

A VIEW FROM THE GRANDSTAND

This afternoon, after putting the office cats away for the evening and giving them their daily rations, I paused on my way back to the house and sat for a while on one of my favorite meditation places - the tailgate of the farm truck.

As I sat there, I contemplated the fact of silence. Well - relative silence. It was the silence of the woods broken only by the raucous calls of the Stellar Jays announcing the movement of some forest critter on the far side of the creek; the occasional vehicle moving up the road on the far side of the canyon; or the sound of a passing airplane.

Other than that it was only me, the gurgle of the creek and the sound of the breeze in the firs. Ideal meditation conditions with the intermittent distractions.

I found that I was resenting those intrusions into my silence - at least the man-made ones. The wind and the creek are comforting, and the Jays eventually quiet down, but the cars and planes, even as occasional as they are, still rankle my contemplations of things.

When that happens, I often recite my mantra "if only Costco delivered out here, I'd never leave." This afternoon I gave my attention to how I'd fare even farther out of the mainstream with even less man-made events to attract my attention. It's a recurring fantasy that'll never happen for a number of reasons, but it's my version of how I'd use the millions of dollars if I won the lottery.

Even here, though, a response to a medical emergency is a minimum of forty-five minutes, and usually longer. We've got ways of getting each other across the walk bridge if we can't be mobile, and making sure that all our meds are stocked is a normal thing. Farther out, while the meds wouldn't be a problem, the response time would. It's not like the ER or Immediate Care is just down the street.

Another reason that it'll never happen is the increasing inability to keep up with the rural maintenance chores. This was brought home this summer when my partner was laid up with a broken ankle caused by the Internet (that's another story). It brought home vividly how age, while not directly affecting our ability to do stuff, sure enters into both the drive to do it and how long we can keep doing it at any given time.

I've often said that I was born a hundred years too late, and that I'd have been a very happy lighthouse keeper on some remote piece of rock, with supplies ferried out and minimal societal contact.

Dealing directly with the rest of society is definitely not my strong

suit. On the very few times that I have to go into Costco or Food4Less, I'm almost in a panic mode having to negotiate my personal space with a whole bunch of people that I've never seen before. That's one of the reasons why I love my solitude. No having to figure out what the other person is going to say or do and work around it. No fighting traffic and hoping that the next idiot behind me doesn't pass on a double-yellow line or the one in front stops suddenly for no apparant reason.

I know it's a total paradox to be saying these things after having spent eighteen-plus years in San Francisco and the Bay Area - fighting traffic on the commute down the pensinsula or riding BART and MUNI to get to work downtown. And then once there, being stuck in a cubie having to play dutiful corporate servant, bending to the whims of whatever the boss has in store for the day. It's been over seventeen years since I left that ratrace and I have never looked back. In truth, the prospect of getting older and maybe having to move closer in to town or even - gasp - having a small apartment again ... well, I think I'll take my chances out here in the boonies with my partner and my cats. Go out feet first, as they say.

The solitude of the woods grows on you, even with the man-made intrusions. I know it's a dichotomy that I'm a total technonerd and that I suffer withdrawal when the power goes out and I lose my Internet and DirecTV, but the isolation and solitude is still soooooooooooooo much worth it, at least to me.

I realize that most people are social animals given to small talk and trivial conversation, but that ain't me. I've always felt that I was a spectator in the game of life, watching the teams battle it out from the third tier, back row. I've never had the total urge to get involved in the game itself. So I'll just holler at the players from the top of the stands.

So if you happen to see me being nervous in the grocery aisle, fretting about how to get through the checkout line, just give me a little room and let me be - I'll muddle through. And thanks in advance for giving me that.

I'm a loner and always have been. I've been fiercely protective of my privacy and my (at least the internal) solitude. I'm not noted for having a lot of friends, and I put off a lot of people (unless they're masochistic enough to break through my shell.)

Being as how I am still sitting up in the top row of the grandstand watching this game of 'life' go on down there on the field, it gives me an opportunity to view it somewhat dispassionately. And that lack of emotional involvement gives me (I think) a look at what people do and

say with a minimum of bias. You may not believe that, given my predilection towards being a libertarian, but that's the mindset that best agrees with what I see as possible solutions and end results for all the problems that our country faces.

The solitude that I have gives me a unique opportunity to take a look at current events and correlate them with what history I know or can research. The latest results of that exercise follow here:

This is, in fact, still a representative democracy, where the majority of the people should determine their leaders and those leaders SHOULD reflect the views of their constituents. The justice system should be blind, and not have multiple tracks where there is one system for the rich and powerful, one injustice system for minorities, and something inbetween for the rest of us.

We can't afford to discriminate against minorities, be they racial, social, religious, ethnic, or sexual. All these parts make up our national whole, and the sooner we come to grips with this, the better off we'll be.

I know, I've said many times before that multi-culturalism basically doesn't work for any number of reasons, the basic one being human nature. I still believe that as a theory, but, in reality, that isn't the hand that we as a country have been dealt. We've become a polyglot of all kinds of population segments, part immigrant and partly of our own doing over two-plus centuries of "civilization" on this continent. Unless we balkanize (split up into regional divisions or somesuch) we have to come to an uncomfortable agreement on how to get along without a lot of physical and mental violence being perpetrated on the country as a whole. That uncomfortable agreement has to be a compromise on how we deal with each other and the enforcement of that compromise (which no faction will be happy with).

The white Euro-centric majority has been used to treading heavily and overrunning Native-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics since the first settlers arrived following Columbus. Oh, and let's not forget the Chinese immigrants that built the western half of the transcontinental railroad.

We have Native Americans who feel that they have been physically and economically brutalized over the years. Most (if not all) of the treaties that the federal government has signed with the tribes have been violated by the government and left the native population in an almost apartheid condition within this country.

Each time, (with few exceptions) the settlers never bargained in good faith with Native Americans for their land, the settlers just kept

encroaching on their turf and winning through an edge in technology (rifles) and numbers (population). A classic example is the treaty with the Sioux nation, which gave them a lot of territory and their sacred homeland, the Black Hills of South Dakota. When gold was discovered in the Black Hills, the government voided the treaty and the result was the Indian Wars and Custer's Last Stand. This is but one example - there are many others. However, with the advent of tribal casinos, it would almost seem that their revenge is finally coming about.

The African-American population of the country has been brutalized and subjugated since colonial times under slavery, Reconstruction and through much of the Civil Rights Era. Even now there are efforts to suppress the black vote and 'put them niggers back in their place.'

In the case of the imported African Americans, they have had tens of generations of indentured and involuntary servitude, particularly in the southern states. That's a tough social burden to slough off, particularly when the ruling white class isn't helping much with Reconstruction, segregation and suppression.

The Hispanic population has been in the southwestern United States since the time of Coronado and Cortez, and their heritage and longevity in that area has been a constant bone of contention with the 'Anglo invaders' since the time of the Santa Fe Trail and annexation. And of course, the local Native American population got a double whammy from both the Spaniards and the follow-on Americans, with Junipero Serra in California and DeVargas in New Mexico which led to major uprisings and the Pueblo Revolt of 1680.

The Hispanics have resented the fact that they have endured two centuries of being considered second-class citizens since they were in power, and seeing their land grants that were given to their families in the sixteenth century by the King of Spain, taken from them. These were (and are being) voided in the courts just because some state legislature passed a law requiring proof and unanimous consent from all the heirs to the grant before a sale could be made. Finding all the heirs to a piece of property that has been divided among subsequent children a hundred times over five centuries is all but impossible. The only remedy is a quitclaim deed, which invariably goes against the interests of the hereditary owners of the land, and for the wealthy white landowners. If the original land grants were still valid, much of Albuquerque and Santa Fe would not exist.

The Chinese and Japanese populations are with us also. The Chinese were brought in as cheap labor in the 1850's to build the

transcontinental railroad through the Sierra Nevada mountains. Once through with them, they were ostracized and even legally excluded from additional people coming to the country.

The Japanese quietly immigrated to Hawaii starting in 1868 and following the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, they were prized as replacements for the Chinese labor that no longer was available. Of course, many of us remember the wholesale incarceration of the west coast Japanese during World War 2 and the unrelenting discrimination against them for years following.

All these people are still with us, and all the old grievances are still there.

From my lofty perch atop the grandstand, I see a lot. Some of it doesn't make sense, and much of it I just shake my head at in wonder. Sometimes it seems a miracle that we as a species have come as far as we have. Other times, I wonder why we haven't progressed much beyond the caves from whence we came.

I am awestruck by the fact that my internet data travels about 60,000 miles or so at the speed of light to get to a computer server somewhere and that unit sends me back some electronic signals another 60,000 miles to my screen. And the widget that my satellite dish points at automatically relays my data back to another dish somewhere else. But my awe is modified by the fact that the rockets that place those satellites in orbit were developed as weapons of war by the Third Reich. And the original satellites were placed out there as items of intimidation in a space race with the Soviet Union.

Computers as we know them today are direct descendants of original designs that were designed to do the computations for atomic bomb research in the 1940's. EINIAC and MANIAC were the first large mainframes used in atomic/nuclear research at Los Alamos.

The Internet was originally designed in 1969 by the Defense Department (DARPA) to allow their researchers to connect their computers for large computations.

The major advances in aviation have been made using breakthroughs evolving from wartime machines. An example:

The Horton flying wing (HO-229) was developed as a high-speed fighter by Germany during WW2, and the design spawned Jack Northrup's YB-49 and XP-79 military experimental aircraft. While those advancements lay dormant for a few decades, they re-emerged in the design of the F-117 stealth fighter and the B-2 bomber. Civilian versions

are on the drawing boards, but it'll be a few years before we see those.

The first pressurized aircraft was the B-29 bomber in WW2, which allowed the crew to not have to wear oxygen masks at high altitudes throughout the entire trip. The benefits are in every passenger jet that flies over 10,000 feet high.

The first jet aircraft was the ME-262, a WW2 fighter that was built by the Germans and would have changed the outcome of the war if they had managed to produce it in enough quantity to supply the Luftwaffe.

The Interstate Highway system (modeled on the AutoBahn in Germany) was originally justified as a way to get troops and equipment from place to place quickly in the event of a war.

The nuclear power plant is the direct descendant of atomic reactors used for researching the atomic bombs that annihilated Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

These are just a few examples of major technological advances brought about by wartime aggression or defense.

On a much smaller scale, the ingenuity of the human mind to find ways to improve their lives or get around regulations is never-ending. Finding legal loopholes to enhance their corporate profits is a way of life for entire floors of lawyers employed by multi-national corporations.

Trying to clean the environment and make life better for millions of citizens runs up against corporate interests whose bottom line would be impacted if they had to abide by the regulations affecting them.

All in all, it boils down to a giant game of 'King of the Mountain' played out on any number of scenarios from individual interactions to giant corporate structures and nations. It is human nature, once again, that succumbs to greed and the need for 'more' that fuels all this technology and social structures.

If it were possible to eliminate greed as a prime factor in human nature, much of the strife that we either personally encounter or see on a national scale would disappear. But without genetic engineering on a massive scale, this is not a viable solution. In addition, many of the advances in technology and social structures would not take place if the desire for an advantage over our fellow man were not present.

"Necessity is the mother of invention", they say. If I did not feel the need to be superior to my neighbor, I wouldn't need to improve my way of doing something or making a new widget to improve my life and status. There are some altruistic individuals that believe in doing things for mankind is their lot in life, but I have to wonder if their payoff is in the acclaim of people for improving their lives. Fame is an amazing

motivator.

It all boils down to greed. The form that greed can take is either monetary, accumulation of things, fame and acclaim or any number of other venues. It's the idea of 'more'. And 'more', once invoked, is never enough.

One of the ways that this can be somewhat mitigated is to make the definition between 'need' and 'want'. Stuff we 'need' is rarely the same as what we 'want' except for essentials when we don't have them. For hurricane victims in Puerto Rico and fire victims in Santa Rosa, need and want coincide in a terrible way. For corporate executives on Wall Street, need and want are so far apart as to be on different planets.

From atop my grandstand, I see both of these and shake my head in wonder at the dichotomy.

On a slightly different note ... I see a few other facts about our society (other than greed and avarice) that cannot be disputed and that we have to come to grips with if we are to succeed as a nation and have a future that will not devolve into chaos and third-world status.

First unpleasant fact: Segregation (both racial and economic) by neighborhood will occur regardless of all attempts at integrating these segments of our society. We have to realize and accept the fact that this segregation will occur and there's nothing we can do about it. A recent study showed that America's cities are more segregated now than when segregation was the law of the land. No amount of homogenizing is going to make integration work. The trick is to embrace this fact and deal with it.

Second unpleasant fact: School integration is a failing philosophy. The same study quoted above found that the schools reflected the makeup of the neighborhoods. Again, we have to accept that this is going to happen and trying to alter that trend will be non-productive. We have to let it happen.

Third unpleasant fact: If facts one and two are true (and they are), the local governments have to reflect the makeup of their neighborhoods. This starts with the police, whose racial makeup must reflect the neighborhood. The local politicians must also reflect those that they represent through realigning the city and county boundaries to make them coincide with the racial and economic populations that define them.

Fourth unpleasant fact: This is going to be a long time coming.

Yes, this is a radical viewpoint, but taking clues from nature, we find that various subdivisions of one species that could interact almost never does. Horses and zebras, when merged into a single herd, will segregate out at the first opportunity. The 'green monkey syndrome' is alive and well. On the human side, on a child's playground, you will find that blacks congregate with blacks, white with whites, and other minorities follow suit. They all get along on a superficial basis, but when left to their own devices, the various groups will stratify and disperse.

Does this viewpoint make me a racist? In a strict definition, it probably does, but facts are inconvenient things, and all the facts that I see lead me inevitably to this conclusion.

The bottom line is this: In our private lives, we tend to segregate ourselves into groups (tribes) in which we feel comfortable, be it religion, ethnicity, race or whatever and mixtures of all these. In our public lives we have to deal with everyone else, regardless of our personal preferences.

An interesting example that overrides the above is the military. As long as a person is in the military, they don't have much of a choice about who is in the foxhole next to them; who they share a cockpit with; or who lives next door in family housing. They make it work because they have to. When they leave the service, however, the majority will migrate to an area where they feel comfortable i.e. a like-minded community.

Now, that being said, we have to look at how we make all this work in such a diverse and multi-cultural society. I think it is possible, as long as we take into account the preceding four unpleasant facts.

First, the police forces must reflect the racial makeup of the community, and racial neighborhoods must be policed and patrolled by officers that look like them. It doesn't work for a white detective to try to interfere in a black domestic dispute when they don't understand the racial norms and biases of the community. Likewise, a black officer in an affluent white neighborhood won't achieve the same level of cooperation that a white officer would. While this is an uncomfortable thing to accept, it is a key to making our country work, at the local level. As an aside, in most residential neighborhoods, patrol units should consist of a patrol officer and a social worker to diffuse domestic violence situations.

Next, the city (or at least the law enforcement precinct) and school district boundaries must coincide with the racial and economic boundaries that exist already. The objections here are the economics of

how you make the cities work under these conditions, considering the disparities in the local revenue based on the economics of each area.

A basic principle here must be followed. While the segregation of various groups will happen, the overall requisition of funds must be uniform and be dispersed based on need, rather than by boundaries. If a particular area has a greater crime rate, then the economic resources must be re-allocated to deal with this problem. If the local government services are lacking in a particular area, the more affluent areas with cash surpluses have to step up and assist.

There will be great resistance from more affluent school districts or neighborhoods, for instance, to divest their superior funding to help an impoverished district next door. That resistance crumbles, however, when the crime rate overflows into their neighborhood. It's happened any number of times before. But unless we opt to have a permanent educational/social underclass, this has to be done.

In the public square we must be racially and economically colorblind and have equal justice under the law. In terms of where we live and who we associate with, that's a different matter. Publicly, we sell to whoever walks in our door if we're a merchant, and get treated equally well in the justice system. There can be no difference in how public norms are applied. But at a personal level, in our neighborhoods and schools, there must be non-diverse ways of dealing with inter-personal relationships and education.

Yes, these things go against our nature and the 'green monkey syndrome.' Yes, these things will be hard to swallow as a society. But the alternative of a divided and fractious nation that is constantly infighting will lead us to being overrun by something or someone that will be far worse than a united society will allow.

Thus endeth the lesson [and descending from soapbox.]