



Muse Poop Deja Vu

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- Aftermath

An interesting word, aftermath. Sort of implies after the blind logic but has come to mean after the fat lady sings. The election is over, the politics sidetracked for the time being so what does that leave me? Expounding on possibilities? Or turning the lens inward, facing some things the election made a nifty façade to hide behind. Just what is important?

Back in the early 80's I had an idea. It wasn't a real good one but it worked at the time. Putting it bluntly, I was seriously lost and doing a fine dance I thought would keep the world from realizing that. It sort of worked for me so why should the rest of the world not believe it? A couple of things slipped past the shield without much impact. A little girl and a donkey. A good friend who didn't really understand but loved me anyway. I hurt a number of people in that thrashing, like a snook with a Wounded Spook in its jaws just trying to keep on being a snook.

I came out of a family that was pretty typical, fairly dysfunctional and a part of me wanted to show that it didn't have to be that way. I accepted the idea of family and tried very hard to do more, be better than my past. When I was confronted

with a choice, my family or what I could do, I chose my family. In college, I was offered something of a dream. A possibility for a scholarship to Georgetown. All it meant was me following my dream (which didn't really include a family). I had at least three professors willing to back the choice.

I know now I could have possibly become the anti-Rove. I could have embraced the idea and a small part of me wanted to do it. The larger part saw my two kids, little people who needed a full time dad. And I felt my own childhood, looked to my dad. I chose to stay home. I chose my kids, my family. I knew if I stepped into what the heady world of what Georgetown meant, I would turn my back on my family. I couldn't play Washington games and been any kind of a dad. Not in my eyes. Not that I did such a great job without it but I tried.

A Fundamental Lie

Lots of talk these days. Politics, religion, religious politics. Some things just naturally go together to their mutual benefit. Like peanut butter and jelly, or peanut butter and chocolate or Irish whiskey and coffee, or, well you get my drift. Religion and politics really fall into the category of oil and water, fire and ice, or life and death. This melding has been something that has been tried many times in Western history and the results have never benefited mankind in general. You would think that by now we would know better but such is not the case.

The reason for this is, IMHO, there a great many people out there who claim to be Christian but lack the comprehension of basic Christian teachings. Somehow they keep coming up with the idea that this Jesus fellow was about fighting. I suspect much of this is due to reading the rather violent Old Testament and some of the books of the New Testament written by folks who never really met the man and that, over the years, interpretations and editing have tweaked the message in the

divinely inspired book to fit the more militaristic aspects of human society.

The New Testament is filled with contradictions. This is to be expected because much of the information was written down a generation after it happened or later. For me, this places the Bible into legend. None of it was written by the man himself and IIRC only one book was written by someone who actually was with him. But in spite of this, there is one thing that remains pretty constant and that is the legend of that last week. Up until then Jesus had done a good job of side stepping the whole Messiah issue. I suspect it was because there were several factions in the Jewish community who were chomping on the bit, looking for a warrior king like David to lead them so they could get rid of the Romans.

That wasn't Yeshua's bag. He was Gandhi, 2,00 years before Gandhi. He was the original counter culture revolutionary. Love, not war. His teachings were all about suffering anything in this world because it would get you a penthouse in the next. Read the Sermon on the Mount. The only slightly step out of character was the thing with the money changers in the Temple and even then his anger was at the money.

So now we are down to the big fundamentalist lie. The monstrous Christian lie, propagated over the centuries in the name of political power and control and spitting in the face of the man who supposedly founded their religion justified by one act. His dying. In the final days there were several opportunities for him to either walk away or rally his supporters to fight for him. He begged his father to take the cup from him, to let him live and finally said, "Into your hands, Father". Pilate gave him two chances to duck. Herod gave him one. In the end, in all accounts, he bore his cross, suffered and died because of his belief. Didn't ask anyone else to do it for him. Didn't call up the warriors to defend him. He died for his teachings.

Had he done what his followers are calling for today and have all across the centuries there would have been a huge

revolt in Israel. The Jews were primed for the return of their warrior-king Messiah. Blood would have flowed and in the end Judaism would have probably died. If you don't agree check out Masada and the Diaspora. Might have survived as a minor religion. Christianity would never have been born. Rome would have pounded Palestine into submission in their very efficient and brutal fashion.

But the bottom line is the heart of the one legend that shows in the various books of the Bible. Jesus died for his beliefs. Didn't fight for them, didn't go to war for them, he accepted and died for them. You can pick any other reading from any other book to try to explain, justify or whatever but the bottom line is Jesus so believed in what he did that he was willing to die for it. All by himself, not behind a wave of warriors, just him. Sort of how it always comes down to it, every person is always faced with one last thing. One on one with their maker.

No mulligans.

A New America

Yessiree, we done got us a brand spanking new legacy for America. And it is brought to us by Madison Ave, Wall Street and other fine upscale operations. The same folks who had the bright idea to replace Coca-Cola with New Coke! It's always got to be New and Improved! And cheaper to make so they can sell it for more. And it all happened in the span of one lifetime, pretty damned amazing. We went from the heroes of the world to the zeroes in 70 years and it is being sold to us as a good thing.

From the country that brought the world the Marshall Plan that rebuilt a war torn planet to one that is bent on maintaining a war torn planet.

From the richest, most affluent creditor nation to a crippled and crippling debtor nation.

From the dream of owning your own home to the nightmare of foreclosure and bankruptcy.

From civil rights for all to a return to bigotry and discrimination.

From a nation where parents worked hard to make sure their children had educational opportunities they never had to a general population just barely smart enough to piss downwind that wants to do away with the Department of Education as unnecessary.

From a nation that once took pride in making quality products designed to last to a disposable, cheap foreign shit WalMartized society.

From a journalistic media that reported facts and news to a vast infotainment and propaganda machine selling cheap thrills.

From a massive manufacturing giant to a collection of franchises in the service industry.

From a nation that once proudly read the words on the Statue of Liberty about welcoming the huddled masses to one bent on tacking "Void where prohibited" just to cover our butts.

Yes, America, we have built a new legacy. Where inheritance will include massive debt, a reverse mortgaged home worth 12 cents, a cheap microwave and a pair of season tickets for the Detroit Lions. Not too mention a devastated economy bent on spending money blowing up other countries that made us wet our pants in fear of a handful of nasty terrorists so badly that we gutted everything we once stood for.

Sniff, makes ya feel so proud.

Arrr Begarrrr

Shiver me timbers. Swab the poop deck, matey, piracy is back. We've got our letters of marquee declaring the government backs our actions so hoist sail and hunt the prey.

Grab your fan blades, prime the file cabinets for firing while we hunt. Arrrrgh...somebody shut that damn parrot up.

Profits there be in plundering the weak, the sad sacks who think that by paying us to protect them we will listen. Yes, mateys, they hand over their coin of the realm and expect us to protect them from evils and illness but since we be blessed by the powers that be we can laugh...ha ha ha...while they wallow in their suffering. Even better, once we take their pitiful tribute we can hand them over to the debtor's jails while we make port in Switzerland, safe behind our bank accounts.

Never fear, my friends, the Jolly Roger flies once more! We have bought the harbormasters and our plunder is not only secure but guaranteed. Our profits are our freedom. Just as it was in the old days, we have been given the right to plunder the unsuspecting in the name of making the world a safer and better place. No one notices that we are total privateers, embracing our booty, sinking whatever we find so we can enjoy the lifestyle we have become accustomed to. No one notices we provide no useful service other than pillage and plunder for our own gain. Pirates gather wealth and booty because that is what we do. Gold is our gain, our reason for being. We don't have to supply anything else.

Cower, ye people. Give us our tribute or we will...we will...crap, what will we do? Whine because you got smart? Ha, we will spend part of our booty to convince the harbormasters. What? They are getting in trouble because people are getting pissed over getting raped, pillaged and plundered? Aarrgh, be afraid, town folk, we control the sea lanes. Hardeharhar. Oh, you don't really need the sea lanes? Ok, this can end right now. How are we supposed to play Captain Hook if you guys won't do the Peter Pan part? I mean, we are the scary health insurance pirates, we hold your very lives in our hands. You pay us big bucks so we can party and disappoint you. It's in your Constitution. Article 37, listen to big business, pay out your ass and cower in fear! Oh come on, I know its in the Constitution that any big business is

guaranteed ridiculous profits as long as there are toadies to buy people in Congress. Its right there in black and white...profits are sacred.

Ok, then it was a Supreme Court thing that said companies are people and have rights. If they have rights then they have feelings and if you deny them huge profits they will cry and that is un-American. Americans don't want to make corporate executives (us pirates) cry, do you? We have worked hard to get our pillaging accepted and hide our booty where we don't have to pay taxes. Do you have any idea how much it costs to run a pirate ship? I tell you, the overhead is staggering and if people want to whine just because they can't get chemotherapy, they should try finding the money to buy cannonballs these days.

It all comes down to, pirates are people to, ya know. We have standards to maintain and we are paying good money to people to do so. If you want to whine about things like cancer and bankruptcy, just imagine how hard it is to maintain three houses, seven cars and a mistress in every port. And you try and get parrot shit out of your favorite shirt now that Billy is gone.

Ashes

we all fall down. For decades the Republicans have been beating the drum of free enterprise, free market, it will regulate itself. They have stripped the controls of government and given the mega corps free rein on their behavior. OK. So why should the government, read the tax payers, have to bail the big boys out? Because if they fail, the economy fails? So the taxpayer is supposed to give them more money for losing their own? They are talking 700 billion dollars to shore up these failing idiots.

According to Wikipedia the US population is at 280 million. If the government was to give every citizen 1 million dollars that would come to 280 billion bucks out of the treasury. This is less

than half of the proposed bailout for Wall Street. The crisis is about paying off mortgages so this solution would give folks a way to pay off the personal mortgages for homes and have a big chunk to reinvest. Just think of the massive wave of big screen TV, new car, Ipod, Gameboy et al purchases that would follow. So I'm being facetious but it is cheaper and makes more sense than throwing money at people who are in trouble for mismanaging money.

I have learned a rule of thumb in the past 8 years. If the Shrub says it is needed, it ain't. Anything he says he wants is just what he shouldn't get. Are we headed for hard times? Definitely. Will it be bad? Very. Is there a quick fix? Nope. Is there someone to blame? Yup. Each and every American citizen. Every Republican who figured the way to live was by what was best for themselves. Every Democrat who didn't have the guts to stand up and say that is wrong. Every Christian who ignored compassion and went with righteousness. Every damn citizen who had a little bit of power that didn't pass it on. Every citizen who thought taking care of their fellow citizen was too expensive or just not worth the effort.

We voted for what we have. The economy is in the toilet and the flush lever is moving. We, the American public, have listened to the ad clowns and the spin doctors and we have achieved what they have spouted. Our movie industry can hack, slash and inundate us with violence but show a tit? Sexuality is a core piece of what we are yet we have sacrificed that, accepted violence as a substitute. There is a reason for it. If we become inured to violence, we accept it. Accepting violence denies humanity. It has been going on for hundreds of years, fed by Western religion, encouraged by government until we no longer see people as people. The powers-that-be encourage violence because it short circuits compassion.

Compassion is our greatest strength and asset. It is what gets us through great tragedies, compels us to respond in the times of need. When we bond with our fellow human beings, we

grow and that makes it the greatest threat to who ever is in power. For the Christian types, it was Jesus' most powerful message. Yet it is downplayed in today's organized religion. Sports are nothing more than sanctified violence. Baseball, the least violent and once America's sport has been supplanted by football and hockey. Organized violence. How many Americans find enjoyment in the spectacles of organized violence, actually cheer their fellow humans on to commit their displays? Football players, boxers, hockey players, all indulging in the past time of beating their fellows into the turf?

Don't bitch about a violent society, not when you encourage it. Don't complain when some one gets greedy or selfish, its what we encourage. The whole play is in the final act and it will get ugly because it is what we have built. Money is god because we have made it so. God didn't turn his back on us because the world is still here. The rest of creation is struggling but only because we have caused it to happen. God doesn't have to punish sinners here on earth, they do a good enough job themselves. Every bitch we can come up with, every problem we have, is our own making. If life sucks it isn't God's doing, its ours.

Back for More

Well, hey there. Good to see you back here at the finest diner in America. Ah'm sorry, I should have had better manners the other day, my name is BillyJoeRayJimBob but most folks call me...Dick. Yeah, that is a heck of a name but my po ole sainted momma just wanted me to remember my daddy and since she wasn't quite sure jest which one it was, she sorta tossed em all in fer me.

Today's special is grits n eggs with a fine slice of ham in red eye gravy. Not hungry jest yet? Well you come on up and set a spell and we can chat. Its a pleasure talking with folks like you, mind you set over to the other side of the porch. I sometimes

miss the spittoon. You know, since you was here last I been thinking about putting some new things on the menu. Cookie thought a nice Sam n Ella sammich would go over good. Or mebbe some of that Suzy stuff. Since the coal mine has been running its lots easier to catch catfish in the river these days. You just pick one out as it floats by. Way easier an safer than dynymite.

I bet you got you one of them deegrees what says you are some kinda smart about something. Me? I got me a doctorate from the Schools of Hard Knocks. What? Yeah, that's a good un. Mebbe most of them hard knocks was up side my head. But this here idea about edimicating folks is purely mean. They start thinkin and havin ideas and they get all confused and uppity. Its like teachin chickens that just because they lay eggs and git et and the farmer makes all the money from it that this is a bad thing. Hell, if the farmer didn't feed them chickens and give em a place to live, where would they be? Just getting folks all excited over things they don't know nothin about. I call that mean.

Life is sort of like a good pecan pie. Now that Cookie, he makes a fine one. I could get you a slice ifn you care but I'd have to charge you fer it. See, if I give it to you, I wouldn't have the money to make a new one. That's how this country works. Now you take that pie, fresh from the oven and out on the winda sill to cool. If we had us a bear jest wanderin around, he'd gobble it up, taken away your right to a mighty fine pie. So we jest natcherally lock it up in a pie safe, fer yer own good, mind you. Jest like rights. Those folks up in Washington know you jest cain't let things as good as rights be hanging out there where the bears can git at em. They's special. Must be because you got folks saying they got a right to tell them bankers and rich folks they ain't got the right to persue their God given right to life, liberty and the persuit of happiness. Yup, money has a way of making folks downright happy and if you say different I'll know you is jest being silly.

I spent me a little time up in the capitol and I seen how things work. You take them people in Congress. They got lots of folks back home, all the time yapping about this and that. Most of em don't have no idea about how important time is for them law making folks. It jest makes sense they listen more to the ones that hands them money without listenin to all that clamor. Why, you wouldn't go tellin yer daddy how to run things, would you?

Big Deal

The electorate of California voted to prohibit US citizens from having rights under the US Constitution. In case no one has noticed, the Constitution has been routinely ignored in the past 8 years, even abrogated by federal law. Basically what is at stake is the right of an American citizen to enter into a legal contract based on gender. No big deal and no precedents in our legal system. Blacks are still slaves, women can't vote and...I'm sure there are more.

Yup, being ironic and facetious here. There are really two separate issues involved and both are covered by the Constitution. First is the separation of Church and State. Churches and their members have every right to be against the idea of gay marriage. They can refuse to perform ceremonies, offer sacraments, whatever their little hearts desire. That is a guarantee here in the US of A. The second is the legal aspect of a marriage contract. You can get married (enter into a binding contract like buying a house or a car) in the US without any Church being involved. Not too long ago it was illegal in most places for a person of 'color' to marry a 'white'. I am not 100% certain but I believe that bit of discrimination has fallen by the wayside. Let's say I am only 99.9999% sure.

Why this is even an issue is beyond me. This is not a theocracy. Gay people are not demons. They are American citizens with the same right of the pursuit of life, liberty and

happiness. I am really getting frustrated and irritated by the group of under-educated, self deluded who think they have the right to dictate because they chose to believe in mythology. People who chose to let someone else think for them because they lack the intestinal fortitude to do it for themselves. And what really chaps me is because I (and a few others) happen to think that humans are inherently capable of good all by their little selves, we are doomed to eternal hellfire.

Think about it...almost every religion ever known has its own ideas, its own tales explaining the world. Most are just reiterations of the same lack of knowledge that existed at the time. Take your pick of creation myths and you will find very little deviation from the basics and that certainly includes Christianity/Judaism. Man has never come up with an original idea when it comes to religion. For those Christians who claim resurrection as original, it isn't even close. I can think of at least three other major mythologies that predate. There is a long and ugly history that says mixing religion and politics never works. Ever. Not in recorded history. It really is the opiate of the masses, one that is generally controlled and administered by those in power. This isn't new stuff. It is incredibly well documented throughout history. Actually, the times mankind has made significant advances was when it pushed religion back into its closet.

Bottom line is, if your God finds gay marriage offensive, let him deal with it when the chickens come home to roost. If they are doomed, that is between them and God. If they aren't, we will never know. And if you feel threatened by this, maybe you best ask yourself why. If you are capable of that, I am sure you wouldn't like the answer but then, I doubt you are capable of it.

Characters

Over the years people have asked me just how much of my characters is me. The snide answer is all of them. Since they come from deep within the twisted corridors and back alleys of my brain, they are in essence various aspects of me. I would imagine this is true of all writers. One of the most basic tenets of writing is write about things you know about. It makes the act of writing something like analysis without the therapist or couch. You take what you know of yourself and what you learn about others and use it to construct characters, sort of like Legos of observation and experience. That is what makes it difficult for prolific writers. Characters tend to share traits, which is why some go for serial novels with a protagonist they can continue to mold.

Each protagonist gets a healthier dose of the writer's personality because they are the focus, the teller of the tale. Each antagonist tends to get traits the author finds to be less than desirable. Supporting characters are a collage of people and traits, both observed and imagined. One may get their physical description from one person and their emotional or psychological construction for another. Maybe even several others. That is the beauty (and the fun) of writing. The author gets to rearrange the building blocks to suit the tale. A hero may have some basic qualities in common with the author augmented by others that the writer would like to have. And as the character develops, the possibilities for growth and change are limited only by imagination. The directions of these changes are dictated by the plot development and this is where the idea that a character 'is' the author fades. The object of writing fiction is to confront a character with challenges, problems to overcome and since the tale is imaginary (unless the author is writing thinly veiled autobiography) there is no real way for the character to retain more than the base profile of the author's personality. The writer is imagining how the character will react to a situation and imagining the reactions of the characters around them.

This is where the self-analysis comes in for a beginning writer. The first path is how would I deal with this? Once that particular (and easy) answer is found it opens the door to more possibilities. How would I react if I wasn't me? If my past were different? How would someone else react? What would be the more correct path and what would happen if I were more of a shit? When you build a different past for a character it opens things up for what motivates them. You can go to the lofty perch of righteous what ifs or wallow in the darker stuff. It is all there, waiting to be explored. I've been looking over things I have written over the past 35 years and I notice I do have a strong tendency to make my heroes with a baseline of long suffering, put upon tragic figgers. There is a strong element of self sacrifice as well as misunderstood honor and dedication. A great part of this comes from the styles of fiction I read when I was a kid. Is it an element in my own personality? Oh yeah. Will I be able to get past it to build characters from a different place? Maybe. Those elements are somewhat archetypical to fictional protagonists and it doesn't matter if its from Tolstoy or King.

The process of storytelling is the development of the characters as people and there are only so many basic types to choose from. A well-adjusted, fairly normal protagonist makes it hard to tell a tale with any power. Not to mention there are very few of those critters around in real life. The good guys don't always win it all. Sometimes they only get partial victories, sometimes they lose what they had thought was the battle they wanted to win. It's all about possibilities and trying.

Chump

There are times I feel the word is tattooed in big bright letters on my forehead. Not that often and not that I believe it but still...there are times. Just as there are times when I realize I'm not Superman not even close. Heck, I don't even live up to my

own standards sometimes but what I do is keep on trying. It isn't always easy.

One of my biggest issues is anger. I have a real hard time dealing with it. I've figured out that isn't surprising. As a kid I was small, a first class shrimp. One can learn, very quickly if they are lucky, to duck and cover. It irritated my dad but I lacked the competitive drive that can turn some wee folk into scrappers. Even then I realized violence was a poor answer, both physical and otherwise. My biggest problem was I was bright and more than a bit of a smart ass so I wasn't exactly very accomplished in the art of keeping a low profile. I wanted attention as much as anyone so I became a class clown.

As the years passed my diminutive size and overactive mouth kept me right on the edge but always there was the anger simmering in the background. I studied philosophies and religions trying to figure out why things and people were the way they were. And I observed people trying to see if I could understand why they behaved the way they did. When I finally managed puberty and my body caught up with my brain, I realized I no longer had to live in fear of physical confrontation. I still hated the idea but I didn't have to be afraid anymore. With the cocky arrogance of youth I then realized it was time for a little payback. Needless to say, it was a bad choice.

Not that I went looking. I had known too many bullies in my time. What I did was worse in many ways. I didn't go looking for fights or confrontations but I certainly didn't shy away from them. And when I did respond, it wasn't physically. Years as a certified smart ass had sharpened both my tongue and wit, just as all that observing had taught me insight. Jugulars and weak spots were ridiculously obvious. It was a good thing that I also had the memories of what it felt like to be on the receiving end. Any joy or good feeling that might have been possible in fighting back was countered by the guilt over inflicting pain or heartache. What fun is it when you can't enjoy the thrill of winning when you can feel the hurt you have caused? It took me a while but I

realized it just wasn't me. Ok, I had it rammed down my throat and it took me many years to totally get it clear.

But I did. I fought with it and eventually came to see anger just wasn't something I wanted in my life. I learned to accept things and people as they were. I first learned to control the anger and from there I learned to go to the source and keep it from even developing. Did I do a perfect job? Nope. It can still sneak back a bit. I just went through a period where I even toyed with letting it happen. There is a queasy sort of rush when it flows but its like a dog rolling in something disgusting. You know its bad and nasty but what the heck. And then you have to live with the stink on your soul. No thanks.

So now I get to live, working at trying to accept and understand others and figuring out how to keep from being taken advantage of. I have to accept I am basically a nice guy, low key and not into competition or confrontation. I can manage some it on an impersonal level, even enjoy a good challenge but not on a personal one. I'm pretty low on ambition, not real good at setting any kind of major goals. I'm not asking a lot from life other than to have a chance to enjoy it and dealing with anger is just too much of a waste of time.

Civil War

If I hear one more person say anything good about the Civil War I may go postal. One more claim of what a great president Lincoln was. One more piece of pap about how 'preserving the Union' was somehow both a good thing and even vaguely Constitutional. What Lincoln did makes the Shrub's antics justifiable. And do not go all fuzzy and warm about how he freed the slaves because he didn't. The Civil War did not end slavery except on paper. Hell, Alexander II of Russia freed the serfs 2 years before ole Abe wrote his masterpiece and he didn't have to start a fratricidal war to do it.

Historical perspective here...1860, less than 100 years after the founding fathers told King George to forget the colonies. It was called the American Revolution. The colonies though ole Georgie didn't have a clue and therefore didn't have the right. Fought a couple of wars over it as I recall. The bright boys came up with things like the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution to codify/justify why they should be free and separate. Pretty impressive things that have worked to justify the continued existence of the US. Maybe I'm wrong but they also included things like state's rights.

So less than 100 years later there is this group of states who have their own idea of what should be. They tell the boys in Washington, thanks but no thanks. You guys go your way, we will go ours. So what happens? Fort Sumter gets shelled. Can you spell Baghdad? The northern states get all up in arms because the Southern States are...gasp...buying and selling people. Forget that the North is indulging in massive abuses of child labor and treating the few blacks who live there like crap. Forget that the average slave in the south has a better standard of living than most of the workers in the North. Yeah, it is horrible that many of the southern planters treat their workers like livestock. Oh wait, planters and farmers might realize that an investment in livestock (be it cattle, horse or slave) is just that... an investment. If you beat your horse, it can't pull your wagon. It isn't like in Boston where if someone can't work your factory there is always another schmuck you can hire for a penney.

So old honest Abe wages a war that costs more American lives (since both sides are American) to force the South to remain in the oh so sacred Union. And when it is over turn the scalawags loose. Don't treat the freed slaves like humans, not even north of the Mason-Dixon and treat the South like a conquered territory.

Commercials

I'm sure that there are readers here who don't really care to read the political rants I tend to be given to. So shoot me, I get riled by the crap we have to deal with there. I am liberal enough to feel nauseated by the idea there are mega corps making money from our health care system. Or the fact that almost 50 cents of every dollar we spend for health care goes to 'administrative' costs. I want to puke when I see the commercials for saving the poor abused animals, the poor puppies and kitties with a celebrity who is asking for 'just pennies' a day so they can be saved. Or the commercials that tout the same thing for the 'poor starving children' in foreign countries. Yeah, I agree with them in principle but what about here at home? What about the poor bastards who live in cardboard boxes right here? What about the millions of honest-to God Americans who can't go to the doctor.

Come on, Sara, get your priorities straight. It is a crying shame critters are being abused, shouldn't happen in a country that doesn't view those critters as food. Excuse me? You didn't know that only 'civilized countries' don't look at Bowser and Snookums as a the blue plate special? And you are totally unaware of the number of families in the US of A who have sacrificed everything they have in the attempt to gain meaningful medical attention for their children? The greatest, most advanced country in the known history of the world thinks that medical assistance is a commodity? You didn't know that the terrible, Communist country of Cuba provides medical care for all of its citizens, whether they can pay or not? I guess since you made your bucks you don't have to consider those who haven't. So how come you can feel sorry for the stray pooch or kitty when little Bobby or Sara can't get the health care they need? Why are you asking people to hand over money to help critters when real human children need the same?

Why is it the most powerful and prosperous nation in the world can't provide for its own unless they can pay? A big Christian nation, supposedly endowed with compassion says

nope, big bucks for medical care or no way? This country can spend billions to be able to bomb the shit out of others and can't take care of it's own? Sorry Sara but I don't buy it. I love critters but I would see the extinction of dogs and cats before I would accept one child not receiving medical care. Why is it your camera crews can show these pitiful critters and not feel they should be doing the same for the people who are in the same condition?

I have seen many commercials on TV calling for sympathy and money for the underprivileged of the world, asking Americans to help. When do I see one about things right here? When does the camera cover the trials of the residents of our own country who need help? When does the finger point home? Yes, we have the capacity to help others, to help the critters but we need to get our priorities straight. Let's start with our own people before we take on the world or the critters. If we have people here in the US dying from lack of care we can't be taken seriously elsewhere.

Curious

These past few days I've been catching up on my news reading, sort of distracting myself. Or reminding myself there are more important things happening in this world than a collapse of part of mine. Wow, there was LOTS of stuff that caught my eye. Some highly interesting, most irritating and a bunch that was flat out amusing.

First is the California ruling on the discriminatory aspect of banning same sex marriage. I thought it was about time somebody realized there is a separation of Church and State in this country. Marriage laws are about the legal contract. The spiritual/religious side is something the various churches have to deal with. Denying the right of two consenting adults to enter into a civil contract is illegal discrimination. If you don't believe it,

just check and see how many of the laws banning inter-racial marriages are still on the books.

The second was an article on a nude beach in Vermont. It has been a nude beach for some 25 years and has signs posted to alert anyone who isn't already aware of it. Now there are people who are making noise about it. Seems they don't want to have to look at nekkid people when they go to the beach. For over two decades the answer has been pretty clear, you don't wanna see, go to a different beach.

Myself, I have to ask some questions about all this hullabaloo and I think the answers will reflect a change in attitudes in the US in the past few years. I can't see the reasoning of the offended righteous who claim that the idea of this type of behavior is offensive to God. Leaving aside arguments about all being brothers and equal in god's eye, or the one about ocular occlusions or even the bit about judging, I can't help but wonder why anyone would spend any time wondering about what some one else is doing in the privacy of their own home. Or why the puritanical taboo about the human body has managed to survive this long.

It can't be anyone is truly worried about the sanctity of marriage, not with a national divorce rate over 50%. You want a threat, there it is but I don't see a single soul looking for a Constitutional Amendment banning divorce or any sort of huge outcry about doing anything to reverse that particular trend. Sorry, it don't wash. I'm thinking it has to do with people living in fear. Fear that somebody is doing something they don't approve of and not suffering any consequences because of it. Fear that their own ideas just might be less than valid. Or that there might be others that work just as well. There have been lots of religious groups who have called for bans on lots of behavior, like dancing or singing (hymns excepted) or clothing or public displays of affection or...or...you get the idea.

Basically trying to get the rest of society to buy in to their limited view of the diversity of life. And all of this in spite of all

the evidence of what such behavior leads to. People are people, they have vices and virtues and it is impossible to legislate morality and equally impossible to drive it from the pulpit. Repression has never worked, never built anything worthwhile but it has led to some of the ugliest behavior mankind is capable of.

The thing I find the most puzzling is why anyone would spend time worrying about what other people are doing. I'm thinking serious counseling is called for if someone loses sleep or gets serious angry because of what they imagine might be happening. That is just plain weird. It makes us a nation of Agnes Cravitz's. And getting worked up about nekkid people on a secluded beach? Give me a break. About 10% of the population might present a possibility of inspiring lewd and lustful thoughts if viewed naked. If that happens, again one should either seek counseling or a cold shower.

I raised three kids and many were the times they would strip at the beach, particularly when they were in diapers. I didn't blame them because I could imagine how uncomfortable those soggy, saggy things were. Anyone who was disturbed by the sight of nekkid cherubs ought to check themselves in to the nearest mental health facility. As for the vast majority of humanity, particularly the older part I'm thinking it requires more than a little imagination to get all het up over the look of their pulchritude. At my age, 90% of interest is not in physical looks and frankly, I'm not that old. The big problem comes from the quaint idea that one can separate the mind and soul from the body. If viewing something incites lust, the problem is in the viewer, not the view. Avoiding or removing the exterior does absolutely nothing for resolving the problem. If you think it does, you should consider moving to Egypt. That's where de Nile was the last time I checked.

Daddy Dearest

Many years ago I read a couple of books by Joseph Campbell about the evolution of religion. How the warrior father image replaced the Earth mother in the West. It made lots of sense. And it certainly helped define the development of Western society along patriarchal lines. Men know everything. Or rather, men control everything which, in a weird way, came to mean they knew everything. I think St. Paul was instrumental in this idea in European society. Why a closeted gay with delusions of violence would gain a place of eminence in a religion based on love and compassion says a great deal about said religion's commitment to compassion.

But this is about Fathers. As in divine Fathers like God and earthly fathers like me. Supposedly the divine father has the idea that if you don't do exactly as he wants he will banish you for eternity into hellfire. This is a core teaching of the Christian religion for over 1,600 years. Screw up and BIH. Unless you repent before you die and agree that the Big Daddy is 100% right and you are a worm who has to agree with it. Just makes you want to be a kid, donit?

Now for my take. I'm a dad. Three times over. And a grand dad, 4 times over. Contrary to what some might say, I'm human. If one of my kids (grandkids aren't old enough yet) decided to embrace ideas contradictory to mine I will damn each and every one of them to eternal hellfire and pain for the temerity of their acts. Unless they accept every word I say as gospel and the sole reason for their existence, they are less than toast. As their father, I have supreme and ultimate control over their minds, bodies and souls and it is my right to punish them for any deviation from my will. I brought them into this world and I have absolute and total control over them. And if they rebel, it is my right, my responsibility, to damn them to the most horrible and grievous punishment imaginable.

This is what the Fundy Gawd says. It sells humans into slavery by their birth rather than freeing them to find their path. I am a father. A father who would no sooner visit any of that crap

on my children than I would stick a nuke up my ass and visit the President. Fathers are supposed to love their children, want only the best for them. Not make them puppets to live lives under their control. Screw every religion and philosophy on the planet that does not embrace this idea.

Fathers are supposed to be protectors. Guides. Teachers. Fathers do not damn their children to hell for any reason and any religion that says differently is based in demonology. It is based in evil and pain. There is no place in this universe for that. That is about control, about making one's own needs mean more than the need of society, of people. Any religion that espouses any form of damnation for anything less than outright and clear evil behavior, is selling snake oil. You can't go to hell for defying your father. Nor your mother. You can't be damned for eternity for honest love. Or eating fish on Friday. Or marrying outside your faith. Or believing in another deity. Or believing in no deity.

Fact is, no Father could ever even dream up an idea like Hell unless He was one sick puppy. And if you want to believe in a deity that would accept the idea of BIH for eternity, you might be one sick puppy. Good news is, you can heal.

Density

That's what George called it in a moment of fevered adolescent stammering. A simple transposition of a couple letters and life is explained. Its no wonder people have been getting them confused all these years. How can we help but become confused when there is so much literature out there that pounds on, harps at, glorifies the whole destiny business when it comes to love. For the illiterate out there, the main recurring theme is boy meets girl, they get run around in various circles and then destiny kicks in and they both realize they are the only two people in the world. Ok, it is a tad snide but it really is the most recurrent theme in literature since the advent of English.

For example, take the Arthurian legends. This is one of the most admired and messed up examples of life ever written. And rewritten. We have this kid who is raised as the poor relation and gets a serious case of low self esteem until the day he pulls a sword from a stone and suddenly he is King of the Britons! Whoo hoo! So he uses his shabby background to forge some new ideas and manages to put together this thing called the Round Table. Lots of stuff about justice and equality and fairness which were pretty unheard of no matter what era you favor for Art. Then he meets this gal, Guinevere and falls in love. Of course she is reluctant at first but Art is pretty irresistible so she falls for him too. (Don't forget the part about how he is King of the Britons). And Art has this buddy, a warrior brother who is the mainstay of his operation, Lancelot. These guys are close so it follows that Guinevere falls for Lance as well.

The basic legend has the triangle tearing the three apart. She loves Art but he's got this whole king thing going on. She also loves Lance but this is bad because she belongs to the king. Art loves them both as does Lance. But appearances say the Queen belongs to the King and nobody else so now all three of them are feeling guilty for their own reasons. After a lot of turmoil Art ends up dead, Guinevere a nun and Lance goes off to Paris where he changes his name and opens a bar. Bottom line is nobody gets happy, the Round Table falls apart and the Britons end up with many years of trying to put it back together again. Am I the only person in the world who sees this is an incredibly stupid thing? There is not one bit of good that comes out of it yet it has become the basis for so many tales since that one could hardly codify them all. And even the people who look back on the original feel sorry for them but no one says, the dumb shits. Hell no. They practically deify the putzes and wish they could emulate them! This whole ménage à trois is praised for being the epitome of true love. It is a major part of the fantasy fed to the general public about what love should really be like.

What a load of crap. Three rational, caring, supposedly intelligent human beings who blasted their lives into smithereens because of appearances. Nobody won, everybody lost. This is a success story? This is what we should do with our lives and feelings? A man is supposed to condemn his wife to death for the crime of also loving his friend? And then tear down all of the good he had built because he feels like shit for doing it? I'm sorry but this whole legend should be the template for how not to do things. There isn't nobility here, just rampant stupidity. Art had a good start and then folded in the home stretch. He had principles and turned his back on them because of spin-doctors. What might have happened if the three had stood together instead of standing apart? If Art had told Mrs. Grundy to go to hell and stood tall for his principles, what would the end result have been? It couldn't have been any worse than what did happen.

Does anyone else see...

The difference between bailout strategies in DC? We have a group of people who really produce nothing other than more esoteric ways to manipulate money, which they have demonstrated they also aren't very good at doing and somehow this qualifies them for massive handouts of unfettered cash. Then we have three companies who actually produce a product and support a vast support infrastructure of suppliers who came to the Hill, hat in hand with plans on how they are looking to fix their problem. Huge concessions by both management and labor and the brain butts are acting like Mr. Potter.

Granted, the Big 3 got all glassy eyed with greed. They exercised poor judgment in focusing on big, expensive gas-guzzlers but that was what the greedy, shortsighted public was demanding and the clowns on Wall Street were hyping. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that buying a car more expensive than many people's homes that gulped fuel through a

fire hose instead of a gas line was probably going to be a costly piece of over indulgence. It used to be the only people who ran trucks were the ones who sort of needed them for their work. The poor minivan just wasn't cool enough. So lots of time and money was put into retooling auto plants to make urban assault vehicles.

That's right, time and money because the line that is geared to building the urban equivalent of an Abrams tank won't make smaller, more fuel efficient, less pretentious but more useful small cars. Somebody has to shift gears, actually lots of somebody's and this transition takes...tah dah, time and money. But the point of all this is that the Big 3 have plans in hand, right under their hats. Real plans. All they are asking for is loans so they can implement them and save a slew of jobs. Not just the jobs of their own management crew but down the line to the people who work in the plants and the scores of tertiary companies who supply the various products used to make a car. They don't make every part that goes into a vehicle, not even close. Alternators, fuel pumps, brake shoes, belts, hoses and, and, and...the list is very long.

There is also another problem Washington could deal with that would go a long way to helping not only them but every other manufacturer and employer in the US. There has been a lot said about how the 'costs' of union labor are eating them alive. Almost as much as about how it isn't exactly true. How union workers are making so much more than non-union in the other, newer, foreign plants. Truth is, the wage scale isn't all that different. What is different is the little matter of legacy costs. Providing health care for retired workers. The Big 3 have been making cars and employing people since Henry figured out the assembly line about 100 years ago. That means there are lots of retired workers out there as well as those presently employed. Honda, Toyota et al haven't been here long enough to have to deal with that.

As long as we see health care as a profit center and a huge one at that, these costs will continue to eat away at business's ability to stay competitive in any kind of market. If you take the cost of health care provision out of any company's way, you will find a vastly different picture for the future of American business. Eliminate the vultures who pocket a big chunk of every health care dollar while providing nothing but expense and mind numbing paperwork and suddenly, it doesn't cost so much to go to the doctor. Get over the screaming meemies about socialism and communism. We already accept paying for public services like law enforcement, fire fighting, water and waste management. We don't expect every little burg to build its own roads or maintain them at their own expense. It is called social infrastructure, you know, provide for the common good. They wrote that in years before Marx and no one screamed.

We even accepted a whole new agency whose sole purpose is maintaining national security that is allowed to operate without proper oversight and in violation of Constitutional authority and no one hollered Gestapo! It has been a historical fact that the fascist and dictatorial types are very good at crying Commie or some such epithet to cover their own controlling actions. Give the rubes a scapegoat and they will go lemming every time. For too long we have been in the business of finger pointing and not addressing the real issues. The good news is if it keeps on much longer we won't have to worry about who is to blame. We'll be too busy scrambling to survive.

Dreams & Reality

A life long question and battle for some. What are dreams? What is reality? Does one make the other a lie? What we want versus what is. I don't know for sure about the rest of humanity but for me the both exist, both have texture. For all but a few, reality tends to suck. I suppose that is why dreams exist.

For some the two become one and not always in a good way. Something about ancient Chinese proverbs about being careful what you wish for. Seek and ye shall find. Eventually? Proverbs and wise sayings are nifty but not always accurate. Life happens as it will and not always the way we seek. I am minded of the old saw about how the Good Lord tests us, places obstacles in our path and other such stuff. The reality of that is, life happens. It doesn't seem to favor any, hence the saw about testing.

I have spent my entire life seeking, being what I am. Some of the time, it hasn't been a nice person. My bottom line has been I ain't perfect and I don't see most folks as being much better. I have only recently become aware of the idea that my childhood was less than beneficial. I was a kid and I sort of wanted to be accepted as such. That it didn't really happen was the result of things my folks had to deal with.

I wanted love, as do we all. I yearned for people to accept me for what I was. And I have spent my life seeking that. I realize now, I spent a great deal of effort and energy in the attempt to be what was more socially acceptable. Way too much energy. I doubted myself so much that I couldn't be me, I had to try and be something else. Something acceptable. I wanted to belong, be accepted. Fact is, I will never be typical. Some will say that is a defense mechanism, I'm trying to prove to the world I am different. It isn't a defense mechanism, I am.

I have spent the greater portion of my life trying to belong, to fit and the fact is, I don't. And I never will. I have been loved, loved by some wonderful people, some who are still there. The problem is, I'm a dreamer. I can function in the world called reality but I want more. I see what can be and while see why it can't be, I still want it. I hear John's vision of Imagine.

Entropy

The process of degradation of a system into decay. Or maybe the Newtonian Laws about inertia. For centuries we have believed these things only apply in the physical sciences. I'm wondering if there isn't an application in the economic world. As in the bigger something gets (more inertia) the more difficult it is to change direction. Or that everything answers to entropy.

Call it the Jabba da Hutt school of economics. Slowly built, using intimidation and manipulation through fear of reprisal until an entity gains a modicum of control. As the control increases, the morbid obesity of the controlling entity does as well. Fear plays a major part in the building phase but as the controlling entity gains weight the ability to respond diminishes. Take the US car companies as an example. They slowly built themselves into a juggernaut, burying rivals (like Tucker and Rambler) until they controlled the market. Or the banks in NY, slowly building to such a size they were 'too big to fail'.

I submit, they are too big to survive. They, both the banks and the car companies, are outsized, incapable of generating what they need to survive. They are depending on the fear tactic that they are too big, too important to be allowed to die when the truth is they have out lived their value. Let GM and Chrysler die off, abandon their US operations and leave them open to someone who has not become so bloated they will listen to the needs of the market rather than dictating them. Both are looking to retain life by importing vehicles made off shore that they have been selling to the rest of the world. Both will die off in the US for their blindness.

Entropy. The process of degradation of a system into decay. Welcome to the US. The only problem is that the people who have not been part of this gluttony just don't want to accept it. Let the big dogs fail, die off. May the American public discover they can throw the chain around Jabba's throat. They aren't too big to fail, they are over ripe.

For Walter

When my kids were babies and feeling fussy, not wanting to go to sleep, I would hold them to my chest and talk to them. Or sing songs. Sometimes without words, just to make a rumbling sound under their ear. In a few minutes they would quiet and slip off into sleep.

When I was younger, I remember listening to Walter read the news in that incomparable baritone, slow paced to make sure everyone had a chance to understand. I remember feeling very sad when he retired in 1981. I knew it was the passing of an era, the last time I would be able to listen to the news and know on a gut level, whether it was good or bad, that what I was hearing was the truth. No more rumble of comfort.

No more hearing, in that mellifluous tone..."And that's the way it is" and trusting it was so.

Rest well, Walter. You left the world better for having known you.

Faith and Begorrah

So much of what we are being inundated with these days is about faith. Having faith in this or in that as a means of making your world work. Setting aside the religious aspects of the definition of the word it basically means trust in something for which there is no evidence that one should give that trust. There is no logic behind most faith, no provable reason for it other than you have it. Western civilization was incredibly faith based until the period called the Enlightenment. One believed because one was told to believe and evidence that this faith was dangerously unfounded was suppressed for centuries.

Science came to be the polar opposite of faith. Science tended to observe provable phenomenon and bring it into mainstream life. It was, and is, an uphill battle. Less than 150

years ago things like germs, bacteria and virus were virtually unknown. Disease was some mystical thing that God or Satan visited on mankind and there just wasn't anything we could do about it but have faith and pray. There are still people who believe this to be so.

It wasn't that long ago only bugs, birds and a few mammals could fly. Man could only explore the depths of the oceans for as long as he could hold his breath. And everything beyond our planet's atmosphere was totally beyond our reach. For every single thing we have learned from science, there has been a blowback from the faith-based members of society about how we are poaching on the province of the divine.

One has to ask, if they are not blinded by faith, why this is so. By their own faith, man is gifted by God, made in His image. (I'm working primarily with the Western concept of Christianity but it isn't confined to that.) The whole idea of man as an entity is about how he is more than the beasts of the field and only slightly less than angels. The very idea that a parent doesn't want their child to succeed, to improve, to be more is just twisted.

In the real world, rules work. If you slip, you will fall. Gravity works whether we have faith in it or not. An object at rest, tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. These things are true whether you want to believe it or not. Some rules aren't fully known yet and it is ironic that we react to them in a very faith based fashion. You can't exceed the speed of light. For that one refer back to the flight thing and if man were meant to fly, God would have given him wings. Instead of wings, He gave us a mind. The greatest piece of evidence in existence today for some sort of divine presence is that man has the ability to think. And communicate complex ideas. Across generations.

The concept of faith in a god is one of the more childish things man has come up with. It is a juvenile thing, born from fragile egos. Juxtapose the idea of some sort of all powerful

divinity requiring its creations to worship it and feed it's ego with that of your basic parent. Does one raise children so that their main purpose in existence is to make their parents feel fulfilled? Is this rational human behavior? If not, why would one have faith in a parent deity that felt such was so?

I suspect humankind will not truly excel until the day they learn to have faith in themselves. The young need to learn how to leave the nest, to learn how to use their wings. To learn to rely on what they have been given and taught. A truly loving parent feels immense pride and joy when they see this in their young. The Xtian doG must enjoy raising retards. Time for mankind to clean up the santorum and grow up.

Fences

There is something about straddling fences that should lack appeal. If your legs are long enough, you can move along the fence in a very uncomfortable fashion. If they are too short, you get a sore crotch and go nowhere. The only real solution is to pick which side of the fence you want to be on and do something about it.

The illegal actions of the Bush Administration are, for some odd reason, Obama's fence. He started out talking high ideals and has taken some action to back up that talk. Now he is starting to waffle. Anyone who has ever studied the Carter Administration is familiar with the trend. I doubt if we have ever had a more principled President than Carter and yet the political pressures forced him more and more to the center. It appears it is already at work on Obama.

The pressures can't be coming from the international community. They are and have been astounded at the lack of response from the US to the tattering of our country and ideals. We have abrogated the international treaties we are signatory to

on torture, ignored our own laws on the subject and shown an arrogant, exceptionalist attitude to the opinions of our allies. I would say our reputation is about on par with that of a sleazy used car salesman who will say or do anything just to make a buck. Our 'word' doesn't even rate as decent toilet paper.

On the home front we have a firm majority backing the President's actions, people who bought the change theme, who want to believe in the 'Yes We Can' attitude. There is a public just hoping and praying it will come to pass. They have been encouraged by much of the President's work to date in most areas. They are outraged by the release of information on just how far things went. And they are getting more puzzled by the tepid response of the administration to the Bushy Horror Picture Show.

It can't be that the President is concerned about losing the support of the Republican Party since he obviously doesn't have it. He is not going to coax them into learning how to play nice nor should he have to do that. Personally, I think they are swirling in a maelstrom of fear. They are terrified that the monstrous behavior of the past 8 years will come to full light and Americans will learn just how badly damaged our country is. It is time for the President to jump down from the fence and walk into the light of the law. It isn't going to hurt anymore or do anymore damage than the economic crisis has done. It is time to cry havoc and cut loose the dogs of law.

For those who fear the possible repercussions of such an action, they are still buying the fear meme that is paralyzing and destroying our country. And it isn't just the Republicans. All of entrenched Washington is trembling because a full investigation would show the American people just how corrupt our government system has become. The status quo is fighting for it's continued existence. The privileged in power want to retain their insular little world where the government is more important than the country. Money runs Washington and the American people are just an audience to their show. We should

just rename the place Versailles. If the actions of the previous administration show nothing else it is the arrogance of our government. It answers only to itself and the money from the large donors who feed the greed. And it is increasingly obvious it will do just about anything to maintain the game.

Mr. President, you promised change we can believe in and you are doing pretty well in most areas but it might be time to realize that saving the economy, the environment and other worthy humanitarian things is laudable. The only problem is if you don't re-establish our reputation, return to following our Constitution and show both our citizens and the rest of the world we are a nation to be trusted, its just slapping a coat of paint on a collapsing barn. If you give an aging hooker a make over, dress her up fancy, maybe even a face lift and tummy tuck, she will still be a hooker, willing to sell herself for money.

Get The Lead Out

This was a phrase I often heard in boot camp exhorting us to move faster. It is also related to a theory I read on a reason for the fall of the Roman Empire. It was posited that by using lead in the building of their water system may have caused Romans to go crazy. It was an interesting theory but Rome was too large for any one factor to be responsible for its collapse. That is what this little rant is about...collapsing empires and acceleration.

There are a number of parallels between the final days of ancient Rome and what we are experiencing these days in the US. Privileged classes versus lower classes. The elite buying out of military service. The hiring of mercenaries. Vast public displays of entertainment to distract the general public. Public displays of wealth and privilege without regard for the effect on the poor. Use of nationalism and divine right to justify military expansion. Over extension of said military resources. There are more but these are sufficient. Basically, the Romans got greedy,

arrogant and lazy. They bought their own hype about how great Rome was without understanding how hard work and dedication was what had actually built the empire.

This is a pattern, particularly in Western civilizations and in the last 2,000 years. Yes, there are exceptions (damn that Bell Curve) but this isn't a definitive treatise, it's a rant. Societies start small and aggressive and as they age they consolidate and stratify and eventually stagnate and die. Like people. Lots of hard work and effort to build when young and as age slows you down, you tend to conserve energy and stand pat on old laurels. This pattern is repeated with monotonous regularity, like mankind has put their favorite LP on the turntable and left the hold down arm off so it just keeps playing and playing.

A rather frightening example of this is the USSR. They built a culture on an idealistic myth and then proceeded to use the myth as cover for the reality of domination. In the end they had a monolithic government, run by a single party that was actually a group of economically advantaged people and companies that focused on military activities and ignored the working class. They spent themselves into ruin with a fruitless war in Afghanistan and supporting subversive activities in numerous other countries, trying to gain political and economic dominance. Their media was tightly controlled by the same people who were setting the political agenda. And their primary adversary sat back and predicted their demise and claimed credit for it when it actually happened. This is a Cliff notes synopsis, just hitting the high points but the essence is there. For me the similarity is rather scary.

The other aspect is that of speed. Rome spanned centuries but as communication and transportation shrink the world, the time frame of a given country cycle is compressing. If a society opts for the old classed format, it doesn't take nearly as long for things to go into the dumpster. The US has 234 years under its belt. The USSR barely made 70.

There are options. England, Canada (and Europe sort of) show what happens when nationalistic jingoism is kept down and societal development is more the main focus. Their dreams of empire were abandoned decades ago and their support of their own society became more evident. I'm not saying they are perfect in this or that all is running smoothly. There are still the greedy who try to disrupt things for their own profits. There is still lots of work to do but at least they are trying a new pattern.

So we need to get the lead out. A classed society is doomed to failure because nobody wants to be on the bottom. Nobody has ever said, well, I really just want to be a serf or wage slave when I grow up. And the mean time to collapse is getting shorter every day. Right now we are on a path that will see the collapse of America as we know it within a decade, at most. If the Gulf mess plays out at even half as bad as worst case scenario, the time frame will shorten. It might not be all bad. The northern states might be able to convince Canada to let them join and Mexico could get some of its old territory back. Who knows, maybe China would want to buy a state or two.

Ghastly Whisper Theory

As opposed to the Big Bang Theory. This is where the universe began with a monumental explosion and human civilization fades quietly into oblivion. The fundamentalist types have been watching for the final battle over in God's sandbox for centuries. One might even say some have been actively promoting it. They just have tunnel vision. When John the Crazier wrote that stuff the worst thing imaginable to ancient mankind was war so it isn't surprising he came up with his gruesome tale. The old 'when all you have is a hammer, all problems become nails' idea. That tunnel exists even today. We have a group who proudly proclaim the earth is so vast; poor little man can't really have a major impact on it.

They ignore things like the Dust Bowl of the 30's. Humans actually screwed up what has been called the breadbasket of the world to the point where top soil from Kansas took a vacation in Virginia. Between learning from our mistake and the earth taking a turn, we dodged that bullet. But it was a warning we didn't really heed very well. There was another smaller incident in the 50's and 60's with the over use of pesticides and chemicals that again threatened huge portions of the ecosystem. Another one dodged because there were enough people with the brains to listen and act for the earth instead of their wallet.

Now we have a real biggy brewing in the Gulf. BP has let a genie out of the bottle and it isn't a nice one. The ramifications of this mess will slowly unfold over the next few months. At present, it is an ugly bunch of sludge mixing in a bathtub. It is spreading as more goo is squeezed from the ocean floor. Normally, crude oil doesn't mix well with seawater, just sort of rides along in blobs. Thanks to human technology, we have found a way to spread it thinner with chemicals that make it even more poisonous. As it finds its way around Florida and into the Gulf Stream, it will spread even faster. If it was a finite amount, such as that generated by a surface tanker spill, it would become more and more dilute but it isn't yet.

The next bit of fun will be the hurricane season. These storms suck up seawater, spin them up into the sky and disperse them like a giant version of one of those spray bottles we use for spritzing the pesky weeds in our lawn. They also act like a godly mixmaster, churning the bathtub and carrying the ocean onto the shore and spreading the crude even more.

Now I am not a marine biologist but I don't think that organisms like plankton and algae will find either the crude or the dispersed compounds to be healthy. I suppose I could try an experiment and mix a few quarts of oil from my next oil change with some water in the aforementioned spritzer and spray it on my lawn but I think I'll just take it on faith that it would kill the grass. We get the majority of our oxygen from the sea so if we

kill off portions it stands to reason we will diminish the ocean's capacity for production. I'm certain there are scientists who are working on calculating the impact but I am sure there will be one. The longer the sludge pumps, the greater it will become.

So, we get the Ghastly Whisper. By the end of summer we will see if the storms end up sprinkling the entire eastern portion of the US with toxic rain. With some luck, it will be diluted enough to be just irritating. We will also see how far the plumes reach in the Gulf Stream and how contaminated our sea life will become. Maybe we will get to dodge another bullet. And maybe the Mayans were smarter than Crazy John. There is a bit of good news/bad news here. The good news is the earth will probably survive and eventually recover. The bad news is human civilization is going to take a huge hit. Money isn't going to mitigate this one. Nor are we going to be spreading dirt. How many times can we count on being lucky?

Health Care

Can someone explain something to me? Why is it that the greatest nation on earth (and possibly in the known history of mankind) can't provide decent health care to all of its citizens? This nation, founded on Christian principles, supplies basic health care on a pay-as-you-go system? We have some of the most advanced medical technology ever known and send billions of dollars overseas to support the health care of struggling third world nations (ironically a fair share of that is donated money) yet if you can't pay here at home, you don't get help? Why is it we expect our employers to shoulder the burden of paying for health insurance, which is perfectly acceptable, and scream socialism/communism if it were to be funded by the government?

England began its trek to 'socialized' medicine in the wake of WWII. Most of Europe has some sort of nationalized health

care. Even Cuba has it. As of today, the EU is doing at least as well if not better than the US in most areas. Lots of Europeans were leery of the idea of a united Europe but it is working. We are talking countries here with centuries of animosities and yet they are somehow able to find ways to work together. Over here, we have bupkis. We spend megabucks on health care with half of it going to people who have absolutely nothing to do with actual health care. Insurance companies, HMO's and other administrative groups that are siphoning off the cream while 47 million Americans get squat and we call it a free market. I call it organized ghoulery.

And stupid. Not to mention as about cost effective as paying \$100,000 dollars for a Vespa. As it stands we show more compassion for foreigners and stray animals than we do for our own people. I would love to hear the logic behind the idea that the same Christian, God-fearing folk who are so outraged about the possibility that a few thousand abortions might be performed in the US while millions die for lack of money, and hence health care, right in their own town and this is the American way? I take it back, I don't want to hear the logic because I would probably throw up.

We Americans piss away more money every day than anyone has ever done in recorded history. We buy more junk, more luxuries than any other civilization and that includes the Romans who substituted bird tongues for Ipods. In the waning days of Rome the Caesars decided it would be a good idea to quiet the discontent of the rabble by offering bread and circuses, courtesy of the government. The populace could go down to the local stadium and watch all sorts of mayhem to take their minds off the little things like starving. Free admission to the same type of mindlessly bloody games we pay \$40 a month to get from HBO or \$90 a seat at the local stadium. Evidently the Romans weren't as savvy as we are today but that was 1,700 years ago so they can be excused. We are much better at squeezing every buck we can out of even the most barbaric ideas.

I think ole PT was an optimist.

Hi-De-Ho

A great tune by one of my favorite groups back in the 60's. Blood, Sweat & Tears with David Clayton Thomas singing lead. I personally like their version of Sympathy for the Devil better than the Stones one. I liked their use of brass and Thomas has about as poignant a voice as you can find. I have to admit it wasn't their best songs nor were they the only ones to cover it but I liked their version. Something about Thomas' gritty voice..."I been down so long, bottom looks like up. Once I thought that seconds saves was enough to fill my cup. Well, they taken all I got and that ain't no way to live, being taken by the ones who got the least amount to give.'

I'm working in a little online writer's group with two other guys. Started back in January. We've been sharing chapters, critiquing each others work and generally just enjoying the interface with each other. We all have different styles and come from different places but we share the need to write. And the reality of having to live in a world where it can't be the only thing we do. Bills to pay, grass to mow, pipes to fix, families to tend to...all the things that keep a writer from being able to write.

There are lots of books out there about how to write. Mostly written by people who found a way to make it work but most of them are about how to structure your life to make writing work. I'm sure there is lots of good advice but most of what I've seen treats writing as a trade. Anyone who truly feels a need to write probably isn't a word mechanic. Linking words into a salable form isn't hard to do. Writing something from the heart is. Every word, every tale might just as well be written in blood because a wordsmith invests a piece of themselves in what they write. If they don't, it's schlock, casual utterances without real meaning.

It is sort of like the Obama phenomenon. How did a first term Senator, and a black man to boot, manage to beat one of the most efficient and powerful political machines around? There are lots of theories but I have one that won't be popular and I think says it. Sincerity. He means what he says. His words aren't just mouth noises meant to buy him a place in the limelight. The man talks from his heart. And that is what a writer does. He doesn't just scribble things he figures will sell. Probably 90% of what a real writer puts down won't sell unless they get that Grail of a publishable work. A real writer, a wordsmith, writes what they have to write and the buying public be damned. Publishers want security, they want a guaranteed return so I figure about 95% of real publishable work never sees the book stores.

Maybe the Internet will change that. Maybe the idea of downloadable books, without the expenses of printing and physical distribution will open things up. Personally, I still like a real book in my hands but with the burgeoning market of cell phones that can play movies...who can say if people might not be willing to download a story.

Times are changing and the markets as well.

If your Snark be a Boojum

America is such a fascinating place with an amazing diversity a rich history unlike any other country on record. Begun by dissidents, rabble rousers, freedom fighters who took on the premier power in their known world. People bitching about taxes on tea and whiskey, government or societal pressures on little things like religion. The North populated by Puritans, the South by convicts and farmers and yet they found common cause in throwing off the brutal yoke of British tyranny.

I have always been thrilled and fascinated by the justifications of these oppressed colonists. They came up with the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, icons of human rights that rank up there with the Magna Carta. "We hold

these truths to be self evident'...'certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'... That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish'. Powerful stuff in that document that is the basis and justification for the existence of this country.

So we have a President who has the audacity to want to reach across the aisle, seek consensus and possibly compromise. What is he thinking? That the 40 odd per cent of the people who didn't join his 'landslide' might just think they had a voice? Ok, there is reason to believe that there is a faction in the government (and population) who have different ideas about where the country is headed. And there is a slightly larger group who think those folks are (pardon the political incorrectness) retarded. I guess it depends on which side you are on as to who is 'lacking in cognitive ability'.

It isn't nice to point out that people who faithfully believe in various systems that have brought us to this particular juncture might do well to learn to think for themselves. I mean, two thousand years of more of the same deserves another two thousand, right? Let us totally ignore that everything that was accepted as 'common knowledge' in 1 AD has been pretty much shown to be appropriate to 1 AD. Not real or factual, just appropriate to a culture that knew the earth was flat and centered on the Mediterranean Sea. Worked for them so it should work for us? That we figured out that things we can't see with the naked eye can actually kill us isn't helpful or even real. Germs, bacteria and viruses are imaginary boogiemens invented by 'scientists' to scare the crap out of us when they don't really exist.

So don't be suckered into any ideas that other people are people. The Holy One's will tell you what you need to know and believe. Doesn't matter if they are elected or appointed by God, they know better. Blacks aren't really human, they just play the role on TV. Same with all the others who aren't like us real God

fearing folk. You don't have to deal with Democrats, Arabs, gays and so on because they aren't really real. I know it because they don't pay their dues. My real question is, who is keeping track?

Seems to me it boils down to who has the money. Health care? As long as you can pay. How come people get police and fire protection, roads to travel the entire country, oh yeah, those are for the paying customers. If you live in a cardboard box and don't have a cell phone you are probably under the radar. If you have a modicum of intelligence and can buy the plan, you get covered...sort of.

It is such a wonderful thing that the world is so black and white (meaning the contrast, not the ethnicity). And the best thing is if you are right, you don't have to worry about the wrong because...its wrong. Polarization is such a comforting thing, don't you think? Makes choices so simple. They, whoever They may be, are wrong and I am right. Screw them. My one question is if you dehumanize those who are wrong, does that make it bestiality?

I've never been clear on that one.

Individual

adjective

1. separate and distinct from others of the same kind; mark the individual pages; on a case-by-case basis;
2. concerning one person exclusively; we all have individual cars; each room has a private bath;
3. characteristic of or meant for a single person or thing; an individual serving; separate rooms; single occupancy; a single bed;
4. being or characteristic of a single thing or person; individual drops of rain; please mark the individual pages; they went their individual ways;

The rights of each individual person in society has somehow come to mean that the individual exists outside of society. That somehow every individual has rights that are separate and distinct from others of the same kind. That each individual is a person, exclusively, with the characteristics that are unique to them being sacrosanct. Sounds wonderful and very utopian. Everyone gets to do whatever they uniquely decide they wish to do. Whenever they choose to do so.

So which individual made this happen? George? Tom? James? Ben? John? Patrick? Which individual signed the Declaration of Independence making it law? Of course, that would only be law for the person who signed it because anyone else would have had to sign their own personal Declaration.

Which individual fought the Revolutionary War? Rambo?

Which individual has fought all our wars? And why was he so selfless to fight for all those other individuals who couldn't be bothered? Or was it she?

Which individual built all the roads and dams?

Which individual does all the medical research?

Makes all the cars?

Educates the kids?

Grows the crops?

And what happens when an individual decides killing people is a fun past time?

Or that selling tainted food is just fine?

Or they can hire children to work in factories?

Or they can drill oil wells they can't control that poison an entire Gulf?

The fact is the individual is only as important and sacred as a single cell in the human body. It cannot exist without the body providing the environment with many other cells, working together to make it all work. And a single cell going rogue can cause immense damage when it ceases to realize its continued existence is dependent on all the other cells around it.

We enjoy personal freedoms because our entire society stands together to insure those rights and freedoms exist. No single human can exist entirely on it's own. It is the United States of America, not a Bunch of Individuals Doing Whatever They Want. If someone wants to rationalize selfishness, move to Somalia.

IQ

For some silly reason there appears to be a media topic about IQ these days. Supposedly Obama hits at 139. Slick Willy is at 189 or 159, depending on the site you visit. JC is at 156, Tricky Dick 155. Average IQ runs around 100 and depending on your source, anything over 125 is considered exceptional or even genius. Granted that the term genius is sort of politically incorrect these days. According to one source we have never had a President less than 125 on the scale. According to others, the Shrub is down in the 91 category and since the IQ quotient test idea only dates back to the 1920's, a great number of Presidential IQ's can only be estimated. For that matter, the vast majority of IQ's are only a guess because most people have never taken a valid IQ test.

Back in the 60's it was something of a fad in the school systems, like speed-reading and such. I'd be willing to guess that unless you were in the public school system in the 60's you probably have no real idea of your own IQ. And that most people these days have a very vague idea of what it actually means. A real basic definition is that it is a measure of what you can know or learn. Not how smart you are, a real ambiguous term, but what you can do in the intellectual realm. A measure of what you could know. I've always suspected if one is too high on the scale reality starts to disappear. Too low and it isn't perceptible.

For the most part I see people with IQ's above 125 and below 160 as the prime movers in our world. They are bright

enough to perceive new things yet still strongly attached to reality. If the majority of our Presidents have been in that range it is a good theory. What I wonder about is what it means in our daily life. What is life like for those in the exceptional range? Those who are bright enough to go beyond the mundane daily stuff?

It's a Good Thing...

That there is no such thing as some secret cabal of wealthy types who would be willing to make long range plans aimed at modifying America as a nation to enable them to get richer and more powerful. This would be a very scary thing. We are so incredibly lucky that nothing like that could happen in the US.

But it would make for a real riveting suspense novel if say this evil group were to use their money and power to slowly influence our society with such concepts as blocking national health and manipulating the existing system from nonprofit to profit based. And then maybe begin to erode the education system, starting with cutting the various humanities and arts programs while encouraging sports programs, especially football. During this period they would begin explaining to everyone how the government was ineffective and not to be trusted. Maybe they could throw in some extra-curricular activities in foreign countries, maybe a baby invasion or two, just to remind people that while inept, the government was needed to protect us from such threats as Grenada and Panama.

Then, after they had run up a deficit and been voted out of control they could spend 8 years on useless but expensive investigations in order to block the effectiveness of the other side. And when that doesn't work, they could try something more drastic such as impeachment or even stealing an election. That would open the door to manufacturing the absolute perfect

wet dream of their greedy militaristic minds...the perfect war. No real enemies, just products of their nasty imaginations.

Now we add another decade of deficit spending to undo the repair done by the previous administration, a couple of wars with mercenaries and torture, the whole time telling America is what has to be to keep them safe. Then, when that damage is done, we get two choices for President...a woman and a black man because the idiots they put up were never intended to win. What followed would be sickening. A 24/7, full media blitz decrying the demise of America.

And to make all this possible we would have some serious groundwork. Slowly but surely inuring the American public to the ideas of violence. Full scale promotion of football to replace the namby pamby America's sport of baseball, right down to the grade school level eventually. Increased violence in movies. A shift in TV entertainment from variety shows and comedies to ever increasing harsh dramas. Start a trend of having America laughing at itself with AFHM and move on to reality shows depicting ever increasing levels of selfish behaviors. All of this in the name of increased profits.

There would be lots more ways of basically converting the US into a giant Petri dish for breeding sociopaths. Rewarding people for selfish behavior while denigrating everything else would be common. Our heroes would become shallow, selfish types who either 'beat the system' or excel in behavior that makes them wealthy, no matter what the cost.

It's a damn good thing nothing like this has happened in America.

The Jading of America

Jade. A semi-precious stone found throughout the world that comes in several colors. Or a disreputable or flirtatious girl. Noun form. As a verb it means to wear out or dull through repetition or excess. I'm going with the verb form, obviously.

Remember back when Rob and Laura slept in separate beds? Or when Alfred made one of the scariest movies of all time in black and white with no graphical violence shown? Into the 60's TV and movies were severely constrained about what was allowed to be shown on camera. In the evolution of public entertainment we have come quite a ways but in a very telling fashion. Explicit sex is still considered pornography though the occasional titty or butt is allowed in a movie. If you are paying to see the movie. Violence? Name your poison, ladies and gentlemen. Dismemberment with chainsaws, axes, machine guns? No problem. Movies depicting graphic violence and death may carry an R rating but show even a fraction of sex? We have been slowly but surely jaded to the idea that violence is bad. It has become an accepted part of our society.

Politicians lie. Pretty much what everyone thinks. For the past 50 years we have been exposed to this idea as an accepted fact. Only the most innocent and naïve think the promises of a politician on the campaign trail are worth anything more than tepid beetle spit. We have been trained to not only accept major failings in our politicians but to expect them. Somehow the idea that someone elected to represent us in government should be held to higher standards has slipped by the wayside. They aren't just human in their failings, they are to be massive in them. They are larger than life and so their failings should be as well. There used to be expectations that if a person accepted greater responsibility, they did so because of a greater strength, a capacity to carry that load. And when they stumbled, they were not only held accountable, they held themselves accountable.

Once upon a time war was viewed as a last resort, something to be pushed into when all else failed. Now it has become a tool. With the public jaded, immunized to violence, combat and aggression have slipped over into the diplomatic toolbox. And the military has adapted video game violence as a recruiting tool. We have been sold out, sold down the river, manipulated to the point where tactics used by the Nazis in the

1930's are fresh. As a nation, we have committed war crimes and we have people out there selling it like OxyClean. We have a national media, owned by corporate interests, spouting propaganda on the air waves and no one calling foul. We have millions suffering from a lack of health care and a Congress ignoring the public to protect the profits of the companies growing fat, like leeches, on the blood of Americans.

We have a government, bought and paid for by corporate interests, fighting to retain their position of privilege at the expense of the people they are supposed to represent. And we have no one in the streets protesting. We have a jaded public, clutching their cellphones, their Ipods while they bleed. We have people either cheering or bemoaning the people of Iran for their efforts from the heated driver seat of their SUV. What we have is a nation that has sold their soul, allowed their birth right to be taken and abused and all they are concerned about is whether prices at WalMart stay low. Yes, we have become jaded. The process has been gradual but very effective. If there is one thing the US stands for these days, one positive thing, I would love to hear what it is.

Just Add Water & Microwave...

Many years ago one had to put water in a pan, wait for it to boil and then add rolled oats. After stirring for a bit (I'm not quite old enough to remember how long it took) you would get oatmeal. Then Quaker came along with Quick Quaker Oats. Essentially the same preliminaries, they just cooked in a couple of minutes. Then, thanks to NASA, the microwave was born and making oatmeal could be done in a single bowl in about two minutes. And oatmeal is only the tip of the iceberg. Since the 60's the US has been hell bent on bringing K rations to the American table in the name of saving time. It certainly can't be because veterans so loved the things that they missed them.

Seriously, it was the birth of the movement to make Americans slaves to time. They have slowly but surely sold the idea that we need to pack as much as we can into every waking moment, efficiently using every second to maximize our return on our time investment. Work, where this greedy monster was born, obviously led the way. We can thank ole Henry Ford for that one. While this concept has some very valid and useful points, the problem came when it became the sole reason, the dictator of business operation. Maximized throughput with the enhanced bottom line. Yeah, baby, that will make your business thrive providing management also takes into consideration the fact that the people who do the work are not just another piece of machinery.

That is the part that has been taken out of the equation over the past 30 years. People are not machines. Nor do machines totally run themselves. Nor can machines do everything. The respect for the efforts of labor has been degraded to the point where it is treated like a commodity. If you don't like working here, you can and will be replaced. And with the population rising and the number of jobs falling it is true. Someone can always be found who is so desperate for a job that they are willing to do just about anything to put food on the table.

This worship of saved time is an aspect of the recovery of America has to be revisited. Instant gratification is killing us. Our corporations have to return to balancing short-term profits against long term sustainability. This doesn't just apply to things like safety and environmental impact but also to building a working partnership between labor and management that is mutually beneficial and respects both. The obscene disparity between top management compensation and labor wages has to end. The idea that labor is disposable has to end. The really bad part is that it has taken 30 years for this high profit, right now school of management to become ingrained in our business

society and there appears to be no reason that management would willingly revise their attitude.

It will probably take a major economic collapse and it will happen. The present system is unsustainable. History has proven it many times. A civilized intelligent society monitors itself and works to keep the pendulum from shifting too far in either direction. Our pendulum has been forced so far right that when it cuts loose it will be more of a wrecking ball and with the Republicans back in control of the House I foresee the pendulum being forced even further right, accelerating the impending crash timeline.

It is real difficult to fix major problems fast enough to satisfy the instant society we have become. But the bad things? Yup, those can happen overnight. Just take a shaky economy, add Republicans and you won't even need a microwave.

Just Maybe

I have a very bad feeling about all this. It is like watching one of those cheezy horror flicks where you are screaming at the idiot..."Don't open that door!" Anyone with even a little sense knows that the monster is just waiting on the other side.

It is hard to believe that Americans have such a small sense of history. Especially when they are being reminded of it every day. The comparisons to what is happening in the US today to the events of 1930's Germany are chilling. A populace, hammered down by unemployment and a sinking economy with a reasonably decent government trying to turn things around. A party with no sense of morals exploiting the fear, preaching racism and violence, telling the down trodden they only way out is to attack the rest of the world because they are exceptional and deserving. Yeah, it isn't even the Cliff Notes version but it covers the basics.

For some odd reason, no one cares to think about what our government has been doing for the past 50 years or so. Or rather, a clandestine group working through our government, hiding behind the screen of national security. These jokers have been responsible for the destabilization of more countries, engineering take overs and coups to install puppet regimes that are 'friendly' to the US than any other, including the USSR. In other words, willing to run their countries into the ground so that the privileged few at the top can get rich.

Now, it seems, they are bringing their game home. The Republicans are stalling everything they can in order that the economy doesn't recover too quickly. They are flat out lying to the people, harping on every little insecurity they can while wrapping themselves in the flag. They are claiming divine right and getting away with it even when their leaders are displaying immoral behavior that would make a buzzard retch. Fear is their weapon of choice and not enough people realize the source of the stuff to be afraid of is the very group telling them to wet their pants.

They are deliberately undermining the authority of the President with every sort of ridiculous lie. They have trashed our legal system to the point where Americans are claiming torture is both legal and necessary. We have war criminals bragging on national television and pundits cheering them on. And they are only a teeny step away from fomenting open rebellion. I fear we will see violence in our streets before the end of the year and when it happens, the Republicans will be out there calling for more. We are being set up for a coup and have been manipulated by the masters into not even seeing it coming. It can't happen in America.

Yup, and I will be happy to make you a heck of a deal on a bridge.

There are a couple of other aspects to this that probably really shove this into tinfoil land. One is, as a country with have been indoctrinated with two basic concepts. The first is our

government is basically good and incapable of treating Americans in a devious fashion. After all, we are all working towards the same goal. Believing anything else is some sort of whacky conspiracy. The other is a sort of codicil to the first. Corporate interests are driven by the same nationalistic ideology. The problem is the big money is all multinational these days. Nationalism and patriotism have been replaced by ideology and market. Business is global and beyond any one country.

Memorial Day

The President sat behind his desk, reading again the reports and proposals for the Defense budget and the explanations behind the need to maintain armed US presence in various far flung corners of the globe. All were both concise and verbose in their declarations. Due to US interests, the actions in the Middle East were deemed vital to the continued existence of the US economic system. Major campaign donors were encouraging an increase in two countries in particular where the locals were beginning to make noises that sounded very democratic and threatened the current governments which were friendly to US interests. The President laid the reports down and leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes for a moment's respite. In another hour he was due to appear at the Arlington National Cemetery to commemorate the sacrifices of the nation's fallen warriors.

He truly felt the need to make this speech. When he was elected, he wanted to do what was right and end the wars that were draining the very life blood from the country. That was how he wanted to honor the battle wearied fallen. But the business of politics was not to be denied. Even if he had been willing to hold to those principles and be a single term President, he knew if he brought all the troops home and ended the wars, he would face a major uprising at home. And quite possibly harm to himself

and his family from the falsely generated rage against a President who was a pacifist, who wouldn't fight for his country.

"Mr. President?"

He looked up to see his National Security advisor standing in the door to the Oval Office.

"Yes?"

"Sir, we have a problem."

The President snorted. "When don't we?"

"No sir, we have a big problem. In the past two hours, American currency has suddenly turned red."

"Is this some sort of joke?"

"I wish it was. Not only has it turned red but it has taken on a slippery, wet texture."

"Where is this happening?"

The NSA coughed and held his hands up.

"Everywhere, sir."

The President took his wallet from his pocket and pulled some bills out. They were indeed red and coated with a viscous substance that had a disturbing coppery smell. Looking closer, he saw the familiar visage of Andy Jackson had been replaced with that of man in an Army helmet. Fanning through the bills he saw that each had the image of a soldier in the uniforms of various wars.

He looked at his advisor, his concern slowly turning to horror as the blood dripped from his money onto his hands and desk.

"What the hell is this?"

"Honey? Wake up! You're having a bad dream."

The President sat up in bed, his heart pounding and his body covered in a cold sweat. His wife held his arm, her concern etched on her face as the dream slowly faded and his pulse returned to normal.

"What was it?" she asked.

Before the President could answer there was a knock on the door and his National Security advisor entered.

"Mr. President, we have a problem."

A Whole Mess

of Stupid. Yessiree, Bob. Been makin it right here in America for bout 50 year. Mebbe longer but we didn't git serious bout it til real recent. Took us that long to sneak up on folks so's they didn't get all riled up. Yessir, been dumbing folks down little bit at a time and sellin em pie-in-the-sky so now they got doodly squat in their pockets and fer some, less than that in their heads.

Sort a like you comin in this here cafe and orderin yogurt and fruit and a bran muffin. And now yer complaining cuz I set down one of the finest plates of biscuits and gravy ever served. Lemme tell you, bud, ole Cookie, he was a cook in the Army and our boys dearly loved his biscuits and gravy so you best just pipe down and support the troops. Heckfire, I know you didn't order it but its your patriotic duty to eat what gets put in front of you.

What's that? Well, I guess you could take your bizness elsewhere. My cousin Billy owns the next place down the street and Aunt Lou has a diner in the next town so you might git something different there. Doubt it though. See, we done figgered out that if everybody gits fed the same, they come to 'spect it. Boy howdy, ain't it jest grand how you can go jest about anywhere's in the whole US of A and find you the zact same food waitin fer ya? Same clothes, same groceries, same jest about everything. See, we done figgered it was too damn hard on folks if they had to go and think about makin choices, we just set things up so's they'd be made fer em so's folks could git on with the important stuff like where ta spend a car payment on a night out jest a pushin 'n shovin to listen to some clown sing or watch a buncha folks chase a ball around.

Now don't you go gitting all upset about them sick folks who cain't git health care. If God didn't want them to be sick, they wouldn't be. Sides, if they had more gumption they'd be takin care of their own selves. And you jest know God knows what he's talkin bout, 'specially since he's done got him so many people gitting paid big money to git his word out.

Aw, now you done let yer food git cold. No nevermind, we got a whole messa stupid jest awaiting to dish out. Maybe we cain't sell it to furriners but we done got us a real captive market right here at home.

Moral Ethics

Or Ethical Morality. It has always bothered me that these things, taken separately or together (though I have a difficult time doing so) have been the bailiwick of organizations and schools of thought, which claim, divine prominence. At least here in the Western world. Why must these things come from outside, dictated by external authority? I know the Church has spent centuries building the case for this and ramming it down the throats of society with many claims of hellfire and damnation. It doesn't say much for humanity that they have accepted this *without one shred of proof*. Not to mention many exhibitions of proof to the contrary. It has been my observation that when something is true, it finds its way into our reality whether we humans want to accept it or not. Nor does it matter to the truth if mankind believes it or not. Nor does the irony of it escape me.

An example of this is the present move to ban gay marriage contracts. I can understand why the religious organizations might find ways of taking offense so if they want to keep their dogma from blessing, sanctifying or whatever these unions, that is their right. But the last time I checked we had a nation where Church and State are separate. Freedom of religion also includes freedom from religion. The legal process of entering into a

contract is one of the core building blocks of democracy. Not that long ago other types of people were prevented from doing this and these egregious wrongs have slowly but surely been corrected. Women can now participate, as can blacks, Hispanics, Asians. It wasn't that long ago that society felt it immoral for people of different races to intermarry. This whole magilla is just more of the same blind prejudice. It is evidence that morality and ethics are not divinely inspired and enforced. Just as it is evidence that people are so very selective about what they believe to be God's will. If they were truly interested in the moral fiber of this country they would be more concerned about the fact that about half of all marriages end in divorce (What God has joined, let no man sunder) than the idea of a tiny number of people wanting to exercise their civil rights by making a contract between them that allows tax breaks, rights of certain legal powers (next of kin) and trying to provide a stable home atmosphere.

This happens when responsibility for either morals or ethics is not personal. It opens the door for such silliness as; everyone else is doing it or if I want to be accepted by (insert whatever group you want) I have to subscribe to their tenets. It is compounded when the sources of these morals and ethics have split in so many ways that it is impossible to find much continuity in the original concepts. Sort of like being a Democrat. There is no source so people make it up as they go along, picking and choosing from the limited and ambiguous guidelines to make things work for them. Usually in the short term. And the groups that are supposed to have the true skinny either change their tune to pander to the childish needs of the moment or fall back on the inflexible dogma that made the mess possible in the first place. This what happens when people abdicate their personal responsibilities. Christianity made this particular bed and it is slowly coming around that it is a most uncomfortable and useless one.

Part of the problem today is communication. As the song said..."Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication." It has only been in the last century that information of all sorts was made available for mass consumption. And only in the past decade or so that it has surpassed human capability to process. Prior to the printing press, people had to depend on their local padre to tell them what was in the Bible. This kept a nice captive audience. For local news it was minstrels and merchants who traveled and dispersed news that didn't come through the Church. A very slow process and easily contained and controlled. That the bulk of humanity in Europe was illiterate helped as well. Don't worry, chilluns, we will tell you everything you need to know. Which isn't much.

So enter the printing press. And Martin Luther. Now Martin was not the first to try and reform the Church. He was just luckier because he came along just after Gutenberg came up with the printing press. With information beginning to flow people were exposed to more ideas and the novel concept of thinking began to show its ugly head among the masses. It was the beginning of the end for the nice closed system the Church had built, an end that is finally coming to fruition now 500 years later. The main difficulty today is that nothing has risen to replace the old way, which is why we have this void of morality and ethics today. Organized religion is still fighting to retain old patterns that can never work in this modern age rather than searching for ways to make it grow. They are battling to keep Christianity a child when it is time for it to become an adult. Instead of embracing all of the writings of the early Christian era, they insist it isn't needed. They don't see that something has to not only be allowed to grow, it must be nurtured and encouraged to do so. Maybe mankind in the 5th century wasn't ready for more of the information.

I personally find this to be blatant apologistic nonsense ranking right up there with our present government classifying information 'too dangerous' for general dissemination. It isn't

that the people can't know these things; it is that it would upset the power structure's applecart. The idea that we should live our lives based on some mythical concept of later just isn't cutting it like it used to. We know too much. And in some very critical areas, too little because the whole spiritual, moral, ethical aspect of man has been held in forced stagnation. Whether or not Jesus was divine really has little bearing on his message. What the afterlife will be has no impact on what now is anymore than what an individual will be ten years from now has any impact on what they are today.

That is the heart of the problem. Everyone has exactly the same amount of time on this planet, in this existence. Now. Some get to string their nows into longer runs than others but this moment is all we get to deal with at any given time. This has been construed as a bad thing under the belief that people would become selfish and immoral if all they have to work with is now. It may be partly true because it has been pounded into our heads that this would be so. That people would be capable of enlightened self-interest without threat or coercion is hard for the powers that be to comprehend. The very idea that a person would choose to see that certain types of behavior would be beneficial to both themselves and others without being threatened scares the willies of them. Even the precious Commandments. Thou shalt not Kill. Duh. It doesn't take most people long to figure out that killing is a bad thing. And if you perceive that we are all the same, based in the same shard of the divine, it isn't much of a stretch to see that killing someone else is not only wrong and counter-productive, it just might happen to you as well. Same goes for all of the other Commandments with the exception of the first couple.

Taking the Lord's name in vain...since we don't know the name, how can we? And why would it matter anyhow? The idea we can damn someone just by saying it is beyond ludicrous. We just don't have that authority.

Keep holy the Lord's day...just which one is it? The business of a calendar is something man developed to make some sense out of the string of nows. There are many calendars out there and even the one we use in the West is horribly flawed. Seems to me, everyday is so setting one up with eminence is just another means of providing a point of dissension. Another way of separating or dividing. Like we need more ways.

So, if we are all children of God, made in his image, all equal in his eyes, etc., etc., etc., why are we not capable of accepting that responsibility? Why are we not encouraged to look within, to find that divine nature and follow it to where it must inevitably lead? Is it such a horrible stretch to think that if we truly come to realize we are all the same, we just might be able to behave in an ethical and moral manner because it just makes sense to do so? And why do the keepers of morality find it so strange and unsettling that people choose to behave in immoral and unethical ways when that is exactly the example being presented to them? We have those who set themselves up as authorities on said behavior who do not practice it. Or rather tend to follow their own brand of morality that is steeped in contradiction. To this day the Catholics still hold that theirs is the true faith and non-Catholic's are destined for hell. Protestants are pretty similar in their foolishness. It doesn't seem to bother them that they are setting themselves up as judges and ruling in an area they have no authority to rule.

There is not a soul on this planet who has any say whatsoever as to the dispensation of any other soul. What they do have the ability to do is maintain artificial standards by which people can be judged. They do have the capability of manufacturing and reinforcing differences because people have been trained to think they do. I would imagine most thinking humans on this planet have found themselves in a situation where they discovered that another human who is supposed to be on the outside is actually very much like themselves. It is a common and powerful theme in literature and media. Sort of a

rite of passage. The young white man who discovers a colored is really a human being. The (whatever religion you care to name) who discovers that the person of whatever religion happens to contradict the first suffers the same pain, dreams the same dreams. It happens over and over in every culture. Its why war seldom lasts long. One, people are not killers by nature. Two, as the two adversaries meet and blend, they come to realize their differences are not all that great. And it takes a truly sick individual to be able to maintain the ability to cause pain and death.

Every difference that has been used to cause conflict has been man made for quite some time. The old conflicts at the tribal level for resources have long ceased to be the basis for fighting. We no longer fight because we need food or water. It isn't even the idea of protecting said resources. Conflicts are mostly based on misplaced pride and ego. Race, nationality, religious belief are all manmade and have a distinct tendency to be very ephemeral in nature and yet we keep using them as a basis to assert superiority. The only thing that keeps us from total self destruction is the time proven fact that negative behavior is always self correcting. And positive behavior (no matter how self-centered and narrow) causes growth.

Case in point...the two wars in Europe in the 20th century. The first was caused pretty much by arrogant nationalism coupled with some strange imperialistic ideas. When the bad guys lost, the good guys behaved very badly and continued to punish said baddies thus setting the stage for the big ugliness of the second war. Most everybody agrees that this war was justified (from the Allied side of things at least). Granted, if the Germans and the Japanese had succeeded their success would have made the world a less pleasant place to live but their ultimate goals were self defeating. The German ideals of Aryan supremacy were foredoomed for the simple reason there were not enough of the type to ever establish and maintain supremacy. The Japanese ideals were similarly narrow and

unsupportable for long term societal survival. But the good news was we learned from the first war that you can't keep punishing and not expect bad things to come of it. Sort of like spanking a child repeatedly for misbehaving. After the first time, it either builds resentment or breaks the spirit. Neither positive in nature.

Another example is the Soviet Union. Lenin and company 'telescoped the revolution' and forced the birth of a government. And for about 80 years they had to use force to maintain said government until it collapsed under its own weight. Does this mean Marx was wrong in his theories? No. It means that Lenin and his successors didn't really follow what Marx said and they paid the price. I've always thought it ironic that Marxist theory and Christian concepts were so similar, one with God, one without.

But the telling part of all this is that whenever a government or society focuses on things that are beneficial for the greatest number and works at the idea of equality, said societies flourish. When they narrow the focus and encourage divisive thought and behavior, things go in the toilet. We are, at present, in one of those cycles. We have a segment of society that is indulging in very selfish behavior and it is wearing us down. The Haves are doing a very creditable job of justifying their having and are going to continue until some major event causes societal breakdown. Odds are this will come in the form of a depression that will make the one in the late 20's look like a tea party and I expect it to happen in my lifetime. Greed and callousness are clear negative behaviors and they cannot survive for long. We learned in the first third of the last century that imperialism and plutocracy are not self-sustaining. Nor is a society unevenly divided. And if anyone cared to study history, they would find this to be true in even the most primitive of cultures. The only ones that survive are the ones that adapt to concepts of equality, sharing and mutual support.

New Listing

'Offered by Galactic Realty and priced to move. One humanoid inhabitable world, only 14 billion years old. A bit off the beaten track, this planet would make a great summer home or that getaway planet for relaxing. It's about 2/3 surface water coverage will provide years of relaxing fun and the wide variations in topography and climate that spice for the jaded residents of the world wide multiplexes of Arcturus and Betelguese. It is a bit of a fixer upper though. The present tenants have been lax in upkeep but nothing a couple megacreds and a thousand years can't fix.'

Makes for an interesting ad, doesn't it? It really is such a crying shame that the planet is getting so run down. One would think the Divine Being would have built it to last more than a paltry 6,000 years. We all know that humans have no discernible impact on the Earth and that any problems that exist are a direct result of negligence on the deity's part. Some will say this is punishment for sinning. Others will say it is all part of a mysterious plan that will result in God turning on his giant Hoover and sucking up the faithful to their heavenly reward. Myself, I always figured when you break out the vacuum cleaner you are cleaning up the trash and detritus before company comes over.

It is pretty obvious that man has had no effect on the planetary environment. Everything is exactly as it was 6,000 years ago. The water is as pristine and clear, the skies as unsmudged. We all know man built Cleveland where they did so they could have a ring side seat to the first spontaneous ignition of a river. And it was definitely the smog that drew mankind to all of the major cities where they now dwell. God clearly wanted us to evolve so that we could consume the deadly cocktail his efforts have wrought on the water table. All the creatures that have become extinct did so as a result of God's plan, though why he wanted all those passenger pigeons in heaven is beyond me.

I suspect the best is yet to come. God has to have a sense of humor. Why else would he make our world like a giant spinning top with big chunks of ice on top and bottom to balance it? Why else would he float the entire crust over a molten center like a ginormous chocolate covered cherry? Ever play with a top as a kid? It is entirely possible we are going to find out what happens when you change the balance of the top by removing the counter balances in an unequal fashion. I'm hoping it doesn't happen for another couple hundred years but mankind is rather impatient. We may get to find out if the Big Guy really does appreciate us treating his gift to us like a lot in a cheezy trailer park with a run down double wide, 3 junk cars, several busted appliances and an up ended bath tub with a plaster statue in it.

Or maybe some nice alien will answer the ad first.

Our Father,

who art in heaven

(Say hi to Art for me and tell him he still owes me ten bucks)

Hallowed be they name.

(I suppose God is shorter)

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

(So how did you get a lawyer in heaven to write up that will?
Oh, that's right, you're God.)

in earth as it is in heaven.

(Forget the gold streets then?)

Give us this day our daily bread

(Give? You mean in like not pay? You going commie?)

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass
against us.

(Now you are starting to piss me off. Those brown terrorist types started it.)

And lead us not into temptation

(I can find my way to the bingo hall.)

but deliver us from evil

(thanks for making me remember to make that flight to BA round trip)

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever.

(And we are gonna help by blowing up all those places and people that just can't get it right.)

Amen.

Perceptions

It's what life is about. Our perceptions of the world around us. For centuries those perceptions have been focused on the material world, and more specifically the importance of gathering things in the material world. Nationality, race, religion and economic status have driven this world for most of recorded history. Civilizations have risen, expanded and spread their influence until we are where we are today. We have had a plethora of philosophers who have added their two bits to the perceptions of the world. The same can be said of religions, governments and scientists. Each spouts its perceptions of what is and what is important and the herd follows.

What if it is all a myth? The power brokers throughout history have fought hard to maintain their myths and they have broken down, crumbled only to be picked up again from a different direction. Same shit, different day. What if it is all a manifestation of ego? The idea that every living being on the planet is a uniquely created entity that will continue throughout eternity is fallacious. If this is true, the massive exponential expansion of human population dictates that there is a soul factory someplace cranking out people at a phenomenal rate.

Every person that ever existed still exists as a soul in Heaven and God just keeps turning them out.

What if we are not a perfectly unique entity? What if the soul is not created for each birth but rather there are collections of energy that persevere? Everyday life says this is more likely. We all start life with a very basic set of tools and as we grow we add and subtract things to make ourselves into a new entity. Sort of a cosmic game of Gin Rummy. The Hindu ideas about karma and reincarnation touch on this. The more good karma we collect, the closer we get to 'going out' or achieving Nirvana. If we collect bad karma, we go backwards to a less complex energy form to try again. The idea of being reincarnated as a cockroach for being really good at collecting bad karma is a bit extreme but makes some sense.

These days scientists are probing the mechanics of the mind in order to figure out if consciousness is merely a biological process. Not surprising because science has been at polar odds with religion for all of recorded history. They are discovering some interesting things like there appears to be more to the idea of mind and body being less separable than previously thought. Duh. There might even be a possibility that science may come in from the weeds at their end of the field to accept a more centrist position. As resources dwindle I'm thinking scientists will be the vanguard for finding the way to the need for a simpler life. Not out of some altruistic impulse but because of cold hard facts. It is slowly becoming apparent this planet hasn't the resources to supply enough people with enough goodies for it to be possible for everyone to have the gaudy ostentatious life styles of modern Western civilization. And that said lifestyles can and are destroying the very planet.

Religions are of no help. The anthropomorphic Western ones are stuck in centuries old dogma and blind to their own failings. The idea that God is going to spank evildoers in the next life doesn't have the ability to contain said doings in this life like it once did. People have learned that the supposed reward and

punishment system espoused by religions is hokum. Power corrupts. It feeds the perceptions of ego. Good rarely shows clear rewards because they are not the things we have come to perceive as rewards. Rewards are money, power, control, things. They are immediate and blatant. Having a reserved front row seat in Heaven just doesn't compete with a new Lexus now. Face it, people are smarter than they used to be and ethereal bogeymen are pretty laughable.

Somewhere along the line we are going to have to seriously look at the reality of life and the world. The Buddhists have a good start. Henry Thoreau went in a good direction. More is not better. Bigger is not better. We have all the evidence we need to prove it if we would simply see it. Life has to be about balance and coexistence. It has to be about harmony and true perception. Ego has no place in it. There just simply isn't one entity that is more important to the continued existence of this world than any other. Not in the long run. No individual creature, no nationalistic state, no religious belief, no race, nothing is right and indispensable. You can't remove or isolate or even define what life is. Life is the gestalt at any given moment of the totality of everything. No component defines it. It is the whole magilla and it is up to us to find our place in it. Odds are it won't be the control position. We have the ability to comprehend and manipulate beyond any other creature, which we have taken as license to do as we wanted. What we are slower to recognize is with power goes responsibility. The nice thing is life has its own ways of pointing this out. Things like plagues, global warming, natural disasters and such help to remind us that while we have a little power there is a greater one. Our egos tell us we are the boss, unique and privileged. Reality says we are tolerated.

The idea that the world will continue without mankind is one we don't even consider. It got along just fine without us in the past and if we really muck things up it will show us how truly fragile we are. There will be no negotiation, no warning shots beyond those already evident, it will just happen. Maybe it will be

a new bug or a variation on an old one. The bubonic plague has worked nicely in the past when man neglects to keep his house clean. Or maybe it will be a couple of nice volcanoes. We have already done a nice job of weakening the atmosphere and volcanic gases could accelerate the process of providing an autoclave effect for the planet. Or good old nuclear winter. You see, this planet has been through the cleansing process several times. Since man wasn't around to do it slowly, nature provided its own means. Asteroid hits are pretty impressive as are major tectonic shifts. By crippling or weakening the environment we provide fertile ground for the effects to be magnified.

We also help by our habit of gathering in large numbers in small areas. A very large percentage of the world's population is focused in a fairly small geographical area. And this trend towards corporate farms is playing right along with it. In the last decade in the US alone we have lost a great number of family farms. And we have seen the centralization of food production. If the trend continues we will have paralyzed our ability to provide our own food. And given a prime stranglehold target to anyone bright enough to blow spit bubbles. I think it is a hoot that Homeland Security focuses so much attention on airports and old ladies with nail scissors when it would be incredibly easy to hit the factory farms and starve us out. The damned things may be advantageous to big corporate profits but they are incredibly stupid.

Personals

Ah, life has changed so much in the past years. Once upon a time the personals were encoded bits of oddness stuck in the grocery store tabloids. Things like NSDWF seeks man with lobotomy and large check book. Or maybe HSHDM seeks woman who owns a liquor store with IQ under 70. Half the fun was trying to decipher the code. The other half was wondering if the

person behind you in the checkout line wrote one of the weirder ones.

Now it has become big business with psychological profiles and TV ads. Over the past 7 years I have dabbled in the online dating sites. At first it was pure frustration, anger and loneliness. I probably still have profiles on sites that have been gathering cyber mold for years. I was naïve enough to think people actually wrote true things. I am sure there are some but now I read them from time to time just for fun. I've been tempted to check out the male profiles to see if they get it any better but...nah. I really don't care that much. I'll just assume they fit into similar patterns to the women's.

Probably the biggest share are the Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm types. Their profiles are all sunshine and light, they like to do most things and are looking for a man of similar makeup to share their lives. Now I'm working with the 40+ crowd here so the vast majority of them are quite probably divorced. One must assume the reason they are single again is because the previous guy wasn't Robert Taylor in his Ivanhoe suit. I'm thinking that the sweet decent guy they seek just may have gone gay by now. Romance has never been a particularly strong trait in males and those who do suffer from it need to have it revitalized on a regular basis. Bottom line, if they are so nice, why are they on a singles site?

Then you have the Man's Woman. Drives a big assed truck, likes to hunt and fish (one of my favorites are the ones who put the little caveat in that he has to take the fish off the hook), own a Harley and ATV, hike 47 miles before breakfast (in bare feet, no less) and love to watch action movies. I haven't seen one yet that claims to indiscreet scratching in public places, chewing tobacco or belching but I don't read THAT many profiles. I shouldn't be so cynical but really. Again, who were they with before? A stockbroker who hung out in airports and art galleries? I have a strong suspicion that they intimidate guys because most of them sound like they out guy the best redneck in Kentucky. What guy

wants to stay at home and bake biscuits while his woman brings home the pork?

The real scary ones are the ones who put out a laundry list of what they don't want. No sex crazed drug addicts, no decrepit alcoholics, no abusers or guys with anger issues. If you have ever even heard a tasteless joke, contemplated farting anywhere but a public toilet, so much as glanced at even a picture of another woman on a magazine cover, missed the hamper with a sock or used the wrong fork with the shrimp cocktail, don't bother to reply. Pouncers, just waiting for a guy to screw up and they will. That is the guy will screw up and he will get pounced on and left in such a state that a can of Alpo would be more appetizing. After I get done shivering I can't help but wonder what motivates them to write these things. Not having been on the female side of this singles racket, I'm not sure just what kinds of responses they get.

My favorite ones are the Flakes. They always have the catchiest tag lines, the interesting photos, the best written profiles. They also talk about the strangest things. One of the best was from a gal who was into Chinese Astrology. Said she was interested in roosters, pigs, ducks or maybe even a slick snake. Me, I learned about Chinese astrology from the place mat in my favorite Chinese restaurant. I think I'm a Mule. Or maybe a Horse. But her profile was fun to read. Another made a comment about how she can't abide slobs, following it with a line about turrets syndrome. Give her an A for interesting, a D for spelling.

As to my profile, its about three years old and written in a fit of pique. I'm tempted to redo it. Part of me wants to write how I am a sex crazed maniac who enjoys doing bizarre things to small animals. You know, like send them on a vacation to Tarpon Springs. Lace it with lots of sarcasm, irony, maybe post a picture of Heath Ledger as the Joker as my own. Or maybe something about a moving spiritual experience at the Cathedral in Chartres.

Or maybe I'll just ignore the darn thing, keep reading and chuckling and work on my writing.

Purpose

As a word all by itself, it is sort of odd looking. Incongruous. At a glance one might even read porpoise and wonder what sort of silliness I might be trailing after now. But the word is purpose and the intent is a rather mild rant on several aspects of the word. As in, 'You did that on purpose' or 'Your purpose for doing that is...' and on to the more esoteric ideas about one's purpose in life.

All of my adult life I have done two things with consistency, reading and writing. I have sampled a great of literature both fiction and nonfiction from almost every genre. My writing has tended to stay in the adventure/fantasy realm mostly because it is great fun but I have made the occasional side jaunts into plain old mainstream drama type fiction. For the most part this has been in short story form since I have no real desire to delve in depth into the soap opera format in a longer piece. I prefer to tell a tale for fun while trying to blend in characters who are reasonably real. My problem with longer works is I began my reading career with heroic fantasy and I am afraid I became canalized at a young age. My oldest memories of stories come from ERB, Edgar Rice Burroughs. Tarzan and John Carter were the original templates for heroes and ERB's style of putting his heroes through ridiculously tortured plots and bringing everyone out in a HEA ending was the baseline I learned. As I grew and my list of authors lengthened (and my life experience expanded) I began to see there was more to life and fiction than that.

What I learned is life isn't about HEA (Happily Ever After). Nor is fiction. The purpose of a tale is not to always lay everything out, answer every question and tie off all of the loose ends. Some of the best stories I've read did something much more important. They made me think. Granted, there are times when we like to read a book that is nicely contained. It is relaxing

and reassuring to see good triumph over evil, to watch the good guy get the gal (or vice versa) and have things fall nicely into place. This seems to be the general idea for writing today...give the people what they want. Keep them entertained but for god's sake don't make them think.

For me there are two reasons for writing. One is expression and the second entertainment. The expression business involves unloading various ideas and emotions that clutter up the landscape of me. Sometimes its pleasant, other times it can get intense. That is where the entertainment aspect of it comes in. Anyone who thinks writers write to entertain the masses has never felt the real urge to write. They are either brain dead or mechanics. There are lots of people out there who can join words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs and express thoughts in such a way. They understand the mechanics of writing, the structure and definition of words. This isn't anything to be sneezed at in this day and age. But there really are two types of writing. One is the terse, informative type that has usually been associated with journalism. To me, this is informative writing and the folks who do it are word mechanics. Then there are those who truly indulge in what is loosely called creative writing. They are the wordsmiths. Both groups include artisans, journeymen and apprentices. Both are valuable contributions to the craft. One group supplies information, the other tells stories. Some wordsmiths are capable of being mechanics and a few mechanics can indulge in wordsmithing but the crossover is small in both directions.

Writing is a solitary profession for the most part and incredibly difficult. Most people start out with fragile egos and think about what other people want to read. A true writer learns quickly that writing isn't about ego. Sure it is great to have people who enjoy reading your stuff but the essence of writing is about writing. It's about expressing ideas in your own format whether or not it is understood or accepted. And most people who know writers have learned that to the beginning writer

criticism is difficult to accept, which is true. For a writer to become a writer rather than a dabbler, a dilettante they must learn to hear the comments of readers without taking personal offense. Giving and accepting criticism is something of an art that a writer and those close to him must learn to deal with properly. The truth is writers can survive without proper feedback but they need it to flourish. There are two sources of this feedback. One comes from the general public who buy the stuff to read. Money is a nice form of feedback. The other comes in the formative stages from people who are honest and tell a writer what they think of their work. It isn't always affirming but it helps a writer to build their craft.

So for this rant, the purpose of writing is expression. The purpose of reading is entertainment or information, depending on the writing. Myself, I will continue to write no matter what happens. I enjoy it. For those who read, you get to decide if you wish to continue. Some have provided feedback. All of it has been appreciated and listened to. But a blatant hint, comments are greatly appreciated, whether posted publicly or sent privately.

Quantum Leap

Someday I would like to own the DVDs for the entire Quantum Leap series. And I would sit down and watch it from beginning to end. Yeah, it's a mix of scifi and fantasy and some of it is hokey as heck. But it is also a series that had its moments. A man leaping into his past, righting wrongs. They did a great job with it. Some fun stuff, some touching stuff, some real interesting stuff.

Wouldn't we all like to go back? To at least one spot, one juncture where you would have liked to have made a different choice. Yeah, its impossible but that doesn't negate the dream, does it? Nor does it mean, with all your accrued knowledge that

the second choice would be any different than the first. Its fantasy of the first water. Sort of like wanting to believe in Santa. It doesn't happen, could never work but...

I have been writing stories since about the 7th grade. I have been reading fiction since I was old enough to hold a book. Heroic fantasy, scifi, history, westerns, you name it, I've read it. And wrote it. My heroes always win...sort of. Sometimes they get the girl. Sometimes it's a clear victory but damn seldom. There is always bitter with the sweet. And failure with success. Sort of like life.

Ranch Breakfast

Somewhere in my ponderings I came across a memory of a movie. No huge surprise seeing as how I love movies, particularly the old ones. This one isn't that old; 'The Electric Horseman' from 1979, directed by Sidney Pollack with Bob Redford and Jane Fonda. It's one of my all time favorites. If you haven't seen it, you should try it. It's basically about a 4-time world champion rodeo rider, past his prime searching for himself. There's one scene where Bob and Jane are waking up after spending the night out on the range. Bob is more than a bit stiff from sleeping on the ground and Jane says something about how he's all bent. Redford shoots her a great 'no shit' look and answers that some parts just wake up slower than others.

That seems to be what it is all about. After years of riding the rough string and getting the crap beat out of you for it, some parts just wake up slower than others. You go from some kind of champion, always ready to climb up onto the hurricane deck of a horse they say can't be ridden (and doing it) to where you just sort of dread the idea of one more hell ride. Pride says you can do it again and maybe this time it will end better. Maybe this is the horse that will gentle down, become a partner to ride the range with. Bronco busting is a painful way to make a living. Maybe that is the flaw in the analogy.

And maybe there comes a time when the rider figures out there are other things to do. Maybe it comes from age, maybe experience and maybe it never comes at all. Some people keep getting back in the saddle knowing (or at least suspecting) that the ride is no longer worth it. They know it is going to hurt but unless it kills them, they ride. I can relate to that. Sometimes it's pride, sometimes it's commitment and most of the time it is just plain mulishness. (Rhymes with foolishness...nice little piece of irony). I run long on mule so it has taken me a while but I think I am finally figuring it out. I'm getting tired of hyping Ranch Breakfast, tired of living on dreams and not seeing what is today. Getting back in the saddle again just proves I'm a slow learner and not nearly as smart as some thinkle peep I am...me at the head of the list. It's time to retire from the lists and find a new hobby.

Re-Evolution

Just a new word for what is coming. It isn't just evolution of a society nor will it be just a revolution. But it is coming and it will be ugly. The scales have been tipped too far and when the weight is pushed off, things will swing badly. Of course, that assumes the weight can be pushed off.

The weight is aristocracy, oligarchy, greedy privileged types who have been hogging the cash thanks to unregulated capitalism. The real power in our government. We are in French Revolution territory with a ruling class seeking to maintain its undeserved position of power and privilege that it has achieved by manipulation coupled with the arrogance that their right of accumulation verges on the divine. Just as the French aristocrats felt their nobility was a shield and sword to keep the rabble in their place, under the heel of their betters.

The difference these days is that the aristocracy actually has money whereas the French nobility was notoriously bankrupt. It is entirely possible we are heading into an era where the rich will

be spending their money to hire private armies to protect their interests. Just as they are hiring propagandists to spread their ideology. It is a twisted mix of the Terror and the rise of Hitler.

The money is now promoting protectionist legislation for the banking, investment and credit industries while working at crippling the union portions of the auto industry. It is also protecting profits in the healthcare industry at the expense of the public welfare. Our elected officials are working very hard to make this happen in spite of rising public pressure against it. This says our government has become part of the problem and is not going to be part of the solution. Even with the rising tide outside of Washington that is the progressive movement, the dikes and levees built by money are holding.

And the machine marches on with a continuous flow of irrational tirades and fear mongering aimed at the basest of claims as a distraction from the reality. Americans are being paid to dismantle America and because they are being paid very well, they are doing a good job. They are peddling fear and dissension, targeting basic ideals they have no respect for but know that will push the hot buttons of people who have been dumbed down and taught not to think. They are manipulating emotions at a very basic level with repetitive lies. We have become a nation controlled via emotional manipulation directed by sociopaths who understand how to use emotions while feeling none of them.

One small consolation comes from Judas in JC Superstar. "What will they do when they find out you have lied?"

What, indeed. That is where the ugliness comes in.

Requiem

in pacem. Rest in Peace. Forgive my Catholic upbringing but I truly wish this to our country. We have outlived ourselves. Our country was born in an era where personal freedoms, beyond religious concepts, were the base. The founding fathers had no

love for any religion and tried to establish this country on a secular basis. They came from a background where they realized that the Christian religion was so segmented that there was no basis for forming a government on it. They tried to establish a secular government, based on ideals that all men were created equal and that for a government to survive, it needed to be founded on the ideal that people were people. Bless their pea picking little hearts, they thought that succeeding generations would catch on to the idea.

We didn't. We conquered a continent. We pushed the residents further and further, lied to them, cheated them, killed them all in the name of our progress.

And now, today, we are playing the same pitiful game. For decades we have claimed high ground, fighting the evil Commie menace. And in the late 80's, we won. The US became the supreme, the sole source of power. We got it all. Only one problem, we no longer had an enemy. We became the gunfighter with no one who would challenge us. The big dog with all the power and no one to fight.

We became our own enemy. No government challenged us. The Soviets had abandoned their revolution and embraced American Gangsterism. They agreed, if you can't fight them, join them. One could consider this a sort of victory but the idea that Russia has embraced our lawless side says a lot about what America stands for.

Empire always collapses. Any group who follows the idea that elitism is a means to power always crumbles. Only the groups who realize, prior to collapse, that others may have rights have a chance of retaining position. The British Empire is an excellent example. One hundred years ago, the Brits had an empire that spanned the globe. They realized that supporting and/or controlling that empire was impossible. It took them many years to implement the idea. India, Australia, Canada and others, all were cut loose in such a fashion that they retained relations with Britain. Today, the old British Empire is pretty

much the backbone of civilization. Not because of fealty but because of respect and commonality of cause.

Where is the US today? We have dreams of grandeur but is there any reality in the dreams? We have spit in the face of just about every ally we have. We have the UN on our shores and while we give them money, we show no respect for their ideals. We have become the old gunfighter, the one who says that only violence can answer the problem. What we are missing is that the Old West is gone. We still hold that the only answer is war and violence when the rest of the world is slowly outgrowing that idea. Just as the US has been asking for these past 100 years. We are the last ones with the guns.

For decades, the US has tried to tell the world, violence is not the answer. When we had a Cold War enemy, we held to that. Suddenly, we don't have an enemy. Since the collapse of the USSR, the US has struggled. Our military might turned to nothing. We had no enemy. So we made one. The people who benefited most from the idea that we had to be militaristic came up with ways to continue the program. The big drawback is, it is a lie. There are no more big bad guys. Most of the world would like to work things out. But we have to send a massive military machine after a handful of dissidents. Six years of war, no solutions, no 'improvement of our threat status. More money to the machine.

The world is changing. Things are becoming global. The US influences it all and still holds the pathetic idea that it will only happen when we direct it. Sorry, but we have spent the last 100 years aiming at this and the US is the last country to realize that what they have pushed for is finally happening. Either we get on the bus or we will be left on the side of the road, screaming and screeching like our pathetic rightwingers who have no clue about what is happening.

We have spent both my lifetime and my fathers trying to make this happen. And now that it is we have a small bunch of

idiots who are terrified they might have to grow up and leave their diapers behind.

Last time I checked, people in diapers probably shouldn't be consulted on how things happen for the rest of the adults.

Right of Passage

Yes, the wrong spelling but malice aforethought. While there are many rites of passage in many societies, all designed to signal the passage from childhood to adulthood, most are symbolic gestures to remind the participant it is time to put away the toys and move on to become a responsible, productive member of society. This generally includes such things as accepting responsibilities, performing actions that are not just for personal gratification and realizing the individual is not the center of the universe. But there is more to it. It is one of those questions that inevitably bite one in the keister. One has the right of passage, you can grow up and stop being a self-centered, spoiled child except with that right also comes the duty of growing up.

This is where the US is having some serious difficulties. Most of the rest of the industrialized world has realized that cooperation and respect for others is the only way people can live together and flourish as a society. And it is working pretty well for them. Sadly, the US is still held in the thrall of a group of dangerous children. Children, in that they retain the juvenile idea that the world revolves around them and that they have every right to having their every wish granted and immediately. They have their little clique, their in crowd, and the rest of society exists just to serve their pleasure. Our society has been slowly permeated with their beliefs, twisting the basic generosity of spirit and humanitarian ideals our country was founded on and which had served us very well for two hundred years until the

idea of individual rights has become the mantra of the greedy and the frightened.

This isn't surprising. Children live with many more fears than adults because they lack the experience that enables them to deal with scary things. The deregulated capitalistic types live in constant terror. The idea that the accrual of money and power saves them only demonstrates their fear. It is obsessive/compulsive behavior; something most would call a mental illness. Since they can buy approval, they have foisted it off on the American public as a good thing, a goal to reach. They don't understand the adult concepts of compassion and responsibility to anything beyond their own self so they push their propaganda that these things are weakness. They are like the Lost Boys and Peter Pan, caught in their fantasy only they have found they can pass their fears and childishness to others.

It is time for America to grow up. It is time for us to realize this isn't a kid game. Just as the young couple who, in their youthful passion, make a new life, we are at a crossroads. We can stay irresponsible children, ignore the magnitude of what we face and abandon our responsibility for our actions or we can stand up and do the right thing. For too long the 'love child' has suffered because the parents were too frightened to do what was needed. It is time to put down the Ipods and jet skis, time to quit hiding behind the juvenile idea that a society can exist without the participation of every member who is capable. And that it is up to those who can to help those who can't find some way to add what they can.

There is no mention in the Constitution of the Right of Passage because it didn't have to be there. That one is too basic and one that is too personal. Society either grows or it stagnates and dies. We get to chose.

Script Boy!

'Time for a rewrite, this scene just isn't working.' There is an old saying that the pen is mightier than the sword. There is something even mightier, the eraser. Or, in this age, White Out. (It is called that because paper is white and ink comes in many colors but that's another rant). We are seeing a movement today aimed at rewriting history on many levels. Modern history by portraying the actions of the previous administration as glorious and noble, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. And early American history so that the founding fathers who, almost to a man, were pretty much secular humanists according to the existing historical records which include reams of personal writings from all of them become staunch supporters of modern day Christianists.

This practice is not a new one, particularly when politics and Christianity mix. Back some 1,500 years ago Christianity got its big leg up into the political arena when Constantine decided it would be a great idea to have a popular religion backing his political power. He gathered up a bunch of bishops and scholars and tasked them with coming up with a codification of teachings that the general population could get behind and hence behind him. So they vetted the existing writings, picked the ones they thought would work and came up with the beginnings of the Bible as we know it today. They did this under God's watchful eye, immersing themselves in holiness while they hung out as the Emperor's guests. (Did I mention they then tried to destroy all the existing copies of the writings they deemed unworthy?)

A modern analogy would be if the countries top Republicans all gathered at GW's ranch and decided just what Executive memos could be released to the public. Whether Reaganism or Nixonian doctrine should be included so that everything would look nice and peachy for the public. Obviously, these scholars would have no political agenda and would only publish the truth for posterity's sake. Sort of like Tom Ridge. And one could also claim they would be divinely guided in their efforts because everyone knows God blesses America. Fifteen

hundred years from now people will be praying to the Divine Bush. Scary thought.

Constantine and GW also share another little quirk. Constantine said Jesus appeared to him in a cloud on his way to sacking Rome, encouraging him to do so. GW skipped the cloud part about Iraq. I have a bit of a problem with this sort of intervention. If you talk to your cornflakes at breakfast, you would probably be considered eccentric or weird. If the cornflakes talk back, you are crossing the line into neurosis. If you go out and try to get people to do what the cornflakes tell you to do, you have gone over into full-blown psychosis. But if you do it for political reasons, like taking over a country, you are some sort of saint or hero, at minimum very blessed.

I know this to be untrue. My Malt-o-meal told me that cornflakes are jealous liars. They're just mad because they aren't the only breakfast cereal in the world anymore.

Semantics of Fear

There seems to be a lot of hubbub these days about terrorism and war. Since the election it appears it is escalating. Lots of words and claims about dire events in our future. Old bogies are being dusted off, prejudices flaunted and mostly an amazing (and saddening) display of old crap long since debunked. A priest in South Carolina telling his flock they will be denied Holy Communion because of their vote and a Church hierarchy that is being very ambivalent about its response. A member of Congress using terms like Marxist to describe the President-elect. American citizens being denied basic civil rights for sinning. What's next? Chopping off hands for stealing? Stoning for adultery? Burning and dunking for witchcraft? I sometimes think when the century changed it went backward instead of forward.

I've been sampling op-ed pieces these past few months from across the spectrum and about 70% of them are pretty decent pieces. One thing I have noticed the past week is the increasing number that are challenging the 'yes, we can' mantra of the Obama campaign. Their mantra is what is is and it isn't going to change. Many even say that it shouldn't, that the US is perfect the way it is. I find this particularly bad because a great deal of it is nodded to by my generation. The Boomers who came out of the 60's and who should, quite frankly, know better. The same group who coined and lived the axiom of don't trust anyone over 30 are now living in terror that the world they have built might be challenged by a new generation who are getting fed up with this utopia.

It wasn't that long ago that it was an accepted fact that non-white humans weren't human. That one can be filled with the other misplaced dogmatic facts like the earth is flat or the center of the universe. Another is the idea that the US of A is always right or perfect. It may be the most promising game on the planet for the last two centuries but we aren't saints. Sad to say, I'm not so certain it is still true.

Sex & Violence

I just read an op-ed piece from someone who has been devoting some effort into getting the more blatant billboards using sex and violence to advertise a product. Madison Ave has thoroughly embraced these two as prime attention getters in positioning products for sale. Not terribly surprising since they are two of the most powerful aspects of humans. I think humor comes in a distant third, honesty isn't even on the list. Ridicule does rank pretty high though. In my life time I have seen TV and movies go from Rob and Laura in separate beds and bloodshed always happening off camera (the shower scene in Psycho is still one of the most powerful scenes ever filmed and old Alfred

managed it without details) to heroes and heroines hopping from bed to bed like rabbits on Viagra and speed and on camera dismemberment that would make a pathologist with 30 years experience heave.

I guess it shouldn't be too shocking for people to learn that most serial killers have serious sexual problems, most likely the driving motive behind their rampages. There are lots of people out there who decry the rise in violence in things like video games. As a 50+ I do play a few video games and have great fun (expending lots of angst and frustration) with, I am sorry to say, the superhero type games. Does this encourage me to become a serial killer? No more than hitting the heavy bag in the gym would. Fantasy and reality are still pretty well divided here. Its why I stick with the superhero games, gore is at a minimum and bad guys clearly defined.

What I find interesting is how aspects of our society equate sex and violence as pretty much the same thing. And if you can look without filters, violence is preferred. Forty years ago the lines in the media were about even. Showing a sexual encounter was roughly the equivalent of showing a violent one. Sadly, that has changed. Slowly but surely, violence has become accepted. If you scoff, as many will, look at what is in our theaters. On any given day you can find a movie depicting all sorts of mayhem, in graphic detail but the sex side is kiddy car in comparison. I am not advocating what has been relegated to 'porn', the intimate relationships between consenting adults doesn't need to be graphically portrayed but if I had a choice between the two, sex wins.

It is why I prefer old movies and what have been defined as chick flicks. I prefer to exercise my imagination. I don't want explicit portrayals of either sex or violence. And I think most people would agree with that. And I am real tired of the double standard over sex and violence. As long as it exists, we will be a crippled society. The two are, or should be, diametrically opposed. Yet they carry the same stigma. Neither should be

considered by polite society. Sex is seen as a biological function that should be tolerated for procreational aspects only. God forbid it should be fun or enjoyable. Violence should be the last resort and only used when rational means of interaction fail. It shouldn't be considered 'fun' or 'entertaining'. But we have things like football and hockey, 'sports' where people beat each other and we call it entertainment. If you think it is all in fun, take a look at the retired sports figures and how many of them are barely functional as human beings by the time they are 40.

Sex and violence, a heck of a pair of products to export. Put greed with it and how could the rest of the world resist? But it's all in good fun.

Should Do

versus do do. This is the position America finds itself in. What we should (or could) do as opposed to what we actually do. When I was much younger the US espoused high ideals about democracy and human rights. We even sort of walked the walk, at least on the public stage. There was all the back scenes crapola where we backed various dictators making deals where we would quietly support their thuggish tactics to gain power as long as they played nice with us publically. That almost every one of those deals came back to bite us (and the world) in the butt is something that really gets overlooked. But we at least tried to keep an open, honest face out for the world to see.

Places like Iran, Panama, the Philippines, Nicaragua, Iraq and many others. The hidden dealings all aimed at consolidating American influence done in the name of national security which really is a code word for economic benefit. We publicly decried human rights violations, called for the world to be a better place so they could grow up to be like us and enjoy the American Dream. We went into Viet Nam at the invitation of the puppet regime and slowly learned just a little bit about how impossible it

is to make the world safe for democracy one bullet at a time. And we should have learned that the Western concept of democracy fits non-Western societies like pants on an elephant. It isn't that they don't fit, you just have to convince the elephant first on why he should wear pants.

Then came the 80's and the manipulation got a bit more evident. The whole Iran/Contra affair almost blew the doors off the process but not quite. A little lull and then came Bush. With the 9/11 attack America ditched the whole charade. We were the victim so the kid gloves came off. Our government now had the excuse to use all the nasty techniques it had been secretly supporting. Invasion, torture, economic manipulation, squelching human rights, open propaganda, all the fun toys the third world had been able to indulge in.

And now we have a President who says, no. We don't do that. The problem is we still have a very vocal group who screams, yes we do. We have a media that thinks their programming stops at the US coast. We have people who are not only admitting they broke the law, they are bragging about it and the government is letting it happen. And the rest of the world is standing by and watching the US crumble.

We can't say a word if Israel decides to attack Iran because we set the precedent. We can't say a peep about any country in the world that mistreats people because we violated so many laws by not only using torture but by allowing those who did the dirty to walk free. We have to live with the facts about what we do do. And, like some incontinent old dog, we are wandering around with our doo doo, dropping it everywhere and not noticing that it is a mess. We bark about how great we once were and don't realize how much of the world either pities us or laughs at us. We don't even notice that places like England are banning some of our worst, telling us to kindly keep our droppings to ourselves.

It's about time to either put the old pooch out of its misery or teach it new tricks. About 80% of the country figures it isn't

too old to learn.

Sin

Sin is pretty much defined as a crime against God's law. Why there is any sort of differentiation between man's law and God's law, I am not exactly certain other than to say man is pretty sneaky. That is because of Original Sin which sort of states man is born in a state of unholiness, or sneaky. Why an individual who has an absolute clean slate needs to have original sin dumped on him/her sort of alludes to the Church's idea of control but is not the subject here.

I watch lots of documentaries. The History Channel is great fun. In the past few weeks they have been fixated on religious issues and are coming out with a program about the...duh duh dun...the Seven Deadly Sins. Lust (one of my personal favorites), Gluttony (I had a hard time figuring out AYCE on a restaurant's ad), sloth (something I always thought was a weird tree dwelling creature in South America, wrath (akin to anger with trimmings), envy (can you spell Brittany?), pride (Amuhrika, God loves us) and greed.

So how come we need seven? The first 6 as I have listed them are all a product of the 7th. I personally like Bob Heinlein's definition of sin, the deliberate hurting of anyone else. That one covers the whole gamut. Greed covers the other six, wanting something you don't have. Sloth is the only one that almost slips the grid but it really is just being greedy for yourself and not wanting to do anything. And none of them qualify as sins per se.

The only sin is forgetting you are human...just like every other living soul on the planet.

Society in an Eggshell

Yesterday we had a brunchfast that relied pretty heavily on the magical chicken egg. Poached eggs for the wee'uns, Crab Benedict for the more discerning palette and eggnog; so I probably shouldn't be surprised that I awoke at 4 am thinking about the dream I had about eggs. Odd things my subconscious plays with in dreamland.

Consider your basic egg. Nicely packaged, a comfortable incubator (at least for the mom) bringing forth a new generation of bird that can produce more eggs, be edible in it's adult form or provide hours of entertainment and appreciation with their songs or beauty. All in all, a wondrous thing. But I had never looked at it as an expression of society in an eggshell.

Man learned early on that the insides of your basic egg was both edible and nutritious in its natural state. Then, when Ug learned about fire it was discovered eggs could be cooked. I suspect one was accidentally dropped on a hot rock and sunny side up was born. Since then, eggs have become something of a staple in most societies. And, as societies become more civilized, so does their treatment of the egg. No more of this lop off the egg and slurp it down, no, that will make you sick. The cholesterol, also a bad thing.

This is where civilized society comes in. How many have gone to fry up an egg and tossed it because the yolk got broke in the process? Or boiled and decorated eggs at Easter and ended up tossing some when they got too old? Eggs are pretty cheap so it isn't a really big deal. Unless you happen to be starving. But we have, for the most part, gone beyond that point. We take eggs for granted because there are literally millions, if not billions, of chickens out there just a clucking and a dumping. We just go merrily along quicheing, custarding, caking, dressing up our lives with the hard work of hens because it isn't like they mind being kept in cramped, unsanitary quarters, living on chicken feed so we can use the efforts of their labor to pamper ourselves.

This is juxtaposed to a memory from my childhood. We would go to the grandparent's farm on weekends and help out. This was done so we could get a few good meals while providing my Mom's parents with much needed assistance in running the farm. One of my jobs was tending the chicken coop. I had to collect the eggs and then feed the feathered beasts and then clean the nests. I was not allowed to carry the basket of eggs to the house because dropping an egg was something of a minor catastrophe. The dog liked it but it meant a smaller helping of scrambled eggs for me. Each and every one of those ovoids was important just as the chickens themselves were. Not exactly life or death but they could spell the difference between going to bed with a full tummy or a growling one.

What our civilized society is doing, both on the microcosm and macrocosm level, is we aren't taking care of the chickens. And we are gobbling up the eggs, wasting a great many of them while thinking their will always be more. We are distancing ourselves from the very things that have brought us to this point. Our greed blinds us the workings of nature because we think it will always be there and if we have this magical paper in our pockets, everything will be fine. Work in a chicken coop? Ewwwww, gross!

Steps

What life is all about...steps. They come in all sizes, from baby to giant and they can go up or down. Generally speaking, they are how things get done. You don't dump a bunch ingredients in a bowl and suddenly have cookies. And you don't make or break a country in one fell swoop. Americans have something of a tradition for being impatient, even arrogant enough to think that steps don't always apply to them but it isn't true. We are where we are today because we have been slowly led in a series of steps to the point where we have been desensitized to the actual steps of change.

Our education system has been tinkered with to the point where we are no longer producing individuals capable of cognitive thinking. Our economic system has been stripped of needed regulation that once existed. Environmental policies have been removed to allow profits, undoing years of real progress in making our country a place heading towards a sustainable ecosystem while business could still function. Our moral/ethical values have been undermined with a continuous barrage of incidents of increasingly bad behavior promoted as entertainment. And our political system has just flat out gone into the toilet. Bribery has morphed into a practice that actually defines how our Congress works. And the cherry on the sundae is that racism and bigotry still exists to a greater degree than any thinking American believed.

We have a pretty ugly and bleak picture for where America is today. We are no longer in even the top ten for standard of living and we only have ourselves to blame. Along about 1980, America started to drink. We imbibed the heady brew of exceptionalism. We started on a course of consumerism that quickly turned into a binge. In the 90's we had a bit of a respite but it disappeared when we had a President who told us in response to the first major foreign terrorist attack on our country...go shopping. He and his compatriots handed over the keys to the liquor store while they stood back and raked in the profits.

And in the summer of 08, it finally began to crash and it came down hard on many fronts. The more rational Americans began to see that the course we were on was destructive. Consumer spending was dying as decent paying jobs disappeared overseas. It wasn't that we didn't want to continue but like a drunk we had reached the end of our resources. We were right on the edge of skid row and a bottle of cheap muscatel. Now we were stuck with listening to the very people who conned us into our self-indulgent binge telling us we should just go right on doing it. They have been getting ever more

strident in their calls, don't think, just drink. It's what you want, what you need.

So America is caught between two choices. Either we do the equivalent of the AA 12 Step program and recognize we have problems and blind consumerism isn't the answer or we follow the 3 step process from Lynard Skynard and head for the door. We have to realize you can't base a consumer society on a service economy. We have to reclaim things like production and manufacturing right here in America. We have to make things again. Right now we have a major portion of our economy involved in jobs that produce nothing really tangible. Wall Street and the investment industry juggle money. The health insurance bunch juggle money. The entertainment industry manages to provide a small amount of real product but it is a pitiful number compared to the amount of money it consumes.

We are on the first steps of recovery but it is going to be wicked rough. The only way we will make it is by bringing back into focus what works. A functional, fairly employed, thriving middle class, enough regulation and control to reign in the worst of the greed and a society that knows it is a society. We, the People. Because the 3 step option towards the door really isn't viable. We have no place to go.

The Company Store

I love that song. Tennessee Ernie's deep voice crying the lament of the miners. "Saint Peter doncha call me cuz I cain't go, I owe my soul to the Company Store." The way things are going it could easily become our national anthem. I am sure there will be some who will scoff and shake their heads about just another whacked out conspiracy theory. That is to be expected since we have been indoctrinated as a culture to react in just that fashion whenever anyone comes up with an idea that claims some group or cabal is working secretly to undermine or take over the

country. So let's just say I have some questions and let people do their own thinking.

The first is why is it so hard to even contemplate that a group of people who have dedicated their lives to accruing money and power might actually entertain the idea of working out some sort of plan that would gather more money and power to them? It is pretty obvious that major corporations are all headed by people who graduated from the Gandhi Business Academy and that their primary motivation in running their companies is the overall benefit of the US and humankind, right? No company has ever shut down US operations and sent them to third world countries where slave labor pretty much exists. None of them has ever done anything that benefited the major shareholders at the expense of the workers. Nor do we have any companies that produce absolutely nothing while taking in major profits spending money to buy the votes of elected representatives so they can continue raking in cash while their constituents are demanding otherwise. Nope, not here in America.

And how come we have a major political party that has spent the last half century railing against big government while they built the same government into a monolithic structure that can barely support itself? And in the process, slowly but surely remove the parts of that government that dealt with the regulation of things like the free market and corporate interests? Could it be they are looking back to the times where the robber barons did whatever they damn well pleased? Child labor, 80 hour work weeks with no benefits, no worker rights? I don't know about you but I have heard several people say recently that they would 'take just about any job' so they can support their family. "Another day older and deeper in debt." Credit card lobbyists over riding a cap on interest rates. Bank lobbyists blocking foreclosure avoidance assistance. When homes get foreclosed and go on the market, who has the money to buy them? EFCA? Unions? Evil Socialist ideas.

And why is it that a presidential candidate gets lambasted for making a comment about people and their needs for guns and God and this same party is now using the same idea as a rallying cry? Why do we have main stream and cable media broadcasting every word this party says, no matter how ridiculous? Why do we have a supposed national debate as to whether the US was justified in using torture, something that has been both illegal and anathema to the American way of life for over 100 years? Or a government that feels investigating the probability of such behavior when the perpetrators are on national TV admitting they did just that?

How about a group of people who have been drawn into the program by being manipulated to the point where they have some sort of divine right to not only demonize other groups of people to the point where it becomes ok to not only invade their country but to treat them in ways that would make Torquemada and Stalin smile? Or when they complain their rights are being violated when a law is proposed to guarantee equal rights to another bunch of subhuman monsters?

If you can answer these questions and not even wonder if it is even possible that there is some sort of guidance behind it, you are much more trusting than I. Either that or their program is pretty darned effective.

The end justifies the means

How did this phrase get to be so important? Especially when it is just plain, flat out wrong? I am pretty sure it has been used by more people as some sort of living credo than any other, especially by those who manage to grab any level of power. The concept that any sort of behavior is acceptable if one has high-minded goals is so totally silly that I find it impossible to believe anyone with even a smattering of morals could seriously think it to be otherwise. Indulging in behavior that is counter to one's

ethical and moral standards to achieve an end and then somehow not being responsible for said acts? Seems sort of like giving up one's virginity and then expecting to get it back. Or saying horrible things to someone and then adding 'just kidding!' That works well.

What got me going on this was the recent cover on the New Yorker that depicted Barack and Michelle Obama as militant terrorist types. The explanation was it was satire, irony, something about the weird fear-mongering ideas about the two. Gimme a break. I used to enjoy the New Yorker but I doubt I will ever pick one up again. If it was intended as a political cartoon, why put Michelle in it? Since when are prospective First Ladies fair game? And if you want to make a satirical point about the dirty personal attacks on the candidates, where's John? Where is the caricature of the doddering oldster in his too tight, moth eaten uniform with the Depends bulge in the britches?

For me, it smacks of racism. Not your basic Billy Bob with his pick up truck hanging out at the general store bragging about how he was the only member of his family to graduate the 8th grade. 5th Ave is slicker than that. This is about the trendy types who think they aren't prejudiced because they say hello to that black fellow who has an office down the hall. You know, the people who say 'some of my best friends are (insert whatever group that comes to mind)'. The very fact this is even talked about says racism and prejudice is alive and well. It might even be making something of a comeback what with all the fear mongering about terrorism and illegal immigration. I guess that should be expected when we have a government that actively promotes fear.

The bottom line is if you get down in the pig poop and wallow, you shouldn't be surprised if you get to stink. And if you insist on tossing rocks in your nice glass house you had better be ready to pick the slivers out of your butt.

The End of the World...

as we know it. They are at it again. Or still. They being the hyper-religious types like Pat Robertson and the like who keep telling us God isn't happy and is going to close the show. I am torn as to how to respond. Part of me says yeah right, please keep your neurosis to yourself. Your track record is worse than a weatherpersons. But the bigger part says...about flipping time.

Just once, I would like to see them be right. Not the fire and brimstone, Armageddon destruction their version of god has programmed them to expect. I would just like to see the end of the world 'as they know it'.

This would entail no longer having people who 'talk to god' trying to tell the rest of society how to live. I've always figured if there is a 'big guy', he has my number and can call me direct with anything I need to know. I don't care for the idea that important things in my life need to be filtered to me by someone who interprets 2,000 year old documents. Especially when they think they should be paid for providing the service.

Nor is the fact that there are so many varied interpretations of said musty tome that it is ludicrous to think that any one of them is more valid than any other. If they can't even play nice with their fellow delusionals, why do they think anyone else should take them seriously?

Or maybe we can get beyond fighting wars because god is on our side? If you claim to follow someone who is called the Prince of Peace making him the justification for killing is just plain sick.

The whole business about demons and devils is just too Dark Ages. If the rest of the world's mythology is just that as they claim, why do they want people to believe theirs is any different or better?

Maybe we could stand to lose some of the repression of human spirituality and sexuality. The idea that we have this

innate basic drive that should only be used to propagate the species and never enjoyed is just so contrary to human nature. But it fits their twisted need for control that they make people feel guilty for even suspecting that what instinct tells them is right, is wrong.

The end of domination by fear. The end of societal manipulation by the boogiemans. The end of the world as a myth, driven by neurotic (or psychotic) types who feed on their need to control others.

The end of the world as they know it...can't happen too soon for me.

The Human Race

Is a remarkable thing. Prolific, pliable, noble, productive, contrary, and very easily duped. It seems to me the main reason we still exist is that there is a basic core of goodness and rationality that manages to surface just when things are at their worst. It is too bad it takes the worst of times to bring out the best of humankind.

Little things like the Black Death. It was roughly the equivalent of today's miasma when viewed in its milieu. A global epidemic that hammered the masses and changed a great deal of belief in the process, the Plague could be said to have ushered in societal changes like the Reformation and the Renaissance. Neither noble nor priest had much effect on its implacable course and the average Joe the Peasant was left to their own meager resources.

I say meager because that was what they were allowed to have by the aforementioned nobility and clergy. The vast majority of victims of the Plague throughout the world (and yes it did hit the entire world, not just Europe) were just average people. And they went through all the usual gyrations of looking

to the nobility, the ruling class, the haves and to the spiritual leaders who had been telling them for centuries that they had the answers, only to find neither did.

There are times I think it would be more productive to don a tacky, archaic robe and stand on a street corner with a sign saying the End is near! It wouldn't make any difference but it would be good for a few laughs. For me the problem would be it fits the pattern and that would be just too campy. We have a few essentially basic reasons for why we are in the present state of affairs. One is nationalism and the concurrent pride in that. It is pandemic and has been for as long as humans have been around. Us versus them, strangers=bad and god likes us so therefore we have to club the others into buying our neurosis. The other is religion, only slightly different but equally bizarre and putting out the same basic message. There is a group (or groups) of people who know better and should therefore be in charge. It works because the majority of humanity (life is a Bell Curve) really don't want to play that game.

I don't really think there is some secret society of human spiders who manipulate and control the world. It is possible but unlikely. It makes for great theater and high entertainment exploited by the likes of Ludlum and company. Did you ever wonder why conspiracy theories are so lampooned? Could it fit with the ever-present policy of ridicule for certain ideas that don't fit the accepted norm? It has worked pretty well for thousands of years. If you can make something sound ridiculous enough, people will be embarrassed to even think about it, let alone consider it seriously. It is a very effective tactic. Repeating something often enough and in an authoritative voice doesn't make it true but it does help make it accepted. (How many centuries did it take for the Catholic Church to acknowledge that Galileo was right?)

So, how long is it going to take people to realize they have been involved in the longest running con game on the planet? The present version is a dilly. Put more money and control into

the hands of the few and life will be good. Don't even bother to look back and see that every time this has happened in recorded history life for the vast majority of humanity has gone down the toilet. Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain! Just believe in all the things that have kept mankind in a constant state of conflict for thousands of years. And for goodness sake, don't listen to the little voice inside you that says no, this is wrong. Don't take responsibility for your own feelings and beliefs because there is always someone else to tell you how bad that is.

Listen to them. They, obviously, know better because they have no problem with little things like your conscience. They have no problem with telling you violence and killing is bad unless it serves a purpose. Like making money which is perfectly all right since it is the American Way? Oh no, its because the 'bad guys' are heathens/not Americans (substitute any nationality and/or religion here). Forget the fact that they are people are EXACTLY THE SAME AS YOU and not just from a biological standpoint. Forget Ole Willy's line about 'prick me, do I not bleed?'"

Back in the early 80's there was a guy who made a mint with a nifty program that pointed out the obvious...you don't get to vote on how things are, you already did. This last political voting cycle showed there are a bunch of people out there who are just plain tired with the status quo. Every day we get to vote on how things are going to be so when are we going to wake up and vote for humanity? When do we quit listening to the blather and hype and vote from the heart? The pundits only exist because we give them an audience. The greed only exists because we buy into it.

The Joy of Perfection

Or is it perfecting the exceptional? The exception to every rule? Whatever it is we are doing to ourselves, we need to take a

long hard look at it. As a society we spend an incredible amount of effort seeking perfection and making ourselves miserable when we don't achieve the goal. It has been a process that has been growing on an almost exponential curve since at least 1980. Winning is everything, doesn't matter what the competition is nor does it matter what you have to do to win.

The whole concept has blended with the need to be right to make Americans some of the most neurotic over-achievers this planet has ever seen. You can see it in our society in almost every aspect of existence. Fashion changes are approaching light speed. The popularity of entertainers and the length of their careers is effecting their stage names. If one has a long or complicated name, odds are they will fade to oblivion before people figure out how to spell it.

“Then a Miracle Occurs”

One of my favorite cartoons. And it so aptly describes the modern Republican business/economic theory. First you take a company that makes therbligs. Management sets up all the procedures for procuring raw materials and a facility for manufacturing. Also a process for distributing and selling the finished product. Then they hire workers to actually make the therbligs.

In a reality-based capitalism, the operating costs would include paying the workers a decent wage so that they could have the money to buy said therbligs and the thingamajigs and whatsits made by other companies. And a rational boss would realize that if the workers had a reasonably safe working environment, injuries and time lost would be kept to a minimum. Just as having some sort of health care would help insure a sustainable work force without the cost of constantly retraining new workers. In very basic terms, this is how sustainable capitalism works.

What we have today ignores the concept that capitalism is responsible for maintaining a viable middle class market by investing in wages. That's where their 'Miracle Occurs'. Somehow by concentrating wages and profits in the top 2% of management in a frenetic short term feeding frenzy they think they can maintain operations. Off shoring manufacturing is a bean counter dream for maximized profitability but it is also like planting the same crop in the same field every year. The soil will become exhausted and no longer be able to produce crops. Unlike farming, they can't buy fertilizer to rejuvenate the field because the fertilizer needed is money in the hands of enough people to be able to purchase. So part one of the solution is to rebuild capitalism into a cooperative effort between labor and management with respect for the realities of maintaining a marketplace.

The second aspect is to put the Cold War behind us. We have to look at the reality of what socialism is about. The cries of evil empires are just so much hysteria being used to frighten under educated people. We already have it. From infrastructure to water and waste treatment, police and fire protection, education, air traffic control, food and drug safety and many other programs designed to support society. That is really what modern day socialism is about. Providing a network of services, funded by society that benefit all. The scary talk about government taking over businesses and shutting out capitalism and free enterprise is pure hogwash. What it does in an ideal environment is work to maintain a more even playing field, handling the things that need to be dealt with as we live in closer proximity.

When folks dug their own outhouses and buried the trash in the back 40 they only had to worry about digging the jake too close to the well. The facts are that in modern America things like waste and trash have to be dealt with due to population densities, said densities having come from burgeoning industry requiring people to live closer together. That and the fact there

are a shit pot more people today in the US than in 1776. In a true capitalist society some company would undertake doing this work and, of course, do it for profit. Not a bad idea by itself. Now take all of the basic services that are presently being funded and operated in a nonprofit manner and consider just how many checks you will be writing each month. For a prime example of how this would play out, use health insurance as an example. We are presently spending roughly 1/6 of our GDP supporting an industry that really provides nothing while taking a profit.

Then we can stop and consider how unregulated private companies will deal with things like waste when they are looking to their bottom line. In a way, we will get a sneak preview of what a true free market capitalist society would be like if the Republicans decide to shut down the government and freeze the debt ceiling. How's that song go?

"Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got til it's gone..."

The Times, They are a-changin

Dylan was right. The times are changing but I don't think in the way most people think they are. I spent last week living out of a motel room, working long hours so I spent a little time watching the boob tube. Current programming lacks just about every aspect of entertainment as far as I'm concerned so I watched TCM. They are running a series called Moguls & Movie Stars and I caught the first episode. It was about how the movie industry was born at the turn of the 20th century. I hadn't known of the major court battle between the various independent filmmakers who went on to build the major studios and Thomas Edison. It seems old Tom thought he solely owned the infant industry because he invented the movie camera. The courts eventually disabused him of the idea but the tale of the battle

was fascinatingly like modern day claims by companies like Microsoft.

Also interesting was the information about the movies that were made and the stories told. I would recommend at least the first two episodes I caught. Sort of spooky.

From there I stumbled across an episode of Bonanza from the 60's. Normally I would have just bounced on past but this one was about a young Chinese man who was accused of murdering a girl in Virginia City. It was during election season and the guy running for mayor was running on an anti-immigrant platform...Keep VC pure type stuff. Lots of racial tension fed by the crooked lawyer candidate and his minions. Of course, Ben and the boys stepped in and in the end exposed the guy for the sleaze he was. I was struck by just how easy that scenario could have happened this year in Nevada.

There were a couple of other programs along similar lines. Each portrayed events from 50 to 150 years ago, all could be current with one little difference between then and now. Fewer heroes today. It is the result of at least 30 years of degradation in the entertainment industry that has slowly eroded the perceptions of Americans. We have become jaded as a society, inured to tribulations of others. In the 60's, most violence in the movies was off camera, used as something to catch your imagination and express evil without actually becoming part of the story. Today, the story tends to get sidelined while the gore and violence is depicted in graphic detail. It becomes the main reason for the movie. (I almost barfed when I saw that there is now a TV series about zombies.)

To my way of thinking, the changes in the times is not in the injustices. We still have prejudice and bigotry. Greed, shady business practices, corruption in both government and politics, yup. Where we have a change, at least in America, is in our attitudes towards these social evils. Honor, decency, character have all been denigrated to the point of undesirability. Ward Cleaver would be laughed at today and Rob Petri wouldn't be.

There really aren't any icons to be looked up to, no real heroes to be admired, even if they are fictional. Sex, violence, corruption... meh. Yawn. Where's the special effects?

It has taken over 30 years to gradually deaden the conscience of America and we are in the end game these days. We are headed for the Rupture, not the Rapture. There is a huge boil, filled with nastiness that is smothering our society and it is about to cut loose.

Thinking Hurts

Yup, a bald statement that if you thought about it would hurt so obviously a rational being would avoid hurt. My sympathies to the snake eating its own tail.

When I was about 10 or so I realized that I had this on going process in my head. It involved assimilating vast amounts of information the world was bound and determined to present to me. Biochemical necessity? Spiritual prerogative? I was confused. I appeared the function was beyond my control.

Constant data in, what to do with it? Having been raised as a Catholic, I had one source to rely on about dealing with this noise. Ignore most of it and have faith the Church would tell me what it meant. Handy but it lacked a certain satisfaction, especially when what they told me seemed to contradict the information coming in.

I suppose I could blame my parents for this one but they sort of liked the idea I not only could read but could do so from any book that came into my little hands. Maybe they should have filtered the input. God forbid I should read fairy tales and children's stories. Or move on to mythology. Yes, by the age of ten I had sampled the basic mythologies. I always thought Prometheus was cool, a Titan, one of the original Greek big boys who rebelled and gave man fire! What was he thinking? I guess it

was no surprise I was asked to leave catechism class when the teacher told us the really big reason Christianity had the answer was because Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected and I pointed out that the whole resurrection/redemption schtick predated Christianity in at least two other mythos. My bad but I was 12, what did I know?

What I have figured out is that government and organized religion have been messing with people's heads for all of recorded history. Basically, a small group has figured out that most people are just not comfortable thinking for themselves when it comes to big things. The vast majority of people are more concerned with the little things like, food, shelter and family since that is 90% of their life. Western religion is really good at this one because they glommed onto the idea that if you scare the crap out of people they are even less likely to think for themselves. Dress your people up in fancy impressive duds, tell them they will BIH for eternity if they don't listen and you get a nice flock of sheep. Don't believe it? When was the last time you bought anything because the ads said it made sense versus when they trotted out the proverbial dog & pony show.

A perfect example is Bill Gates and Windows. There has not been one version of the Windows software that has actually worked yet Microsoft keeps coming out with new, updated software (that you have to buy) that supposedly deals with the issues plaguing the older version. They sell a pig in a poke that one pays good money for, it never really works so they sell you a new pig.

Same thing with Christianity. Two thousand year old mythology that ignores the basic radical concepts the guy who gave his title to (Christ isn't his last name) that included such things as I am the New Covenant, love thy neighbor as thyself, walk the second mile, take the plank from your own eye first, you know, hippy Commie stuff. Ick, what's all this talk about forgiveness and tolerance and compassion? Touchy, feeling things we might have to actually think about?

Folks, if you want to 'have faith' in whatever clown sells you a bill of goods, don't whine when it profits them more than you. God isn't on our side, he doesn't like war, people aren't not people because they are different. There are no terrorists under your bed, the world will not end if the US isn't always right nor is it destined to survive forever. Yeah, Abe freed the slaves and preserved the union, forget the fact it cost tens of thousands of American lives (not counting the blacks who died during the Reconstruction because their citizenship was pretty much a technicality or that they didn't really get any rights for 100 years).

It comes down to the rich get richer, the poor get poorer until the poor get fed up and realize there are a whole bunch more poor than rich.

What a Hoot!

I've been reading this stuff about carbon footprints. How the mega polluters want to buy the right to pollute from those who don't. At first, I thought it was something of a joke until I found out it is actually becoming a salable commodity. And there are people working hard to make money by finding the nonpolluters and selling this 'right'.

As I understand it the people of Gooba-Gooba have no heavy industry but a population of say 20, 000. Or the farmers of any given county in any state in the US. Or the entire freaking population of Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, New York, where ever. According to the brain butts, there is so much CO2 that can be generated and the map has to do with population and square feet. As the hew and cry is raised, the ecology of the planet heads for the toilet, there are actually people who think they can buy their way out. Pretty soon people will be calculating their carbon footprint so they can sell it.

I'm sorry but this seems to me like John Astor (my apologies to him as I know he didn't do this) going up to the people

crowding the lifeboats on the Titanic and offering to buy their seats.

Everyone is getting nervous. The global economy is about to be trashed. The US economy already is. The weather is getting weirder by the day. I'm thinking people are starting to realize the Titanic analogy is becoming more and more real and it is starting to scare the bejesus out of them. If Mama Earth gets ticked off even Bill Gates will be shitting little blue beads because no amount of money will protect anyone. Want examples? Look at the past few years, the natural disasters that have torn through the US alone. We haven't repaired the damage from Katrina yet and it just keeps on coming.

Billions of dollars poured into Iraq, thousands of lives lost... any indication the end is in sight? Wars on poverty, drugs, terrorism...are they still with us? We have an administration that is not even one step away from inquiry by the world court. We have abrogated our Constitution, sidestepped major treaties, and violated just about every single value we have stood for. And the dance band plays on...oddly enough, 'Nearer my God to Thee'. Ironical because we may get that meeting sooner than we think.

I've studied and read many accounts about the Titanic, an engineering marvel, virtually indestructible. One chunk of ice sent it a mile down into icy waters. For decades, the power boys had us living in fear of the Red Menace. It allowed them to manipulate because they knew it was no real threat. Now we have a real threat. One that not only doesn't play games, it just flat out isn't predictable. It can't be bought. It can't be tricked or manipulated. There are no leverage points. Try throwing a hundred billion dollars at a hurricane...can you spell wet confetti? I fear Judgment Day is coming and it won't involve trumpets or opening graves or anything that demented weirdo imagined. It will be very straightforward. We have messed with the planet to the point where it will have no choice in its

response. It won't target the nonbelievers, it won't spare the true believers.

The response will be totally pragmatic, with absolute disregard for belief systems, bank accounts or national boundaries. There will not be a single iota of thought involved in the process. No one will be targeted, no one spared. The Jews and their precious Israel, the Muslims and Mecca, the US and all of its vaunted power...toast. No holy book will save anyone. No Constitution, no roll of cash. The Earth will show mankind that none of that ever mattered. John Lennon was right. This is one accounting we can't buy our way out of. Nor can we fight it. No tank, no bomb, no army will stop it. It might not be the end of the world but it will be the end of the world as we know it.

You might want to hit Starbucks one last time. Oh wait, even Starbucks is closing places...economic crunch, you know.

"The icebergs on the starboard bow, won't you dance with me..."

Where Have You Gone

Joe Dimaggio? John Wayne? Anyone who once stood for America as a country of ideals and beliefs? What happened to Big Blue's stance for Truth, Justice and the American Way? You know, the idea that America stood for things, moral high ground, democracy, human rights? What ever happened to the idea that America was something a little bit better?

Did we trade it in for video games, Ipods and Big Macs? Did we forget that America has laws because so many have been able to buy their way past them?

When did we decide we could ignore our heritage because we were afraid? Back in the 60's we actually had an 'Evil Empire' with nuclear capabilities that tried to put those nasty missiles just 90 miles from our shore. Somehow we managed to keep

from going to war, I think it was diplomacy that was a major factor, and the US survived. Is the key today that there is nobody threatening us with the capability to actually do the dirty deed?

And where did the hippy type Baby Boomers go? The 'hell no, we won't go' crowd. Did they let their brains calcify to the point where they are now the 'I got mine, screw everyone else' crowd? Evidence seems to point that direction. Money does appear to be the root of all evil and America has done its damndest to gather as much of it to itself as it can. We have worked very hard for the past few decades to prove to the world that he who gathers the most coin, wins. And anyone who disagrees either gets bought or invaded.

By current standards, we should get rid of our red, white and blue flag and just fly a dollar bill in front of every post office and embassy. It seems to be what America stands for these days. Laws are trumped by political expediency, our ideals take a back seat to fear and respect is only earned by the roll of greenbacks one can flash. Can't pay, can't play.

Pretty silly considering we are bankrupt.

Who are the Good Guys?

In this world today, this isn't a rhetorical question. When I was a little kid I learned that America was the good guys. As I got a little older and started having to think about what I wanted to do with my life I did so in the opening act of Viet Nam. Saving the world from evil Communism, Domino Theory, helping the poor fledgling democratic government who asked for our aid. That all sounded pretty good to a twelve year old kid. Of course I was also faced with the images on the nightly news about what was going on with the civil rights movement and listening to the rhetoric from both sides of that issue. I think that is where I

began to wonder. MLK made a lot more sense than George Wallace.

Then along comes Tet and the burgeoning anti war protests. More information on the news about carpet bombing and napalm. Older brothers and cousins of friends and family returning from Uncle Ho's Happy Playground with tales that made HP Lovecraft look like Dr. Seuss. As my high school years dwindled down and the draft loomed ever closer, I got to thinking real hard. And studying so I could figure out just how true it was that America was the good guy and that we really did believe in Truth, Justice and the American Way. The more I looked, the more I learned. Even then I was more of a cynical realist but I also had a romantic optimist's heart.

I figured out that America was really two countries. The one we played on TV was kind, generous, altruistic and that was the one that believed in Superman and Santa. The greater majority of the population held this in their hearts to be true. This is still true today. With the exception of Hurricane Katrina, the American people reflexively respond with support and effort in the face of crisis and calamity. There is still a strong outflow of support for charities today in spite of the dire straits we all find ourselves in. The heart of America, the belief in our TV image is still strong on Main St.

What is working to kill us and that dream are the faux Americans. They aren't new, they have been with us all along. They are the ones willing to do anything to line their pockets with cash, the con artists and grifters on a major scale who see real American ideals and beliefs as an opportunity to shear sheep. They were the ones who decided that taking the land from its previous inhabitants was cool because they weren't doing much with it anyway. They were the ones who have fought any kind of regulation or control because they wanted a totally free hand in making like pirates.

There have been attempts at curtailing their greedy drive. Sherman Antitrust and Glass Steagal held the feeding frenzy

down and helped keep the economy moving. The idea that the free market is self-regulating is a best-case scenario. It requires responsibility and conscience as well as social awareness in all participants for it to function ideally. The main problem has always been that certain types of people do not have the internal function that tells them when they have enough. The accumulation of wealth and power is a powerful addiction that leads to destructive behavior. It encourages sociopathic actions that provide the immediate satisfaction of more money with no real concept of the possible repercussions that reflect out into society.

We walk a fine line in making a society work. Most Americans recognize that a certain amount of regulation is needed and yes, they will complain whenever they feel it is getting to be too much. Over-regulating can stifle an economy and a society. It is like a governor on an engine. Damp it down too much and you can't get the rpm to run the vehicle. Take it out entirely and the machine will overspeed and self-destruct. Right now the greed mongers have the pedal to the metal and we are dangerously close to having the engine that is our economy blowing up in our faces. The same can be said for society. The rhetoric is overheating and too many aren't listening to the sounds of the bearings going out. Hopefully the quieter, more rational Americans can get the maniacs out of the driver's seat before it all blows up in our faces.