go back into his office, his hand was still tucked into his empty belt.

At times—this I can tell you first hand—just the implication that *there might be a gun present*, can quell a problem.

## ON THE OTHER HAND

Spring 1969, Richmond, Virginia.

Two young lovers taking a little ride out into the countryside, in a nifty old car. What could be nicer?

The road was a gentle roller coaster under the warm, softening tires of my old car. Windows open. Gentle breeze. Clouds, birds, a stream running along beside us for a bit before swerving off into the distance and disappearing between two lush green perky hills...that sort of thing. It's just Joanie and me and everything in nature that counts as good.

On that day, the full goodness of Life was in us like a rhythm.

A pickup truck passes by. I hardly notice it; I'm in love. She, a true Southern belle—gentle, soft spoken, and uncommonly lovely— doesn't notice it at all; ladies don't notice pick-up trucks with shotgun racks and leering rednecks. The truck slides up over the top of a rise, around the curve and out of sight. They have no part in our little world.

When we round that curve however I can see that same truck stopped up ahead. It's in the very middle of the road. I slow down as we approach it. What on earth would a pick-up truck be doing stopped right smack in the middle of a country road? "Do you think they're OK?" she asks. "Maybe we should stop and ask if they need help," she says.

I slow down to a crawl. This ain't right and my instincts are telling me so. My instincts are screaming at me. This ain't right, this ain't right. I notice that the driver of the truck is turned around in the seat, one arm thrown over the seatback,

grinning at us. The guy in the passenger seat is doing the same. Between these two leering jack-o-lanterns is a baby seat with a child in it. She's squirming, craning, trying to see what they're looking at. The driver continues to stare at us as we roll slowly toward them. He unconsciously reaches over and pats the little child on the head.

By this time we are maybe a dozen yards from them and I have come to a complete stop. Something is very seriously wrong here. I don't know what it is, but something is not right. Joanie is sitting bolt upright, "Do you think they need help?" The break in her voice tells me that she's hoping that's the case; she's hoping the matter's as simple as that.

The driver turns away for a second, and now his truck is coming at us in reverse. I can hear it whining as he accelerates. He's climbing on the accelerator. The truck is barreling toward us; it's fishtailing wildly. Both of these men are grinning at us as the truck slams into the front of my car. "Oh my God," screams Joanie. She can't believe this is happening.

My trusty old Peugeot has conked out from the impact.

The truck pulls forward about 20 feet, and suddenly he's coming at us again in reverse. I'm telling Joanie to brace herself for the next hit. Meanwhile I'm frantically trying to get the engine of my little car to turn over. Seconds before he hits us again, it starts. The collision takes place just as I throw it in reverse. The impact has the truck bouncing. Now, I'm backing up as quickly as I can away from him. Joanie is in tears, crying, "Oh God. Oh God. Dear God."

We've managed to put about 30 feet between us and them, when the Peugeot conks out again.

As I frantically work to get it started, I'm keeping my eye on them. The driver of the truck ruffles the hair of the child, reaches up and takes a shotgun down from the rack that hangs above the child's head. The passenger and the driver both get out of the truck; they're laughing as they pick up parts of my car—pieces of grill and trim from the headlights. They hold them up jokingly, victorious, and toss them into the back of their truck. Then the driver points the shotgun at us and, peering down its barrel, he begins slowly walking toward us.

I am praying as loudly and as quickly as any reprobate has ever prayed, "Dear God, help us. Dear God, help us. Dear God, please help us."

And God does help us.

The redneck moron bastard father idiot lowers his shot gun, laughs, spits in my direction, goes back to the cab, replaces his shotgun on the rack. His door closes—clunk. His buddy stares at us for a bit longer, then gets in the other side. His door closes—clunk. They drive off, with the child between them looking back at us.

What could be nicer than a little ride in the country around Richmond in the Spring?

For several months I refused to leave my loft, except to go to school. I sat up nights, keeping an eye on my car from my window. I was convinced that anyone crazy enough to attack us like that was crazy enough to come into town looking for us—or they might stumble across my car while driving through town, and new visions of glorious violence would open up before their eyes.

I'll tell you what I honestly believe.

I don't think God stepped in to save *our* lives that day. I think God stepped in to save the life of the lovely young woman beside me. I just happened to be in the right place to be saved along with her.

Ever since then I have made a point of seeking out, latching onto and, if not always remaining strictly devoted, at least remaining close to the finest, purest, and most wonderful women I could find.

And, that has really worked out pretty well. I now have the best wife any man has ever had—perhaps in the entire history of marriage—and, I'm as happy as a man of my peculiar temperament can possibly be.

Those idiots in that pick-up truck did me a favor.

It's never about the gun; it's about who's holding the gun.

WHY GOD GAVE US GUNS

## NEOCULTURE

## THE PRECISE MOMENT THINGS WENT WRONG

Dimmie had to sign for the envelope. He was delighted; he'd never had to sign for anything before. He told the mailman as much, but the mailman seemed somewhat less enthusiastic about the glorious event. Nonetheless, Dimmie signed with great joy and a flourish.

He thanked the mailman and went back inside, wondering what precious article could possibly require such security. Whatever it was, it must be something great—his mind was awash with thrilling possibilities, all of them grand, all of them vague. But quickly those possibilities were washed away by the very real fear that it could be something legal or from the government or, worse yet—and though he could not name one, at that moment, he was sure there must be some things which might be worse than receiving something legal or from the government.

With manful determination, accompanied by an unpleasant mix of fear and expectation, he tore open the envelope.

Inside he found another large envelope, addressed to him and, inside that one, a smaller, much more tasteful envelope with his name written upon it in an elegant hand. Upon seeing that, Dimmie concluded that it must contain very good news indeed. He liked the whole presentation of the thing—certified delivery, a fine envelope within an envelope, nicely, carefully, hand written.

He wanted to tear open the envelope but, instead, showing full appreciation for the obvious care the sender had taken, he went into his study and dug around in a drawer, among the

used batteries, paperclips, and rubber bands, to find the letter opener his Aunt Wilma had sent him on his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. It was a thing of beauty—brass, nicely balanced, leather-bound handle and, though not sharp, slick as a weasel.

Dimmie took the thing of beauty, inserted its tip under the edge of the flap, and theatrically slit the top edge of the envelope. It made such a sound, had such a feel to it, and produced such satisfying results, that he wondered why he had never used that wonderful letter opener before; in the very same breath he made a promise to himself to use it again as soon as any opportunity might present itself.

Dimmie extracted the contents.

It was a card with a pleasant drawing of a bird tweeting out a single melodic note on the cover, with these engraved words: “Just a note to tell you...”

Dimmie opened the card quickly and scanned the printed message inside, which read: “...that YOU are NOT invited to our Tuesday evening gathering to discuss ONENESS. An explanation followed: We believe it would be easier for us to achieve full diversity and inclusion if you were not to attend.” Scrawled below that was a scrawled addendum: “If you should show up, Dimmie, you will not be admitted.”

Dimmie—as Dumas would have it—collapsed into a chair as if felled by an axe. The card dropped from his hand to the floor. And, he found himself thinking back dreamily about those distant times when he used to think it was unnecessary cruelty for someone *not to invite him* to an event. Gosh, what an innocent world that had been.

## THE NEW UP AND DOWN

One day, an old white cisgender male—and it sickens me just to say those words—started to get on the elevator with me at the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor; and, as he stood there, stupidly blocking the door, he asked me, “Is this car (he called the little elevator room/box /passenger carrying/thingy a “car”)... Is this *car* going UP?”...just like that.

“Well, this *car*,” I said, “is going from here to the 16<sup>th</sup> floor, so, you decide.”

“That sounds like UP to me,” he said in that smug, chirpy, all-knowing manner such creatures unfailingly exude.

Just being informative, I said, “Well, personally, I see it as going *down*.”

I was very kind about it.

He seemed confused—surprise, surprise—as he carefully checked out all those buttons and, after looking up at those arrow-things, he said, “I think it’s going up.”

I said, “Well, you can think whatever you want, and you can get onboard or not, but make up your mind, old man.”

Naturally—just my luck—he got on and, as the doors closed behind him, he pushed 16...so, we were stuck on that ride together, the whole way.

As the elevator started to move, he verbally assaulted me, saying—very rudely, “I think we’re going *up*.”

I said, “Well, you can think whatever you want... just leave me alone.”

But, he did not leave me alone. When the doors opened on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor and another human being (thank gawd!) got on, the old man took the opportunity to say to that person, “This car is going up.”

He may claim to have said that to the person getting on, but zuh and I both knew it was directed *directly* at moi.

The new person looked at me, pushed the button for the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, and I rolled my eyes. “*HE*” I snorted, referring to the insufferable old man, “insists that we’re going *UP*.” I rolled my eyes toward the grace of heaven. “*He* thinks we should allow the elevator company to tell us all which way we’re going.” To which zuh smiled and nodded knowingly.

As the doors closed and we got underway, headed toward the 16<sup>th</sup> floor again, I’d had enough of that old man’s tyranny; and I felt I had to speak out against it. It was my truth against his. “Just because *some people* stubbornly cling to the archaic idea that going from the ground floor to the top floor is going UP, does not mean that ALL OF US must subscribe to that way of thinking. For me, and for many of us in the real world, going in that direction is going DOWN.”

“What?” asked the old man, and he laughed at me.

Thankfully, the human being understood; zuh winked.

That person, that hero, that voice of sanity in an increasingly insane little horribly confined world, very calmly addressed the old man saying, “Might I suggest to you, sir, that what you *choose* to call up, some people may *choose* to call down.”

The old male looked confused for a while, and then *he* laughed. “Up is up,” he quipped stubbornly, and *he* did not dare look at either one of us humans after saying it.

“Look, *Mister*” I said, “I don’t choose to call going from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor—which I am doing—to the 16<sup>th</sup> floor, which I am doing, ‘Going UP’, I CHOOSE to call it going DOWN; that’s my view, that’s my choice and I have that right.

You, SIR, can call it whatever you like but, for me, it's going DOWN!" I had really had enough of that unbearable old man. "I honestly don't understand what you're saying," *he* said. "Nothing could be more obvious," I said.

At that very point my hero stepped in again, heroically trying to explain calmly what I was attempting to get into the thick head of that horrible, belligerent old creature.

"What is up, and what is down is a personal choice," my dear savior explained. "It's a personal choice; that's all. If you see going from where you got on to a floor with a higher number, as going up, that's OK; our friend here sees it as going down. It's each person's private and personal choice."

"WHAT?!" said the old man laughing cruelly. "UP is UP, and down is down, and that's all there is to it."

"No," explained the voice of reason again, nicely, "For you, it may appear to be that way, others may see it differently; up and down are not the only choices we have."

"I honestly don't understand a single word you're saying," the old man said. "My god," *he* said, shaking his head.

And, at that point, I just lost it. I'd had enough of his stupid belligerence. I lunged at him; cornered him, bent down to look him right in his old-white-man eyes and I screamed, "YOU DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND! It's MY REALITY, not yours."

A gentle hand on my shoulder guided me to the opposite corner of our little private box-like Hell, and my hero spoke again to the vile old bastard.

"Perhaps, in the past, as far as your limited imagination would allow, the idea that we are going up right now made sense, but, today, it's not that simple. For our fellow passenger here—the hero gestured toward me—what you call up is not

what zuh calls up. For zuh, it's down. You really should try to accept that. I think you find it more comfortable if you do."

In response, the old man pushed a button, the elevator arrived at a floor—I don't even know which floor it was—the doors opened and he (thanks be to GAWD in heaven) stepped out.

Standing in the doorway, blocking it open with his veiny old hand, *he* took the opportunity to take one final shot at me. He looked me right in the eye and said, "You goddamned people are ALL out of your fucking minds."

Those were his exact words.

OMG! We laughed so hard.

As we continued on our way to the top floor, I think my new friend and I both thought the same thing: Yes, someone here was definitely out of *his* mind, but, it wasn't either of us.

When the door opened on 12, the only rational person I'd met on that trip got out and said, "Don't let 'em get to you."

A few minutes later, as I was getting out on the tippy-top floor, someone getting on cleverly asked, "Going up?"

"I don't know anymore," I said, "apparently *I'm* confused."

At least that is what *some people* would have us believe.

## THE SWEDES' IRRATIONAL FEAR

My truly wonderful wife and I had been watching this Swedish murder mystery series for a couple weeks when this occurred. The bad guy knocked the lead detective over the head, stuck him in a coffin, and was in the process of burying him alive, when my truly excellent wife turned to me and said, "Look at how shallow that grave is."

"Yeah," I said, "I'm pretty sure that grave doesn't meet legal requirements. That guy's gonna be in real trouble if the local authorities ever discover the way he did that."

"The Swedes must have a real fear of being buried alive;" she observed, "this is the second Swedish murder mystery in which someone is being buried alive."

"Yeah," I said, "the Swedes have always had an irrational fear of being buried alive," I mused. "Here in America some stupid bastard threatens to bury us alive, we just shrug it off. 'Go ahead, Jackass, bury me alive; see if I care; you'd be doing me a favor. I slog my way through worse things than being buried alive every day of my goddamned life.'"

My father's generation would have said: "Wait, you're not planning to use that garden spade to dig my grave are you? For god's sake, I have a good shovel in the garage; let me go get that for you; I think you'll find it more suited to digging in this soil."

Kids these days play video games every minute of every day, where people are disemboweled, set on fire, and buried alive, without batting an eye. But mention the word Bumpy to them, and they curl up in a ball, begin shaking uncontrollably, and whimper like blind puppies who can't find their way back to their mother's teat.

I honestly do not know what to make of that.

## VIDEO PROOF

Not too long ago and somewhere else, not here, a screaming woman stepped up to a man and hit him, right in the face; it was all captured on video. What didn't show on that tape was the event that lead up to that punch in the face.

Moments earlier, the man had inadvertently stepped on the woman's shadow, and after mumbling, "Oh, I'm sorry," went on his way. She followed him, screeching, "Excuse me, sir! Excuse me, sir!" When he turned to face her, she smacked him; full-fist, one good shot, right in the face, and he went down. While he struggled to his feet, she continued screaming obscenities at him.

That was all on the video.

Then, the woman turned to the person recording all this and said, "Did you see that? Did you get that? That (.....) man assaulted me! Can you send me a copy of that?"

So then, instantly, that nation was divided.

People who had been there took sides; people who had not been there took sides; people who saw the video took sides; people who never saw the video—but only heard about the thing from an associate while eating lunch—took sides, and they all dug in. Whatever side they took their response to anyone who took any other side was always the same: "Did you see the video?" Apparently the video was all the proof anyone needed to prove any side they took on that matter.

And then, because one of those two people involved was black and the other white... I don't even need to say it, do I?

You could play that video a thousand times and some people would still claim that the man had assaulted the woman. Others, who had watched it a thousand times, would claim that it showed the exact opposite.

One poor fool—who had been there at the scene and had witnessed the occurrence—made the mistake of saying that the video did not accurately portray the event. Naturally, of course, both sides latched on to that statement as additional proof that their view was correct; and, although it did not change one single mind, some death threats were also made against that poor fool—but only a dozen or so. As things were in that weird world, those death threats came from both sides.

At this point, you know as much about the matter as anyone else; so, you decide. And, don't forget to tweet. If enough people tweet about it, that poor woman may end up on Victim-Célèbre, the new fun gameshow that's sweeping the internet, entrancing a nation, and comforting the self-abused.

“Hey, hey, hey; welcome to VICTIM-CÉLÈBRE; it's Friday, so, you know what that means; whoever wins today will transfix the nation for nearly **four full days** before we meet again to select a NEW VICTIM-CÉLÈBRE!

Let me explain how the game works, for any of you who are not on internet life-support—then we'll meet our contestants. Each of our three contestants are here to tell us how they've been abused, ignored, oppressed, insulted, assaulted, denied, offended, persecuted, prosecuted, or had their feelings hurt, and how that has affected their lives. Then by answering a few questions, they'll compete for tweets, with the hope of becoming our NEW VICTIM-CÉLÈBRE!

That contestant, who comes closest to being offended by the slightest hint of the implication of an insinuation, will garner the most tweets, be our winner, and hold the title of Victim-Célèbre until our next show airs and three new contestants vie for the right to be named our VICTIM-CÉLÈBRE!

Our current Victim-Célèbre, Justin Jason Sean is standing by hoping to win another four days, should none of our guests get sufficient tweetage. If you recall, when Justin witnessed an old white male opening the car door for his wife, both his instincts and his training were uh-mediately called into play. He confronted the offender, saying. “Do you have any idea what you just did?” And when that old male played innocent, our hero properly instructed him... What did you tell him Justin?”

“I said, ‘She’s not your puppet, Dude!’”

“OK, it time for you to fade away, as we try to find a new VICTIM-CÉLÈBRE! So, let’s meet this week’s contestants.

Contestant number one—a victim of tremendous, crushing, racial oppression—made only \$12 million last season, while sitting on the bench, with a major football team... I think you may have actually played in a game that year; am I correct, Newel? No? Well, but that only adds to the chance that YOU will be our *next* Victim-Célèbre. Contestant number one, everybody: Newel Posit. We’ll hear more about his truly heartbreaking story as the game goes on. For now, let me introduce our other contestants.

Contestant number two suffers because, though he is a long-standing and highly honored member of Congress and, by strange circumstance, a ranking member on the Ways and

Means Committee, he has recently been publicly criticized for not paying taxes over the past 17 years. Welcome, Congressman Smugg. If you don't mind, I'll be keeping one hand on my wallet... just a little joke... I know it's useless.

Contestant number three is a Muslim... and a female, and black as well; so she really needs no further introduction. If she walked with a limp, we'd just fold up camp right now.

Let's begin the game with contestant number one. Number One, if, in your wildest imagination, you could come up with only *one* other reason—and we know that this is asking a lot of you, after all that you've been through—but, IF you could come up with *any other reason*—other than blatant racism of course—*why* you no longer find yourself employed by any team in professional football, what would your guess be? Well, I see our contestant has taken a knee. Let's give him the respect and the silence anyone who does that deserves.

Congressman Smugg, here's an easy question for you. If there was \$10 in a cookie jar, how much money could you take out of that jar, regularly, on a daily basis, without anyone finding out?"

"Hell, Bill, I suppose thirty or forty dollars, tops."

"Each day, Congressman."

"Oh, huh... I see what you mean; that's trickier than I thought ... So, let me say—every day—no more than \$20."

"Thank you. Is it OK for me to ask a follow-up question?"

"Sure; shoot."

"What if, while reaching into that cookie jar, you somehow dropped a nickel of your own in there?"

"My own?"

"Your money, Congressman."

“A nickel?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, well see then, that’s another matter. If it was just the taxpayers’ money I wouldn’t mind so much...”

“Since we’ve got you here, Congressman, what do you make of all those silly, nit-picky, tax paying citizens who constantly exhume the ridiculous idea that members of congress, like yourself, should pay their taxes, just like everybody else?

“Now, that’s an easy ‘un, Bill.”

“So what do you say about that?”

“Well, Bill, though I don’t really see the necessity to answer such an absurd and naïve question, I welcome the opportunity. So, I’d like to say that it’s—and I think you’d agree with me, Bill—simply preposterous to think that anyone who knows anything at all about our political system, and the way it works, would even consider bring up such an issue; it’s just so insignificant, when weighed against the contribution we in governmental service provide, unselfishly, year in and year out, throughout our long careers, going quietly about the onerous task of overseeing those vital matters that keep the ship of State afloat and steaming steadily forward, with our only concern—that being for the welfare of every single citizen—firmly fixed, in our minds, and always in view. I’d like to think that anyone who so casually tosses about such accusations, raising concerns about my personal finances and carelessly slandering my reputation, along with that of my family—my wife, my children, our dog—would think about the harm that they are also doing to the noble history of this nation in which we all live out our privileged lives, before causing further harm by the unfair and thoughtless broadcast of such spurious and wholly unfounded allegations against a man who has given his entire career etcetera and so forth.

I have more to say about that but I am just too upset to go on at this moment. I am very upset, Bill... very upset indeed.”

“I can see that you are.”

“Well, I just find it so upsetting to see that this issue has come up again, or, for that matter, that it should ever come up, but especially, somewhat conveniently for my enemies, at the very time when my re-election committee is just beginning to explore the possibility of my return again to Congress, where I might have the honor, the privilege and, most importantly, the grave responsibility, to proudly representing, still/once more the very people who seem somehow to find it in themselves to selfishly and carelessly... etcetera and so forth. I’m sure you must know what I am trying to say, Bill.”

“I think we all know exactly how you feel, Congressman.”

“I’m simply too upset to frame my thoughts in a way that will truly express the pain, the, the... well, you see what I mean.”

“Thank you Congressman, Smugg. Now, contestant number three—as a Muslim, you’ve got every single person in this country walking on eggshells rather than offend you in any way whatsoever, and yet you have *still* managed somehow to find offense somewhere in all of that. We have to admire your diligence. I can see that you have been given several honorary degrees, for your great contribution to *our* education. We all thank you. And because I have no doubt that what brings you here today must be terribly disheartening, we don’t even need to hear it; I’m sure we can all imagine what it must be like to suffer as you do. So, don’t say a word. Please, don’t say a thing. I want to personally offer you this hope though—you **COULD BE** our *next* VICTIM-CELEBRE!

We’ll return for more Victim-Célèbre! after this message from one of our sponsors.”

Have you ever had an independent thought? Well, if you have, then you know just how troublesome thinking for yourself can be; it can be upsetting; worse yet, at times it's downright distracting. And, if you're like the rest of us, you really don't need any more distraction in your life.

Of course, like facts, thinking often gets in the way of even your strongest political convictions; and nobody needs that.

So, if you ever find yourself thinking about things, instead of simply regurgitating formulaic dogma, maybe it's time to ask your pharmacist about *Vacuity*™.

*Vacuity* is a thought suppressant that won't get in the way of your political commitments. With *Vacuity*, you'll be back out there on the streets in no time, sputtering vitriolic doctrine, gathering signatures, and, when called upon, kicking ass!

*Vacuity is most commonly used to instill conviction without any unnecessary doubt. Side effects may include stupidity, unprovoked rage, a tendency to continually and repeatedly make unfounded accusations, as well as a tendency to stick stubbornly to assumptions despite any amount of contrary information you may be exposed to. Superior feelings have been known to happen.*

*If you experience any of these things while taking Vacuity, see your pharmacist uh-mediately, you're on the right track, but he may suggest a larger dose.*

*And, if you can't afford to pay for your *Vacuity* prescription, don't worry someone who pays full price will pick up the difference.*

## A DELIGHTFUL DAY by Jackson Lee

"I've read your book—A DELIGHTFUL DAY—Mr. Lee."

"Oh, good. Thank you. What did you think?"

"Well, it gave me a lot to think about."

"It did? Well, uh... great."

"The title alone is quite revealing, isn't it?"

"Revealing? Well it's a children's book; it's written for children."

"Yes, and when you wrote this book—for children—did you consider that this day, this *delightful day* is, perhaps, not so *delightful* for many children?"

"I did... I mean, the intent of the book was to bring the child's attention to some of the nicer things in their world."

"In *THEIR* world? I think you mean in *YOUR* world, Mr. Lee, but let's just move on. I can see already that this is going to be a difficult interview!"

"Uh... I'm sorry, I don't understand..."

"That, Mr. Lee has been obvious to me from the beginning. But, let's just move on. We'll skip right over the logo of the smiling, tubby little Teddy Bear and the tearful, anorexic giraffe snuggling up nicely to one another under a shared umbrella, and go directly to the very first sentence in your little book—A DE-LIGHTFUL Day—for children. 'Mom was in the kitchen.' What do you have to say about that?"

"What do I have to say about 'Mom was in the kitchen'?"

"Well, let me put it to you more simply, MISTER Lee. Do you honestly believe that every DE-LIGHTFUL day begins with a MOM in the kitchen... Is that the ideal...the way *you* think it should be, throughout the world?"

"Uh, I... I am truly sorry but, I don't understand..."

"Let me put it to you another way then. In *YOUR* world, Mister Lee—*great writer of children's books that you are—*

are all the lovely sparkly little kitchens, in all the pretty little houses, occupied by MOM, every morning, busy as a bee, first thing in the morning, every DE-LIGHTFUL day?"

"Is every kitchen...?"

"...occupied by a 'MOM'..."

"...occupied by a Mom..."

"...throughout the known world,"

"... throughout the world..."

"...every morning?"

"...every morning?"

"It's a simple question. Is every delightful kitchen in your ethnocentric little xenophobic world occupied by a lovely, tidily dressed mom, in an apron no doubt, humming little show tunes to herself, as she prepares a sumptuous breakfast for her delightful little offspring?"

"No. But, in my *little book* Mom IS in the kitchen. That's just the beginning."

"Oh, I'm sure it is."

"Do you see something wrong with a Mom in the kitchen?"

"Well, ha-ha, Mister Lee; let me ask you this: Could that 'Mom' not be in a boardroom, or sitting astride a rocket sled, preparing to be one of the next brave multicultural crew members destined to go into space, or secluded in a room, leaning over her desk, working out a way to create new and renewable energy sources, or a critic of children's literature?"

"Well, I guess she could, but then she wouldn't be in the kitchen to prepare a good breakfast for her children, and my book would have begun: 'Mom was elsewhere, doing other things, and so the kitchen was quiet, cold and empty, when the children got up that day'."

"Very clever."

"I think so... you know, for a spontaneous reaction."

"Let's talk a bit more about 'Mom' shall we?"

“Sure, why not?”

“I’m curious—as I’m sure all my viewers are—about this ‘Mom’ figure.”

“She’s not a ‘Mom-figure’, she’s a real mom.”

“OK then, let’s talk about her as if she is ‘just a mom’. In your book, she appears to be white.”

“Yes, in my book Mom is white; there are some white moms in this world; she’s one of them.”

“And I noticed that all of her children appear to be white.”

“All of her children ARE white; they each came from that woman.”

“So, we must assume that the father is white as well?”

“I would assume so; that’s not unusual.”

“Oh, but it *would be* UNUSUAL if the father were of a different race? Is that what you are saying, MISTER Lee?”

“You know, can we take a break?”

“You want to stop taping?”

“Not all together, but can we, please, take a little break?”

“OK.”

“Are you OK, Mr. Lee? You’re all red.”

“Well, I’m a little upset.”

“I can see that. But, there’s no reason to be upset. I think the interview is going along quite nicely.”

“Nicely? I feel like I’m being skewered; like, I’m out there defending myself against an onslaught.”

“Oh my goodness, Mr. Lee, **I** felt like *your* relentless attacks upon me were getting way too out of hand. That’s why I suggested we take a little break.”

“You suggested we take a break?”

“Yes, don’t you remember?”

“YOU suggested that we take a break?”

“Well, how do you see it?”

“YOU suggested that we should take a break?”

“Why don’t you have a little water, calm yourself and, when you’re ready, we’ll go back on set and give it another try OK? But, try to calm down; it’s just an interview.”

“Now, we’re back; we were discussing Jackson Lee’s new book for children, *A DELIGHTFUL DAY*. For a while there it looked like we were never going to get past the first page. Mr. Lee seemed to want to make sure that he got a certain point across before we got any deeper into his book. What was your point, Mr. Lee?”

“My point?”

“Yes, you seemed set on making a specific point, when we went to break. Wait, before you speak to that, let me make it clear, I am not insinuating, by this question—which you refuse to answer, for some strange reason—that your little book is peppered throughout with suggestive images and disturbing hidden messages; it’s not.”

“It isn’t!”

“Yes, that’s what I just said. Your book is NOT peppered throughout with clever little vile messages. I don’t know why you’re getting so upset. If I thought that the thing had *racist* undertones or somehow revealed a deep and truly disturbing psychosis concerning sexual preferences—other than the single one which you personally find acceptable—I’d simply say that. But I’m not saying that. I’m not saying that this is a dangerous and somewhat frightening read, designed to pollute open, accepting little minds. That is not what I’m saying.”

“What are you saying then?”

“Well, let’s go back—not just to the beginning of this trying interview, but even before your arrival here, like a king, at our lucky-to-have-*you*, humble little studio. Even back before that; when you wrote me saying, “Thanks for the invitation”.

Did you honestly believe that I was asking you here for something *more than* just an interview? I mean do you think that by putting it in print that way, it could later be used as evidence that my ‘in-vi-tation’ to you was also license to do whatever you might want with me after this interview concludes? Did you honestly think that? Did you think that would hold up in a court of law?”

“Uh...”

“Oh come on now! MIS-TER LEE, I’m not just some naïve little Public Access talk show host that you can manipulate and take advantage of. I’m a tenured Professor of Literature and Gender Grievance Studies at an established, highly respected, educational institution, and I deal with people like you every day. You, on the other hand, are a writer of ONE little, wholly insignificant, children’s book and, apparently, inclined to see things that are not there. If I read your little book correctly—and I think I have the ability to delve into the depths of your sick and shallow mind—you have a tendency to look for reasons to be offended; you have the ability to take the simplest thing and twist it into a political statement.

You’re always on the attack, Mr. Lee. Why is that? Are you people ever going to learn to relax? It’s just so ironic that YOU should write a children’s book about a *Delightful Day*, when you live such a tiny little dark and twisted life. You should take your own advice, Mr. Lee... Or better yet, take mine. Everything on earth is not political! Go out and enjoy the day for a change. Instead of making laughingly blatant attempts to indoctrinate our children, why not go out, look around, and see what the world has to offer. Smile for a change, instead of filling your hours inventing new ways to fill our children’s eager, trusting, ever hopeful, minds with ideological crap. Government isn’t the answer to everything.”

“Who said anything about government? I’m sorry but...”

“Oh, Mister Lee, don’t be sorry. Don’t be sorry, Mr. Lee. Why are you apologizing to me—you should apologize to anyone who bought that so-called book of yours. Apologize to them. Beside, you would feel no need to apologize if you honestly felt that what you have said in that book of yours is not offensive.”

“Can we take another break?”

“Oh, poor Mr. Lee! Are you suffering? Are you feeling a little angst over some silly perceived persecution? Let me comfort you; you are not being persecuted, Mr. Lee. Far from it; you are being praised for your good work—isn’t that what you’re after? I want all of my listeners to know what’s in your little book... Isn’t that what you’re here for? Where are you going? Hey, get back here. You come right back here! My god, he’s touchy; why are people like that always so touchy? I was only playing around. Some people have no sense of humor. It’s unbelievable to me to think that someone like that believes he is in the position to teach our children anything.”

## RATS in the BASEMENT

One day, Dimmie Snorte discovered rats in his basement; they had already caused a LOT of damage. Some things of real value had been eaten; old video game consoles and comic books and thousands and thousands of photographs of Dimmie, which his divorced mother had taken of him from the moment her divorce was final until the day he left home, at the tender age of 42. It really looked as if those rats didn't care—and, let's be honest, there was a foul smell down there as well. "Oh, my gosh," Dimmie thought, "there are rats in my basement, what should I do?"

He ran upstairs and told his sister, Debbi Snorte—who studied yoga to calm the whirlwind in her mind—"There are rats in our basement, what should we do?"

Debbi looked up with the gaze of one who truly understands certain specific unspecified things which the rest of us could never possibly be expected to grasp, sighed and said, breathily but somewhat mechanically, "There is no reason I can see why we should not welcome rats into our basement."

Dimmie—the perfect 21<sup>st</sup> Century American male; arrogant and sheepish, stubborn and compliant, with heavily calloused thumbs—said, "Huh?"

Debbi—the perfect 21<sup>st</sup> Century American female; a natural-born self-absorbed leader, perpetually aware of the endless oppression she suffered, flighty and stern—knew that this situation required a lecture. Knowing that Dimmie was not always eager to have wisdom beaten into him, Debbi sighed. "There is," she began, "no more difference between those rats and us, than there is between males and females. AND, while we're at it, when are you going to change the oil in the SUV?"

Dimmie thought about that (the rats, not the car.)

Though it is undeniably true that there is no difference whatsoever between males and females, he still kinda thought ... well, he *felt*, really... that there was maybe kind of a difference between himself and those rats.

“Do you honestly believe,” asked Debbi, interrupting his thoughts, “that rat culture... the values those rats hold dear and live by... is inferior in any way to *our* so-called culture?” Her accusatory tone made Dimmie feel very small indeed. Oh, how on earth had he ever sunk so low?

Debbi was right, of course. What on earth made him think that their way of living; standing upright in clothes, eating with a fork, working for a living in order to pay off a mortgage, was in any way superior to gnawing a hole through someone’s basement wall, eating electrical wiring and old copies of Rolling Stone, reproducing in a corner behind the stairs, and leaving ‘evidence’ of their culture all over the basement floor? Was that really so different from the way he and his sister Debbi conducted their lives?

“My gosh,” he thought, “no wonder they gnawed on my stuff. It was *I* who imposed upon *their* sanctuary. Which of us, after all, is the real intruder here... that guy who pays the mortgage, the utility bills, and maintains the building inside and out, or those poor rats who only wish to be left alone, steeped in their own values, to live in peace?

“Thank you, Debbi,” said Dimmie quietly, “at last I think I understand.”

“Well,” said she, somewhat snappishly, “I really wonder what you are thinking at times, Dimmie.”

“I guess I wasn’t really thinking at all,” he admitted.

## THE INTERVIEW THAT CHANGED THINGS

Coach Derek Shivers had just been awarded the most highly coveted honor of being named Coach of the Century; he'd taken so many teams to so many championships over so many decades that the award had become inevitable. And so, you know, there he was, LIVE, on every mode of sports media available, being interviewed by one of THE most famous players that EVER touched that big round ball, one of his own, of course, one of the GREAT PLAYERS of the game—arguably the best who ever played—who Shivers had coached throughout his career, Reggie 'Free-Flight' Betts.

Let's look in, once again, on that interview and see what it reveals. Derek Shivers is sitting in a metal folding chair on the side of the court, holding a big golden trophy in his lap. He looks stunned; he's grinning widely and, if I'm not mistaken, those are tears in his eyes. After shaking his hand and patting him on the back, and leaning over to give Coach Shivers an awkward hug, Reggie 'Free-Flight' Betts takes a folding chair opposite, nods for a while, grinning and, if I'm not mistaken, there is love for the man in his eyes. Let's listen.

Reggie Betts: You did it, man! You did it! Finally, after all this time, you *finally* get the recognition you deserve, and here you are, Coach of the Century! You deserve it, man, for all that you've done; for the game, for the many teams and countless players that you've steered to greatness, for all of us who you taught, not just to play the game, but how to be *real* in life, we all thank you. And, of course, Coach, I thank you for helping me personally to become the player that I could only have become with your guidance...thank you, Coach.

Derek Shivers: Thanks, Reggie; it's been an honor for me to find myself, throughout my career, surrounded with such talent, and so many guys with the irrepressible desire to win, that...well, you know, I really owe it all to you, the players.

Reggie Betts (jokingly): Yes, you do. Yes you do.

Derek Shivers: No, but I'm serious.

Reggie Betts: Me too, Coach.

Derek Shivers: Uh...

Reggie Betts: You got somethin' to say, Coach?

Derek Shivers: Well, it's quite an honor...

Reggie Betts: Yes, it is. You were saying something about us players...

Derek Shivers: Well, I was saying that without players like you, Reggie, of course, and, well, it would be impossible for me to name all the greats that have played under me...you know. But, it has been a real blessing for me to find myself surrounded with such talent.

Reggie Betts: Surrounded? You really feel that way, Coach? You feel like you're surrounded? How long have you been feeling that way, Coach?

Derek Shivers: Uh...

Reggie Betts: Nah, man, I'm just fuckin' with you; don't worry about that. I'm just yankin' you around a little bit; that's something we do; you know that. You've had *enough* great players playing *under* you, that you know how we are.

Derek Shivers: Reggie, I...

Reggie Betts: You what?

Derek Shivers: I...

Reggie Betts: Spit it out, Coach! You what? What is it you're trying to say?

Derek Shivers: This has turned a little ugly, Reg.

Reggie Betts: Oh, has it? It's turned ugly for you, after years and years of having us greats *surrounding* you, playing *under*

you, winning *you* titles and awards. I guess you were under tremendous pressure *surrounded* as you were for all those years, and unable to utter the *one word* that expresses how you truly felt about us.”

Derek Shivers: That’s unfair. It’s untrue, and I’m really surprised to see this coming from you, Reggie. It’s not right, and you know me well enough to know that it’s not right.

Reggie Betts: Oh, come-on now, COACH! You’re telling me you didn’t spend your entire career suppressing that single thought?

Derek Shivers: I did not.

Reggie Betts: You never even *thought* that word?

Derek Shivers: Well, it was pretty much impossible to avoid, with you guys throwing it around constantly; it was part of the environment; it was like the air around us, and you expect me to *not* take it in?

Reggie Betts: Oh, so, now it’s *our* fault that you’re a racist?

Derek Shivers: Wow! You’re calling me a racist?

Reggie Betts: I’m just sayin’, you know, that by virtue of being a white male you have always had the privilege of doing what us lowly players don’t have the privilege of.

Derek Shivers: You don’t know what you’re talking about.

Reggie Betts: Oh, don’t I? I know *exactly* what I am talking about, and you do too. I’m talking about white privilege.”

Derek Shivers: How many years have you known me, Reg?

Reggie Betts: How long have I known you?

Derek Shivers: How many years have you known me?

Reggie Betts: What’s that have to do with anything, man? I’ve know you long enough to know what’s on your ugly old white supremacist mind; that’s how long I’ve known you.”

Derek Shivers: You’ve known me all these years, and you don’t know that my father was black?

Reggie Betts: Oh... what? Your father was...

Derek Shivers: My father was black.

Reggie Betts: Huh. Well, then... congratulations, BROTHER!

### **H H, FIRST N-CEO, and a man of his word**

Of course, undocumented residents had been working in the public sector in California for years when Hector Morales Cortes Avila Hernandez became Mayor of San Francisco. But HH was the first N-CEO (Non-Citizen Elected Official) in the United States. In his inaugural speech HH said, “We, the Non-Citizens of this great city are not, by nature, a vindictive people...” then he winked. And the celebration began!

When HH winked, everybody in the joyous throng laughed, because they remembered what he’d said in every campaign speech: “You know, I can’t help but notice that certain POC are ‘disproportionally represented’ in our jails and prisons. If you elect me, I promise to create a more diversified and much more inclusive prison population.”

Uh-mediatey upon taking office HH set out to fulfill that promise; DWW (driving while white) stops, arrests, and convictions began to escalate exponentially. The people of San Francisco—citizens, N-Cs, guests of the State—loved it. Finally, they’d gotten a Mayor with a sense of humor.

## KFB-37b MAKES IT BIG on EARTH

“Say, Brut-zorn, did you hear about KFB-37b?”

“Hearing that voliperate’s name sickens me.”

“But, somethin’ really weird happened...”

“Just the thought of that idiot makes me laugh.”

“You can stop laughin’ now, Brut-z, because he made it big.”

“Not in this universe!”

“No, not in this universe, but in a galaxy not too far away.”

“We’re talkin’ about the same guy... that 37b moron we tied, gagged, loaded, and shot out into space?”

“The same. He ended up on some planet, in some other star system, where they think he’s some kind of a genius.”

“Nah, I don’t believe that. I refuse to believe it.”

“S’ true.”

“We shoot the stupidest spawn-of-a-rundner that has ever voliperated on this planet out into space, and he lands on a planet, somewhere, where *they* think *he*’s a genius? I am incapable of believing that; my trob-receptors are burning.”

“No, really, they think he’s an eppiglian genius. He’s got ‘em all under ni-Rn control.”

“*He* has *them* under ni-Rn control? Come-on, Schnoidle, you must be pulling one of my many vestigial legs... for which I can neither find shoes nor gloves to fit.”

“I am not pulling any of your vestigials, Brut-z; not one.”

“He’s controlling them all through a simple ni-Rn?”

“Well, not all of ‘em, but quite a few; and the rest are starting to fall in line.”

“Yeah, OK, sure. I still don’t believe it. You’re trobing me. You are telling me that 37b has somehow convinced *sentient beings*, on some planet far far away, that he, himself is capable of thought.”

“And, he’s got them doing things.”

“How do you know all this?”

“The guys down at the u-port picked it up an idle wave.”

“So, what do *the guys down at the u-port* say? The stupidest spawn-of-a-rundner that ever voliperated on this planet—and often backward, by the way—who we wished good luck to, more than a furdlick ago, and shot out into space just to shut him up and be rid of him—lands on some planet where the poor creatures are stupider than he is... and what?”

“First, as a kinda test, he launched this thing called bitcoin.”

“What’s bitcoin?”

“It’s a cryptocurrency.”

“What’s a cryptocurrency?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, explain it to me.”

“I can’t.”

“Well, what do *the guys down at the u-port* say it is?

“The guys down at the u-port say they don’t know either... AND—here’s the weird part—KFB-37b doesn’t even know; it was something he just made up to see how pliable those beings were. He wanted to see if he could ni-Rn ‘em.”

“He doesn’t know, himself, what this bitcoin thing is?”

“No, nobody on that planet knows anything at all about it, but they all bought into it; they all want it, they feel they may need it... you know, sometime in the fuuuuuuuuuu-ture.”

“Wow. Maybe he’s smarter than we thought he was. Just made it up out of nothing, and they all jumped on board?”

“Yep. And he’s making buckets of bangum.”

“So, now, what’s he up to?”

“He wanted to see how far he could take that bitcoin first.”

“Yeah... and so?”

“Well now, he’s got ‘em considering Socialism.”

“And up here, we can’t even bind our vestigials.”

## I WALK ALONE

“You’re frightening him!” his mother wailed.  
“Nonsense,” I shot back, perhaps a bit cruelly.  
She struggled, trying to free herself from her bindings, in order to save her precious son. Meanwhile, he, a child of 37 and as arrogant as any young godling could be, glared at me.  
“Why are you so cruel?” his mother wailed.

I am not cruel by nature; but, if I was going to be accused of cruelty, I might as well live up to the accusation. So, I came up with the cruelest thing I could possibly think of, and I leaned toward the young fellow, and I looked him right in the eye, and I sneered. “You know those 37000 *followers* of yours on Facebook? They’re not 37000 people who are interested in what *you* think,” I hissed, “They’re 37000 people who assume that *you*, godling, are desperate to hear everything *they* think.” His mother shrieked, “YOU’RE HURTING HIM!”

I ignored her, only leaned in closer and whispered into his ear, “That must be heartbreaking news to you, godling.”  
“Oh God!” his mother wailed. “Please stop...”  
But, I’d come this far and I wasn’t stopping. At that point I’d taken a liking to the word, godling, and was kind of enjoying the cruelty just a bit as well.  
“Let me tell you something about Socialism...” I began.

“Leave him alone!” she demanded, “You’re hurting him!”  
I snorted. “I am not hurting him.”  
“You’re making him think!” she wailed.  
“Believe me, lady,” I snarled, “I am not making him think.”  
“Yes, you are; you’re trying to make him think.”  
Actually, when she said that, *I* began to think.

With the godling glaring at me, and his mother sobbing uncontrollably in the background, I found myself wondering how it had come to this; how had I become the monster that I had become? I must have been triggered.

It could only be that.

I was triggered.

Good heavens, what a relief! I was not responsible for my actions; something someone said or did had triggered this behavior. None of what I was doing was my fault; it was all the fault of someone else. I cannot tell you what a comfort it was to discover that. I bet the constant influx of pure, uncut idiocy from every quarter, every minute of every day, had set me up for it. In my more reasonable past, I might have simply shrugged it off, saying, “My God, those people are all idiots.” But, somewhere along the line I’d become vulnerable.

As far as I could tell, I had done everything in the world a reasonable man could do to avoid entanglement; I paced, I cussed, I ranted, I raved, I threw things. But, now that I’d been triggered, I began to wonder what had triggered me. Had I become a victim of *victimhood*?... of... *thought-shaming*?

Either way, prior to kidnapping a mother and her 37 year-old godling son and tying them up in my basement, I wouldn’t have even considered such a thing; it never would have occurred to me. Until—I vaguely recalled my dear wife telling me that some puffy-faced little woman on TV was being assaulted ‘all over socialist media’, for preparing Mexican food even *after* a DNA test had proven, without a doubt, that there was not a single drop of Mexican blood anywhere in her lineage. If someone had said, *cultural appropriation*, at that point, I think I’d have lost it.

But, as Fate would have it, my wonderful wife told me that just as I was preparing my own take on spicy Thai noodles.

I wagged the godling's phone in front of his face tantalizing him. Then, tossing it casually into a far corner, I turned and walked up the wooden steps. I needed a break. However it had come to this, I needed to figure out how it would end.

Upstairs, sitting in my favorite wing-back chair, surrounded with my most reliable silent friends; my dog, my cello, my books, I began to poke at that bruise and ask myself: How *had* it come to this?

These days, my wife and I peek out through a crack in the door, to see that nobody is out in the hallway listening, before quietly discussing anything of a rational nature. When I've had as much of that as any free man can take, and I mutter, "Those people are all idiots!" my excellent wife, says, "Yes, they are dear; now just try to calm down." But, at what point did we take to whispering the truth?

I tried, single-handedly, to put an end to the tyranny a few years ago—March 15 of 2013—via the then still-seemingly-friendly Facebook, by publishing a little piece declaring: "There is no longer any reason to cower, my friends, I bring you good news. From this day forward, state the truth openly, loudly, freely, joyfully, in public; I'll accept the blame. Starting today, I accept *full* responsibility for all things; political, economic, religious, social, cultural, whether local, regional, national, domestic or foreign. I lay no claim to anything that goes well, of course. However, I do accept full responsibility for our problems. ... This among other things."

But it didn't take.

Then—on July 15—wishing to put an end to the ever-emerging, never ending spate of weepy public apologies, I also *apologized* for everything. On the then-still-apparently-yet-untainted Facebook, I declared: “On behalf of anyone who speaks what they feel is the truth one moment, and later—due to our emerging hive mentality—must issue a servile public apology (or two or three or more)... I apologize. From this day forward, I apologize for everything others might say which conflicts in any way whatsoever with any of the swarm's weird beliefs.

For all honest opinions; political, economic, religious, social, cultural, both foreign and domestic, I hereby apologize.

I lay no claim to any statements deemed by the Hive to be correct, of course. However I do apologize most sincerely for any and all independent, and therefor offense, thoughts, statements, utterances, personal asides, remarks, and jokes, made by those of us who have not yet fully evolved.

... This among other things, of course.”

But that didn't take either.

When that woman, with no provable Mexican ancestry, prepared a Mexican dish on TV and was fired for it, I could see that my sacrifice had led us nowhere; things had only gotten worse. And, I found myself longing for simpler, more open and much more honest times, when we could victim-blame, and fat-shame, and point out undeniable fact, in public or in private, without being ostracized, threatened, or beaten by people who do not know us, have never met us, know nothing whatsoever about us—other than our skin color—and cannot take a joke.

That's what I was thinking, while trying to discover what best to do with my captives. And, when had my mind become so feverish with this nonsense that kidnapping a woman and her godling male child seemed a viable option? Then, suddenly, I remembered.

It wasn't about a non-Mexican cooking a Mexican meal at all—it was about opening the car door for my dear wife.

It was a bright and sunny day. My truly wonderful wife and I were coming out of a French bakery where we often went to pick up brioche and the occasional almond croissant. We came out with our stuff, I opened the car door for my wife, she got in, smiled, and quietly said, “Thank you, mon ange.”

As I was walking back around behind the car, a young man—  
young by my standards—standing beside what looked like a \$6000 bicycle, glared at me. I had no idea what he was glaring at, but he felt compelled to solve that mystery for me. He said, “Do you have any idea what you just did?”

I looked at him askance.

“In opening that car door for that woman...” he began.

I cut him off, saying, “I showed her the courtesy and the respect she deserves.”

His view, of course, was that I was not taking correction very well. (I never have.) So, he felt compelled to shout at me, as I opened my own door, “She's not your puppet, Dude!”

As we drove away I asked my wife if she had witnessed any of that, and she hadn't. So, I sketched it out for her, pretty much in the same terms as I did just now for you, and she said wisely—as is her way—“You should have told him it's none of his business.”

There you go.

It required no thought. I got up, I went down stairs. First, I untied the mother, then I untied the son, and I said, “I’m really sorry. Now, I realize that you goddamned idiots may think anything you want, and that it’s none of my business.”

When the cops arrived, they seemed to think it was theirs however, and I didn’t even try to philosophize with them.

Ah well, the days when a rational person could take a doting mother and her 37 year old male godling hostage, and try to talk good sense to them, are over.

The world is no longer a safe place for reasonable people.

## THE FUTURE LOOKED SO BRIGHT

One time, not here of course, but in some forward thinking distant land, it was declared that it would be illegal to sell or possess gas-powered vehicles as of January 1, 2040 at 12:01 AM. Oh my GOSH! Can you imagine?!

So, like, there was all kinds of excitement in that wonderful place as 2039 rolled slowly toward 2040. Everyone was poised, like children waiting for that wonderful moment when they could rush downstairs and begin tearing into their Christmas presents.

Precisely at midnight, as the New Year, the new age, the new world, burst in full glory before their eager eyes, everyone in that forward thinking distant land plugged in their wonderful new electric vehicles, and... the entire state went black.

BAM! Just like that, they were *uh-mediately* thrown back into the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Who could have seen that coming?

But, what fun! Apocalyptic video games had prepared them.

“We cannot let common sense and stuff get in the way of our dreams!” declared the Governor, as he stumbled around inside his mansion, in the dark. And, although only his mistress could hear him, his next statement would be more meaningful. “Does anyone around here know where I can find a candle?”

## ONE

On February 14, 2020, a person was in an examination room at Public Hospital 4316. The person was being examined by an aged nurse, concerning a matter of negligence which resulted in a large, unwelcome, and steadily expanding protuberance in the person's lower abdominal region.

"Well, let's take a look, shall we?" said the nurse in a kindly manner. It was the last thing she said before the offense occurred.

As she turned to pick up an instrument from a table, the nurse uttered these NLAs (*no-longer-acceptable* words): "Would you like to know the sex of your child?" The offense was uttered in the same stupid, lilting, insensitive tone one might use when saying, 'Oh, what a lovely day!'

"Gender," corrected the patient.

"Pardon me?" said the nurse, claiming utterly indefensible, completely intolerable, innocence.

"Well, first of all," snapped the patient, appropriately offended, "the word is gender, and secondly...how old are you anyway?"

"I'm 48," replied the nurse feigning confusion.

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"For saying *sex* instead of *gender*?"

"No, for being so old; it's offensive for the rest of us to have to look at you."

"I'm sorry."

"You should be; it's disgusting. And, having anybody that old touching me makes me feel really creeped out."

"I'm truly sorry..."

"Apology not accepted! Who do I talk to around here about the way I'm being treated?"

The patient looked around, found the red button by the side of the examination table, and pushed it. Very soon thereafter, the nurse was taken out and beaten with sticks.

While they beat her, a hospital administrator instructed her, with each stroke—the *gender* of the *child* will be *determined* by the *child* at age *six*; it's *not* for *you* to *make* these *decisions*—we've been *through* this *be-fore*. Our *forbearance* in *keep-*ing you *here* is very *near* an *end*. Now, what do you have to say for yourself?"

In her defense, the ancient nurse replied, "I don't mind if someone hates me because of my skin color—I guess I wasn't really thinking when I made that decision—and I can certainly understand how having someone around who thinks for herself is an unnecessary irritant for those who refuse to think at all; but, there is nothing I can do about my age."

That argument fell flat, of course, and she got another whack.

Later, in the hospital cafeteria, she confessed, quietly, to a friend that, during the beating, a tiny demon had whispered in her ear, urging her to say, "You people are creating the most fucked up world's imaginable—I wish you all good luck with that—but you are NOT going to drag me into it." Her friend shushed her *uh*-mediately. See, in those halcyon times, the truth itself was NLA, and only spoken of in whispers.

When the being was delivered and a birth certificate issued, the 'gender' of the creature was marked TBD. That would be determined by the being itself upon reaching age six. Until that day, if the being had a little penis, it would be treated as if it didn't, and if it did not, it would be treated as if it probably should have had.

Those were the rules.

When it came to naming the being, that was another matter. Woke breeders no longer used surnames, such as Cooper, or Hardesty or Liebovitz as first names for their offspring. The truly woke, left that—as they did the thing’s gender—to the thing itself.

An historical note:

For a while there the naming of some beings was put in the hands of an older offspring, but by 2023 the name *Useless* had become so common that, if you walked onto a construction site to deliver a pizza, 20 years later, and shouted “Pizza for Useless!” all work would stop and every being on site would look up.

And, as a socialist society, we can’t be havin’ that.

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on The Neo-INSATIABLES

Joe's Five Year Plan focused on development of electric power, the production of iron and steel, and industrialization on a massive scale; but, since we've got all of that in place—thanks to evil Capitalism—the kids think it's time to move on to the redistribution of wealth.

In their daydream they'd all be developing video games, directing animated film projects, and skateboarding until the day they're miraculously transformed into Entertainment Industry lawyers (for the boys), or porn stars (for the ladies) and celebrities (everybody else) while the universities hand out vodka-infused lollipops during gender grievance studies.

Make no mistake though, these shrimp are all Capitalists. And, they're the worst form of Capitalists; they are everything they claim to despise. Those tattoos aren't fooling anyone; these are not a tribal people, they're a bunch of insatiable consumers. These rapacious little *insatiabiles* can't go 30 seconds without their stupid phones, or spend a single hour without coveting one useless new product or another, or trying to develop a scheme to sell similar useless crap to one another. And, my god, they all yearn for Socialism! They demand it. It's like a bunch of drunks demanding a new Temperance Movement.

They somehow fail to see that the system they demand would take away their right—not to mention the ability—to demand anything. If they ever get the post-apocalyptic world their video games have somehow convinced them they want, they'll all starve to death because none of them would know how to plant a turnip.

There are a lot of pigs to be slaughtered if these dreamers are to continue gorging on hot dogs, and that's a distasteful task which none of them wants to undertake. Worst of all are those standing on the sidelines cheering them on, telling them that hot dogs should be free...and that, if they are too damned lazy to get up off the couch and shuffle on over to the kitchen to microwave one for themselves, that's oppression ...or maybe racism...either way though, it's definitely Capitalism's fault.

This is not conjecture. While entrapped in Southern California and incapable of extracting myself, I lived with a woman and her twenty-seven year old precious only son. I paid rent; I mowed the lawn, I fixed the washing machine when it needed it; I bought food, I prepared meals, I did the dishes, and I took out the garbage. When she was in trouble, I responded to her call for help.

Her twenty-seven-year-old son paid no rent; he mowed no lawn, fixed no washing machines, bought no food, prepared no meals, did no dishes, and took out no garbage. When she was in trouble and called for help, he stopped playing with himself long enough to holler my name.

One day, when I remarked, "There are too many people living in this place." she said, "You're right. You have to go."

She did not blink, she did not ponder; she just tossed me out like the rent paying, lawn mowing, washing machine fixing, food buying, dinner preparing, dishes doing, garbage hauling, ever-caring useless rat that I was.

That is the kind of thinking we're dealing with.

And, I believe that it explains our current situation.

# **THE STATE OF AMERICAN EDU.**

## SEVEN

Kyle was uncomfortable with the number 7. There is some debate as to whether he was born that way or whether he'd picked it up somewhere along the way before attending kindergarten. Good parents, these days, encourage such fear.

The first psychologist to speak with Kyle about his feelings concerning that awful number, had used the phrase 'abnormal fear' in her report, and was taken out uh-mediately and beaten with sticks. The revised report correctly stated that Kyle felt 'uncomfortable' with the number seven.

There is nothing 'abnormal' about an uncomfortable feeling triggered by any basic number, particularly the number seven. We all know that seven ate nine. And, six was probably next.

His teachers were all informed of Kyle's feelings before he attended his first class, and appropriate steps were taken to ensure that he was not exposed unnecessarily to that number.

Above the chalkboard, where the numbers 1 through 10 were displayed on large placards, the 7 had been removed and replaced with 6+.

In all of the text books, pages with 7 involved were changed so that Kyle would not inadvertently come across a 7. Thus page 7 became page 6+, page 17 became 16+; it was little to ask, and all of the teachers stayed around after class, with whiteout and pens to make the corrections.

Despite those noble efforts, during that first year, mistakes were made, of course, throughout the community.

At Kyle's birthday party, for example, he was given a book, "7 Ducklings, None of Them Male", and his poor mother became upset. The book was uh-mediately confiscated and taken to another room where, with scissors, paper, glue, and a little creativity, the title became a less offensive 6+ Ducklings None of Them Male. The wonderful, understanding woman who did that kind act, would later carry that book home with her in order to make all further necessary alterations there—eliminating the 'male' aspect entirely, before returning it to Kyle, so that he might enjoy its untainted delightfulness.

Just about that same time, Kyle was taken to a restaurant to get his favorite—fish sticks—and when he was handed the menu there appeared, on the cover, what looked to be a large 7. Later, it was shown to be a leaping trout, but Kyle's loving mother very quickly straightened out the manager of that restaurant, in no uncertain terms.

"My GOD, what is WRONG WITH YOU?!"

Even outside, in the dining room, customers could hear her scream. "I told you in advance that **my son** has **septaphobia!**" Naturally, upon her return, people rose to their feet and applauded her for her bravery; and, to his credit, the manager came out and apologized publicly.

After this story hit the local news, and later nearly crashed the internet, thousands of women came forward with similar tales; their children too felt uncomfortable around the number 7. They understood. Many of them wanted to help end the oppression. Kyle's mom soon found herself the leader of a massive organization (The 6+ Movement) which is dedicated to seeing that the number seven will never hurt the feelings of even one more sensitive child with a reasonable fear of seven.

Soon—well, I guess everyone knows this—she had taken her campaign all across the country, and received several honorary degrees along the way. Kyle’s Mom is said to have been nominated for a Nobel Prize for instilling ESN (extreme sensitivity to numbers) awareness into an entire nation.

Since all of this first began—it seems like only yesterday—the number seven has been removed from street signs, billboards, calculator, computer, and telephone keypads, apartment doors, elevator buttons, book and movie titles, throughout Kyle’s home town. The U S Mint has joined the movement, declaring that they have stopped their plans to issue a new seven-dollar bill.

One of YouTube’s most frequently viewed videos is the one taken in Kyle’s class where his teacher asks a little girl, “What is 10 minus 3, Gloria?” and she proudly answers “6+” It’s just such a breakthrough moment!  
“And 2 plus 5 is...?”  
“6+”

At this point the 6+ movement has successfully identified 17.8 *million* children who say they feel uncomfortable with the number seven and more than 187,000 who have come forward to say that they actually fear that number greatly.

In her latest press conference, Kyle’s Mom—who admits that she could have no greater title than that of *Kyle’s Mom*—has sent out a plea to all men named Steven, asking them to please use either Steve or Stephan, because Steven looks so much like seven in print, that it may cause unnecessary discomfort in some children upon seeing the name.

The 6+ Movement remains a small but extraordinarily important movement which must continue to grow if we are ever to become the inclusive, multi-sensitive culture that we all envision. Someday, we may all arise to a wondrous new world, after crushing the numerical patriarchy.

And, one more thing, *Seven Seas Restaurant*, in Des Moines, we'll see YOU in court!

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE* on the Number SEVEN**

I've actually had some personal experience with that *fear-of-seven* nonsense. When I was a kid, just learning to read, I was reading out loud with my father one time, and I had a little difficulty with the word "did." As I remember it, whenever I would come to that word, I'd come to a complete stop and refuse to speak it.

Who can explain such a thing?

My father—a good, honest, and genuinely caring man—asked me, "What's that word?"

"I don't know," I said.

"The word is 'did'," he said in a kindly manner, "Start again." So, I started the sentence again, and again, when I came to that word, I stopped cold.

"What is that word?" asked my father in a fatherly, perhaps somewhat bemused, tone.

"I don't know," I said quietly.

"The word is 'did'," he said. "Say it."

"Did," I said.

"OK. Say it again."

"Did."

"Good. Now read the sentence."

I started reading, but when I got to that word I stopped.

"What is that word?" my father asked, becoming maybe just a bit exasperated.

"I don't know," I whined.

"Did," he said, "The word is 'did'. See, D. I. D., 'did'. Say it."

"Did."

"OK. Now read the sentence."

I couldn't. I didn't. I sat there in silence.

“What is that word?” he asked encouragingly.

“I don’t know!” I wailed.

“The WORD is DID!” he said sharply. Then he took a deep breath and calmed himself. “What is the word?”

I cowered. “Did,” I said meekly, tentatively... hopefully.

“Say it again!”

“Did...”

“Now, read that sentence.”

I tried, but stopped cold when I came to that awful word.

“The word is DID. Goddamn it. Say that GODDAMNED word. Say it!”

“Did.”

“Say it again,” he commanded.

“Did.”

“OK. Now you read that goddamned sentence, and you’d better not stop!”

I read with some hesitancy but, out of fear for my life, I did not stop.

“OK. I think that’s probably enough for tonight. Look at that word. What is it?”

“Did.”

“What is it?”

“Did.”

“Stop crying. This is nothing to cry about. Next time you see that goddamned word you’ll know good and goddamned well what it is.”

That certainly proved to be an understatement.

Because of that experience, I have a suggestion. Instead of the entire world changing in order to accommodate little Kyle’s discomfort with the number 7, I think Kyle should try to adjust to the world.

And I think I can help him do that.

Give me twenty eight minutes alone with Kyle and I'll have him singing songs from Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.

Then, of course, there this:

One evening about thirty years ago, I was the guest of a nice woman in her home in Malibu. And for some reason which I've never been able to explain, I found myself standing in front of this poor woman pontificating about how to raise kids. I wouldn't allow *MY* kids to do this. I wouldn't allow *MY* kids to do that. That sort of thing.

It was all bluster, and frankly—since I don't have any children—I surprised myself with the depth of my feelings on the subject. As far as I could tell, I'd never given the matter a single thought.

Nonetheless, there I was huffing and puffing and putting on a pretty good show. No doubt I struck an impressive figure pacing back and forth across the hardwood floor with one finger occasionally extended toward Heaven, the source no doubt of all this sudden wisdom. For some reason, as I tell this tale here, right now, the term horse's ass comes to mind.

At any rate, I'd finished laying out the definitive rules for raising kids the proper way, and was taking a well-earned breath, when the lady asked meekly if she might ask me a question. Of course, I welcomed the opportunity to clarify the finer points of my theory.

"How many children have you raised?" she asked. And she didn't seem surprised when I answered, "Well, uh, none...actually."

That excellent woman was wise enough to realize that nothing further needed to be said, and kind enough not to say anything further. Instead, she handed me a glass of Merlot.

I think I may have actually learned something that evening. Though, admittedly, writing about education isn't exactly proof of that fact... I've never been a teacher either.

## WELCOME TO HAPPYLAND

“Welcome to Happyland,” said the woman flatly, without looking up from behind a huge grey Steelcase desk.

“Welcome to HAPPYland!” piped a little girl, smiling up at me.

The comparatively nice woman, who had held the door for me as I came in, said, “This is Mr. Mockridge, he’s arranged to be our guest at Happyland for a few hours; do you have a badge for him?”

I looked down at the little girl, who seemed to be alternately pouting and leering.

“Right there,” snapped the woman pushing a plastic badge across the desk with the blunt end of a cheap pen. “He has to sign in,” she mumbled, “All visitors must sign in.”

I leaned over a clip board and began to sign my name.

“CLEARLY!” snarled the woman behind the desk; and I began to print. I thought to myself, ‘Everyone seems kinda grumpy, here in Happyland.

The comparatively nice woman said, “Let’s go in, shall we?” And, the little girl, clinging close behind, said. “Yes, let us go in, celery?”

I smiled down at the little girl, as we passed through huge wide double doors, and she screamed.

The comparatively nice woman looked down and said, “It’s OK. It’s OK.”

As we continued on inside, I quietly asked the comparatively nice woman, “What happened?”

She turned to the little girl, knelt down, and asked, “Can you explain to the nice man why you screamed, Little Occam?”

Little Occam, without looking up, pointed at me and pouted, “He looked at me...”

The comparatively nice woman stood up and explained, “She didn’t like the way you looked at her.

Little Occam said, “He looked at me, and I didn’t want him to look at me.”

The comparatively nice woman raised one eyebrow and said, “You looked at her and she didn’t want you to.” Addressing Little Occam, she said, “That’s OK... Are you OK now?”

“It’s not OK!” said Little Occam and stamped her tiny foot on the old, worn, green and red checkered linoleum.

“Why do you have only one shoe?” I asked Occam.

“I only NEED one; that’s why!” she screamed, and stamped her bare foot, with little effect.

“Ah,” I said.

“Is she always this way?” I whispered to the woman.

“When she’s not some other way,” she said coldly.

“Ah,” I said. “Me too.” And, despite herself, the woman laughed a quiet little, near-human laugh.

Meanwhile, Occam began tugging at my pant leg. I looked down. “You’re mean!” said Occam pointedly.

I laughed, “I’m mean? I guess I can be, from time to time, but how did you guess?”

“I’m gonna leave you two to get acquainted,” said the woman, and quickly ran off to break up a fight between two children on the other side of the large room.

“Why do you say I’m mean?” I asked Occam.

“Cause you keep tryin’ to lie.”

“I don’t keep tryin’ to lie,” I said.

“Yes, you do. That’s a lie what you just said.”

“Well, OK,” I said, “I apologize. I didn’t mean to lie.”

“APOLOGY UNACCEPTED!” screamed Occam; and that drew the attention of every child in that room. They all looked up and dryly shouted “APOLOGY UNACCEPTED!”

Then they all went back to what they had been doing.

One child, with huge round glasses came up behind Occam, mumbling “Apology un-excessive, apology un-excessive...”

“Who’s this little guy?” I asked Occam.

“Zreh’s not a guy, zreh’s a gy-raffe,” said Occam defiantly.

“I’m sorry; did you say he’s a giraffe?” I asked.

“ZREH’s a GY-raffe!” Occam screamed.

“OK, OK,” I said, “calm down...”

“I don’t need you, or anyone like you, to tell me to calm down,” she said crossing her little arms.

“Yeah,” said the gy-raffe, crossing his arms too, “we don’t need anyone like *you* telling *us* anything.”

They both nodded in defiant agreement.

“What do you mean *someone like me*?” I asked.

“Like you,” she said, “all greedy and ugly and stupid.”

“Yeah,” said the gy-raffe, “greeny and ugly and stupid!”

“What makes you think I’m greedy?” I asked.

“AND... ugly and stupid...” they prodded.

“Well,” I said, “I’ll give you the ugly and stupid part; I’d be the last to deny it; but, what makes you think I’m greedy?”

“You’re from the tippy-top; greedy, greedy, greedy.”

“What makes you think I’m from the tippy-top?”

At that point, the comparatively nice woman returned and I asked quietly, “Is it true that this little guy really thinks he’s a giraffe?”

“Zreh self-identifies as a giraffe, yes,” she said.

I laughed a little and asked, “What do you mean ‘zreh’?”

“It is, since you don’t know, the correct epicene pronoun when referring to gender non-conforming self-identifying anthropics, including gy-raffes.”

“Ha,” I laughed again. “Was his father a giraffe?”

“No, I believe that both parental units were human.”

I laughed a third time, “Parental Units? Isn’t that something from an old Saturday Night Live routine?”

“The joy you seem to get from cruelty is very upsetting.”

“I’m sorry for that. But, at what point do you tell zreh-here that he’s a little boy? Or, does zreh work that out for himself, in time?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, while kneeling and brushing the giraffe’s hair out of his eyes.

“I mean, at what point do you dissuade zreh-here of the illusion that he’s a giraffe?”

“Dissuade zreh? What do you mean?” she said standing up again. I could tell by the tone of her voice that she honestly did not understand what I was asking.

“I’m just asking—let’s see—I’m just wondering how you break it to zreh that he is not a giraffe, that he IS a little boy. You know, how and when?”

She looked at me in utter confusion. But, I could see that she was trying to understand my question, so, I tried again.

“I’m curious to know if you intervene at some point, or you just let him grow out of it.”

“Grow out of what?”

“The idea that he is a giraffe...”

“Zreh,” she began to explain to me very carefully, “self-*identifies* as a giraffe. Zreh doesn’t *think* he’s a giraffe, zreh *feels* that zreh is, in fact, a giraffe. Whatever zreh may appear to be to you, inside, zreh knows that zreh is, in actuality, a giraffe. And, we here, at Happyland, accept, support, and celebrate zreh for what zreh is.”

“But surely...” I began.

“ONE,” she said, cutting me off. And, while looking me right straight in the eye, she continued, very sternly, “If you cannot understand what I just told you, or you REFUSE to—which I

believe is what is really going on here, *MISTER* Mockridge —then maybe you don't BELONG in Happyland. And, TWO... don't call me Shirley; my name is Faith; you can see it right here on my name tag,"

"Yikes," I said. "I'll be leaving Happyland now," I said, and turned to leave. By what miracle I do not know, but by the time I'd taken three steps to those huge double doors, she was already there and holding one of them open for me. When I looked at her to thank her, she turned her face away as if I'd slapped her.

Out in the lobby, without looking up, the woman behind the Steelcase desk snarled, "Sign out."

I leaned over the clipboard.

"LEG-ibly..." she cautioned.

And as I turned to leave she mumbled, "Hope your visit to Happyland was a pleasant one."

"Well, I certainly learned something," I said.

And, as I approached the exit door, I thought I heard her snort and dryly say, "I'm sure you did."

## GRADE SCHOOL VISIT

While walking my wife's dog on the sidewalk near a schoolyard, I stopped for a moment outside the 12 foot tall chain-link fence, because I could not help but notice that the kids, all running around squealing for no apparent reason, were all in uniform. The boys wore shirt, tie, jacket and matching shorts, the girls wore white shirts, grey skirts, and round-toed shoes with a single wide strap across the instep. I noted that traditional garb with some surprise, and wondered at what age they'd all start dressing like convicted criminals and upstart prostitutes.

While involved in thought, I watched as three girls prepared to skip rope. Two of them—standing about eight feet apart—took one end of two separate ropes and began swinging them in opposing directions while, outside the ropes, poised to leap in, was a third. As the ropes churned in large loops, the twirlers chanted: “Little Sally Pender, doctors could not mend her, she went out on a bender, got in a small rear-ender, the law could not defend her, the judge would have to send her, to prison never ender, or she would have to pay... *how many genders can you name today?*” At hearing the word ‘today’, the third girl leapt in, and ramrod straight, began to skip.

While she skipped, the others chanted:  
Agender, bigender, punch you in the eye gender; cisgender, dys-gender, it's not right to mis-gender; my gender, your gender, is it cake or pie gender; gender fluid, gender druid, she had a gender and always knew it; gender I D, gender-fied-ee, gender neat and gender tidy; non-conforming, yet performing, still outside of social norming; gender questions, gender answers, just look and see what's in your pants, sirs;

gender neutral, genderqueer, let's all just go and have a beer; non-binary, secretary, go and ask your uncle Larry; man or woman, cat or mouse, which is which and which the spouse; trans-gender, transition, transsexual on a mission; you're born with it, you've made your choice, you drive a Prius or Rolls Royce; it's psychological, generational, apparently also inspirational ...

At that point the skipper became entangled—as was my mind—but, I walked away inspired.

So, I made arrangements to visit the Charlotte Perkins Gilman grade school, and see how things compared to the unending nightmare I'd experienced 60 years ago, as a skinny, pimply 10 year old. And, even though my skin has cleared up since then, and I've put on a few pounds, I was still nervous and slightly sick to my stomach, just entering the place.

I was given a stick-on tag that declared me a VISITOR, with my name almost perfectly spelled underneath; the only thing wrong was the last few letters in Darryl—I don't want to be too picky—and my last name, which is Mockridge not Mockbridge. I was told that I could, if I asked the teacher nicely, sit in on any class I might choose. I was thankful of course, but could hardly believe my ears.

I asked if there was Civics class, and found myself instantly under suspicion. A quiet little phone call was made and I stood around waiting until a big man, looking very much like a security guard, was instructed to take me to Ms. Felton's Sensitivity Class. From the state of his belly, I knew he'd have to guess which shoes he had on that day; and from the look in his eye I knew that he'd take pleasure in finding any excuse to beat me to within an inch of my life.

I wanted to be careful not to do that.

I had no idea what a Sensitivity class was but, from the way that guard acted, I was sure we both could have learned a thing or two in that class.

We stood in the hallways, outside the classroom for a while, observing things—me, the class, him, me. From what was scrawled on the chalkboard I could see they were considering things of a lofty political nature. The question, written in large blocky letters, was: “Who Would Make the BEST President?” The word best was underlined three times. Under that there was a descending list: “Any POC, LGBT, Black Female, White Female, Black Male, Other, White male.”

“What’s POC mean?” I asked my overly attentive friend. “You don’t know; you really don’t know?” he shook his head. And, thankfully, at that very point, Ms. Felton looked over and noticed us. She sighed deeply, said something to her students—who all craned their necks to see who was out there in the hallway—and came striding over to open the door a crack and demand, “Yes?”

The security guard told her who I was and that I had been cleared to sit in on her class and she mumbled something about the administration that did not belong in a greeting card, which I shall not repeat.

She silently gestured for me to come in and stuck a reasonably convincing smile on her face, looked at my name tag, and—once we were in the front/center of the room—said, “This is Mr. Mollbridge; he’s a journalist, Can any of you tell us what a journalist does?... Jimmy?”

“Attacks the President?”

“Yes. And what else? ... Janelle?”

“Allegations?”

“What about allegations?”

“Makes ‘em.”

“Yes, if he’s any good, he makes *continual* allegations...what else?”

She waited but there were no further insights into what a journalist does, so she went on.

“Mr. uh... (she glanced at my name tag again) Mullbridge is going to visit with us for the rest of the class; he’d like to see what we’re studying. Is that OK with you? ...Yes, Jimmy?”

“He’s old.”

“Yes, he is; he’s quite old.”

“Well, what’s he doing here?”

“I don’t really know. Should we quiz him and see what he knows about sensitivity?”

The cheering was deafening.

“OK, Mister Mollbridge, I guess we’ll have to test you—I hope you’re ready for this.”

I smiled. I mean, I tried very hard to hide my trepidation behind a wavering smile.

“We do a lot of play-acting in this class; I hope that’s alright with you?”

“Play-acting... sure. My entire life is a form of play-acting.”

“OK. Now, Mr. Mollbridge, let’s say you’re on a train and a white male gets on. What do you do?”

“I’m on a train...”

“Yes.”

“And a white male gets on?”

“Yes. What do you do?”

“What do I do?”

“Yes, what do you do?”

"I *am* a white male."

"Oh, we are all very well aware of that."

There was some giggling and some laughter.

"Wait... So, I'm on a train and a white male gets on...?"

"You seem confused."

"I am... a little."

For some reason, that generated a flood of laughter.

"Let me make it a little easier for you. The question is: Are you gonna let him get away with that?"

"Get away with what?"

"MISTER MOLLBRIDGE, it's a simple question. Are you going to just sit there and let him get away with that?"

"Get away with... stepping onto a train?"

"Or, ARE YOU just going to sit there?"

"Probably. I don't see..."

"See, children," she said pointing at me in exasperation,

"THIS is the perfect example of what we've been talking about. Look carefully at this man. Note the belligerence of his stance. Listen to the tone of supposed innocence, which hides willful defiance." She shook her head. "MISTER Mullbridge, you cannot *honestly* tell me that a white male getting onto a train is not an act of aggression, *and* a teachable moment."

I didn't know what to say to that. So, I said nothing,

"Do you not recognize," she insisted, "that act as the perfect opportunity for *you*, a caring person, to Speak Truth to Power?" She made a gesture toward the guard who, keeping an eye on things from outside, came quickly inside.

As the guard was escorting me out of the classroom, by the elbow, I heard her snarling to her students, "He admits no

fault; he makes no apology; don't you think there was just something horribly pugnacious about that man?

I wedge myself in the doorway, in order to catch the end of her rant.

"It was more than just a little insulting for the office to ask me to allow that man into our classroom. Yes, Jimmy?"

"I bet he's not much of a journalist."

As I was being escorted from that harbinger of a bright and brutal future, I suddenly recalled a dream I'd had the night before.

It took place in what I supposed the Gilman School would look like. I had asked a woman, with a haircut like I'd seen on porcupines, if I could use a bathroom, and she looked at me as if that were just one of the several thousand things she found bothersome about me, about any and all males, about residents of the rational world in general, and said—kinda sharply—"...down the hall, to the left."

I thought, "Of course."

And, as if correcting my thought—you know how dreams are—she thought, "*Naturally.*"

Glad to put some distance between myself and such loveliness, I nickered like a horse upon seeing his oats arrive, and was pleased to (in an acceptable dreamlike way) observe myself waddling Chaplin-like down the hallway.

After making that sharp left turn, I found myself looking down a long, nearly-endless hallway with a series of bathroom doors along either side. There must have been thirty or forty doors, each marked with a round plastic sign.

The first two signs, I recognized. They were the silhouette of a round-headed, round-shouldered man and a round-headed square-shouldered female in a triangular skirt. Beyond that though, I was lost.

As I waddled down the hallway, looking at the sign on each door, the place took on a museum-like quality. I mean, I knew that those signs must each mean something to some people, but none of them made any sense to me. Each was a bold symbol which I had never seen before; many looked like Sanskrit; several of them appeared to represent humans with two or more heads; one of them I recognized as a silhouette of FDR; and several of them, scattered along the way, bore a symbol like that lightbulb in cartoons which indicates the character has just had an idea... only, the lightbulb was crossed out diagonally. I thought that must be the equivalent of “To be determined later” or perhaps, “We have no idea”.

Suddenly, my urge became emergencial and I started heading back, desperately looking for the sign with the balloon-headed, round-shouldered male. Not being able to find it soon enough, I dove into a bathroom with a sign that looked like the Aramaic symbol for YHWH.

When I emerged, I was confronted with a crowd of teachers, young future student-rioteers, members of congress, local authorities, ‘journalists’—convincingly disheveled, but stern—and cops in riot gear, all hands-on-hips, glaring at me.

Of course—or *naturally*, as some would have it—I woke up in a sweat.

## MY INTERVIEW

“Have a seat, Mr. Mockle...ton. I see here, from your resume, that you have a degree in Painting.”

“Yes. I mean, I think I do. There was some confusion.”

“Well, if you think you do, that’s good enough for us. Now, you realize that there’s much more to teaching painting at this institution than merely painting... what are your feelings about politics... for example?”

“I don’t know a damned thing about politics and have no interest in learning. As far as I’m concerned politics, religion, and the lottery are all pretty much the same thing, and what we think or say or do has about the same effect on each of them. Of course, with the lottery, if you don’t enter you can’t win. With politics and religion, your influence is pretty much the same whether you participate or not.”

“Very good, perhaps we can find a place for you; you sound open minded enough. A little involvement in things on campus will soon find you up and running with the pack.”

“It’s my belief that any involvement in politics, at any level, dulls the mind and skews your vision of the realities of Life.”

“Very good.”

“...because, our opinions mean about as much to a lamppost as they do to any politician. If those ruling class elitists didn’t need our vote to hang onto their cushy jobs, the lamppost would probably be more considerate.”

“Oh, I hear you.”

“Do you? Cause I get the idea that I’m talking to myself.”

“Well, once you’re embedded we’ll give you instruction about how you might inspire, let’s say, your painting students to consider your particularly unique political viewpoint, while they’re slapping their paint all over.”

“You know, I have serious doubts that this is the job for me. I’m telling you, as directly as I can, that I *honestly* believe that any time spent considering political matters, is time wasted. Painting and politics don’t mix. Maybe I should just go.”

“Interesting...”

“Let me say it another way: I think I made a mistake applying for this job, and I’m pretty sure that I don’t belong here.”

“Yes,” he nodded, and made a little note on his iPad.

I began to rant, “People who are incapable of differentiating between discernment and intolerance, give me a rash; it infuriates me to find myself surrounded with whiners who have no respect for the premiere liberties of personal belief and independent thought ... people who find everyone acceptable except someone who has a thought of their own.”

“And, we are glad to hear that. That kind of thinking is exactly what we need more of around here, at the moment.”

“I’m warning you; as to politics, when I am not shamefully uninformed, I am, at very least, terribly misinformed, and each of my unshakable political opinions has been built upon that solid foundation; though, sometimes I do rely upon fragmentary and unreliable information as well.”

“Yes, yes, I see. Try not to get too upset. Politics is not about being upset.”

“With the exceptions of Charles Krauthammer, Heather MacDonald, and my very dear wife, I assume that’s just the way everyone does it.”

“We honor your forthrightness.”

“Am I being unclear?”

“No, I understand you completely.”

He continued making notes.

“I really don’t think I’m the guy you want here, tromping around on your well-maintained lawns, having non-political thoughts, and teaching painting.”

“Oh, don’t underestimate your value to this institution, Mr. Mockford. Admission requirements have recently changed.”

“I am, quite possibly, the worst person to do what you seem to be asking from a painting instructor. It would be difficult to find any man less suited to the task. What does politics have to do with teaching painting anyway? I know as much about politics as—to borrow a phrase from Mencken—a hog knows about predestination.”

“We expect no more.”

“Correctly or foolishly, I believe I live a much better, more fulfilling life, admitting to those few select facts.”

“And we celebrate your choice...”

“The entire history of mankind, at every level, is the story of one person trying to impose the tyranny of his opinion upon others. The extent to which violence, force, and coercion of every sort has played in persuading them to accept that opinion, says something about how strongly we each cherish our own view. But, it says nothing about the real value of our opinions. And, so, let me do that here. We all have our opinions; none of them mean a damned thing. The illusion of illumination the delusion of insight...”

“OH, LOOK,” he said, interrupting my rant, “I see that you are married!”

“Yes. Happily... if that’s still legal.”

“Very clever, Mr. Mockford; very clever.”

“We spend as much time together as we can; on the couch—her, with a cat in her lap, a dog snuggled up against her legs—talking or reading, or watching weird old films.”

“Do you ever watch any political...films...?”

“I do... you know, sometimes. She likes ‘em. Here’s one for you. A Russian peasant boy wakes up on a train to Moscow. He doesn’t know how he got on that train. Wait!—he’s also dressed in a nice new suit. How did this happ... my god,

there's MONEY in the pocket of his vest. Two rubles. He's astounded. As he stares out the window at the passing unforgiving frozen landscape, he tries to piece things together... CUT TO: geese walking around squawking in the tiny fenced in yard of a small wooden cottage. A kindly looking old peasant woman—slightly on the heavy side—comes to the door wiping her hands on her long, heavy apron... she looks out... she scans the horizon... she shakes her head and shouts, "Yuri."... She wrings her bony old hands. Is that a tear in her eye? I don't know where she finds those films... I supposed you'd call that political."

"It will do."

"Some of those damned films are endless."

"I'm sure they are. Now, in 2018, 16% of Americans said that they would move to another country if Bumpy was elected. What do you say to that?"

"None of them did though, did they?"

"Not that I've heard of."

"... not one single moron moved out. I wish every one of them had kept that vow. I voted for Bumpy."

"Excellent. I see here that you are white—well, I can see that with my own eyes—no claim of marginalized or minority background of any sort; not a celebrity for example. I can see that you are unquestionably male. Now, I want to make it clear that we've had many candidates for this position and several—well quite a few with what previously might have been considered credentials... but, after all, who is really in the position to judge the value of one candidate over another? This institution has a long-standing tradition of, shall we say, *bending* just a little perhaps, when it seems correct... but such things can be carried too far. What I need to hear, from you, is that you understand that your hiring would have nothing to do with any effort to retrieve our historic position in the

American scheme of things as a respectable, nay, noble institution of higher learning... replacing, to some extent, the slightly pinkish, land of lunacy image we might've previously planted, cultivated and now have begun to reap. Hiring you, and others of your ilk, is not an attempt to regain the respect and the high esteem we may have thrown out the window by our short-sighted policies over the last 40 years. It has nothing whatsoever to do with any attempt to, on the somewhat larger scale, quietly begin to dismantle the cruel and evil tribal society we've helped to create through decades of myopic lockstep participation in a mindless sociological ideology. What I'm saying is that, this—getting someone like you onboard—is not about recovering a certain balance, or re-establishing ...let us say, a renewed equilibrium, which might be considered more reflective of a certain, well, reality... What am I trying to say? This—the hiring of an aged, white, heterosexual married male, with political leanings of an undisclosed ...Not a word, Mr. Mockrum!... with *undisclosed* political leanings, has NOTHING to do with quotas; I want to make that clear. We are merely looking for the best painting instructor we can put in place, for the benefit of our students, and, I believe that you, Mr. Mock-uh-rmmrm are a good fit, an excellent fit actually. So... Welcome aboard! Oh, you want to do the handshake thing. I guess that'll be OK. Welcome aboard!"

"You're kind of a radical aren't you?"

"Well, Mr. Mockruh, that is an understatement. But, if I could get you to dive into this pool of political piranha with me, at least I wouldn't feel so very much all alone."

"Do they know what you're up to?"

"If they did, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Then, just as our hands were about to meet, I woke up.

And, sadly, I looked around to discover that life had not really changed for the better; well, not in every detail anyway; it had all been a dream. So, I dove back into sleep, and had a somewhat more believable dream.

When I got to the garage, I discovered that I'd lost my keys. With slim hope I quickly returned to the store where I'd just purchased 3 pounds of jalapeño sausages. The guy behind the meat counter shrugged. At Customer Service—after I asked a second time if he was absolutely sure—the gentleman behind the desk snapped, “Nobody turned in any keys. OK!”

But, I was feeling pretty good about it; knowing that nothing on that keyring indicated where I live. I was sure I wouldn't be returning home to find my joint ransacked, my stuff rummaged through, thrown about, and rejected, by a thief.

That's what I was thinking as I stood at the top of the stairway overlooking the parking lot. Then, Oh-well, there goes the car! I knew it was my car because, of the 320,000 grey C 300s in San Francisco, mine was the only one that hadn't been washed since the last good rain.

So you know how dreams are. Next thing, I'm confronting the car thief. We're standing beside my car with the front door open, and I'm waving a crumpled plastic wrapper from a muffin in his face, and saying, “You have a fear of gluten, but you have no qualms about stealing someone's car...?!”

## LEFT SPEECHLESS

While waiting for my guide to arrive I was seated, appropriately enough, in the waiting room, and found myself tempted to look at a two month old People Magazine to see what color Beyonce's finger nails had been way back when.

Two pretty female college students were sitting across from me, each immersed in some small electronic device that requires a lot of that which used to separate us from most primates. And, whenever someone came in, they broke the spell long enough to look up and see who it was—and of course, to glare at me: the universal oppressor.

We had all been in there waiting for a very long time, sitting in silence; separated into opposing teams by nothing more than the drama of choosing to be. It reminded me of that game we played when I was a kid, Cowboys and Indians. And, foolishly, I may have said so out loud.

"It's kind of like Cowboys and Indians in here," I said quietly; but, merely as an observation.

They both looked up, sighed a bitter coordinated sigh, and glared at me. "Let me tell you something," one of them said.

"That word is no longer used. It's vulgar and vile and don't you dare use it in our presence again."

"What's vile and vulgar about it?" I asked.

"It's un-inclusive!" they chimed simultaneously.

"I know," I said, "I should have said Native American..."

I was actually pleased to have made human contact.

Shocked at my ignorance, they looked at each other.

"Not *that* word," one of them sighed.

"Which word are we talking about, then?" I asked.

Their dismay was instantaneously converted to fury and, under tremendous restraint, the closest one leaned toward me and whispered, “*Cowboy...*”

I said nothing—what can you say to a thing like that?—but I was eager to hear their thinking.

They went on to explain to me—in a weird and really very disturbing, strangely synchronized way—that *cowboy* isn’t *inclusive* enough. Of course, I listened. Whenever I find myself trapped in a confined space with frightening robotic twins regurgitating what they’ve been fed, with sincerely wrinkled brows, I listen. So, I did; I sat there and I listened.

They went on to explain that *cowhand* is offensive to anyone who might have lost one or both hands while out calf-roping one day, and *cowpoke* is just plain rude, infused, as it is, with a certain ‘probing’ masculinity. And, when they said that, I did not laugh; I did not slap my thigh, I did not say, ‘Oh my god, what the hell is wrong with you people?’ I did not say a word. I just waited. I nodded and I waited.

They thought—they went on to explain—that *someone* should create a new *inclusive* term, which would include all lesbian *cowboys*, gay *cowboys*, bi-sexual *cowboys*, trans-gender *cowboys...*” The list was endless. In my head I added all heterosexual women, Blacks, Asians, La-thee-nos, and anyone with a hangnail who might have had an occasional hankerin’ to wrangle themselves some beef cattle. Meanwhile, they’d moved on to the dream of expunging that awful word, *cowboy*, entirely from every text or reference they could find throughout the known universe... “And replace it, no doubt,” I thought, “with something like: tuz or mollop.”

Lord, help us all! This is the generation working on Artificial Intelligence.

Though I was fascinated, and suffering in gut-level fear, I sat there in self-enforced silence. It's a good idea to keep your mouth shut when assailed by idiocy, lest you find yourself assaulted by raging stupidity. Believe me, there is NOTHING you can say in response to that sort of thing that will help anyone. You'd only entangle yourself in it further.

I am not the hugging type, but when my guide showed up I could have kissed him on the mouth. When he said, "Shall we go?" I could have done a cartwheel out that wonderful open door to sanity. I have never, in my life, been so eager to get away from two really good-lookin' young women. (And, I guess I'm required to apologize for having noticed.)

But, I did walk away understanding their point of view a bit more. And, I found myself wondering why there is such a disproportionate number of *criminals* in our prisons, and what could we do to make those institutions a little more inclusive? I thought Congress might be a good place to start.

## WOMEN'S STUDIES

"If all these sweet young things were laid end to end, I wouldn't be the slightest bit surprised."

*Dorothy Parker*

Poor Andrea was so distraught. On her way home from her enhancement surgeon, she was walking down the street, in her new yoga pants, and a man looked at her. When she told me about it, she was still furious, of course!

"I am so sick of treating myself like a piece of meat," she told me. "What are you laughing at?"

I told her, "You said, I am so sick of *treating myself* like a piece of meat."

"I did not."

"Yes you did."

"I did not! I *said* I am so tired of *being treated* like a piece of meat."

"No. Andrea, you did not. You said, I am so sick of *treating myself* like a piece of meat."

"Whatever..."

"Indeed."

We didn't talk for a while after that.

"I'm beginning to wonder if that may be the reason I can only hook-up with three or four guys a week," she sighed.

"Or, maybe you're on your way to becoming a nun."

"What's a nun?"

"I don't know, Andrea; I don't know everything. That's just something my mother used to say after her fourth abortion."

"We should study for our test, OK?"

"Sure..."

"OK. Let's see...The first woman to sneeze and bless herself in seven languages?"

“Pamela Finster Combs. She blessed herself in nine languages actually, three of them in what were then yet to be discovered ancient African dialects. That was in 1832.”

“GOOD. I’m impressed, Andrea! How about the first woman to roller-skate backward down Main Street, in Oxford, Ohio?”

“Wait, I feel like I should know this... Claudia...no wait...

CLAUDINE Augh—spelled like it’s pronounced—1993.”

“Wow, you certainly know your stuff. OK, give me one.”

“OK, let’s see—this is an important one OK? And you have to get the date right. The first woman to open a door for herself and glare at the man who tried.”

“GOD, I always get this one wrong. It’s much earlier than I usually think it was...”

“I’ll give you a hint; she was friends with Madame de Maintenon ...?”

“Zabeth Dieu!”

“Right! Good work. Zabeth Dieu, and the date?”

“I can never remember if it is 1647 or 1674.”

“1674. How about the first woman to go into a store, get only what she went in there for, and march right out again?”

“That one’s much later than anyone would believe...”

“Ha-ha; it’s a trick question—it hasn’t happened yet.”

“OK, Smarty-pants; here’s one for you, the first woman to tell her boyfriend, ‘If *you* don’t know what you did, then I am not going to tell you.’”

“That’s easy: Eve.”

“I sure am glad we’re taking this course. It really helps me to understand what very little difference there really is between males and females.”

“Me too, and... I think I may be pregnant again.”

“Why don’t guys ever get pregnant? It’s so unfair...”

“It so is.”

## The DANGERS OF RATIONAL SPEECH

This is a transcript of a speech given by Charles, Dark Cloud, Bellwether at (redacted) University, on (redacted). It was attended, almost exclusively, by student protesters, supporting administrators, local politicians and (redacted), none of whom were POC. Bellwether was there to speak about ‘race’.

CB: When it comes to race, most of us have decided that it is better to walk on egg shells for a thousand years rather than take the smallest painful step in the direction of fixing things.

Crowd: RACIST!

CB: Apparently for anyone to even raise the issue brands us.

Crowd: You ought to be branded. Nobody wants to hear your stupid bullshit!

CB: For all intents and almost every imaginable purpose, it is considered hateful for any white person to make any reference to historical fact, current reality, or undeniable truth, when it comes to this sacrosanct issue. However, declaring that nobody hears your cries, while refusing to let others even talk about it, only confuses the matter.

Crowd: That’s because you’re an intolerant, xenophobic, homophobic, Islamophobic, RACIST bigot!

CB: (covering the mic, and addressing the crowd directly) It’s still OK to be courteous, you know.

Crowd: But, the fact is that it doesn’t really help. Why don’t you speak the truth for a change?

CB: That’s fine. (placing his note cards inside his jacket) Here’s some truth for ya’: It doesn’t help to manufacture sociological excuses for the way things are in the poorest communities in our nation while also claiming those things are a proud part of a unique culture. Glorifying violence, drugs, prostitution, and criminal behavior; in music, in

movies, in comedy routines, while *simultaneously* ignoring true heroes like Robert Smalls, discounting the contribution of valuable institutions like the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, and pretending not to understand the dangerously-honest candid insights of Tommy Sotomayor, does not help things either.

Crowd: What do you know about it?

CB: I know this much: That any kid, growing up in such a milieu, should ever end up capable of thinking for himself is a tremendous testament to the independent nature of the human spirit.

Crowd: Racist!

CB: It doesn't accomplish anything for you to stand there shouting *racist*. In fact, it makes things worse. It doesn't help to use fulsome phrases like *our precious black children* while purposefully ignoring the ongoing wholesale slaughter of those children by other blacks. And, the peculiar idea that it's government's job to fix all that is ludicrous. Government is not only the most incompetent tool anyone could choose to work on a complex and sensitive problem, it is—whatever they may tell 'round election time—the least caring.

Crowd: Fuck YOU. What about offering a little dignity to people who have been oppressed for hundreds of years?

CB: It doesn't help, in any way, to demand recognition of the dignity, resilience and noble bearing of a people throughout their cruel history here, while forgetting where it all began. The enslavement of Blacks did not begin only after those poor people fell into white hands. It began when enemy tribal kings *captured* the ancestors of Black Americans and *held them* in pens, like cattle, *until they could sell them off* to slave traders. When those slave traders showed up, in Africa, asking, 'You got any people you'd like to sell into slavery?' those chiefs said, 'Yes we do! Step on over here and let me show you what we've got on hand at the moment.'

Crowd: Bullshit. You're a liar!

CB: No; actual fact. Anyone who feels the need to muck around in history, in an effort to find justice, should start their mucking in Africa.

Crowd: We demand reparations!

CB: You're demanding reparations from a government that fought a long and bloody war to set Black Americans free. I believe that it is a mistake to ignore that fact. And, that is pretty much everything I have to say on the matter.

Crowd: Yeah... go ahead, run away, you racist coward.

CB: You know, in all this talk about reparations for slavery, *everyone* seems to be forgetting that our Federal government demanded an end to slavery. At the risk of dividing the nation permanently, the government of the United States stood up and declared that black lives did, in fact, matter; and they went to war to champion that belief. The cost, to set American Blacks free, was more than half-a-million lives... thousands of them were black men in uniform.

Crowd: Bullshit! That war was only about saving the cotton industry.

CB: That war was fought despite the possible loss of half the nation—slavery was the bone of contention. Demanding an apology from our government is overlooking that fact.”

Crowd: AUTOCRAT!”

CB: You don't even know what an autocrat is... do you?”

Crowd: RACIST!

CB: You clearly don't know what that means either.

Nonetheless, I need to say that those of us who choose to cling unforgivingly to this issue should stop, consider that war seriously for one moment and, once informed, instead of demanding *reparations*, you'll more properly consider issuing a statement of thanks to *the descendants* of those who died fighting for that cause. That would be time more nobly spent.

Crowd: You're a moron! You're a liar and a coward and a racist and a moron.

CB: Yes, I am all of that. While we're here, I might as well help you add to that list, and take the opportunity to prophesy that the gun problem in the US will *never* be resolved. So, now, with that settled, there is no longer any need for us to *have a national conversation* about that one either."

Crowd: Yeah, we can *all* agree on that... Moron.

CB: Yes, we can *all* agree that, if the problem is that guns keep falling into the hands of criminals and the criminally insane, and the only solution anyone will even consider is to keep guns out of the hands of the rational and the law-abiding, that problem will never be resolved.

Crowd: I hope you're having fun, RACIST!

CB: Actually, I am, kinda ...in a weird way.

There is a short video of Bellwether as he was leaving that event, which is both fascinating and revealing. In it (on it) he is approached by a young woman who asks, sweetly, if she might ask him a question. Bellwether smiles and nods, as she calmly asks, "How many times must people call you a racist before it becomes indisputable fact?"

Bellwether considers, smiles in a fatherly way, and says: "Well, that's a good question. If you mean, how many times must you accuse me before your slander is transmuted into presumed fact, I believe, if you get socialist media involved, once should be enough."

She then turns her phone upon herself and says charmingly, "I'm standing here with the *alleged* racist, Charles Dark Cloud Bellwether, and he has just finished his racist speech." Bellwether stops her by touching her sleeve, and says, "That's two... you used it twice."

"Yeah, I know," she says, "I just wanted to test your theory."

Bellwether laughs and says, "You seem like a good kid, can I tell you something?"

The young woman says, "Sure."

"At the risk of coming across as too much a human being, I'd first like to ask you something."

"OK."

"You know that most of this bullshit is imaginary, don't you?"

"What bullshit?"

"Oh, all of this victimhood, oppression, unsafe, nonsense."

"Sure."

"You do?"

"Sure."

"Then you know that a lot of what these poor victims say and do is only a reaction to their own imagined oppression?"

"Sure, I know that."

"You do?"

"Sure."

"Do you think *they* know it?"

"That I don't know."

"Do you think that *they* know that all that's required for... well, possibly *they* don't know that then either. So, tell me what you think of this—I believe that if they would simply stop imagining themselves to be victims—oppressed, unsafe, whatever—they'd actually cease being victims."

"I agree with that."

"You do?"

"Sure, and most of my friends would agree with it too; and we suspect a lot of others probably do as well, but they are afraid to say so,"

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that—not that they're afraid, but that they see things in that light. Would you and your silent friends agree that if those poor victims were ever

to experience actual victimization, true oppression, or found their personal safety in real jeopardy—and their timid souls survived the blinding light of realization—that they would look back longingly upon these simpler times?”

“Yes.”

“So...then, why don’t you do something about it? Why don’t you—who understand their language—speak up?”

She shrugged, “You gotta go along to get along.”

“Huh...”

“Believe me, you do NOT want to needlessly needle those nitwits.”

“I do believe you; and, I suppose the threat is relentless. These days it takes bravery to state any obvious truth.”

Bellwether thought for a moment. “They are a strange combination of debilitating frailty, self-pity, spitefulness, and venom, aren’t they?”

“Well, Mr. Bellwether, I really enjoy standing around here talking to you about this, but I gotta go study for a test.”

She patted old Bellwether on the shoulder before pirouetting and waltzing quickly away.

It was the most refreshing thing I’d seen on video in a very long time.

## THE DREAM

As he stood in my path, I threw my cape over one shoulder, revealing the butt of the rapier which had killed so many just like him, and had wounded countless others, giving them plenty of time to mull over their grievous mistake. Instantly, I found myself assailed by three additional villains—one at each side and one from behind. Surrounded, I casually reached up and, taking my chapeau by its broad brim, sent it sailing gently just above the cobblestones.

This commanded their attention long enough that I was able to get behind them, withdraw my weapon, and slowly, using tiny nicks—so slight that they would burn but would not bleed—I managed to herd them into a group directly in front of me. Being a man of experience I felt that I could see what would come next. And I was right. In every window and in every doorway there suddenly appeared more of them. Slowly I observed each of them in turn; and even knowing the futility of my efforts, I set my heart on fighting. I was determined to take a stand, not to save myself but, though they could not possibly understand, for them.

As I supposed they would, they all began to chant, “We want SOCIALISM, we want SOCIALISM.”

In response, I sheathed my sword, walked over, picked up my hat, placed it smartly upon my head, sighed and, in a weary tone, said, “You don’t even know what Socialism is.”

When one of them, who seemed to represent them, stepped forward saying, “You’re right, we don’t; teach us”, I knew it was a dream and I woke up.

## WHAT SOCIALISM IS

As time goes on, the cult of Darwinian economics, along with its blindly devoted adherents, suffers increasing disintegration and, through the stress of its inherent inhumanity, decays. Naturally, albeit unwittingly, the attitude of most devotees, unaware of the externally driven motives which drive their *uncooperative impulses*, begin to first doubt and then abandon the cause for a saner, more humane, progressivism.

However, it cannot be denied that, most of the *uncooperative impulses* commonly associated with Darwinian economics are incongruous with the underlying subservience its adversaries suppose, and even less are they ‘externally driven’.

More than a few adherents of capitalism are vicariously inspired by the hope for the life awash in porcine behavior and greed, which its advocates popularly portray as ‘*success*’, and which they insist are the motivational inspiration behind their beloved socio-economic structure called Capitalism.

Unfortunately, those who cling to that idea, free of personal subservience to any particular greater cause by way of the system they claim to despise, choose self-alienation, rather than acceptance, and view indifferent societal affiliation, not as the sublime Liberty it is, but as personal deprivation.

Where in that perspective can be found any feeling?

And where, in that, is the humanity?

*Brenda Flubb-Dorden, Harvard, December 1952*

Those are the thoughts of one of *the movement’s* greatest leaders speaking to those who yearn for Socialism. Naturally, after reading that, I think anybody would give Socialism a second look.

## **SOCIALISM 101**

Welcome to Socialism 101, the prerequisite to this course is Comparative Political/Economic Systems. If you did not take Comparative Political/Economic Systems you should not be in this class. For those of you who did, we'll review a bit before we begin our look at Socialism.

First, however, let me state directly that if I thought for one moment that it would harm you, in any way, to look at things with a cold eye for a change and possibly, by way of that new experience, free yourselves of the tyranny of mindless devotion to vague hopes, historical misconceptions, proud ignorance, self-imposed hyper-sensitivity, and feel-good ideologies, I'd have forgone teaching altogether. That would have been just so much easier.

I feel I should also tell you that, like you, I've lived a life entirely devoid of any deeper meaning but, very late in life, I began to wish that someone, somewhere along the line, had taken the time to attempt to pry open a window in my mind. That's my way of saying that I truly understand your willful resistance to thinking for yourselves. It takes guts to stand alone in this world. And, from past painful experience, I know that calling a moron a moron to his face may only lead to a broken nose and, often, because I am the sensitive sort, mine.

That being said; take a look at the overview of Comparative Political/Economic Systems that I've printed out for you, and let me know if you have any questions. While you're doing that I'll just stand here gazing about the room as if stupefied and tugging at my lower lip, idiot-fashion. I may occasionally emit a grunt; just ignore that.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY An Overview

### SOCIALISM

1. Launched and driven by an ideal which, nobly, includes everyone
2. Everyone struggles mightily to attain that ideal

### DEMOCRACY/Capitalism

1. Launched and driven by an ideal which, nobly, includes everyone
2. Everyone struggles mightily to attain that ideal

### SOCIALISM

3. Men are put in place to represent the people, and to implement, oversee and protect that glorious ideal

### DEMOCRACY/Capitalism

3. Men are put in place to represent the people, and to implement, oversee and protect that glorious ideal

### SOCIALISM

4. Mysteriously, these men all become fat and very VERY rich

### DEMOCRACY/Capitalism

4. Mysteriously, these men all become fat and very VERY rich

### SOCIALISM

5. Everyone else works to keep them in power and support them in luxury

## DEMOCRACY/Capitalism

5. Everyone else works to keep them in power and support them in luxury

OK. You've had plenty of time to read the review of Comparative Political/Economic Systems. Admittedly, these are just the basics, but I think the differences are pretty clear.

The real difference, if you recall, for the great majority of us, is that under either system we often observe people anxiously arriving early to stand in long line, waiting desperately in many cases, hoping to get their hands on something. Under our horrible, utterly despicable Capitalist system, that *thing* is most likely the latest shiny new electronic trinket; under the glories of Socialism that thing is probably a loaf of bread.

If there are no questions, let's begin Socialism 101.

Ah, Professor Gauche! Yes, yes, of course, take any seat you wish. I was just getting started. We were about to begin talking about the hidden dangers of rational thought. I had just mentioned the negative effect objectivity has upon tolerance, diversity, sensitivity... and how so-called rational thought shores up false ideologies which promote racism, xenophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, violence and unnecessary cruelty. I was just saying that it is OK to be rational but, unless we recognize that there are limits to such thinking, it can also be quite dangerous.

So... let's go back to where I left off.

In this course, I will outline some of the dangers that rational thought brings to our culture. In my esteemed colleague's book, *The Dangers of Reason; How Rational and Objective*

Thought Stifles the Progressive Agenda, Professor Gauche—who apparently will be honoring us with his presence for a while—listed three such dangers; although, as the course develops we will no doubt discover many more on our own.

The first, and perhaps the primary danger, is that rational thought—objectivity, reason, whatever you want to call it—is detached; it lack the human touch. Imagine if two people, each accused of the same crime, were treated in the court of public opinion, in the media, and even in the courtroom, in the very same manner. If, say, a Muslim and a Jew were judged equally for the same offense, or a Black female and a white male were held accountable to the same extent for extortion. Where is the ‘feeling’? Where is the social/human factor in that kind of justice? In essence, where is the social justice?

Oh, well, thank you, Professor Gauche, I will. Thank you for stopping in. It was nice to have such an authority on the subject sitting in with us. Come back any time.

Now...where was I?

When talking about Socialism, we need to remember that there are among us weirdly optimistic people who believe they can summon their guardian angels to help them find a parking space, and darkly hooded old women with pointy chins and moles in the most distracting places, who think they can ‘draw down the moon’ (whatever that might mean)...and that those good people believe those things as surely as tots believe in the Easter Bunny or most of your fellow students believe in Socialism. So, going in, we must realize—and accept the fact—that most things in life are a matter of personal perspective.

For example: If you're driving in the city and there's a *slow-poke* in front of you—who doesn't seem to care if he ever gets anywhere—and a *truck driver* directly behind you—who is driving like his vehicle is engulfed in flame and you're the only thing between him and water... you need to realize that YOU are the *truck driver* for that poor slow-poke in front of you, as well as the *slow-poke* for the truck-driver behind you. My wife taught me that.  
I am quite proud.

Just so you know where I stand in that equation; I've often wondered which would make the better bumper sticker: *This is not a Racetrack, JACKASS! OR, I IGNORE ALL MORONS.* But, I seem to have gotten off track.

On the colder, undeniable side of things, we have something which you have probably been taught, all along the way, to find repugnant—called reality. Since that word is a trigger for many students these days, I will attempt to avoid using it for the remainder of this course. I cannot, however, avoid referring to the thing it represents.  
So, with all that in place, let's begin.  
Is Socialism right for us?

Admittedly, there are some things I don't understand about Socialism. But, these are the basics, as I understand them: The establishment of a tiny proudly conspicuous ruling class making fundamentally stupid, though well-intended (certainly well-intended) economic decisions that systematically devalue the currency and destroy the country's economy, sending it into a spiraling, ever more rapidly accelerating, descent into nationalized Hell, as everyone stands around hollow-eyed and wondering how it came to that so quickly.

Meanwhile, good, honest people begin developing survival skills, concurrently juggling their search for food with spying on their neighbors and friends in the increasingly frantic hope of seeing something, or overhearing something of value which they can turn over to authorities and thus find favor in the eyes of the once dear and well-intended, now openly oppressive and massively militarized, minuscule elite ruling class, and thereby obtain a little more of that ever more-elusive, increasingly dear, scrap of bread.

This is not theory—this is a concrete inevitability as it has been demonstrated repeatedly by those who have tried to make the lofty noble scheme work.  
How do I know all this?

I don't, personally; but, I did once read a history book, and just yesterday, I glanced at the news from around the world.

As said, most things are a matter of personal perspective.

That is why those people who have fled Socialist countries and now cling to Capitalism as a drowning man would to anything that floats, may have a different perspective from you, who having never had anything at all to do with Socialism, and who, driven only by the rampant desire to feel excluded, must face the challenge of consciously admitting that you are pampered and privileged and feeling guilty about it, or pretend to blind yourselves to the fact by purposefully, somewhat theatrically, alienating yourselves, in propitiation to your poorer fellow students and expiation for the unforgivable crime, which shall not here be named. I suggest you look in the mirror to find out for yourselves—if you do not already know—what that crime might be.

Follow that path and you *will* end up screaming about your aching desire for Socialism.

At this point—if you are astute—YOU must be asking, why anyone would try to sell that barrel of rotting fish called Socialism to anyone else. And, I have an answer for that. Primarily—because it’s easy.

It requires no cunning whatsoever and very little effort to sell almost anything to trusting, wide-eyed, apparently credulous human beings, with no sense of history, who are increasingly less informed about, and increasingly less interested in, anything that didn’t happen to themselves personally—or maybe some micro-celeb.—in the last 2 or 3 hours.

If I wanted to, I could have you all wearing stupid-looking pork-pie hats, and walking around looking like Sam Sneed. But, I would never be so cruel. I can see that whoever thought they could sell you on the idea that every female in America, under the age of 73, should be walking around in black tights, whatever their size, shape, or fitness, had no such qualms.

Secondarily—as to why anyone would attempt to sell that particularly rotten barrel of fish called Socialism—we must take a look at the sellers; the old goats; the college professors and administrators. Many of them have been around since Trotsky first refused the bit under Stalin, so they should know better. And, because they should know better, I think they should be ashamed of themselves. But, they’re not.

Neither are the politicians who promote it. We must ask about *their* willingness to scrap everything they once pretended to hold dear—their lives, their fortunes, their sacred honor.

Why this sudden eagerness to cast off the false face of dignity and begin spitting out silly leftist dogma? If it's only to create new voters, they could do that more easily by simply allowing an unhindered influx of needy new voters from neighboring countries. Since many of those neither speak the language of this nation nor care to learn, they are more easily made into fully-dependent vote casters.

But, there must be more to it than that...

So, it raises another question: Why would most of those old goats rather sacrifice an eye than lose their seat in Congress?

The quick and easy answer is this. Most of them somehow have managed to parlay a \$174,000/year salary in to multi-millions—by what magic no honest person can even guess. But, since they are *expressly prohibited* from earning or accepting income intended to influence their vote on any matter... we know it can't be that. So, it remains a mystery.

Whatever the secret behind their great personal ever-growing wealth, it certainly explains why, instead of clinging more dearly to the Constitution, talking to you reasonably about history and events, and correcting your baseless ideas about the wonders of leftist politics, they'd rather sell you whatever idea you are most eager and most willing to buy. It's the easiest thing to do, and it keeps them in office, with one hand on the money making machine.

*I am not going to attempt to sell you anything, however.*

OK, so let's take a break, and we'll get back to this in about, say, twenty minutes... no, make that half an hour.

## *A PERSONAL NOTE* on HIGHER EDUCATION

After receiving the Legion of Honour, a few years back, my father—who never said a word about war all the time we were growing up—began speaking to me about the horrors of war.

He'd had a hand in the taking of Metz—as Patton put it in his commendation: “a fortification which had never before in modern times fallen by assault...” That series of fortifications was taken—(Patton again)—“in terrain favorable to the enemy, and under almost intolerable weather conditions of rain, flood, and bitter cold”, an accomplishment which, according to Patton, “required not only individual courage, skill, endurance, and determination, but also sound tactical judgement coupled with an insatiable desire to close with the enemy”, and which “greatly contributed to the destruction of an entire reinforced German division.”

That was the merest glimpse at what he'd been through when my Father returned home, after driving the Nazis back into Germany, and began his freshman year at Purdue.

Many years later, I was sitting in the office of a car repair shop looking out at the damaged front end of our poor car, when I noticed the Indiana license plate on a *totaled* vehicle. I asked the kid (in his late twenties) who owned it, if it wouldn't have been easier if he'd had done that back home, rather than driving it all the way out to California to do it, and he laughed. I asked him where he was from and he said, Indianapolis. I told him that my brother had been born there and my father had gone to Purdue. He told me that he'd gone to Purdue too, and I asked him if freshmen are still required to wear a beanie on campus.

He said he'd never heard of that, and I laughed. "Yeah," I said, "I think my father may have had a hand it putting an end to that nonsense."

When my Dad was a freshman at Purdue—after the war—all freshmen were required to wear a beanie on campus. So, one morning Dad was walking across campus, on his way to some engineering course—without a stupid beanie—when an upperclassman stepped in front of him and demanded, "Why aren't you wearing your beanie, Frosh? How about I teach you a lesson concerning that."

My Dad—just back from the unrelenting merciless Hell of war—replied, "How about the next time you utter the word 'beanie', I rip your head off and shove it up your ass?"

According to Dad, that was the end of that discussion and, possibly, the end of a long-standing tradition at Purdue.

Years later, I tried—but failed—to launch a tradition of my own when I graduated from Richmond Professional Institute.

Uh-mediatey after finishing my four year stint there, I was hired to mop floors, as a part-time janitor, at the very same highly esteemed educational institution from which I had just graduated. And, I was OK with that. I really was. However, others, after catching wind of my chosen career path, put an end to it; and my first paycheck also included a note of dismissal. That's how much they thought of their own degree.

I asked the manager of the maintenance crew if I had done something wrong, but he just rolled his eyes in an exaggerated manner, shook his head, and stared at me, until I went away.

## **SOCIALISM 101** (continued)

OK. So, during the break, one of you came up to me and, without resorting to any foul accusations—thank you for that consideration—asked me if I honestly believe that our system is *so fliggun great* (though he didn't say 'fliggun'). I want to start out this half of the class by answering that question.

No. I do not believe our system is *so fliggun great*.

Our Federal Government is a fiercely-guarded, massive, overgrown, self-contained, self-perpetuating, mechanism composed of elected, self-serving, self-assuming and self-assured ruling class individuals, each with their own separate agenda, and with no other purpose than to continue grinding out laws and regulations and tax law, in conjunction with various nearly innumerable—430 was the last number I heard—loosely associated, separate, fully-autonomous, fully-independent and self-determining agencies designed specifically to provide the forces necessary for the oversight and passionate pursuit of infringement, without compassion or any desire to either understand or bend in any way, and without any help or input of any sort from any outside source—including 'our' elected representatives—other than those it chooses, based solely upon assumed benefits the deciding individuals or agency may reap due to such association, either immediately or in the future. And all that is boringly true.

What's *frighteningly* true is that those 430 plus departments, agencies, and sub-agencies, sticking their noses into almost every aspect of our lives, are all run by people who were not elected, cannot be fired... and defy anyone to try.

No reasonable person could possibly look at that entangled bureaucratic mess without admitting that it is almost perfectly designed to support (if not encourage) corruption and waste. And, not surprisingly, it does.

Even at its best, the product of that unnecessarily overly-complex machine—which continually adds and has no built-in mechanism for subtraction—is a small, self-interested, often corrupt, *professional* ruling class, within which only a select few have any influence.

The whole thing is fueled by resentment and jealousy.

And—I'll be honest with you—I've never understood how authority works—people have this annoying tendency to simply accept the fact that others, who call themselves leaders of men, are somehow qualified to lead. From my experience, most leaders, of any sort, are idiots; and, the larger the following, the more unsavory the leader. I don't know exactly how that works; but, look at the head of any organization and ask yourself honestly if you would trust that guy to check the air pressure in your tires.

Far too many of *our* political *leaders* have proven themselves to be less-than-ordinary human beings with extraordinary weaknesses which they surrender to readily. For many of them the world is awash in foul opportunity which they cannot resist; it always seems to come as a surprise to them when they are caught; and they consider it an outrage if they are either publicly reprimanded or expected to pay any penalty for their indiscretions.

Why?

Because, the ruling class in the United States is at once a *celebrity class*.

Therefore they are above the average citizen and far beyond the reach of the law—they think of themselves that way, and act that way. And we accept it. It is an idea respected by all.

Remember the hubbub some congresswoman made when she was asked to show her ID when entering a Federal Building? How *dare* those guards treat *her* like a common citizen! The Buddha said *the man who seeks riches and celebrity is like a child licking honey from the blade of a sharp knife.*

Of course, the strange proclivity of politicians making outlandish statements in public, without embarrassment, continually surprises us. But, we accept them for what they are. It might be kinder and closer to the truth to simply say that we love our politicians like we love our dogs... we hold our noses, look away, clean up after them, dote on them, and take great pride in their smallest accomplishments.

In return, the ruling class remains separate, aloof, demanding of respect, powerful, often threatening, frightening, and frequently (quite reasonably) feared.

If you're like me though—and I think few people are—you want more than your representative-elite *pretending* to share your values, your beliefs, your views; on life, society, culture, morality; occasionally you want them to make some effort in attempting to convince you—in a vague, casual, not really fully-committed, general sort of way—that they actually do. You want someone who pretends to understand your concerns while campaigning, but also, once in office, shows inclination toward taking occasional action of which you might approve. I'm just being silly. That, of course, is asking too much. It rarely happens. And...

Ah, Professor Gauche! Welcome back. Yes, please; come right in. This is perfect timing.

I was just saying that... since so-called rational or 'objective' thought is so invasive, seeping into every aspect of our natural identity concerns, the needless application of thinking of that sort, when it comes to social problems, requires careful monitoring; 'objective' statements must be carefully and continually scrutinized, lest they get completely out of control. And, who is going to undertake that monitoring? It begins with 'G' and ends with 'ment'.

Rational thought is so closely tied to every aspect of our lives that... each of us, I'm sure has enough to look after, to criticize, to find offense and outrage in, that...

Oh, well, thank you for dropping in again, Professor. Hope to see you again. Any time; always glad to have you in our class.

What do you say, we take another break?  
See you in, twenty minutes.

## IT ALL BEGINS HERE

OK, class, after nap-time we're going to discuss politics...but first nap-time.

No, Mandy, we have to take nap-time first.

No. No. NO, we have to take our naps first. But, as soon as nap-time is over, we'll jump right into politics.

OK. OK! But, only one question. I'll take ONE question from one of you...everybody put your hands down, and let's be real quiet, so we can hear the question. I'm gonna close my eyes and spin around and point; and whoever I point at gets to ask the question. OK?

OK, so, here I am closing my eyes... and I spin, and I point.

Wow, Morgan, I guess you win; you get to ask one political question, and then it's nap-time for everyone.

Don't be disappointed, the rest of you, we'll have plenty of time for politics after nap-time, and you'll get plenty more as you make your way through school. For now, let's see what Morgan has to ask. Go ahead Morgan.

"Uh, what I think, what I think, is that gommment should try to give everything to everybody, and then no poor kids would be poor and hungry and we could watch movies on our smart phones while driverless cars take us to some place to hang around with our friends..."

Yes, that's...well, I must say, that's an amazingly astute statement, Morgan; now what is your question?

"Oh. OK. So, why **doesn't** gommment give all the money to everybody?"

That, dear Morgan—these tears show you how close little Morgan has come to the very heart of things, children—but, what you ask, Morgan, and what you all need to know... is that *THAT* is the very heart of things political. Why *doesn't* the government simply give all the money to everybody?

We're gonna be—I'm afraid, we're ALL going to be asking ourselves that same, very simple question, probably for the rest of our lives.

Thank you, dear, little Morgan, for putting it so simply, so concisely. I can tell you this, children, that if those mean grown-ups in government could see things half as clearly as little Morgan here, it would be a far better world. I see a bright future for you Morgan—perhaps someday you'll find yourself in Congress.

Now, with that pleasant thought on your minds, let's lie down on our blankies and take a little nap.

No, no; no more questions. It's nap-time. Just lie down; we'll have plenty of time to discuss politics after you get your rest.

## **SOCIALISM 101** (continued, again)

Welcome back. I'm going to try to wrap it up in this session, so stick with me for just a little bit longer.

During the break, one of you sidled up to me in the hallway and asked if I am drunk. Thank you; I didn't know I was that entertaining. But, just so you know, I am not drunk—though, at times, in this class, I wish I were. That same person took the opportunity to ask me if all the wonderful things that a Capitalist system offers can be found in Socialism.

And, the answer is yes. Socialism offers all that and more.

So, if you really want to replace a reasonably well-functioning economic system, with a myopic, ideologically driven, arithmetically unsound, well-meaning, dependency-based, delusional daydream; if you want ruler-lords, with overwhelming drives which they have no need to control, overseeing, regulating, inspecting, auditing, taxing, taxing, taxing, prying, snooping, sending you forms to fill out, taxing, scrutinizing, inspecting and fining *more* of your life in an centralized, institutionalized, massive juggernaut of cradle-to-grave relentless, unending, always frustrating, mindless bureaucratic oppression, you can have all that, with Socialism. Under Socialism you'll need a permit to piss on a Tuesday.

So, first, let's ask ourselves this: Why, when by chance, through the unwitting cooperation of an eagerly self-deceived major political party, and the witless support of well-meaning, guilt-ridden, shame-filled members of the oppressor class—calling themselves 'progressives'—a Socialist *was* actually elected President of the United States, did *he* do *nothing* to

make that Socialist dream come true? Why, when he had the chance to do that good old Socialist shuffle, did he do the big bank bailout instead? Why *didn't he* take that very real opportunity to do what he always said needed to be done? Why didn't he redistribute the wealth through that bailout money?

Why, instead of putting that cash into the hands of good honest, hard-working, people, did he give the scoundrels *who caused the problem* something between \$700 million and 16 trillion dollars (depending upon who you're talking to) so they could continue running their underhanded businesses. Why?

If he had given that money directly to the people, it would have gotten into the system *uh-mediatly*, as you kids say.

Depending upon who you listen to, those bailouts were the equivalent of \$16,000 for every man woman and child in the United States; though some reported it was only a mere \$9000 for every man woman and child. I don't know which is correct; but, if a check for nine grand shows up unexpectedly in most people's mailbox it'll get spent, and probably that very day. The sudden influx of those funds would have done a lot for our rapidly deflating economy.

How does giving money to people who have just proven themselves to be *criminally* irresponsible—at the expense of every single one of their trusting clients—make any sense? It doesn't, but our socialist leader didn't see it that way. Why? Could it be that those financial institutions were also the protectors of his personal wealth? Gosh, I wonder.

More to our point, what would a real Socialist have done?

Let's look back for a moment at our review sheet for the prerequisite course Comparative Political/Economic Systems. Let's look at step 4. "Mysteriously, these men all become fat and very VERY rich."

So, what am I saying? Am I saying that it's all the same thing? Nope. There is a *big* difference between those two systems; and the big difference is this: If *we* don't like the guys in power and we want to get rid of them, we vote them out; under Socialism, if you don't like them, and you want to get rid of them, you'd probably have to kill them. And, I've been told they can be quite stubborn. That's one of the primary differences, and it's a substantial difference.

Oh, my goodness, what a blessing... PROFESSOR! Are you...? No? You're more than welcome to. Oh well, I'm sorry to hear that; I'm sure we're all sorry to hear that. I was just telling my students here that no less concerning than its other dangers—all of which you so wisely pointed out in your book—is the impact that learning objectivity has on the student's thinking; and how it has a negative effect on less 'successful' students, as well as causing greater unforeseen harm to privileged, supposedly 'successful' students. And, that rational thought is, of course, as you've pointed out, perceived to be *a masculine approach to thought*, which is, essentially, difficult for many women to deal with. Oh? Are you sure you can't stay?

I guess that's enough for today. We'll be talking about other aspects of this matter—Socialism, not that idiot Gauche's nonsense—when next we meet. In the meantime, I want to thank both of you for attending this class. Thanks for listening and, let's just keep what's been said here today to ourselves.

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on TEACHING MY FIRST CLASS

As I recall it, the instructor was saying, “Voltaire said: *‘I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend unto death your right to say it.’*”

And I muttered, “Voltaire never said that.”

This demands some explanation. See, back in those days—now more than 50 years ago—us college students were not merely allowed, but were encouraged, to think for ourselves. Our instructors did not see us as just a bunch of empty skulls, open to being filled with useless political crap. Though there was some of that going on, admittedly.

When I muttered, “Voltaire never said that.” the instructor said, “You have something to say, Mr. Mockridge?”

I said, “I was just saying that Voltaire never said that.”

“OH?” he said smugly, “and who do you think said that?”

“Some idiot biographer of his said it as a way to supposedly sum up his thinking...simplistically, and badly, and wrongly ...years after the great thinker was long gone,” I said.

“Oh, well, Mr. Mockridge,” he said snidely, “since you think *you* know so much, why don’t *you* just come up here and conduct this class.” He extended the chalk, he held in his hand, in my direction.

“Are you serious?” I asked.

“Well,” he said, “if you honestly believe that you know more about The Enlightenment than I do, clearly, you’d be doing us all a favor.”

He held the chalk out again, with emphasis, as a challenge.

And I accepted that challenge.

As he took my seat and took out his notebook, I began by saying, “Voltaire never said, *I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend unto death your right to say it.*’ He DID say, ‘The more I know about people, the more I like my dog.’” The students all laughed.

When I looked at the instructor, I could see—though he had his head down—that he was sorta snickering too.

“Isn’t that true, Professor?” I asked.

He nodded. “Yes,” he said, “that’s true, Mockridge. I seem to recall that Voltaire took the idea from a guest of his, however—an aristocratic lady, a friend, whose name I am always incapable of recalling.”

“Was it Émilie du Châtelet?” I asked.

“No. another one, but it was someone like that. Voltaire refined it, making it clever enough to put in into print.”

I laughed; he laughed; the gulf was bridged.

And so I continued.

“As to that statement frequently—and *incorrectly*—credited to Voltaire,” I said, “My god, what nonsense!”

(From there on, I may have wandered just a bit.)

“Purer nonsense,” I declared, “has never seen ink. No lofty statement ever issued from the pompous manipulative duplicitous mind of man has ever been so full of pure bullpocrisy. A thousand wars, ten thousand battles, a million duels, a billion fistfights, and almost every marital squabble from the beginning of time has been fought in order to protest, suppress, or eliminate all together, another person’s right to say a thing. A more truthful statement might be: ‘I do not agree with what you say, but, if you say it again, you do so at your own peril.’”

“On the personal front,” I continued, “no person holding an opposing opinion to my own has ever (EVER), under any circumstance that I can recall, conceded that my opinion is even worth listening to, let alone worth fighting for.

Fighting against, is another matter. Still, I’m allowed to have an opinion, no matter how ill-informed, lame, stupid or embarrassing, and to cling to it unreasonably and, in this world, I can now publish it quickly, easily, so that all humanity might benefit, or get a good laugh out of it, or take up arms (which seems to be the option of choice these days).

Man,” I said, “is a creature who, at the highest level of social development, strains to bear, without wincing openly, the irritating sound of any other man’s voice. If that other man’s voice is spouting an agreeable opinion, our most elevated social being might condescend to smile and nod while inwardly attending his own distant thoughts, or accumulating a list or corrections. And that is because, even if someone is in complete agreement with us, they could not possibly know as much as we do. Growl and pound your chest, if you disagree.”

I looked up to what I thought would be the amazed faces of my fellow students and that, is exactly what I saw; that, and a lot of yawning and rolling of the eyes. The instructor slowly got up from my desk, extended his hand, and I put the chalk in it. He thanked me and asked me to return to my desk.

After having given thought to what I’d said, he gave me an F. And, now, these many years later, I’ve discovered that I have more to say.

And I say this:

God knows—and you may have guessed—that I long to hear what every man woman and child on earth might have to say

at any moment on any subject whatsoever, whether it involves me or not. I wait, poised, eager to listen. And I'm sure that desire runs in both directions. Such is the natural benevolence instilled in every man that draws breath... or, so we are told. We're just one big loving community. If you agree, tweet.

To those who claim that man is, by nature, a social creature, I ask, Then why are the happiest days of *my life* spent either alone with a musical instrument or in the presence of my wife, who fills the room with a lovely calming pervasive music of her own just by being in there with me? And what is to be made of this yearning hope, burning like a small fire within me, that I might occasionally attain blessed solitude, with no contact whatsoever with anyone else, for a very long time?

Briefly, I think that contemporary Man has reduced himself to a creature with a mouth and a mirror. The internet seems to bear this out. We like to hear our own voice and we like what we see in the mirror while brushing our teeth. We pretend to believe that others may enjoy our grating voice and admire that charming leer as well. Despite all the ridicule and threats of physical violence, that thought still comforts us.

However, that assumption—that the entire world is out there waiting to see what we might say or do next—is wrong. If you disagree, please don't turn away... I'll fade into non-existence.

## RESIST WHAT?

One afternoon a man came upon his son, a small child at the time, sitting on the driveway with a basketball at his feet and his head in his hands, in complete misery. The kid was in tears. His father asked what the problem was, and the boy told him, “I’ve been playing basketball against this big invisible guy, and he keeps beating me!”

Remember that kid.

In those halcyon days long past (1967, 68), when so many of us were seen carrying around copies of *Psychology Today*, I actually looked inside one of them once, at the library. And, I learned something that I still tout whenever I get the chance. The man who *thinks* he’s on fire, IS on fire—whether he’s actually on fire or not. Couple that with the kid playing basketball against a big invisible guy and always losing, and, there you go; you have the perfect definition of the ‘resist’ movement.

These people all yearn to be a part of something big and meaningful; at the same time they persist in thinking of themselves as marginalized and unrecognized individuals. What *they* fail to recognize is that they are already a part of something very big and extraordinarily meaningful; it’s something which expects, supports and almost demands individuality. There is no larger genuinely diverse group of unique individuals than the United States of America.

In order to join in, all any citizen has to do is *stop* resisting.

Then they may discover that they are not on fire, and that the big invisible guy is actually on their team.

## THE MAKING OF A SHEEP-PUPPET

"I'm glad you could make it today," said my guide. "The campus will probably be completely deserted tomorrow."

"Why's that?" I asked.

"Well, the reason's two-fold," he said. "Some of our students will be leaving this afternoon to nail down a good place in line to pick up the new iTrance, when it comes out tomorrow—later, most of them will go, directly from the store, down to the anti-capitalism protest."

"Ah," I said. And I had this thought, 'Stupidity is one thing; viciousness quite another; but if you put the two together, you've got yourself a bachelor's degree.'

He looked at me for a moment, as if he may have actually heard that thought, then took my elbow and quickly dragged me out of the way of a long line of oncoming sedan chairs.

While they passed, we were standing there in a respectful silence, until I asked, "Who are all these people?"

"Incoming students," he whispered.

"Freshmen?"

"Yes."

"I can barely see into those things, but from the wailing I hear coming from inside, they seem... distraught." I said.

"Yes, they are frightened; they're nervous; for the first time in many of their lives they feel vulnerable; it's an anxious time for them. Mainly, they're afraid they may be asked to think. But in Orientation, we'll assure them that won't be necessary. They'll come away feeling safer, empowered ...and ready to learn about politics."

"They're all here to study Political Science?"

"No." He looked at me as if I might be an idiot. "Politics is the backbone of every study at this fine institution; the major is irrelevant."

“Ah. Who are those people carrying them?”

“College Administrators and Professors.”

“Ah. They look pretty humble.”

“Yes. They know their position.”

“I haven’t seen that ostrich-feather fan-thing for a while...”

“Yes, we do our best to make freshmen feel welcome.”

“And who are those people in front scattering 100 dollar bills along the path, like rose pedals before an Assyrian bride?”

“Those are their parents.”

“Ah. And who are those guys down on their knees, picking up that money and dumping it into that large goat-drawn cart?

“I don’t know; maintenance workers or something of that sort; I suppose some may be politicians.”

“And the guy driving that cart is the Comptroller I suppose.”

“You suppose right.” He looked at me as if he just might have to reevaluate my intelligence. “Now, if you don’t have any more questions, we should probably keep quiet and show some respect, this situation is frightening enough for our new students without a lot of unnecessary chatter coming at them from beyond the monogramed, hand-tooled brocade curtains.”

After the procession had passed, he smiled at me, smacked his hands together joyfully and said, “Well, that’s how they come to us; would you like to see how we send them out into the world?”

“Sure,” I said.

As we walked along he—apparently deep in thought—maintained a dreamy silence for a while, and only began speaking again as we entered a massive old building.

“I have to confess that they come to us very nearly ready to be released into the world. But, *we* put the final touches on them,” he said proudly, as we drifted slowly through the corridors of the massive old building.

“Beginning in kindergarten—and throughout their primary, secondary and college-prep years,” he explained, “they are carefully prepared. Here,” he said, “we test them; do any necessary remedial work, do a little last minute tweaking, insert a few final thoughts, and send them on their way.”

“Ah,” I said. “And that takes four years?”

“I think you’ll find this very exciting.” He winked.

I smiled.

Just then, someone came running up to him and spoke very quietly to him. He asked a couple questions, then turned to me and said, “I’ll be right back.”

Left there alone in the hallway, I looked into one of the rooms. In it was a skinny, pimply, bespectacled, white kid with a bad haircut, pacing the floor in tears and wailing. I opened the door a crack to pick up the gist of his pain. He was alternately calling out for the extermination of all white males and admitting his personal guilt in choosing that particularly despicable skin color for himself. He also confessed his willingness to acceptance any sacrifice required of him, to somehow correct that terrible mistake.

I honestly did not know what to think of that. Was it comedy or a tragedy or both? I stepped aside and made a little note to ask Ionesco. I also noted the vast improvement that had been made in advanced education since I had gone to college. I suppose students have pretty much always been sheep throughout history, but these new sheep were self-sheering. I didn’t really mind that; however, the fact that they would expect the rest of us to become self-sheering too upset me.

Watching one of the most pampered malcontents in the entire history of the world declare that all white males should be

exterminated did not disturb me. If I could have cared less, I wouldn't have bothered. What upset me was that he—clearly unhinged, as well as being racist—would have no qualms whatsoever about going out, marching around in a pack of other unhinged racists, and screaming that the President of the United States is unhinged and a racist. These ideas had been instilled long before he got his degree in Useful Idiocy.

The extermination of all white males is a charming thought of course—it an idea that is taught predominantly by white male college professors, I suppose—and, invariably those students shouting loudest for it are white males themselves. In the world I come from, those of us with any residual reflective clarity lingering in our heads call such self-deception 'idiocy' ... but, these days, of course, we do it quietly.

When my guide returned, I told him what I had just witnessed and he said, "Yes, on occasion, if luck is on our side, when we remove the desire for *unnecessary personalized thought*, we also take out any residual self-preservation."

"Ah," I said, trying to match his indifference.

"Let's take a look in here," he said.

We peeked into the next room through a window in the door. Inside, in the large white well-lighted room, there was that same skinny, pimply, bespectacled white kid with a bad haircut and clenched in his fist he had what looked like a college diploma. He was standing, trembling, before a seated woman in a lab coat.

"I see he has his diploma, or what looks like a diploma, in his hands; has he already graduated?"

"Not officially."

"He has his diploma, but he has not yet graduated?"

"Not quite."

“So, he has, or has not, received his degree?”

“He has not yet actually received his degree.”

“But... he has a diploma?”

“He does not yet have the parchment.”

“He has his diploma...but, he doesn't have a degree?”

“That's correct, yes.”

I laughed, “I'm just screwin' with you,” I said, “I actually understand what you're saying.”

He looked startled, and a little disappointed, “You do?”

“Yeah, I do, I had a similar situation.”

“You did?”

“Yeah. The comptroller at my school wanted \$35 from me before I would be allowed *to attend* graduation. He couldn't tell me if I needed *to attend* to get my diploma, or if I needed my diploma to have my degree. He just wanted the 35 bucks.”

“Huh. I didn't know the problem was so common.”

“Ha,” I said, “I'm surprised, the way these joints are run, that it's not more common.”

“What was that all about?”

“I was being asked to pay \$35 to fix a hole in a wall which had never been fixed in a building that had been torn down a couple years after my elbow went through that wall, and I didn't think that was either fair or reasonable.”

“Hmmm,” he mulled, as if that gave him a new idea. Then he brightened, “Well, we're not done with this one yet.”

“But he *will* get his degree?” I whispered.

“Just watch,” he said. “We want to be sure that he's ready before he escapes our grasp.”

“You know... I'm still not really clear on...”

“Just watch. This should answer any questions you may have,” he said.

My guide put a finger to his lips, asking me for silence, as he pushed open the large steel door. I nodded agreement.

The woman in the lab coat turned to look at us and smiled. She too put her finger to her lips, before returning her attention to the young man trembling before her.

“Tell me, Jeremy,” she said sweetly, “which of these two is an example of hate speech. A man quietly remarks to his friend that a woman passing by is *slightly on the heavy side*...”

“*That*,” the young man declared instantly. “is hate speech!”

“Yes, it is—and I applaud you for your fiery response; quick, unequivocal reaction to any horrible and hurtful injustice is a noble trait—but, please allow me to finish the question. OK?”

“Yes, sorry. I’m a little nervous.”

“That’s OK. What if I were to say, ‘All those old white men in Congress should be chopped up into little pieces and fed to sharks, while we all stand around laughing and applauding’ ...what would you call that?”

“That’s your constitutionally protected first amendment right to free speech,” said the young man calmly.

The woman in the lab coat giggled a bit, turned to us beaming, and gave us a *thumbs-up*.

“Excellent defensive-aggression! Now, what about the extermination of all white males...?” she asked quietly.

“Free speech,” he responded snappily.

“Ah, I see you’ve been studying... Calling an undocumented person an *illegal immigrant*...?”

“Hate speech,” he declared.

“I’d like to blow up the fucking White House...?”

“Free speech,” he said.

“What do you say about open criticism of pedophilia?”

“Hate speech.”

“Very good, Jeremy, I thought I had you there! In fact, it was a trick question. I’m proud to say that the U. S. Army agrees with you; such wild, careless, and harmful talk is now

unacceptable according to government policy. Disparaging pedophiles is only one example of the foulest sort of close-mindedness and IS, in fact, officially, hate speech. I think you're about ready to go out into the world. But, let's try a few more. 'There were many Israelis, Zionists and Satanic Jews in key roles in the 9/11 attacks...'

"First Amendment."

"What would Jesus do?"

"Pure and vile hatred!"

"Calling one of the wannabe dictator's cabinet members his buttboy..."

"First Amendment!"

"Calling anyone Pocahontas..."

"Hate speech, pure and simple; foul and unacceptable!"

"OK; now let's say we have a label, on a pancake mix, with a black woman on it..."

"RACIST!"

"Good. Now, what if you were to walk up and down the aisle looking at all the pancake mixes on that grocery store's shelves, and you can't find a single image of a black person on any label?"

"RACIST!"

"Excellent. I think you're almost ready, Jeremy. Let's do a little play-acting here. I'll be a college administrator; you are a student, OK?" So, I—as a college administrator—come out of my office and meet with you on the quad, in front of a gathering of other students, to apologize for something my wife has said, which you feel was inappropriate."

"Got it."

"So, I've just come out and you are there on the quad and I say, 'I'd like to apologize to all of you, but especially to any of you whose feelings may have been hurt by my wife's thoughtless suggestion that someone who is not *La-thee-no*

might wear a som-brrrrer-o at a Halloween party. Her comment was spoken in ignorance, but also in innocence, and I certainly don't think she meant to cause any of you any upset.' Now, what do you say in response to that, Jeremy?"

"Apology NOT ACCEPTED!"

"Very good. And so then I say, 'Both my wife and I are sorry for adding to the confusion, for creating a hostile and unsafe environment, and for any harm we may have caused any of our students. She certainly didn't intend to upset or offend anyone.' And how do you respond?"

"I say, 'INTENT doesn't matter anymore; don't you get it? Your wife's *intentions* have no part in this discussion!"

"And..."

"And?"

"And..."

"And... just because you *and your wife* are white does not mean that you can go around stealing the sovereignty of some people's hat! Who the FUCK do you people think you are?"

I whispered to my guide, "I especially like that 'sovereignty of hats thing.'"

"Me too, he whispered back; it shows both a profound *and* a deep understanding of how what you say contributes to an outcome that makes us all feel more secure. This is something we try to install in every one of our graduates."

"OK. But, can we have some fun here?" continued the proctor. "Though I agree with what you're saying—you need to lean in when you say it."

The boy leaned in toward the woman and sneered, "How the FUCK did you get this job anyway?"

"Jeremy, wait. I want you to lean in CLOSE to me and fix me with your eyes. I want to see the fire; I need to feel your breath on my face when you speak. Now, try it again."

The boy leaned in to within inches of the woman's face. "This is OUR University, and we need to feel safe here. LOOK AT ME. Look at me when I'm talking to you!" "Excellent. That is excellent. Continue." "Your fucking wife should be strung up by her heels!" "Excellent!... go on. Show me that you understand the importance of this, and the effect it has on everything on a much grander scale. What if I were to respond, 'I'm sorry, but I don't understand.'..."

The candidate thought for a moment, then, screamed, "YOU don't have to understand, you mother-FUCKING IDIOT! You don't have to understand. You're probably incapable of understanding the sacred meaning of sovereignty anyway; that's why you want to build your stupid wall! Try to understand this—you're here to serve US."

"Good work, continue."

"I'm gonna see to it that you and your idiot wife both lose your jobs. We don't pay good money to come here, just to have vermin like insult us. Your FUCKING WORDS HURT US! Do you understand that?"

"Go on; this is really very good, Jeremy."

"No... you'll never understand how much your words hurt us. So, Fuck YOU, and fuck your lousy wife, and I suggest you leave this campus before we drag you out of your house and have you thrown into the Charles. How on earth did you get this job in the first place?"

"Wow. Jeremy, I am amazed. I'm sure your parents would be proud. And," she said, "I think you are ready to go. One final question—'How can you tell—without looking at the color of his skin—if a male is a racist?'"

"If they disagree with me."

"On...?" she prompted.

“On anything,” he said proudly.  
BINGO. I think we’re done here.”

I asked my guide the young man’s major. He leaned over, touched the woman in the lab coat on the shoulder, and whispered something to her. She whispered back, and he turned to me and said, “18<sup>th</sup> Century French Literature.”  
“Ah,” I said, “the Enlightenment.”

## A VISIT TO A PRIVATE SCHOOL

I was told that I could stick my nose into one of the classes, and if I asked, in a kindly manner, I'd be welcome to go inside, have a little seat in the back, and quietly observe. That seemed enormously accommodating; so, I wandered down the hall until, looking into one room, I saw a tall, trim, attractive, reasonable looking woman talking calmly to her students. I quietly opened the door a crack to listen in on what she was saying.

“We really must ask ourselves what we are doing when we willingly participate in patriarchal grammatical oppression. Every single time we open our mouths to speak, we cooperate with the madness. Consider the all-encompassing, albeit subliminal, power of the Patriarchal Pronoun. What is ‘he’ doing in the very middle of the word ‘they’? Ask yourself that. Why is ‘they’ built upon the Patriarchal Pronoun? What about ‘where’? There ‘he’ is again. *HE* is the armature upon which the language we are forced to speak seems to be built! It’s here, it’s there, it is everywhere. Even the vital, ubiquitous definitive article—*the*—ends in ‘he’. I want you to give that some thought, after you leave *this*—th-*HIS*—classroom today, and go *home*—a word which is composed of an insistent ‘he’ held only at bay by a calming interceding OM. I’d like you to sit down and compile a list of all the words that are built upon the Patriarchal Pronoun. When you return *he*-re for our next meeting, we’ll look at all of those words and consider what we’ve learned. I think you’ll come away with a new way of thinking about things in general, and begin to develop your own unique way of looking at our world.”

“Yikes!” I whispered.

And I closed that door as quickly as I had opened it.

As I walked down the hallway I quivered, hoping to shake off any residue sickness that may have clung to my clothing; and shook my head in an effort to dislodge anything I may have picked up just by having heard that.

Sheesh, you don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to see that assailing the rightful and noble position of the Patriarchal Pronoun is not the whole shebang. Such shenanigans sheds light on the sheer madness behind the supposedly-heroic herculean heresy to herd the sheeple.

As I was about to enter a class full of weeping young white men, a young woman came dashing out of one of the rooms across the hall and asked sweetly, "Can I borrow you for a moment?" and took me by the elbow.

She led me, into a classroom full of young women, all sitting nicely, properly, at desks, in neat little rows. As I entered, I noticed a sort of low rumbling noise began to build. The young women were all focused on me in a way that, if they were a pack of wild dogs, let's say, and I was a wounded rabbit...would have told me that they were about to tear me to shreds. In fact, one of those women stood up suddenly and started rushing toward me, except her handler intervened, saying, "Denver... DENVER ...sit down. Sit DOWN!"

Denver returned to her seat but—as everyone else in that class—remained fixed completely upon me.

"Fuck you!" muttered Denver under her breath. And, as she said that, others took up the phrase and began to utter it quietly, under their breath, while glaring at me.

"No," cautioned their instructor. "*With the eyes*, remember? You can say it—you need to say it, you have the right to say it and it should be said—but say it *with the eyes*."

Denver shot to her feet again and, between clenched teeth, while looking directly at me, stifled out a restrained ‘Fuck YOU.’

“Denver!” said the instructor sternly. “WITH THE eyes... Sit down... and say it with your eyes.”

The instructor then took me by the elbow and led me out of the room, into the corridor again, and said, “Thank you, I appreciate your help. We’re just getting started,” she explained, and smiled at me as though I might be an idiot.

“Do I have this right...my mere presence offended them?”

“Oh, my god!” she said, bursting into laughter. She shook her head as if she could not believe my ignorance and, laughing uncontrollably, staggered back toward the classroom.

When she opened the door to go in, there was that low rumbling again. And, just as the door was closing behind her I heard her saying, “Denver! SIT DOWN!”

As I was wandering down the hallway—hoping to find an exit—a young woman, hurrying by, dropped a paper; and I picked it up. I shouted at her, but she didn’t hear me. And, as I started walking after her, to return the paper, I look at it.

It was a list of names.

Amelia Briddle

Susan B. Cullworthy

Anne P. Dipple

Emily Trunk

Etc.

I caught up with the woman, as she took her place in a line, and touched her gently upon the shoulder. Startled, she turned suddenly and glared at me.

“You dropped this,” I said.

She said nothing, just ripped the paper from my hand and turned away.

Now curious, with the beginnings of an education of my own under way, I asked, “Who are all those people?”

She snapped, “ALL *these people* are waiting to go to our next class.”

“No,” I said, “I mean the people on the list—the list of names on that paper you dropped...who are they?”

She looked at me aghast.

“You don’t recognize any of those names? Well, of course, you wouldn’t would you?”

“Well, I’m willing to learn,” I said quietly.

She turned to me, and placing the list under my nose, said—somewhat snappishly I thought, “Amelia Briddle: the first woman to shingle a slate roof. Susan B. Cullworthy: first woman to spit in a koi pond from a trapeze. Annie Dipple: first BLACK woman to recite the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment backward, forward and backward again, while balancing on a ball. But, YOU have never even heard their names before...” she declared, maybe just a little snippily.

And then, she did something completely unexpected; she burst into tears.

I didn’t know what to do. I knew that, as an old white male, it was probably illegal for me to console her in any way, so I said brightly, “Emily Trunk! I’ve heard that name before... refresh my memory.”

She looked at me through teary eyes, sniffed and said, “Really, you know about Emily Trunk?”

I said, “Yeah, the name sounds really familiar, but I just can’t... maybe you can remind me.”

“Emily Trunk,” she said, “first woman to Judge a pure-bred guinea pig contest.”

“Oh!” I said, “I thought I heard that name before. Wasn’t she the one who...”

“...established the proper proportionality between back line flatness and the height of the pasterns!” she declared.

“Oh my god, that was a great moment!” I declared.

“August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1879,” she said, proudly. “It took place in a little park in San Diego, you know.”

“Oh really...” I said.

“Someday,; she said dreamily, “I hope to visit there.”

“Well,” I said, delighted at having made a breakthrough, “enjoy your class.”

“I’m not here to *enjoy* anything!” she snapped, and turned her back to me again. “I’m here to learn,” she pouted proudly.

As I walked away, I realized that I was learning a few things myself. I was learning that even as an enemy one may, on occasion, be seen, if only for a passing moment, as a unique individual, rather than merely part of a greatly despised class.

## **GOVERNMENT and POLITICS**

## THE BIG STUPID COUNTRY

Once there was a Big Stupid Country which nobody liked, especially other countries; which is really terrible because, above all, a country should be liked by all other countries.

A lot of people who actually lived there didn't like that Big Stupid Country either... notably professional athletes, actors, singers, comedians, and just about anybody who had benefitted greatly by living there and found themselves celebrated and doing exceptionally well despite the frivolous, near meaningless, nature of their lives.

Many of those people's offspring had attended the most progressive higher-education institutions, where they had been taught what the problem was—the problem was that the BSC was *uncaring*.

In fact, it was the most terrible, uncaring country on earth!

Consequently, people travelled from all over the world trying to get in by any means they could contrive. No doubt, while clawing at the gates of the BSC, each of them looked back longingly to the enchanted land from which they'd fled.

Inside those gates, the BSC was infested, top to bottom, with seething bigotry, racism, sexism, xenophobia, hatred, and oppression of every imaginable sort! And, no one resented it more than people who despised Liberty, and whose *raison d'être* seemed to be spewing their own seething discontent. From their perspective, the BSC was heartless. The whole place was terrible, heartless, and uncaring.

So, add that to the long list of its other accumulated evils—bigoted, racist, sexist, xenophobic, hateful, oppressive, and anything else you can think of—and you get a pretty good picture of that awful place.

It was so awful that, every day, thousands of people arrived at its border, after having risked their lives, travelling untold miles, leaving behind their own beloved, wonderful, delightful homeland—which was probably much better in almost every way—in order to get to the BSC.

The BSC was so heartless that all of the poor people huddling in fear at its border were turned away while, inside, all the truly caring wealthy folk yearned to throw open the gates to their massive well-maintained property and invite these poor people inside, to tend to their generously overflowing fields, push the baby around in a stroller, and maybe do a little ironing. But, no; the BSC turned its back on them. Despised and abused, they stayed, clinging only to hope.

Here's something:

For a while there, one clever lad made a small fortune printing up large two-sided placards, and selling them to protestors at the border. One side said, "This Place is horrible!" and, in bold print, listed all the various ways the BSC stunk—bigoted, racist, whatever. On the other side it simply said, "WELCOME."

It was a brilliant design that allowed caring people to simultaneously protest the insufferable cruelty of the government that guaranteed them that right, while pretending to care about people they'd hesitate to sit next to on a bus.

Those poor people had abandoned all their stuff, man—their *stuff!*... and their homes, and like their loved ones, too, Dude—leaving it all behind—only to discover that, when they got there, they could not enter that BSC. It was a cruel lesson to learn so late. But, why wouldn't they be allowed in? Because, just as the kids had been taught, that Big Stupid Country was not only uncaring; it was *heartless* and uncaring.

The President of the BSC called the places, from which these people were fleeing, bad names; which was wrong, of course. But, to be fair (if that's still allowed), nobody ever asked those people who fled those places what *they* would call the countries they'd left. No reporter ever approached any of them, as they clawed at the walls, to ask, "Wasn't it difficult for you to have to leave such a paradise for the unbearable oppression and continual deluge of racism we all experience every day, martyrs that we are, in this horrible country?"

In the BSC, the corporations were all heartless and uncaring; the banks were all heartless and uncaring, the healthcare system was so heartless and so uncaring that it cannot even be described—some people actually had to pay to see a doctor!—and, well, just every part of that place was totally heartless and uncaring, because the government of that BSC was heartless and uncaring.

Everybody could see that.

Every smart person could, anyway.

Thankfully, in that BSC every divorced, soon to be divorced, or hoping soon to be divorced, mother was blessed with a child who was the golden center of its own sparkling little universe; and every third one of them, between the age of 11—when insight and wisdom are in full bloom—and 37—

when the aged mind begins at last to falter—was a celebrity; which worked really well. And, thankfully, we will always have the selfies and sex tapes to prove it.

In the BSC there was no limit to the number of people emerging from obscurity to become instant celebrities, although at least one particularly despicable human being, by the name of Mockridge, suggested that the number should be curtailed in some way. His idea was that celebrities should be selected by some criteria. For example—he thought—what if a celebrity was required to have a skill, or demonstrate talent of some sort, or maybe possess a pleasing demeanor? He never went so far as to suggest that actors should too.

Of course, the massive oppression previously described inspired celebrities and those who cared about them, to resist!

They knew that if they all got together and voted, they'd get the government they wanted, and thing's would change in that Big Stupid Country... because, the government *they* wanted would make a bunch of laws that would force people to be caring. So, when the news got out, somehow, that government in that BSC was little more than an opportunity for self-serving ruling class individuals to add to their own ever-increasing personal wealth, all the celebrities, and all those who adored them, and all the fully-indoctrinated college kids, and some college students, and really old white guys with beards and ponytails, sucking on pipes—each being fully aware that being the center of the universe carries great personal responsibility—demanded that government should do it's real job, providing emotional support; and not just to citizens of the BSC, but to the whole world.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!

One time, a memorable event took place. Hundreds, if not thousands, of caring people showed up in the nation's Capital demanding the emotional support they all needed, deserved, and knew, in their hearts, was their constitutional right.  
**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!**

Someone at that event attempted to spread the rumor that elected officials work in conjunction with hundreds of loosely associated, fully-autonomous, fiercely-guarded, separate and self-determining agencies, designed specifically to grind out new government authorized rules and regulations, and provide the forces necessary for oversight and enforcement; which pursued infringement passionately, without compassion or any desire to either understand or willingness to bend in any way, and without any help or input of any sort from any outside source—including elected officials—other than those it chose, based solely upon assumed benefits the deciding individuals or agency might reap due to such association... when, in fact, everyone knew that those agencies should be in place to provide **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!**  
**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!**

One speaker, at that memorable event, having heard that rumor, laughed, and shouting at the crowd through a blistering microphone, declared, “All of that will change when we get the **SOCIALIST** government we want. **THEN,**” the speaker shrieked, “we’ll **ALL** get what we deserve!”  
The speaker raised a fist; and, the crowd cheered.

“Meanwhile,” continued the speaker, through the squealing microphone, “we, who have been strengthened by our continual coddling throughout life, and who have prepared ourselves for these all-too-real events by playing video games

daily, incessantly, almost since inception—will emerge fully armored with the skills necessary to overthrow the Patriarchy which coddled us, in a foolish effort to make us weaklings! The speaker raised a fist; the crowd cheered.

“THEN, our new massively militarized minuscule elite ruling class,” the speaker shouted. “now transformed, will, in its full glory arise, and, we will, thereby, obtain...”

What precisely they would obtain was drowned out by the eruption of screaming and applause brought on by a great irrepressible anticipation of the answer.

“THEN,” the speaker concluded, “we WILL have the country we’ve been begging for... and we’ll have  
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!”  
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!  
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT!

And, so it was.

Note: Throughout the grand transitioning, away from an uncaring government, to an emotionally supportive government, one old cynic was said to have raised the nice glass that his loving wife had given him, and muttered to himself, “If you don’t know what to expect from a Chinon, it’d be unwise to order the Chinon.”

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE* on CONGRESS and DOPE**

I'll tell you what I know about marijuana.

By all accounts it is not addictive. NOBODY who has ever tried marijuana would make such an accusation; but, its accusers call it a *gateway drug*. Of course, if you're a weakling or an escapist, and you have a highly addictive nature, whatever you get your hands on may operate as a gateway drug. Marijuana is not a desperation drug either; that's why such people quickly move on to harder stuff.

If any drug is a "recreational drug", marijuana is it. Marijuana is used by people who want to get *as close to* reality as they possibly can, and maybe become friends; they want to see it up close, poke it, understand what makes it tick, and if they can, find the humor in it. At least that's my experience.

From my experience, I can tell you that, under the influence of marijuana, you feel that things are as they should be, or maybe somehow could be, and that Life is, for the most part, an amiable experience. Given the chance—and by that I mean unless something from outside interferes—you'll find yourself absorbed, contemplative, somewhat giddy, with a voracious, nearly insatiable appetite for music, art, literature, Doritos, and somebody to conjugate with. But, whatever you do, or don't do, you'll be thoroughly entertained.

Marijuana allows you to observe and dwell upon the most beautiful and least demanding aspects of life; [insert lengthy supposedly poetic list here]...and to savor the taste of each word as it leaves your lips, drifts aloft, and clings before you for a while in the air.

For anyone frustrated by lesser demands—working in a meaningless job for a man who thoroughly despises you, for only one example—marijuana points the way out.

From their actions I would guess that no one in Congress has ever smoked dope. If they have, they've forgotten what it really means. For those who haven't. I think they should. It would probably do them some good.

I smoked dope from time to time while in college (50 years ago), and truly enjoyed it. The first time, while wandering around outside alone, I realized that street signs lead a quiet little life of their own... which I could not help but admire.

Before I left college I stopped smoking marijuana. I haven't done it since. But, I'd like to. Someday, maybe. It would be like visiting an old friend... an old friend which my wife would never forgive me for visiting.

This is what I think:

If all those self-serving, pompous, career-elitist buffoons in Congress were locked inside a big room and the place was pumped full of marijuana smoke, they'd all emerge better human beings, and far better representatives of the people... but, maybe that's the wine speaking.

## MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE!

“Politics supplies us with a full range of illusions and false hopes; the worst, most regularly touted, and therefore most damaging, is the peculiar idea that we personally have the power to effect change in this world by way of political action.”     *Charles, Dark Cloud, Bellwether*

“WELCOME to MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE!...the new fun game that pits two citizens, each who have voted for the same sitting congressman, against each other, to see who can meet their Representative first.

Welcome, contestants.

Our contestants are Bill, a tow truck driver of no significance, from South City, and Mr. Warren Trent III, an investment banker, who specializes in run-away corporations and global corporate take-over negotiations. Mr. Trent resides, part of the year, right here in our State’s Capital. Welcome Mr. Trent, sir; it’s an honor to have you on our show.

Let me explain how the game works, if you don’t know already. You’ll both start over here, behind this starting line; your Representative will be seated off there, in the distance—if you look carefully, you’ll be able to see him from here—and it will be your task to get to him first, in order to introduce yourself and have the opportunity to express your many concerns.

I’ll be asking each of you questions in turn and, if you answer correctly, you may advance three steps toward your representative. So, what do you say, are you ready to play?

Let's bring out Congressman Smugg. When he's properly seated, we'll begin the game. Ah, there he is.  
If you can hear me Congressman, how about a little wave?  
And, there it is.

OK contestants, if you're ready to begin, it's time to MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE!

Here's your first question, Bill. Who is more likely to have influence on a person; someone who is in the same room with them, or someone calling a Congressional Office phone line? What do you say, Bill?"

"The phone line?"

"Oh, Billy, Billy, Billy. No, Billy-boy, I'm sorry; but often such phone lines are busy or you're placed on hold, or you're asked to leave a message that no one will ever listen to. So, you'll have to stay right where you are. Don't move an inch.

Our next question is for Mr. Trent. Thank you once again, Sir, for taking the time to come all the way down here just to participate in our little show."

"That's fine, let's get on with it."

"Which is *the surest sign* that your representative truly represents your interests while considering how he'll vote on what you personally might consider to be a crucial matter? He calls you at home and invites you over to his house for dinner with the family, **OR**, one night you go out for a few drinks together and end up doing something *which requires you both to take a vow of secrecy*?"

"That's a tough one."

"Yes; I'm sure it must be."

“I’ve always felt that it’s important to meet the family, but if you can get *anyone* into a situation where that vow of secrecy is required, you can be pretty sure you’ve got his ear.”

“I can see that the Congressman is waving in agreement. That’s correct! So, take a few steps forward, Mr. Trent.

Alright, now Bill, back to you. This next question is a follow-up to the question I’ve just asked Mr. Trent. Let’s see how well you do. Here goes; listen carefully. Who do *you* believe might have greater influence on an elected official; someone who is standing next to them, with an arm around their shoulder, offering them *another* shot of good whiskey, in a suite, in a luxury hotel, in a town nowhere near home, surrounded with a pack of eager, attractive, available, discrete professionals without a stitch of clothes on, who are cheerfully calling you by spontaneously contrived nicknames, and giggling, apparently uncontrollably, at something someone said only seconds earlier, which you’ve all forgotten, **OR**, someone who is standing around on a street, in the pouring rain, shouting lame-brained badly rhyming slogans, while trying desperately to get anyone (ANYONE) to accept a soggy leaflet or sign their name, with a ballpoint pen that doesn’t work on a petition that will be uh-mediatly trashed if it ever reaches that elected official’s office? Think carefully now.”

“I’d have to say the petition.”

“The petition? Are you sure?”

“Yes. Definitely, the petition.”

“OH, Billy, I’m really sorry; that’s wrong. You stay put. Let me walk over here to... Mr. Trent, are you ready for another question?

“Let’s hear it. I don’t have all day.”

“I’m sorry sir, I’ll do my best. Which is *the best approach* to having your concerns heard by *your* representative: laughing at one of his badly delivered jokes, while handing him a big bundle of unmarked bills, with a wink and the unspoken promise of more cash to come, **OR**, sitting out there in a waiting room, rocking back and forth, red in the face, with a list of silly demands clutched tightly in their sweaty fist, and occasionally demanding to be heard? Oh, wait, before you answer, the Congressman seems to be saying something... let’s turn on his mic, so we can hear what he has to say... Yes, Congressman?”

“Warren, is that you?! I didn’t recognize you at this distance. What the hell are you doing way down there? Come over here; let’s go have ourselves a few drinks before lunch.”

“Well, so there you have it, another exciting round of MEET YOUR REPRESENTATIVE!...the new fun game that pits two citizens against each other, to see *who* can win the chance to MEET THEIR REPRESENTATIVE!

## *A PERSONAL NOTE* to POLITICAL HOUNDS

In the horror movies the evil guy always drags some poor young, leggy blonde into a darkened room somewhere and, after removing her gag, declares: “Scream all you want, nobody can hear you!” From all indications, these days, THIS may be our greatest—nearly universal—societal fear. So, we pretend.

We pretend that somebody is listening, that somebody does hear us, that somebody cares. For many of us, there seems to be real desperation behind our yearning to be heard.

We had better be careful with that desire by the way; there are people who are already listening, and they want more.

Meanwhile, on the lighter side, the most detached institutions and organizations on earth (search engines, banks, airlines, pharmaceutical manufacturers, insurance companies, health care providers) all tell us, in their advertising, how much they really care.

Pardon me while I snort derisively.  
(I’ll need about seven minutes.)

Of course, around election time, politicians want to assure us that they care; even though such caring falls far outside governmental protocol. You won’t find ‘caring’ written into any government job description, at any level. On the bureaucratic side—the side we have no vote and no say on—resentment seems to be boilerplate in every government employee’s contract; it’s certainly written in their hearts. The source of their bitter discontent is—not the job; no, the job would be just fine if they didn’t have to deal with—us.

That feeling is systemic because all government employees are overburdened. And, so we weep for them... of course.

My guess is that politicians care about us every bit as much as the bureaucrats. They constantly send me emails asking me to make a small personal contribution to their election campaign—and those emails are always personal, chummy, earnest, heartfelt, and extremely urgent—but, they never expressed any interest in how I'm doing.

Still, 'round tax time—when they are in the position to make demands, instead of simply trying to wheedle money out of us—they show how much they really care.

But, whether they care about us or not, there is no reason we should spend any time caring about them, fretting over their decisions, arguing about policy, or following their non-stop hypocrisy. Involving yourself in politics only draws you away from your own course in life. That's what I think.

OK, so, two drunks emerge from a bar late at night. As they stumble along together in a generally sorta-homeward-like direction one of 'em notices a dog bent practically in half, licking his balls. He turns to his friend and observes, "Gees, I wish I could do that." In response, his friend offers this very good advice: "You should probably introduce yourself first." I tell you this tale for a reason.

The reason is that in every business there is an inside and there is an outside. Typically, those on the inside disdain outsiders. They really don't want or need, generally solicit or welcome, advice from people on the outside. Opinions of outsiders mean even less. That's just the way it is.

It is that way especially with government. Most politicians—whatever they may pretend publicly—believe, as I do, that outsiders should content themselves with their own affairs.

Despite the façade, government is strictly members only, and invited guests... unescorted ladies, of course, are always welcome and, from what I've heard, young male pages. (Please don't pretend you don't know this!)

Our part in governmental machinations and the never-ending squabbling of the elite aristocratic ruling class is non-existent. To think otherwise is delusional. Watching their antics, hour by hour, day after day, and taking sides in every emerging partisan tantrum, accomplishes nothing. For too many people political rubbernecking has become a psychosis; they've taken up arms against their fellow non-combatants, in an on-going bloody war over matters that none of us really have a hand in.

Here's some news: The infuriating madness of politics does not require your input, or your cooperation, or even your attention. It'll all get along just fine without you. When you go on vacation—ignoring the news the entire time you're away—the juggernaut of political nonsense still rolls on.

So, here's the point, if there is a point. As far as following politics is concerned, you may be in that basement, and the bad guy in your head may be telling you, 'Scream all you want, nobody can hear you'—but you are not captive; you're free to leave at any time. There is no reason for you to stay there in that miserable, dismal basement, entangled in the political circus. You can turn your back on it at any time.

There you go; I think I just hit it squarely.

I once offered to play some music *from my generation* for my amiable, somewhat younger, far better educated wife, and she said this: “Why would I want to spend any time listening to something that I know I would not enjoy, when I could be spending that same time with something I know I will?” That is an excellent question.

So, two drunks emerge from a bar and, as they stumble along homeward, one of ‘em notices a dog licking his own balls. He drunkenly reflects, “Gees, I wish I could do that.” In response, his friend, who may be just a little more sober, says, “I don’t think he’s looking for any help, but you go right ahead; I have better things to do.”

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE* on CONGRESS and COCAINE**

I'll tell you what I know about cocaine.

By all accounts it is addictive. **NOBODY** would deny that; nobody would even consider denying it; cocaine is highly addictive and that's that. Despite what anyone may say about cocaine being a "recreational drug", it is anything but.

Cocaine is a *desperation* drug. It's used by people who want to get *as far away from* reality as they possibly can, *as quickly* as they possibly can.

From my own experience I can tell you that under the influence of cocaine you feel that you can do anything; moral or immoral, legal or illegal, rational or irrational, sane or insane—and get away with it. Given the opportunity—and by that I mean unless something steps in to prevent it—you'll try.

I tried cocaine one time, and I didn't like it. When I found myself attempting to break into a locked display case in an antique store full of customers, in order to steal a Persian rug, I knew something was wrong. Only later, when I remembered that I'd actually walked twelve blocks back to my truck to get a crowbar—after my fingernails had failed to gain access—did I realize precisely how wrong. With cocaine in my system I found myself doing something I never would have even thought about otherwise.

The only thing I could see of myself in those stupid actions was a genuine appreciation for the beauty of that rug, and the fact that I wanted to steal it so that I could give it as a gift to a friend, who I was sure would enjoy it also.

So, I dropped cocaine cold; never did it again; never considered doing it again. Cocaine is no friend of mine.

Congress acts as though they are—each and every damned last one of them—on cocaine. And, if they were, they would act no differently than they do today.

Oh... and, if Congress was on cocaine, they would never even consider kicking it. It'd make perfect sense to them.

A little unnecessary additional note:  
Luckily for us, most politicians, and all those who cover them in print, prefer alcohol. Mencken once noted: "Between 1899 and 1904 there was only one reporter south of the Mason & Dixon Line who did not drink at all, and he was considered insane." I think it's safe to say that Mencken held much higher regard for that reporter than he ever did for any politician.

The **QUEEN REVEAL**; a prediction

"Nobody ever listens to me." sighed my friend, the cynic.

I said, "What, specifically, are you talking about?"

He said, "I said this first in early 2013, and again later that same year and then again in December last year. Nobody hears me. I don't want this to come as a complete surprise however so, I'll give it one final shot."

"So, this will be our last opportunity?" I said hopefully.

He ignored me.

"Do you know what a queen reveal is?"

"The queen's path opens up when some piece which couldn't be moved previously, is moved or taken."

"Close enough. It's a trap for neophytes."

"So what does that have to do with the Presidential election?"

"Everything," said the cynic.

I rolled my eyes, grimaced, and began looking about the room; I had the feeling this was going to be a long siege.

"The Republican Party misunderstands the situation entirely," the cynic began. "Things are much worse than they could ever guess. What they fail to recognize is *hive-mentality*."

Wearily already, I nodded.

"Barack Obama understood it. He demonstrated that the *swarm* will work intently to deliver on whatever they've been told they think. And—mark these words—someday soon they will be told to think that they should place another Obama in the White House."

I let out a sound that might have suggested that I'd just taken an unexpected shot to the gut. "I know," I mumbled, "I read your first piece, back in 2013."

“Yes, so *now* you see *precisely* what kind of a whack-job I am. Think what you will of me, but I advise you not to forget what kind of a whack-job *the electorate is.*”

“...much to the chagrin of anyone who might still suffers the burden of either rational or independent thought.”

“I forbid you to quote me to me,” he said.

“OK,” I said, “I’ll try not to do that.”

“Don’t try...” he warned, and looked me in the eye until I could not take it anymore and turned away.

“And, the message is?” I said, in order to pretend interest, apologize, and get things back on track in a single shot.

“That the American voter is not looking for a President with experience so much as *someone with a vision*. The Democrats alone seem to understand that *that candidate* who repeatedly spews out the longest unbroken string of hive-approved pabulum, with the greatest amount of disgust for normalcy — *without gagging on his own venom*—will activate the swarm. And, as far as the self-afflicted left is concerned Michele Obama has what it takes: she’s already had *eight full years* inside the White House. In their minds she has been standing upon sacred ground lo those many years... and she certainly has a vision.”

I laughed.

“Laugh all you want,” the cynic continued, “she has seen the inner workings of the mechanism at close quarters. Whatever her credentials, or lack thereof—with the previous President of the United States as her closest, dearest and most personal advisor—candidate Obama knows which levers to pull in order to activate the swarm.”

“None of that is literally true.” I observed.

“Quibble if you must,” he said, “but you should realize by now how futile it is to attempt to drive the wedge of facts, truth, or even reality, into the left’s wobbly gelate ideology.”

“So, you think all 3420 Democrat candidates are decoys; a distraction, in place only until Queen Obama is revealed?”

“Well, when Maxine Waters surfaces, proudly/defiantly shouting into the camera: ‘In OUR country, UN-qualified no longer means DIS-qualified!’ you’ll know I was right.”

I laughed.

“But that will not be the end of it,” the cynic said.

“Oh, yeah?” I smirked. “Tell me more, dear cynic.”

“While she’s in office, President Obama will take a particular interested in the 22nd Amendment... you know, the one that says: ‘No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice...’ I’ll lay wager on that. I’m also betting that, at some point during her victory speech, Vice President, Maxine Waters will proudly declare, ‘Now, we’re gonna do what’s right, and complete the work that Barack started!’”

I laughed. I snorted. If I had been in the position to do so—and I recognized that I wasn’t—I would have slapped the cynic on the back.

“Laugh all you want,” he said, “—go ahead, get that out of your system. Then, take a good honest look around.”

I paused. I considered things. And, after a very short time, I began to wonder if he was right.

Now—it’s been a few days—after considering what the cynic said, I feel comfortable predicting that Obama will also win re-election in 2024.

Meanwhile, let's play... LET'S PAY FOR STUFF!

It's a game in which voters play against their representative in a half-hearted effort to tame that rascally national budget.

"WELCOME...welcome. Welcome to the new fun game: LET'S PAY FOR STUFF! Our contestants today are an unnamed citizen, whose name is not really all that important anyway, and his opponent, who, by chance, just happens also to be that same lucky voter's highly esteemed representative, Congressman Smugg. Welcome, Congressman. Are you both ready to play, LET'S PAY FOR STUFF!?"

Well, I can see you've got that clever, eager-to-spend look in your eye, Congressman; are you ready to play, LET'S PAY FOR STUFF!?"

"Always."

"Ha-ha, excellent, Congressman. I think I should probably warn the good citizen here that he's facing some pretty stiff competition. Isn't your main task creating taxes and spending the revenue generated by those taxes, Congressman?"

"Oh, there's much more to it than that."

"Oh-ho, I'm sure there is. OK! So, why don't we start with you then, Congressman? Our first item is this wonderful set of matching rubber gloves. They come in various colors—either yellow, pink, or blue—and are suitable for doing almost any task around the house—or around the Senate (wink)—and one size fits all. So, what would YOU pay for these rubber gloves, Congressman? Oh, and one other thing: these gloves retail for \$1.39 at any drug store. So, now... LET'S PAY FOR STUFF! Congressman Smugg, What would YOU pay for these fine rubber gloves? ... matching set...variety of colors..."

"Oh, I don't know... something insignificant... million, maybe million-five; I wouldn't go a dime over two mill."

“Well, Congressman, that’s a pretty impressive bid, but I don’t think you understand how this game is played.”  
“I don’t think YOU understand how this game is played.”  
“Ha ha-ha. Yes, I’m sure it’s more complicated than...”  
“No, actually it’s simpler.”  
“Simpler?”  
“It’s not my money.”  
“Ha ha-ha; I don’t think this poor citizen has a chance against you Congressman.”

While we go to commercial, here’s a question for all of you. If a guy who runs a Ponzi scheme on a couple hundred greedy ‘investors’—paying dividends to previous ‘investors’ with the money coming in from new ‘investors’—is called a criminal, what would you call an entire organization that conspires to do that to millions of loyal, patriotic, trusting people while going more deeply into debt with every tick of the clock and assuring them all along that everything is just swell? We’ll be back in a minute...

**GOLD!**

If you’re anything like me, after a career capped off by a leading role in one of the most popular, longest running, TV series ever produced, and marrying one of the riches women in America today, you’ll retire happy, comfortable, and financially secure. Of course, if you chose to follow some other more foolish, less meaningful, path in life, you’re probably wondering right now, ‘How on earth am I *ever* going to retire?’

Well, I’ll tell you.  
It’s simple; just do what I did.

I bought gold *twenty* years ago, and I strongly urge you do the same. Gold is a solid, safe, dependable investment that you can hold in your hands. And gold won't let you down. It'll always be there for you. Once you've got some gold put away—well, I'll tell you, there's just no feeling like it.

The Dollar loses value every day, and the stock market is unpredictable. Don't just sit around and watch your hard-earned savings and your investments dwindle down to nothing. Gold's value has been recognized and respected throughout the ages.

So, here's what we'd like to do for you, today. Send us your worthless dollars, and in return, we'll send you something that has *real* and *lasting* value, GOLD! Believe me, if gold wasn't such a bargain right now, we wouldn't be so eager to see that YOU get YOUR share.

In hard times—like the times we may be facing ahead—nothing is more readily recognized, more greatly desired, more eagerly accepted, than gold!

No matter how difficult, or even how frightening things may become, you'll always be able to walk into any grocery store in America, toss a gold coin on the counter, and get anything you want... including the respect you've earned.

And remember this—no man has EVER been torn from a sound sleep in the middle of the night to find a loaded gun pressed to his forehead by hooded criminals demanding his GOLD!

## The BAD ELECTION

Once there was a bad election.  
It did not turn out right at all.  
Oh, how could this happen?  
Someone must have cheated—that's how; and we know who.

So, then, a lot of people—not quite half, I'd say; maybe something just a little short of half—who voted, were upset. And some people, who didn't vote, were outraged.

They'd been deprived of the opportunity to cast their vote because, in order to do that they would have had to do the same things that everybody else had done in order to vote, and that just didn't seem fair... so the vote which they didn't cast, but might have, didn't even count.  
I would think anybody could see the unfairness in that.

The candidate who did not win (let's say, hypothetically, that it was a woman), was particularly upset by the outcome, and refused to accept the results. "I CANNOT and WILL NOT accept the results of this election!" she declared loudly and defiantly and repeatedly and stubbornly—and some would say bravely—and demanded a recount. So, you know, they did that recount—some would say it was just to shut her up.

Going into the recount she was down by, let's say, 19,000 votes. But, during the recount a box containing 3,000 ballots was found in the trunk of a car—it had somehow been overlooked on the night of the election. And, wouldn't you know it, every single one of those 3,000 ballots was for her, the candidate who supposedly had lost!  
What does *that* tell you?

So then she was down like, only—a mere—16,000 votes.

And, wouldn't you know it, as the recount continued, several more boxes that had been misplaced or overlooked turned up along the way. One of them had 6,200 ballots in there, and most of those were for her as well. So, then—at the end of the recount—she was only down like 9,000 votes; which is pretty damned close by anyone's count. So, she insisted that a manual recount take place.

And—though everyone sighed and bellyached—they did it. And in that process, she lost a few votes—which put the entire process in question. “How on earth,” she asked, “can I go into a manual recount and come away with 12 votes less than I had going in? I challenge anyone to even *try* to explain that to me!”

And, nobody did. Nobody even tried. They all kinda knew, going in, that there was little chance of explaining that to her.

However—just to calm things down a bit—they went through another manual recount with the same results. And, when she asked for it, they did another machine recount too; which ended with results that now matched the manual recount. So, which of the machine recounts had been wrong? The more they counted, the more suspicious it looked. As far as she could see, the entire process was shady.

“Wouldn't you expect to come up with SOME differences, no matter how small, in a manual recount, compared to a machine recount?” she reasoned out loud, quite loudly, “Just due to human error...there'd be some” she concluded. “I defy anyone to explain *that* to me.”

But, again, no one took up that challenge.

For her, the fact that the machine recount and the manual recount came up with the same exact figures, put the entire election in doubt. “Is this a sham or a scam or what?” she asked. And, when she was pressed on the issue, she cut the reporter off, saying, “Before you take one step further, you had better know that I am *personally* insulted whenever *anyone* should question my stupidity; so be forewarned.” That ended that conversation.

Then the County Clerk/Elections-whatever declared the results official (somewhat suspiciously) just as a few more boxes of overlooked votes were walking in the door.

“How can you not count these perfectly legitimate, untainted, untampered-with ballots, just cause the election has been over for a week?” she asked.

It was wrong. It was all wrong.

The entire election was wrong.

As far as she could see, it was a bad election.

I mean, here was a woman who had all the requirements to hold that office BUT, because of someone’s inability to count, she did not win. Worse yet, the cheater who beat her was just another one of those typical predictable old white males.

The whole thing was not only a disgrace; it was a joke. She said as much. She also said, “I promise you this: I will never again run for office; the whole thing is a perfidious charade.”

Speaking of which, I was surprised to discover that I’d voted in that election; I don’t live in that state. And, the one time I passed through there, I picked up a fungus.

## **The POLITICIAN, the SURPLUS, and the PAGE**

So, there's a good and honest voter, and he's on the bank of a river with:

a politician

a not-particularly-ugly congressional page, and

a budget surplus.

He wants to get all of that to the other side of the river, safely.

The problem is that his boat can only accommodate himself at the oars, and one other item.

He can't leave the politician alone with the surplus for any length of time or he'll turn it into a massive deficit, and the boat will sink.

He can't leave the politician alone with the not-particularly-ugly congressional page for ANY length of time or... well, let's just say that it wouldn't be fair to the kid.

As you can see, the voter has a real problem. And it is neither the surplus nor the not-particularly-ugly page.

So, how does our voter do it?

It's a conundrum.

Here's what the voter does. He takes the politician across the river, leaving the not-particularly-ugly page behind with the surplus. He drops the politician off and returns to pick up the surplus. He then rows across with the surplus, leaves it upon the bank and, a struggle ensues.

But, with some wheedling and the threat of physical force, he finally manages to get the politician back into the boat.

They then cross the river together, with the politician alternately looking back longingly at the budget surplus and, like a fox with his eye on an injured hen, looking forward to the bank where the not-particularly-ugly page awaits.

The voter then brings the not-particularly-ugly page on board, and, at gunpoint, drives the politician off onto shore

He then takes the not- particularly-ugly page across the river.

After dropping the page off to wait with the now steadily-growing surplus, the voter returns for the politician.

On the way across, the politician asks, somewhat distractedly, “Why did you think you had to go through all that?”

The voter snorts loudly; he thinks the politician is kidding.

“Seriously,” says the politician. “Why did you go through all that business of shuffling things back and forth?”

“You honestly don’t know?” asks the voter.

“No,” says the politician, with big blue innocent saucer eyes.

And, so he wins yet another vote in the upcoming election.

***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on POLITICS and POLITICIANS

My Father once told me, “I knew everything I needed to know about politics when, as a kid, I saw a man, running for the office of Sheriff, spend \$50,000 to land a job that paid only \$5,000 a year.”

His father, before him, was known to have said, about politics, “It’s all damned nonsense; I don’t want to hear about it, and I don’t want it in my house.”

I think they were both right.

My father’s mother gave me some advice, when I was a very little boy, which I believe no politician in the entire history of that profession has ever even attempted. She told me, “Say what you mean, and mean what you say.”

I’m going to do that right now.

This is what I believe:

If politicians are proof of anything, they are proof of the fact that money cannot buy honesty; it frequently used to buy the opposite. However, honesty is the foundation of a beautiful cynicism which allows us to clearly see politics for what it is.

## THE CORNERSTONE OF MY THINKING ON POLITICS

How old would you be if you'd only kissed one girl one time and got up every morning at 6:30 to pedal around the neighborhood on your bicycle tossing newspapers in the general direction of your subscribers' front doors, but with considerable accuracy?

That's how old I was when I got my first lesson in politics.

At that awkward age, I was as thin as a rail and trembled like a leaf whenever the thought of a girl crossed my mind, and, so then, quite naturally I guess, I was continually atremble.

I thought I had some friends though; kids I played baseball with in the summer and football with in the winter and just generally knew and liked; neighborhood kids.

I wasn't the most popular kid in the neighborhood, but if you asked me who was, I couldn't name him. There was no leader, we were all pretty equal, and we all had our flaws, whatever that amounts to.

I was the embarrassingly skinny, pimply, painfully shy one. So, I was surprised to be invited over to JoAnn Rink's garage for a party after school one day.

I was even more surprised when I got there and it was only me and three girls. I seem to recall saying, "Where is everybody?" and the girls all giggled as if they might know something. I was hoping they did, because I sure didn't. Then they produced a bottle.

Gathering around in a circle, they sat on the garage floor. “Won’t you join us,” Renee Perkins said seductively. Since this was something I’d dreamed of, I sat down. I was ready.

At that point JoAnn went outside, and when she came back in Billy Kelmer was with her. He announced excitedly, “Quick, let’s go across the street to Tex’s house, there’s going to be a fight!”

Naturally, since fightin’ was, if not better than kissin’, at least a lot less stressful, we all grabbed the opportunity to get up and run out of there. On our way I shouted at Billy, “Who’s gonna fight?” and he replied over his shoulder, “George Engel.”

I stopped in midstride.

I was stunned.

It was impossible for me to imagine George Engel fighting anybody—he was a large, slightly goofy-looking Jewish kid of the quietest, calmest and most peaceful disposition imaginable. If I’d had to pick a phrase to describe George Engel it would have to be good-natured. Kind-hearted would also have described him.

“Who’s he gonna fight?” I shouted.

“You’ll see. Hurry up.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. If George was a genius, I’d never witnessed the fact, but he was no idiot either, and surely he knew that he wasn’t a fighter.

I was pretty sure any one of us could take him because he was just so gentle. But, I couldn’t imagine why anyone would want to pick a fight with George Engel... because he was... you know, just so gentle.

When we arrived at Tex Wooster's house there was no sign of George Engel anywhere.

I'll tell you who was there. There was Billy Kelmer, who I didn't think would fight George Engel, because he was too small for the task, and, though a pretty good liar, basically a chicken.

There was Larry Lurie, who I didn't think would fight George Engel, because he was a skinny arrogant pseudo-intellectual of some self-imagined sort, and his viciousness was strictly verbal and underhanded. (He was a bigger chicken than Kelmer).

There was Tex Wooster, who I didn't think would fight George Engel because they were too much alike. Tex was just a big, aw-shucks Texas hillbilly and more puppy-dog than kid. There was Kenny Leake, who I thought would fight anybody he was certain wasn't big enough or strong enough to beat him (and George Engel just might have been both.)

And, there was me, who never had any intentions of fighting anyone ever (I don't know if I was chicken or not, I guess I was.) And then there were the girls of course. I was sure none of them was going to fight George Engel.

So, where was this kid who was going to fight George Engel? Was it some kid we didn't even know? And, where was George Engel?

After we got there, everybody gathered in a big circle next to Tex Wooster's garage—with the girls hanging around outside, kinda on the edge of things.

I was wondering, ‘What the heck is going on...?’ when someone said, very loudly, “Boy, that George Engel sure is a moron!”

Someone else said, “And his breath stinks! Goddamn, have you ever smelled his breath?”

And someone else said, “What do you think, Darryl?”

I said, “I think George is a nice kid. He’s just quiet. You know. I never smelled his breath.”

Then someone said, “Man, it’s not just his breath; George Engel stinks from head to toe. What do you think, Darryl?” And I said, “I never noticed, really.”

Then someone said, “He’s so gutless. George Engel is the biggest chicken in the neighborhood.”

And someone else said, “He’s scared of his own shadow. I think one of these girls could take him. What do you think, Darryl?”

I said, “You know, I think you’ve got him wrong. He’s kinda religious. I think his religion makes him walk away from arguments and things. I don’t think it’s because he’s afraid to fight.”

“But you agree, he’s a big dork, don’t you?” someone said.

“He is a big dork, isn’t he, Darryl?” someone else chimed in.

“You think he’s just a big stupid stinking dork, don’t you, Darryl?” said one of the girls.

“Well...” I said. “He IS kind of dorky...I have to ad...”

And before that sentence was fully out of my mouth George Engel rose up from behind the bushes, charged me, wrapped his big arms around me, drove me to the ground, and started pummeling me.

The kids all closed in and started shouting.

“Kill ‘im, George!”

“You heard him. He called you a dork!”

“Teach him a lesson, George!”

“Rip his head off!”

Meanwhile, all the girls were screamin’ “Get him, George. Get him, Georgie. Get him!”

Through this event I learned something about friendship and, obliquely, subsurface, I began to establish a foundation upon which I would later construct my thoughts concerning politics.

These were kids I knew. Until that day, if anyone had asked, ‘Can you name a few of your friends?’, without any thought, or any hesitancy whatsoever, their names would have fallen from my lips like litany.

Whenever I see that pack of wolves called Congress snapping and snarling at each other with sneering contempt, I smile knowingly. “Hey,” I say to myself, “I recognize that!”

## **THE BUMPY PRESIDENCY**

## A LOOK BACK AT THE BUMPY PRESIDENCY

This is just an overview—believe me, you do NOT want to see the underview.

Thomas Bumpy was not the clever manipulating genius that some repeatedly claimed he was in order to (I'm guessing) comfort themselves.

Nor was he the deranged psychopath those who refused to be comforted obsessed over, in their continually regenerated, self-induced mindless hysteria.

Thomas Bumpy was exactly what every President of the United States had been since Kennedy—nothing more and nothing less—but without the fixed false face.

Of course, like any person drawn to work in politics, if he had any character, it was only skin deep, and if he ever displayed any dignity, it was a credit to his handlers. And Bumpy's handlers were, without a doubt, whichever way you want to look at it, some of the worst. Either they had no influence over the man or they were giving him some of the worst advice ever given.

Like all *leaders of men*, whatever self-respect he had was unearned, and the respect his followers had for him was a mystery to anyone with the ability to think for themselves.

I believed then—in those convulsive days of the tottering republic—that much of the trouble President Bumpy faced, and some of the troubles we faced as a nation, would have simply vanished—disappear entirely—if he had done only two things; things which his father had probably expected of him at age 12:

got a haircut, and  
kept his thoughts to himself.

And, I believe that still today.

I think many people, at that time, probably believed it as well,  
but found themselves either incapable or unwilling to admit it.

But, Thomas Bumpy could not pretend to be anything that he  
was not; and he was not what you would call self-reflective.

I think it was after the first debate with good old *Ms. What  
difference, at this point, does it make*, that everybody began to  
sit up and take notice. Until that moment everyone had pretty  
much taken Bumpy's run for President as a joke (some would  
say, even Bumpy himself).

For any of us watching that event, who still believed that  
Presidential candidates should show occasional signs of either  
intelligence or dignity, Bumpy's first debate with *Ms. What  
difference, at this point, does it make* dragged on and on,  
showing no sign of either, from either.

But, I believe, that contest would have been over in an instant  
if Thomas Bumpy had shown up at that debate with a  
reasonable haircut.

If he had only done that, no one in that auditorium would have  
known what to think; they'd all have been stunned, staggered,  
dumbstruck, rendered speechless, as if pole-axed.

WINNER, by KNOCKOUT, FIRST ROUND, Mr. Haircut!

We'd seen that haircut-thing before though, in the 1960s. In those halcyon days, due to some peculiar glitch in the American psyche, there was no greater crime on earth than for a male to have hair touching either his collar or his ears.

Long hair was a particularly vile, and almost unforgivable, affront to every sputtering, sniveling soul. Apparently, idle minds still make for deep concern about other people's hair.

For some of us, it wasn't Bumpy's hair so much as the fact that any grown man—whether in a position of power or not—should spend so much time messing with the stuff. Bumpy's carefully orchestrated mélange of conflicting angles, planes, and sweeping frontal cantilever looked like something that required both arduous prep and hourly adjustment.

When I was fourteen, back in 1963, Billy Kelmer had a haircut like that, and he looked like a complete idiot. Of course, Billy Kelmer was 13 at the time, and he wasn't running for President.

It's none of anyone's business, of course, how another man chooses to arrange the stuff on his head; and, in fairness, we must add that, whatever childish criticism Thomas Bumpy may have levelled at his opponents, he never criticized their hair. Still, I think Bumpy's hair made many people nervous.

His weird approach to whatever it was he thought he was accomplishing above the brow line, combined with his inability, or flat-out refusal, to keep his mouth shut, created a distasteful combo—a repulsive marshmallow and sardine sandwich, which many people, eyes closed, nibbled and gagged down, because the alternative dish was even worse.

At any rate, it was during that first debate that the decision was forced upon the poor voters.

From there on out, the immediate gut-level response, of people who shared his beliefs, and admitted openly that they would vote for Bumpy, was to cringe at the sight of him whenever he appeared on TV. Even his biggest fans never felt that they could relax entirely until he'd left the stage, because of his mouth; and then, for a heartbeat or two, they always worried that he might return. I know; I was one of them.

Throughout his campaign, people, who felt they *had to* vote for the man, tuned in to every speech he gave and listened carefully to every word, not because they wanted to hear what he had to say, but in fear of hearing what he might say.

In that way, his supporters got a brief glimpse into the tiny minds of those who (loudly) claimed to despise Bumpy so much that they would leave the country if he was elected—who never did, once he was. (I only say '*claimed to despise*' him out of an excessive kindness that I've always held for incessantly annoying, truly stupid people.)

After all, if someone who intended to vote for Bumpy, despite his tendencies, harbored such nagging doubts, how must *they* have felt (those who claimed to despise him and swore they'd leave the country if he was elected, but never did) each time his big, smug, gloating image rose up, leviathan-like, before their fearful eyes? Despite that glimpse, many people *on Bumpy's side of things* claimed **not to understand** the extraordinary reaction of those, *on the other side* who, at the very thought of Thomas Bumpy as President of the United States, lost their minds entirely.

The reasons, of course, were really pretty hard to ignore.

If not all, then certainly some of what those poor people were going through must have been based solely upon his smug appearance; because, the idea that he might say something socially unacceptable, politically dangerous, personally damaging, or just plain weird, could have only given them greater hope.

If Mr. Bumpy had only been capable of living a single day without giving-in to the overwhelming urge to respond to every slight with a relentless raging torrent of invective, his hair would no longer have been the fuse that set off his overly sensitive, highly explosive enemies. That's what I think.

And, that's probably enough of that.

## BUMPY'S ENEMIES

Bumpy had enemies of every sort imaginable, and though that's not surprising, there was occasional mystery in it.

The comedy of human existence naturally promotes sloppy drunks loudly and scornfully deriding their fellow drunks. So, that explains why most congress-persons would denounce Bumpy openly, loudly, continually, unconvincingly. It was more than merely a ploy to garner the idiot vote.

What I could never understand is how anyone with a nose-ring, awesome full-sleeve tattoos, and one half of their head shaven, might gag at the sight of Bumpy. You'd think they'd call him *Bro*.

It's also somewhat of a mystery how large mobs of stupid, truly aggressive, remarkably violent young masked cowards—out in the street screaming until they were red in the face, shattering windows and making demands—could claim that Bumpy—who put up with all their nonsense—was a fascist.

As kind of a little side note—for those who are attacked by such cowards, it hardly matters whether they are being beaten for the sake of inclusiveness or diversity. And—it's nagging that old goats, with experience and a view of history, chose to remain silent throughout such behavior; or worse, ordered law enforcement to stand down. It's difficult to say which are the more despicable cowards.

Worse still were the college kids who defiantly declared themselves Socialists. They were upset because someone said that Bumpy may have once spoken with a Russian—a fear

which made no sense whatsoever. If Bumpy was, in fact, all buddy-buddy with Russia, as some insisted, the sooner their dream of joyfully slogging into the quicksand of Socialism would have come true.

The fear that Thomas Bumpy was a Nazi or a fascist or a tyrant of any one of several sorts—ideas disproven by the very fact that they could get away with saying those things in public—were promulgated by politicians, movie stars, professional athletes, celebrities, and some guy who called himself a scientist. So, let's look at each of them.

The politicians who railed against Bumpy—laughing when he declared his intention to run, mocking him and calling him names every step along the way, and sneering at the ridiculous idea that someone who had never been a professional in the highly respectable, noble and dignified field of politics could possibly handle the job—were heavily invested in his failure. After all, if an idiot, a fool, a big buffoon—who they'd jeered at and ridiculed—can waltz into the Oval Office and start getting things accomplished, what does that say about them? In order to maintain the illusion, that only career politicians have what it takes to twiddle their thumbs year upon year, while riding around the world in private jets and mysteriously growing enormously rich on a relatively modest salary, they needed to take action.

Their only move, after his election, was to continue calling him names, to question his sanity, and hope that the public is every bit as stupid as they apparently think we are. If that act had the look of desperation about it, that's only because it would be devastating for them to discover that we're not. So, necessarily, they took a sacred vow to stand firmly in the way

of Bumpy getting anything done and feigned blindness to the fact that, despite their childish resistance, he was.

Professional athletes were against Bumpy because they believed that ‘taking a knee’ during the National Anthem was a grand gesture which would heal our nation’s racial divide; a deep pecuniary canyon which—somewhat embarrassingly—they lived like kings on the wrong side of. Meanwhile, with that white supremacist Bumpy at the helm, the unemployment rate among blacks had plummeted and, in some communities, long-sought, well-deserved opportunity had begun to appear for the first time, in a very long time.

Movie stars—whose work is broken down for them into tiny increments of one minute or less—resented Bumpy because he was their opposite in almost every conceivable way. They are told where to stand, while pretending to be someone they are not, having an emotion which they are not experiencing at the moment, and repeat lines written for them by someone else, in a controlled and convincing manner. And it’s amazing how good many of them are at that. Unfortunately, parroting a clever thought is not the same thing as thinking.

A sock puppet’s opinion of Bumpy would mean as much.

As for celebrities; nobody even knows where these people come from. One day—BOOM, there they are.

These days, every third person between the ages of 11 and 37 claims, and is almost always granted, celebrity status. How they find the time to think about anyone or anything other than themselves is beyond me. Yet, amid all their primping and posing, they always found time to hate Bumpy, and to let it be known, often in song.

The problem those people had with Bumpy was that he was competition for them. They knew that every second people spent talking about Bumpy was a precious second lost; it was a second which could have been spent buying whatever it is that they seemed to be selling and selling and selling, to their dedicated followers.

As for that guy who called himself a scientist; what does he have to do with anything?

He wasn't a scientist.

He wasn't even a celebrity.

Though he pretended to be one and longed to be the other.

Those were Bumpy's enemies. He was giving them all a pretty good run for their money.

## HOBNOBBING WITH PUTIN

The political party which had been pushing socialism as hard as anyone could push anything and still deny it with a straight face, relentlessly accused Bumpy—who was doing everything he could to shore up the foundations of capitalism—of hobnobbing with Putin—a man who was doing everything in *his* power to reestablish and expand the Russian imperialistic communist state, while he and his friends all grew rich off of their deep personal immersion into the joys, and riches, that only capitalism can bring. You figure it out.

In that equation there was only a single honest person, and that was Bumpy. The rest of them—every single one of them without exception—was publicly pushing something to which they themselves did not personally subscribe. Why?

The political party which was pushing socialism thought of it as a way to garner the votes of the emerging neo-barbaric masses. Putin knew that he and his cohorts would be sitting in the position of power no matter what the official state of their State, and therefore saw no reason not to wade into Capitalism while expanding and acquiring greater ‘cooperation’ from their neighbors. And Bumpy, who was exactly what he said he was, stood alone and was hated by both.

Strangely, the political party pushing socialism could not let go of the idea that Bumpy had been, and probably still was, hobnobbing with Putin, despite the fact that it could not be proven. And, although hobnobbing with foreign leaders is less like a crime and more like something that people in high positions of government are paid to do, a full scale investigation was launched.

*Everybody* was eager to discover any evidence that Bumpy had done pre-election hobnobbing because, if THAT could be proven, well then... you know... who knows, you know.

Once that train left the station, there was no stopping it and no turning back; next stop (after the hobnobbing was proven) would be impeachment; and both the political party, which shall not be named, and almost all of the well-established old goats of Bumpy's party, could hardly wait for that glorious day to arrive.

To prove hobnobbing, a Special Counsel was appointed to look into the seemingly randomly selected, though worrisome, accusations made by unnamed sources, and everyone began chewing on the bit. And they'd almost chewed that bit in two before—just as they suspected—it was shown that Russians had taken out ads on Facebook!

Of course, we all know how very persuasive advertising can be—that's why I drive a Ford, a Mazda, a Land Rover, a Mercedes, a Chevy truck, a Dodge Ram pickup, a Toyota, a Honda and a Mini-Cooper. It's also why I take every drug the pharmaceutical industry can pump out—after checking with my doctor, of course—because I simply cannot resist those ads. And, it's pretty much understood that no voter, no matter how strong-willed, is invulnerable to an ad on Facebook.

It is absolutely horrible how we were all manipulated by those damned Russians. Thank god enough of us had what it takes to override the urge, think for ourselves and vote for Ms. *What difference, at this point, does it make.* Sure, we missed the opportunity to create an historical event, by failing to put a completely unbearable female in that office, but having

Bumpy in there was almost as good; at least those who hated him were not fearful to admit it. Also, because of him, we got ourselves a virtually deranged press for our entertainment. They honestly seemed to believe that their ever-emerging, non-stop hysteria over Bumpy was being taken seriously; which made their feverish delivery all the more comical.

We all have the right to our own fears, our own prejudices, and our own beliefs—for a while yet—but we do not have the right to insist that other people adhere to ours—yet. And none of us has the right to take advantage of the vulnerable, the weak, the trusting, the innocent, by incessantly broadcasting our personal delusional delirium and calling it news or, far worse, by taking out political ads on Facebook—a true sign of hobnobbing.

When the guy who previously sat in the Oval Office whispered to then-Russian President Medvedev, “After my election I’ll have more flexibility.” and Medvedev said he’d pass that secret little message on to the incoming President—that was fine; no hobnobbing there. After all, how are we ever going to establish peace unless we talk to our enemies?

When it looked like the Russians were *not* going to get a controlling percentage of a company that mined uranium in the United States, and a bunch of investors in that company made large (HUGE) contributions to the foundation run by Ms. *What difference, at this point, does it make* and her husband, AND he, *What difference, at this point, does it make*’s husband was invited—by coincidence—to give a speech, for a mere \$500,000, to a bunch of Russian bankers who dealt directly with the Russian government just before the deal was approved...(breathe here)...no sign of any

hobnobbing whatsoever could be detected anywhere in all of that; not even a hint. Business, after all, is business.

After the Russians had Bumpy placed in the Oval Office he proved his real worth to them almost uh-mediately, by expelling Russian diplomats, banning the use of Russian designed software on government computers, increasing sanction against Russian Oligarchs, Russian banks and Russian corporations doing business in the United States, AND giving \$200 million in military aid to Ukraine—a place Russia had, at that time, suddenly rekindled an historic fondness for.

So, all the suspicions were correct and, just as predicted, Bumpy showed his true colors, demonstrating his loyalty to the Kremlin yet again by bombing and destroying Russian air bases in Syria. Of course, any single one of these actions might have been enough to reveal Bumpy's ties to Putin, but combined, they were irrefutable proof of hobnobbing. What further proof would any thinking person need?

A cynic tells me that he was out hobnobbing with a friend of his the other night and, as they were leaving the bar, he kicked his friend in the groin...twice. Now, THAT's hobnobbing!

That was precisely the kind of thinking that led to the appointment of a Special Counsel and launched the famous Hobnobbing investigation—the Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce of our lucky generation.

Any cynic might have offered some good advice to that Special Counsel guy, if only in an effort to speed things along. And that advice might have... Oh, look, here's a cynic now!

Let, see what advice he has to offer.

Special Counsel, might I suggest that, if you burst into a room and there's a body there, and there's a gun, you should, after bagging the gun, run out of there yelling, "Let's go; we've got everything we need to make our case!"

That, Special Counsel, makes a certain kind of traditional sense, and you'd be a hero.

If, however, you go bursting into a room and everybody in there is just standing around chatting with drinks in their hands, and there is *no* body and *no* gun, and you have to look around to see if anything of a criminal nature may have taken place in there, or will take place in there in the future, there is little need to launch an investigation. Just as a general rule: If there is no evidence that anything whatsoever has taken place, then maybe you should forego an investigation.

ALSO, if by chance you should ever find that you may have, inadvertently, launched an investigation into something that does not require an investigation and, after years of tedious prying and poking around, you really cannot come up with anything, you should, instead of hanging on like a rabid dog with a ragged bone, try to bring a quiet end to it. Give that some thought. (Thus sayeth the cynic.)

That advice would have proven enormously useful to the Special Counsel heading the Hobnobbing investigation.

Here's what I cannot understand: If what they said about President Bumpy were true, why wouldn't the party which shall not be named—aspiring to Socialism as they do—be wildly supportive of a President surreptitiously representing

the will of their well-established big brother, Russia? After all, if anyone would know how to take the next step in the direction of purified leftist idiocy, it would be those who have practiced it for years.

Stranger still, when the guy who previously sat in the Oval Office whispered sweet nothings into Putin's ear, they were all for it.

## THE BRIDGE

Shortly after Bumpy took office—three minutes and fourteen seconds, by some accounts—an audio tape, supposedly of Bumpy talking to an unknown interviewer popped up. Very shortly thereafter the tape was proven to be a hoax, written specifically *for Ms. What difference, at this point, does it make*, by a taxi driver/unemployed screen writer, living in the East Village. None the less, upon the solid foundation of that tape, the FBI, the CIA and the DNC all launched their various independent and combined investigations into Bumpy and his associates. They were each looking for signs of hobnobbing.

Though hobnobbing was recognized, by all, *not to be* a crime, that tape was proof enough that there may have been some.

I have obtained a copy of that (admittedly fraudulent) tape and offer it here, for your consideration. If you ever get a chance to hear the actual recording, you'll uh-mediate recognize that it is not even a good imitation of Bumpy. Still it was enough to launch a thousand investigations—and it might prove useful to you, if you feel the need to launch an investigation of your own.

Personally, I think that, if there was any hobnobbing done, it was between Ms. *What difference, at this point, does it make* and those Russians who wanted a controlling percentage of a company that mined uranium in the U. S....but, as she herself once said, what difference, at this point, does it make?

So, here's the transcript:

I know I promised you a wall; you'll get your wall—oh, you will get your wall alright. And it is gonna be a great wall, a wonderful wall. It is going be the finest, the most elegant, the most

magnificent wall... AND, as I promised you, the most effective wall built since the Great Wall of China... we may even employ some of their techniques—why not, it seems to have done the job—I don't know... we'll see. But, I'm not here today to talk about a wall. I'm here to talk about a bridge.

I was just talking to a friend of mine—a new friend, I've just met—and we decided to go in on this bridge idea together. He thinks it's a good idea; I think it's a good idea, and it'll put a lot of people to work. Maybe we'll take some of our—sorry, if you don't like to hear the word—*illegal* immigrants—but that is what they are; it's what they are—from some of our so-called *sanctuary* cities and put them to work on this bridge... maybe, maybe not, what do you think? I don't know yet. But, this bridge—and like I've said, it is going to be a wonderful thing, a marvel of both form and function—is going to put a lot of people to work..... a lot of people, good jobs too.

The last bridge of this sort built—built by the Chinese by the way—is over 100 miles long, think of it. It's over 100 miles long and cost over *8 billion* dollars to build—much closer to 9 billion to be honest—and that's in China, where they like to play with the value of their money; so who knows what it actually cost them?—and took more than four years to build.

The bridge my new friend and I are going to build will only be a little more than half as long—it'll be—well, you'll just have to wait for that, you'll just have to wait—but, it'll be half as long, and we'll employ just as many people—why not? We should. People need good work; and we'll pay them good money for good work; it's the American way.

BUT, our bridge won't cost anywhere near the 8 billion dollars they spent in China. We're looking at, conservatively, maybe 3 billion for our bridge.

This bridge—what can I tell you—this bridge will pay for itself, in the long run—both in trade and in creating a strong bond between two of the greatest nations in the history of the world. I won't tell you which two—that, you'll have to wait for. But, first, we're gonna take care of the southern border—we'll keep out the gangs, the drugs, the human traffickers, the criminals—and we're gonna open up things a bit—just a bit, a little bit—in the north. Maybe, just maybe, we'll develop a working relationship with an ancient foe... two great nations working, together instead of always being at odds with each other. I don't know, but you never know, we'll have to see how it goes.

If I recall, that's what you elected that last guy to do... though he didn't do such a great job of it, did he? But... I think, I can get this thing done, without bowing to anybody or getting into bed with dictators or APOLOGIZING for this country, our country, being a great nation, for that is what we are: a great nation—the greatest country in the world... that's what we are, that's what we are.

And, so, we are going to build that bridge, and in the same stroke, while working together, create a new understanding between two powerful nations.

My new friend and I are still kicking things around a bit—we seem to understand each other though—two powerful men, who both like to get things done—and the bridge is just the beginning of a new friendship that I think both nations will find very beneficial...very beneficial. I think we will.

And so now, I'm not gonna say any more about it right now, I'm just not; I've already said too much. I don't want to get into details at this stage of things.

I'll just say this: it will be 6 lanes wide and, let me tell you this: it is going to be simply beautiful. A lovely conveyance.

And, it will do the job. It will do the job as well as the wall I intend to build down South does its job—but in a different way. They'll both do the job, but each in their own way.

There are a few things, a few details, we need to work out yet... some weather problems and so forth...but I thought this is an interesting idea and you should be in on it. So....

[There the tape ends abruptly.]

## APPLE PIE

We've all heard the phrase: *As American as apple pie*; but not that many of us can make a good apple pie, any more. So, today I'm gonna show you how to make one of the best apple pies you have ever tasted. And, it's actually pretty simple—that's the secret; a good apple pie is simple. The crust is simple; the filling is kept simple.

You know, I remember one time when Andy Rooney was ruminating over a packaged commercial pastry of some sort. He read the label on the back, then, very sadly he said, "I have here something they call an Apple Turnover. It has thirty-seven ingredients, and not one of them is apple." He sighed and said wearily, "Some of these things, I don't even know what they are."

Well, today I'm going to show you how to make a GREAT apple pie using only a handful of ingredients, and you'll know every one of them. So, let's start with the crust.

The best crust requires only three ingredients: flour, butter, and water. If you use unsalted butter, you'll need to add salt; I suppose you could say that's four ingredients. What's important is that you measure correctly and use these few ingredients properly.

Some people like to prepare their filling first so that, once the pastry is ready, they place it in a pie pan and—schloop—they shove it right in the oven. I prefer to make the pastry first and refrigerate it while I prepare the filling. You can do it either way. Today, we're gonna do it this way.

“Breaking News! Breaking News! Sorry to interrupt your programming, but we have breaking news tonight.

An undisclosed source has just come forward to reveal the fact that, during Thomas Bumpy’s run for the Presidency, they once saw a known and admitted Russian—an actual living, breathing, known Russian—come out of a building very near to Bumpy Manor (is it Manor or Manors?—who knows... I don’t) and cross the street to a hot dog stand... We have a picture of that hotdog stand here. There’s the hotdog stand. That’s the hotdog stand a *known* Russian, who had just come directly out of Bumpy Manor approached DURING Thomas Bumpy’s run for the Oval Office. Within minutes, this reliable witness tells us, someone from the Bumpy campaign—we have no name yet, but we’re working on it—someone working *inside* the Bumpy campaign, within minutes of a KNOWN Russian buying a hotdog there—here’s a picture of that hotdog stand again—just minutes after a known Russian bought a hotdog there, a high ranking Bumpy associate came out of Bumpy Manor, crossed the street, and bought a hotdog, or hotdogs—we don’t yet know which—from that very same hotdog stand. Can this be merely a coincidence? Can we see a picture of that hotdog stand again? Let me be clear on this, he or she may have bought more than one hotdog at that stand. We’re working on getting more details; and, when we do we’ll bring them to you. But for now, that’s the breaking news. Again if you’ve just tuned in...we’ve got breaking news: someone—a source very close to the Oval Office—has just told us that, during the Bumpy campaign for the White House, a known Russian was once observed coming *out* of Bumpy Manor. We’ll be following that story closely and, naturally. keep you informed, as things develop. Now, back to your regularly scheduled program.”

...makes, not just a good pastry crust, but a *great* pastry crust for any fruit pie. The important thing is how you handle the ingredients. THAT's the real secret.

So what I have here is 3 cups of flour—some people prefer to use pastry flour, but there's really no need to be picky with flour. What IS important, is that you sift the flour. Now I have here a stick—that's 8 tablespoons—of pure unsalted butter. I'll be adding my own salt—about, say, ½ tablespoon. If you use salted butter, there's no need to add salt, but I prefer to do it this way; I've always had success...

“Breaking news; breaking news! This just in. Here's Trent Cafferty. Tell us what you know, Trent.”

“Well, I've just finished speaking to someone very close to the Administration, and they say that all hell has broken loose in the White house.”

“... just as we'd supposed it someday would. What else have you uncovered, Trent.”

“Well, I'm told that in those rare times when he—Bumpy—is not completely out of control and shouting at someone, he's walking around, knocking things over, mumbling to himself.”

“That's what we've heard too. So, you've gotten this from reliable sources?”

“Yes, reliable sources. We've also heard that he has no understanding whatsoever of the way our political system works...he's basically just making it up as he goes along.”

“Yes, we're all aware of that. But, back to his mood-swings. I've heard that no one who works with him understands his moods. And, that they've learned to expect him to lose his temper at any moment, without warning...”

“... or his mind entirely.”

“Yes, of course. I’m sure everyone in this nation shares that same fear. Have you been told that that’s the case?”

“Well, my sources tell me their biggest fear is that... unfortunately, he’ll probably lose it entirely during an important meeting with high ranking foreign dignitaries.”  
“Wouldn’t that be something?!”

“There are indications that it may have already happened. I’ve heard that.”

“You have? You’ve heard that?”

“Yes, I’ve heard that; from reliable sources very near the White House. I’ve heard that he’s lost it several times.”

“See, now THAT is exactly what we’ve predicted all along! We’ll, of course, have more on this story as it develops... Meanwhile back to your program.”

...just a touch of—and a lot of people find this surprising—but just a touch of vinegar. Trust me on this. Now, add a pat of butter on top, right in the middle, and we’re ready to close.

“Breaking news; breaking news! We just received tape of President Bumpy and his wife, shortly after landing at Dulles Airport. Here they are crossing the tarmac... and...right there. Did you see the way she refused to take his hand just then? Can we go back and freeze that moment. Right there; she clearly refused his hand. This may be a sign that the First Lady has had enough. Could we be seeing divorce during this President’s first term? And will the steps leading up to that divorce lead to further disarray in a White House already deeply embroiled in constant turmoil? I’m sure this moment—we’ll show it to you again—is an indicator of that those closest to him can only take so much of the man’s constantly fluctuating, temperament. Let’s go back and look at this—it happened just moments ago—as President Bumpy and the First Lady were coming off of Airforce One...”

## THE SECRET ROOM

After more than a year—employing a series of false promises and outright lies—I managed to obtain an interview with a spokesperson for [organization’s name withheld as per contractual agreement]. It was another year of cautious wheedling on the phone, and eventual face to face kowtowing, before I could convince someone that I could be trusted and shown what they refer to as *the center of things*. I had to sign a fistful of documents stating that I would not reveal their location, or their method of operations. Yort, my guide, agreed that I could use his or her real name, but must make no reference to gender—which might be subject to change at any moment.

What I’ve discovered is that there *is*—as many of us have supposed for quite some time now—a secret organization whose job it is—and these are their words—to *continually supply the emerging tribal culture and its supporting media with increasingly idiotic exponentially bizarre concepts by which a select few might make demands of the established oppressive Patriarchal order and ultimately disrupt all rational thought on the national level.*

“How do you manage all of that?” I asked.

“Our agency,” Yort explained, “is divided into several departments; I’ve been authorized to show you only one: our Breaking News Department. They are responsible for; daily jargon, as well as the preservation and relentless promotion of previously inserted concepts. What I cannot show you is what goes on in our other departments.”

“Such as...?”

“That I cannot tell you.”

“You can’t even mention the names of other departments?”

“Listen Butch,” Yort said, sighing heavily, “you cannot imagine what I had to go through to get you in here; don’t press your luck.”

“OK. Sorry.”

“Follow me.”

As we began our walk down a long empty corridor, I asked, “How do you come up with your ideas?”

“They are organically generated. Our strictly delineated hiring process supplies us with *the kind of minds* that naturally generate disruptive thoughts, implications, allegations, accusations, *factualized* theory...”

“It must be difficult to find ‘minds’ that can come up with ideas, on an hourly basis, which are each exponentially more absurd than the previous one, I suppose.”

Yort stopped, evaluated me for a bit, snorted, shook his or her head turned and, without uttering a word, continued on.

“Can you tell me something about the selection process?”

Yort stopped, looked at me as if to determine whether I fully understood my place, turned, and continued on.

We passed a large room in which hundreds of people were seated behind desks, mumbling into headsets. I stopped to listen, but couldn’t make out what they were saying. My guide came back, and putting a finger to his or her lips, opened the door just a crack.

I listened until it became clear that they were mumbling the word *hobnobbing* over and over again.

Yort smiled and gestured for me to follow him or her across the hall, where he or she put his or her finger to his or her lips again and opened a door on a similar scene. I put my ear to the opening.

There must have been 600 people in there, with headphones, all saying ‘Russia, Russia, Russia’. I turned to him and gaped. “Follow me.” Yort sounded peeved.

“Can you tell me what you’re looking for when considering a candidate for employment...?” I asked.

“Primarily, we look for discontent in a candidate—it doesn’t have to be seething discontent; for some departments we look for that, but, a good, general, overall, unfocused discontent is something we like to see in any serious candidate. It’s their impetus. Then, we also check for sense of humor, of course.”

“Really? A sense of humor?”

Since we were passing another large room full of young people with headphones, I stopped, opened the door, and I put my ear to the opening. There must have been 1000 people in there repeating the word, *Racist*, into their headsets.

I withdrew my head to discover my guide standing there, hands on his or her hips, glaring at me.

“Don’t do that.”

“OK, I was just curious.”

“Yeah, well your curiosity can get me fired and you... But, you were asking about our candidates for employment.”

“And you said that you always look for a sense of humor. I’m surprised to hear that.”

“No. what I *said* was that we check for sense of humor. It’s very important that people who work here have no sense of humor—if during an interview we detect any willingness to laugh at... well, almost anything actually, they’re out. A cruel *sense of humor* is another matter entirely.”

“Can you tell me more about that?”

“Yes,” Yort smiled mechanically, but said no more.

I made an effort to smile convincingly while waiting.

“During their first interview, at some point, an individ...a TEAM member...enters the interro...interVIEW room, carrying a tray laden with glasses and a large pitcher filled completely with ice—the ice is important. The tray bearer then takes a fall and, apparently embarrassed, breaks into tears. The test comes to this: does our candidate laugh at this or display an unnecessarily empathetic response?”

For some reason I began to laugh.

“What are *you* laughing about?” Yort asked.

“Oh, you know, it was such an arduous task to worm my way in here—and I thank you by the way—but now, after seeing what’s going on here, all this puppetry... you know, to be honest with you, I’m beginning to wonder if you people aren’t just fooling yourselves.”

“Wow,” Yort said, evaluating me for a while. “Is that your way of saying, let’s move on?”

“Yeah,” I said sheepishly, and apologized.

“Do you, or do you not, think there is a center of power?”

“Well,” I admitted, “honestly, I’m torn. I mean, I am standing here; but the idea is ridiculous.”

“It’s not only ridiculous,” Yort said snootily, “it’s absolutely true. Let me show you something.”

Leaving the door open, we entered a large empty room.

“It *looks* convincing,” I admitted, looking around at all the computers and—“Oh, look!—an entire wall of blanked-out monitors.” I said snidely.

“With that attitude of yours,” Yort said, with grand indifference, “I feel no compulsion to convince you...”

“Oh, please...” I began, just as a person dressed in grey flannel from head to foot sped by in the corridor outside. Yort touched me on the elbow, asked me to wait, and quickly ran out into the hallway after them.

Yort returned with that person in tow, leaned over a desk, and started writing on a scrap of paper.

“Just one second,” Yort said to the person standing anxiously behind him. Then, handing the paper to me, said, “Look at this.” In block print it said: “**unstable, unpredictable, threatens the very core of our nation**” I shrugged and handed it back to Yort, who folded it neatly and handed it to the other one—who left, uh-mediately, fleet of foot.

Yort took a seat and offered one to me. I sat down in one of the most comfortable chairs I have *ever* sat upon in my entire life and, following Yort’s example, leaned back with my hands behind my head. I waited for an explanation. A short few minutes later, that same grey flannel person stepped in, tossed three newspapers on a desk, and departed without saying a word.

From where I sat, I could read the headlines on the top paper: “WH INSIDER: PRESIDENT UNSTABLE”. The partially revealed headline on the one directly underneath it read: “UNPREDICTA...”

I couldn’t see the third paper, but, at that moment, given the chance, I’d have bet every dollar I will ever earn for the rest of my life that the phrase “threatens the very core of our nation” appeared, in bold-face type, somewhere on page one. I laughed heartily.

“What are you laughing at?”

“Nice trick...” I declared.

Yort said nothing.

“Not entirely convincing,” I chided. “but entertaining enough. Good work.” I was feeling pretty smug.

Without saying a word, Yort picked up a remote control and nodded in the direction of the wall of monitors.

I looked, as one of them came to life. There, on one of the largest and ‘most respected’ cable news networks, sat three commentators around a table. Yort turned up the volume.

One commentator shook his head and said bitterly, “The man is completely unstable.” The others all nodded in agreement, before another added, “He’s unpredictable; you never know what he’s going to do next.” The third said, “Yes, and *that* behavior threatens the *very core* of our nation.” They were all nodding furiously in agreement when Yort switched off the sound on that monitor and turned on a second monitor with a similar program from a sister news network.

Before us appeared an extremely tightly-wound woman, leaning over her desk, looking us in the eye, pointing a shaky finger in our direction. She was saying, “I’m telling you, that man is unstable! He’s completely unstable...completely. He’s also unpredictable; and his behavior is a threat the very core of this nation!” She glared at us for a while before Yort muted her. Yort looked at me and, out of a kindness I did not deserve, raised one eyebrow.

I was dumbstruck.

Before I could formulate my thoughts, Yort switched on yet another monitor. There, on a video blog, a man with a beard, a nose ring, and green hair, was summarizing his thoughts. “ONE: He’s unstable; just look at him, OK? UNSTABLE! TWO: He’s unpredictable; just listen to him; just read his tweets. UNPREDICTABLE! And isn’t that enough?” he whispered. “So, add that all up, my friends—add it up—and you reach the undeniable FACT—it is a fact—that that man is a **threat to the very core of our existence as a nation!** We need to face that fact before it’s too late: the man is **unstable**,

and **unpredictable**, and he's a **threat** to *the very core* of our nation. What more can I say? What more do I need to say?"

My guide into this strange new reality turned to me and said, "It usually takes a few minutes to get to... Oh, wait; here's one already." Yet another monitor came to life, and suddenly a gaggle of congressmen appeared before us, jostling each other to get to a podium, in front of a crowd of 'reporters'. One of those congressmen, head bowed as if in prayer, began quite seriously, "As I stand before you, the moment has come to take action. The man, who many of us still believe was *not* duly elected to the office, has repeatedly proven himself to be unstable; and anyone would have to admit that his increasing unpredictability threatens the very core of our great nation." Yort muted that monitor as three more flickered to life.

At that point, a half dozen muted monitors were alive with 'reporters' speaking to us frantically, sincerely. And, though there was no sound, I could read their lips: Unstable! Unpredictable! Threatens the very core of our nation! This is what we now call reporting the news; it was the very height of investigative journalism. There were tears in my old eyes. Yort turned off all the monitors with a click, looked at me, and raised one eyebrow. "That's pretty frightening," I admitted. I sat for quite a while in thought.

Then, I said, "Propinquity."

"What?" Yort asked dreamily.

"Try Propinquity," I suggested. "I don't even know precisely what it means; I don't think anybody else does either, but I've always liked the sound of it. I'd like to see you put that into the hopper; let's see what comes out."

Yort laughed, and touching a little device in his or her ear, spoke very quietly to someone. I couldn't hear what he or she was saying, but I distinctly heard the word, propinquity. "OK, thank you," Yort said quietly; touched his or her ear again and, without saying another word, turned to face the wall of monitors.

Instantly, there were the same three commentators sitting around a table. The first commentator shook his head and said bitterly, "The propinquity of that man to the red button is what makes me nervous." The others all nodded in agreement. Another added, "Ha, his propinquity to us, is what I find upsetting!" They all laughed. "Propinquity is a BIG problem," the third admitted. Another said, "Ha, Propinquity is THE ONLY real problem." They all agreed.

As that monitor went black, another came alive, and there was that very tightly-wound, nearly hysterical woman again. She leaned over her desk, looked us in the eye, pointed at us and said, "I'm talking about propinquity! That's what it's really all about: propinquity. Have you considered the propinquity of that unstable, unpredictable man to all the mechanisms that make our government, our nation, our society, our culture, our very existence work? Propinquity is an existential matter! Think about it." She glared at us for a while before Yort—thankfully—turned her off.

Yort looked at me, and shrugged. I continued to look at the blank monitors for a bit; then, I turned to Yort, grimaced, and mouthed the word *wow*!

When I returned home that evening, to work on my own little worthless blog, I gave everything I'd seen and heard that day a great deal of thought—I must have spent almost 2 minutes—before beginning:

For a very long time, *everybody I know* has suspected that a secret place must exist where they generate the idiocy. But, whenever anybody suggested that such a place might exist, *everybody I know* looked at that person as if they must be crazy. And then, of course, we all laughed. But, it was always a nervous kinda laugh.

Now that I've been there, and have seen what I have seen, I can assure you that the place does exist, and that it is the source of all the idiocy. To prove it to your own satisfaction, just listen for the phrase 'crippling our nation's economy' in tomorrow's news.

## BRINGING DOWN BUMPY IN THE NEWS ROOM

With Bumpy around, it had become impossible for career politicians to focus on the important things. Normally, the vast majority of their time would have been spent planning and fundraising for the next re-election campaign—an exhausting, never-ending process which required focus. But, Bumpy was a constant distraction. So, he had to be brought down.

They tried everything, from mockery to name-calling, from unfounded allegations to accusations from multiple unnamed sources. And, although he'd proven himself to be something less than a saint, long before his election, none of it worked. They called him a racist, a misogynist, a bigot, a xenophobe, a homophobe, a moron, an idiot, a fool, a tyrant, a dictator, a fascist; and none of it stuck.

Despite (or maybe because of) the failure of the full barrage, they eventually decided to focus solely on the racist idea; and began making that accusation almost exclusively, calling him a white supremacist and a racist systematically, and always with great force and venom. But, that failed too.

Distraught over the failure of such a noble venture to catch fire one woman screamed—"We have been calling *that man* a racist repeatedly, for months on end; Blacks, People of Color, Women, LGBTX, Leftists—both inside and outside of Congress—actors, news casters, figure skaters, have all been calling him a racist—what further proof do you need?!"

And I really think she spoke for all those people.

The nicest thing any of them could think of to say about Thomas Bumpy—which none of them said, because they had shot so far beyond common decency so quickly that there was no returning—might have been that... you know, maybe he was mentally impaired. In that case, their dedication to the Republic demanded that they speak up, declaring their deep concern about his sanity,

A cynic might ask where all these great patriots were when the previous tenant released FIVE Taliban generals—some of the most dangerous men on earth—in exchange for *one* U. S. Army deserter? And, meaning no disrespect to any stupid, indecent, immoral, or irrational elected official, he might also ask, where all the smart, decent, moral, reasonable, elected officials were when the decision was made to give thousands of assault rifles to Mexican drug lords? Where was their concern about the President's sanity then?

But, never mind that; they were talking about potentially dangerous or disastrous future decisions, not completely incomprehensible decisions from the past.

Eventually, the honorable enemies of Bumpy—who had never been quite sure if the Constitution *really* means everything that it says—began looking at the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment, hidden somewhere deep within that questionable dusty old document.

Therein they discovered, much to their delight, that—according to some interpretations—any President who happened to disagree with them on any issue could be, and probably was, incompetent, unstable, unfit to hold office, and probably even, as they had supposed all along, a danger to the Republic.

Good Lord!—is that not the very portrait of Bumpy?

Of course, they found it unsettling to think that Bumpy might be incapable of holding office, due to his—now revealed—emotional instability, and they felt the urgent need to share their concerns with the populace, by every means possible.

Thankfully, most news services offered them their full cooperation in spreading this shocking news. They too—it seems—had been equally concerned about the consequences that might arise from the man's troubling behavior. Then, having declared it so, it became the patriotic duty of politicians and journalists alike to do everything they could to remove Bumpy from office... for the sake of the nation.

Meanwhile, in order to forestall the catastrophic consequences the nation would no doubt suffer if Bumpy was not stopped, they swore a sacred vow to heroically stand in the way of anything he wished to accomplish, until he could be gotten rid of. Their most patriotic duty was to do everything they could to bring him down... for the sake of the nation.

So, that was the situation or, at least, that's what they told us they were up to. They were driven by the desperate need to wake up the electorate; to make sure that every person understood how fearful the situation; to inform them of the impending constitutional crisis; and to warn them to prepare themselves for imminent economic collapse.

*A PERSONAL NOTE* on BUMPY's IMPEACHMENT

When I think of Bumpy and those fools in Congress who want to bring him down, I cannot help but think of this event. It's mostly from recently shored-up memory so, like everything else in this book, it is likely wrong when it comes to the specifics; but, if nothing else, politics is a generalist thing.

In 1974, Muhammed Ali took on Heavy-Weight Champion of the World, George Foreman, in Zaire. Foreman, for the previous few years had not gone more than 2 rounds with any opponent because, by round two, that opponent was on his back, semi-conscious. So, Foreman was feeling pretty good going into the match with upstart Ali—a pretty boy, a braggart, and a buffoon—with little experience beyond an Olympic gold medal.

Bing, the bell goes off—Foreman turns around after getting a few final words of advice from his handlers, and Ali is right there. Smack—Ali hits Foreman right in the face. Foreman, a monster of a man, with fists like wrecking balls, well-trained and fully engrained with a fighter's will, though somewhat startled, comes back with body blows that would fell anyone or anything on earth, except Mohammed Ali.

Neither of the announcers remark on the fact that Foreman's body blows seem meaningless to Ali. Foreman might as well be slamming his gloves into a brick wall. Neither do they mention the fact that Ali is concentrating completely, without exception, on hitting Foreman right in the face. The entire first round can be summed up thus: Foreman landed several massive body blows on Ali—with no effect; Ali hit Foreman in the face, exclusively, at every opportunity.

Round two—the bell goes off, and Foreman turns with *mouses* all over his face. Nobody announcing that fight mentions the fact.

I think that round goes pretty much the same as round One, except—noticeably, but unmentioned by the announcers—near the end of the round, Foreman has Ali up against the ropes. Ali is fending him off with a long right hand and Foreman is already so weary that he's throwing a continuous series of weird little punches—none of which land. He's paddling, laces down, right, left, right, left; like a dog who'd fallen into a swimming pool. A child could take those shots. Foreman seems to be fighting solely on instinct.

That instinct carries the fight through the next few rounds, with Foreman continuing to pound away at Ali's stomach, with absolutely no success. Ali purposefully puts his back against the ropes and, while fending Foreman off with one long arm extended, basically relaxes, while Foreman wears himself out throwing body shots, with only an occasional shot to Ali's head. Ali, from his safety on the ropes, just waits it out, throwing an occasional shot to Foreman's open face, and, apparently chiding the man.

I think it went 7 rounds. And, Foreman fought on bravely throughout, running almost entirely on instinct and resolve for the final few rounds. Until, after having worn himself out, and nearly senseless from being beaten savagely about the head since bell One, he walks right into two quick shots that would have felled an ox.

So, Congressmen—and you so-called journalists too—think about Zaire while you slug away mindlessly at Bumpy.

## THOMAS BUMPY DANGEROUS MAN

I never understood what it was about a man with no experience in politics who, once elected, began uh-mediatly making efforts to systematically, one-by-one, fulfill his campaign promises, that had all those career politicians so upset. That tactic also seemed to upset a large portion of the citizenry. From their reaction, you'd think the idea of a candidate actually trying to follow up on a campaign promise had never really occurred to anyone before, and somehow even witnessing the attempt was offensive.

They said that he was just too rambunctious for their refined taste, and he set a bad example by speaking plainly; but, anyone could see that they were seriously rattled by him. What would happen if a cynic came along and saw what Bumpy was up to? You know how those cynics can be. A cynic might have people wondering if government is merely a massive, overly-complicated machine perpetually grinding out careers for aristocratic slackers.

In fairness though, we'd have to ask a career politician.

Oh, here's one of those lofty beings now; he has his beady little eyes closed, his chin is resting solidly upon his meaty fists, and he seems to be dreaming. I bet he's thinking: "Gosh, I really wish I could come up with *something* that would enhance the Liberty of each and every one of our wonderful, deserving and trusting citizens, while at the same time limiting our incursion into their lives... I wonder if I could come up with something like that which *wouldn't* cost a million dollars a minute. What could it be; what could it be?"

Meanwhile, Bumpy—apparently, with total disregard for the wellbeing of career politicians—appeared to be thinking about other things; sovereignty, the economy, establishing solid international relationships, and whittling down government. Maybe that was it; maybe the real politicians felt slighted. If so, their resentment for Bumpy seemed a bit overblown.

However, as I began to look at it from their point of view, things became clearer, and their desperation to be rid of Bumpy started to make some sense. Quite naturally, well-established politicians would be particularly offended by anyone who might try to accomplish some of the things which they'd been promising to do for decades. They'd be more offended still if he actually succeeded. So, to their way of thinking, Bumpy was a dangerous man.

Many of those professional job holders had been in office, doing whatever it was that they'd been doing, since Diogenes gave up his quest, and were no longer physically or mentally capable of doing anything that might be considered real work.

Most of their time in office had been spent establishing a large network of lobbyists, corporate heads, ultra-super-wealthy contributors, and hangers-on of nearly every conceivable subservient sort; and maintaining that coterie by encouraging each of those nodding camp followers to think of themselves as a close personal friend. The job holders knew that all of that would go away—POOF—if they weren't reelected.

They were all vitally aware that the only difference between *that stupid old grumpy bastard who never puts the lid on his garbage can properly* and the Honorable Senator, is the title that comes with the job.

Still, a cynic might ask if the reason politicians cling so very desperately to their positions—which basically have no job description and expressly requires nothing in particular from them—might have less to do with the glory, and more to do with the mysterious, almost exponential growth of personal wealth which the position so frequently affords them.

Now, here comes Bumpy, disrupting the entire process. He blows into town, a whirlwind of bluster from out of nowhere, and suddenly it begins to look like the joy ride has limits.

Quite naturally, someone who has never fulfilled any promise nor passed any bill that wasn't an additional, completely unnecessary pain in the ass for us peasants, would be particularly offended by anyone who attempts to fulfill promises, pass a few bills that might lighten our burden and, in the same breath, might cost them courtiers.

So, Bumpy could not (COULD NOT) be allowed to continue on along that reckless path. What was at stake here was more than aristocratic privilege—though that sort of thing can be very upsetting to any elitist of the ruling class—CAREERS WERE AT STAKE! So, they felt the need to oust Bumpy from office, and there was some urgency to do so.

In this way, Bumpy became not just a loud mouth, a fool, a distraction and an embarrassment, but a dangerous man.

## BUMPY AND TWITTER

Why on earth would anyone name anything Twitter and expect it to be taken seriously? Apparently however, for some people, there is nothing more serious on earth; some are actually addicted to this ultimate expression of infantile petulance. Bumpy was one of them. And he either would not or could not quit. Could not was my guess. It was not that the man was unwilling to put an end to his ridiculous, childish habit; he was simply incapable.

Of course, it is no one's position to tell a grown man how to conduct himself; but, if that other man represents you in some way, you might reasonably expect a certain decorum; and, constantly getting yourself into spats, like a peevish little school girl, is not what most of us expect from a President.

Some people would say that there was not a single person on earth, whether they were for the man or against him, who did not wish that Thomas Bumpy would keep his mouth shut. That's not really actually true, of course. I'd say that, of the 327,169,388 people populating the United States at that time, only 327,169,382 wished he'd stop tweeting. (I didn't care.)

I think we, who were for him, believed that, after sweating his way through the jitters of Twitter withdrawal, he'd come out a fresher, slightly ruffled, but more endurable President. I'm not sure it would make much difference on the other side; they'd simply stay the course, griping and making things up.

[A little note: My sister tells me that the only person who handles Twitter with any notable skill is James Woods.]

At any rate, here's a little song of encouragement, I wrote.

I got off the coffee  
And I got off the beer  
I got off of many things  
I'd like to make it clear  
That when it comes to quittin' things  
There ain't no better quitter

I got off the Facebook, man  
But I can't get off the Twitter

I got off the racetrack  
Just dropped those ponies cold  
I got off pornography  
My stash has all been sold  
When it comes to breakin' chains  
I'm seldom ever bitter

I got off of the YouTube, dude  
But I can't get off the Twitter

I got off the cigarettes  
And I got off the weed  
I just turned my back on 'em  
And never felt the need  
I got off the whiskey  
Dropped it without a jitter

I'm thinkin' bout droppin' email too  
But I can't get off the Twitter

I got off the cell-phone  
And I got off TV  
Quite frankly, son, neither one  
Ever meant that much to me  
I got off the rare roast beef  
And I'm feelin' so much fitter

I got off the Google search  
But I can't get off the Twitter

I got me off of all that stuff  
But I can't get off the Twitter

I can drop damn near anything...OK?

But I just can't quit that Twitter

## THOMAS BUMPY, IDIOT SAVANT?

The people who claimed that Thomas Bumpy was a disgrace to the Presidency because he was such an idiot; stupid and loud and crude, uncouth, unbridled, and uncontrollable, also insisted that he was cunning and clever, a master of nuance and insinuation, and that every phrase he uttered was carefully orchestrated to carry a hidden message of encouragement to extremists, telling them to hold fast, it would only be a matter of time. To them the mindless babbler was also a highly polished practitioner of the *dog whistle*.

It's undeniable that Bumpy was anything but subtle—except when it came to that dog whistle thing, of course. When it came to that there was no man on earth with greater control over every word he uttered and every gesture he made. (Did you see the way he raised his eyebrows just then?! Surely, that was a signal.)

My god, if there was ever any man more incapable of dog whistling than Bumpy, I do not know who it could have been. It was not only beyond his ability, it was beyond his very nature—giving a speech, the man's default delivery was a bellow. If Thomas Bumpy had something to say, he said it out loud in whatever form it happened to take as it spilled from his mouth; he did not care how it came out, or how it came across, or what anyone thought of it.

Elephants cannot fly, not because they're hiding the ability—revealing it only to those who share their evil future plans—but because they cannot. They wouldn't fly if they could, nor care to, nor even give the possibility a thought; if something's in their path, they just knock it down... like Bumpy.

Personally, I never objected to what Bumpy said, or how he said it. I'm all for any President speaking to good, honest, hard-working Americans in the good, honest, straight forward language they use themselves, in their own homes. And, I do not object to the President of the United States talking to idiots in a language they might understand—I much prefer that to playing patty cake with antagonists, on their terms.

Also, I believe that anyone who represents this country should speak to our self-declared enemies in terms that they cannot fail to understand. So, I was never against Bumpy saying things to vicious tyrannical poseurs in terms that left no doubt whatsoever that he meant every word. That is only as it should be. I do not want to ever again hear another US President say, "I'm warning you, if you step over that line, I am going to do nothing!"

It is undeniably true that many of the things that Bumpy said could have been said, after additional thought, with greater diplomacy—though additional thought *and* a cattle prod might have been more effective. The truth ain't always tactfully spoken. As far as Bumpy being crude and unrefined goes; it was a welcome change from the refined hypocrisy we'd come to expect and accept. And also, there's this: If you have rats in your attic, you don't care about the comportment of the exterminator; you just want him to get rid of the rats.

As to what a middle-aged Mr. Bumpy said to a young man on a bus, in a private conversation between two males, twelve thousand years ago—it was peculiar, vulgar, weirdly worded, childish, and a hell-of-a-lot less clever than Bumpy must have thought it was... but, I understand. I don't approve of that sort thing... but, I understand how it can happen.

*A PERSONAL NOTE* on CRUDE REMARKS

Thousand years ago, in a small café, a bunch of book people are holding court, and I'm sitting in. It's a fairly regular affair and the people who run the café seem to enjoy our presence. I don't have much to say at any of these gatherings, because I am not a book person; but that doesn't stand in the way of me being part of that esteemed crowd; I know them all.

Part of that crowd is a man named Peter Darling, who knows about books and art and a wide variety of intellectual and aesthetic matters, which leaves me quietly envious of him. That he has an articulate, charming, and beautiful bohemian wife, does not hurt the equation.

Mr. Darling doesn't often have much to say, but when he speaks it counts. I've always had an appreciation for that.

One day, while sitting in that café alone, without the book people around, I overhear some guy at the next table talking to his friend. He leans across to his friend and quietly makes a clever but completely tasteless comment concerning one of the waitresses. I look at the waitress the next time she comes along and... Yeah, you know, I could see what he meant.

So, now the scene is set. (Throughout the rest of this, I must ask you to try to hold on to the idea that I am, supposedly, a reasonably well-educated, generally respectable sorta guy.)

So, then, those two guys depart, and in walks Peter Darling. He recognizes me; he smiles, he sits; he flags down that very same waitress. The normal exchange takes place, they smile at each other, and she departs.

Then, I lean across the table to Peter Darling, and I quietly repeat, word-for-word, the clever but tasteless comment I'd overheard earlier, concerning that waitress.

I ask him, "Have you ever thought that?"

Peter Darling says, "No. I never have."

So, that remark is set aside and respectable conversation ensues, until I get up to fly home three cups later.

When next I walk into that café, Peter Darling's articulate, charming, and beautiful bohemian wife is there, and I detect just a bit of a chill in the air. I smile a little broken smile, but it is not received well... and she gets up and leaves.

I don't recall when it was that someone informed me that that waitress was Peter Darling's daughter, but I wish they'd have told me *before*, and not after, I'd disgraced myself.

So, here's the point (not an excuse.) Even a, supposedly reasonably well-educated, generally respectable sorta guy might, on occasion, repeat something clever but undeniably crude, concerning a waitress, to a fellow male, not really meaning it and having no idea what the outcome might be. I'm sure most waitresses would be willing to testify to the verity that runs through that statement in all directions.

It has been almost 40 years since I said what I said to Peter Darling, and I still have no idea what inspired me to repeat that remark. Naturally, I wish I hadn't. Best guess though—I probably just wanted to impress him.  
And, I think I did that.

His wife seemed to be impressed as well.

## BUMPY'S UNPROVOKED ASSAULT ON MS13

More lies! When will it ever end?

The White House just said that MS13's motto is "kill, rape, and control." But, this is just another example of Bumpy's outright lies; "kill, rape, control" is **not** MS13's motto. Their *official* motto is: 'Mata, roba, viola, controla'... "Kill, STEAL, Rape, Control". When-oh-when will the deception ever end?

When Thomas Bumpy called MS13 animals, Nancy Botoxi blasted him, saying, "... when the President of the United States says, 'These aren't people, these are animals,' you have to wonder, does he not believe in *the spark of divinity, the dignity and worth of every person?*"

Nancy Botoxi, Paraclete of the Left, is right of course. What kind of President could fail to see the spark of divinity in a person simply because he is involved in drug smuggling, kidnapping, human trafficking, arms smuggling, rape, murder, stabbings, dismemberment, and occasional decapitations? How can anyone stand by and watch in silence while the President assails the dignity and worth of such people?

As human beings—nobler still... as *political* beings—we must ask ourselves if the penalty for mere gruesome brutality, and maybe some milder forms of criminal behavior, should be the unfathomable cruelty of deportation.

OH, where have we, as a nation, gone wrong!?

Damn Bumpy and his horrible oppression!

Actually, there's a simple test to see if there is any depth to Congresswoman Botoxi's reaction or if she's simply spewing more ideological driven nonsense.

Good Congresswoman Botoxi should secure the next property that comes available in her neighborhood, and invite a few of her beloved MS13 dears to move in. She could send a few of her staff over to help them unpack all the boxes containing a spark of divinity. Oh, wait, I've just been told that she had a Spartacus moment, and that she *has*, in fact, already done that.

Here's Nan now. (Congresswoman Botoxi's insists that those of us who live in her District call her Nan.) Let's see what she has to say.

"Our so-called President has said that my new neighbors aren't people, but animals. So, on the day they moved in, I went over to their little place with a cinnamon Bundt cake and a fresh-baked apple pie, from Mollie Stone's, to welcome them to the neighborhood. And I must say, they were all—each and every one of them—just perfect gentlemen.

I asked them about how they liked the neighborhood, and they said it was certainly nicer than the truly horrible, inhuman conditions some of them had been kept in before their last deportation. I asked them how their day had gone, and discovered that they had each already been hard at work—undertaking some of the work normally handled by our local, San Francisco, government—distributing drugs to our poor, needy junkies.

I must say that I have never met a group of young men more dedicated to their motto; which I discovered was: 'Mata, roba, viola, controla'... Kill, *Steal*, Rape, Control, and NOT simply 'kill, rape and control', as that compulsive liar who occupies the Oval Office—not for very long, I hope—would have us all believe.

They'd all had a very busy day, living up to their motto.

One of them, Tranquillo, confessed that he felt some shame because, though he had killed, stolen and raped recently, he hadn't really controlled. I noticed that he had certainly taken *control* of that Bundt cake, though!

When I pointed that out to him... he blushed deeply and passed around what remained of it, so the others might enjoy some. They all laughed of course, with *the spark of divinity* lighting up *the dignity and worth* in their clever eyes.

I found my new neighbors actually quite charming. They were all fine young men—not *animals*—and, I had to admit that Tranquillo *had*, in fact, taken control... over my old heart.”

## GRANDE OPERA

Took in an opera the other day—I'd been drawn in by the fact that it had been running for a very long time. But, as is the way of most opera, it was slow and drawn-out, and, as far as I could tell, purposefully tedious. Also, with all that relentless racket on stage, I found it almost impossible to get any sleep.

It opened with a larger-than-life Basso Profundo standing off toward the right side of the stage, facing a large chorus of whiny countertenors and fidgeting sopranos opposite, on the left, standing almost completely in the dark.

I don't speak the language, so I was forced to read the superscript interpretation, which ran across the top of the proscenium.

In the opening act the BP belted out an aria in which he seemed to imply that every person who crossed the border into their glorious land was *not*, in fact, an actual angel, descended directly from Heaven. To which the chorus let out a loud disapproving, somewhat agitated sigh. There was some grumbling involved, and a few raised fists.

The BP went on to sing about drug smugglers; gang members, and the fact that women had been raped along the merry way. "Some of those *angels*," he sang, "are wanted criminals in the lands from which they've fled." This was followed by a long thunderous drum roll from the timpani guy.

I guess that was a major theme, because he repeated it several times; each time with timpani accompaniment, and each time the chorus responded more vigorously in escalating protest.

Rapt, in majestic indignation, they shook from head to toe in barely controlled fury, and wailed, “Oh, how can you say that? Do they not have, like us, *the spark of divinity?*” Then a *March of the Toreadors* kind a thing took place as they milled about the stage, wailing, and tearing out their hair.

The Basso Profundo, hands firmly upon his hips, responded, (basically) “I didn’t say *every one of them* is a smuggler or a rapist or a criminal; I said that *some* are...’

Then absolutely every single person in that chorus rose up again, and sang, “Oh, how can you say that?! Oh, how can you claim that every person who seeks asylum in this land is a smuggler and a rapist and a criminal?”

In response the BP repeated his previous ditty, ‘I didn’t say that *every one of them* is a smuggler or a rapist or a criminal; I said *some* are....’

I’d already gotten the point, but apparently others could not be expected to, so it just went on.

After a while of this, I no longer had to look at the superscript to know what the chorus was wailing about. Instead, I closed my eyes and mouthed each phrase along with them: “Oh, how can you say that every person... blah blah blah... smuggler...rapist...criminal?”

When new words were added, I was forced to open my eyes again to see what they were now saying. To the usual, *Oh how can you say that* ... smuggler/rapist/criminal litany, they'd added a new verse about *fleeing persecution*.

At that point, the BP rose up upon his toes—or maybe a platform of some sort actually came up from below—so that he stood high upon the stage, as he sang: “I did NOT say that every person who comes across our border is a smuggler or a rapist or a criminal!” Here the timpanist came thundering in again. “I did say that *some* are!”

This was followed by the orchestra creating a swirling wind kind of sound, after which, the chorus wept openly, singing the usual, but, to the *fleeing persecution* routine, tossing in something about *innocent children*. “Surely,” they sang in great earnest, “these innocent children are not smugglers and rapists and criminals!”

The BP looked down at them from his great height and declared, “I never said they were!” before stepping down and stomping off stage, leaving the chorus apparently confused. “What was he trying to say?” they sang among themselves.

A clownish fool-figure emerged from the crowd and sang (somewhat sarcastically I thought), “Does he honestly believe that we don’t need to import more criminals, gang members, and drug dealers?”

Could he be so blind? Does he honestly believe that we already have plenty of our own?"

The chorus went on to sing, "This is a CRISIS; a great humanitarian CRISIS!" And, in a synchronized wailing, they sang. "Oh, look at those poor people!"

Three seconds later, the BP stepped back on stage to sing, "Yes, and to end this crisis we need to build a wall!"

This was followed by a thunderous, drum roll from the timpani guy.

The chorus responded, singing, "CRISIS? WHAT crisis? What the hell is that man talking about?"

They mumbled amongst themselves for a moment until a soprano emerged from the pack and sang: "There is no crisis on the Southern border; a purely manufactured crisis only there. That man," he sang, pointing in the direction of the Basso Profundo, "is a manipulator, a hypocrite, a liar, and just look at that hair! He's a racist, a sexist, a xenophobe, and quite unfair to ISIS, now manufacturing a border crisis."

Then the chorus backed him, singing, "There is no CRISIS. There is no crisis! It's only a manufactured crisis!"

"Crisis?" laughed the soprano; and the chorus all laughed along heartily. "Are you kidding? I've never heard such nonsense!" the soprano sang.

And, as the chorus laughed again, the audience all joined in, laughing along, knowingly.

I may have nodded off about then, because when I awoke the scene was quite different.

Now, a man stood over the body of a young woman; he had a gun in his hand. Police were prancing across the stage toward the scene; the chorus gathered around, in a gasping crowd.

As the police laid hands on the man, they all gasped again, and a commanding voice from the wings shouted, “STOP!”

A woman came striding on stage, crossed to the place where the man was being held and declared, “Unhand that man!”

According to the superscript she was the Mayor.

Then, as the cops let go of the man, the Mayor began to sing, “This man is innocent! Oh, how can you say otherwise? A simple immigrant... seeking asylum, he fled persecution. A man’s whole life cannot be judged because he may have picked up a gun, one time, and happened, by chance, to kill someone. Is he a smuggler?”

“NO!” shouts the chorus.

“... a rapist?”

“NO!” shouts the chorus.

“... a criminal?”

The chorus hesitates.

“Is he?” she demands, while looking threateningly at them.

There is some mumbling in the crowd.

She explains the man’s plight in song: “This man, who has crossed our border seeking only to escape violence...picks up a gun and kills a young woman—who is out strolling around with her parents on a lovely sunny afternoon—who among us might not have, at one time or another, done the same thing?”

“Your Honor,” breaks in a soprano sorta from the right side of the stage, “In some towns, that may be deemed unacceptable behavior.”

“PAH!” she thunders in response, as the big drums roll.

“Are WE not better than that?!”

There is a lot of mumbling, “We are. We are. We are...”

The chorus surrounds the soprano and, looking fairly threatening, they chant: “How can *you* say that this poor man, fleeing oppression, seeking asylum, is a criminal?”

He sings counterpoint, “Are you saying that if you enter a country illegally, and you shoot and kill a citizen of that country, that’s cool?” (He’s just asking. Their way of thinking is apparently new to him.)

As he asks the same question over and over and over, the chorus answers in the very same words every time, without variance, and it breaks out into one of those glorious maelstroms of operatic confusion with everybody singing their own thoughts in steadily increasing volume and rapidly escalating mindlessness.

This goes on for what feels like 20 minutes.

“We understand that these things sometimes happen.” The chorus eventually sings. They go on to ask: “Is he really a criminal simply because he *may have allegedly, inadvertently, accidentally, supposedly,* murdered someone?”

About the time a French guy—horizontally striped shirt, beret, and a baguette under one arm—steps out from the crowd, I rose from my seat and started making my way to the aisle. As I strode toward the exit, I heard him singing, in a pleasantly-fractured English, “We must ask ourselves what *we* have done to cause this poor man to pick up a gun, to shoot and kill this woman, on such a fine day.”

Naturally, I apologized to the janitor of the Opera house, for throwing up in his lobby.

***A PERSONAL NOTE* on THE WALL**

If you're struggling to decide which side of the illegal immigrations wall debate -thing you're on, I've devised a little test. It requires you to answer three simple questions...  
... *honestly*...  
... if you can swing it.

1—Do you have a door on your house or apartment?

2—Do you keep that door open at all times?

3—Knowing that *only a few* of the people who might come in through that door will be there to kill you or steal all your things or set up camp in your living room as a place from which to run whores, deal drugs, or dismantle stolen luxury vehicles, are you more inclined or less inclined to close and lock your door?

## HOW I KNOW BUMPY WILL NEVER CHANGE

I worked in a small hotel in Del Mar for almost 9 years, and almost every day, when I arrived at work, the man I worked with would tell me that one or more customers, that day, had accused him of being rude.

For nine years I listened to that story—someone had either called him rude to his face, or walked away saying it loud enough for him to hear, or reported him to our boss, or mentioned it to one of us, his fellow workers.

(...though why they did that, I could never understand.)

Mike had been a U.S. Marine and was quite proud of the fact. By nature he was—as I am myself—direct. Some people call directness cold, others seem to think it's rude. (It's neither.)

Personally, I prefer offering directness rather than the obviously phony, toothy, leering grin—typically accompanied with a lot of mindless blinking—which many hotel guests seem to expect. If a customer wants to know where they can mail a letter, I tell them as simply and directly as possible. I've never felt the need to ask about their favorite color, or their children's nick-names for each other, or how well they did the last time they went to Reno.

So, I understood Mike.

I also liked him and respected him. In return, he always treated me fairly. And, one night, he probably saved me a lot of trouble, with one hand behind his back.

But, from time to time—when he greeted me with a tale about how someone'd unfairly claimed that he'd been rude to them

—I was tempted to tell him this: “You know, Mike, have you ever considered the possibility that there may be a hidden message somewhere in the fact that thousands of people have accused you of rudeness? You’ve been working here for more than 30 years—it must be thousands by now. If that many people have all drawn the same conclusion, there might be something to it; and maybe you should begin to consider the possibility of adjusting your approach a little.”

I never said that to him however. And, I don’t regret my silence. But, Mike was *not* President of the United States.

Mike never changed. Though thousands of people, over countless years had been telling him the same thing, he never softened his tone.

Based on that experience, I’m bettin’ that the President of the United States probably won’t change any time soon either.

## ***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on SYMPATHY

You don't have to like the man to feel empathy for the President; you just have to make a single comment on any social media that anybody else may not agree with.

I once made the mistake of adding a single comment to an online discussion during a U. S. Presidential race. I said something like this: "Perhaps you should listen more carefully to what McCain has said about this; it's not very different from what Obama has said." In response, I became the center of the discussion and, more than uh-mediatly (almost instantly) the target for a dozen attacks.

Taking the opportunity to teach acceptance, tolerance and inclusiveness by example, my new open-minded, multi-cultural, diversified, free-speech cyber friends called me a puppet, an asshole, a moron, a stupid bastard, a mindless zombie for the Republican regime... none of which I am. (Well, maybe a moron, but anyone who fires enough shots into the dark has the chance of hitting something.)

These attacks went far beyond *questioning the motives of those who disagree with you* (which is small-minded enough), but it was before the advent of calling anyone with any opinion other than your own 'evil'; and a step or two behind the period we find ourselves in now, where *they* feel not just the right, but the responsibility to crush opposing thought.

All of this viciousness was launched because I suggested there was not a great deal of difference between the two candidates on *one particular issue*.

I had the gall to suggest that someone might listen to what was actually being said instead of remaining dug-in, firmly entrenched, deadened, enshrouded, blindfolded, shackled to thoughtless, mindless college-taught ideology, and deaf to clear, indifferent reason.

It was a lovely experience from which I learned not a lot, but more than enough. So, I sympathize with Donald Trump.

What Trump is exposed to every day would crush any normal human being. That poor guy is being attacked every minute of every hour, by people who either do not know what they are talking about or refuse to look at any fact concerning him with an unjaundiced eye. The endless onslaught of unfounded allegations, sourceless accusations, irrational criticism and outright hatred which he faces, and is expected to endure, must be infuriating. Add in the fact that his undeniable accomplishments are being purposefully denied, or ignored altogether, and it can only be maddening.

Naturally, as a so-called writer, I truly understand the desire to be heard. As an American male, I understand the urge to strike back against the outright lies of critics. What I cannot understand is why Trump refuses to learn that such attacks probably should be (if only for the sake of his own sanity) simply ignored.

Far too often I find myself wondering (and I don't think I am unique in this) why the President of the United States should find it so difficult, if not impossible, to respond to his critics in a reasonably well-educated, basically civilized, somewhat less-than-self-centered, slightly more-than-merely dignified,

gentlemanly and statesman-like manner; which would be not to respond to them at all, in any way.

So, with that in place, there's this:

AN OPEN LETTER TO DONALD TRUMP,  
President of the United States

Mr. President,

May I suggest, that you allow those who absolutely refuse to listen honestly to what you say, and will never openly admit your accomplishments, to remain forsaken, dwelling in the bitterness of their own dark thoughts—or huddled together in a perpetually agitated swarm of incomprehensible defensive viciousness—without continually poking them with a stick.

It may do us all a world of good.

Maybe not; who knows, but you could at least give it a try; if only for a change of pace.

Sincerely,  
Your well-meaning friend,  
Darryl Mockridge

***A PERSONAL NOTE*** on TWITTER

I admire Bumpy's spirit. In a very real way I think *that* is the level at which we *should* live out our political lives. I'm fairly certain that his 'energy'—his passion, commitment, and determination—is the same stuff that allows someone to become a great cellist, or a great athlete, or even a very good President; it may well be the prime essential.

I respect passion, and I admire commitment, and I have never said a bad thing about determination (all things I do not myself possess), but I'm not so sure that those traits, applied to politics, through Twitter, are merely an amusement. Bumpy may find it entertaining—how quickly *others* rise to the bait—but some of the people, who openly declare their hatred for him and everything he stands for, are not just stupid; some of them may also be every bit as vindictive and dangerous as they enjoy pretending to be.

My assumption, whenever I come across a particularly cold, vicious, and graphic attack, on the internet, is that it's coming from some 12 year-old gamer, or possibly the equivalent, which these days could mean any male as old as 56, if still living with mommy, or 86, if holding a seat in Congress.

But, after giving it some thought, I think most 12 year-olds have better sense and are generally much more open minded.

Just a little final note to make myself look even more foolish, more reprehensible, more reptilian: this thing that we all suddenly find ourselves in the midst of is, not just unnerving, but spooky. What we don't know, and cannot see coming, because of all this input-input-input-input, is spooky.

It's spooky in part because, as Bob Dylan warned a very long time ago, "Meanwhile, outside, life goes on all around you." It is also spooky because, attempting to take part in the increasingly rapid onslaught of input is not an improvement on life, and all the twittering in the world won't get any of us any closer to those things that really count.

The real fear is that it can only separate us from them.

More frightening still, is the fact that so many people are comfortable with that.

While mesmerized or dazzled or enthralled or entranced by our own cleverness, viciousness, absurd creativity, we are distracted from the best, the beautiful, and the most important things in this world. Lasting happiness cannot be found where it does not reside; and it does not reside in rampant arrogance. Not that that thought will change any minds.

But, let me say this anyway:

When we walk the dog each day, he always pees on a post or the corner of a house, or a log as we enter the park—it's his way of checking in. He then pees on several things along the way—where other dogs have left their mark.

And, after the walk, on our way out, he always (ALWAYS) goes by, smells that post or corner or log, to see if any other dogs had responded. And, if any did, he pees there again.

That is Twitter.



## A FINAL NOTE:

My father once told me:

If you stand up in front of ten people and tell them something—explaining the rationale behind what you are saying, and the benefits of the idea—three of those people will walk away believing that you said exactly the opposite of what you said; three will have no idea whatsoever what you said; three will have a general sense of what you said, but they'd be incapable of recalling any particulars; and *one of those ten* will, down the road at some point, present your thinking to you as if it is their own, and expect you to see the brilliance in it.

My fear now, of course, is that only nine people will read this damned thing.

Oh, man... I can't believe I forgot to mention climate change.