

# AWARE ONES OF THE TREASURE COAST

## BIMONTHLY NEWSLETTER

"We are Progressive Humanists  
We are the Soul of the Coffee House  
We are Love and Laughter"

Vol.2, No.4

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# Ivy Esther Zillioux

9 October 1937 – 16 June 2017

# A DEDICATION

## PREFATORY NOTE

Ed Zillioux

I spent much of Thursday, June 15 with Ivy at Kindred Hospital, a long-term acute-care facility in Riviera Beach, although she did not know I was there. Armed with her Living Will and Advance Directive, *which no one should be without*, I served as her final advocate to ensure her natural death without the use of invasive procedures to artificially prolong the dying process, as her directive specified. Ivy died at 2:30 a.m. the following morning.

This issue is dedicated to Ivy and to all the members of the Aware Ones of the Treasure Coast who feel the pain of losing one of their own. We begin, therefore, with a tribute to Ivy. Our regular newsletter content follows.

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## AN AWARE ONES' TRIBUTE TO IVY ZILLIOUX

### *My Wife*

By Ed Zillioux

Ivy's life before she met me can be summed up by her childhood in London (see the piece she wrote on her memories of the '40s below), and growing up in New York's East Village. And jobs with Dell Publishing, some stints at modeling, undergraduate studies at NYU, and, oh yes, three marriages.

For me, it began in the back yard of a friend's house in Jupiter, Florida. Sure, it actually began several months before, but this was a chance to get together with all our friends to say "I do," and then do all the things you do when you're with your friends. We picked Ron and Ina's house not just because we were good friends, which we were, but because Ron was an aficionado of building and firing cannons. His neighbors didn't like him.

Here we are saying "I do" at the precise moment that Ron fired his cannon:



"We Do"

"Gotcha"

At the time I was between jobs. Having just escaped from Ann Gorsuch's take-over of the USEPA, I moved back to Jupiter, where I intended to lay back for a while and write the Great Florida Novel. This effort failed of course, but I found Ivy so it was all worth-while. Ivy managed to support the two of us until I recovered from my mid-life crisis and found a job with a consulting firm in Atlanta.

My first assignment required that we move to Raleigh, NC as a staging point for work in the wilds of the Outer Banks of North Carolina. We found an apartment on New Hope Road (no kidding) and our life together got off to a good start.

Ivy was a lot of fun. She was game to do anything, well almost. We hiked every trail we found in Florida and North Carolina, and later in Atlanta and South Carolina before coming back home to Florida. She even started running with me. I just recently gave her running shoes, still in like-new condition, to one of my granddaughters – 34 years later! And we camped a lot, Ivy giving homage to my love for nature. The first time we went wilderness camping she insisted that we get properly outfitted: backpacks, trenching tools, tent, sleeping bags, portable grill, tree shower, and food. Bent double from all this weight on our backs all we saw on the trail was our feet. When Ivy spotted a log bench by the side of the trail, she immediately sat down and immediately flipped over backwards from the weight of her pack. All I could see of her were the bottoms of her feet up in the air. Ivy was also a big help picking out food, following my suggestion of buying freeze-dried meals to save on weight. And then she packed all the water we would need to reconstitute the food. "But honey, there are clear mountain streams and we can boil the water..." "But we might not find any streams."

And the water was packed. Here's a picture from that trip, note the coffee pot bottom right, next to the clear mountain stream:



Ivy loved to dance. She taught me to do the Irish Jig. And she loved music, from the Blues to Opera. She could sing from memory virtually all the scores from Broadway musicals – at times doing so spontaneously in restaurants. She once got a standing ovation. She loved the theater too, but only the best, none of those amateurs for her. The last play we saw together cost us \$2000 for a stay in NYC and *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway. And she loved her Cadillac. And I better end with that, or this could go on forever.



And I loved my Ivy. Goodbye my love.

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## *Ivy*

By Dan Vignau

Although Ivy had been ill for quite some time, Ivy always had a smile on her face as she welcomed you into her home. Quite the conversationalist, she could entertain and keep your attention with stories of her British upbringing and world travel. She and Ed were very lucky to have been able to share many years together. We will miss her dearly.

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## *Ivy*

By Gloria Cosgrove

The first time I saw Ivy, a few years ago, was at a Thanksgiving dinner that a number of us Humanists attended. She was most definitely holding the floor that day and expounding in her lovely English accent about how much she liked America, and how lucky she felt to be living here.

On subsequent visits, I learned when some of her family emigrated to other countries, she chose America. I saw how she enjoyed having her house filled to overflowing with Christmas decorations, and how fond she was of the dancing figurines that were displayed on her shelves.

The last time I saw Ivy, just a few months ago, was on an afternoon when she had just been discharged from the hospital, and some of us had gathered in her living room to welcome her home. She made it quite clear that day that she was not interested in the conversation that had segued onto recent unpleasant political events. She wanted to talk instead about her family. So when she pointed at a photo album on a shelf at the other side of the room, I retrieved it and sat and listened as she pointed out various family members and identified each of them by name. Finally, she pointed at the picture of one man and said, "That is the most wonderful man in the world. That's my Eddy."

This was a lady who knew what she liked, who knew whom she loved, and who didn't hesitate for one moment to let her likes and loves be known.

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## *Ivy Zillioux, Impressions and Recollections*

by Bert Mautz

The first introduction took place over dinner at a waterside Fort Pierce restaurant. Was never attracted to the shrinking violet personality. Delightfully, Ivy in dinner table conversation is a force of nature. Is her theatrical presentation of self, self aware, an affectation, or pure Ivy? Either way she was both fascinating and charming. Took a barnacle-encrusted oyster shell for remembrance of Ivy Zillioux.

Visiting Ivy at home, reclining upon the living room sofa, was another impression; some of us never learned how to handle the help. My own mother, Ruth, worked along side the house cleaners my father hired to make her life easier. Asserting control, directing others was a skill to which Ivy was to the manor born. Haven't we all heard, "Ed, would you make me a cup of tea?" In that wonderful imploring and commanding at the same time voice, and who could refuse or delay? Ivy is an unforgettable presence.

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## *Ivy remembered*

By Joan Auerbach

I did not know Ivy well. I recall meeting Ed, Ivy's husband, at the Humanists of the Treasure Coast in 2013. It wasn't until quite some time later, perhaps at a pot luck dinner, that I experienced Ivy.

She was different from the rest of the women I had met through the Humanists up until now. I mused what she might have been in a former life. Clearly, she had left a more exciting life behind before settling out in the country side in White City.

She seemed to me theatrical and bohemian, clearly used to seeking and enjoying attention. This was a woman of substance I guessed. Wonder if she was ever on the stage? And, during the course of a "get acquainted" conversation at some gathering, she mentioned that she'd had several previous husbands. "Yeah, that fits and certainly does not surprise me," I thought to myself.

Months later, Bert and I joined Ivy and Ed at a water front restaurant in Fort Pierce. (By sheer coincidence Paul and Gloria were at the same restaurant that evening, but we remained at our table and did not join each other.) That evening I discovered a few more heretofore unknown revelations

about Ivy. Both of us like our Martinis before dinner. And – this woman knows and likes good clothes and jewelry! Aha, a kindred spirit!

Each time I saw Ivy at some gathering after that dinner, perhaps Thanksgiving at the Burkharts, I paid particular attention to her interesting and deliberately chosen clothes. "Wonder where she got those? They sure as hell didn't come from Macy's," I thought to myself. "And look at that totally cool jewelry! That woman wears more rings than I do!"

I didn't see much more of Ivy after she became so ill. But the image of her appearance is still very clear in my memory. Rest in Peace, Ivy.

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## *Memories of the '40s*

By Ivy Zillioux

(posthumously, gently edited)

My earliest memories were living in an old three-story stone house in London that was in an "H" shape, run on gas that heated our water, cooked our food, and lit our lamps. We shared the house with several other people. There were Mr. and Mrs. "D" and their three daughters, and their grandchildren, Gwendolyn, Margaret, Brenda, Randy and baby Jim. So there were seven children, all under the age of 10. We were looked after by Nanny Kemp, who gave us our lessons in the upstairs school room that also doubled as the music room.

A cherished memory from that time was watching the lamp lighter, with horse and cart, come and light our street lamps at dusk. He would pull a ladder from the cart, prop it up against the lamp post, and climb up to light the lamp. He repeated this until all the lamps on our street were lit; every evening, I would watch until he disappeared from sight.

In those days, all deliveries were made by horse and cart. I was especially fond of the milkman's horse, to whom I gave sugar lumps, not minding the feel of her huge damp mouth on my outstretched hand. Then there was the Rag and Bone Man, who clopped down the street crying out, "Any old Rags, Bottles or Bones?"

The newspapers came out twice a day. Mail was delivered twice a day. The police force rode about on bicycles; no guns, only whistles and truncheons. All the trains and busses ran on time. Our house was close to Westminster Bridge, where we could hear Big Ben strike the hours. All clocks and watches were checked against its chimes.

It was an orderly and comfortable world that was shattered in 1939 when WWII was declared. I was only three, my sister Elizabeth was Six. Most children stayed in London until France was occupied by the German army, when the British government decreed that all children be removed from London in a massive evacuation called Operation Pied Piper. At first, Mother would not let us go because I was so young, so we stayed together for two more years.

During the "Blitz" we all sheltered together in two reinforced rooms down in the basement. We children were in hammocks slung between the concrete pillars that extended from floor to ceiling. The adults slept on cots arranged around the rooms. Upon hearing the air-raid sirens, we kids would grab our "Mickey Mouse" gas masks and scramble down into the basement with Nanny Kemp sharp on our heels. Nanny would tuck us into our hammocks and hear our prayers, then go find her own bed.

The grownups drank tea and played cards. I remember drifting off to sleep listening to the soft blur of their voices. Sometimes when the bombs fell we would all sing "Rule, Britannia!" at the tops of our voices.

Old Mr. D would go out into the walled garden and shake his fists at the sky, shouting his insults into the night. He was an air-raid warden for our street. During the day, he would march up and down our street in full regalia wearing his tin hard hat. Us kids stayed out of his way. He didn't particularly like children, ergo we played our games inside the walled garden.

Fearing invasion, all the London street signs, as well as the signs in the Underground were taken down and all street lighting was extinguished. Every home and building had blackout curtains over the windows. All private cars and bicycles were commandeered by the local government.

My sister and I were eventually taken by Mother to an evacuation center where we were to board busses to take us to a safe place. On the way there, the air-raid siren went off. We were at a crossing, there was a pub on the corner. A policeman, who had been directing traffic rushed into the pub. When he came out after the "all clear" siren, he found my mother spread eagle against the wall, protecting us kids with her body. "I never go into pubs," she told the policeman.

Once my sister and I were seated on the bus, my mother took a big safety pin and attached the skirt of my dress to my sister's dress. "Now you watch out for our baby girl. Don't get separated, always stay together," she admonished my 8-year-old sister.

When we arrived at a church at the end of our bus ride, Elizabeth and I were taken to a house where we shared a bed. Our first night in bed together I clung close to my sister, putting my feet up her nightdress; her



soft warm belly comforted me and made me feel safe. We slept like that for the whole time we were in that house.

We had been in Yorkshire for a few months when mother came for a visit. All hell broke loose. My sister and I were in sad shape, thin with lice-infected heads. I had a bad rash all over, which was diagnosed as scabies. Our time in Yorkshire was an unhappy experience. The extra food rations that mother had bought on the black market, as well as other gifts, were never enjoyed by sister and me. The horrible stories our caregiver told us about the Germans bombing our house made our lives a misery. All that changed when mother took us up to our maternal grandparents' home in County Durham, in the far north of England where my mother was from.

Life with our grandparents was very different. My grandmother Bella was almost as deaf as the proverbial doornail. She was also a religious nut. The house was always full of priests and nuns, much to the discomfort of my grandfather, who I suspect was an atheist, although no one ever said so.

My grandparents had loud arguments, sometimes throwing things. Grandma's favorite weapons were wooden spoons. Grandpa's were words shouted at the top of his voice as he exited the house by the back door that led into a large vegetable garden, then down a path that led to his woodworking shop. The shop was his haven, where he spent many happy hours making toys for the orphans that lived with the nuns in an old castle near our village.

There was a large church in the village where we went to mass every Sunday, and on Wednesday and Friday. We were enrolled in the church school that Grandma walked us to every day, even on Sunday. Gone was our pleasant school room at home with nanny Kemp. No more Sunday walks in the park to feed the ducks, nor to Buckingham Palace to see the changing of the guard then off to Lyons Corner House for ice cream.

My grandfather in his younger days had kept a kennel, having champion hunting hounds. He had been very active in training gun dogs for birding and retrieving skills. He would take hunting parties out for a fee. As a result, he knew the countryside, its hills, and meadows, and where the animals were.

He and I started to go on long hikes. He would take Polly, his golden retriever, who was the last remnant of his hunting life. Polly was an old dog, but she still liked to hunt. She was an expert on rabbits and a good bird dog. Grandpa carried no gun on our hikes together. He had grown tired of killing. He lost three sons to the war, at which time he sold his dogs and tore down the kennel. He swore never to fire a gun again, and never did.

Although there was a lot I didn't like about living with my grandparents, there were some very happy times. Music was a big part of

our lives. Most people in the village played an instrument, drums and fiddles, penny whistles, Jew's harps, bagpipes, etc. Grandpa played the piano and fiddle. I could keep time on the bodhrán drum and everyone could dance. We would have the orphans over for supper and dancing on a Saturday night. It generally started off with prayers and hymns. Then the band would start a jig and we were off, singing and dancing and "behaving like heathens," which at some point would start an argument. But not before the nuns and priests and orphans had left, and my sister and I had been put to bed. Often we would drift off to sleep hearing the music and pounding of dancing feet.

One summer day, dear old Polly dog laid down for a nap in her favorite spot in the woodworking shop, but when it was time to be fed she didn't get up. Our dear Polly was no more. Grandpa and I gave her a grand funeral. We fitted her for a coffin, a plain pine box. We put her in the wheel barrow and took her to her favorite place in the garden and put her into the earth, and rang a bell for each year of her life.

In October of 1945, my mother came up to our grandparents to bring us back to our house in London. My chief concern at the time was the chocolate birthday cake my Grandma Bella had baked for me. My mother consented to take the cake on the train and I guarded it carefully all the way home to London.

We arrived home in the middle of a great celebration. Our street was all decked out with flags and bright lights everywhere. The corner pub was open nonstop with loud music filling the street. Huge bonfires roared at the railroad crossing. People filled the streets, sitting at makeshift picnic tables. Bagpipes were playing and soldiers were everywhere in their blue and khaki uniforms. The whole scene was jubilant! (I thought it was for my birthday party until my mother explained it all.) Hanging from lampposts were effigies of Hitler and people were bashing them, laughing and staggering about in sheer joy. The troops were home!

In our house things settled down after a while. There was sadness too among all the gayety. Three men from our household had gone to fight but only one returned. He had no injuries, not so much as a scratch – his wounds were internal. One quiet Sunday afternoon he went into his bathroom, lifted his gun to his right temple and blew his brains out. He gave no warning and no one ever knew why.

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## NEWSLETTER CONTINUED

In this issue:

SECTION	PAGE
Introduction	2
AOTC Members & Friends	
Meetings & Events	3
Member News	3
Commentary	5
The Way We Were	7
Articles	12
Letters	15
Poetry	16
Comedic Corner	17

-- Produced by the TC Secular Writers --

## INTRODUCTION

Dan Vignau

Like all good seekers of truth, The Aware Ones are skeptics. Since so much folklore eventually proves to be false, we take a scientific approach in our thirst for knowledge. Science deniers pose a serious threat to our planet. Join us for coffee or tea to discuss current events, politics, science, and yes, sports, as we attempt to make our planet a better place for future generations to live.

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## AOTC MEMBERS & FRIENDS

### Members

Joan Auerbach  
Marsha Banks  
Rick Burkhardt  
Sandra Burkhardt  
Paul Carlos  
Gloria Cosgrove  
Barbara Lange  
Jim Longo  
Bert Mautz  
Charlie Thompson  
Marlynn Thompson  
Dan Vignau  
Ed Zillioux

### Friends

Amar Almasude  
Joanna Almasude  
Toni Gandel  
Marilyn Graton  
Stretch Graton  
Virgil Thorp  
Bob Haskins

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## MEETINGS & EVENTS

### Meetings

Sunday Coffee – Every Sunday, Importico's Bakery, Stuart, 10 am'ish,  
outside when weather is tolerable, i.e., no snow.

TC Secular Writers – Every other Thursday, Jensen's House of Brews, 6:30  
pm; July 13 & 27; August 10 & 24.

### Events

#### Monthly Potlucks

June's potluck was belatedly yet pleasantly hosted by Amar and JoAnna Almasude on 6/28.

July's potluck will be hosted by Bert Mautz on Wednesday, the 19<sup>th</sup>. Wine bar at 5 pm, food at 6.

August potluck to be determined.

## MEMBER NEWS

Sandra, Rick. Hagar, and Capt Jack arrived safely at Camp Burkhart, their Ohio escape from the sun, on Monday, May 15.

Here's Sandra, showing off her new gas mask (says her son Jon gave it to her so she can mow grass without vile repercussions to her breathing):



Sandra also sent, "...we have reunited with our Trumpy Republican friends and resumed spending Sundays with them -- obviously NOT in conversation, but in driving to Canton for a movie, then dinner... Yes we miss your bright thoughts, keen minds, and warm hearts! So we will be especially grateful for your company when we return in October. Would you please stage an Anti-Trump revolution for us as a welcome home party???"

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And from Paul and Gloria:

"We have arrived safely at the cabin in NC Tuesday (May 30) afternoon. Gloria's son and daughter-in-law were here to greet us and had cleaned and aired the cabin. They helped unload and setup.

We are now decompressing."

Which was followed by a picture of Gloria with her new pet.



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And from Marilyn Graton:

"Stretch and I will go to New Jersey before Mothers' Day.  
Kids will visit,  
Granddaughter Sophie will have bat mitzvah.

Then to spend a month in Rockland, Maine.

Back to NJ.

Always try to be in Florida by early November.

Will miss the group of like-minded folks down here.  
Nothing remotely the same up north."

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## COMMENTARY

"The time has come," the Walrus said, "To talk of many things..."

### Behavior Evolution

Ed Zillioux

I have wondered how behavior in humans evolved. What is the natural selection advantage incurred by both good behavior and bad behavior? If one gives a survival advantage over the other, why do both persist in concert with each other? The world today appears suffused with the latter, even though there are greater numbers of individual humans in every society that are more good than bad.

E.O. Wilson makes the case, in his recent book *The Meaning of Human Existence*, that "National wars may have subsided... But insurgencies, civil wars, and terrorism have not. The principal driving force for mass murders committed during them is tribalism, and the central rationale for lethal tribalism is sectarian religion."

But good and bad behaviors both exist among non-theists as well as theists. From the evolutionary perspective, therefore, there are two separate questions concerning the drivers of natural selection of human behavior: that for good vs. bad behavior, and that for religion itself.

Through all of human history, religion has been the glue that held the tribes together. In the early Roman Empire, the philosopher Seneca the Younger realized that "religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful." Today, as in all centuries past, there are many more common people than wise, as well as rulers, or successful politicians always ready to play to that commonality. When Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address characterized democracy as "government of the people, by the people, for the people," he probably realized he was lifting this phrase essentially verbatim from the first English translation of the Bible by John Wycliffe in 1384. A contrary perspective on the "tragedy of the commons" was expressed by H.L. Mencken, journalist and social critic in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "Democracy is a pathetic belief in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance.... On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last,

and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.” And who said we didn’t see this coming?

But back to the role of natural selection in getting us to where we are today. First, religion:

By studying brain mapping, neuroscientists claim that evolution and religion are closely intertwined. This is not surprising, since as the brain develops through the life of an individual, brain mapping would be likely to find similar intertwining with any strongly held predilection. But neuroscience, in my limited reading, tells us nothing about the survival advantage that selected for the precursors of religiosity in the first place.

The so-called God gene, hypothesized by geneticist Dean Hamer in the 2004 book called *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into our Genes*, doesn’t cut it. The God gene, or VMAT2, produces the sensations associated, specifically, with spirituality as a state of mind. A lot, probably too much, has been read into that, but spirituality could include a belief in God, or gods, or not; it doesn’t tell us anything about origins of organized religions, and furthermore, *spirituality as a state of mind* is probably as prevalent in non-theists as it is in theists. Maybe more so, since spirituality in theists is tainted by dogma, which could arguably be the antithesis of natural spirituality.

The formation of tribes in early Homo groups had an obvious survival advantage, since the lone individual would soon be dead meat. It has been pointed out that a religious-type structure would have served a survival function in holding the tribe together. Well, yes, but wouldn’t not being eaten if caught out alone on the savanna also tend to hold the tribe together? There are almost as many examples of banding together in groups to limit predation as there are animal species, e.g., schools of fish, herds of zebras, antelopes, etc.

Let’s move on to the second question. Is there selection advantage related to good and bad behaviors?

This seems to be easier. Again, I find the most rational thoughts from E.O. Wilson. Competing levels of natural selection works like this: Selfish activity within a group provides a competitive advantage for the individual and this translates into a selective advantage for this bad behavior. On the other hand, being cooperative and altruistic reduces an individual’s advantage in competition with other members, but increases the survival and reproduction rate of the group. So the two behaviors, though opposite, are both conserved by natural selection and, indeed, must have been in order for the species to have survived. That is, bad behavior favors individual survival, while good behavior favors group or tribal survival. According to Wilson then, “individual selection favors what we call sin and group selection favors virtue. The result is the internal conflict of conscience that afflicts all but



psychopaths..." (E.O. Wilson, 2014). Now who comes to mind when you consider someone completely devoid of an "internal conflict of conscience"?

Yeah, we have a narcissistic psychopath in the White House. Albeit, the sociologist among us, Dan Vignau, argues that sociopath would be the more correct term. Same point.

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## THE WAY WE WERE

### AFTER FIFTY YEARS - A Reunion with Childhood Friends

Bert Mautz

Let's get the grim memories out of the way up front. Mother's incessant criticisms; pillow hair, halitosis, acne, grades in school, not making the cut for Lester's piano recitals, windshield streaks after washing the cars for Sunday, but toughest of all; why wasn't I as good at everything as Janet Henderson and David Broadbent. So not fair, they were older, ahead of me in school, and Janet even skipped a grade.

David and Janet were each the eldest in wonderful Mormon families, fathers, professors; biochemistry and agricultural economics at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois. These men would be role models long after my escape from the church and the culture.

David, prompted by his sister, recalled a first memory of throwing snowballs at me in our grade school, Dr Howard playground. I share no such memory, but it would be entirely consistent with my fear and admiration of the "big kids," in the school yard.

Mima Broadbent found me while she and her husband were doing missionary service in Florida. Emails exchanged, dates missed, and then; "Tuesday?" and she's bringing, big brother David along. It has been decades, likely a funeral, when last we saw each other. Lunch at the *Boathouse* would provide adequate opportunity to catch up on decades lived, even pick a few scabs.

Many commonalities; Mormon upbringings, college town environments, academic fathers, college and graduate degrees, temple marriages in perpetuity, raising kids, joy in our grand children, aging's

vicissitudes, and now having the time to wonder what it all means. And one significant difference. Back in the seventies while in Ann Arbor, in quick succession; I left Mormonism and the mother of my sons. Similarities ended then, or not so much.

Anticipating our get together, I had several insecurities. Would I be able to keep my post Mormonism hostilities under control? Would their proselytizing zeal overcome them? Could I refrain from mocking such bright, educated, and worldly seniors, their hanging on to the fairy tale fraud of Joseph Smith?

David is a master of understatement, even that "backward talking," where treasured grand daughters are described as "ugly," for fear of gushing about their beauty and a grandfather's joy. Mima could run a corporation, self effacing, "only a mother, take the leftovers," as we shared Key Lime Pie.

Lots to talk about. Including several recollections from long ago, of my father, learning of my polio, coming to see their father, literally falling into his arms. fearing for my life. I had no idea.

Most of all we laughed together. J.R.Larsen, bishop at the time, paraplegic chemist who sent me on that asinine mission to West Berlin. Bastard, hadn't thought about him in forever. Maturity and perspective explains most of life's turbulence, in retrospect, all those things we had in common, our individual approaches, taking into account spouses and other circumstances, we did our best, no tragedies, lots of outcomes, predictable and unique, parallels and commonalities outweighing a few differences. Would we, knowing what we know now, choose to be parents? Dangerous honesty.

Friends of, and for life.

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## ARTICLES

### Disparaging God or "No thanks, lord"

By Virgil Thorp

My heart would not let me do it. I wanted to cry out, "That's bullshit!" so badly but it wasn't the time and it would not have been right.

The occasion was a normal morning as I pedaled through the neighborhood. I usually wave to everyone and most wave back. This particular morning was different as I encountered a neighbor lady who was walking alone and waved me over.

"I almost lost my husband last night," she blurted with tears welling up in her eyes.

"Oh no," I said, "is he going to be all right?"

"Thanks to the lord, yes!" she exclaimed between short breaths. "He's on life-support. His lungs were full of blood. And the doctors said, 'We're losing him, we're putting him on life-support.' He couldn't breathe. He had broken his leg. The marrow went into his lungs. And they were full of blood. And he couldn't breathe. And I started praying to God. And God did it. He started coughing out the blood. And God made it happen. Thank God," she said gesturing to the sky, "Praise the lord."

The look on her face, the anxiety, the concern, the fear, the relief; it was all so sincere. And there I was, atheist, heretically skeptical, and I could not bring myself to refute her raving. Why couldn't I say, "That's bullshit?" Or, even, "That's not how it works?" Was it because I had been there too?

Personally, I've had cancer. Beat it so far. My mother had cancer. She lost her life at age 43. Her younger sister followed her at about the same age. Her daughter, my sister, gone too. Same kind of cancer, same kind of suffering. They all had prayed and it didn't help. I prayed hard every night and every day for my mother. I prayed when I could hear my parents through the bedroom wall pray and their muffled sobs as my father did his best to ease her pain. It didn't help then. Was it God or the morphine?

When my turn came to face the disease, I didn't pray... as a matter of fact, I even chased a person from my hospital room who wanted to pray for me. Because I knew it would not help.

I did my best not to let my skepticism show as my neighbor related her incomprehensible tale. Of course, she was distraught and it showed but the story of the events that led to her husband's infirmity had holes. It was somewhat hysterical and understandably so. But her certainty that it was God who saved the day disturbed me.

Not because she might be right, but simply because why would not an omniscient, all-loving, all-powerful entity have prevented the broken leg in the first place? So, I was asking myself questions. Was it the doctors' faults or something else that caused the problem initially? Misdiagnosis? Something

sewn up in the wound? An artery leaking? What? But her God knew all and had saved him. In her mind.

Actually, and of course, it was the hospital staff who saved him.

In my mind, as she was going on about God being the only reason for her husband being alive I had flashed back to Baptist Memorial Hospital when I was an adolescent and my mother had just undergone her hysterectomy and my faith began to pivot. After the surgery, my father and my sister and I were walking out through the lobby and ran into a family acquaintance who whipped out his St. Christopher medal and began to mutter a quick novena. "Hocus pocus make the bad go away thank you father for I have sinned la-la-la-la-la."

"I really believe this," he said with total conviction and made me wonder why our family was Lutheran while he was obviously Roman Catholic (and probably a pretty good used car salesman). "You use this and I know God will save her."

So, divine intervention or biblical morality. Was my mother's cancer caused because she had angered God for following the wrong religion I wondered? Yes, I'd say that was the beginning of my apostasy. Losing your naiveté is like watching a hero's feet turn to clay and in subsequent years it had been brutal, starting with Santa Claus who had taken his seat and was soon joined with other fearful myths and legends that had lain hidden under my bed and crouched in my closet in the fallen heroes exhibit of my mind. It was God's turn now.

My short life seemingly had been a series of disappointments, cruel tricks and scams. Being fooled because I trusted that the information I would get would be the truth. From adults to playmates, friends, enemies and family alike. From school room to playground. Tricks and fooling. Sometimes it would just be semantical word games meant to confuse and confound like Zeno's Paradox. How could you not attain your destination if you traveled half-way everyday? How long would it take to get somewhere? I always said two days and then they'd laugh and try to make me feel stupid, sometimes even showing me on a piece of paper. Half-way, half-way, half-way. See, you're still not there.

"Wait," I'd say, "you're not going as far each day."

"No, I only said 'half-way.'"

But my prayers to God for her cure went unanswered and remained unanswered for the next few years as her disease progressed. And then, with her body ravaged and mind wracked from pain, I beseeched with even more anguished devotion for God to please take her because I could barely stand to see her suffer another day or another hour, even though I cherished those

parting words she'd say to me every morning as I left for school, "I love you son."

No, I did not pray a prayer of thanks when I arrived at the hospital that final day when they had summoned me from history class and then told me she was gone as I raced through the emergency room doors. Her pain was stopped and that was a relief but I just called out God for what she had endured and said what was in my heart, "You bastard."

And I wasn't struck by lightning.

Maybe that's what I should have prayed for? Maybe that's what I should have told my neighbor even though I wanted to say, "Why the hell did your God allow this terrible thing to happen, the bastard!"

But at that moment, my heart wouldn't let me.

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## LETTERS

Ed Zillioux, Fort Pierce, FL  
Submitted (pending acceptance), 22 May 2017  
Palm Beach Post

Should better medical treatment be contingent  
on the ability to pay an extra fee?

There is a new initiative circulating within the medical community that would have a bearing on the quality of service you receive from a medical provider. It is called "concierge service." Within the past week, I have run into this on two separate occasions. The first time was regarding a surgical procedure that I am in need of. The surgeon in question was booked solid for the next seven months. I was told there was no possibility of having the procedure done earlier since it would not be fair to others on this waiting list. Even in the event of a cancellation, the list to fill the resulting opening would be equally as long. But wait, I was then told, there is a new service that is initiating in five months called "concierge service" that, for an additional fee, I would be able to bump someone who is already in line for the procedure and essentially be treated as a priority patient, placed ahead of those who would not or could not pay the additional fee. The fee for concierge service, of course, would not be covered by any medical insurance.

The second time, I answered a questionnaire regarding this concierge service that asked how much I would be willing to pay on an annual basis to my primary care doctor for more prompt service and greater personal time on the part of the physician than he/she is normally able to provide to all patients. I was given three amounts to choose from: the first was in excess of \$1000; the third was in excess of \$2000; the second was something in between.

I could afford to pay the extra fee for priority service, but knowing there are others who could not afford to pay has caused me to decline. I am deeply disturbed by this initiative and believe that it raises ethical questions that should not be a routine part of our access to medical care. I ask all medical doctors to consider the ethical cost of concierge service and whether this cost is not greater than the additional income that concierge service would provide.

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## POETRY

### DISCONNECTED

By Gloria Cosgrove

I dialed 411 for information  
and heard the operator say,

"Sorry ma'am,  
there is no hot line,  
no number at all.  
No listing for a god.  
No indication  
that he or even she  
ever existed."

Thus giving me  
sufficient reason  
to remain religiously  
disconnected.

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## We Stand on the Shoulders of Darwin

By Ed Zillioux

Sea turtles weep whilst shedding their eggs,  
    Who said only humans tear?  
Owls hoot but do not holler,  
    Humans do both, but don't give a hoot.  
Pigs root for truffles and squeal with pleasure,  
    Humans can't root, but too often we squeal.  
Dogs will bark and growl and whine,  
    Well, two out of three ain't bad.  
Elephants honor their dead – or so it seems,  
    And so do we – or so it seems.  
A monkey knows nothing of heaven,  
    And nor will we, nor will we.  
Why do we think we're so different,  
    Being by chance, at the Darwinian tail?

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## COMEDIC CORNER

