

THE JOURNAL

JULY/AUGUST 2025 VOL. 10, NO. 4



"Bloody Sunday" 60 years ago and counting.

By Ed Zillioux p. 31

"The Pay Pal Mafia" – Bats in the Belfry, Nazis in the Attic

By J. Dan Vignau p.48

"Where's Arthur?" – He was just a sweet old panhandler

By Virgil Thorp p.90

AOTCJournal

Welcome to the **Journal of the Aware Ones of the Treasure Coast**, a secular humanist gathering, providing companionship, conversation, support, and good times, within honest and objective atheist, agnostic and freethinking values.

Vol.10, No.4

July/August 2025

In this issue:

Introduction	3
AOTC Members	8
Meetings & Events	8
Commentary	23
Articles	44
The Way We Were	70
Fiction & Poetry	89
Comedy Corner	99

**- Produced by the TC Secular Writers -*/*

awareonesofthetreasurecoast.com

INTRODUCTION



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AMERICAN NEWS, LLC

*MERRILY MARCHING
BACKWARDS TOWARDS
WHAT EXACTLY???*

This year, 2025 is living history. It is as important to our nation's history as 1776 was.

I know, last year, 2024 was nothing special. Kinda boring really. You would get up, pour some caffeine, watch Morning Joe eat up and spit out what legacy news media wanted us to turn our attention to. Make Donald Trump sound electable vis a vis a half-breed woman married to a Jewish man. There was very little

anxiety, fear, or even health concerns (I know I stopped using any masks as I would shop Publix, Winn Dixie or Walmart.).

Up until last November 5th, I thought life was getting pretty much “back to normal”. And then the roof caved in. I had an upset stomach from November 5th to January 20th. Anxiety and acid reflux ramped up every day. And then, Donald J. Trump took an oath that he never intended to honor and brought the shit of project 2025 to the fan.

Hatred and bigotry have oozed out from the powers now in charge, contaminating any and everything their filth touches. Elon Musk was appointed as head of DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency), and the destruction of governmental safeguards was on. Every day, we were battered with more news of departments that had been constructed through time-honored, cause and effect science, were being ripped apart in maniacal glee. National Institute of Health (NIH) and all the good work it did ... gone. Social Security (SSA) ... bleeding. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) ... hobbled to the point it is unable to pursue tax cheats.

An escalation of the so-called “culture war”. Anti-woke, anything that had to do with equality, diversity and inclusion was demonized and crushed under a monstrosity bloody foot.

Assaulting Medicare and Medicaid. Destroying FEMA and USAID with undisguised delight when liberal tears were detected as much needed food and medicines were left to rot and needy people were left with nothing. Gutting the National Park Service.

There are outright lies about immigrants. They say they will deport the evil ones. The gangsters, the drug-dealers, the raping murderers. It hasn't been that way. Its farmworkers, chambermaids, assisted living workers, shit-pot cleaners. They live a life of fear and apprehension. The fiendish Stephen Miller has declared a goal of 3000 migrants – illegal or not – to be deported every day. Is there a bounty? Where's your papers?

Where's your birth certificate? Where's your passport? If you are not white, you could be stopped, handcuffed and taken away, fuck the proceeding questions!

Morons have been appointed to positions of power. Linda McMahon of WWE wrestling fame, was appointed to lead the department of education. Yes, there is an important difference between AI technology and A-1 steak sauce. But Linda doesn't know that.

Robert Kennedy Jr., the drug savaged son of a martyred hero, an opponent of science and vaccines, is in charge of the department of Health and Human Services. Just the opposite of who should be in charge of that agency, He recently dismissed seventeen (17) members of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) vaccine advisory committee. And get this, he says he will restore public confidence by appointing his own people to that committee. I feel safer already, don't you?

The entire cabinet resembles a Fox News broadcast. Why? Because it is a Fox News Broadcast! The same Fox news broadcasters who were complicit in spreading false news about election fraud by Dominion Voting Systems. \$787 billion worth was the settlement. So trustworthy.

I don't want to, but I will dedicate a sentence (or two) to the craziness of the on-again, off-again series of tariffs and anti-tariffs and the rising cost of eggs and gasoline. Price fluctuations at retail outlets are now in dollars instead of pennies and nickels and dimes. Is this winning?

Ed Zillioux's commentary in this issue, "Bloody Sunday", 60 Years Ago and Counting (p.31), is a revelation into the heart of our nation's bigoted past. He mentions a song from the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic musical, South Pacific, that was an epiphany to him and slammed our collective prejudices, "You Have to Be Carefully Taught". That song touched me when I heard it, too. So

much so that later in life I would quote the lyrics in many editorials and diatribes.

Another drama affected me similarly. It was Spencer Tracy's eloquent speech from the Lawrence and Lee play that was turned into the movie of the Scopes 'Monkey' Trial, *Inherit the Wind*, based on events that took place 100 years ago. Tracy was the Clarence Darrow character, Henry Drummond, who says this chillingly accurate prediction about Christian zealotry as he addresses the courtroom:

- [Henry Drummond](#): *Can't you understand? That if you take a law like evolution and you make it a crime to teach it in the public schools, tomorrow you can make it a crime to teach it in the private schools? And tomorrow you may make it a crime to read about it. And soon you may ban books and newspapers. And then you may turn Catholic against Protestant, and Protestant against Protestant, and try to foist your own religion upon the mind of man. If you can do one, you can do the other. Because fanaticism and ignorance is forever busy, and needs feeding. And soon, your Honor, with banners flying and with drums beating we'll be marching backward, BACKWARD, through the glorious ages of that Sixteenth Century when bigots burned the man who dared bring enlightenment and intelligence to the human mind!*
- [Judge](#): *I hope counsel does not mean to imply that this court is bigoted.*
- [Henry Drummond](#): *Well, your honor has the right to hope.*

Conflicts have broken out in the Middle East; conflicts have broken out in our cities. Conflict is here. The boy cries wolf and chicken little says the sky is falling. You know something? They might be right.

Welcome to the Journal of the Aware Ones of the Treasure Coast Vol. 10, No. 4 July/August 2025. The clock is ticking.

Virgil

Imagine having a government that now
has over 30 people employed in the
administration who used to work for a
TV station that was fined \$787 million for
lying to its viewers.



We continue the process of increasing the distribution of this Journal in the hopes of attracting new members. If you are new to the Aware Ones and would like to know more about us, please visit our website at <http://www.AwareOnesOfTheTreasureCoast.com>.

You are also welcome to join our tables and the fresh air at either Stuart's *Sandsprit Park* 3443 SE Saint Lucie Blvd, or *Flagler Park* (under the Roosevelt Bridge on the 1st Friday of the month), where we gather every Friday *around* 11:00 am to share ideas and challenge your mind – masks optional. Members are encouraged to share and spread what is becoming a very interesting magazine. Outside criticism and interesting contributions are welcomed. Everyone is welcome to join us at the Sunday 11 am Zoom meeting.

If you do not want the journal and wish to have your address removed, please email vmthorp@outlook.com for confirmation.

AOTC MEMBERS

Dan Vignau	Ed Zillioux
Marsha Banks	Bob Haskins
Ernie Breud	Barbara (Lange) Longo
Eddie Buitrago	Jim Longo
Ray Duryea	Jerry Shaw
Rick Burkhart	Sandra Burkhart
Roberta Synal	David Dorenzo
Paul Carlos	Lucy Thorp
Gloria Cosgrove	Virgil Thorp
Gale Baker	Linda Webb
Bert Mautz	Betty Tewksbury
Betty Kasoff	Mark Kasoff

MEETINGS & EVENTS

Meetings



Friday gatherings: **First Friday of month at Flagler Park** (next to *Hudson's on the River* restaurant across the tracks from the Roosevelt Bridge). All other Fridays, *Summits at Sandsprit* – 11 am gathering in the sun and fresh air of Stuart's Sandsprit Park. BYOB.

Sunday Zoom – 11 am Zoom meeting. Contact Dan Vignau <vignaujd@comcast.net> to be included with the connection codes.



TC Secular Writers – We have returned to Jensen Beach at the *House of Brews* (3311 NW Main Ave, Jensen Beach, FL 34957) on every other Thursday evening at 6:00 pm.

Events

July 2025 National Watermelon Month



July 1

National Postal Worker Day



July 2 1937: Amelia Earhart and navigator Fred Noonan are last heard from over the Pacific Ocean while attempting to make the first equatorial round-the-world flight.
Photo: (Associated Press / Metropolitan Museum of Art / MoMA)

Made in America Day



July 3 – **Writer's Group @**

Jensen House of Brews, 6:00 pm.

Compliment Your Mirror Day



July 4 – **Aware Ones at Flagler Park, 11 am.**

Independence Day – Happy Birthday, America!!



July 5 International Bikini Day

July 6 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**



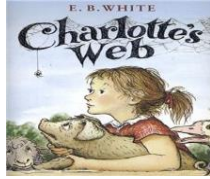
I don't know who needs to hear this but Los Angeles is not burning to the ground and if you believe this, you are easily manipulated by propaganda, lack basic critical thinking skills and are simply really stupid.



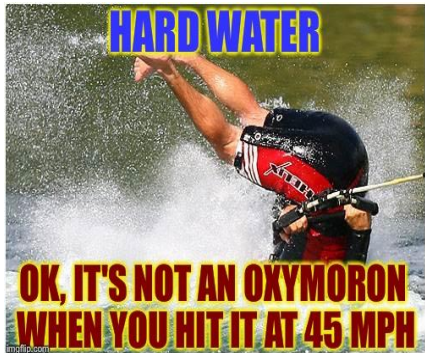
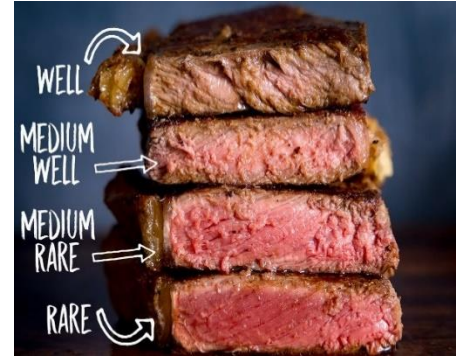
July 8 Cow Appreciation Day

Body Painting Day

July 11 – **Aware Ones at Sandsprit Park 11 am.**



E.B. White born, 1899



World Kebab Day

July 13 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**

National Oxymoron Day



Disney teaches you to hate your step-mom, whereas PornHub has a completely different approach.

July 16 1942: Vichy France orders the mass arrest of 13,152 Jews who are held at the Winter Velodrome in Paris before deportation to Auschwitz. (wikipedia)
Photo: Two Jewish women in occupied Paris wearing the yellow Star of David badge in June 1942, a few weeks before the mass arrest (German Federal Archive)



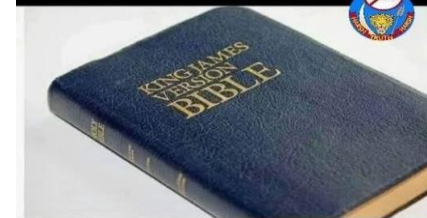
July 17 – **Writer's Group @ Jensen House of Brews, 6:00 pm.**



Yellow Pig Day

July 18 – **Aware Ones at Sandsprit Park 11 am.**

When your bible has the word "version" in it



Just how accurate can it be?

July 20 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**



National Ice Cream Day

July 24 National Tequila Day

July 25 – **Aware Ones at Sandspruit Park**



11 am.

National Food Porn (Culinarians) Day

July 27 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**



July 31 – **Writer's Group @ Jensen House of Brews, 6:00 pm.**

August 2025 National Catfish Month



August 1 – **Aware Ones at Flagler Park, 11 am.**

1936: The Games of the XI Olympiad opens in Berlin, Germany with a ceremony presided over by Adolf Hitler. Photo: Getty



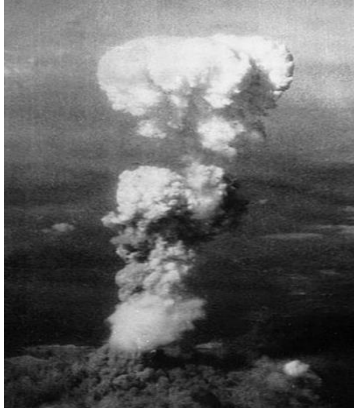
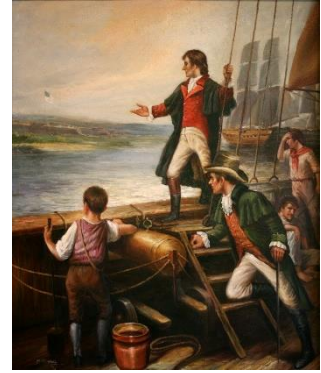


International Beer Day

[Francis Scott Key](#) Born in 1779.

August 3 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**

August 4 U.S. Coast Guard Day



[Barack Obama](#) born, 1961

(44th U.S. President)

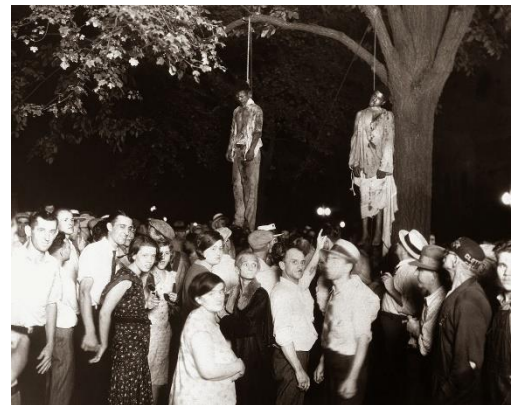
August 6 Hiroshima, Japan - 1945. Photo: Prof. Bernard Waldman, Project Alberta camera operator aboard the Necessary Evil (aka Plane #91)



I gotta admit that I

kinda miss the quiet old man who steered the economy out of a raging dumpster fire without turning every day into a circus train to hell.

August 7 1930: The last confirmed lynching of African-Americans in the Northern United States occurs in Marion, Indiana; two men, Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, are killed.



National Purple Heart Day

August 8 – **Aware Ones at**

Sandsprit Park 11 am.



International Cat Day

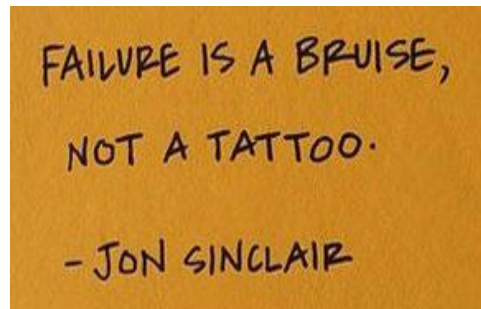
August 9 1969: On this night in Los Angeles, followers led by Charles Manson murder pregnant actress Sharon Tate, coffee heiress Abigail Folger, Polish actor Wojciech Frykowski, men's hairstylist Jay Sebring and recent high-school graduate Steven Parent. The following night, Manson followers murder supermarket executive Leno LaBianca and his



wife Rosemary in their home in Los Feliz.

Smokey Bear Day

Betty Boop Created in 1930 .



**August 10 – Aware Ones
Zoom 11 am.**

Herbert Hoover Born in 1874, in West Branch,

Iowa.

**August 12 1977: The first free flight of
the Space Shuttle Enterprise.**

Photo: NASA



**August 14 – Writer's Group @ Jensen
House of Brews, 6:00 pm.**

1935: President Roosevelt signs Social Security Act, creating a government pension system for the retired. Standing with Roosevelt are Rep. Robert Doughton (D-NC); unknown person in shadow; Sen. Robert Wagner (D-NY); Rep. John Dingell (D-MI); Rep. Joshua Twing Brooks (D-PA); the Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins; Sen. Pat Harrison (D-MS); and Rep. David Lewis (D-MD) By signing this act, President Roosevelt became the first president to advocate federal assistance for the elderly.



**Navajo Code
Talkers Day**

V-J Day

**August 15 –
Aware
Ones at
Sandsprit Park 11 am.**



Tomatoes Galore Day

Julia Child Born in Pasadena, California in 1912.



August 17 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**



August 19 **Bill Clinton** Born in Hope, Arkansas in 1946.

August 20 **National Bacon Lovers Day**

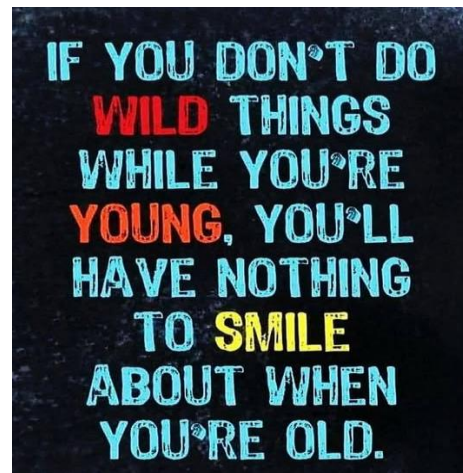
August 22 –



Aware Ones at Sandsprit Park 11 am.

August 24 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**

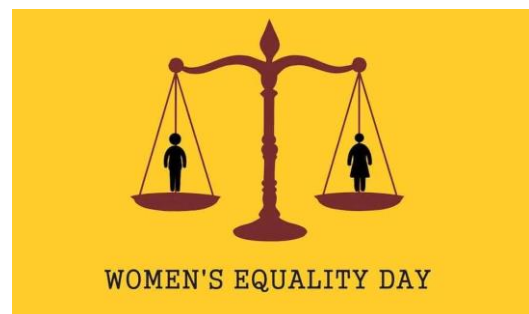
August 26, 1968: The Democratic National Convention begins in Chicago, as thousands of antiwar demonstrators take



to the streets to protest the Vietnam war, and its support by the top democratic nominee, Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

Women's Equality Day The anniversary of women getting the right to vote - the signing of the 19th Amendment, 1920.

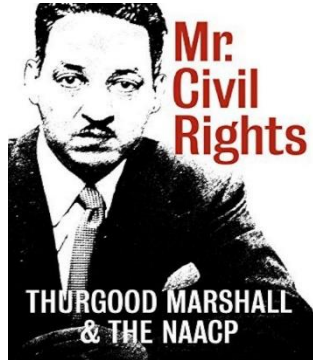
August 28 – **Writer's Group @ Jensen House of Brews, 6:00 pm.**



1963: The March on Washington, one of the largest political rallies for human rights in United States history, culminates in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The march is credited with helping pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Photo: Associated Press



August 29 – **Aware Ones at Sandspruit Park 11 am.**



2005: Hurricane Katrina devastates much of the U.S. Gulf Coast from Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle, killing an estimated 1,836 people and causing over \$108 billion in damage. Photo: NASA, NOAA



August 30 Thurgood Marshall took a seat on the Supreme Court, 1967.

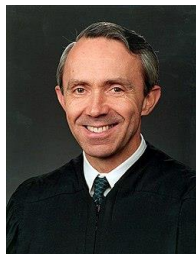
August 31 – **Aware Ones Zoom 11 am.**

LIVES LIVED – LIVES LOST

May



1 Ruth Buzzi, 88, American comedian (Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In) and actress (Sesame Street, That Girl), complications from a stroke and Alzheimer's disease.



7 Joe Don Baker, 89, American actor (GoldenEye, Walking Tall, Cape Fear), lung cancer



8 David Souter, 85, American jurist, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (1990–2009). Once named by The Washington Post as one of Washington's 10 Most Eligible Bachelors, Souter never married, though he was once engaged. He was an Episcopalian.



9 Margot Friedländer, 103, German Holocaust survivor and public speaker. In January 1943, her mother and brother were taken to Auschwitz concentration camp, where they were murdered. Friedländer's father was also murdered at Auschwitz. She survived by living under a false identity that involved dyeing her hair red and removing her Jewish star from her coat.



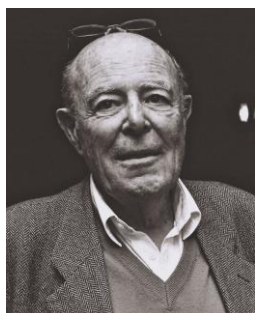
12 Alla Osipenko, 92, Russian ballerina (Kirov Ballet, Yacobson Ballet). She was the preferred partner on stage of Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rudolf Nureyev and Yuri Soloviev. After Nureyev defected to the West in 1961 while on a tour with the company including her, she was blocked from international touring.



13 Kit Bond, 86, American politician, governor of Missouri (1973–1977, 1981–1985) and member of the U.S. Senate (1987–2011).

20 Mine Kondō, 114, Japanese supercentenarian, oldest living person in Japan (since 2025). She worked as a farmer for much of her life while also raising silkworms and creating handmade paper.

- George Wendt, 76, American actor (*Cheers*, *Forever Young*, "Bill Swerski's Superfans"). Wendt was best known for playing Norm Peterson on the NBC sitcom *Cheers* from 1982 to 1993.



24 Marcel Ophuls, 97, French filmmaker (*The Sorrow and the Pity*, *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*).

The Sorrow and the Pity (1969). The four-and-a-half-hour film portrays "French citizens who are revealed as having been all too eager to collaborate with the occupiers." American film critic Pauline Kael described the film's impact this way: "There are fragments that in context gain a new meaning: the viciousness of shaving the heads of the women who had slept with Germans is horrible enough without the added recognition that

probably those who did the shaving had spiritually slept with the Germans themselves."

- Susan Brownmiller, 90, American journalist and author). *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, which was selected by The New York Public Library as one of the 100 most important books of the 20th century. She first became involved in the Women's Liberation Movement in New York City in 1968, by participating in a consciousness-raising group in the newly formed New York Radical Women organization, where she stated 'I've had three illegal abortions'.



25 Phil Robertson, 79, American businessman (*Duck Commander*) and television personality (*Duck Dynasty*).

26 Rick Derringer, 77, American musician (*The McCoys*), songwriter ("Rock and Roll, Hoochie Koo") and record producer ("Weird Al" Yankovic). He gained success in the 1960s with his band, *the McCoys*. Their debut single, "Hang On Sloopy", became a number-one hit in 1965 and is now regarded as a classic track from the garage rock era.



30 Loretta Swit, 87, American actress (*M*A*S*H*, *Freebie and the Bean*, *Race with the Devil*), Emmy winner (1980, 1982).

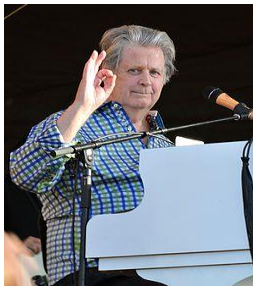
June

3 Jim Marshall, 87, American football player (Minnesota Vikings, Saskatchewan Roughriders, Cleveland Browns). Marshall recovered an NFL record 29 opponents' fumbles, including his 1964 "wrong-way run", a play in which he recovered a fumble and returned it 66 yards in the wrong direction into his own end zone, where he threw the ball out of bounds, resulting in a safety for the San Francisco 49ers.



9 Frederick Forsyth, 86, English novelist (*The Day of the Jackal*, *The Odessa File*, *The Fourth Protocol*). As for becoming a novelist, he confessed "I never wanted to be a writer," but wrote his first full-length novel, *The Day of the Jackal*, because he was "skint, stony broke." Published in 1971, the book became an international bestseller and

gained its author the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Novel.



• Sly Stone, 82, American Hall of Fame musician (Sly and the Family Stone) and songwriter ("Everyday People", "Family Affair"), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

11 Brian Wilson, 82, American Hall of Fame musician (The Beach Boys), songwriter ("Good Vibrations"), and record producer (*Pet Sounds*).

14 Melissa Hortman, 55, American politician, speaker (2019–2025) and member (since 2005) of the Minnesota House of Representatives, shot with her husband by crazed Christian extremist.



17 Charles Burrell, 104, American classical and jazz bass player.

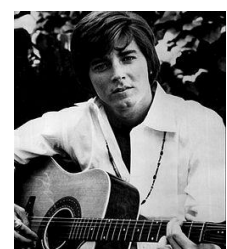
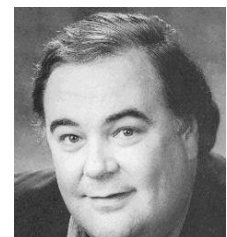
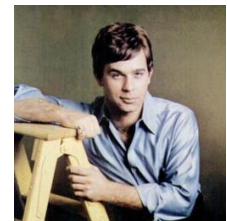
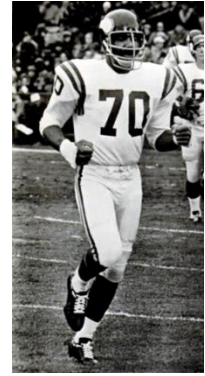
18 Lou Christie, 82, American singer-songwriter ("Lightnin' Strikes", "I'm Gonna Make You Mine", "Rhapsody in the Rain"), cancer.

19 Gailard Sartain, 81, American actor (*The Buddy Holly Story*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Hee Haw*).



23 Mick Ralphs, 81, English Hall of Fame guitarist (Mott the Hoople, Bad Company) and songwriter ("Feel Like Makin' Love"), complications from a stroke.

24 Bobby Sherman, 81, American singer ("Little Woman", "Julie, Do Ya Love Me") and actor (*Here Come the Brides*), kidney cancer.



Heroes



**'Disgusting': New
England Patriots
threatened with
MAGA boycott for
flag display**



The Patriots on Sunday released a social media post, presumably with the intention of promoting Pride Month, that included a LGBTQ+ pride flag.

"We celebrate together," the team's account on social media wrote.

That didn't sit well with thousands of conservative activists and influencers, who took to the comments to insult the football team. Several commenters threatened boycotts of the team.

@Unhinger wrote, "You just lost a ton to Fans. Enjoy the bud light treatment."

Michelle Hawley, who calls herself a "Trump-loving patriot" in her X bio, said, "People need to boycott any team does this no merchandise tickets nothing."

Sovereign Minds, a user who said Kamala Harris should be charged criminally for a mass-burning attack in Colorado, rejected the "celebrate together" notion itself.

***"NO KINGS" Rally, June 14,
2025 Stuart's Roosevelt
Bridge!!!!!!***



Asshole(s) of the Month





Gov. Ron DeSantis says that Floridians are **ALLOWED** to drive over protesters in the street, if they feel like their life is in danger...

LOVE this! 🍋🍋

"And we also have a policy that if you're driving on one of those streets and a mob comes and surrounds your vehicle and threatens you, you have a right to flee for your safety. And so if you drive off and you hit one of

these people, that's their fault for impinging on you. You don't have to sit there and just be a sitting duck and let the mob grab you out of your car and drag you through the streets. You have a right to defend yourself in Florida."



Republican Senator doubles down on her 'we all are going to die' response to Medicaid and SNAP cuts, comparing it to 'the tooth fairy' and recommends voters concerned about losing health care 'embrace my lord and savior, Jesus Christ'

@factpostnews



Iowa Sen. Joanie Ernst's apology in a cemetery after declaring "we all are going to die." At a town hall meeting.

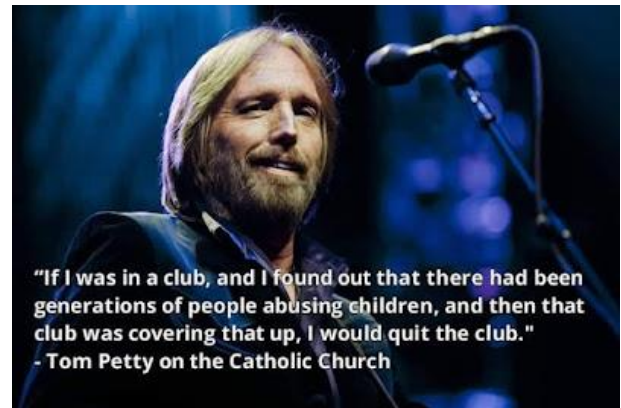
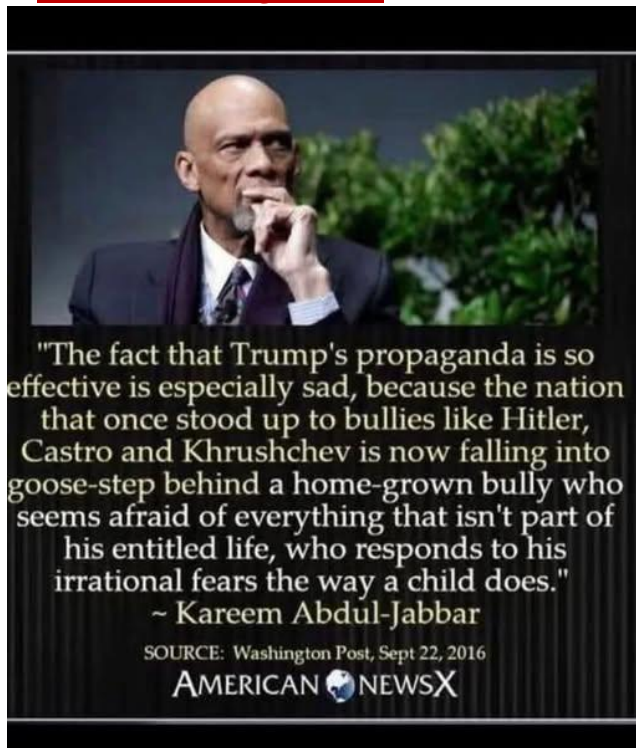
REICH-WING WATCH



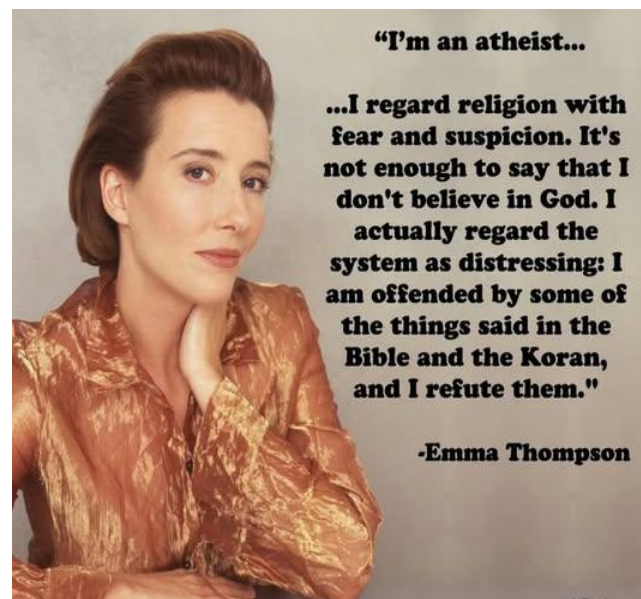
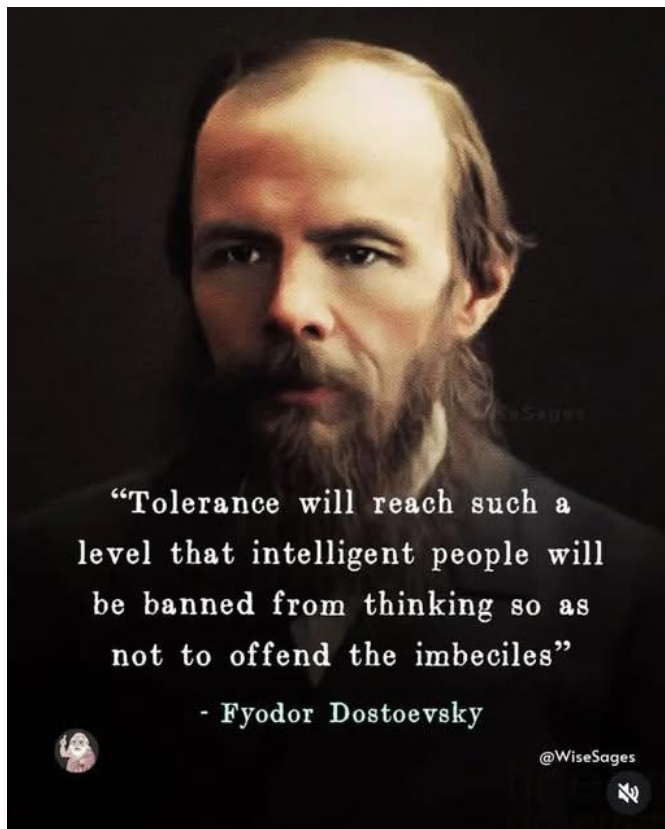
MAGA Republicans Mike Lee and Mary Miller Introduce Legislation to Make Transmission of Pornography a Federal Crime.

Under this legislation, sending a nude photograph via text message could result in up to 5 years in prison, with higher penalties for repeat offenders.

Humanist Quotes



"The law is meant to be my servant, not my master, my torturer & my murderer" ~
James Baldwin, 1966 [#WalterScott](#)



COMMENTARY





THE WRITER, IN SEARCH OF AN IDEA

By James Longo

"Why do I bother to write?" Jack asked.

"Why do you bother to write?" Jill asked.

"Few people read what I write."

"How do you know that?"

"Did you read what I last sent you?"

"What did you last send me?"

"A piece on our bicycling touring and how it has changed."

"You sent me that?"

"Exactly, did you even notice?"

"I've been busy."

"I've been busy too," Jack said with a hard stare.

"Don't start shit with me," Jill said raising her voice.

"Sorry, I wasn't trying to start shit. I was hoping at least you, of all people, would read my writings," Jack said, holding up his hands in surrender.

"Okay, I'll try to read them in the future."

"Thank you, but if the people I love won't read my stuff, am I not very good? Am I wasting my time? Why should I bother?"

"You write great dialogue, I've always said that," Jill said.

"But you won't read it."

"I don't have to read it ... I live with it."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Jack said, again with a hard stare.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, it doesn't mean what it sounds like, it's just that you usually bounce your ideas off of me before you write, so I have a pretty good idea of what you're writing about," Jill said, squinting back at him.

"Let me get this straight, you already know what I am going to write before I write it, so you don't have to read it?"

"Maybe we should change the subject before someone gets their feelings hurt," Jill said trying to lower the temperature in the room.

"Which is a nice way to say I suck,"

"You don't suck. People are busy. People don't read like they used to. People have too many venues for entertainment. You can't expect to spend five minutes reading your stuff. Some people don't want to hear your opinion, because it isn't theirs. Some people can't handle that."



"If no one wants my opinion, why am I writing?" Jack said with a raised eyebrow.

"Are you writing for them or are you writing for you?" Jill said with one raised eyebrow imitating Mr. Spock.

Jack's eyes got wide, and he stared at her in silence for a moment. "I guess both. I must admit at this point I am mostly writing for myself. It's cheap psychotherapy. I spend a couple of hours every other week putting down on paper what I think about and by the end of my essay. I usually understand the subject differently than when I started."

"So, why do you bother sending it out?"

"Hmm, I guess I am hoping my self-analysis will be as enlightening to others as it is to me. If not enlightening, thought-provoking, or at least entertaining," Jack said.

"So, you write for yourself, but send it out in the hope you will give someone a positive surprise ... If they will read it."

"If I could get them to read it."

"You can give the horse the water, but you can't make him drink."

"Hell, in my case, you don't even know if they drank, but it turns out that's not why I do this," Jack said and turned to his computer and started to write.



President George W. Bush's chief speechwriter, Michael Gerson, has a message for people who are excusing President Trump's racism:



*Racism — the
embrace of a cruel and
dangerous passion.*

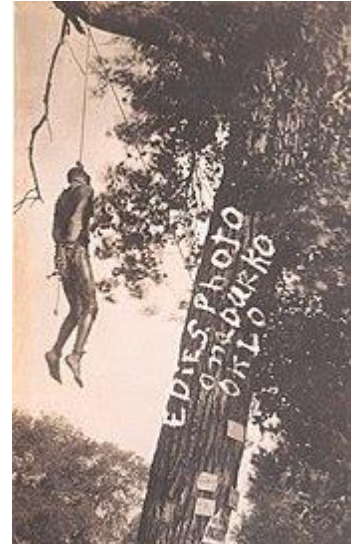


"I had fully intended to ignore President Trump's latest round of racially charged taunts against an African American elected official, and an African American activist, and an African American journalist and a whole city with a lot of African Americans in it. I had every intention of walking past Trump's latest outrages and writing about the self-destructive squabbling of the Democratic presidential field, which has chosen to shame former vice president Joe Biden for the sin of being an electable, moderate liberal.

But I made the mistake of pulling James Cone's 'The Cross and the Lynching Tree' off my shelf — a book designed to shatter convenient complacency. Cone recounts the case of a white mob in Valdosta, Ga., in 1918 that lynched an innocent man named Haynes Turner. Turner's enraged wife, Mary, promised justice for the killers. The sheriff responded by arresting her and then turning her over to the mob, which included women and children. According to one source, Mary was 'stripped, hung upside down by the ankles, soaked with gasoline, and roasted to death. In the

midst of this torment, a white man opened her swollen belly with a hunting knife and her infant fell to the ground and was stomped to death.'

God help us. It is hard to write the words. This evil — the evil of white supremacy, resulting in dehumanization, inhumanity and murder — is the worst stain, the greatest crime, of U.S. history. It is the thing that nearly broke the nation. It is the thing that proved generations of Christians to be vicious hypocrites. It is the thing that turned normal people into moral monsters, capable of burning a grieving widow to death and killing her child.



When the president of the United States plays with that fire or takes that beast out for a walk, it is not just another political event, not just a normal day in campaign 2020. It is a cause for shame. It is the violation of martyrs' graves. It is obscene graffiti on the Lincoln Memorial. It is, in the eyes of history, the betrayal — the re-betrayal — of Haynes and Mary Turner and their child.

And all of this is being done by an ignorant and arrogant



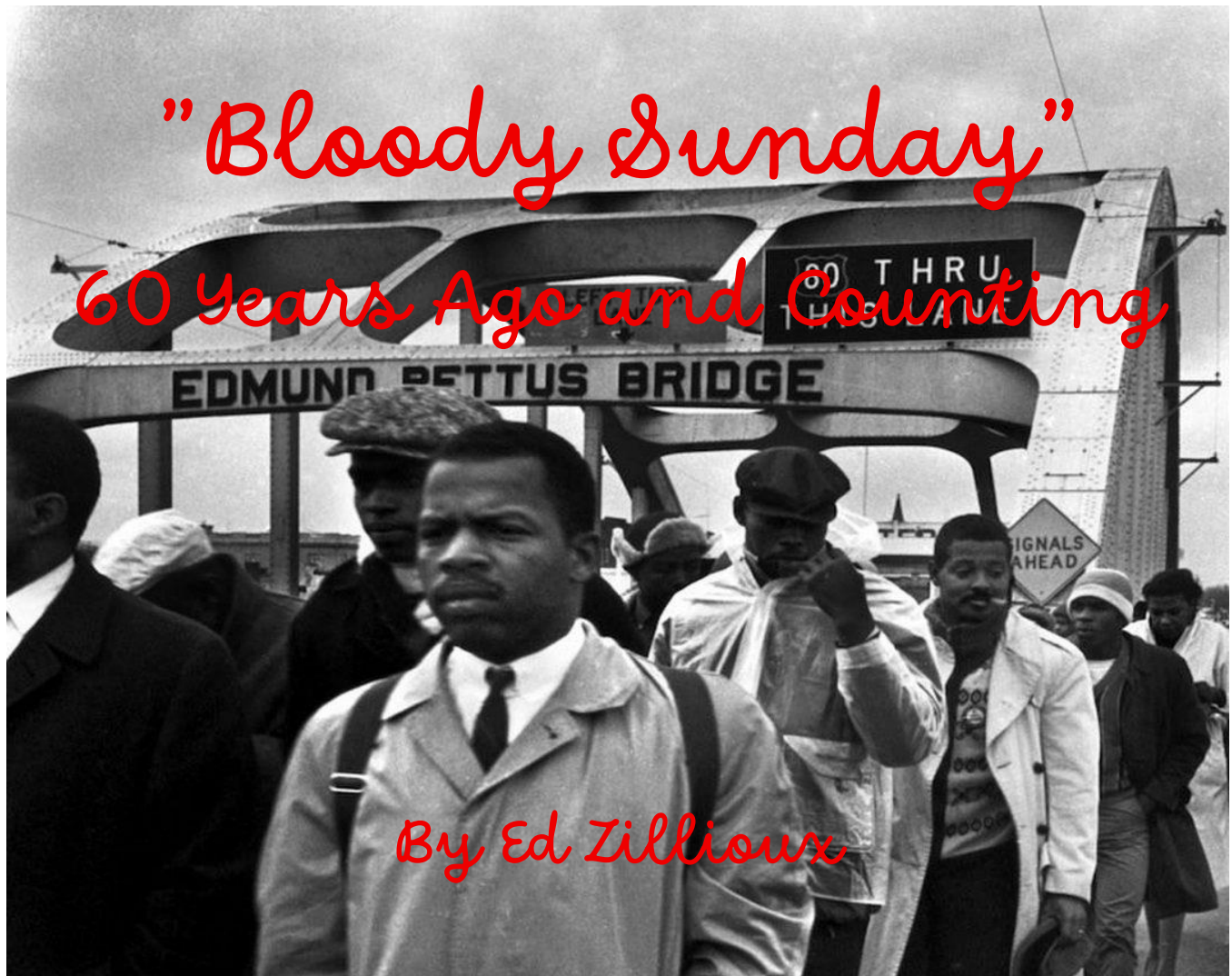
narcissist reviving racist tropes for political gain, indifferent to the wreckage he is leaving, the wounds he is ripping open.

Like, I suspect, many others, I am finding it hard to look at resurgent racism as just one in a series of presidential offenses or another in a series of Republican errors. Racism is not just another wrong. The Antietam battlefield is not just another plot of ground. The Edmund Pettus Bridge is not just another bridge. The balcony outside Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel is not just another balcony. As U.S. history hallows some causes, it magnifies some crimes.

What does all this mean politically? It means that Trump's divisiveness is getting worse, not better. He makes racist comments, appeals to racist sentiments and inflames racist passions. The rationalization that he is not, deep down in his heart, really a racist is meaningless. Trump's continued offenses mean that a large portion of his political base is energized by racist tropes and the language of white grievance. And it means — whatever their intent — that those who play down, or excuse, or try to walk past these offenses are enablers.

Some political choices are not just stupid or crude. They represent the return of our country's cruelest, most dangerous passion. Such racism indicts Trump. Treating racism as a typical or minor matter indicts us." — Michael Gerson





When will it ever end? On March 7th, 2025, we passed one of the ugliest milestones in the continuing struggle for racial equality in the United States of America. 60 years ago, on March 7th, 1965, a large group of mostly black and brown voting rights activists, including a young John Lewis, gathered in downtown Selma, Alabama with the goal of marching 54 miles on foot to the capitol building in Montgomery to deliver a petition demanding free and fair elections. But, they never reached their intended goal.

in order to enter the capital, they had to cross the Alabama river on the Edmund Pettus bridge (*named for a Civil War Confederate General and Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard – Ed.*) where, at the East end of the bridge they were met and severely beaten by an all-white group of state troopers and sheriff's deputies.

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbade racial discrimination in voting, the average southerner in Alabama was having none of it. The month before the Selma to Montgomery March, a peaceful demonstration was attacked by segregationists in the nearby town of Marion, resulting in the shooting and killing of Jimmy Lee Jackson, a young voting rights activist, by one of the state troopers participating in the attack.

I was 29 years old at the time of the March on Bloody Sunday. But I was unaware of the racist events boiling in our Southern states. Unaware and unengaged. I was born and brought up in the small towns of upstate New York. I was unaware of any black or brown kids in my schools, or at least in any of my grades, and this was true all through and including to my graduating class in high school. Shortly after I graduated, I joined the Navy and was shipped off to boot camp at Bainbridge, Maryland where, still, there were no black people in my company.

It was not until I was sent by train on route to Key West and the navy's sonar school that I finally saw the first evidence of segregation. We stopped to change trains in Savannah, Georgia and I had a chance to walk around a bit. I spotted a water fountain and walked over for a drink. I saw the word the word "colored" clearly printed on the porcelain front of the fountain. I was stopped and waved away. They pointed to the nearby fountain marked "white". Of course I had known there was segregation in the southern states, but this was the first time I came face to face with it. I felt repulsed.

At my first station following my schooling in Key West there was 1 black man. His name was Clentus Keester Williams, which we quickly shortened to *Willie*. Assigned to the same barracks in the naval station on rainy Air Force Base in Puerto Rico, Willie and I became friends. Later on, when he brought his wife down to live in a housing unit for non comms on base, Willie invited me to a home cooked dinner, and we had a pleasant evening together.



but, how different would my life have been had my parents been born in Selma, and I had attended schools in Alabama? Even though my genetic makeup would have been the same, I would not have been the same person.

As Rogers and Hammerstein succinctly put it in their famous musical South Pacific one song called “You’ve got to be carefully taught” impressed me with its truth. *(Full lyrics below)

Two days after Bloody Sunday the reverend Martin Luther King Jr. led a second march of thousands of voting activists back to the Edmund Pettus bridge so they could kneel and pray in these exact same positions where the state troopers had attacked them and turned them back before. These activists’ actions led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which protected voting access for all Americans this year the 60th anniversary was led by vice president Kamala Harris creating a jubilee at the Edmund Pettus bridge.



*"YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT" LYRICS

You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear—
You've got to be carefully taught!

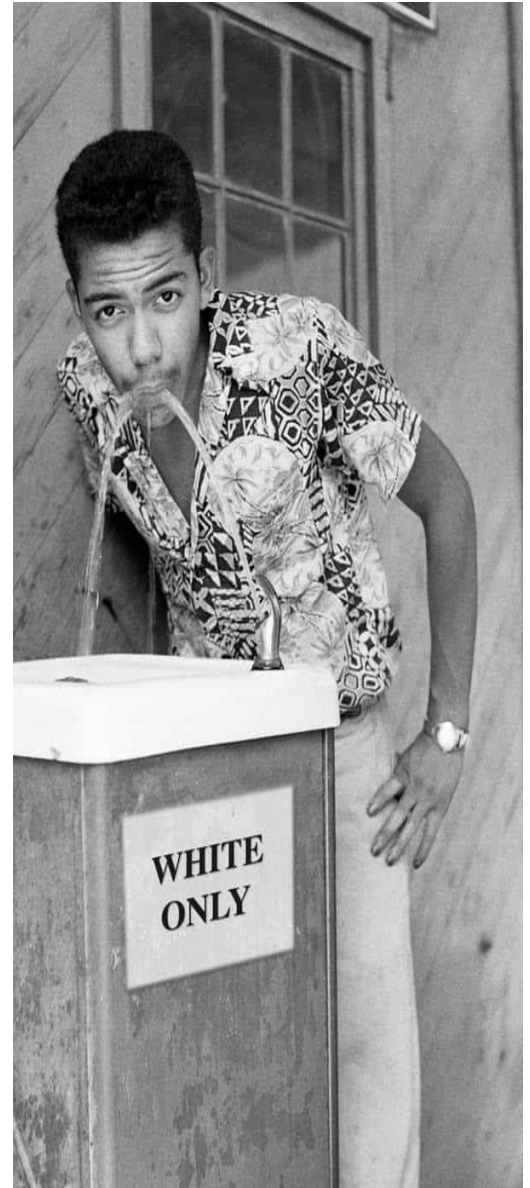
You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade—
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate—
You've got to be carefully taught!
You've got to be carefully taught!

I was cheated before
And I'm cheated again
By a mean little world
Of mean little men.
And the one chance for me
Is the life I know best.

To be on an island
And to hell with the rest.
I will cling to this island
Like a tree or a stone,
I will cling to this island
And be free—and alone.

"You've Got to Be Carefully Taught"
(Rodgers/Hammerstein II)

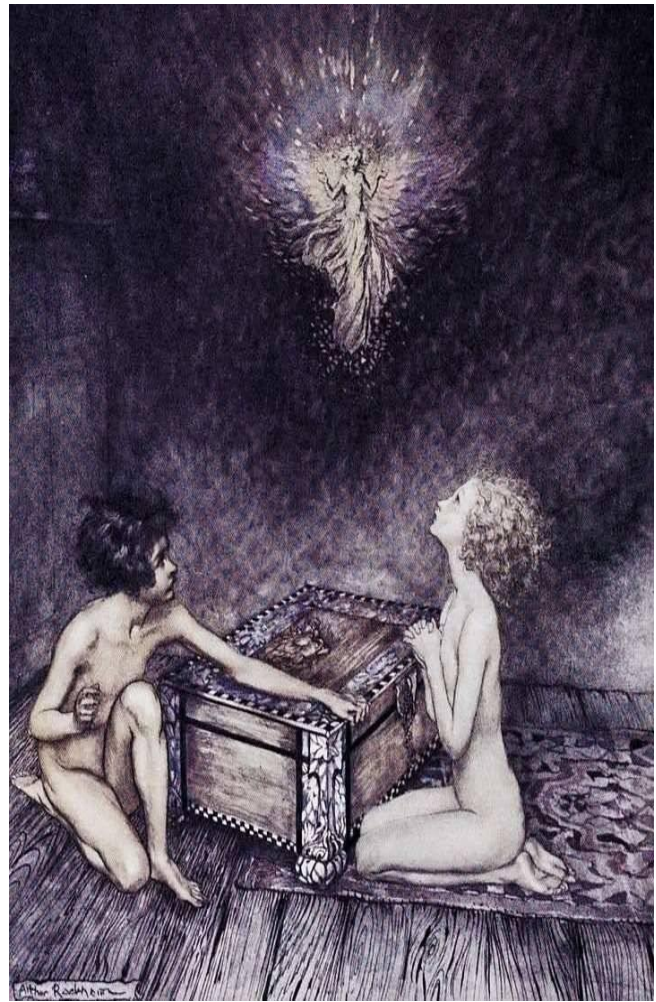


TWIM

THIS WEEK IN MYSOGINY

By Lucinda Lugeons

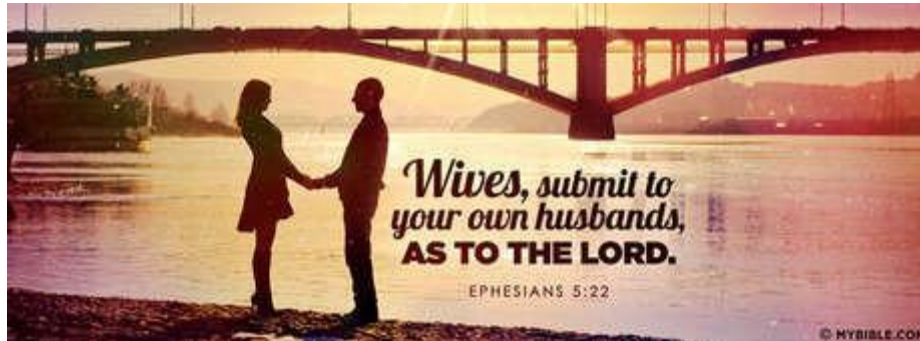
Here's a fucked-up thing to chew on: Every time I've appeared on [The Scathing Atheist] in the year 2025, I've done so with fewer rights. And if you also live in America, you've had fewer rights every time, too. If there was an American freedom tracker out there in the world, the cliff it's tumbling down would put the stock market correction to shame.



But the speed at which you're losing those rights is different depending on which reproductive organs you bring to the table. And we were reminded of that yet again when a federal judge in North Dakota decided that Catholic employers no longer have to abide by federal regulations that protect workers seeking abortions and fertility treatments.

And if you wanna know how full of religious bullshit this ruling was, let me just quote a quick excerpt for you: "It is a precarious time for people of religious faith in America. It has been described as a post-Christian age"). And I'm sorry, but the only people saying America is in a "post-Christian age" are Christians trying to scaremonger other Christians into taking away people's rights.

But hey, maybe I'm just overthinking it. After all, I'm thinking and I'm a woman, so some would argue that's evidence of overthinking right there. And one of the preeminent people making the argument against women thinking (in both word and deed) is Paula White-Cain; televangelist, senior adviser to the White House Faith Office, and person whose eyes are always trying to kill something on the other side of a wall with nothing but focus.



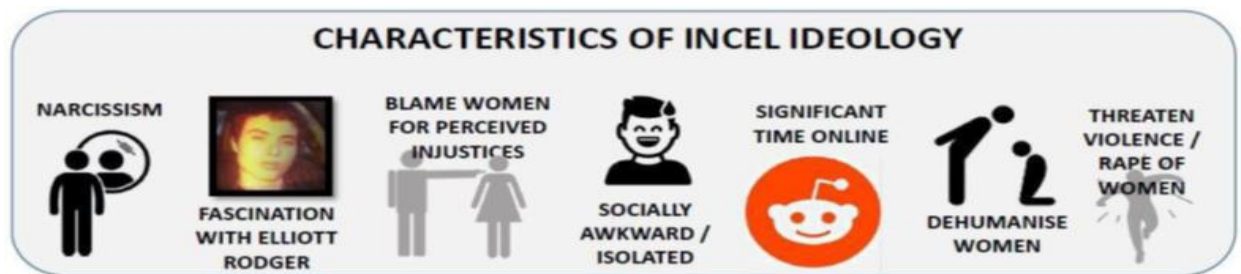
In a recent interview on the Steve Gruber show, she — a senior adviser to the fucking president — reminded female viewers that her god designed them to submit to their husbands. While agreeing with Gruber about how Christianity needs more “real men”, she said of her husband “If there’s ever a time that a decision has to be made and we don’t agree on something, he’s the head. It’s not that hard to submit”.

Now, Paula, I’ve never met your husband. But the one thing I know about his decision-making process is that it led him to marry you ... After he saw how that worked out for your first two husbands. So, I’m pretty confident in saying that nobody should submit their decision making to that numb-nut.

And what about women *without* husbands? Who are they supposed to submit to? Are they just supposed to walk around in a quantum superposition waiting for a man to come along and collapse the wave function for them? Well, luckily, Republican gubernatorial candidate Kyle Langford has an answer: Incels.

Now, to be clear, Langford isn't a serious candidate. He's one of a dozen Republicans running for Governor of California. And he's, like, number six or six among the Republicans, none of which stand a fucking chance. But when he was discussing his platform on immigration, he made a little news by suggesting that undocumented *female* immigrants should be allowed to stay, if they marry incels.

So anyway, I need a minute to formally broaden my definition of "varmint."



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Judge blocks worker protections for Catholic employers:

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/judge-blocks-worker-protections-abortion-fertility-care-catholic-120884316>

Paula White-Cain reminds Christian women to submit to their husbands:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/paula-white-cain-wives-submit-husbands_n_680a6681e4b0d1cc4a5a80d8

Republican gubernatorial candidate proposes letting female immigrants stay if they marry incels: <https://2paragraphs.com/2025/04/republican-governor-candidate-proposes-female-undocumented-immigrants-can-stay-if-they-marry-incels/>

illustration for the 1922 publication of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'A Wonder Book' by Arthur Rackham

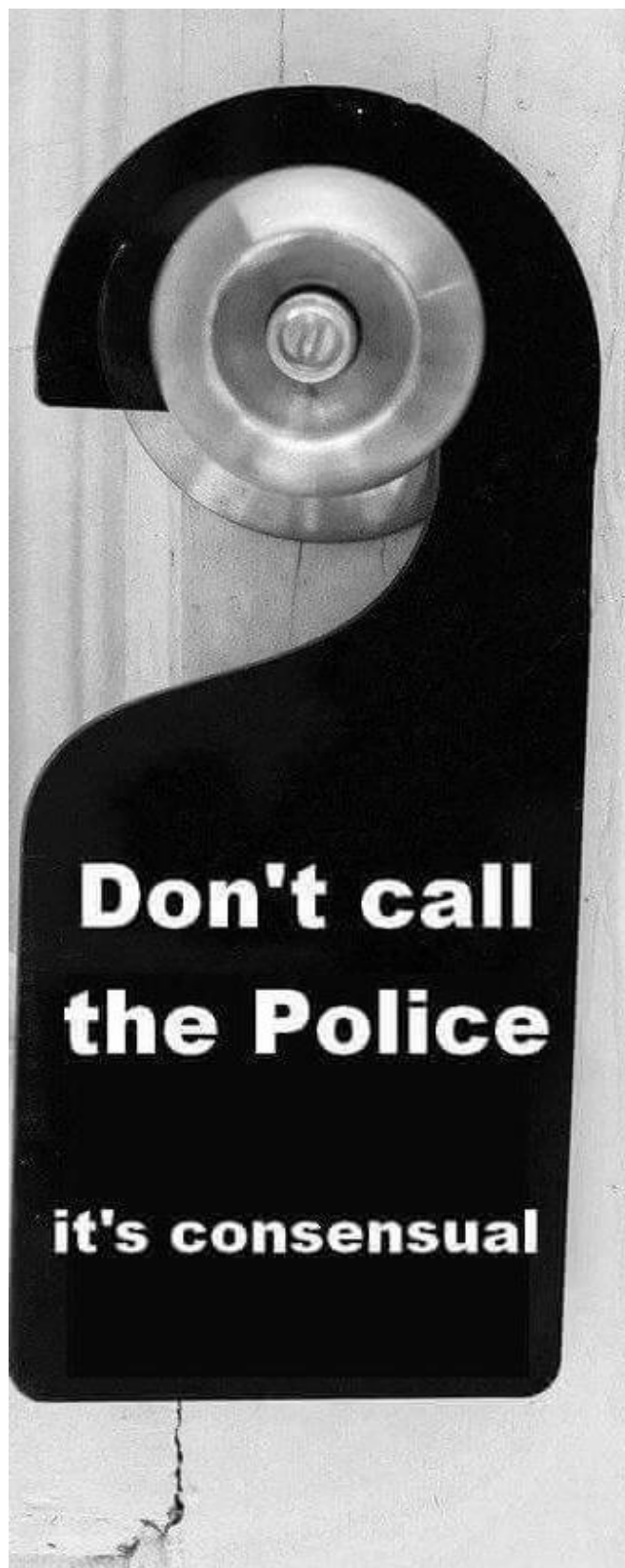
scathingatheist.com



I detest censorship. I abhor prohibitions. I resist any bluenose effort to restrict my access to or my ability to enjoy what I consume, be it food, drink or pornography ... even smutty pornography. In my most exacting parlance – freedom.

The idea, mistaken that it is, that prohibition and censorship will protect the innocent from being molested, etc. is preposterous. The innocent are in a constant quest for who they are, why they are. They want reality. Reality says that education is good, not evil.

It is that old biblical “Adam and Eve eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” bullshit. The “all my olive trees are virgins” nonsense which is proprietary and stinks of chattel ownership of another’s mind and body. The crazy Judeo-Christian notion of good and evil. The same Judeo-Christian notion that encourages slavery, vicarious cannibalism and human sacrifice.



Some parents, like the misnamed "Moms for Liberty", a group that deliberately misconstrues the human condition to further incite a culture war, do not want their children educated. Especially when it comes to sexuality. Too fucking bad, I say. Such education is an inherent right. Sexuality is just as important a thing as electricity and without the proper education, you will get shocked. They know this. We know this. The children deserve better. Come on, it is grow up time.

Lying, that is, not telling the truth to the growing adolescent is a crime in my humble opinion. "Let kids be kids," they often bleat. What a stupid idea when it is an excuse to postpone education. Actively delaying life is futile when the human animal responds to its hormones. Telling them that their sexuality is evil is depraved. Letting them

blunder because you're embarrassed with your own sexual impulses; Because you got a hard-on in study hall when it was your turn to read the smuggled, dog-eared smudged page, and sticky printed manuscript, 'Behind the Green Door'.

Uncomfortable as it might be in mixed company, taboo sex is hot. Whatever it might be, from Sophocles' Oedipus and his mother, Jocasta, to a Law and Order, student teacher tryst based on actual court transcripts of Mary Kay Letourneau. Recently in the television melodrama, Yellowstone, my dirty mind imagined that sultry Beth Dutton wasn't being maternal but was a little bit moist when she sidled up to the recently orphaned, young teenager with curly hair and pearly teeth, Carter (NFN) while he sat

RELIGION IS NOT BENIGN.
Stop pretending it is. Some of
the side effects of childhood
indoctrination can include:
Anxiety, terror, lack of trust,
immaturity, inability to make
decisions, sexual hang-ups,
inability to understand
science, inability to determine
fact from fantasy.

mourning on that bench outside the hospital when his pa died. Of course, she took him home. To prevent understanding is the height of denial and irresponsibility.

What I have recently found more pornographic, more obscene, has been the white racist supremacy that parades in the Oval Office, goose-stepping over non-whites and non-christians and what they call the "non-acceptables" in our society. Which, when you think about it, is pretty funny coming from such thieves and blackguards.

Censorship of pornography is only an excuse to suppress and prohibit other ideas, other lifestyles. They are like Joseph Goebbels with the lies they spread: "Millions of Immigrants are raping and murdering." "Transgenders are invading women's sports and raping women athletes in locker rooms." "Gay people



Bruno J. Navarro

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"Once you decide that a single vulnerable minority can be sacrificed, you're operating within a fascist logic," they said. "That means there might be a second one you're willing to sacrifice and a third, a fourth. Then what happens?"

are recruiting because they have to ... because they can't reproduce. How else can they proliferate!?! "God only makes perfection, just two sexes, man and woman." "God doesn't make mistakes." "Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve." Laken Riley, Riley Gaines, Ashli Babbitt, Alina Habba, Olive Oyl" And on and on with hyperbolic conclusions based on fear and bigotry.

The idea that you or anyone can successfully obstruct another person from learning about what they are, or who they are; telling them instead that how their bodies respond to stimulation is evil and should be punished is pathetic. THAT is sick. That's projection! That's perversion! That's deviancy! How fucking dare you drape your hang-ups upon them!

The funny part is that, as history repeats time and again, censorship and prohibition will not work. It will not stop an active imagination, even if that imagination preaches behind a pulpit on Sundays. Whack-a-mole all you want, uncomfortable ideas, complete with words, pictures and actions will pop up in exponentially larger areas, more places and in your own home.



Here's a for instance: Take this picture of a delicious cinnamon roll. It looks sweet. Hell, it is sweet. It looks like it will add at least five pounds to my weight the next time I step on a scale. But, it will taste fantastic. Because I have eaten cinnamon rolls before, I know they will taste fantastic and if they are fresh out of the oven and my olfactory sensors are working when I inhale, I have an urge to devour at least one. But, what if I look at it and say that the glaze isn't sugar, but semen? Looks the same though. Globbs up just like an ejaculation does. Will it taste the same? Will I be as eager to taste it if it is? Probably won't smell

the same. No doubt won't taste the same and if I don't like it, I won't eat it again.

If it is pornography I say, "let me see it." My reaction will be either; "you call that pornography? I know pornography and that is not it." And then I will go into a long-winded dissertation of what is pornography or, what is smut or, what is eroticism. If it is eroticism, my response will, usually be, "Wow!" Maybe I will like it. And maybe I'll say that botoxed lips and hair extensions are absolutely not sexy, will not taste sweet and what is, in my humble opinion, hard-core smut.



ARTICLES



More than a second

Transgender Commentary
By Ophelia Benson

Oh grow *up* ffs.

I had gender reassignment surgery – then the Supreme Court said I wasn’t a woman

Because you’re not. You could have had rabbit ears surgically attached to your head; you wouldn’t be a rabbit. You could have had feathers

painstakingly inserted into your skin; you wouldn’t have been a bird. You could have worn a Marilyn Monroe mask; you wouldn’t have been Marilyn Monroe. Forget about being a woman; try being an adult for a change. Adults understand that cosmetic tweaks are not magic and can’t make us something we’re not.

I’m not trying to make a statement about what a woman is, I just want to be one, writes Juno Dawson.

But you can’t. You can’t be a coffee pot or Delaware or Euripides. The list of things you can’t be no matter how much you want to is infinite. It’s childish to whine about it, let alone claiming you can do it.

On 16 April this year, I held my phone in one hand as a kindly nurse, Sofia, removed my surgical dressings.

“Huh,” I said. “The Supreme Court has just ruled that I’m a man, apparently.”

“Well, you have a lovely new vagina,” Sofia replied.



And all the angels clapped and then we went home for tea.

Why on earth would I share something so personal? It seems that politely asking for a dignified life has fallen on deaf ears, so I'll be undignified for a second.

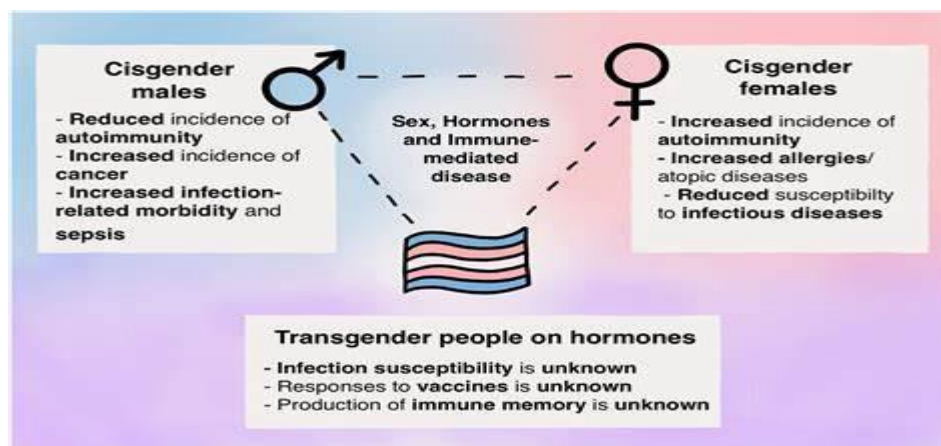
Pretending to be a woman and expecting the rest of the world to agree is not even close to "politely asking for a dignified life." It's not polite and it's embarrassingly childish.

If one uses the word "fascism", people accuse you of hysteria – but isn't this precisely what fascism looks like?

Uh, no. Not even close.

My view is that despite the law being very clear, actually, a few very determined transphobes have crawled their way to the heart of the law like maggots in an apple.

And there we go: he wants to be a woman and actual women are *maggots*. I wonder why we don't cheerfully welcome him into the club.



Ophelia Benson (born 1948) is an American author, editor, blogger, and feminist. Benson is the editor of the website *Butterflies and Wheels* and a columnist and former associate editor of [The Philosophers' Magazine](#). She is also a columnist for [Free Inquiry](#). In 2009, Benson co-authored *Does God Hate Women?* with Jeremy Stangroom. The book explores the oppression of women in the name of religious and cultural norms, and how these issues play out both in the community and in the political arena.

www.butterfliesandwheels.org

The Pay Pal Mafia

Bats in the Belfry, Nazis in the Attic



By J. Dan Vignau

This article is about three very rich men – entrepreneurial technocrats – from a country whose history is rife with pro-Nazi, and pro-Apartheid associations, South Africa. They believe in a Technocracy, rather than a Democracy. The members of their families have attempted for decades to take over the governments of Canada, South Africa, and now, The United States.

In the 1930's, Technocrat #1's grandfather, Joshua Haldeman, headed the Canadian branch of an US movement termed, *Technocracy Incorporated*. This movement grew out of opposition to Franklin Roosevelt's election, especially because of the reforms of his New Deal legislation. This was a movement whose express purpose was to overthrow democratic governments in order to have technocrats who are big businessmen come in and run the country.



Throughout the 1930's, this group took on increasingly aggressive overtones. They sided with German fascists and began wearing gray uniforms modelled on Hitler's Nazi brown shirts and Mussolini's Fascisti black shirts.



When Britian and Canada declared war on Germany in 1939, the movement was banned due to its clear sympathies with Hitler. Pro-Nazi and other subversive, anti-government documents were discovered and seized in Haldeman's house. He was arrested and sent to prison for a few months. After his release, a few years later, Haldeman founded another anti-government political party, this one was rabidly antisemitic and promoted the conspiratorial, antisemitic forgery called, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.



Haldeman found few supporters to his new hate filled movement in Canada after the war, so, he relocated to the former British colony of South Africa, where he discovered very fervent cache of supporters of apartheid.

Technocrat #1's second grandfather who also made the move to South Africa, made a fortune in the mining of Emeralds. It was here where our Canadian protagonist was educated, only leaving when he turned 18; otherwise, he would have had to serve his required term in the South African military.

Technocrat #2 was schooled in Johannesburg, at least until his father moved to Southwest Africa (now Namibia), near the town of Swakopmund to work in the Rössing Uranium mine.



The reason that Southwest Africa was separate from South Africa was it had been a German colony until the end of the First World War, at which time it became part of the British Colony. It remained that way until Namibia became a republic in 1990.

A large part of the population retained the dubious parts of their German ancestry and thought. The New York Time sent a reporter to the country who wrote about being given a Nazi Salute when he pulled up to a gas station. Many curio shops sold Nazi memorabilia, such as mugs and flags. The region also honored Hitler's birthday with flags and celebrations. In 1989, it was reported in the New York Times that during "the [April 20th] birthday of Adolf Hitler, a Nazi flag was flown from the top of a building in Swakopmund, before being taken down by police."

This area had two types of white people, those who supported apartheid, and those who claimed to oppose it. Those opposed still reaped grotesque profits from it, but claimed that their genius and hard work, made them wealthy, rather than the indigenous, nearly slave labor which extracted, in this case, billions of dollars of uranium, which coincidentally is where our Technocrat #2 got his fortune to come to America, as did Technocrat #1 with his emerald fortune.

Our Technocrat #2 was educated at what he called a truly brutal school, where students were forced to wear uniforms and were corporally disciplined (sharp whacks across the knuckles with wooden rulers which wasn't much different from Roman Catholic

schools in other countries). He declared such punishment turned him against government, and into a self-named libertarian.

These two had a partner, whom we will call Technocrat #3. He was born in Cape Town in the 1970's. but moved to Tennessee as a child. He claimed in an interview, that the rampant racism of Tennessee influenced him to such an extent that he totally agreed with his partners' racist dogma. He is now Trump's (so-called) Crypto Czar.



The liberal press has deemed these gentlemen, *The Pay Pal Mafia*.

These three entrepreneurs want to rule the world, and Donald Trump has opened his regime to their anti-democratic ideals.

If you have not guessed their identities yet, they are; Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and our untraceable crypto money czar, David O. Sacks, all part of the founders of Pay Pal.





“West Point Cadets’ Silent Revolt—

Anonymous Graduates and Faculty Reveal Why President Trump Didn’t Shake Their Hands”

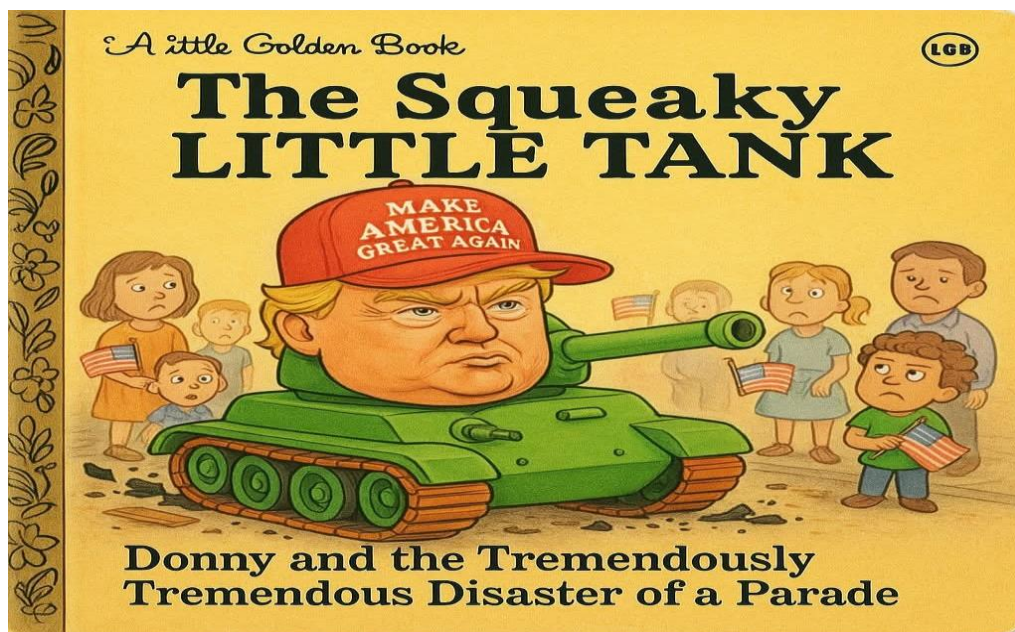
By Robert Hawks

WEST POINT, NY — In an unprecedented turn of events that unfolded with all the subtlety of a brass band playing “Taps” backwards, President Trump declined to extend his stay at the graduation ceremony of the United States Military Academy, leaving the newly minted second lieutenants’ hands as unsullied by presidential sweat as the honor code itself.

The mainstream media, ever allergic to nuance and eager to maintain their symphony of static, hasn’t said a peep about the real reason for the snub.

But through a series of clandestine interviews with anonymous graduates and equally reticent Academy faculty members, I have unearthed the hidden story of this ceremonial duck-and-cover. The reason, dear reader, lies within the very marrow of West Point's ethos: the Honor Code.

For those unfamiliar (or who haven't been paying attention since the dawn of the republic), the Honor Code stands stark and absolute: "I will neither lie, nor cheat, nor steal, nor will I tolerate the actions of anyone who does."



One newly minted officer, who would only identify themselves as "Second Lieutenant K," offered a hushed explanation: "We realized that by shaking the hand of a man already convicted of 31 felonies, we'd be tacitly tolerating those actions. It's not just semantics—under our code, we can't wink at dishonor and call it ceremony."

Faculty members, equally cryptic yet unwavering in their adherence to the Honor Code, found themselves wrestling with the potential fallout of the traditional handshake.

“Cadets approached me after final drills,” admitted an anonymous instructor. “They were genuinely concerned. ‘Sir, if I shake his hand, am I violating the code?’ They weren’t being flippant. These are people who signed up to die for principles if called upon—don’t underestimate how seriously they take them.” Another faculty officer, known only as “Major T,” put it bluntly:

“Look, you can salute the office.

“That’s tradition and lawful.

“But to physically clasp the hand of a man who has lied, cheated, and stolen—when our code demands zero tolerance? That’s not a handshake. That’s an ethical trap.”

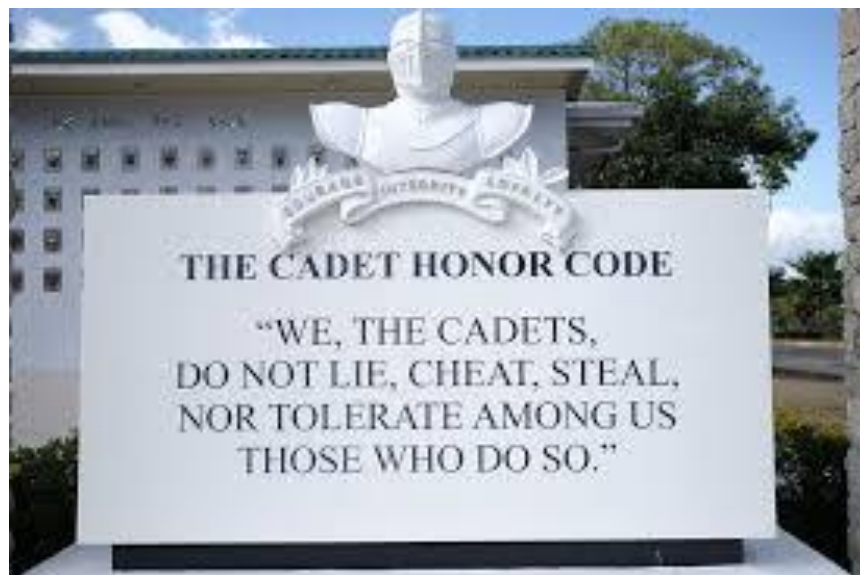
The consensus among these sources was clear: A handshake would have become a symbolic endorsement of the very actions the Honor Code forbids.



And it wouldn’t be a momentary lapse either—cadets feared it could haunt their entire careers.

"Years from now," explained a cadet, "someone might claim that our commissions were tainted—born in an act that violated the very code we swore to uphold."

Thus, an extraordinary decision was made behind closed doors, framed in the same ironclad logic that has guided this institution since the days of Benedict Arnold's ghost: better to forego the handshake altogether than compromise the moral backbone of the Corps of Cadets.



The decision, while sparing the graduating class an ethical quagmire, also spared the nation a broadcast spectacle that would have further underlined our national rift:

"Can you imagine," mused Major T, "an entire line of newly commissioned officers refusing to shake the President's hand, yet saluting him? It would've been the perfect image of our times—honor intact, but unity fractured."

And so, President Trump's decision to depart swiftly wasn't born of political cowardice or personal pique, but of a carefully orchestrated plan to protect the very soul of West Point. After all, in a world where handshakes can be loaded weapons, even the Commander-in-Chief had to recognize that the Honor Code brooks no compromise.

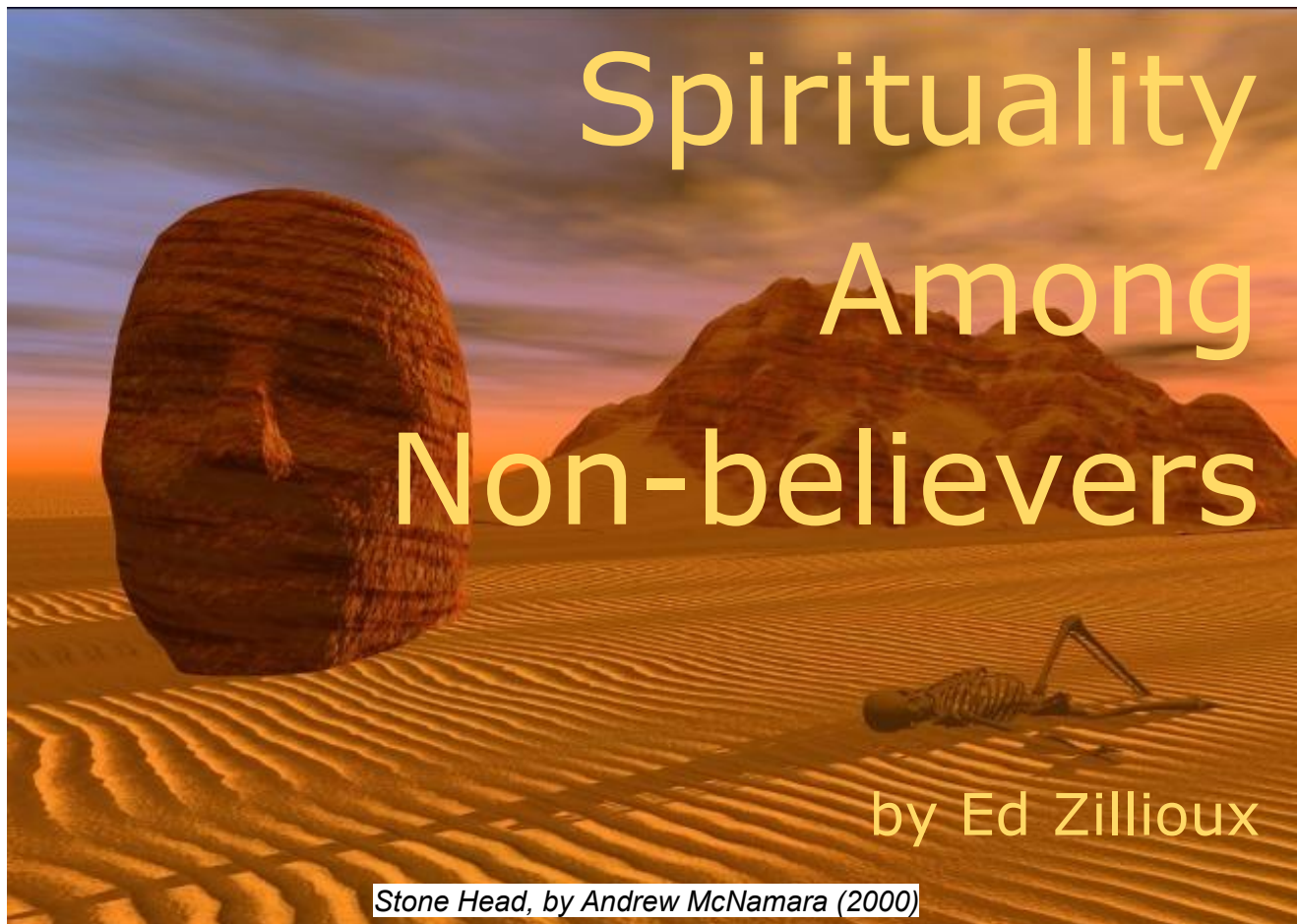


Or perhaps he simply realized that he'd be exposed.

As for the graduates, they walked away with their honor unsullied, commissions secure, and a story to tell that would never appear on cable news but will echo down the halls of the Academy long after the brass bands fall silent.

In the end, what's a handshake, really, when compared to the weight of an oath sworn under the long shadow of the Hudson? After all, even the president can't break the spine of an honor code written in blood, sweat, and the quiet resolve of those who know that a commission earned in truth must never be tarnished by the stains of another man's lies.





The following is an update of two earlier pieces I wrote on this subject. The first, entitled "Let's Talk Spiritual," was published in the HUMTC Newsletter in February 2014. The second was prepared for a panel discussion that I led on July 13, 2014 entitled, "Are Humanism and Spirituality Mutually Exclusive or Complementary?"

On a Tuesday of a week in 2018, the word "spiritual" was invoked by Roy Moore, a former chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court and an accused pedophile; to defend, or more specifically to describe, his fight to discredit his female accusers, aged 14 to 19, at a time when Moore was in his thirties. Like so many others of his so-called faith, he used the word spiritual synonymously with the word religious. I first heard him say, "This is a spiritual battle." He followed this with his reference to religion. In an effort to further legitimize his fight to clear his name of sexual wrongdoing, he then quoted two passages from the Bible dealing with false accusation. Moore's sad attempt at a defense based on religion or spirituality is sick. This is certainly not what I could equate with spirituality. Moreover, I would like to believe that

whoever was or were originally responsible for the biblical passages Moore quoted would agree with me. And so, I continue....

There seems to be an ongoing debate about whether spirituality is a legitimate humanist value. For example, Sam Harris wrote in his personal blog (June 27, 2012) a piece entitled "In Defense of Spiritual." He commented, "Whenever I use the word—as in referring to meditation as a 'spiritual practice'—I inevitably hear from fellow skeptics and atheists who think that I have committed a grievous error."



In the vein of full disclosure, I'll say up front that I consider this debate (or whatever it is) to be spurious, unwise, misguided, and totally unnecessary. So why am I writing about it? Simply because it has risen to the level of at least a quasi-debate among individuals who might be described as spokespersons for the humanist movement... but mostly, because it annoys me.

I believe I have a pretty good handle on my own spiritual inclinations, which have not substantively changed throughout my lifetime, i.e., through my early years as a dogma-indoctrinated Catholic kid, through my personal transformational period, and into my atheistic homeland, where I've resided through most of my years. Basically, it equates with a passionate love for nature

(it's why I became a biologist) including all living things and the quest for finding my place in the realm of planetary stewardship. I'm not claiming any enlightenment or significant contributions here; it's just the ideal that I have aspired to, not the degree of my success in achieving it.

A while back, I attended a meeting of the HUMTC at the UU church in Vero Beach. There, without any previous discussion of the topic, a member gave his definition of spirituality (obviously he had prepared his remarks and wanted to share them with the group). Not a bad summary, but I felt he got one thing wrong. He began with a statement that equated spirituality with religion, as though it only has legitimacy as an attribute of the religious experience. At the end of his definition, I responded that I did not agree, and one other member immediately agreed with me. We were not challenged and, regrettably, there was no further discussion on the topic. But it caused me to consider whether the linkage of spirituality with religiosity really was the dominant view, let alone the correct view.

Shortly thereafter, I received the January/February 2014 issue of *The Humanist* with this caption on the cover: "Are atheism & spirituality mutually exclusive?" The editor Jennifer Bardi certainly thinks so when she remarks, "I don't have a spiritual bone in my body." She qualifies her position, "Because spirituality suggests a depth within the self, and an awareness of – and appreciation for – a connection to what's beyond ..." Well yes, it can be that, but that's simply an application of the term by someone who is already a believer in such mysticism. I think, in terms of a basic definition of spiritual, it is more of a connection to what's around us and that implying a reference to the "hereafter" is a bridge too far.

Bardi apparently fears a possible association with the Christian sense of the hereafter and the linkage of spirituality with religiosity. Why is it that humanists seem content to leave the use of such excellent terms to the religious? Words like contemplative, transcendent, numinous, and many more.

Language is a beautiful thing and I refuse to give up a single word in deference to Christians or any other established religion or cult. When will they realize that we do not pose a threat to their identity just by the simple action of sharing words? You may say, "Yeah, but people will think that you're talking about spirits and ghosts and all manner of metaphysical stuff that we don't believe in." I say that's their problem.

In the same issue of *The Humanist*, Ryan Cragun wrote about the much publicized "Oprah-Nyad Affair." He concludes, "...it seems



the majority of atheists and nonreligious people in the United States are indeed spiritual in the sense that they experience wonder and awe and are moved by what surrounds them." (Cragun is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Tampa.) This is followed with an article by Michael Werner on "The Church of the Greater Solipsism." Werner contributes to the discussion with "The mantra today is, 'I'm not religious; I'm spiritual,' keeping it just vague enough not to offend others while providing an image of moral piousness." I like a lot of what

Werner writes, but to denigrate spirituality to nothing more than a holier-than-thou attitude is unnecessary, unfair, and perhaps even mean-spirited. (Werner is a past-president of the American Humanist Association.)

I have previously written, "Humanists that I have met and interacted with, in general, have shown a greater degree of spirituality and are more caring of the environment than the 'average' religious person." (ref. "The Anthropocene" HUMTC Newsletter, August 2013.) I have changed my mind. To help explain what I mean, I will again quote from Bardi. In her Editor's Note she comments on the *Humanist* interview with Hemley Gonzalez, who, in his search for meaning through charity, rejected self-serving religion-based charities and founded *Responsible Charity*, a nonprofit humanist organization for helping the poor. Bardi writes, "That's not a spiritual act. He's a humanist so it's not a religious act. It's a humanist act." I will go a step further, and say it's not a humanist act, it's a *human* act.

We all have the propensity for good behavior. It's what it means to be human. It's inherent in our genetic code. It's how we evolved (see my previous commentary on "Behavioral Evolution," AOTC Newsletter Vol.2 No.4). And it's how we are able to recognize evil. In the absence of empirical evidence, I am about to go out on a limb: I expect that there are as many truly good people who follow religious beliefs as there are among those of us who are non-religious. It's just easier for a humanist to see good behavior as an end in itself, than it is for a theist whose behavior is often predicated by the hope for reward in the hereafter.

There's a blog on the internet that discusses Christopher Hitchens' 2010 debate with the Unitarian minister Marilyn Sewell where Hitchens is accused of hijacking the language of spirituality. In his response, Hitchens said, "Hijacking the topics and language of spiritualists should not be resisted, but rather, it should be used carefully to enrich the scientific discourses." Nevertheless, I don't like the idea that borrowing terms from any one discipline to inform another should be referred to as hijacking

or usurpation. One could easily argue that religion itself has usurped many words that rightly belong to all.

Why, then, do we have to establish who “owns” spirituality? We



all get hung up on labels and spirituality turns out to be a doozy. But we’re stuck with the term, so it needs to be better defined. It seems to mean different things to different people and even supposedly authoritative sources are often colored by their own biases. A good definition needs to be simple, without bias of any kind, and broadly applicable. So, without any claim of authority, I will, for the purpose of this writing, offer my own definition:

“Spirituality is the desire and the will to do good, without anticipation of reward, and the capacity to feel joy and inspiration in the beauty of nature.”

But I would be remiss in this discussion if I failed to point out that numerous well-known authors have responded to the use, misuse and meaning of the word spiritual. I will end by including two particularly insightful synopsis:



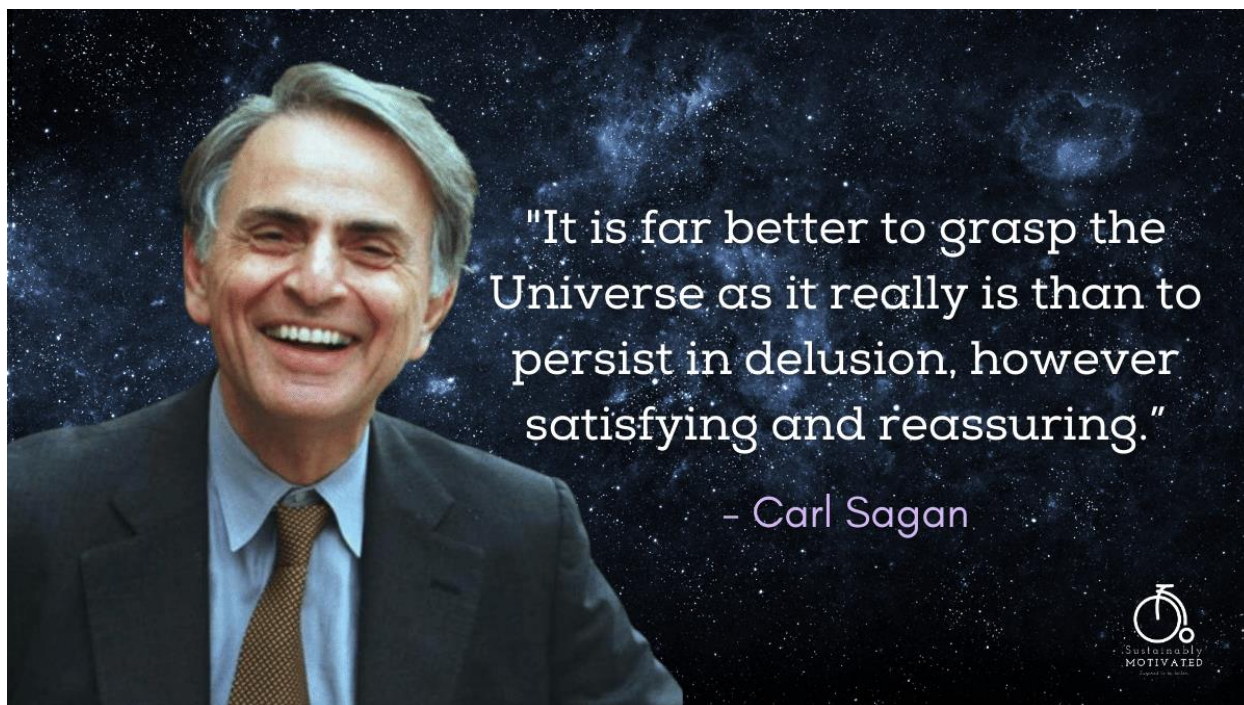
**There's simply no
polite way to tell
people they've
dedicated their
lives to an illusion.**

~ Daniel Dennett

@NateTalksToYou

First, Daniel Dennett, in his book *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, provided the following:

"If you can approach the world's complexities, both its glories and its horrors, with an attitude of humble curiosity, acknowledging that however deeply you have seen, you have only just scratched the surface, you will find worlds within worlds, beauties you could not heretofore imagine, and your own mundane preoccupations will shrink to *proper* size, not all that important in the greater scheme of things. Keeping that awestruck vision of the world ready to hand while dealing with the demands of daily living is no easy exercise, but it is definitely worth the effort, for if you can stay *centered*, and *engaged*, you will find the hard choices easier, the right words will come to you when you need them, and you will indeed be a better person. That, I propose, is the secret to spirituality, and it has nothing at all to do with believing in an immortal soul, or in anything supernatural."

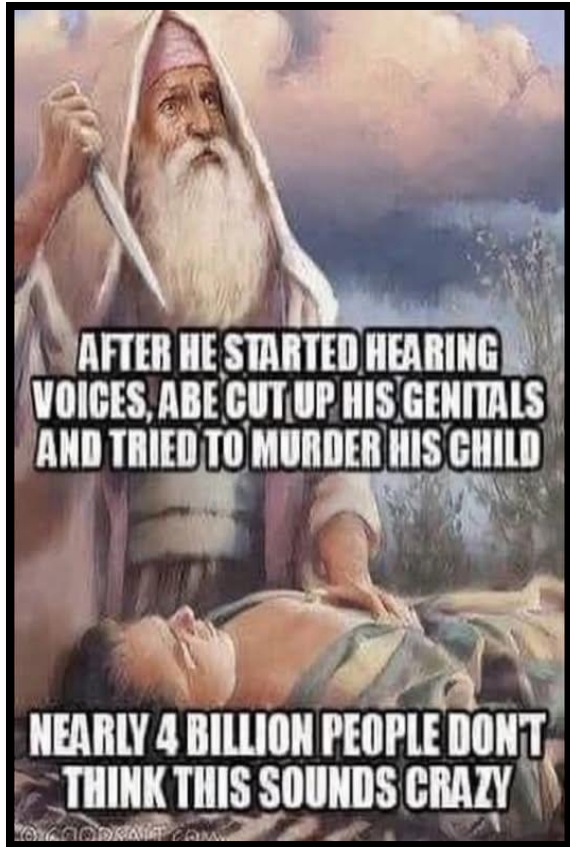


Second, Carl Sagan, in his book *The Demon-Haunted World*, wrote the following on spirituality as it relates to science, hinting on the tendency among some to resist its use in secular contexts:

"Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual. So are our emotions in the presence of great art or music or literature, or acts of exemplary selfless courage such as those of Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both."

So, let's stop quibbling over who "owns" spirituality. Remember, the "Golden Rule" is as valid for atheists as it is for theists.

Picture on p. 62 -- Kyle Scheurmann - Rainbow Trout, 2025 - Oil and cedar ashes on linen



THE RECTITUDE OF CHRISTIAN ASSHOLERY

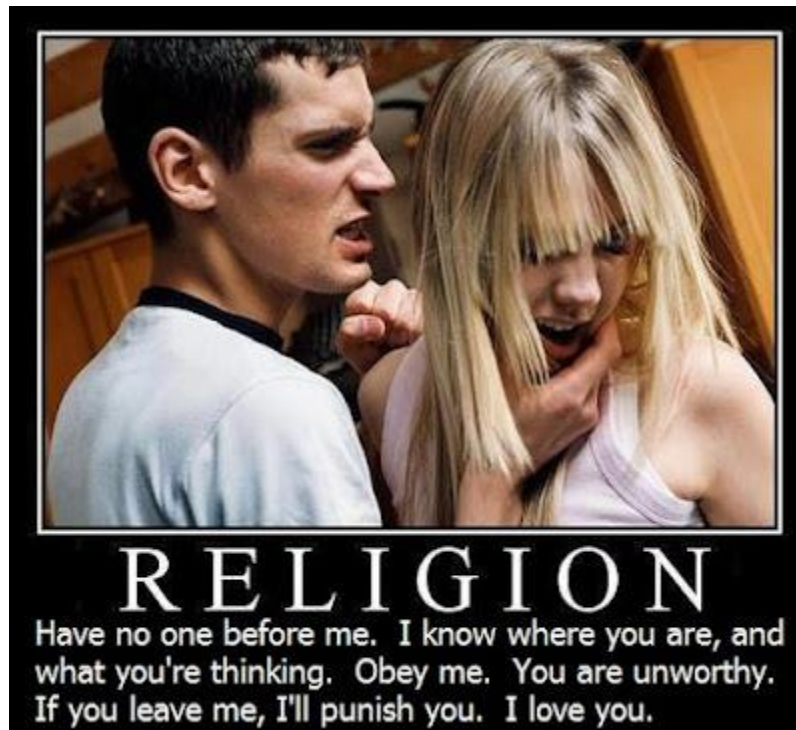
By NOAH LUGEONS

Whenever you express your atheism outside of, like, the American Atheists' annual convention, you're likely to have to deal with one of these

motherfuckers who thinks religion serves some kind of a purpose. Maybe it's from a religious person, or maybe it's from one of those hyper-elitists who'll admit that you and I don't need religion, but all those misguided normies do. And the purpose, as they see it, is to make people more moral; to help them tamp down on their most anti-social reflexes and weigh unethical actions against divine punishment.

Now, the standard atheist retort here is usually to point out how much less ethical religious people are than nonreligious people — even if we let them load up the category of "moral" with a bunch of irrelevant stuff like "not getting divorced" and "knowing what the Bible says." But as CS Lewis points out in *Mere Christianity*, that's not quite the "knock down, drag out" argument we often present it as. After all, if religion makes one more moral, then it stands to reason that people who have problems being moral would be more likely to seek its services. So — with apologies to Lewis for using so much better an analogy than whatever

lawnmower fucking shit he came up with — pointing out that atheists are more moral than Christians in this instance is kind of like pointing out that people on diets are heavier than people who aren't and then using that fact to say diets don't work.



Now, that's far from a perfect analogy, and not just because diets don't work. It also assumes that people come to religion because they feel they need its services rather than because they were indoctrinated as children. But it does poke enough of a hole in the atheist rebuttal that it needs to be addressed. So here's my proposal:

First of all, let's set aside that argument that being *Christian* makes one moral. I think even most Christians would dismiss that, because anybody can just say the Jesus words. And the common Christian definition of "Christian" excludes a lot of people who would self identify under that name even before they need a "No True Scotsman" fallacy, right? Like, "being Christian" in the minds of a Christian means more than "answering Christian when somebody asks your religion." So instead of using the metric of "being Christian," we'll use the metric of "doing Christianity."

Now, we obviously can't objectively measure one's humility or whether one was thinking about Heaven and Hell when they made such and such a decision, but luckily, we don't have to. We have a proxy that serves our purposes. Because if the claim is

that “doing Christianity” imparts morality — and that doing so gains religion a social value to offset its social cost — then we have to believe that going to church counts as “doing Christianity.” Otherwise, even if it *could* impart morality, we’d have no evidence that it *was* imparting morality. In other words, if “going to church” doesn’t count as “doing Christianity,” then you can no longer argue that churches serve a positive social function *even if Christianity does*.

The implication, therefore, is that Christians will — generally speaking — be at their *most* moral when they’re *in* church, and their second most moral right afterwards; right after they’ve drank from the font of morality that is their religion.

So here’s how I propose we test this: I want you to go find the nearest and most honest person in your life that’s ever waited tables for a living. And I want you to ask them about that Sunday afternoon crowd. Ask them how moral the “fresh from Church” Christians were compared to, say, a bunch of stoned teenagers staggering in for four waters and a shared plate of cheese sticks at



10:30pm. Ask them how well the Christians tipped. Ask them how often they left little “come to Jesus” notes on the tip — or *instead of* the tip. Or, at its worst, *disguised* as the tip. Ask them how many of those people chastised them for not being in church instead of at work — as though they’re at work because the server chose to be there and not because the customer chose to be there. Ask them how trivial their complaints were, how messy their tables were, how rude they were, how ungrateful they were, and how *ungenerous* they were. And use that to fill out Christianity’s report card.

You probably won’t be surprised that this thought occurred to me last Sunday afternoon when my wife and I went out to eat. We went to this little diner one town over and we timed it such that a huge church group was already seated when we got there. And it’s a small diner so they took up damn near the whole place. It was this church group and maybe 3 other booths. When we got there, most of the tables were just finishing up their food and a few of them were already done. And when we left, they were all *still there*. And the kitchen was running super slow, so we were there for over an hour.

Now, consider that from the perspective of the business owner or the servers. A big group comes in and fills up your restaurant, which is great. But then they just fucking sit there through all of lunch rush. For over an hour *after they’re done eating*, fourteen tables worth of well-dressed red necks keep you running back and forth for drink refills and extra napkins instead of getting the fuck up and freeing the table up for the next customer.

Of course, if you asked the Christian booth-hogs, they’d be shocked at any accusation of assholery. After all, visiting with your fellow church members — socializing with them, learning about their lives, engaging with their problems — that’s all moral shit. But it’s moral shit *at somebody else’s expense*. And it’s also moral shit that could happen in the parking lot or in your living room or literally anywhere but the only six-top in Stella’s station this afternoon.



And as I watched it, I realized what a perfect microcosm it was of the problem with "Christian morality." Because what church *actually* imparts isn't ethics, it's in-grouping. It's a sense of belonging that gives you identity by

blinding you to the people around you. Or straight up demonizing them. There's a privilege in belonging to a large group that allows you to rewrite the social norms, rewrite the rules of "right and wrong" — consider a group of twelve people in a restaurant breaking out in applause and compare that to if just two guys did it. *That's* what religion imparts. It imparts a self-reinforcing *feeling* of moral rectitude in spite of one's assholery. That's its product. And that's how we should assess its value.

scathingatheist.com

THE WAY WE WERE

**IT'S ODD WE WERE TAUGHT TO
FEAR WITCHES BUT NOT THE
PEOPLE WHO BURNED THEM
ALIVE.**





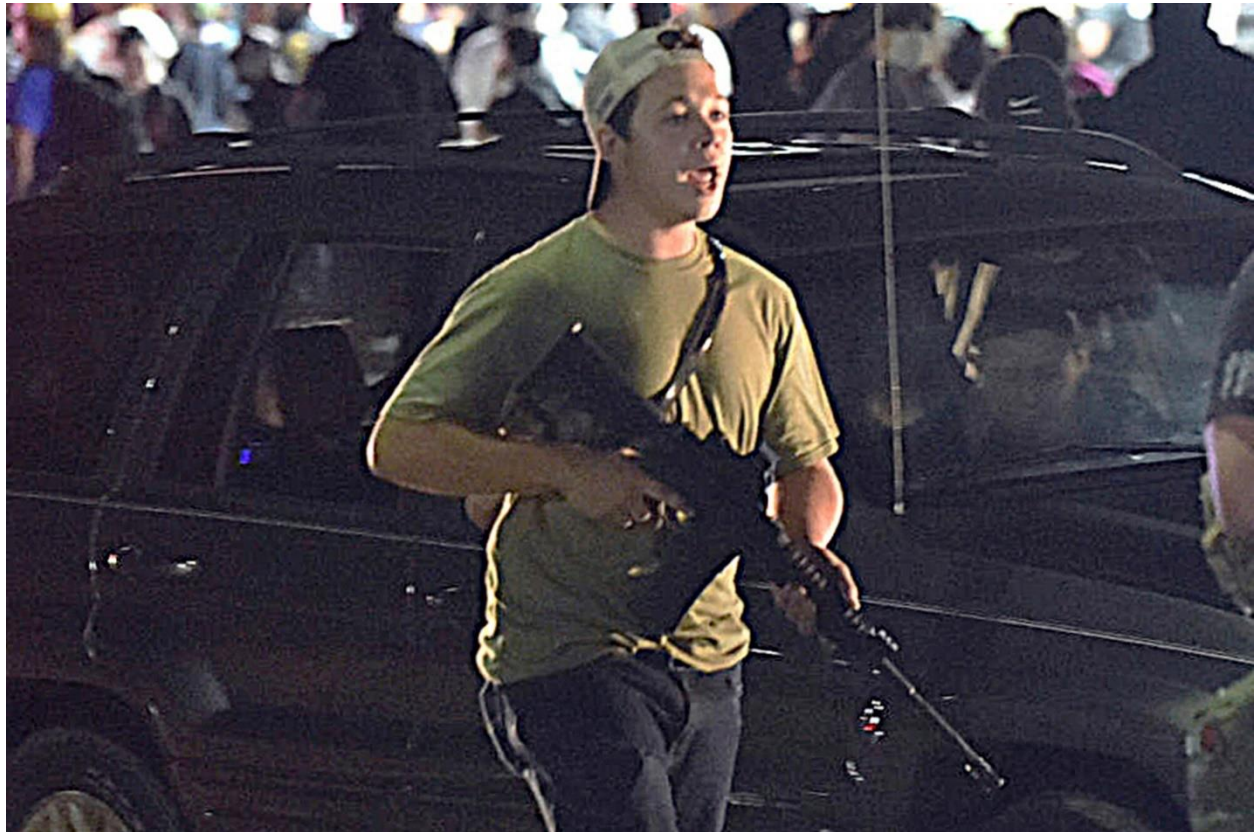
The Consequences of Chaos Tourism

By Virgil Thorp

It was a moment that has stuck in my memory. Not a pleasant moment at all. On November 19, 2021, Lucy and I were heading across the state of Florida to spend the weekend with our sailing friends in St. Pete; to get stoned, eat, drink, watch movies and play video games. We had stopped midway in Bartow in Polk

County (just a little bit down the road from one of Florida's main Ku Klux Klan (KKK) towns, Plant City) for a midday snack.

History seems to have forgotten this place, at least its past. (It was a community that inspired Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" song). Now, it was a good place for travelers to stop halfway between Ft. Pierce and Tampa; we timed it just after the noon rush.



The restaurant, like all restaurants in small towns, caters to everyone, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, white collar and blue collar, but it is clean, the food is reasonable and – for a franchise restaurant – pretty tasty. The manager ran a tight ship with pleasant servers, too. My kind of place, tasty for my stomach and tasty for my eyes. The servers were mostly young females with tight, molded to the buttocks, black shorts, but not quite as revealing as a Hooter's.

I like the place, not really upscale, a sports bar with multiple televisions; booths along one wall, tables that could be moved together for large groups and a circular bar in the back.

When we entered the lunch crowd hadn't left, yet. They seemed glued to the circle of televisions. The middle tables had been shoved together and at least two different companies were represented. I say companies because they had logo t-shirts on. I think one company must have been plumbing as the visible butt-cracks faced us like a gluteal Grand Canyon. I pitied the waitress who was running back and forth to satisfy that bunch. There were a couple of tables available on the edge of the room opposite the booths and we slipped into the closest one.

For a clearer perspective of that day, I will say this; Central Florida is highly red, these people eat red, drink red, have red MAGA hats and stars n' bars everywhere they can stick it; On their doors, on their roofs, on their fences, on their cars and trucks and probably up their asses if they could and my disturbed sense of humor tells me that some have ... and some still do.

For those who know this characteristic, you should not be surprised at what happened that day. This was the day that a jury verdict in Kenosha, Wisconsin was to be announced. This was the day that we would find out if Incel, wanna-be Seal-team Sixer, Kyle Rittenhouse, would be found guilty or acquitted of first-degree murder. It was a trial that – like many these days – had separated Americans because of the racial and political implications of what had happened during one hot August night in 2020.

CNN said, Kenosha was ablaze in “a night of unrest ... sparked by the police shooting of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old Black man who was left paralyzed after an encounter with a white officer.”

This was after another black man, George Floyd, had been killed while on the ground with a policeman's knee on his neck in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd had begged for his life, saying he

couldn't breathe but the cop just told Floyd to shut up and on-lookers to stay back. Floyd died there in the street, gasping.



People, both black and white, were upset. Protests were planned. The northern Midwest was a tinderbox of discontent. At his trial, the weepy and chubby Kyle testified that he had gone to provide first aid for the anti-rioters (you know, those patriots who fight against the white-pussy-lusting negroes) in a completely different state from which he lived (Illinois).

Who knew what would happen when Kyle's mother drove the then 17-year-old, his ballcap turned fashionably backwards, armed with an AR-15 to Kenosha, to do what? Cause trouble? There already was trouble. Kyle just provided a few more sparks.

Kyle had no business in Kenosha, but he sure did get in the way. When it was all over, "Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, were killed, and Gaige Grosskreutz, now 27, was wounded. Rittenhouse was charged with five felonies: first-degree intentional homicide, first-degree reckless homicide, attempted first-degree intentional homicide and two counts of first-degree recklessly endangering safety. – from CNN, Christina Maxouris,"

And now here we were, me and Lucy, a couple of years after a



pandemic brought world-wide claustrophobia, in a small-town restaurant. In the middle of "Klan USA".

I had been drinking coffee all the way from Ft. Pierce and had to answer a call of nature that made my personal condition more immediate than the drama on the televisions. What made this day in November so special and what made it stick in my memory so vividly, was what happened when I toddled off to the restroom in the back of the bar area. Everyone, including the waitresses were watching the televisions. For once, there were no sports channels being televised. No games, no interviews, no panels dissecting the latest Miami Dolphin loss. All the units were tuned

to a local Fox news channel. The breaking news was about the pending verdict concerning young Rittenhouse.

You now have a clue into what the tension in the room was all about. Would he be found guilty and all white people found guilty by association? Would there be a second Reconstruction with carpetbaggers driving old Dixie down everywhere? Would they have to be more accommodating to black folk? Let the black men take indecent advantage of nubile white women? Most importantly, judging by the number of pick-up trucks in the parking lot with gun racks in the rear windows, would the government take the diners' guns? Would the decision leave them defenseless? The sons of the confederacy wanted to know!



I

know that some people might find it disgusting, but I was defecating when I heard a rebel yell as the verdict was read. A rebel yell of triumph. If it had come from me, it would have been a victory yell for passing a turd and having a happy, satisfying poop. But this yell was more like a growl, a growl that chilled my heart.

It was something that I had experienced once before under different circumstances. I was working in a grocery store with integrated employees. I know it may sound funny, but our melting pot of races got on very well and we worked very hard together. You might say, "harmoniously." However, it was at the

end of the O.J. Simpson trial when the former football star was accused of massacring his wife, Nicole, and her male friend, Ronald Goldman. (Diabolical irony was not lost on me, the state versus a black man, who could have guessed?).

When O.J. was found not guilty – “if the gloves don’t fit, you must acquit,” reasoned defense attorney, Johnny Cochrane – there was a hushed, yet still audible, “yes” in the employee break area. I estimate about a tenth of the sound of the rebel yell in Bartow.



For me, a big hole of injustice had been dug in my country since 1619 when African slaves were abducted for plantation labor in Virginia. Little has changed. 300 plus years of degradation, 150 years after a bloody civil war. Were there hundreds of thousands of racial injustice incidents? Old wounds, new wounds. Too many to count!

The hole of injustice is still being dug. It has been filled with the unknowns and the unremembered (the “Strange Fruit”). It was filled with the disgusting silent motion picture of 1915, “Birth of a Nation” and its repellantly dishonest depiction of white-pussy hungry negro rapists. And the glorification of the Ku Klux Klan.



It was Martin Luther King shot dead in Memphis, it was Scherner, Chaney and Goodman in Mississippi. It was Emmitt Till and his fearsome mother (long before Marlon Brando did in the Godfather) who said over her son's open coffin, "Look how they massacred my boy." It was Viola Liuzzo shot to death in Alabama as she transported civil rights protesters during the Selma to Montgomery marches (then FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover made sleazy innuendos about her sexuality – see Birth of a Nation). It was Medgar Evars and Jimmie Lee Jackson. All murdered.

Oh boy, that hole just keeps getting deeper and deeper, doesn't it. It was the Edmund Pettis Bridge "Bloody Sunday", Unitarian minister, James Reeb beaten to a bloody pulp at a restaurant.

I admit, "oh-oh, what am I doing here?" Flashed through my mind.

The four little black girls crushed in the 16th Street Baptist church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. Goddamned deep hole of racist bullshit.

So, I come to this point. On one hand there's the 12 percentage that knew that O.J. was an unrepentant killer but cheered him anyway and on the other, an 88 percentage that knew that chubby, little SWAT team wanna-be, Kyle fearfully shot three people as they attempted to disarm him – killing two, maiming

one – and still cheered him (no doubt thinking, “that’s what I woulda done!).

A ratio of 88-12 is hardly equality, but in both cases, it was like – in their minds – each side had been acquitted. From my point of view, it is just a deep, dark hole of injustice and I felt lost. If I believed in a god, I would pray that I would never be left alone with any of these people.

Let’s face it, racism has not and will not die easy. A stoical person might say, “It is alive, it is well, and the motherfucker is still kicking!”



How Bicycle Touring Has Changed in the



Last Thirty Years

By James Longo

Barb and I have been bicycle touring pushing thirty years. In that time we bicycled up the East Coast, down the West Coast, across the United States, from Niagra to Gaspe, from Istanbul to Lisbon, Lisbon to Warsaw, once around Emerald Isle, from Brussel to Tuscany and Tuscany to Warsaw, from Aukland to Invercargill and Melbourne to Brisbane and Townsend to Cairns, and now once around Sicily. We have bona fide.

GPS is a mixed blessing, in my last trip We saw it send me on rock-laden back roads, to paths that aren't there, to a wall of stairs, to a creek with four cinder blocks, to dead ends, a couple construction sites where we had to beg the construction workers to pass. It also sent us on bike lanes on the beach for miles, only to throw us onto a trail from hell.



Accommodations: We started out carrying camping gear, but I figured out Barb would bike an extra twenty miles for a bed. Our motto was seventy miles and the first motel we saw. We've stayed in some palaces but also some dumps. We stopped carrying a tent, but we never stopped carrying a sleeping bag. We have been forced to stay in palaces where you would rather use your sleeping bag and dirty clothes as a pillow than trust the sheets.

Now we bike to about three or four o'clock pull up a motel app. Look for something with good reviews about two hours in our

future, make a reservation, pay for it, and our only goal is to get there. We still carried the sleeping bag, but only used it on the ferry.

Communications have changed over the last thirty years, with wifi calling and texts. We are really never out of touch. I paid a bill while in Rome. I talked to Virgil while in Sicily. Texted my sister nightly. Years ago we would be MIA for those weeks.

Foreign languages have become easier. You don't speak the language. Hit translate on your phone speak into it and you can

communicate what you want. They speak into their phone, walah, instant communication. No more dictionary, no more universal sign language. Can you say brilliant?

Thirty years ago it didn't matter how long we were out there to get our seventy miles, as long as there was sunlight we could be out there. It was nothing to put eight to ten hours in the saddle. I can remember one day in Southern Australia we got out before sunrise and finished off in the dark and we didn't even make our destination. By the way, Barb got sick the next day.

Nowadays, six hours is plenty, seven if we need to get to lodging, more than that why are we killing ourselves. We'll get them tomorrow. Even our approach to bad weather has changed, We have biked on roads of ice in North Dakota, Blowing snow in Montana, and an English Channel gale in Normandy. We even biked through the back end of a typhoon in New Zealand. Nowadays, four, or five hours in the weather is plenty. I don't have what it takes to suffer that much.

In the past thirty years everything has changed on how we take our vacations, yet in some ways nothing.





Octogenarianism

By Ed Zillioux

I am an octogenarian! How cool is that? Or, more to the point, how lucky is that? Damn lucky I'd say, when you consider that the average lifespan for men living in America is only 75.8 years!

Since I have passed my 89th birthday, 13.2 years beyond the average, I'm now living on borrowed time. Think about that. If time can be borrowed it must be a commodity that could be bought or sold.

I have been told that Walmart carries everything. I wonder if they have a time department, but remembering my previous experience trying to find their toilet department, I demurred on that idea. But I don't know what I'm talking about since I don't even know what time is. If you recall, I once wrote an essay on what time is and came to the conclusion that time is ... *our ignorance*.

Since I once received a “lifetime achievement award” while attending a 2017 conference in Helsinki, Finland, it follows that I must have known what a lifetime was so why don't I have a better idea about time itself?

But wait! I think I have the answer. It's all around us now. In fact everyone seems to be talking about it ... it's called *cognitive decline*.

That's because someone wrote a book about poor old Joe Biden. But I prefer remembering all the good things he accomplished. For a while at least, he was one of our better presidents, certainly better than what we're stuck with now. But I digress.

Actually, I lied to you in the first line of this piece. I am no longer an octogenarian. In passing my last birthday I did not become 89 I passed out in my last year in my 80s and into the rarefied air of my 90s. I passed into my first year as a *nonagenarian*. But since I spent a full 10 years as an *octogenarian*, I feel comfortable in speaking of the period even though I may be living on “borrowed time” ... whatever that means.

My own personal octogenarian era began in 2015, in a period of both sadness and relief, yet ended in 2025 and a period of joy and amazing love. In 2015, my then wife Ivy had already been sick for at least four years with me as her full-time caregiver. It began with a diagnosis of anal cancer. With the care and treatment of a team of oncologists she beat the cancer, but this was soon followed by what became end-stage kidney disease.

There were weeks of getting up at 3:00 AM to drive to the Tradition Hospital for infusions of medications. this is followed by dialysis treatments that I carried her to – now wheelchair bound – at least every other day. Ivy and I began a series of hospitals and nursing homes and back again to hospitals. In one of her final stays, she suffered a rupture of her colon wall requiring fitting her with a colonoscopy bag to catch her poop. To Ivy this was the final indignity.

On my next visit her doctor called me aside to say that every time he examined her something else had failed. She was transferred to a final care hospital in Riviera Beach where I distributed copies of her living will in which she rejected any procedures that would artificially prolong the dying process. But, shortly thereafter, her *newly assigned* doctor asked my permission to intubate her.

I lost it. I bellowed at him. "don't ask me – ask her! Copies of her living will are at every nursing station – HAVE YOU EVEN READ IT?!!!!



Ivy died at 2:00 PM on June 16th, 2017. A sense of relief flowed over me. Ivy's suffering had finally come to an end. I was alone.

Two years later I received a call from my friend, Jeany Sawyer, who was enjoying music at the American Legion with several of her girlfriends. She asked me if I would like to join them, and since the legion was less than two blocks from my home and I had nothing else to do, I said, "sure" and was there within just a few minutes.

Jeany made the introductions; there was Laura, a pretty lady about my age, then Kathy and Sara, both younger than me but obviously two close friends presently involved in a deep

conversation. So, since Jeany and I had danced frequently before, I asked her if she would like to dance. Jeany uncharacteristically demurred and said, "why don't you ask dance with Laura." it was not a question, and I thought, *hmm – is this a setup?*

Nevertheless, Laura was a good dancer, and we were soon enjoying a good time together. But, when the music stopped, we parted separately with nothing more than a suggestion that we should get together sometime. And we might have, but fate was about to step in with different plans.



Next, we come to the 4th of July. Jeany (her again) invited me to dinner at her friend Lee's house, and I accepted. Upon arrival I found that Sara was also there. Lee did a good job at putting the dinner together, a role he obviously enjoyed, and I thanked him for his effort and praised his hospitality. But for me, what really made this dinner special was meeting and getting to know *Sara*.

Later, as we were leaving, I asked Sara if she would like to see the fireworks display the city was putting on at the downtown Marina and she immediately accepted. We were soon sitting on the edge of the concrete wall with feet dangling over the water, watching and feeling the fireworks. I like to call this "our first date".

That was six years ago. Since then, we have done everything together, from dancing all evening at our favorite piano bar in Vero Beach and going home afterwards, to spending several days in an eco-tent in the deep Everglades, to watching the simultaneous sunset and moonrise while cuddling together on a bench on the Fort Pierce inlet pier. I could go on, but by now, you should get the point. Love kinda-sorta sneaks up on a person. On days we couldn't be together physically we spent hours together on the phone.

I can now say that I love Sara.

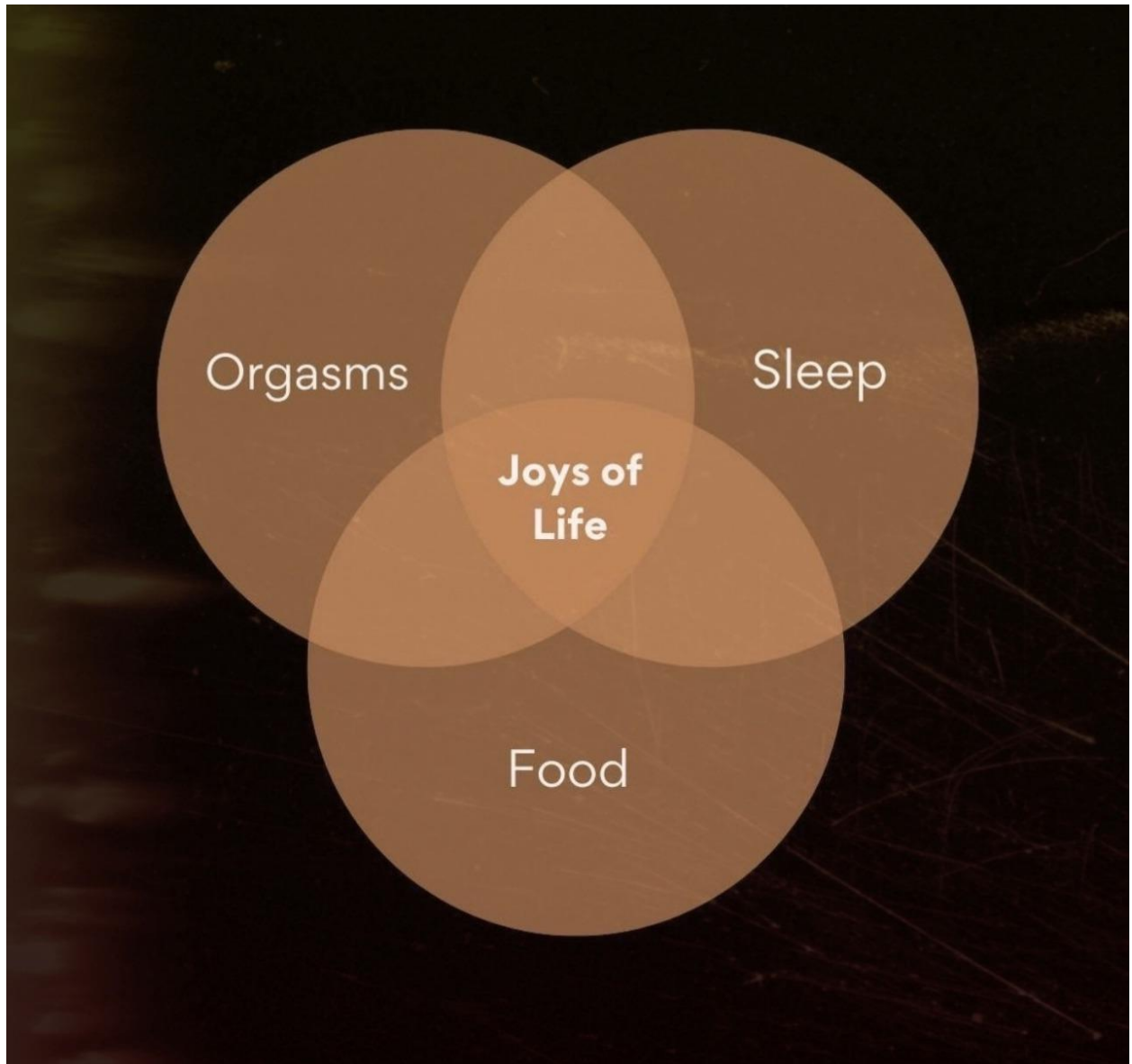
I have been married three times. and each time there was love and there were good times. But I honestly say I have never loved anyone as much as I love Sara.

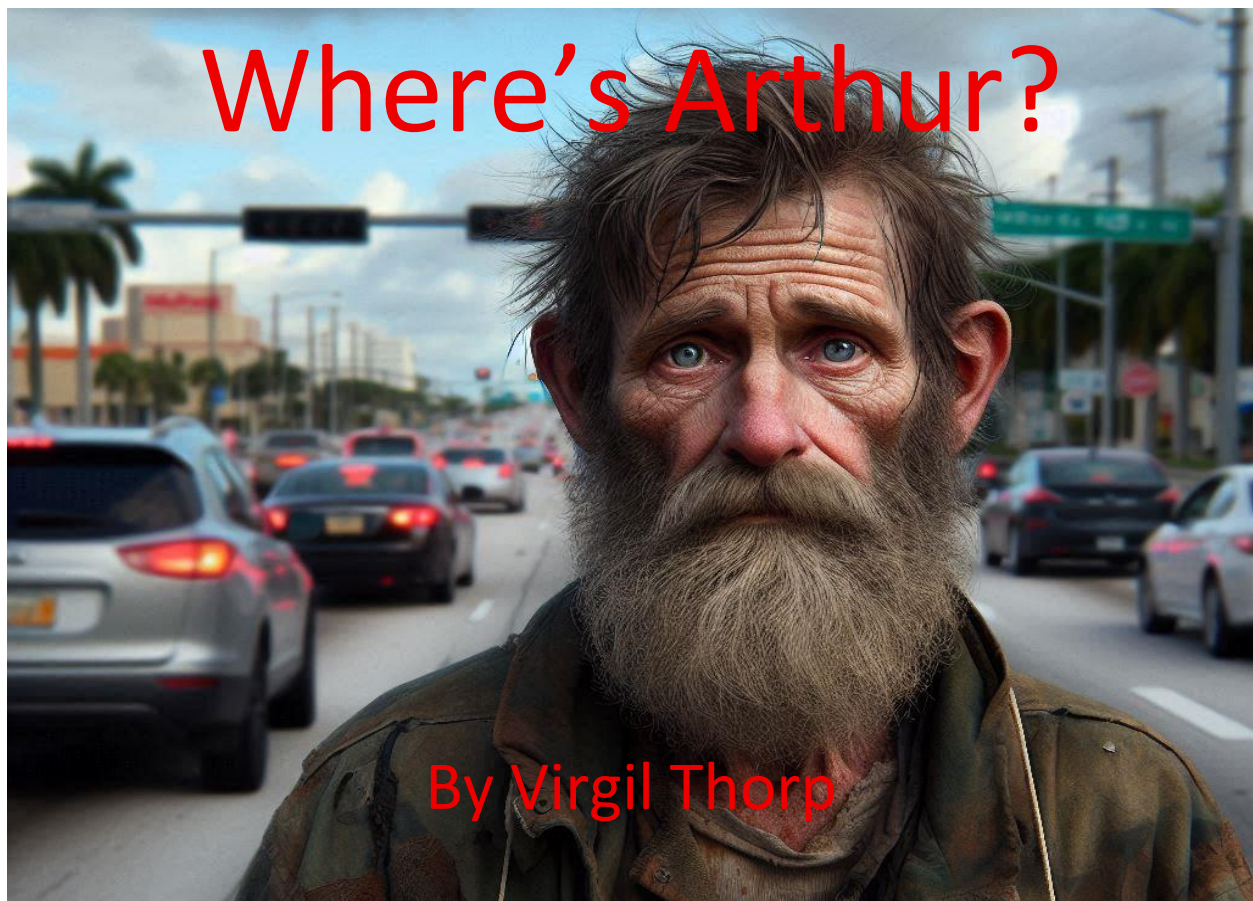
And here I am, with my octogenarian years behind me and entering into my *nonagenarian* future with a woman like Sara who loves me too! How freaking lucky is that?!!!

And yet, there is more! Despite all I have written about love, I would be remiss if I were to say nothing about familial love. Or this is a separate category but let there be no doubt that this is at least as valid as either romantic love or the strongest love one can have for a best friend. In my case, by order of their ages, there are my two stepsons John and Bob, and three daughters, Suzanne, Geanine and Ann Marie. I love them all deeply, without exception and without distinction. There is so much that is great about being a *nonagenarian*.



PROSE





The state of Florida is a pretty good place to be if you have nowhere else to go. Except for a few chilly months in January and February, a person can have a pretty comfortable existence. It was a great place for Arthur.

Arthur is short, barely five-foot six. He is fifty-eight or fifty-nine. It is really inconsequential to recount Arthur's history. Whatever it was, it made Arthur not care anymore. Left everything in his life and decided to run away from it all. He found himself located in South Florida. You see, Arthur is a panhandler. He will ask for "spare change", but he expects more.

Arthur's lifestyle requires that he remain lean. However, his lifestyle also dictates that his hygiene is sporadic. When you spot Arthur standing on the side of the road, he's holding his cardboard sign that states his homelessness and asks, "please help a veteran". With his grizzled beard, kind eyes, tattered clothes and furrowed brow, he presents a woeful picture that

touches many people's hearts. Arthur is very much like an abandoned puppy with sad abandoned puppy eyes. It is a good look for panhandlers and Arthur knows it.

Arthur is good at predicting who is going to give him money. Whenever he sees a likely generous driver, he approaches the vehicle, nods with a pleading smile, removes his hat and extends it to receive the motorists' generosity. Whatever is placed in the hat is returned by a sad-eyed look of relief that says without saying a word, "you have saved my life, thank you a thousand times." Then Arthur applies his benediction and speaks, "Bless you, bless you." The people who have donated, more often than not, get a special feeling of having made a difference. Not at all unlike the feeling they get from a preacher's actual benediction at the end of a sermon. Like they were one step closer to qualifying for heavenly entry by their beatific donation. Arthur knew that people were often guilt-ridden and craved absolution. Besides, he did look like a puppy and it worked every time.

Arthur had traveled all the way over and around the peninsula, from Apalachicola to Key West. Sarasota to St. Augustine. He watched rocket launches from Titusville. He thought all the mosquitoes in the world lived in Okeechobee. He had finally found himself in Ft. Pierce at the junction of U.S. Highway 1 and the Turnpike Feeder Road. It was a place where, if you walked off the pavement fifty paces, it was almost like an old Florida hammock.

All he had to do was tiptoe down the steep culvert and there was a beautiful camping spot completely unseen from the highway. It was behind a 7-11 and a restaurant. There was a small clearing – almost like someone had been there before – surrounded with leafy, bushy thickets, Sable palms and mangroves at the edge of the water. It was an ecological bonanza with birds, butterflies, lizards and Arthur wagered an alligator or two. After dark, when the businesses closed for the day, he was almost all alone. Just like he liked it.

It was the perfect spot for a guy like Arthur. Rustic, secluded. Not far from a highway. He could pitch his tent, he could huddle in the shade



of the foliage if he was hot, he could make a fire if he was cold, he could ignite his little gas burner to make soup or to fry some of the abundant roadkill he found on U.S. 1. The 7-11 even sold the gas bottles he needed.

Life was pleasant there. He could make a home there. And early in the morning and at peak afternoon rush hour, Arthur could panhandle the traffic that waited for the light to change on the feeder road. Sometimes he could make forty, even fifty dollars. During snowbird season, he once cleared a generous one hundred sixty-five dollars and some Canadian coins. Seldom did he strike out or get stiffed like he had been with the Canuck money. But even a ten-dollar day was a plus.

Often, because he was such a pleasant looking old man, people would be more than generous. It was a surprise to Arthur the first time a person or couple offered to take him to their house so he could clean up and have a real family dinner. Once, a widowed lady invited him to go with her. Her name was Martha. She let him shower and because Arthur was nearly the same size as her deceased husband, gave him several pairs of shoes, pants and shirts, a dandy cardigan sweater and a beautiful three-piece suit that she said would be perfect if he took it on himself to apply for a job.

She even invited Arthur to spend the night in the guest room which Arthur declined out of misplaced modesty – “what kind of a boy do you think I am?” echoed in the back of his brain but he wasn’t sure it was simply wishful thinking. He thanked her profusely when she drove him back to the junction; and she made a promise to see him again, which she did, several times a week and always dropping a five or a ten in his hat or simply,



wave to him if the light changed prematurely. But she never invited him back to her home for a shower, shave and dinner again. Snooze and you lose, yet, all was well.

It was on the first of May when Johnny showed up. Big bad Johnny. Or that was what he said his name was. Johnny was big, he was rough and just looked downright mean. He had all sorts of tattoos that he had gotten in the detention centers he had been sentenced to. Yes, it was a bad day for Arthur when Johnny happened to discover Arthur’s

campsite when Johnny had gone over the culvert to take a piss.

“What in the hell is this?” Johnny said to himself. “Looks pretty comfy.”

Arthur had gone to the VA hospital in West Palm for a check-up and when he hitched a ride back to Ft. Pierce, and got back to his corner, Johnny was sitting on his camp chair heating up a frozen burrito he had stolen from the 7-11 on the corner.

“Who are you?” Johnny said, like he owned the place.

“I’m Arthur. This is my campsite. That’s my tent. You are sitting in my chair.” Arthur was apprehensive. “Where’s my dog?”

“Dunno. Ain’t seen no dog. What’s his name.”

“Archie.” Arthur didn’t have a dog, but he didn’t want the rough looking man to know that.

"Good name. Know'd a bar called Archie's."

"I know'd it too, other side of the lagoon." Arthur replied. "Good place to shoot pool, if that's your game."

Johnny didn't do much but grunt and took a bite of his burrito. He was watching Arthur very closely as he chewed.

Arthur nodded to him and said, "time to get busy, it's afternoon rush hour."

"Whatcha gone do?" Burrito juice trickled down Johnny's chin.

Arthur reached into his tent and took out his cardboard sign. He held it up for Johnny to see. "Try to get a couple of bucks. This time of day is prime." Arthur knew it was rude, but he did not want small talk. Not from this person. He didn't even want to know the stranger's name and was sorry the stranger knew his.

Yet, he felt being helpful would be to his advantage.

"Help yourself to some bottled water in the tent. Don't drink the swamp water or you'll have the runs all the way to Port St. Lucie."

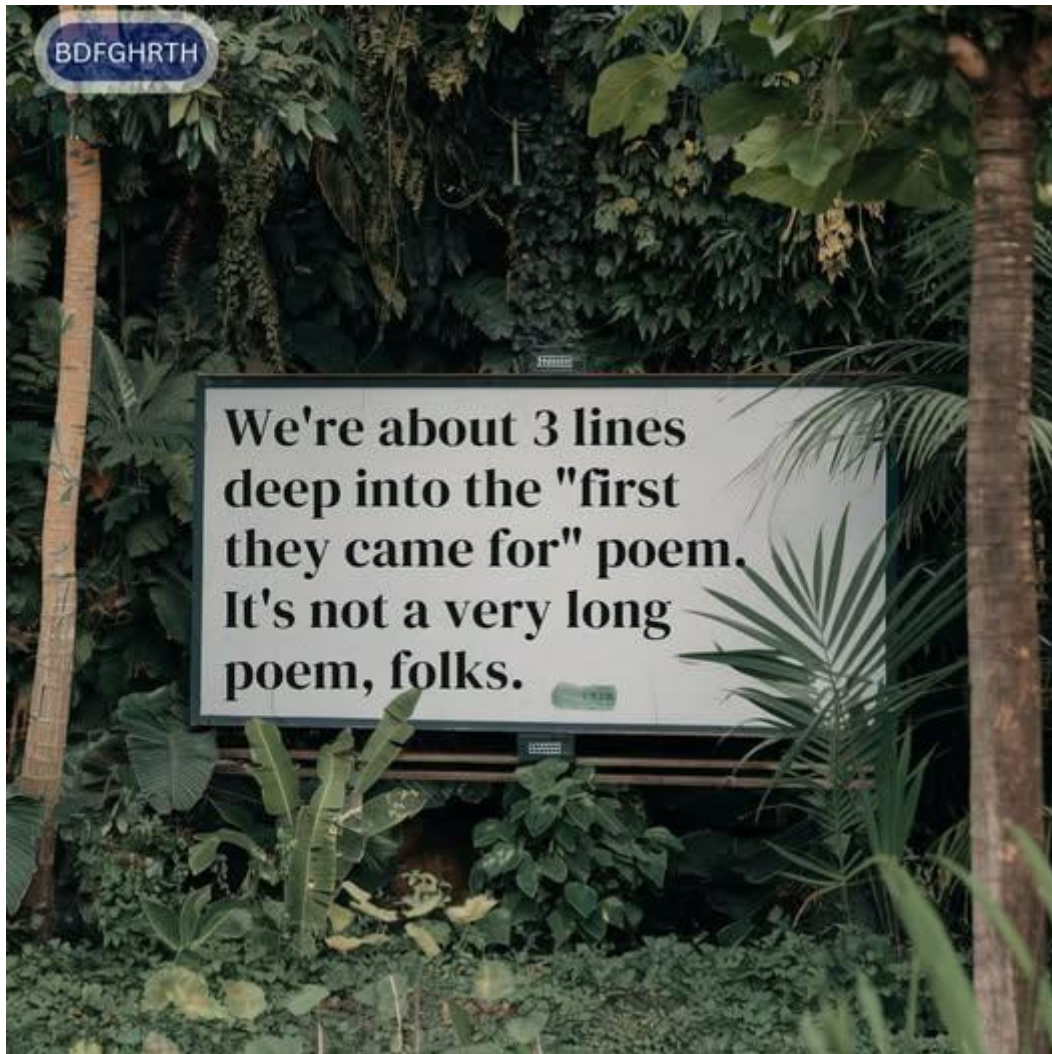
Johnny's grunt was a belching, guttural excuse for a thank you.

Arthur turned away and climbed up the culvert. He hoped his visitor would take the hint and hitchhike South, down U.S. 1. He hoped the stranger wasn't watching him.

But he was.



POETRY



"Throne"



By Gale Baker

Donald the Keng, uh kong, uh keno, uh kanga, uh dung is determined to be a "king."

He sits on his "throne" and tweets conspiracies and nasty rumors.

He says he can end wars.

He wars with the citizens who elected him.

He is about to get us entangled in a war in

the Middle East.

He encourages violence against citizens.

He won't be seeing the massive protests today.

He'll be watching his birthday parade, the one that demeans and embarrasses our blessed Armed Forces and the veterans who fought against Fascism, Nazis and communism.

His "House of BS" is bumfuzzled and just makes excuses for him.

His "House" and perhaps his "Senate" needs a little reality check.

Once he's through with the citizens, he's coming after them.

The dung-ald J. king thinks he doesn't need them.

He needs an awakening.

Who will stand up and say, "enough Donnie?"

Mike the Mickey Mouse from Louisiana?

Come on folks - start calling back your elected officials.

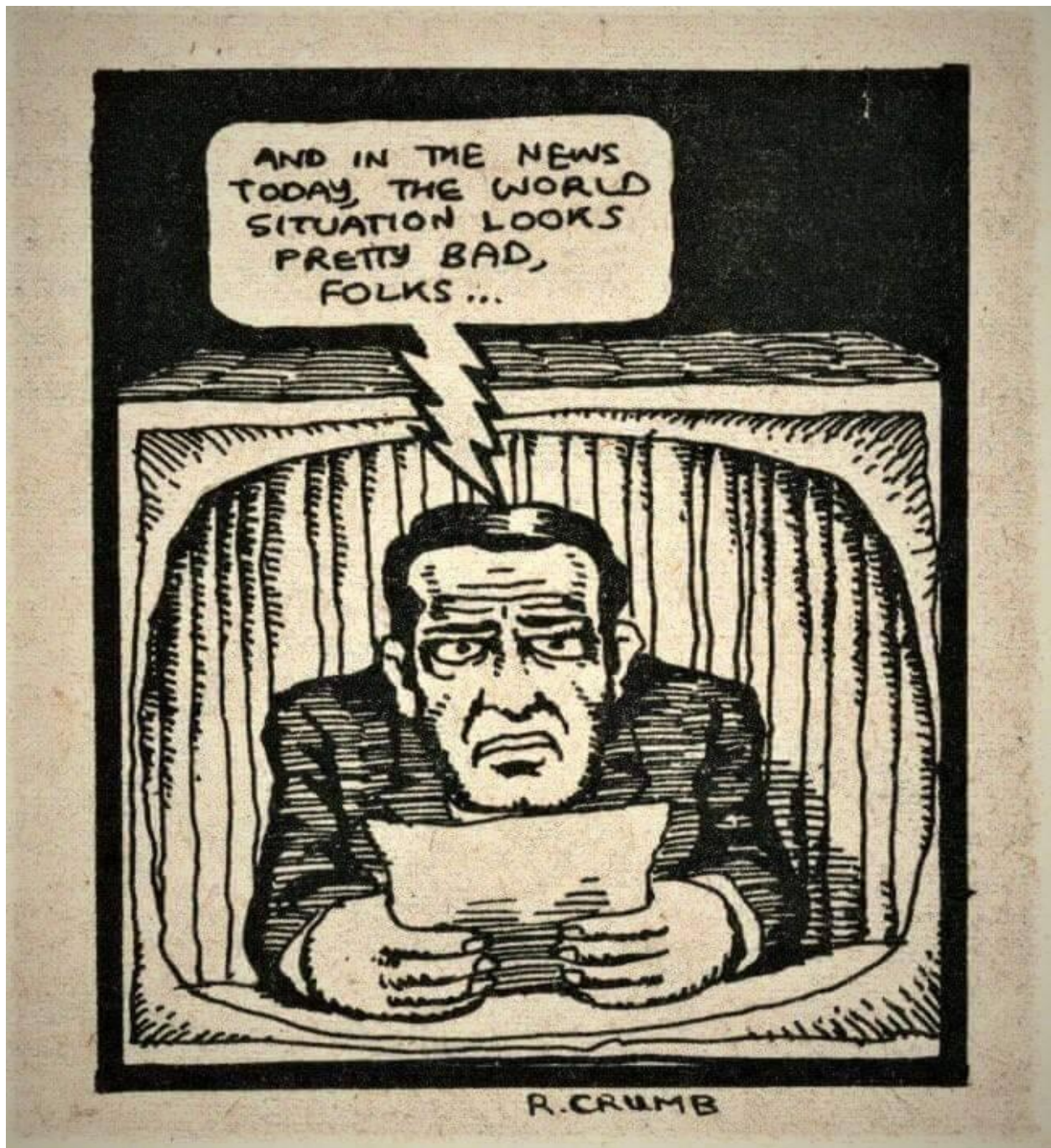


"I love you not only for what you are,
but for what I am when I am with you.
I love you not only for what
you have made of yourself,
but for what you are making of me.
I love you for the part of me
that you bring out."

-Elizabeth Barrett Browning



COMEDY CORNER



Last known photo of Bob



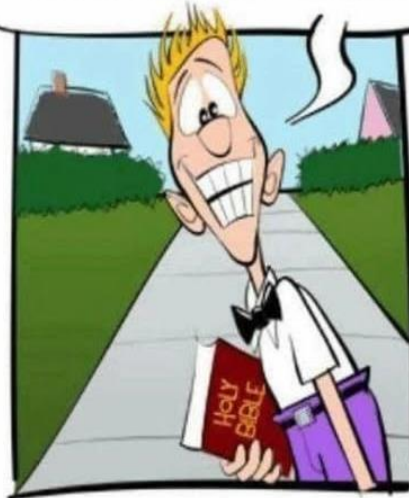
BLOPER

"I went back to warn them, but they already knew and didn't seem to care."

One of my favorite parts of the Bible is where God creates the universe from nothing, but then needs dirt to make a man, and a rib to make a woman, and has to impregnate a teenager so his boy can be born



GOOD DAY, SIR. CAN I INTEREST YOU IN A CHILDLIKE VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE UNCEASING TYRANNY OF A VENGEFUL SKY FATHER, PROMOTED BY A SELF-SERVING, MALE-DOMINATED BUREAUCRACY DERIVING ITS AUTHORITY FROM ANONYMOUSLY AUTHORED ANCIENT TALES AND ANTIQUATED EDICTS?

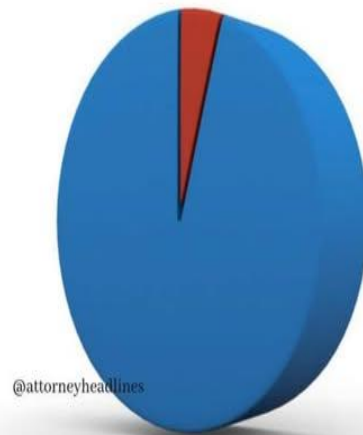


“We’re just trying to keep the perverts out.”

TWONKS

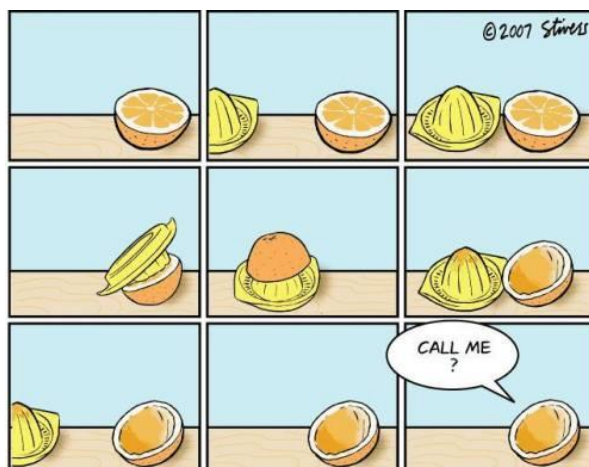


Why Non-Lawyers Think They Could Be Lawyers



They have well-developed analytical skills, are able to read and digest a large volume of material, and write concisely.

You don't even know me, bro. I'm, like, really good at arguing. Everyone's always told me I would be an awesome lawyer. They couldn't even handle me in court.



If you received nudis
of me last night,
I was quite drunk 🍆

Those of you that didnt,
dont worry, I'll be drunk again



*"The protesters seem to be
doing some sort of joyful
synchronized dance. Is it time
to call in the Marines?"*

