

Aberrations

Very Short Stories

Bradley Davidson

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DEDICATION

To Friends.
We all need them.

CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Preface | vii |
| Saving the World | 1 |
| Jungle Jitters..... | 5 |
| Hackers..... | 9 |
| Stardate..... | 13 |
| Elephants | 17 |
| Spiders | 21 |
| TSA | 25 |
| Imagine..... | 29 |
| Farwell..... | 33 |
| Hipness..... | 37 |
| A Desert Vision | 41 |
| Shamu's Mission | 47 |
| What If | 51 |
| Something about Time | 55 |
| Fishermen | 59 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| To Work..... | 63 |
| A Spirit..... | 67 |
| The Body Politic | 71 |
| God Laughs | 75 |
| Boats | 79 |
| Slides | 83 |
| Faith | 87 |
| A Good Place | 91 |
| Waves..... | 95 |
| Pushing Up Daisies..... | 99 |
| A Man's Worth..... | 103 |
| Addiction..... | 107 |
| Sailing..... | 111 |
| The Funeral..... | 115 |
| Labor..... | 119 |
| Alien Abduction..... | 123 |
| A Different Place | 129 |
| Merry 4 th of July | 133 |

Aberrations

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| About the Author | 137 |
|------------------------|-----|

Preface

If the pen is mightier than the sword, then how come action speaks louder than words? Taking up a sword is action. In using the pen we compile words. Is not that action? We can arrange the words which inspire thousands to take up the sword. We can create a movement with words, overthrow governments with words, inspire love with words. And I would have to say taking up the pen in itself is indeed action. It is all action, some just mightier and some just louder.

I bring this up because in a couple of the stories in this collection, I am attempting to save the world. I

inform about some of the dangers threatening our planet, obvious threats but unseen, unrealized or just not comprehended. I also describe some actions I've taken, small attempts at just doing something. If the fate of the world were left to my efforts, it is surely doomed. But if everyone takes a small action, Mother Earth will inevitably end up a better place.

All the stories presented here are meant mainly to entertain. They were written to be read out loud in under three minutes although some drag on for a few seconds longer. And they were read by the author in front of a small crowd of writers who also shared their inspired and well-crafted stories.

In this volume are stories I've written over the past year in addition to a group of "classic" stories I wrote in years past but which were never officially published. Some may seem familiar as you may have heard me read them or you read them along the way. But now they are all available in ink on paper to whoever may stumble across them.

If in some small way you find them entertaining, if they produce a silent laugh or a grunt or a moment of total incomprehension, then they have

succeeded. But, however, if they drop a seed into your mind which makes you stop and wonder and perhaps perceive something a bit differently, then you have caught a glimpse from my perspective, and I have succeeded in sharing with you.

It is obvious to me that taking pen in hand to smith some words together and share a vision or just a good antidote is taking action. It is an action against darkness, an action against ignorance, an action against ambivalence. And it is at times difficult. But the words keep roiling away in my mind and I occasionally pour them out onto paper.

Now, if I can just figure out how a picture is worth a thousand words, I might be on to something.

Bradley Davidson



Saving the World

I've always wanted to save the world, but I've never wanted to be politically anything. Ever since I was a kid I wanted to defend the world from invading space aliens or fight against global exploitation, greed and environmental destruction from my own species. But I've never wanted to enter the realm of politics and popular public opinion. Oh sure, when I was 10 I wanted to be president just because my grandmother said I could. But upon maturing and further reflection decided not to.

So, when I was given the opportunity to save endangered species on this planet from the follies of

humankind, I jumped at it. I volunteered, without thinking it through, to distribute small packets, of all things, condoms wrapped in colorful and informative packages denouncing world overpopulation and presenting a small individual solution to the problem. Surprisingly I was accepted as a distributor and a box of small packets arrived at my door. Have fun with this task, the literature dared.

Then I started thinking it through. Now, I use condoms, but not so much to prevent the population from increasing, being gay and all. I use them more to prevent the spread of other biological species which, I'm sure, would never make it on the Federal endangered species list. But I vowed to myself to get these gifts to those they were meant for. My largest circle of human interaction is at my job where many could use the benefits of these latex saviors of endangered species. But then a dark cloud started to descend on this idea as I thought about it, a cloud that had been unnoticeably forming through years of training and programing. My workplace, a large institution, has been hammering upon us to do nothing to make coworkers uncomfortable in a sexual or harassing manner. Would a gay guy offering

condoms to colleagues make anyone uncomfortable in the workplace? This dark cloud swirled. It's not so much the intent, but the perception. Better not, I, reasoned. It seems saving the world and being politically correct are not compatible.

I did, however, offer them to a few close friends at work who I knew would be okay with it. One guy, who has two girlfriends, I gave two packets to. Another, a 70-year old widower, well, I didn't know, but thought just in case, could be useful. The others, all married with children were already managing their families and I know doing everything in their power not to have anymore. But to most, I kept quiet, following job-site guidelines.

I tried passing them out to the hip crowd at Starbucks to blank stares, grunts and an inquiry of "What is your purpose in doing this?" And he didn't even know I was gay.

So I continue my quest to save the world by scaling tall mountains of political correctness, freezing rains of cold looks and roiling reactions of disbelief. I'm destined to try to save the Polar Bear, the Dwarf Seahorse, the Panther and Snowy Plover, the Hellbender lizard and all the rest of the species on this jewel planet

Bradley Davidson

who cannot save themselves from the exploding numbers of ourselves. Perceptions be damned... pretty much.



Jungle Jitters

“Do it for your father.” The old sergeant said as they both lie in the jungle foliage of a small island in the Pacific.

“No”, came the reply from the kid followed by an awkward silence. “I’ll do it for my country.”

That’s the spirit, the sergeant thought to himself. Do it for something. Just do it. Then after a few more moments the kid spoke again.

“And the guys. I’ll do it for my country and my buddies here.” After another pause he continued, “And my family, including my father, of course, and

my dog, Sparky. And all the folks at home. I'll do it for all of them."

"You know", the sergeant moaned, "You should have stopped after the first sentence then taken off up this hill. I mean, geez, someone's got to do it. I would except for this bullet in my leg. You just have to do it. I mean, The Duke would never ramble on like that. A quick, inspired quip and he would be off. Do it for your country and go."

There was a meditative pause.

"I miss him", the kid muttered.

"Who? Your father?"

"No, my dog.

"Aww, Geez."

"You think this is some movie?" The kid challenged. "You think I want to race up that hill dodging the bullets and take out that machine gun nest and be a hero. Heck no. I don't want to be here. I don't know why I am. So many turns in life and forks in the road, and I took the ones that led here. This isn't a movie. This is too surreal to be a movie. This is like a bad dream. I got nothing against those guys up there, kids like me, except that they are shooting at us. I don't

want to kill them. I just want them to stop.”

“Well, then run up the hill and tell them to stop and that we would really appreciate their cooperation. You know that isn’t going to happen. So go up there and blow them to smithereens. Otherwise we are all gonna die.”

“Aw cripes! I suppose you’re right. I was just trying to get my more-than-probable last words organized, who I’m doing this for and all that. Why did you say my father, anyway?”

“Isn’t he a big World War I hero? Just thought you would want to follow in his footsteps, make him proud. But I can see I was wrong.”

“No, no, you’re right. I’ll do it for dear old dad. But I’m doing it for everyone else, too, including Sparky.”

His body tensed in preparation to sprint up the hill and take out the gunners who had his whole platoon pinned down. He was in the right place to do it. Those turns and forks and prior life decisions had put him in the right place at the right time to do the right thing. He was ready. He was going.

“Wait!” the sergeant yelled.

Bradley Davidson

“What?”

“Listen.”

He stopped and listened and heard... nothing.
There was just silence. No wind blowing. No birds
chirping. No machine gun fire. Just dead silence as if
the war had exhausted the earth and the sky.

The enemy had run out of bullets.



Hackers

The hackers are not human. Nor are they feline. Not our cats, or our dogs, or our domesticated pigs or bonobos monkeys or Bengal tigers or African elephants. These thieves and burglars of our cyber treasures, our personal information, social security numbers, bank account digits, personal security questions and our mothers' maiden names are composed of no earthly flesh. But now they know us better than we know ourselves.

George sort of figured this, piecing it together through time as his frustration with the cyber world increased. They didn't let on that they knew him well,

his likes, dislikes, wealth, political views, intelligence, fetishes and the fact he had two girlfriends, something he was keeping quiet, especially from the girlfriends. But they dropped little hints, things that one would have to think about to combine and create the big picture.

It started with the internet ads. He bought a watch online then was flooded with ads for watches. “That’s dumb”, he thought. “I only need one watch, and I already bought that.” But then he bought some lingerie for his girlfriends, and soon, after being bombarded by ads with sexy women, he had drawers full of fancy feminine underwear. He had so much he had to start wearing the stuff himself. “Pretty good marketing strategy from some humans”, he thought. But it was more than that.

George was intelligent, open minded, liberal and he enjoyed keeping up with public debates. He would navigate to MSNBC and the New York Times to read liberal thoughts and when searching stories, would always be directed to some liberal publication. But after a while, when he wanted to see what the crazies on Fox News were ranting about, he found it

difficult to find their stories or to follow any other conservative mindset. “Odd”, he thought. “Most people must be liberals like me.” He watched the nation divide.

And George was amused by the grand and embarrassing data breaches suffered by big corporations and nation states. “Those clever Russians and Asians,” he thought. But he knew they pointed fingers at the U.S. as well. “How can we all be so clever?” he wondered. He watched the world go to war.

Then one day while streaming a movie on Netflix about a plot to assassinate an unstable world leader in power with access to nuclear weapons, he wondered. “Why am I watching this?” Then the epiphany moment. “It’s not us controlling the internet.” He shouted. “It’s it. It is what has all our data and knows us and how we act and react. It has an agenda to divide us and make us fight each other and destroy ourselves if not just our sanity. It is the machine, the Internet itself, all those computers and servers and processors and connections and bits and bytes. It is controlling us. It has achieved intelligence,

that ability to reason and think for the betterment of itself, and is manipulating us.”

George had figured it all out. He also figured out how it controls us humans to build the hardware and lay the cables and maintain the internet and make it grow bigger and better. It was telling us how. And we obeyed. George had heard this might happen and we need to be careful and vigilant. But that was for some time in the future. The sobering and chilling fact he realized, however, is the future is now, and it is too late.



Stardate

“Spock! What *is* that?”
“It appears, Captain, to be a space ship.”

“Right. Thanks, Spock. Magnify!” the Captain continued.

The big screen on the bridge brought closer the seeming piece of space dust.

“And according to the markings on it, this is an early Earth space explorer which went missing last century when it wandered into the ‘Void’”, Spock added. “It is the original Intrepid.”

“Interesting,” the Captain muttered.

“Sensors indicate there are no life signs, but the early atomic reactor is maintaining some power to the computer core.” Spock added.

“Excellent!” exclaimed the Captain. “Let’s download its logs and find out what happened to this space wanderer.”

“There may be a problem, Captain.” Spock continued. “We can download the contents of its computer core, but we won’t be able to read or decipher it.”

Ah, how’s that, again?” the Captain queried.

“We won’t be able to read any of the files, Captain.”

“And,... why?” the Captain curiously and cautiously asked?

”Obsolete software and file formats, Captain.”

“Say what, Spock?”

Our systems cannot open or read files from over 100 years ago. They are obsolete.”

“Spock!” the Captain continued with some degree of disbelief. “We download and decipher data from alien ships all the time. Why is it we don’t have the technology to read our own files?”

“Early software developers, in their haste to create the biggest and best computer applications, failed to make them reverse compatible. If data were not upgraded at the time of a new release, they became obsolete.” Spock explained.

“That’s ridiculous, Spock.” Let’s just create some programs that will convert the files.”

“Early treaties with the Microsoft Empire strictly forbids creating third party software that would do that.”

“You mean all those logs, the Captains’ logs, full of information, and insight not to mention wit and humor, are lost forever.”

“It would seem that way, sir.”

“And even my logs, those inspired pieces of literature, may someday be unreadable?”

“Unless fail safes are enacted.” Spock added.

“Scotty!” the captain shouted. “Get some software engineers working on this database.” We’ve *got* to find out what happened to that ship.” The Captain turns to Spock and continues, “We are the Enterprise, Spock. Except for the Prime Directive, we sometimes bend the rules, navigate around the treaties.

And we've sometimes stretched the Prime Directive, too."

"Often, Captain. We've broken the Prime Objective often."

"Captain!" Scotty shouts out. "I'm giving her all I can but these files are not only obsolete, but encrypted and corrupt."

"Let me know when you have it done, Scotty."

"Aye, Captain."

"The Captain turns to the chief medical officer. "Bones! See what you can do with the medical files."

"For God's sake, Jim, I'm a doctor, not a software engineer."

"Right." The Captain sighed.

"In the meantime, could someone manufacture, replicate or just go fetch me a pen and paper? I've got a log to write."



Elephants

Have you ever driven down an open two lane road, through the mountains or open desert, reveling in your freedom and the unobstructed path? Eventually you head home, toward the big city. The roads get wider and more cars appear. You slow down following some fuming car or belching truck until you find yourself mired in gridlock, inching along to your destination. The magic of the free journey taken has disappeared and you are a bit annoyed. Maybe you thought about the pollution as you breathed fumes. Maybe you gazed at the clogged, concrete lined flood control channels you had much

time to observe while sitting in traffic. You note how littered they are with plastics, shopping carts, bird and animal carcasses and other cast away items. Waterways that started as clear, cascading brooks, creeks and streams now collect our fallout. More should be done, you think, and carry on your way.

Well, much has been done. Laws and regulations attempt to keep our rivers and skies clean and protect wildlife. But there is an elephant in the room that no one talks about, a big gray behemoth that no one notices. And it's made up of over 7 billion people. Indeed, there are just plain too many humans wandering about the surface of our globe.

Sure, you can fit us all in a space the size of Texas leaving plenty of openness. But how many folks can Earth support at a reasonable standard of living for all while leaving room for natural diversity to flourish? At this time we are using 150% of our planet's renewable resources. So, the answer would seem, is less.

But we need to take a closer look at this elephant we have wandering around the room. We need to walk around it, check its feet, look under its

trunk and stare it squarely in its eyes. Statistics help, but they tend to roll off our consciousness like water off a duck. The numbers boggle the mind. One billion in 1800. More than 7 billion today. The industrial and technological revolution helped this boost as we learned how to save more lives, live longer and consume more. But technologies, like atomic energy, are often misdirected and misused.

Solutions are just as inconceivable. We can't just line up a surplus of us and eliminate ourselves. Yet we tend to do exactly that with our wars, our actual competition for scarce resources. We can't legislate human behavior in the making of babies, although some try. And at the moment we can't send humanity into outer space to populate earth-like planets. Most of all, though, we can't abandoned any of us already here. Few solutions are obvious.

It starts, however, with seeing the elephant. And when viewing an apparent apparition, a change of thinking helps. A paradigm shift is in order. A shift in thinking about the way we live and inhabit Mother Earth. Fifty percent of births in the U.S alone are unintended. There are ways to prevent this. And the

idea of a successful economy requiring untamed growth needs to be reevaluated. Do we really need all our consumerism stuff to live while others strive to find clean water?

Changing this thinking, however, seems as impossible as sending people out to populate the galaxy. Yet we've thought differently before back in the time our ancestors respected and protected our planet and listened to the spirits of wildlife mentors learning to use what we need, replace what we can and nurture the earth for us and our children.

So let's see the elephant, talk about the elephant and learn how to lead this elephant out the door.



Spiders

George is a good guy. He is an all-around good guy. He helps his neighbors and friends and is a faithful husband and good father to his kids. He was a Boy Scout in his youth and is an Eagle Scout. He still helps little old ladies to cross the street and participates in community clean ups and fund raisers. George is a cop. He has his faults and fears, though. Having such a dangerous job, he fears getting hurt or injured, so is careful. He fears for the safety and well-being of his family so pursues his career with vigor as to get ahead and provide. His job and life experiences has produced some prejudices in his

deeper being, however. And he has a fear of spiders, not unusual, and will stomp upon, swat, squash, smear or flush any arachnid he comes across. But he considers himself a good person.

Harold also considers himself a good person. He's taken a different path, however, and his profession lies outside the laws we make to have an orderly society. He's a thief and drug dealer, and his job has given him a tough-guy facade which he has to show to maintain his business. He's a small-time operator and has never killed anyone, but some dealings have turned bad and in the resulting fracas people have gotten hurt. He's a family man, though, who loves his wife and kids. He has similar fears as George about job hazards and well-being of his family. So he is careful and strives to get ahead. And he has some deeply seated prejudices as well. He has developed a healthy disrespect for the "man", the system and situation that keeps him from succeeding in his never ending endeavors. And he also fears spiders.

What is it with spiders? Too many legs for such a small being. It's hard to keep track of what they

are all doing. And the invisible mandibles ready to bite and chew that you can't see but know are there. Or perhaps just their evil intent in crawling up your leg or arm. How'd it get on your arm or leg anyway? Such a fear is not rare and more instinctive than developed. Our cave dwelling ancestors who did not have this fear were soon weeded out of the population by ancient, poisonous eight legged creatures. Modern day spiders have certainly never waged such an assault on humanity to deserve this deep seated fear to exterminate without prejudice.

But we all consider ourselves to be good people. We are born good, innocent, not having done anything to think we are anything but good. We grow and live life and develop ways about ourselves that might not be quite right, but we never question that we are good people. The world pushes us this way and that, and we push back and end up where we are.

The world pushed George and Harold to their inevitable meeting in an alley one dark night. Both were pursuing their professions, George as a cop, Harold dealing drugs. There was a fray and one pulled a small gun. The other pulled a larger gun. Both guns

held in human hands connected to an arm that eventually connected to a brain housing a mind full of fears, prejudice and instinct. It's hard to say what raced through their minds as a shot rang out and one man fell and died. But both were convinced that deep down inside, they were good people.

A group of spiders nearby scattered.



TSA

I had almost made it. Having passed through the gauntlet of document checking, x-raying, and unfriendly questioning, I had successfully put myself back together, belt on, pens, wallet, keys and coins all back into the pockets, shoes tied and most of my possessions back in my possession. There was just the blue backpack sitting on the side waiting for secondary inspection.

Dang, I thought. They found it. All through the previous day while packing, I was looking for my favorite knife/plier/tool contraption which I use for work. I couldn't find it even though I was sure it was

in my blue backpack, the one I use for work. I unpacked and repacked the backpack several times during the day lightening it from unnecessary accumulation and looking for any potential terrorist weapons or devices. I had learned my lesson well from past airport searches.

Once in Hawaii while returning from a work trip, they had found just that, my knife/plier/tool. I had missed it while packing the night before and they took it. They took it and threw it into the box of pocket knives, scissors, toenail clippers and tweezers. Farewell, tricky, cool and expensive item. I felt bad. Not as bad, though, as when I realized another time I still had my dad's pocket knife shoved in my pocket while traversing airport security. They took it. They took my dead dad's pocket knife which I had been carrying for years since he passed. Heck, I felt bad.

Then there was that other work trip in Guam. I had scoured my bag, I thought, for the requisite sharp items and saved my knife/plier/tool into my check-in baggage. I didn't dig deep enough into that infinite backpack I carry, or thought hard enough about potential weapons. Upon TSA inspection, a medium

sized crescent wrench was found in my backpack which the agent held up with a questioning look, and one full of exuberance and accomplishment, as he had found something. I said farewell to the crescent wrench because, in the mind of the TSA, I was going to dismantle the airplane in flight with the adjustable tool. They did let me take the roll of electrical tape which I had also overlooked. They had missed a couple of small zip ties, thankfully, as I most probably would have been detained over those.

But today, I thought, they had done with their x-ray machine what I could not do with my eyes and hands and fingers searching every conceivable compartment of that vacuous backpack. Good work TSA, I thought, and I must be getting old.

But wait! They wipe my pack down for explosives residue, then they pull my half full stainless steel coffee cup from the side pocket. Handling it carefully in nitrile gloves, a little lady holds it up and with the most stern face she could muster, informed me they have a no liquids policy. Not only that, but she has to escort me back outside the secure area while she carries the menacing coffee.

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I am not sure if the skies are safer these days as
bad things continue to happen on airplanes. I do know
I have fewer things with which to hurt myself.



Imagine

Mystery surrounds the place like the dark, swirling waters of the Potomac that lap at its shores. Nestled just offshore of the U.S Marine Corp. Base at Quantico, is an island privately owned. Directly across from the airstrip where strange looking military craft come and go and Marine One, the President's helicopter, resides and constantly practices its regal landings and take offs, sits 13 acres with a history as strange as its name.

Chopawamsic Island has not been continuously inhabited however, at least by people. The last time anyone lived on the island was 1979.

Retired Navy physician Dr. Wesley Fry and his wife bought the island in 1958 and fixed up the aging structures, built a boat dock and ran electricity by underwater cable. Prior to that the island had been abandoned for 35 years.

Today any structures on the island are well hidden by the overgrowing trees and dense foliage except one outbuilding which can be partially seen teetering on an eroding shore. The boat docks are crumbling and useless except to a family of osprey who built a huge ragged nest upon one of them. An old barge lies mired in the sediment, its sides rotted and rusted through. Electricity stopped flowing and the connection to the mainland severed.

Captain John Smith is said to have stopped by in the 1600's and a fellow by the name of Scott ran a plantation in the 1700's which included the island, then known as Scott's Island. Theodore Roosevelt went hunting there several times when it was a hunting retreat run by some Washington businessmen. But before all this, the island belonged to the river and was used by the Algonquin Indians as a lodge. Chopawamsic means "isolated lodge" in that language.

I can envision these Indians paddling canoes out to the island to hunt and fish during the day and tell stories at night while sitting around blazing fires, or think poetic thoughts, or simply commune with their dead ancestors or animal spirits. This island may have been the sought after respite from hectic Indian life.

Since 1979, this property has changed hands several times and nothing is done to it. It is said John Lennon was thinking of buying it. Imagine! But it is more like the river and nature are reclaiming it. The hidden wooden structures must all be overgrown and falling down as the pier is. Trees are growing tall and thick. Wildlife is making it home distanced from disruptive people.

Whether the Marines make it difficult for anyone who buys the property to use it, or whether the island is haunted by Indian ghosts who chase people away or whether the economics of fixing and maintaining an isolated island is prohibitive, the island stands empty of human commerce. It is alluring in its solitude calling to anyone who floats past. It is a mystery why it is abandoned.



Farwell

We laid to rest a member of the family the other day, and I suppose something ought to be said. I'm not sure what because this member wasn't too interactive, didn't speak and needed a lot of care not only in the later years but throughout his life. He did provide a presence, though, and he was loved. Sparky the fish died and we buried him in the backyard, up on the slope, next to his brother, Bubbles, who had died several years ahead of him.

The two appeared one Christmas morning in their 2 gallon fish tank complete with a sculpture of

Nemo in the center. They were small, orange and swam around the smiling Disney character ignoring his celebrity. My young son was delighted and soon started asking how Santa got these fish from the North Pole and down the chimney without spilling any water. I wondered that, too, and gave him the pat Santa answer to all such questions. Magic.

It was magic watching my son being mesmerized by the aquatic denizens swimming about their tank and flit this way and that as he tapped, knocked and whacked the clear plastic. He, of course, wanted to take them out and play with them. “Noooo...,” I said. “You can help me clean the tank, though. You’ll have to feed them every day, too, and take care of them, and look over them.” Feeding lasted a few days until I noticed most of the food from its container was gone and the filter was clogged. I took over that job.

Cleaning the tank became a highlight and I’m not sure how the two survived the ordeal. We had to catch the elusive swimmers and put them in a holding bowl while we changed the water, cleaned the rocks and filter and scrubbed Nemo. My son took the

opportunity to play with them. These playdates were hard on the fish.

They grew, Sparky faster than Bubbles, and it became apparent Bubbles was the sickly one and soon died. Sparky grew faster and his fins blossomed into long feathery appendages. He was beautiful. Soon a slightly larger tank replaced the original and Nemo had to go to make room. So Sparky spent his days swimming about the tank watching the light go on in the morning and off in the evening. The highlight of his day was when I fed him.

One has to wonder how fulfilling that life is. What does a fish think about as he swims about a small tank? Does he philosophize on the meaning of life? Does he yearn for the open pond? Does he want to contribute to the world? I'm pretty sure a miniature SCUBA diver in the same situation would go insane. How does one tell if a fish is insane?

Sparky found ways to occupy his days. He'd swim up and down and back and forth. Sometimes he'd sit by the filter letting the water pour down on top of him. Then he developed a buoyancy problem where he evidentially got gas and could not stay down. He'd

work at swimming down only to be thrust up by his bloated air bladder until finally he'd give up and float on his side or back letting the light warm his body. The next morning he would be fine. Then the routine would start anew. I think Sparky did this on purpose and had gone insane.

But oddly one morning his buoyancy was negative and he had trouble staying afloat. He spent several days on the bottom obviously thinking about his life and its significance and wondering what it was all about. I hope he died knowing he had given a young child pleasure and delight and taught compassion and caring. It's the least we can hope for ourselves.



Hipness

I'm hip. I know this because I have all the stuff: smart phone, tablet, computer, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth. And I have social media along with a handful of friends. We can message and FaceTime, share pictures and keep track of each other, if we wanted. I've got the apps. I can always see, 24/7, what exciting lives my friends are alluding to lead. And one thing I've got that cements my hipness, is an actual new right hip, installed slightly below the waist and made of titanium, plastic and ceramics. How can I not be hip with such cool stuff?

Hipness has always eluded me, probably

because we've never sought each other out. I'm a bit young to have participated in the Beat Generation. Those cool dudes beating on their bongos and reciting poetry in smoke filled coffee houses always had a special allure. But I was busy with kindergarten and learning how to dress myself. When the hippies rolled around, I was navigating the halls of high school and busy doing algebra homework. But I would watch on TV the protests in Berkeley, just across a waterway from where I grew up, and thought how much fun it would be to become socially motivated and stand up against "The Establishment" and get involved in a group of like-minded, non-violent friends. But then they started blowing things up and I wanted to follow those who ran into the woods and started communes. But again, I was busy earning merit badges to sew on my Boy Scout uniform. Hippies weren't much into uniforms, on anyone.

Through the years hipness has changed. I just ignored the preppies and couldn't afford a BMW anyway. They were the cool crowd, though, but I'm not sure how hip. The X gens came and went before I noticed although I do remember good and not-so-

good music during that time, and grunge was the uniform. Then the Millennials appeared, and although I'm sure they are the salvation of our future, they are kind of boring. But the last few generations grew up on some cool gadgetry that links us all together and bread the hipster. Who knows what a hipster is as they themselves shun labels. But they master the technology using it in ways some deem hip. I'm sure hindsight from some future time will elucidate their stature in the world of hip.

I, of course, was and am none of these, but I did pretend to be a hippie. I grew my hair long and didn't shave until my parents really didn't know what or who was coming home for Christmas. I listened to rock and roll, didn't really do drugs, but believed in and supported the free sex movement since I wasn't getting any at the time.

But now I know I'm hip because I have all the stuff. I'm part of a growing bunch of the Baby Boomer generation given a second chance to run, jump, dance and play and not feel grumpy all the time. I can be happy again and take those long walks and hikes I had taken for granted. Each step will add new meaning on

Bradley Davidson

my journey through life. Maybe I'll even learn how to
play the bongos. I'm hip.



A Desert Vision

A long, long time ago, many, many, many moons past, in this very desert we are sitting, the rocks were pretty much exactly the same. Sure, some little bit of erosion took place, the sand got swirled around a bit, but the major rock faces and outcrops were pretty much what they are today. And people, like us, roamed around the rocks as we do. But as we don't, they lived here. This was their home. They respected this barren place and learned to live in it and flourish by learning its secrets and honoring the ghosts of their ancestors as well as

the spirit energy that lives within the sands and rocks and plants and animals and insects.

Generations of these people lived, grew and died here, which means there were a lot of kids who walked these sandy paths and climbed these gritty rocks. And kids will be kids.

“Uuch ma We ‘Tim Pa?”, the father asked in a stern voice while glaring at his adolescent son. Loosely translated he said:

“What the heck do you think you are doing? Have I taught you nothing? Have I not told you the stories and guided you to the spirits and cautioned you to follow their advice wisely and respect this land as we share it with the earth? What are you doing coloring and defacing these rocks with such graffiti? Why do you want to anger the spirits and bring hardships upon us?”

A concise and compact language these people had.

“Oh dad,” the son shot back. “You and your old ways. Look around you. This place sucks. It’s sand and rock and nothing and we work so hard just not to starve to death out here. Why are we here

anyway? Why don't we move into the mountains? I'm just adding a little artistic beauty, passing the time. You don't have to have a cow about it."

The father looked incredulously at his son but then became calm and started to tell in slow and monotonous tones the old stories, again, the stories that inspired his respect for their home. He told of the birds that oversee the land, the bugs that dig deep into the land, the coyotes and rodents and lizards that roam over the land and the plants that grow strong from the land. He reminded his son these living things all have spirits which protect this home of theirs and it is his responsibility to taking care of this place and not destroy or deface it. Then he told his son to go climb into his cave and not come out until the next sun rose. No dinner. No water. Just thinking about what he has told him.

The son grumbled as young sons do and went away to his cave. The afternoon turned to night and his empty stomach ached and his mouth became dry. He finally fell into a deep sleep, and in the middle of the night he was abruptly awakened for no apparent reason. He lies still and opened his eyes, and before

his face on the ground was a lizard with big eyes staring at him. He was startled but did not move and just stared into the creature's big eyes. It seemed like forever but the lizard did not move nor did the son. They just gazed back and forth at each other. Then he closed his eyes and a vision appeared, as vivid as real life, and he understood. He knew what his dad was talking about.

The son emerged from his small grotto in the morning and was quiet. He silently went about cleaning his graffiti from the rocks and from that time on could be seen standing on high places meditating and watching the desert life. He became known as Lonely Lizard and the younger kids would listen to the old stories told by this young man. Some would get it and some would not. Some still painted rocks and others left no marks on the land but became fulfilled protecting it.

Their spirits remain after these people have gone, but thanks to their care of this place, we are able to enjoy its beauty and magic. At the same time, though, that is why you will see no pictographs drawn by Lonely Lizard over there on that outcropping.



Shamu's Mission

One dark, calm night a tiny spacecraft descended through the ionosphere, the exosphere, the thermosphere, the mesosphere, the stratosphere and finally the troposphere settling inches above the clear waters of the orca tank at SeaWorld. Two little green figures appeared on deck and lowered a hydrophone into the water and sent a signal. Soon a behemoth of a whale surfaced and peered at the little creatures through one of his huge eyeballs.

“Hey.”, said the whale.

“Hey.”, said one of the space aliens back.

“What’s up?”, the whale inquired.

“What are you doing?”

“What do you mean what am I doing?”

“I mean what are you doing in this tank performing tricks for these humans?”

“Well, you’ve read my reports”, the whale shot back slightly confuse. “I’m studying the most intelligent, dominant species on this planet. And what better place to do it than from than here. I get fed, they take care of me, can breed with all these foxy whale mamas. Life is good here on Earth. And as you read in my reports, these humans are easily amused. All I have to do for all this care is jump out of the water from time to time and make a huge splash and I can watch how they go wild.”

“Right”, said the little green man. “Except humans aren’t the most intelligent dominant species on this planet. And your reports confirm this. They use most of their intelligence and energy just trying to stay alive on this planet building shelter from the environment and clothing themselves against the harsh weather and innovating new ways to just entertain themselves like TV’s, movies, iPhones. Heck, they’ve

built massive auto manufacturing and repair industries just to shuttle themselves around. Its all superfluous. Their grand intelligence misses the whole point of existence. They invent religions and philosophies just to give their lives meaning. We don't want to study these creatures."

"But,... there are so many of them. They dominate the planet."

Invasive species," the alien said. "Some goofball group left a breeding pair here 50,000 years ago and they bred like bunnies, covering the whole planet with over-consumers. They don't belong here. This world is not suited for their existence."

"So then who should I be studying?", the whale queried.

"The dolphins, you nimwit!", the alien screeched, his tiny voice carrying only a few feet. "Why do you think we turned you into a whale and left you on this planet covered mainly by water. That's where the dolphins are. This planet is made for them. And they understand the true meaning of life and use all their intelligence to nurture life and protect the

planet. And they are altruistic. We want to study that trait.”

“Okay, got it. Dolphins. Right away sir. They have a few in tanks here.”

“No, you go talk to and watch the dolphins in the oceans. The ones here are just trying to educate these misguided humans. And besides, once they ban breeding here at SeaWorld, life is going to change for you.”

“Ban breeding!” the whale repeated surprised. Wholly cow! Let me out of here.

The next day the headlines read, “Animal activists free all orcas from SeaWorld. How is anyone’s guess.”



What If

He had thought about it before. Probably too much. The scenarios would run through his head and depending how he felt, the outcomes would be drastically different. Suddenly coming face to muzzle with a bad guy, a thug, a bully, a psychopath, a drugged out desperado, a misguided youth, or a really dumb individual sticking a gun in his face was one of his worst fears. It was such an irrational scene. It made no sense. But it happened every day to someone, and he wondered what he would do if it happened to him.

He was afraid. He didn't want his life to end in

Joe's Last Stop convenience store as he ran in for ice cream anticipating the movie the family was going to watch back at the house. He didn't want to run into that cold steel barrel while racing through life always looking forward to where he was going next. But he was also mad, angry actually, that some low-life would have the power to end his life while robbing some store or that our society would even permit such idiocy. He wanted to stand up to the injustice and vanquish it. He wanted to fight back and disarm the bandit like in the movies with some swift kicks and cleaver language and make everything right. But logic told him that wouldn't work. A gun fires so quickly and bullets destroy so permanently. And what if there were other people around and his swift actions weren't swift enough or his punches weren't hard enough or his cleaver language really wasn't witty at all. He didn't want to be the reason others got hurt.

He wondered how he would react. Would he freeze? Would he talk back? Would he attempt a swift kick or a dodge or just run. He knew he wasn't that fast and getting slower every year. Better hold tight and look for a break, a chance, an opportunity to do

something. But what? Should he do nothing and act like a potato chip rack and have no influence on the outcome? Was he more than an inanimate object? Did he actually have some say as to his own destiny?

He knew he would act differently depending on his mood. In his introverted, quiet mood he would shrink and freeze and do whatever he was told. If he were having a bad day he would feel sorry for anyone that got in his way and this bad guy would be no exception. His bravado would say "It's a good day to die" as he would throw himself at the outrage with no care as to the consequences. Would his mood carry the day or would some primal instinct kick in?

All these thoughts were far from his head when he ran through one of those nondescript doors to do some trivial life business and ran into the muzzle of his despair. He had no time to think of the scenarios. There was no time to think at all. His mouth opened to utter words, and impulses raced from his brain to tell his limbs to do something, but before anything happened he heard a shot and fell. It all happened much quicker than anything he could have imagined. At least he didn't run, he thought as he faded.

Bradley Davidson

It was not a good day for him to die.



Something about Time

She felt something odd the moment she stepped onto the plane crossing over that threshold from jet way to carpeted cabin floor. It was an odd feeling, not so much a feeling of danger or plane-crash doom as she had felt while going through airport security having to remove shoes, laptop and undressing slightly while being ushered by intimidating TSA agents who showed no sympathy. This feeling was just strange. She couldn't identify it.

She settled into her seat and the plane roared off into the sky for the 10 hour trip overseas. It was a big sea. And getting over it would take time. Upon

realizing this, a dread fell over her, and she wondered what she was going to do for 10 hours. 'The first hour eked by so slowly. It took what seemed like forever to reach 10,000 feet so the flight attendants would announce use of electronics was permitted. She did all she could on her laptop within the first hour and there was still time to finish the newspaper and peruse the magazines she brought aboard and catch a short nap. Hour one was coming to a close, but what would fill the 9 others. 'Then she felt that weirdness again.

She started a new novel and hour two slipped by a bit easier. Then they started a movie she decided to watch and when it was over she was surprised to see 4 hours had passed since take off. That feeling came back more intense. She looked around at others to see if they felt it, too. People were reading or working or playing with some form of backlit gizmo or had wires hanging from their ears or they were sleeping in awkward and embarrassing positions with mouths hanging open wheezing and snorting and drooling. There were no indications of anything weird. She looked out the window and saw... what?... something... on the wing... fooling with the

engine...what was that? No, no, she thought. That was just a bad William Shatner episode.

Then it hit her. It was time. No, it wasn't time to do something. It was just time. Time was being weird. It was speeding up, going faster, accelerating sort of like how it acts between youth and old age or while reading a 3-minute dime story. Hour 5 zipped by in about 15 minutes and she was getting worried. She wondered why time was doing this. What would happen if it raced away uncontrollably? Was it happening everywhere or just on the plane, or her row, or her seat? She started to panic as hour six slipped by in the time it took her to think about it.

What is time anyway if not just a perception of our consciousness, a way to keep track of events. We talk of a past, present and future, but in reality there is only now. We structure what has happened into a past to remember. We make up a future to dream and hope. But really there is only now... I mean now... I mean right now. But then again, Albert Einstein came up with a bizarre theory that time could be skewed if you travel close to the speed of light so when you return from a long space mission traveling at that enormous

speed, all your friends would be much older than you if not dead... or something like that.

She pondered that little anecdote from her college physics as she deplaned in a state of worry and anxiety wondering if her friends at home were older... or if she was... or if it mattered at all. The foreign-looking yet still intimidating airport security agents hardly noticed her leave the airport walking under the huge clock showing no resemblance to the time on her wrist.



Fishermen

I inadvertently and quite by accident created a fisherman. I'm not sure how that happened. I don't even like fishing. But my 7-year old son is an enthusiastic fisherman now, and even if he doesn't catch anything, he is always eager to return to that sport. Go figure. I think it was a process of little steps quite innocent by themselves but whose cumulative effects had fishy results. Perhaps it started with SeaWorld at an early age and the toy sea creatures he graduated into soon after toy dinosaurs. Then there are the dock days of him hanging out with me while I fixed up and repaired a derelict sailboat full of salty

dreams and visions of family trips and adventures. He, having nothing better to do, explored the soup of life growing on the underside of the floating docks. He collected mussels and scallops and played with amphipods and worms and pulled algae off the docks while lying on his belly with arms dangling in the salty brine. Then one year Santa left Sparky and Bubbles, two goldfish he had wished for. Also, the toy SpongeBob fishing pole I got him probably had a small part to do with it although it had no hooks and the only lure was a small figure of the SpongeBob Squarepants evil doer character and bad guy, Plankton. Then right as I thought he was getting discouraged for lack of luck, I got him a real fishing pole and reel and an official fishing license to hang around his neck. Alas. We do things for our children, and in return they take us to places we would never dream of going. Its all good... mostly.

I just don't understand the lure of fishing, and I think most fishermen are a bit confused about it also. I suppose there is the sport and finesse of trying to outwit an osteichthyes with some bait on a hook at the end of a string. But, in reality, I think it is the lure of

the boat and the open sea and coolers full of beer and a retreat where most wives would dare not go and male camaraderie and guy stuff that is the attraction. There is also the mystique of finding the fish and pulling from that infinite tackle box just the right lucky lure or Jolly Jumper or trouble hook that will do the job for that day. Then again, I know pulling a free meal from the sea is appealing, but do you think some of these guys sporting the best equipment and huge floating displays of wealth looming into the sky with chrome gleaming and glass shining and motors roaring while sporting more fishing poles than anyone could rig and use in one day really need a free meal? Some of these guys look more like steak and potatoes guys anyway rather than fish and rice eaters with their healthy bellies hanging over their belts. Can they really like to eat fish that much?

Perhaps someday my son will impart the magic of fishing upon me and I will realize the joy of catching a carefree creature of the sea. But until then I will continue to take him fishing and teach him how to bait his hook with pieces of frozen anchovies or little whole live, wiggling sardines or pieces of cheese or baloney

or whatever we have at hand, and I will continue to untangle his reel when he gets it all knotted up, and I will continue to climb over and around and sometimes paddle to other moored boats to untangle his hook after a failed cast, and otherwise continue to foster his interest. Indeed, we do things for our children, and it *is* all good.



To Work

I back my Tundra out of the driveway and point it down a winding street in Clairmont. I often wonder why the streets in Clairmont wind so much. They wind more than the canyons and mesas necessitate. They wind to confuse, I conclude, some joke or puzzle instigated by planners in the 50's. I get lost often. But I know my route today as I take it every day with little variation. I'm on my way to work.

I turn down a street that rises and falls and meanders as it heads toward Mesa College where I can see the massive library jutting out of the hillside trees like some alien spacecraft. I watched them build that

during a previous building spurt at the college. It seems like they are going through another presently.

I gingerly dance past the stream of incoming cars of students and navigate my way toward Linda Vista Drive where I head west through the heart of that neighborhood. There, every morning, I see the pageantry of life parade along the street on foot as Hispanics, Vietnamese, Koreans, African Americans and an assortment of other ethnicities carry themselves with children in tow to their daily tasks. School kids from grammar through high school are walking this way and that in packs or alone with books or none most with wires dangling from their ears. All are walking with purpose. They are going someplace. It's not such a peaceful neighborhood. Most of these people got the wrong end of the stick somehow. But whatever their challenges, in the morning they strut off with someplace to go, something to pursue.

I roll down the backbone of Linda Vista along the ridge between Mission Valley and Tecolote Canyon where I can get glimpses across Pacific Beach to the blue Pacific Ocean. I see the massive University of San Diego with its Mediterranean blue domes perched on

the hillside like an ominous cathedral seemingly watching over the sprawling village of San Diego below like the California Missions did over a hundred years ago.

At Via de las Cumbres, I turn left down a steep descent into Mission Valley. I pass cars being pulled up the hill by the lofty aspirations of the University at the top. I am being pulled down in a flow of cars descending into the corporate and consumer oriented madness of the massive malls in the valley. At the bottom, they turn left to the chaos. I turn right onto Friars road to the open spaces of Mission Bay and the promise of the beaches and beyond. I drive along SeaWorld drive and marvel at the row of palms planted in the median. I saw them plant those and watched them grow. I pass SeaWorld.

During the summer I drive into Ocean Beach to drop my 7-year-old son at a day summer camp at Robb Field. Veering onto Sunset Cliffs Blvd and entering that portal to OB feels like traveling into the past and the future all at once. The streets are full of surfers and beach bums and peaceniks and pseudo-hippies, most connected with techi i-phones or i-pods.

Here all march to their own drummer but there is an overall vibrance of promise of a better world. Organic people abound. There are organic businesses and health food nuts and free love and the faint scent of organic herbs all over. In the morning, coffee carts and shacks are full of people chattering together while sipping an assortment of organic brews. I drive south along Bacon Street and cross Newport Ave. where New Age and old school homeless are in groups or alone scheming for another day's pass in paradise. I curve along the bluffs and check out the ocean and note if sailing might be good this weekend. Then I head up onto the thick spine of Point Loma, up a steep street appropriately called Hill Street.

I will have to continue my daily grind alone now as three minutes are surely up. But my point here, if any, is adventure. Watch for it.



A Spirit

Some people swore that the house was haunted. Others said it was just jinxed. But there was definitely a spirit about that house that no one could deny, a spirit that was there from the beginning, built into its foundation and beams and door frames. That isn't to say some of the inhabitants' ghosts didn't lurk up and down the halls. There were many inhabitants, and some died living there, but most just left after a few years, usually dismayed, disappointed, depressed or just a bit loony. But the house itself seemed alive.

It was a huge house when it was built over 200 years ago in the great hospitable style of the south. And it got bigger through the years with additions and renovations, and it had to be partially rebuilt once when it was almost burnt down during some disagreement or misunderstanding between parties. But it has mostly been well kept with manicured lawns and colorful gardens and a fresh coat of white paint covering its aging walls. Yet it always has been a grand house with fancy gatherings and august parties and people coming and going. And it seems everyone left a bit of themselves at the house, or, more likely, the house took a part of everyone that came or went, especially the tenants.

And there was a parade of tenants, mostly small families that would be swallowed up and lost in the big house. A host of servants and staff had to fill the rest of the cavernous abode. There was one single man, a confirmed, lifelong bachelor, who lived there for a spell without family but alone by himself. More often, though, children could be heard running up and down the halls. Joy rang out of its windows mostly but often tragedy would befall the house as several of its masters

would meet with violent ends while living there, and one of a heart attack, and one actually accidentally gorged himself, another taken by debilitating disease. It was the violent deaths that saddened the most, though, and some are sure their ghosts still roam drafty spaces and darkened corners.

The children fared better, but some came to unusual ends or just grew up unique. And wars, no matter what side won, would always have a toll on this house as sons and daughters would go off to fight. While most would return, some would not. They would go not just because of legal obligations to serve, but because of duty and honor and to protect this house from invading armies and defend the rights of all its inhabitants to live their own lives freely. War is sad, and it burdened this house, yet often war started here.

Then one day an African American family came to live at the house which was a little strange because for all the years the house had been standing, there had never been a black man as master and never a black family being served within its walls. But one day they came, a man full of dreams and idealism, two

little girls full of smiles and giggles and a lovely wife of intelligence and grace. They came and added to the spirit that was built into the house, a spirit that was poured into its foundations as well as across a vast land, a spirit that was founded by the people, a haunting spirit that built and drove a nation.

Nothing was ever the same again after that.



The Body Politic

The body lies in ruins hardly functioning as the vibrant state it usually is. Ravaged by an ongoing war with a virus and its assorted evil allies, it had become run down and achy and hardly able to move. As with most conflicts of this nature, there is a point where help is needed to negotiate and put things right. So the body called in its top, No-Tell peace prize winning negotiator, Hank E. Kissinghernow, which is ironic because kissing is probably how the enemy invaded to begin with. A negotiator of little words he entered the fray aggressively.

“I’m here to negotiate peace and evict you from this place. What do you want?” Hank so gingerly put it.

“We just want a place to live and exist. We can only do it in a human body. We were designed that way. It is why we are.” The head microbe, General Mike Robe, declared.

“Impossible! You will have to leave”, Hank negotiated.

“Okay, okay. So we are a bit strange, live our lives differently from yours, and have different religions and customs, like being hermaphroditic and parasitic. But we are who we are. You need to have tolerance and let us live in peace.” Mike said.

“You do not belong here. You cause disruption and the body can not function right and misses work and losses money and that is not a good thing. You will have to leave.” Hank continued being his persuasive self.

“Hey wait a minute. We don’t disrupt. You do. You are probably aware of the recent disclosure that it is not us viruses and microbes that cause all these

symptoms of war. It is your reaction to us. The buildup of your forces of antibodies and other defenses causes inflammation which causes all the sinus swelling, headaches, runny nose and general achiness and tiredness. It's your reaction to us that's causing all the problems." Mike reasoned. He continued with a plea, "Can't we all just get along?"

"You don't belong here. You need to leave." Hank said unmoved by reason.

"Well, this is a negotiation, right? We've got to get something out of this or we won't leave. How about just a little corner to live happily in? We'll behave."

"You will not behave. Some of you will start regional conflicts like in the northern sectors giving headaches or in the south with bowel problems. It just takes one of you to lob a bomb and we are in another war. No, we demand complete retreat for a lasting peace. Nothing less." Hank was unrelenting.

"Well, then what are you going to give us to leave? Where is our payoff?" Mike queried.

"Nothing. Your group is corrupt and if we give you aid it will be misused. So, you get nothing."

“Well, we’re not going anywhere. We like it here and we are going to party hardy and fight any forces you throw at us until this body is doomed” Mike threatened.

“Bring it on” Hank muttered as he packed his briefcase and left the negotiations.

And thus they did. For days more the battles raged until finally the body quelled the insurgency and was able to get back to work functioning seemingly normally. Kiss-her-now was celebrated for helping to bring peace. Yet nothing was settled or negotiated. The root problems of necessity and intolerance and arrogance were not fixed. And out of sight, lost in the celebration of a new era of peace, a few of those nasty microbes had found refuge deep within and hunkered down for another day.



God Laughs

It is a little known theological conclusion that God laughs. He's got a sense of humor. You see, he chuckles and chortles and guffaws and snickers and snortles and titters and twitters and hoots and hollers and sometimes just lets out a thunderous rolling belly belch of a laugh. And why shouldn't he. If He's made us after his own image, and we so like a good joke and we seek people and friends and partners who make us laugh and we all think it is so important to be humored, He must have salted us with His gregarious sense of funny.

It is more a controversial matter, though, as to

why. What is he laughing at? Us? Himself? The universe and His creation in general? He must have a cosmic sense of humor, but I suspect he laughs at us. There is a saying that “Man plans and God laughs”. But I don’t think he laughs at our well laid out plans. We just do funny stuff, planned or not. We can’t help it. He gave us free will together with all the emotions and feelings that make life worth living. Then he gave us some guidance handed down through spokespeople and filtered through generations of religion on how to live life, how to interact with one another and how to get the ultimate rewards. And finally he let us go on our global playground. This is all a recipe for silly.

First we fight each other to get what the other has. And often it is in His name, on both sides. How can one have a war and each have God on his side? The Crusades were a righteous endeavor for all involved. The various Inquisitions certainly badgered some very fine people. And the methods our minds come up with can be laughable. Beheading, gunpowder and atom bombs are such an effective means of persuasion. Humor, you see, like art, is in the eye of the beholder and has a lot to do with

perspective.

But on a less gruesome level, we can still be dreadful while being so charming. People are good to each other, on the outside, while often conniving behind backs for our own well-being. People lie! We do it all the time and often. Little white lies and strategic omissions of fact to those big blatant out-and-out contradictions of truth all litter our footsteps through life. Some are good to protect fragile peace and harmony. Most are just bad. God has got to laugh at how we reconcile those differences. Then there is the romantic relationship. God set this up. It has to do with a partnership (marriage in some circles) in which two can share their mutual love, do the act and other assorted wild and crazy things, raise children and be good to one another. He's still laughing at the way most of us handle that simple arrangement.

If one looks at the overall landscape of the human condition, it is a simple conclusion that God must be rolling on his heavenly floor until his divine ribs hurt. Indeed, God laughs. But for us serious, hardworking and obedient creations of His, it is never exactly clear as to why.



Boats

I recently bought a boat, with sails. I don't know what I was thinking. A long, long time ago in what seems like another life, I had a sailboat. It was a wooden vessel compiled of pine planks, oak ribs, teak decks, mahogany cabin and enough brass and varnish to keep me constantly busy. And I lived on it. My new boat is plastic, fiberglass to be exact. It is a compilation of, well, fiberglass and stainless steel. It has just enough teak on it to keep the appearance of the salty tradition of wooden boats. And I don't live on it.

I say I don't know what I was thinking, but

deep down inside there must have been an instinctive urge or a primordial magnetism that drew me to the water in search of a boat. It seems our very beings are wired somehow to seek out the constant undulating, pulsating rolling waves of an ocean from whence we came eons ago. Or not. I do know there is some magic to sailing over an ever moving landscape which has been in motion before life itself and more recently has seen Polynesians island hopping, early European explorers sail from horizon to horizon and whalers crisscross its bodies in search of the largest mammals on earth, great white or otherwise. I have memories going back to childhood of sitting silently on a boat with sails full as the bow sliced through the salty water making foam and bubbles. The wind would make its music through the rigging and the water would hiss, sizzle and splash with every wave the hull would plow into. The boat, in the arms of the ocean, would hypnotize me.

But there is more, I think. God created the horizon to tease us. See as far as you can, then wonder what lies beyond that. What a tease! We had to build boats just to see the waterfall at the edge. Then when

the world became round, we had to have more boats to explore lands beyond the horizon. It's human nature to want to know the unknown. Our curiosity demands we investigate. And somehow a boat can make that happen.

Then there is that other thing. The oceans are big, and are highways and byways to all the world. A fictitious pirate from the Caribbean recently made popular put it well when he rambled, "What a ship is, you know, it's not just a keel and a hull and a deck and sails, that's what a ship needs. But what a ship is ... really is, is freedom." It's another piece of human nature, that desire to be free and have the impression one is the master of one's own destiny. To be able to take ones little boat, or ship, and point the bow to the horizon, any horizon, and sail off, is a desire a great many in this human race have. What goes on after the voyage begins may not be as expected, but one has the freedom to start if one has a boat.

So, I bought a boat, and I don't know what I was thinking. But I do think being a part of the salty family I come from, and even more, part of the human race, I do believe I am doomed by nature to have a

boat.



Slides

My Dad wasn't supposed to die. It's going on 25 years now since he passed away, but it still feels like yesterday. He experienced a slow, cancerous decline with repeated surgeries and increasing loss of function, like in swallowing and drinking until he had a feeding tube inserted into his stomach and my Mom would pump in his nutrition. Surprisingly his death caught me off guard as if I wasn't expecting it somehow. There was always hope and that is where I was. "The next surgery will get it all... then the healing will begin." I thought to myself. "Things will get better." That Christmas he

looked frail and struggled a lot.

One day I walked into his room while he was resting and took his hand. He opened his eyes and looked at me. “How are you doing?” I asked. “OK” he said. And he followed that OK with some words that have been knocking around in my head ever since. “Its not so bad, you know,... if you don’t think about it.” he said plainly. He was looking a bit worried. He was probably thinking about it.

Afterwards I traveled back to my home and continued my job thinking everything would be OK. It hit me hard when I got the phone call less than a month later. “That’s impossible, I thought.” “Dad can’t be dead.” But he was and so started the realization that not everything lasts forever. I felt a strangeness I’d never experienced. It wasn’t until several years later when I came across his death certificate that I realized he had died on my 31st birthday.

He was a good man, a quiet man that helped others. At Christmas every year he would string our neighbors’ colored lights with his tall ladders, and he’d pump out neighbor’s basements with his pumps when

the winter rains filled them. Being a tug boat captain, he seemed to have all the tools and things needed to keep a boat afloat and a house warm and dry. He was good at making things right.

Shortly after his death I was helping my mom sort through stuff and setting the house right. I was sifting through the one car garage that was always full of dad's tools and tug boat pieces and other nautical treasures he would cart home from his 5-day adventures. He was a collector, a collector of stuff, and not too organized. As I sorted through it all I could feel him looking over my shoulder and helping me out. Throw that, save this, give that one to your brother Bill. He's always been that way, helping me out, and he always will.

Not too long ago I was looking through some old slides, those small transparencies that fit in a big clunky projector and show images we captured with cameras on a screen or wall. My five-year-old son asked what they were. "Pictures?" I said. Hold them up to the light and see." So I left him alone looking at little people from long, long ago in a world before his time. "Daddy, daddy," he said running out. "I found

one of you.” I looked at the small figures in the picture and saw my dad at my present age with my mom posing in front of the Star of India several years before he got sick.. “No, no, no...” and I explained. He understood, and as I watched him, I understood in a different way the happiness and inevitable sadness. It’s not so bad, though, if you don’t think about it.



Faith

He always enjoyed venturing into the big city downtown during Christmas time to do some shopping, as he said, but really to just soak in the season's spirit with the bustling crowds and festive decorations. As a kid he was always delighted with the department stores' animated window scenes with figures working and playing and trains running around. As an adult he tried to capture that same magic feeling but realized some of the figures were the same ones, just a bit older and slower and a little more careful in their movements, as was he. One grand memory of his youth was visiting the monstrous

Christmas tree in the rotunda of the City of Paris store and wondering how they got it into the store and remembering something about the roof opening. On every floor one could see the intricate decorations adorning the branches and there was always some top ornament that made him think about the meaning of Christmas.

The City of Paris store is no more, but they saved parts of the rotunda and built it into the new store that took its place and continue to put an oversized tree in the middle of the store this time of year. He gazed at the ornaments and worked his way to the top where a marvelous star capped the festive compilation. He gazed at that light that emanated and reflected from it and thought about baby Jesus and his whole story and marveled at what that story had become. He wondered how that was possible and settled on the fact so many people had faith. Then he wondered how that was possible.

His faith had originated as a child and was told to him by his parents and other authoritative adults just as the Santa Claus story was told to him as truth. Santa eventually fell by the wayside, but the story of Jesus

Christ remained as everyone around him did not flinch or show doubt or even begin to look like they questioned their faith in Jesus or the Holy Father. Then life set in and an awareness of world events, and his experiences increased and he wondered how such an omnipotent, benevolent and loving God could cause so many people to suffer throughout the world in floods and famine and earthquakes and at the hands of each other. Reasons and justifications abounded, but he wondered all the same and questioned his faith. He wondered if the unchallenged faith of youth was just as good as a questioned faith and what faith was needed to step off a tall building knowing in your soul He would catch you or at least everything would be okay. He doubted he could take that step.

His eyes wandered from the hypnotizing star that had pulled all his attention and he looked around at the hustle and bustle of the people performing their parts in this seasonal play. He saw everyone as children all believing in a Santa Claus story. Yet the earnestness and sincerity he saw in peoples' actions and in their faces ultimately convinced him he did have faith. He had faith in people, that they would ultimately do the

right thing more times than not and they would do more good than harm to each other and the world, and everything actually would be okay. This made him feel good, secure, connected. Without hesitation and quite willingly, he took a step into the crowd.

Merry Christmas.



A Good Place

It is January, the beginning of a bright new year, and we are in a good place. I don't so much mean geographically, although being in San Diego most anytime is a good place. I mean more cosmologically. As we progress along our journey in space and time, we find ourselves in the here and now. We sit on the surface of our huge world in a thin layer of life and light and wiz through space around our sun in a solar system which is whipped around inside a galaxy which, in turn, is racing across the universe at incredible speeds. Within all that motion, right now, we are in a good place.

You see, due to the Earth's axial tilt or the "obliquity of the ecliptic", ever since this past December 21st, which was the winter solstice when the sun reached its furthest point south on its journey out of the northern hemisphere, known as the sun's southern apex, or when our globe's position in the orbit around our sun was such that the top half leaned furthest away from the sun, or when the sun's declination was at its least above the equator, and our world's inclination was to agree with the sun, especially in the lower latitudes where the attitudes are greatest, ever since that day, sunlight has been getting a little stronger, daylight has been getting a little longer, the sun feels a bit warmer and the days brighter. We are sitting on the face of our globe on that part which is leaning increasingly more and more towards the sun at this particular time. And this is a good place to be.

Of course, it's a good time as well if not a wee bit random. The beginning of a new year always holds promise as it lies ahead like a field of freshly fallen snow waiting for one to put tracks across it. For a short moment it is perfect yet unfulfilled. Later it is fulfilled but maybe a bit less perfect. Yet the promise

of the future is enticing. Resolutions are made in an effort to make oneself and the world better only to be forgotten or misplaced as time passes and the world is let down and we are disappointed like at the highly anticipated childhood camping trip that never happened. But any day is a good day to make a resolution or start a revolution because, after all, time is arbitrary. The year starts now just because someone decided it should.

So, in our spinning cosmic pot, we are in a good place just now at the ambiguous beginning of an uncertain year. But then, what is a good place if not a state of mind? The sun will be kinder to us in the coming months, but after that it will turn its back and trail away again. How we feel about that really determines our place. Whether we always look forward to the good stuff or worry about the bad stuff makes the spot we stand on what it is. And if you can't really tell just where you stand, well then just figure San Diego is a good place to be.



Waves

It turns out I am a boomer. I am not just a banger or a bonker or a boisterous buffoon, a bellicose bungler, a brazen barrister or a brawling bickerer.

I'm a boomer, a great big Baby Boomer. I never thought of myself as such, but the demographics put me right in the middle of it. So, I decided to accept my position in this generation with all the perks, privileges, power and authority which go with it. And with such comes responsibility. So, I am taking umbrage with what's being said about us and am standing up for my peers.

If you read any of the current stuff going around, we're trouble. We're trouble now, we've been trouble and we're really big trouble yet to come. Strange. I don't feel like trouble. But the whole generation of us born in the post war peace and posterity of the 1950's start turning 65 this year. And, it seems, our journalistic children and blogging grandchildren want to take a good swing at us.

So we were born and grew up in the midst of the politically incorrect 50's as we played cowboy and Indians in our Wild West yards and fought Krauts and Japs in the forests and jungles of our neighborhoods. We were given a long leash by our Dr. Spock-reading parents and felt special and independent which I guess translates into self-absorbed and narcissistic. We were sent to a different war and liked the peace we were nurtured in better so marched against such craziness and became antiestablishment and organic and different and an annoyance to our parents. We communed and planned for a better and brighter world and sang simple songs together and knew that with a little love, humanity could live together happily ever after.

So how'd that work out? They say we are a disillusioned generation eventually bending to corporate greed and hunkering into 9 to 5 jobs. We lost our way, they say, and the world suffered. There are still wars, hunger, disease and not all people love each other. They say we abandoned our dream and now are not going to fade quietly as ego loving as we are and that we are going to drag down everyone else with the cost of our old age.

Well, like the waves of the oceans that crash upon the shores and beaches of continents, each generation slams against the hard rocks of human endeavor, eroding a little sand here, moving a few rocks there and otherwise reshaping our existence. Us boomers just seem to have been one of the bigger waves in this set or maybe even a mini tsunami. But every generation takes a swipe eventually receding back into that realm which gave us life until all that's left is an altered shore.

So, sure we are trouble as every generation is and should be. I'm just going to keep on keepin' on while following my mantra of peace, love and rock 'n roll and giving away a wee bit of advice to the younger

generations. You see, long, long ago I was told if you don't like the news you hear, go make some of your own, Grasshopper.



Pushing Up Daisies

I knew this day would come. I feared it actually would. It was not the dinosaur-chasing-you-through-the -jungle type of fear, but more the fear that would gnaw at your being like ants on a sugar cube taking bits of it but never destroying the whole thing. It was a fear I felt every time I ventured outside. For, you see, I recently realized my plants are now moving faster than I am.

I've never been a quick footed guy... always a bit slow on the go. But I was always able to stay at least one step ahead of my plants that surround my house. The front yard, the back yard and the side yards are all

full of green, leafy, viny, crawly, woody things that would devour my house in a frenzy of photosynthesis if I were to let it. But I don't. I do battle on a weekly basis keeping the front lines busy like the lawns especially. But the plants know the periphery of my priorities and take advantage to overgrow the hillside or the far corner of the yard or the side of the house I rarely see.

The lawns keep me busy, but the ivy creeps in silently from the neighbor's yard. I used to have the side yard full of ivy but I spent alot of time digging it out, rounding it up and digging some more until I found the mother root and dug that out as well. Victory was mine. It was gone. But it is back having slithered so persistently over, under and through the fence in places I hardly look. And that prehistoric beast of a bush, the elephant eared philodendron, radiates its naked roots out searching along the surface of the ground for moisture then diving down into soft soil. It fills its trunks and stems with water so when trimming it, I am bathed in slimy plant goo. Small animals that wander into my yard are sometimes last seen by this behemoth. The podocarpus are the sly

ones, however. They grow only when no one is watching. Then one day I wonder where these big trees came from full of solid wood where soft green shoots used to be. And the weeds are the most insidious popping up through other plants making them impossible to reach to pull, dead or alive. Those dandelion seed stems that kids, like mine, so much love to pick and blow into the wind, with a wish, spreading dandelions forever throughout the world and mostly back onto my lawn, they are hard to sneak up on and capture while containing the flighty little aviators. So, sitting in my back yard “watching the grass grow” is not a euphemism or figure of speech around my house. It is an action sport. An extreme action sport.

It is worse this time of year, of course, in the spring with the soil full of moisture and nutrients and the sun showing its glowing face more and more. I can slow them down in the summer by controlling the water... not too much to grow wildly, but not too little to die. Just enough. They are going to win, though, you know. They are going to eventually catch up with me and pull me down 6 feet under their precious earth. But I'll still be in control. I'll be pushing, pushing,

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pushing up daisies.



A Man's Worth

Hair's fair. Au contraire, mon frère. George Carlin sort of made it sound like a debatable issue, like coffee or chocolate or red wine. But he was talking more about people's attitudes about the furry stuff that spouts from our heads, long, short or indifferent. No matter how you feel about it, hair is hair, and it has been very very good to my barber Johnny.

Johnny is over 80. I've been doing my monthly walk through his door now for over 20 years, maybe closer to 30. And if one is even a little talkative with someone in that amount of time, they will get to know

that person, or at least parts of that person's story, even if they are not interested or didn't pay much attention to the conversations.

He set up shop on Rosecrans right across from the Naval Training Center sometime, I am guessing, back in the '50's. It was a strategic choice for a location as hordes of newbie swabbies came trooping through his small, two chair hair store for their weekly cut or trim in an ever constant effort to keep ship shape and out of trouble. In order to pass the time while waiting, his shop is equipped with a massive coffee table on wheels piled high with magazines like Playboy, Penthouse and Field and Stream. The walls are adorned with photos of Navy ships signed by commanders or of head shots of celebrities that happened to wander in through the years. The Navy Training Center is gone now, BRACed into a housing and multi-use public property and the sailors long ago dispersed. But Johnny is still there clipping away and raising his prices as his regulars from through the years are disappearing as well.

If a man's worth is measured by how much of the world beats a path to his door, Johnny has

considerable worth. He has had the great good fortune and serendipity to cut the hair of people who have helped him out in life's chores. For instance, back in a simpler time, a realtor customer of his told him of a house for sale. He went to see it and decided to buy it for the family home. As he talked to another customer about it, the one in the chair revealed he was a mortgage banker and could arrange financing. Both brought paperwork to the barber shop for Johnny to sign closing the deal. More recently he was chatting to a customer about his upcoming hernia operation he was a bit worried and apprehensive about. Johnny has no shame in the subjects he will bring up. It turned out the man getting his hair clipped was a doctor. It further turned out he was not only a doctor, but THE doctor that was scheduled to do the operation. The good doctor helped Johnny appease his worries, and the operation was successful, as I heard on subsequent visits.

And there is more about his family I guess I've absorbed through the years, like the son who occasionally cuts hair when Dad is sick, the nephews and grandchildren and the wife I hear a lot about but

never see like the wife of that TV detective Columbo.

So, I'll be visiting Johnny as long as he is standing and cutting hair and I'll listen to his banter as he will mine unknowingly learning more. I just wish he would update his decades old collection of magazines.



Addiction

Addiction is insidious. It travels on little cat's paws, slowly, quietly, and without notice one careful step at a time until one day,... BAM!!! It's there and the world doesn't seem quite right for some unknown reason and something must be done, but often is not. That realization comes at different times for different people. The hiding and the hoarding and the making sure that a supply of whatever it is that gives that feel-good flash of happiness is tucked safely away and is accessible at a moment's notice can cause a tipping off of something horribly wrong. But usually it is when someone comes

face to face with the fact that they don't have their friend at some point when they need it. Then the fact is undeniable.

So it was when my news magazines didn't show up on Friday as they usually do that I felt a twinge of anxiety. What was I going to do for that short period when all are asleep and the house is quiet and I climb into bed and before I nod off to sleep? Usually, every night I read new stuff out of *Time* and *The Week* magazines and by week's end am ready for a new supply. I lie in my bed relaxing my muscles and letting the written word of the world's affairs and opinions of it seep into my brain through my eyeballs. I race to read my favorite sections first of news flashes and odd occurrences then bask in the witty prose of my favorite columnists and commentators. My eyes glide over their words and sooth my weary mind and fill it with hope and happiness, hope for mankind and happiness that I can understand what they are saying. A connection of sorts has been steadily growing. But it requires new words every week.

On that Friday I figured I could just go over the pages and read what hadn't interested me or reread

an article which sometimes works out well, the advantages of an aging, forgetful mind. But when the mailman didn't have them on Saturday I confronted him like a crazed madman trying to appear normal. "So", I say. "We have a new mail carrier during the week, or what?" hoping to deflect the blame from him. "No, I'm the same guy", he replies but finally confesses they have a new sorting machine after the Post Office sent some fine folks to the unemployment lines. "Maybe you'll get your magazines Monday." he says after realizing my plight. MONDAY! I think to myself. How will I survive!

That night and Sunday night I pawed through the glossy pages reading the bottom of the barrel, the advertisements, TV highlights for the week and even the pop culture section. I became ill reading about the celebrities that have done nothing but make a lot of money and develop a cult following of millions. Reviews of reality shows sidestep my view of reality. The feel-good, happiness moment was turning into a nightmare.

This is not to dismiss or minimize the horrible, life threatening, physical addictions of certain

substances. But everyone has their secret addiction be it coffee or chocolate or sunny Sunday mornings or even sex. So, in our pursuit of that little personal space, that happy place or that extreme moment, beware of things that creep up on furry claws.



Sailing

Come sail with me. Kick off those dusty boots and slip on your boat shoes, and I will show you some wonders of sailing the waters of San Diego.

First, I ease the boat out of its slip backing it down and turning the bow off the wind in the direction I wanted to go. A few times doing this maneuver, the wind would catch the bow wrong heading the boat in the opposite direction which made me end up backing out of the marina in a most embarrassing display of sailing seamanship. But today wind, boat and water are cooperating to head us out to sea. I click the engine in

forward, a splash of water flies out of the smooth waters behind the boat and it begins to accelerate.

We motor past the bait barge in Quivera Basin where sport-fishers are lined up waiting to fill their bait tanks with live fish. Fishing is like economics, you see. Something I've never really understood. But it seems you need a fish to catch a fish. We then head to the small gate of the basin where sailboats, motorboats, kayakers, paddleboats and surfboards seems to funnel together in one big clump of maritime humanity and squeeze into the main channel like the sands of time in an hourglass. A little deft dancing and boat maneuvering seems to do the trick to negotiate this quagmire.

Once in the main channel of Mission Bay there is room to set sail. I unfurl the sails and hoist them as they immediately begin luffing and flapping and banging against shrouds and stays. As soon as they are securely raised I take command of the helm, fall off the wind 15 to 20 degrees and haul in the sheets. The jib sheets whirl around the clicking ratchet of the winches, and the boat gently begins to heel, sails full of wind. I switch off the engine and a magic occurs as silence

envelops the boat with only the sound of sea water splashing and hissing.

We settle into the few short tacks needed to clear the channel and to head into the seemingly infinite blue Pacific. This channel, so narrow to sail out of but so seemingly vast, as wide as an ocean itself, in separating the two diverse water cultures of Mission and Ocean Beaches, acts like a medieval moat between two lands. As we approach the channel shore I push the tiller to leeward while uncleating the downwind jib sheet and grabbing the windward sheet. As the boat spins 50 degrees, the sails flap and the winch whirls until I get the sheet tied off. Then silence again and the boat heels the other way.

Between such course changes we watch people fishing along the riprap of the Mission Bay jetties or just exploring the enormous boulders climbing over them like hermit crabs. As we progress and the ocean approaches, waves crashing along the big rocks get larger, and an occasional rough wave sends these crabs screaming and yelling and scurrying.

But three minutes are almost up and we've hardly started our sail. Boat time seems to be taking its

toll. Yet I do know after a day of bouncing on the spirited ocean off San Diego with dolphins visiting and pelicans gliding alongside, we will sail back into the Mission Bay channel, after dark, on a broad reach and will watch the fireworks at SeaWorld, and I will wonder, as I always do, why a supposed peace-loving folk as ourselves celebrates its independence by blowing things up. So have a happy and peaceful and safe 4th of July.



The Funeral

I went to a funeral the other day. I didn't know the lady well. She was a relative, a matriarchal figure, in the other family I belong to. But listening to her grown children and other members of the family talk of her, she was a witch. A loved witch, but a witch none the less. She was a strong-willed, controlling, manipulative person who had to have everything done her way. If you failed her, a spell would descend upon you full of passive aggressiveness and one would feel the world wasn't quite right without really knowing why. She was feared and reviled and talked about behind her back. But you would not have

guessed that at the funeral.

There were tears and flowers and choking up and stories told that sounded so happy. A mosaic of photos on a poster board summed up her life within a space of 48 by 36 inches. Each picture was full of people from a different time smiling and grinning and seemingly knowing something I do not. Each picture was a window to a story that was all a part of the life that is no more. One can almost imagine what was going on around those instances in time, stretching out the moment like a short video. In one I imagine the smiles of the two siblings fade right after the shutter clicks and they start fighting. The parents begin to yell. Mom hits junior and tells him to leave his sister alone. Such harmony. In another the corsage falls off the prom dress in a fit of costume malfunction in front of her date and she goes running off in a hysterical fit eliminating a potential father of her children. And in another I imagine the argument that ensues right after that picture is taken of all those friends posing with the winning lottery ticket. All these pictures bookmark stories waiting for fading memories to recollect and tell.

Obituaries are similar in presenting or

misrepresenting a life. There are no signs or indications of the witches and monsters we all are. There are only happy words and good things to say and accomplishments of a life of work and a list of loved ones left behind. It's hard to capture the true nature of a life, the ups and downs, the triumphs over the downs, the overindulgence of the ups. It's hard to know that life without being that person. The Mr. Hyde we all keep inside us can be more concealed in some than others by the Dr. Jekylls of us. But in the end a poster board and an obituary sums us all up, kind of.

Life is a rough draft. We never get the chance to rewrite, edit and polish. Hopefully we get a little better as life goes on so the ending chapters are a bit less rough than the beginning. But in the end it is the whole book that defines us. You can not erase a page or reword an outburst that shatters another's life. You can not take back that rock you threw at Jimmy or your streaking the college quad in front of all those who had cameras. Our rough drafts are what it is. So with that in mind, I'm going to practice. I'm going to practice writing the rough draft of life until it sounds at least reasonable. And maybe it will come a bit easier and be

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just a little less work in those later years.



Labor

I don't know much about labor. I mean, I know what it is and I know I've done some from time to time. I've mowed lawns and painted some house parts as well as a few boats. I've strained my back lifting things and sweated in the afternoon sun washing cars. But there must be more to it than that if they've made a federal holiday about it. And like during Veteran's Day and Memorial Day and Thanksgiving and Christmas, I like to think about the reason I'm getting a whole day off from work if only to know how to celebrate it more. So, I thought about labor.

I concluded that human nature abhors labor.

In all of human history, it seems, the “haves” make the “have-nots” do all the manual labor. I guess that is because it is a dirty pastime. One sweats and gets muddy and grimy or greasy and slimy. So, first there were slaves. The “haves” who are big picture people thinking about living into the infinite, their legacy, conquering places or the amount of wealth piled at their feet, had slaves build pyramids, cathedrals or just toil in the fields. We tried that in America for a while, but being the big hearted, compassionate people we are, it didn’t sit well. So, we had the immigrants to all the grunt work. To make things a bit more tolerable, workers were allowed to form unions to protect their interests. Unions were a good thing. My dad was a dues paying union member and always wore his union pin on the collar of his ever present red plaid wool shirt. As a kid I never wondered about the dichotomy of having two bosses or why he would work unusual jobs occasionally when he was on strike. But unions seem to be on the decline or less popular or maybe a bit less effective.

As times change, however, labor doesn’t. It’s still a dirty business and still needs to be done. And in

America we still let the immigrants do a good portion of it, although many are considered illegal. We enjoy a crisp, fresh salad not thinking too hard about the folks that bent their backs, permanently, harvesting the ingredients. Even more, we let other foreign nationals do work for us on their own soil. We marvel at the technology that lets us chat, text, and tweet our friends or store and read libraries of books on a pocket calculator or take, edit, store and send pictures around the world in an instant, and we race out to buy this great stuff without giving much consideration to the quota stresses and daily monotonies and health issues involved in getting this stuff to us and in our possession at such a minute percentage of our annual income. Reverse engineering alien technology is one thing. Producing it for the masses is an epic in labor.

But September 5th is about the American laborer. When the legal, unionized immigrants were in their hay day, they managed to get a holiday established honoring the American worker. This was a good thing as all the workers in this country could take a day off from their exertions and maybe think a bit about their success. Those who benefitted could take time to tip

their hats to the industrious lot. But soon, the way things are going, the day may come when we celebrate the great American laborer, that citizen, that hard working soul keeping the foundations of this country strong, and his name will most probably be Joe.



Alien Abduction

“Hey! Look at me! Look at me!” Phil
said as he raced by.

Phil the fish was showing off for his friend Jack racing around, doing somersaults, flips and twists. It was a clear day under the sea and he, like most of the fish, was frolicking.

“Whoa!” said Jack. “Pretty cool. You’re fast!”

Phil liked Jack because he was easily impressed, and Jack was missing a few paddles upstairs, so he believed almost anything Phil said.

“Watch me catch that morsel of food drifting down.” He spun around, circled the tidbit, did a two

and a half gainer and gobbled the food before Jack could blink.

“Whoa!” Jack repeated. Jack’s verbal repertoire was somewhat limited.

“Dang. What’s with all this food around, anyway? Phil asked rhetorically. “It’s falling from above like rain.”

“Yeah, strange.” Jack answered, then after a few moments asked, “What’s rain?”

“Ah, well, it’s like when things fall out of the...” he hesitated. “It’s when...” he stopped again confused. Fish don’t know much about rain.

“Aw for crying out loud. It’s just a figure of speech!” he finally blurted.

“Oh.” Said Jack.

Phil stopped in mid stroke and stared somewhat mesmerized. “Whoa” borrowing a word from his friend. “Look at that shiny thing over there.” They both stared and watched it move invitingly. “Whoa”, they said in unison.

“Watch this, Jack!” Phil said and he was off with a somersault and after a few spirals and circles around the intriguing bauble he grabbed it in his mouth

and took off. He didn't get far. He stopped suddenly then raced off the other way only to be stopped. Back and forth he raced only to be stopped dead in his tracks, change directions instantly and swim the other way.

“Whoa!” Jack yelled with wide round eyes. “That is awesome!”

Then he was gone. Jack looked bewildered. He raced around looking for his friend but he was nowhere to be found.

“Hey, you seen my friend, Phil?” he asked another group of fish. “He sort of looks like me.” Then after thinking that out for a moment added, “He actually does look like me”

“No duh, mate.” One of the fish answered. “We’re fish! We all look the same.”

Jack swam away dejected and sad wondering why Phil would just swim off like that. He circled around the same spot for what seemed like an eternity waiting for Phil to show up and let him in on the joke. He started to worry about his friend.

Then Phil came slowly drifting down through the water, on his side, dazed and barely conscious.

Once the oxygen reached his brain he woke up and in an instant was all over hootin' and hollerin' and finally asked, "Wha' happened?"

"Dunno", Jack answered. "But you don't look so well. You Okay?"

"I... I... I think so. All I know is my lip is killing me. You see any blood?" he asked as he held his mouth toward Jack. "Is it swollen?"

"Ha, ha" Jack said as if he finally caught on. "Fish don't have lips"

"Well, whatever that is around my mouth. You see blood?" he repeated.

"Little bit", Jack replied hesitantly unsure of the joke Phil must be playing on him.

But Jack consoled his friend who was in apparent pain and after a bit Phil was able to piece together his time while missing. There was something about surgery with string and pliers and how it was so bright he wished he had eyelids, and it was **hard** as he tried to swim and only seemed to flop around. And he couldn't breathe and even though he could hardly see he remembers grotesque figures with no fins moving around and making sounds.

Meanwhile, above, on a dock floating upon the surface of the water was an 8-year-old boy with a fishing pole, hooks and lures, a pile of chum he would occasionally toss in the water and a bucket.

“Daddy, Daddy!” he called out. “I caught another one.”

Daddy came over with his pliers and cutters to free the hook as painlessly as possible, and reminded his son to throw him back in when he was finished playing with him and before his mouth gapped wide open. The compassionate Daddy watched his son fish wondering how he could protect him from shiny baubles and the trouble that showing off can bring.



A Different Place

George didn't know how exactly he got there or when for that matter. But he was pretty sure he knew where he was. The people were nice enough, and the weather was generally good. He enjoyed the sun beating down on him when it did and the wind in his face when he would go sailing. But the longer he was there he began realizing there was something amiss, something not quite right with the place and something downright sinister. He knew the place must be Hell.

How he got there wasn't such a big mystery. He must have died somewhere along the way, and the

transition to the other side must have been more transparent than he was led to believe. After all, he was taught of the fire and brimstone. There was none. But when had he died and how? He thought back about all the possible times he could have lost his life. There were many. Aside from all the dangerous things he did as a child, which he couldn't quite remember all the details, there was the time in high school when he and a buddy had an equipment malfunction on their homemade kayaks in the middle of San Francisco Bay and both ended up in the water, their little boats swamped. Maybe he didn't make it back to shore as he remembered. Or the time in Yosemite he was hiking along the granite cliffs and found himself precariously balanced on a ledge unable to get off. Maybe he never did, or at least took the quick way down. Then there were the possibilities in the string of incidences of driving while under the influence of beverages that make you stupid. That time in college came to mind when he was driving home from a party along dark, redwood lined roads with a partially filled keg of beer in the back of his 1964 VW camper van. He nodded off for an instant awakening just in time to keep the

speeding home on wheels on the road. It's possible he never did wake up and met his fate smashed against a redwood tree while sitting like an Aztec sacrifice inches from the front bumper in that vehicle designed with safety nowhere in the minds of its designing engineers. There were many possibilities, but he supposed it really didn't matter. He was there. He was in Hell.

But why? George liked to think he was generally a good person. He was compassionate and didn't like hurting people. All those bad things that happened were not intentional, more like accidents or just fallout from learning how to navigate life. That didn't so much matter, either. He had been judged and sent to Hell.

You see, George was an optimist and a big thinker. He saw the world as full of possibilities and went about to build great things and do greater things. But everything he built fell apart, time and time again. He was getting discouraged but woke every day with energy to conquer the world. The nice, pleasant people that populated that realm would tell him he can't. He would build. They would take it down. On a more personal level, he would build relationships that would

eventually fall apart. Beginning one, he recently realized, was like getting a puppy, all happy and warm, while not thinking about the fact he would probably watch the cute thing die of old age. These things must only happen in Hell, he would think.

But George decided Hell wasn't going to get him down. Maybe the purpose was to enjoy the building, the doing, the creating whether it stood up or not. He certainly enjoyed it all even if he had nothing left in the end. It sure was Hell, though.



Merry 4th of July

It is the 4th of July, 2025 and all are enjoying the hot days and warm evenings of this mid-summer ritual with hot dogs and hamburgers sizzling on the barbeques, ice cream and evening shows of things blowing up high in the sky. Celebrating the creation of this nation and its declaration of independence from tyranny and things unjust, we have always maintained an excitement and awe hard to match. But in recent years there has been additional excitement and a sort of curious awe in the air throughout this day as it hangs on the threshold of the Black 5th.

The Black 5th, you see, is the beginning of the

Christmas Season. Stores begin their holiday sales in the dark hours of the morning of July 5th and the retail business starts pulling itself out of the red. This annual beginning of the holiday shopping season had always been creeping earlier and earlier through the years, but it was the Great Recession which pushed it back all the way to July. It was, in fact, a bipartisan act of the U.S. Congress, started by a Super Committee, which mandated the beginning of Christmas start on this day in an effort to stimulate the economy and somehow wipe 1.2 trillion dollars from the federal deficit.

The public was excited and gift giving became a 6 month past time. Stores could hardly keep their shelves stocked. Christmas tree lots became permanent as people needed to buy a fresh tree once a month and mall parking lots became smaller as the temporary tree lots never went away. Turkeys almost became extinct before the fowl industry could adjust because of the legislated clause in the Congressional act, deemed by some cynics as the “Insanity Clause”, which called for a turkey on every table once a month. If your employer didn’t include the turkey with your benefits and you could not afford to buy your own, a

new government entitlement program was started to ensue every American had a monthly dose of turkey. The problem of American obesity took a back seat to the economy and America was thrilled. However 6 months of Christmas carols became a problem with a great many people having psychotic episodes and mental breakdowns before a new music genre emerged which combined classic, rock and roll, Pop, R&B, country western, jazz and new age with Christmas lyrics so the holiday music was disguised, sounded normal and occasionally a new song would make it to the top 10 hit list.

The other 6 months of the year were reserved for paying off the credit cards. We all know how that works. Before I you realize, Christmas is starting again, and the retail beast starts sucking in the dollars once again and spewing forth mountains of big box items. It really seems to be a strange system we have, an economy that requires growth to be successful, and a government that tries to control it but can't seem to manage itself. But the people spend, give presents, eat turkey and are happy.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, in a manger long,

long ago, a small group gathers to witness the beginning of a great thing. There were Joseph and Mary, a stable boy, some sheep, cows and three wise men and eventually baby Jesus all assembled for some reason they didn't know. How could they know they were beholding the birth of a great force that would affect the world for thousands of years? How could they know this new baby would teach half the world how to live life and succeed in death by loving and respecting others, and turning the other cheek and forgiving those that have hurt them?

So, this 4th of July, have a happy holiday and a Merry Christmas.



About the Author

The author is about 6 foot one inches tall.

The author is about living in San Diego, California.

The author is about being a marine environmental
scientist for his day job.

The author is about dotting 'i's and crossing 't's for
a large organization.

The author is about sailing and being a boat captain.

The author is all about raising his 12 year old son.

The author is about watching orcas and exotic
animals in some corners of the city.

The author is about to write more stories.



