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BLOOMINGTON *APRIL 8 – MAY 13*



THE RYDER

PANDEMIC POSTCARDS

by Jason Vest
page 34

THE FIRST EARTH DAY

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
PENNFIELD JENSEN
WAS THERE

page 12

INTERVIEW LINDA POTEAT

THE FORMER IRISH LION
WAITRESS IS NOW A
UNITED NATIONS DIRECTOR
FIGHTING PANDEMICS
AROUND THE WORLD

page 16



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FEATURES

THE ERNIE PYLE EXPERIMENT!
WFIU Debuts a New 13-Part Podcast Series on Ernie Pyle



BEEKEEPING IN POLAND

By Mason Cassidy

Long summer days are filled with hard work outdoors, lots of honey, and a sense of satisfaction in assisting bees in the work they do for all of the organisms that depend on them.



EARTH DAY

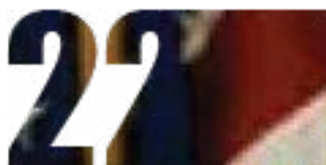
By Pennfield Jensen

The first Earth Day took place on April 22nd, 1970. Ryder contributing editor Pennfield Jensen was there. He looks back at its origins and looks ahead to what may be a grim future: What happens when we turn against each other to save ourselves?

TALKIN' 'BOUT PANDEMICS: A CONVERSATION WITH LINDA POTEAAT

By Jason Vest

In the early 90s Linda Poteat was a server at the Irish Lion. In 2019 she was chief of the United Nations Mission For Ebola Emergency Response in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She spoke with us about Covid-19. "Part of the problem," she says, "is that there is clearly no effective coordinated leadership."



COUNTY GOVERNMENT

By Charlotte Zietlow

What happens when a man storms in, furious because his neighbor's goat is eating his grass? That's a job for the County Commissioners.

OUT WITH A BANG

By Bart Everson

On April 18, 1995, Bloomington-based ROX became the first TV series, anywhere, to be distributed over the internet. One of the show's creators looks back at the calamitous Season 3.

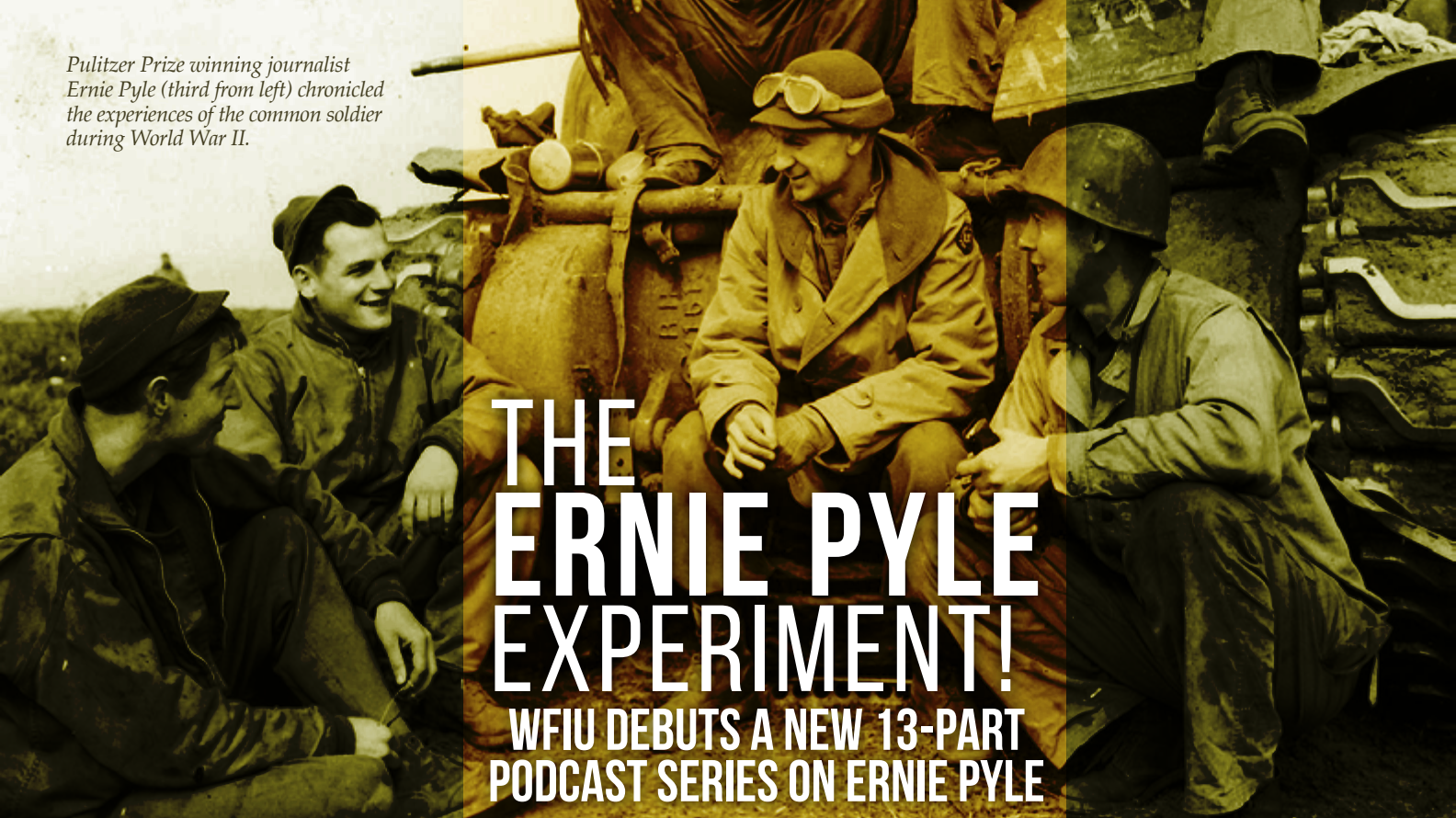


PANDEMIC POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

By Jason Vest

Coronavirus musings from a northern California coastal town including, but not limited to: Werner Herzog, Robinson Jeffers, the emerging mask chic, seagull behavior and the Bank of America's betrayal of its California founder.

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Ernie Pyle (third from left) chronicled the experiences of the common soldier during World War II.



THE ERNIE PYLE EXPERIMENT!

WFIU DEBUTS A NEW 13-PART
PODCAST SERIES ON ERNIE PYLE

This month, WFIU Public Radio debuts a new 13-episode podcast series created by writer, producer, and actor Michael Brainard from the archives of the Ernie Pyle collection at the Lilly Library of Indiana University.

The Ernie Pyle Experiment!, chronicles Ernie Pyle's pre-war work as a traveling columnist for the Scripps-Howard Newspaper syndicate. Ernie and his wife, Jerry, traveled America from 1935–1942, in quest of interesting stories for his column "The Hoosier Vagabond." *The Ernie Pyle Experiment!* explores how it was done.

Each episode, through fact and fiction, examines the circumstances surrounding an actual Ernie Pyle column from this pre-WWII era. The podcasts are based on recently discovered wire recordings in the archives of the Smithsonian Institute that give listeners a view into the Pyles' everyday lives on the road and what led to the creation of the column. Each episode ends with a reading of Pyle's actual column.

The podcast series begins in the spring of 1936 with Ernie Pyle (played by Brainard)

and his wife Jerry (played by actress Greta Lind) laden with the ongoing obligation of work and travel. Scripps-Howard has given Ernie a sound recording device to bring with him on his travels across America.

They want to hear how he interviews people and potentially use the recordings for archival purposes, major story sources, and even radio broadcast. Ultimately, hundreds of wire spools get filled with recordings of the Pyles' everyday life together, not exactly what headquarters intended Ernie should be doing with it.

Subsequent episodes of *The Ernie Pyle Experiment!* follow the Pyles' travels to Ernie's hometown of Dana, Indiana, and other locations across the United States. The podcast also dramatizes Jerry's real-life struggles with alcoholism and how the couple dealt with it.

The first episode of *The Ernie Pyle Experiment!* is now available at wfiu.org/ernie-pylepodcast and on other major podcasting platforms.

Here's a snapshot of each episode.

EPISODE 1 – THE BOURGEOIS STANDARD

As pressure mounts from the home office, Ernie is forced to use a voice recorder for his work in interviewing the people of America. Though he resists the boss's ideas, he and his wife Jerry find a different use for it—recording themselves.

EPISODE 2 – THAT LONG SAD WIND

A quick trip to Ernie's hometown of Dana, Indiana, to visit his folks results in a disgruntled Jerry. She has grown accustomed to living a certain way on the road that may invite judgment from an in-law or two. In the balance is Ernie. He likes the road life too, but the pull homeward proves as mysterious as a Midwest wind storm.

EPISODE 3 – THE SNAKE STORY

Ernie's parents are enjoying Ernie and Jerry's visit home, but his mother just can't seem to accept what her son has become—a city-living work-a-holic. She understands he must make his own way in the world, but she would much rather he do it closer to her, in Dana, Indiana. And she is beginning to think she may be ultimately responsible for how her young boy turned out.

EPISODE 4 – MY MOTHER

After putting some very fine stories through his typewriter during his visit home in Dana, Jerry prompts Ernie to turn them into a series about his hometown. She convinces him to use the recording device to see if he can muster up

some stories about what the neighbors think about his mother. Sure, he knows more about his mother than all of them put together, but what could it hurt?

EPISODE 5 – PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD OF MY FATHER

Ernie discovers that his father drove his car through the front plate-glass window of the Dana dry-goods store. In a quest to get to the bottom of it, he realizes he must



Michael Brainard



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ask the most difficult question of his father, and himself: Who is going to care for his folks in their twilight years?

EPISODE 6 – THIRTY YEARS TOO SOON

In his quest to round out “the Dana series” of columns, Ernie targets his favorite aunt, Mary. In so doing, he seeks out Jerry’s help. However, Jerry may not be in the best state of mind as she has been holed up in his childhood bedroom contemplating the depths of a bourbon bottle. Not understanding how many sheets-to-the-wind Jerry has on her laundry line, Ernie insists she open the recorder on Aunt Mary.

EPISODE 7 – NOT THE WASHINGTON POST MARCH

Finally back on the road, Ernie and Jerry stop into a favorite haunt for the night. However, it is in Ohio. Ohio is home to five newspapers in the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, Ernie’s employer, and whenever he sets foot in Ohio, they harass him for stories about their cities. It is all Ernie and Jerry can do to stay incognito until they get out of Ohio. A drink and a room, that’s all they ask!

EPISODE 8 – HAVE YOU BEEN AWAY?

Ernie and Jerry make their way to Washington, DC, where they are headquartered, and where they keep a home. But, before they make their way home, they stop in a city park for lunch. Forgetting how much a celebrity his column has made him, Ernie gets uncomfortable when people start to recognize him. He escapes on foot, leaving Jerry with the car and a thermos filled with rum. What could go wrong?

EPISODE 9 – A DESOLATE CORPORATION

Ernie’s first writing job was as an aviation columnist in *The Washington Daily News*. Amelia Earhart once said, “Not to know Ernie Pyle is to admit that you yourself are unknown in aviation.” Still believing Ernie

is the one to go to for breaking news in the aviation world, Amelia drops in with some friends to await the facts of a pilot, and dear friend, reported down in the Rocky Mountains.

EPISODE 10 – THE ZIPPER

Though seldom out of ideas for the column, Ernie would write about anything, even if there were better reasons to write something else. Stories about himself always seem to make it into the column, here and there. And bolstering himself up as a bumbling fool is one of his favorite pastimes. So, when Ernie buys a new pair of pants with zipper that does not work, he uses the event to craft an all-time favorite column.

EPISODE 11 – A BED OF COALS

Ernie pays a visit to the home office for a meeting with his editor, Lee Miller. Miller, an old friend, knows about Jerry and her struggle with sobriety. He wants to make sure his investment, and friend, Ernie is not being affected by his wife’s problems. Ernie, feeling backed into a corner, looks for a way out.

EPISODE 12 – THE SIMPLE PROPOSITION

Jerry, happy to be back on the road, celebrates a little bit too much. It is all Ernie can do to stabilize her so he can make it to Albany by sundown. But Jerry has her own agenda. She forces Ernie into her state of mind, and Ernie sees that the near future is going to be problematic if Jerry is to stay by his side.

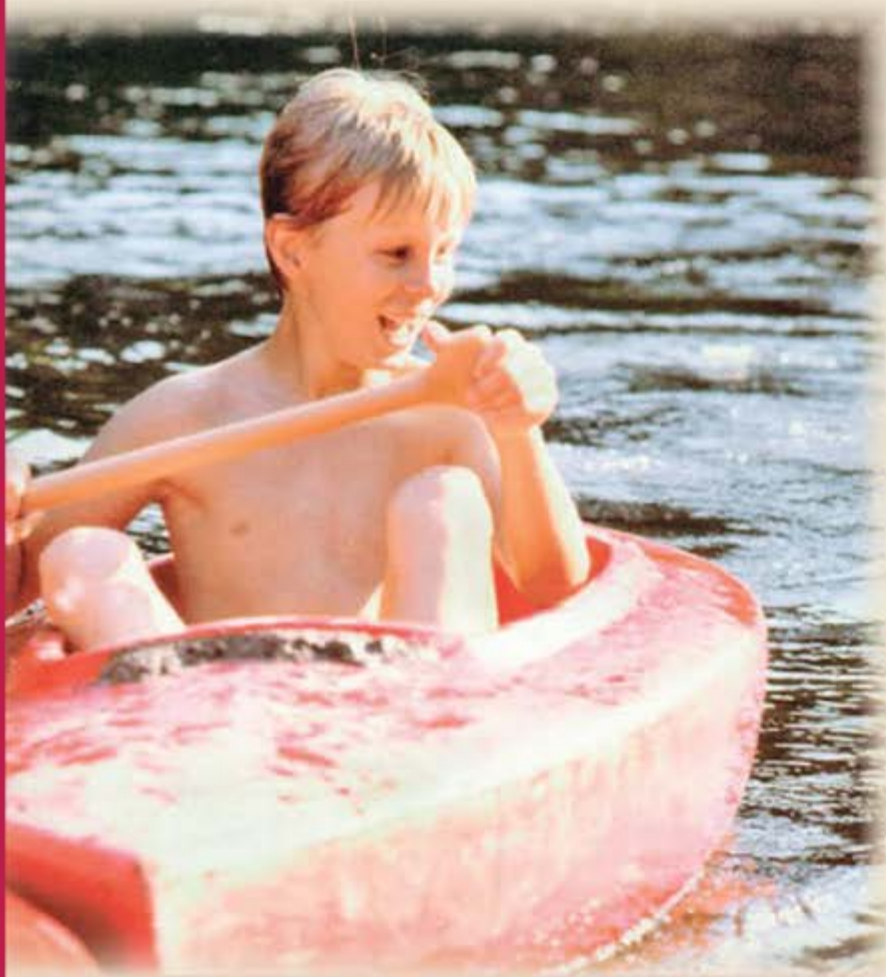
EPISODE 13 – GONE WITH THE WIND

It is three weeks since Ernie dropped Jerry off back at their home in Washington, DC. Jerry has been in the care of doctors, and she has sobered up and hasn’t had a drink since. When a caregiver comes by to check on her and her state of mind, Jerry circles the wagons. The “good-advice” and “wise council” are coming, and she might have something to say about that.

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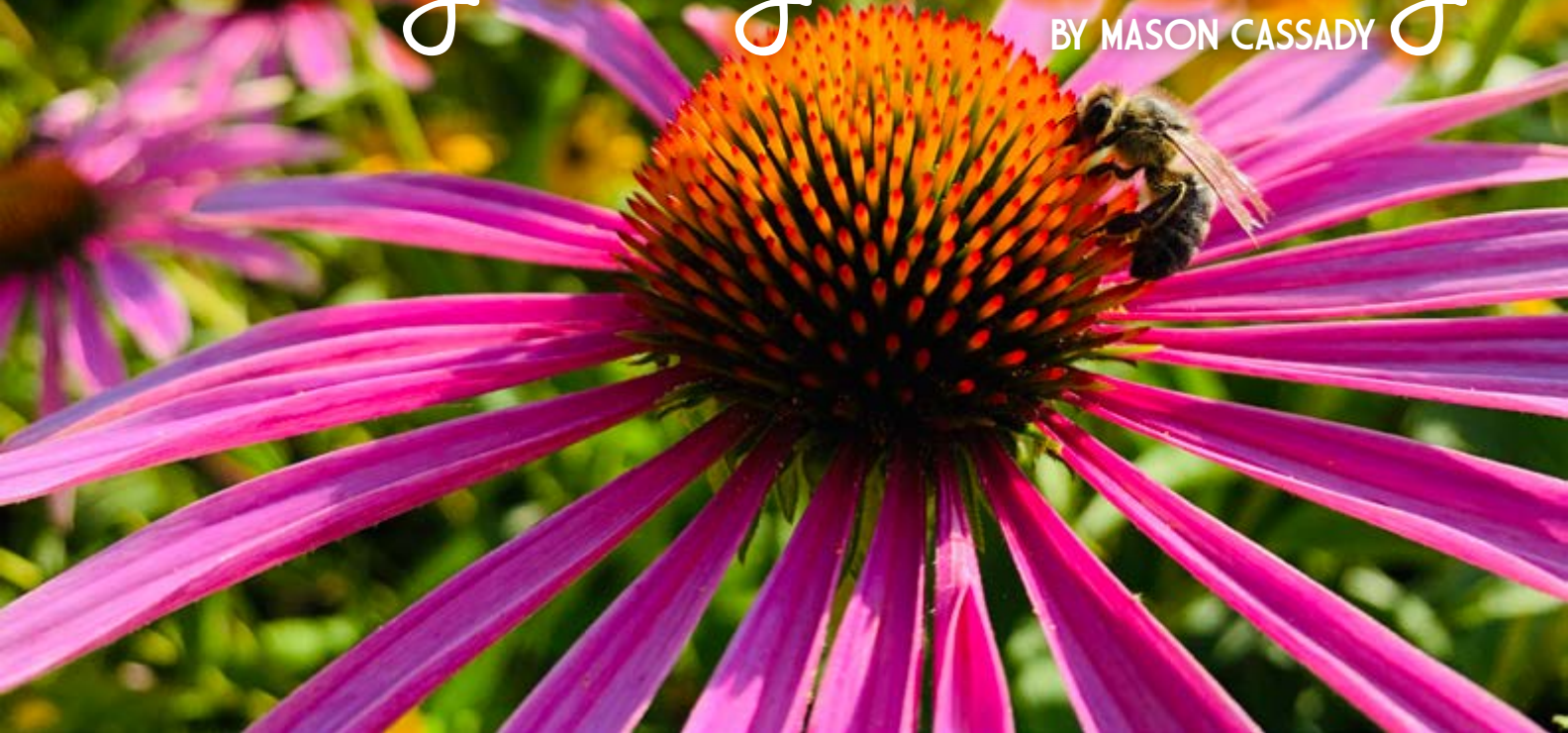
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BEEKEEPING IN POLAND

Traveling Through Work Exchange

BY MASON CASSADY



“Vrrring me more sugaaar!!” Stanislav yelled out in a voice laced in sweat and fatigue through a drone of honeybees.

Clad in a white beekeeping suit on a hot July afternoon in Poland, I filled a bucket with sugar water from the bed of a battered pickup truck and took it to Stan. It was 2 o’clock and the sun was at a painful position in the sky. I was sweating through three layers of clothing but Stan assured me that it was an ideal time to feed the bees. As he said, the bees were *out to lunch* pollinating flowers in the surrounding landscape. Winter was coming, so our task was to stock 50 beehives with lots of sugary provisions for colder temperatures in the coming months.

I signed up to be Stan’s right hand man for three weeks to learn about beekeeping

through an international network called WorkAway. Whatever Stan asked me to do in regards to the bees, I did. In exchange for the work, I got a room in his house, lots of tasty Polish cuisine, cultural immersion and hands-on experience beekeeping.

Stan’s homestead is located near the small town of Giżycko in the Masurian Lake District of northern Poland, not far from the borders of Kaliningrad, Lithuania and Belarus. Covered by lakes and forests, the stunning beauty of the Masurian region made it a finalist in a contest called the *New7Wonders of Nature*. Winners of this contest include the Amazon Rainforest and River, Komodo Island (Indonesia), and Table Mountain (South Africa). And though the Masurian didn’t win, being a finalist in the contest speaks power-

fully to the impressive natural wonders to be found in this less-traveled idyllic corner of Poland.

Stanislav is in his early 60's and retired from the Polish military. He decided beekeeping would be a good activity for retirement and an ideal adjustment back to civilian life. He seems to thrive on long summer days using his hands in sunshine amidst swarms of bees. Stan grew up 80 kilometers from Giżycko and found the area to be an ideal place for a home and family. Stan's wife, Edwarda, is near the end of a career teaching at a local school. Edwarda manages the garden, cooking and is an integral part of the bee operation. The couple has two adult children, Marta and Konrad, and one young grandson named Jas. The family comes together frequently at the homestead to find solace in nature and copious amounts of honey while helping with the family apiary.

Stan spoke a decent lick of English due to his years stationed on international army bases in the Middle East. Edwarda had less experience with English and so our conversations were often non-verbal yet expressive. Stan translated the interesting moments from English to Polish and left others to be communicated through charades. It seemed comical for Stan to watch Edwarda and I try to resolve confusion through theatrical movements of arms and legs. My efforts to learn Polish stopped short after yes, no, honey, food, water, coffee, and

Long summer days are filled with hard work outdoors, lots of honey, and a sense of satisfaction in assisting bees in the work they do for all of the organisms that depend on them.

beer; *tak, nie, miód, jedzenie, woda, kawa, and piwo.*

The work during my stay was wide ranging and often dictated by the weather: Tending to the bees in the fields. Replacing broken tiles on the roof of a barn. Cleaning wooden frames from the hives. Cutting grass. Picking raspberries. Painting hives bright colors.

My favorite task was collecting propolis from frames in the hives. Propolis is a dark brown resin that bees make by mixing saliva, beeswax and exudate gathered from tree buds and other botanical sources. The bees cover their hives with propolis for various reasons: thermal insulation, reduction of vibration, sealant for open spaces and to prevent the spread of disease, parasites, bacterial and fungal growth. After collecting propolis from the hives, we stored

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Stanislaw wearing his uniform from his career in the Polish military

it in a refrigerator to be made into tinctures at a later date. Outside of work, my free time was open for pursuits of my own volition. Many weeknights were

spent cycling around the town of Giżycko. Weekends were filled with kayaking on the string of local lakes and waterways or enjoying outdoor concerts with Stan in Edwarda in nearby villages.

Conversations surrounding meal times were some of my favorite moments. We taught each other new words and laughed over our accents and mispronunciations. I asked a thousand questions while Stan and Edwarda told me about life in Poland. They recounted stories about growing up under communism, particularly noting long waits and short rations of goods. In our current times of super consumption and instant everything, it is humbling to hear personal accounts about the lengthy and bureaucratic process to acquire something simple, like a television.

Edwarda insisted I eat multiple portions of her delicious meals. From borscht and kielbasa to pierogi to pork tenderloin, I couldn't refuse, especially after stories about rations of the past. After meals, Stan would occasionally offer locally made booze. He would arrange an array of random bottles without labels, containing fluids from bright yellow to cherry red. It was never clear exactly what was in the bottle or which relative or friend distilled the substance. The more we consumed, the fewer details Stan could remember regarding the drink at hand. And so we simply cele-

brated this fairly random gathering of people from two distant parts of the planet.

As it goes, I went to the Masurian homestead of Edwarda and Stan to learn about beekeeping but I left with unexpected gifts. I walked away with a different vantage of Poland, new friends, familiarity to a different part of the world, and general feeling of trust toward others and the unknown. As I boarded a train westward toward Belgium, Stan handed me a large jar of honey for the journey. As sweet as the honey may have been, it was fleeting; the people and place of the experience sticks in my mind and heart, lessons to be savored for years to come.

WANT TO DO A WORK EXCHANGE?

Opportunities for work exchange are plentiful around the world. You could be picking olives in Italy, working at an ecolodge in Madagascar or herding reindeer with a Sámi family in Norway. The options are ever-interesting and diverse, just take a look for yourself! Two other popular networks are *HelpX* and *WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)*. Here are some tips to find a quality opportunity:

When you message a potential host, ask many questions. If there are any vague details on their profile, be sure to inquire in that period of initial contact.

Read reviews. This is critical! Members of the network are rated and reviewed by previous workers and hosts. Do your research before signing up to volunteer. As with anything else, bad apples are out there.

If a host indicates a required skill set for the job, be sure you have or can acquire the skills needed beforehand. That said, many hosts are open to teaching and training on the job. And since this is a volunteer opportunity, it is fairly casual and relaxed.

Stick to your commitment. If you sign on for a 3-week stint, don't bail out early! That said, things don't always go as planned so don't be afraid to speak up or leave if it is not the right fit for you.



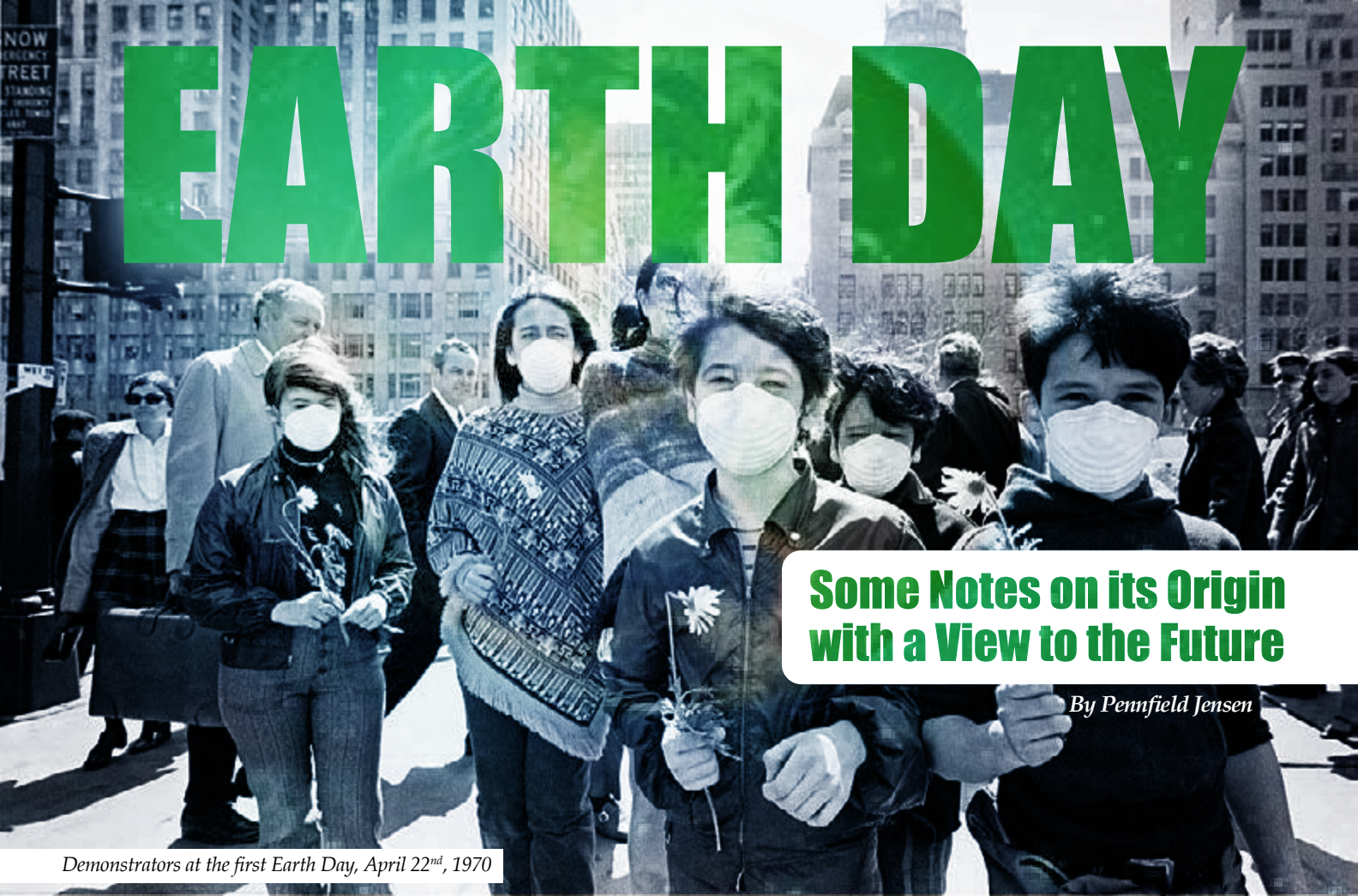
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EARTH DAY



Some Notes on its Origin with a View to the Future

By Pennfield Jensen

Demonstrators at the first Earth Day, April 22nd, 1970

[editor's note: Pennfield Jensen is a recovering environmentalist and until now he has been a frequent contributor to The Ryder.]

Earth Day 2020. Fifty years gone by, and the next fifty trending badly. I hate to say it, but I feel today exactly as I felt when John McConnell launched Earth Day at my conference back in 1969. Let me explain.

The venue was the first UNESCO “Man and The Environment” conference, a three-day affair, November 23-25, held at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. It was set as a precursor to the Main Event of the same name to be held three years later in Stockholm. I call it “my” conference but that’s a stretch. The organizer was Huey Johnson, at that time the director of the Western Region of The Nature Conservancy. I was his de facto assistant. As gofer-in-chief, my task was managing the Sargasso of minutiae any conference of that magnitude entails. For example, John McConnell.

John was not on the roster of conference speakers. He wanted to be, desperately, and badgered me whenever he could find me, which was often, begging to find him a time slot somewhere, anywhere, but the schedule had been set in stone and I had no control over it. That said, no one had any serious objection to him being there. And “there” he was, bounding around pestering anyone who would listen to his idea of an Earth Day. He found supporters, and why not? Eventually he found the ear of Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, an avowed environmentalist. The very next year, 1970, Earth Day happened. San Francisco Mayor Joe Alioto sanctioned it; New York Mayor John Lindsay sanctioned it. Millions of people took to the streets around the country and around the world. A movement had gathered force. *Yes!* Then something else happened. In early 1972 John came by my office. By virtue of a side trip co-founding Earth Times magazine under the tutelage of Jann Wenner and the editors

at Rolling Stone, I had founded Clear Creek, "The Environmental Viewpoint." In 1972 we were going strong, having played a significant role in getting unleaded gasoline legislation passed, and were now gearing up for the '72 Stockholm conference.

THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH FIRES AND THE WUHAN CORONAVIRUS ARE NOT ONCE-IN-A-HUNDRED-YEARS ANOMALIES; THEY ARE THE ADVANCE GUARDS, NASTY PORTENTS OF WHAT'S TO COME.

The Creek offices were on the top floor of the old Reynolds Tobacco Building at One South Park, a seedy corner of San Francisco. These days it is one of the hippest neighborhoods in San Francisco. In those days we shared our environs with crack addicts, gang conflicts, and marginal businesses. The corner office window was graced by a bullet hole the size of a golf ball. The building had bronze Indian heads under the eaves of the roof and a large LSMFT logo in the lobby ("Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco.") We got to step on it every day. We were a team of researchers, writers and artists. An amazing watershed of bright, wonderful people.

John McConnell was ever and always the kind of person whose strength of personality and honest enthusiasm was contagious and fun. But on this day he was distraught, and he was seeking our help. Specifically, he wanted editorial backing in his dispute over the "illegal" appropriation of Earth Day by senator Nelson and his aide Denis Hayes as "their" idea. We listened sympathetically. But we had no dog in John's fight.

As journalist-environmentalists, our goal was to raise consciousness for environmental awareness as an ethic, not just a once-a-year event, then ho-hum back to business as usual. Earth Day seemed to trivialize that larger vision and to diminish the urgency of a much-needed environmental ethos. Second, there was Denis

Hayes. Harvard educated and charismatic, Denis had been hand-picked by Senator Nelson to head up Earth Day as an international operation. All apologies to John McConnell, but case closed. John had been inspired in the Sixties by a 'great idea,' but frankly, I did not think, nor do I today that Earth Day was any one person's idea. Earth Day is one of those inevitable ideas, like Stonehenge and the autumn equinox; its time had come and it belonged to everybody. Or perhaps nobody.

In Indianapolis the 50th anniversary of Earth Day is scheduled for Saturday April 25th at Military Park. An array of 122 exhibitors, a beer garden and photo ops with various corporate mascots such as Roundup-Redi Kilowatt are planned. Bloomington hopes to cheer on our lonely blue marble beginning at 1 PM at Switchyard Park on Saturday April 18th. So we'll have at least two weekends' worth of sudsy gaiety and ominous warnings to look forward to. I had personally hoped to print up bumper stickers that read "I [Heart] Earth Day," and organize volunteers to stick them on the windshields of every SUV they could find (which is every other vehicle I see) until Steve Cotter, a Bloomington Earth Day organizer, put the kybosh on it by saying "great idea, Penn—until someone gets shot." *Right.*

Earth Day has become an icon for 'earth awareness.' That's a good thing. My problem with Earth Day 2020 is that it shows only too well how miserably we, as environmentalists, have failed. The unchecked global rapaciousness that has pushed global warming past the tipping point of no return has created an irreversible fate for "Man and His Environment." The 2015 Paris Accord to curtail global warming by controlling greenhouse gas emissions, was signed by every UN participant save Turkey and Iran. An end-game of sorts for the initial UNESCO conference in 1972, the Accord offered hope. It still does, even though Trump pulled the U.S. out of it and China never acknowledged it. That leaves the others to set the bar while the two largest polluters on the planet party hearty in open and arrogant defiance of irrefutable truth.

WHEN TENS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FACE BITTER FAMINE, CONVULSIVE WAR, AND IMMINENT DEATH, THEIR DESPERATION WILL CRUSH ALL HOPE. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE TURN AGAINST EACH OTHER TO SAVE OURSELVES?



The message on this button is more urgent today than it was 50 years ago.

The science is good. What it tells us is not. We have failed to curb greenhouse gas emissions. We have failed to curb population growth. We have set in motion the demise of ecologies world-wide. Ultimately, we face a perfect storm of impending catastrophes that will be both as unavoidable as they will be horrific. Take pollinators as a random example. Thinking bees? And the global devastation they are undergoing? Their fate pales in comparison to the vast numbers of non-industrial insects, birds, and mammals that pollinate the grasses, flowers, and fruit trees on which we depend. Think ocean ecosystems coping with increased heat, acidity, and micro plastics, the “blanching” of the great coral reefs worldwide and the myriad creatures lost thereby. And of course melting glaciers, hellish droughts, damning floods. The consequences reach far beyond a few litigious millionaires whose oceanfront villas get swept away by rising tides. Sorry, but good riddance to what shouldn't have been there in the first place.

The contingent sad truth is that there are no viable technological solutions to global warming, overpopulation, or the loss of ecosystems. A lot of attention is paid to solar power, wind power, tide power and sustainable growth. Those alternatives may slow the march to oblivion, here and there, but they won't stop it. I think of the rage of Australian bush fires, and of the Wuhan coronavirus that as I write is wiping away trillions of dollars of global wealth and shuttering borders around the world. I don't

see these as once-in-a-hundred-years anomalies; they are the advance guards, nasty harbingers of what's to come.

When tens of millions of people face bitter famine, convulsive war, and imminent death, their desperation will crush all hope. I hate writing this, but it is what terrifies me the most: losing the basic humanism that, up until now, has guided mankind through all of its darkest days. What happens when we turn against each other to save ourselves?

On the nominal Earth Day 2020, April 22nd, approximately 1,000 children will be born in the United States. Around 360,000 children will be born world-wide during those 24 hours.

Looking fifty years on down the road to Earth Day, 2070, I can't imagine what those grown-up children will think of us.

And that's tragic because never has any species achieved such a profound understanding of this incredible world which we inhabit, and of the universe in which we play such a small and insignificant part, yet only we it seems have the ability to comprehend. The wondrous truths that have been brought to light stagger the imagination. We cannot in a lifetime begin to appreciate it all. But we should try. We should work to “see” the world as it truly is. And we should teach others to do the same, otherwise we turn the lights out on life.



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Meditations IN AN Emergency

Observations From a Recovering-Irish-Lion-Waitress-Turned-International-Humanitarian-Aid-Rock-Star on Fighting Ebola in Africa and Fighting Corona in the States

By Jason Vest

“Man, people here are just obsessed with wiping their butts,” marveled former Irish Lion server and former UN official Linda Poteat when I reached her by FaceTime at her Washington, DC, digs at 17th and R St NW, just before April Fools Day. “I mean, really: Most of the world doesn’t use toilet paper. You can have a rag you can wash, you can wash your hand; it seems like one of the weirder things to obsess about. In Congo, people use old newspapers or whatever else is available; when I was in Russia, we used old rubles. There’s a lot of options whatever your circumstances, wherever you are in the world.”

When bad things happen on a large scale domestically, those of us who have seen worse things overseas inevitably gather at some drinkery, or drop each other lines, to ruminate on

the absurdity of certain American overreactions and blind spots to crisis. But it wasn’t just a desire for a similarly-experienced pal to puzzle over the crappin’ paper culling with that set me to reconnecting with Linda. When she wasn’t serving up pints and puffballs with erudite wit and aplomb at 212 W Kirkwood as an IU student in the early ‘90s, she was serving a passionate and savvy humanitarian aid worker. As Bloomington’s late Congressman Frank McCloskey was starting to raise hell over Serb depredations in Croatia and Bosnia, Poteat was shepherding refugees from Banja Luka into temporary asylum safehavens in Bloomington – and gratefully-received welcome-to-America dinners at Janko’s.

Since those days, she’s done everything

from relief work in the Balkans, Russia and Haiti to running the Disaster Response, Disaster Risk Reduction, Staff Care, and Civil Military working groups for InterAction, the international aid group consortium that also appointed her its liaison with US AID's Foreign Disaster Assistance office, as well as to the State Department's Population, Refugees and Migration Bureau. Most recently – and most germane to the moment--she was, for half of 2019, chief of the United Nations Mission For Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This wasn't her first time at the Ebola rodeo: in 2015 she also worked with UNMEER in Sierra Leone in response to an outbreak there.

As we were getting down to pandemic response brass tacks, we tarried over American hoarding habits du jour. "The thing I'm surprised by is that the alcohol shelves aren't empty," she chuckled. "I went into my local liquor store, and the owner was like, 'It's terrible, no one's coming in.' Maybe it's that everyone in Washington has a well-stocked bar, but you'd think that rather than hoarding toilet paper, you'd be seeing people stocking up on, like, massive amounts of red wine. I've been interested in looking at people's grocery store baskets when I go out – so many people are buying prepared meals. For me, I like to make things in my crock pot – I can eat it immediately, freeze it, and have a variety of stuff. All the people buying frozen Lean Cuisine, whatever that means, I find it entertaining. It's always weird when they start to ration. At my local Safeway, you can now only buy three things of cheese

and four things of pasta, apparently because someone or someones came in and binged on cleaning those out. It's really strange."

Before letting her illustrate in earnest pertinent lessons learned from her UNMEER stints, I asked her, per her Ebola experiences in Africa, to sum up what every American should know right now. Mightily distilled, it would essentially be, in micro, "wash your hands, don't go out more than you have to, maintain six feet distance"; and in macro, get everyone to understand that viruses are truly universal, do not have political, religious, racial or cultural preferences, and that finding every possible way to get people to recognize this and work together to achieve the simple trifecta of handwashing, distancing and limiting unnecessary movement, is essential.

And that she wished Bobby Knight was on tap to help.



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In Her Own Words, Linda Poteat
(transcript of our conversation lightly edited,
but otherwise Unplugged):

Part of the problem is that there is clearly no effective coordinated leadership. The President is saying his stuff. His advisors are saying their stuff. The governors are saying their stuff. I love Fauci and Birx but I think sometimes you need someone who's not a doctor to explain stuff, like social distancing. I think a lot of people still don't know what that actually means. It's also hard when there are certain hard-wired cultural notions of obligation, loving and other behaviors that don't mesh with necessary crisis response to contagion. Here, even though we all understand germ theory, it's incredibly hard for people to not visit grandma in the nursing home, or let the grandkids not hug grandparents. And part of the problem is that as a culture here, we really don't like anyone telling us we have to do anything.

It's a challenge to try to explain to people in Ebola zones that while your loved one has died of this terrible disease, you can't wash that person's body as they normally would because you might also get sick. It's a hard thing to explain to someone when their culture requires them to do that, you have to meet them and say, "I understand you have to do this, and I want you to go about your normal practice, but you'll have to do it a bit differently, you'll need to wear these gloves, this mask, and you can't kiss your dead loved one, either." In Sierra Leone there's a very strong belief in spirits – people really believe that if they don't bury their loved one properly, that person will haunt them for the rest of their lives. And you can't poo-poo that, it just doesn't work.

Most of the people on the left don't trust anything Trump says, and on the extreme right most people don't trust anything scientists say. One of the things we always try to do is find someone who's thought of as a thought leader, a religious leader, a prominent singer, artist, people respected by folks and talk with them and get them to pass the message. In Sierra Leone we made an effort to reach out to the imams to get them to talk to their mosques about Ebola, to not have huge groups on Fridays, how to talk to their congregations in a helpful, non-scary way. We'd take them to an Ebola treatment center so they could go back and talk to their congregations and explain exactly what they saw in terms of how people were being treated, to have those imams credibly explain that there were safe

When she wasn't serving up pints and puffballs at the Irish Lion in the early '90s, Linda Poteat was serving as a passionate and savvy humanitarian aid worker. As Bloomington's late Congressman Frank McCloskey was starting to raise hell over Serb depredations in Croatia and Bosnia, Poteat was shepherding refugees from Banja Luka into temporary asylum safehavens – and gratefully-received welcome-to-America dinners at Janko's.

places people could bring their loved ones when they were sick.

It took as a long time, particularly as the government wasn't reaching out to traditional authorities, either. Every small town has a kind of city father, mother; maybe it's the football coach. You have to find the people who are on the pedestals in that community and secure their help, and it's not always easy. Here, people who don't believe in aspects of this, like Glenn Beck or Jerry Falwell, you have to keep trying with reaching out to. And obviously it can be frustrating.

For me, what I see here that's like Congo and Sierra Leone, it's a lack of leadership and coordination. The fact is we don't have a good federally-coordinated approach for pandemics, because most of our natural disasters are like hurricanes, when usually involves anywhere from one to a handful of states. Part of what's been sad in this case is how, because they screwed up with testing in the beginning, the entire Centers for Disease Control has been effectively sidelined and muzzled by Trump ever since. That's too

bad, because the CDC has some amazing risk communications specialists - people who are great at understanding specific communities and tailoring specific messages and sending those down effectively to local levels. I had a bunch of them in Congo and they were great. They're the people who understand that if you're a right-wing person in a state like my parents' South Carolina, seeing an elite Hollywood liberal telling people to stay at home and wash their hands isn't going to work. Risk communications specialists are the types who reach out to the SEC football coach or megachurch pastor to tell them that if they can help get people to behave differently, it would go a long way towards saving lives, because they're the people that people in South Carolina and Alabama are going to listen to. It's like if this had happened 25 years ago and they'd gotten Bob Knight to tell everyone stay home, wash your hands and if you have to go out stay six feet away and here's why, the CDC wouldn't have had to worry about Indiana."

[ed. note: The Ryder has reached out to friends of Coach Knight, passing on Linda's observations,

People in villages in Congo would say, 'Why should I change my behavior? It's not going to come to my village.' But then the person you went to school with dies, and suddenly there are thousands of sick faces close to death all around you.



If you're a right-wing person in a state like my parents' South Carolina, seeing an elite Hollywood liberal telling people to stay at home and wash their hands isn't going to work.

and with the suggestion that icons of IU basketball might consider pulling together doing a series of statewide and national college hoops fan-targeted public service announcements until the coronavirus contagion is decisively checked.]

But again, here's the point: This is a lesson learned from Africa. A lot of the local officials in Sierra Leone were not members of the same political party as the president, so they simply didn't believe anything the president said about anything. That was why we tried to work with the traditional authorities, the paramount chiefs, and they did have a lot of influence on people's behavior. In Congo it was the same sort of thing - everyone hates the Kinshasa government, and in the east, which was a stronghold of opposition, not only were they right that Kinshasa didn't want to do anything to help them, but it wasn't illogical for them to believe that Kinshasa had somehow unleashed it intentionally.

But here, I think what's weird here is that people our parents' age should be able to remember polio, measles, mumps - people of that generation should clearly remember those epidemics. Polio was a really, really big deal. Our generation remembers AIDS very, very well - it was real, at first, but it wasn't until you had that first friend pass away from it that it became very, very real. To be honest, I don't think this is going to become *those kinds of real* until people lose someone close

to them or know someone who loses someone. Sadly, it has to have a familiar face first. I think this is true universally. People in villages in Congo would keep talking like 'Why should I change my behavior, it's not going to come to *my village*,' but then the person you went to school with dies, and suddenly there are

thousands of sick faces close to death around you on a daily basis.

It's going to get that bad here. Because I can't travel to do the normal international disaster relief work I do, I'm helping some local DC authorities with the planning for what's coming next. It's going to be hard for people. I think in Africa so many people are so hand-to-mouth that I don't think anyone feels particularly superior there to anyone else in terms of their earnings. There's also older folks who have lived through if not at least one war, multiple wars; they know what life is like to have things be very precarious in ways they aren't here. The effects on the local economies are hard, but in some respects it may be worse here. In Congo and Sierra Leone, there are far, far fewer people in desk jobs than there are here; there's a lot of manual labor there that never stopped, for people who engaged in commerce, the travel never really stopped. Here, especially for people in the gig economy, and the so many people in the hotel and restaurant industries...that happened to hotel and restaurant workers there, but there are so many less people doing that work there than here. I think we're about to find out just how very tenuous our economy is when all of the people who are earning hourly wages don't have a job.



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COUNTY GOVERNMENT

**Are local officials able to
work in collaborative ways,**

**or are they inclined to
embrace controversy?**

BY CHARLOTTE ZIETLOW

County government is a challenge. City government is a breeze -- straight-forward, well-funded, set up to lend itself to top down management.

The late Warren Henegar, former county commissioner and self-styled country philosopher, often said “these Hoosiers didn’t believe in government, so they created a county government that couldn’t work.” But we have it today, and it *does* work.

Consider the reality: The city has eleven

elected officials: A mayor, nine council members and one clerk. There are many departments and department officials who the mayor appoints with almost total discretion. The county, in contrast, today has 28 elected officials:

three commissioners, seven council members, the prosecutor, the sheriff, the auditor, the assessor, a recorder, the clerk, the treasurer, the coroner, and the surveyor, plus nine judges. Each has their own sphere

of influence, but the auditor and the clerk are in charge of the most money and the most information in their spheres, and thus wield the most power. Knowledge is power.

The city and the county each have similar responsibilities; some might say “duplicating” or “overlapping” responsibilities--planning and zoning, parks and recreation, highways and streets, and internal management.

But the county’s purview is much broader than that of the city. The county is in charge of all land issues, *including the city*. Every parcel is surveyed by the surveyor and recorded by the recorder. All parcels are platted and filed with the auditor and assessed by the assessor. The county treasurer sends out tax bills based on that work and disperses funds to all the taxing units. The county also operates the airport. The county owns all the county roads, and owns and operates the county health department.

The most amazing and confusing thing is the County Commission has three executives, who are also the county legislators and who sometimes serve as judges. The County Commissioners may not spend any money without the approval of



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the County Council, who have to approve all money spent, and set the budget for all department heads, but the Commissioners determine the use and assignment of the spaces that all county officials occupy, which gives them considerable influence.

Believe it or not, all the county department heads are elected officials and thus potentially autonomous. The county government is set up so that all the departments have to work together. "It's a nightmare" ... But it works!!

When I was a commissioner, I had to learn an enormous amount about how it works. My first test was being called on by the sheriff for advice on how to warm the jail. It had been a very cold winter. The old jail was so cold that the sheriff was even not sure how to determine how cold

it was, but after I advised him to get a thermometer we figured it out. We agreed that fifty degrees inside was cold.

I was working with the president of the county council to get some blankets from the Red Cross and to get

The County Commission has three executives, who are also the county legislators and who sometimes serve as judges.

some Visqueen plastic sheeting that the highway department could put up against the windows in the cell block to keep the wind from blowing in. That's one example of how we had to work together on a very practical level to get something done.

Another time someone came in furious because his neighbor's goat was eating his grass. We had to figure out who to call -- whether it be animal control, or the highway department, or one of our own animal-loving commissioners. Everything was a negotiation and a chance to develop some new solutions that might be valuable along the way.

When problems got bigger than goats, we had to develop more sophisticated solutions. We had to remember that all elected officials/department heads had the authority to say no to the county commissioners. But when the state police



Charlotte Zietlow with Warren Henegar. "Hoosiers did not believe in government," Henegar once said, "so they created a county government that couldn't work."

came to the auditor and told her that the airport manager was gradually taking equipment to his home for personal use, it came as a shock. In the end, the Airport Commission had to fire him.

The fact is developing these collaborating relationships can be exhausting, stressful and difficult.

During my eight years as a commissioner, it was a very stressful time, when we were saving the courthouse, building the justice building, negotiating for the post office and preventing the PCB incinerator. The only way we were able to accomplish these things was by working together. Because we were all elected officials, and therefore autonomous, compromise was essential to our accomplishing anything. And that was a good thing. County government may have been meant to fail, but with the right people in place and the right spirit, it's possible to get things done, and the necessity for compromise creates community, and unites the community.

Perhaps this is the time for Monroe County and the City of Bloomington to consider a new brand of UniGov. By blending the areas where we overlap:

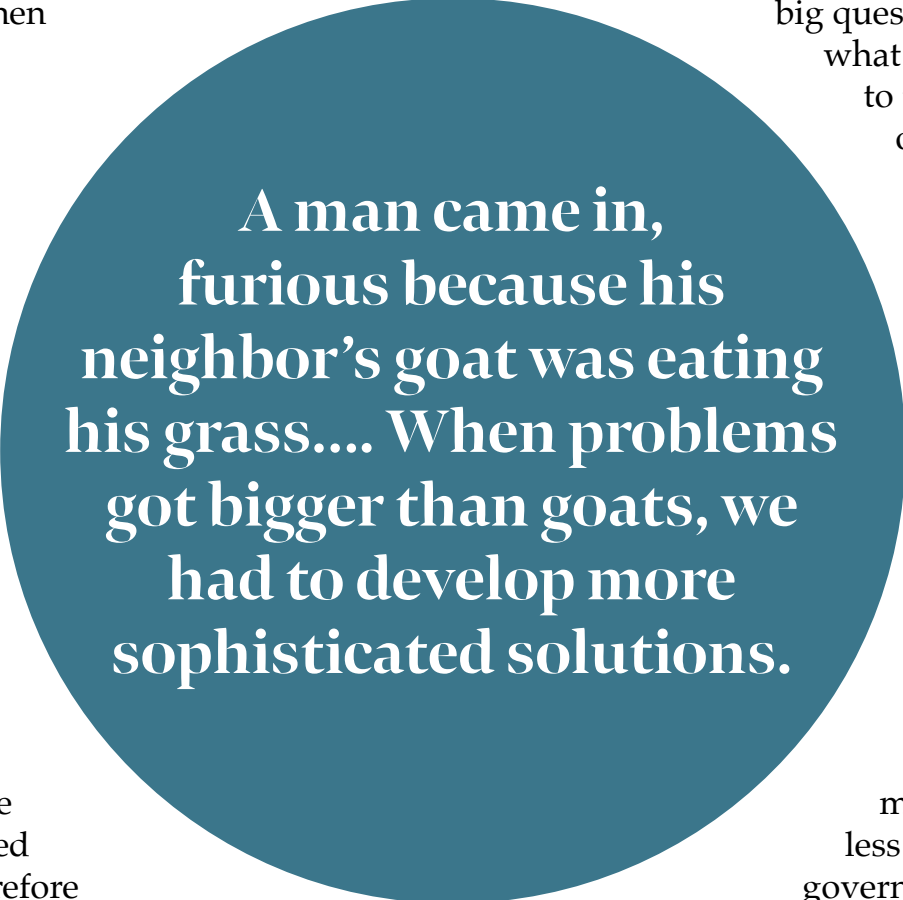
planning, zoning, highway department, Parks and Rec, etc. savings would surely be found.

It makes sense to make the county the dominant government, since it includes all citizens in the county and covers a vastly larger number of jurisdictions. It would eliminate the issue of annexation since all

areas would automatically be included. Of course the big question would be what would happen to the elected city officials. The Commissioners would be the top office holders, and that would not be an easy sell, but the advantage of requiring compromise would ultimately lead to a more stable and less adversarial government.

Given the fact that we did not have a mayoral election this year and only a minimal election of other city officials, that might be less difficult than it seems.

In any case, with the county elections coming up this year, it is important that everyone understands what all the offices mean and who all the candidates are and what they bring to the table. Are they able to work in collaborative ways? Or are they likely to embrace controversy? These are *the* important considerations for all of us today.



**A man came in,
furious because his
neighbor's goat was eating
his grass.... When problems
got bigger than goats, we
had to develop more
sophisticated solutions.**

CHRISTY PAXON



JOE NICKELL



TERRY HORNSBY



BART EVERSON



OUT WITH A BANG

The explosive third season of ROX

BY BART EVERSON

Editor's note: On April 18, 1995, Bloomington-based ROX became the first TV series, anywhere, to be distributed over the internet. To call ROX cutting-edge would be an understatement. In form and content, it was years ahead of its time. Here, Bart Everson outlines the calamitous third season of the show which he produced and hosted with Joe Nickell. They were better known to the viewing public as J&B. Other key players are Christy Paxson (Xy) and Terry Hornsby (TBlack). There will be an online celebration commemorating the 25th anniversary of ROX's internet debut on Tuesday, April 21st. Details at rox.com.

We began production with no expectation of success, with hardly a thought for the future. We slapped a camera on a tripod and sat under a bare bulb in a rough-hewn basement, our rambling dialog punctuated by liberal doses of liquor. Each week we recorded a new installment; each week our faces and voices appeared in living rooms around the city, through the miracle (or curse) of cable television. We quickly found the limits of legality, and soon after that we found an audience. The camera came off the tripod and the streets of Bloomington became our set. The people of the city became our cast. There was no script, and no budget either.

THE WORLD WIDE WEB? WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?

We began our third season with something to prove — a couple things, actually.

We had to show that we hadn't "sold out." We had to demonstrate that we hadn't backed down from our bold advocacy for the legalization of cannabis. We'd ended our second season smoking a joint in front of the county courthouse in a forthright bid for notoriety. The stunt worked: we were seen around the world smoking that fatty on an MTV News Special Report, produced and hosted by Kurt Loder, titled "Straight Dope." They used a 14-second clip from our program. We were famous now, obviously.

At the same time, we had to show we weren't just one-hit(ter) wonders. It would have been easy to keep riffing on the stoner tip, too easy. We needed to prove we could get the same level of attention for something completely different. We had to prove we mattered as media provocateurs.

We did have some inklings. Our friend, Eric Ost, talked about putting our show on the internet. We barely understood anything he told us — *World Wide Web? What the hell is that?* — but it sounded cool. The prospect of getting our content out to a global audience was enticing. Eric reserved a domain name for us: rox.com. It was free back then.

If we were wary of being pegged as the next Cheech & Chong, we were also wary of being pegged as J&B. The show wasn't just about the two of us. It was about a community that seemed to be growing every day. So we changed the name of the show, shortening it from *J&B on the ROX* to just *ROX*. We hoped that would stop calling it *J&B* and think of the show in broader terms.

We even had a budget of sorts. We'd produced the first two seasons without one. J had cobbled together enough individual and corporate sponsors to allow me to quit

my day job as a telemarketer and focus on editing the show full-time.

We were not rolling in dough, far from it. The big house on South Dunn proved too much for us. We dispersed to unrelated, cheaper residences around town. Xy and I ended up on Kirkwood, in the newly-renovated Allen Building. The management at Pinnacle Properties received our application with enthusiasm. They needed some "very low income" tenants to meet their tax obligations.

So it was that our third season began with episode #61, "Moving On Down," which played on the big screen at the local Bluebird nightclub. We showcased our yard sale. We showcased our move-out inspection. We showcased J's last dump in the old house.

We also included a reality-based animation by our friend, Eric White, which featured a joint that rolled and smoked itself. This drew an enthusiastic response from the rock'n'roll crowd at the Bird.

You have to remember this was 1994. Marijuana was still illegal then.

THE OVERT PROMOTION OF REALITY

It was September 1994. Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. It's called the Clinton crime bill, but it was written by Joe Biden. A certain young Gulf War veteran named Tim was outraged by it. The ban on assault weapons in particular ticked him off. He resolved to take revenge on the federal government.

Tim and I were about the same age. We both wanted to change the world. We'll come back to him.

We continued to improvise the show around the actual events of our actual lives. Xy was back from her summer in New York City, where she'd labored as an intern at MTV. Of course, she'd taken her camera with her, and shot a few minutes of shaky video. So we made a show around that.

Montel Williams' people contacted us,

looking for “a Gen-Xer on heroin.” We supplied a friend who was taking Prozac. Our friend Mary-Frances made the trip to New York and appeared on *The Montel Williams Show*. So we made a show around that.

While Tim was stealing explosives from a quarry in Kansas, we were taking control of the means of production. In partnership with Eric White, we’d established the Daisybrain Media Collective. We even had a quasi-nonlinear editing system. The tapes were still analog, but we used a program (running on a Mac SE) to log clips by timecode and automate the process somewhat. For the first time, I was able to assemble full episodes at a consistent level of quality. It took me about forty hours a week to produce our weekly half-hour program.

Once a week, we’d take a tape down to the Monroe County Public Library and submit it to the public access station (BCAT, now CATS), filling out the requisite paperwork, and they’d transmit that program through the cable system to subscribers. That was just about the only way people could see the show back then.

Even as we yearned for broader exposure, we remained intensely local. The Bloomington music scene was kicking into high gear, and local bands provided

the soundtrack for our third season: Kid Kazooey, Brown Betty, Salaam, The Plastic Cheeses, Squash Blossom String Pullers, The Knievels, The Dirtyys, The Submersibles, Abstract Fresco, and (most frequently) The Walking Ruins.

Meanwhile, Tim was renting a storage locker in Arizona to hide those explosives he’d stolen.

A government official condemned our program for “the overt promotion of anarchy.” As later noted by the *Village Voice*, this was “an accolade to die for.” In fact, we used that as the title for ROX #64, “The Overt Promotion of Anarchy.” In addition to talking about the political philosophy of anarchism, we were fortunate enough to take a camera to a “Critical Mass” in which bicycle riders took over the streets of Bloomington, and the cops were gracious enough to oblige our hunger for controversy by roughing up some of the protestors. We deplored the abuse of power but it made for compelling TV. We also showed viewers how to make a red box, a simple electronic device for cheating payphones. No, we didn’t smash the state, but we got on the evening news again.

While Tim was in Kansas with a friend acquiring a second ton of ammonium nitrate, his grandfather died. He went back home to

upstate New York for the funeral, but soon he was in Dallas to purchase a few thousand dollars worth of nitromethane at a racetrack.



The Rox Squad: (left to right) Joe, Bart, and Terry and (front, center) Christy

90% CRAP

People were constantly giving us advice about the show. Call it “constructive critical feedback.” Some said we needed more narrative framing, others said more music, less booze, less shock value, less self-promotion. Some people even said we took ourselves too seriously.

J and I didn’t see eye-to-eye about this. He, and Xy too, suffered a crisis of confidence in the wake of our newfound notoriety. There was a lot of soul-searching and hand-wringing, as they tried to figure out what the show once had but was now lost, trying (already!) to recapture a mythical past.

I had a decidedly different view. I was dismissive of most of the feedback we were receiving. “To me it adds up to about 90% crap,” I wrote in my journal. Staying true to our own vision — that was the trick. J thought I was pompous and pretentious.

While we were bickering, Tim returned to upstate New York to settle his grandfather’s estate.

Though I took pride in our artistic achievements, money was tight. Xy was in grad school, earning no money. Our modest living expenses were consistently greater than my meager income. I accumulated a few thousand dollars of credit card debt. The situation did not seem sustainable, and this weighed heavily on me. I felt a sense of doom hanging over me, over us all. I resolved that I would get a “real” job, if I had to, even though that would leave no time for ROX.

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That prospect felt like it would be a relief, as my relationship with J took an acrimonious turn. I felt I was working hard for little reward. I felt insulted, my pride was hurt, and a certain bitter vindictiveness welled up inside me. If ROX imploded, I thought the failure would be harder on him than me. I liked that idea.

Then all our equipment seemed to break down at the same time. Our response? Episode #68, "Raw Footage," in which we presented three big, unedited chunks of video from the ROX archive. It bought us time. Did I mention we put out a new show every week?

I had a dream in which J and I patched things up.

We cranked out three episodes which demonstrated the expanded scope of ROX. "Blood on the Dial" documented the success of our improv-comedy friends in radio theater; "Head Jobz" looked at half a dozen employment situations; "Generation Why?" turned the camera on Millennials. We didn't call them Millennials then. They were just kids in high school.

In partnership with Rachel Whang, Daisybrain opened a downtown storefront location as a Media Center & Gallery, on East 6th Street, next to the Courthouse Square. Since I was living in the Allen Building one block away, I was able to walk to work and pop back home for lunch or a romp in the sack midday. In spite of my pervasive sense of doom, I felt that I was living the dream, and I relished it.

FAN MAIL FROM JAIL

We ran our "BCAT XMAS" special three times that December, allowing us to catch our breath. Meanwhile, Tim and a buddy cruised through Oklahoma City and took a nice long gander at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

At the turning of the year, I took stock of my finances. Xy and I were not living an



***Time* magazine sent a photographer to Bloomington. This would be ROX's big breakthrough. The next morning, Timothy McVeigh set off a truck-bomb in front of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and killed 168 people. He was arrested shortly thereafter for driving a car without a license plate. The *Time* photographer was re-routed to Oklahoma City instead of Bloomington.**

ostentatious lifestyle. I figured we could get by on a mere \$1,338 per month — roughly \$16K for the year.

On the ninth day of 1995, "Tall" Steve Volan started BlueMarble, a new Internet Service Provider, in a bedroom closet on East 5th Street. A week later, InterSource started up with an office in a strip mall on College Mall Road. Bloomington was getting wired.

Suddenly we were on the front cover of *NUVO*, the alternative rag from Indianapolis. It was a weekly print publication back then. The coverage was flattering, to say the least. Steve Hammer and Jim Poyser called the

show “a revealing slacker diary and satiric tour de farce.” We were also featured in the *The Indianapolis Star* which labeled us “a nutty bohemian blast of irreverence and imagination.”

The reason for all this hoopla? We were finally exporting our episodes to another market. Cable subscribers in Indy could now see our show. We celebrated with a premiere party at the Patio nightclub.

I have no memory of that event whatsoever. Perhaps I was just exhausted. Our electric bill for January was \$45. I’d only budgeted for \$30. Things were tight as ever.

We got a letter from some fans in the Monroe County Jail. Apparently even in prison they could watch us on cable TV, as we ran around town breaking the law with apparent impunity. They wanted to know how we did it. That led directly to episode #77, “How to Make Your Own TV Show,” which was shot on a camera purchased at a local big box store and then returned for a full refund when we were done.

For Valentine’s Day we produced “Love on the ROX,” our 78th episode, which featured profiles of four couples involved in the production of the show. J and Jenny Beasley broke up just as they were shooting their segment, just as they prepared to send out wedding invitations. There were multiple issues in play, not least among them the stresses and strains of living a life where virtually everything we did was subject to being videotaped and put on television. She found it too intrusive. J’s tearful confession to the camera seemed to bear that out.

(Jenny passed away in 2019, a painful loss for our community.)

A few days after our 79th episode aired, I had another financial crisis and was convinced once again that the show was over. J surprised me with a check for \$475. Rent, utilities, credit card payments. Bang. It was all gone in one quick flurry of checks. My relationship with J had improved markedly since Thanksgiving. My dreamed-

of reconciliation had come true.

J was responsible for sponsorships and the like. Xy was in charge of sending our tapes to other cable access networks. TBlack was back on the scene bigger than ever. The four of us came together that winter. Despite my trepidation, I was already planning for a fourth season. I wanted to see the four of us become co-hosts, mixing and matching from week to week.

I-800-93-BONGS

We were all diligently working toward our internet debut, while continuing to crank out the show. A couple from March rank as our best work. “The RCA State” looked at the sale of naming rights on the Hoosier Dome, while “J&B Eat Garlic” took on the subject of stupid laws. We road-tripped to Gary, Indiana, where it’s technically illegal to go out in public after eating garlic. We munched down on some fresh buds on the front steps of the Cook County courthouse and then turned ourselves in.

Steve Hall was the first journalist to break the story of our online debut, in *The Indianapolis Star* on the 4th of April, 1995. We’d set our launch date for April 18th, a Tuesday, which would coincide with our cablecast in Bloomington. We worked feverishly to meet that goal.

J and I got together with TBlack and Xy for an extended production meeting, in which we supposedly decided what the episode would be like. Later on, when I assumed the mantle of production manager from J, I changed everything around and shot it to my liking. This caused some tension.

Still the basic structure of the episode remained the same. We conceived it as a bunch of short segments, generally only a minute or two in length, all designed to stand on their own. These would be presented online in a nonlinear fashion, so that visitors to our website could pick and

choose and view them in any order they liked.

I was editing the show at Daisybrain, then taking VHS dubs to the Teaching & Learning Technologies Lab at Indiana University. Xy's student ID got me in the door, and with help from the staff I slowly figured out how to digitize video. Compressing these segments was a slow process that could only be accomplished overnight; we set the machines up to crunch the files and then came back in the morning to see if they had crashed or not. All of this, mind you, to generate a teeny-tiny video the size of a postage stamp, and highly pixelated to boot.

We compacted the whole show down to a mere 128 MB. Doesn't sound like much, does it? Still, that was enough to be a major headache. This was the era of the floppy disk, and it would have taken 90 of 'em to store that much data.

Thus, our biggest hurdle proved to be getting the video off the Mac at TLTL and onto the machine at InterSource, the local ISP

J faxed out press releases and got us ready to sell VHS tapes of the show. We got a hilarious toll-free number: 1-800-93-BONGS. Our friend Jeff Hamlin tried to scare up some more sponsorship money so I could pay the rent.

My relationship with Pinnacle Properties had deteriorated. I'd been begging to be released from the terms of our one-year lease. After stonewalling me for months, they suddenly shifted gears: they not only agreed to let us go but insisted that we get the hell out immediately. At the same time our car died; we felt lucky getting \$200 for scrap. Suddenly we had no place to live, no way to get there, and no foreseeable future.

AN UNSUSPECTING WORLD

J had come up with a great title for our internet debut: "Global Village Idiots." It would be our 85th episode. It took a few tries to get the DAT process working, and what with certain segments being redigitized and adding various audio files, stills and text, and drives running out of memory overnight, it really came down to the wire.

All of these shenanigans

highlight the technical difficulty of what we were aiming to achieve. This was ten years before YouTube, and there was a reason no one had put a TV show online yet. If we could do it, if we could be first, we would make history. Maybe not big history, but at least a footnote.

While we prepared to unleash our video on an unsuspecting world, Tim and his old

A government official condemned our program for "the overt promotion of anarchy." As later noted by the Village Voice, this was "an accolade to die for."

that had donated a gigabyte of webhosting space to get us started. (Intersource would soon be purchased by the *Herald-Times* and become Kiva Networking.) At length Mike Bone, our first webmaster, figured out how to transfer the info via DAT. That's right, the multimedia files for the first TV show on the internet were put onto Digital Audio Tape and physically transported to the offices of the webhost.

Army buddy Terry loaded a rented Ryder truck with nitromethane and ammonium nitrate from a storage unit in Herington, Kansas. On the morning of April 18th, after stopping for breakfast at the Santa Fe Trail Diner on Trapp Street, they drove to Geary Lake (just outside of Junction City) and spent a few hours mixing the chemicals in giant tubs.

Around the same time, we were posting to Usenet with the following subtle headline:

BREAK OUT YOUR BONG; KILL YOUR TV

Our press release caught the attention of *Time* magazine. They arranged to send a photographer to Bloomington the next morning. We were beyond elation. Certainly, this must be our big breakthrough.

The show aired on BCAT that night, but people were already accessing the show online, from all around the world. We calculated that it would take an end-user with a slow connection about 24 hours to download everything. Some people did just that. We later heard reports that with a decent modem it took only a couple hours.

The next morning was Wednesday, April 19th, 1995. Tim set off his truck-bomb in front of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and killed 168 people, including children in daycare. He was arrested shortly thereafter for driving a car without a license plate.

Tim chose his date because it was the anniversary of the Waco debacle of 1993. It was, for us, a case of bad timing. The *Time* photographer was dispatched to Oklahoma City instead of Bloomington. It hardly bears mentioning in the context of the bombing and its horrors, but it was a major disappointment for us.

That Friday, Tim was identified as a suspect in the bombing. He'd been sitting in a county jail for a couple nights. They were about to let him go when the feds realized he was there. The place was locked down,

and he was transported to a more secure facility. Tim was made to do a perp walk in an orange jumpsuit, and the press snapped photos. That's the iconic photo that ended up on the cover of the next issue of *Time*: "the face of terror." Our article was inside, a full-page report on the new phenomenon of internet broadcasters — with a photo of Rob Glaser, the founder of RealAudio.

That's just when we hit the wall, financially speaking. We had to pay April's rent, and a bunch of bills, with the last of Xy's student loan money. Ouch. That was unacceptable.

I styled the next episode, the season finale, "The Harvest," as the last episode of *ROX*. I didn't want to return to telemarketing, but it seemed inevitable. I didn't want to halt production, but I couldn't see anyway to go forward. In fact it would be seven years before we resumed production, under very different circumstances, but that's a story for another day. In 1995, it seemed like the project had blown up in my face.

We got some of our best press after we stopped. The *Time* article was a major feather in our cap, of course, but a bit of a disappointment in terms of actual content. Steve Hall went much deeper for a *Star* feature, with cool photos. His tagline: "The hosts of the cable access show *Rox* push the envelope of irreverence, then lick the gummy flap, seal it and deliver it to the world." We got coverage in a number of venues over the following months, the headiest rush coming when *Wired* proclaimed us the "best TV show in America."

I was almost too shell-shocked to appreciate it.

Post-script: As for Tim, he was put to death in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 2001. His execution was facilitated by that same Clinton-Biden crime bill that set him off in the first place.

California Correspondence: Pandemic Postcards From the Edge



COASTAL-SMALL-TOWN LIFE-
IN-CRISIS AFFIRMATIONS
AND **IDIOCIES**; THE COMING
MASK CHIC; RE-READING
ROBINSON JEFFERS AND
REVISITING WERNER HERZOG
IN A TIME OF **PLAGUE-ABETTED**
IDIOCY; NOT LOST, BUT
DEFINITELY CONFUSED, IN
THE SUPERMARKET; **SEAGULL**
BEHAVIOR AND THE COMING
DEPRESSION; BANK OF AMERICA
BETRAYS ITS CALIFORNIA
FOUNDER; PITY THE BI-
PARTISAN PUNDITS IN THIS
TIME OF PERDITION; HELP FOR
CALIFORNIA'S WINE INDUSTRY;
THE **PERTINENT PANDEMIC FILM**
WE SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN

by Jayson Vest

CASA DEL QUARANTINE, UNDISCLOSED LOCATION, CALIFORNIA COAST...

Scenes From a Small Coastal Town.

This time of year, my little surf-cowboy burg is quiet. The psychic cash register bell heralding the price those of us permanent residents pay for having a tranquil town to ourselves for eight months of the year – cha-ching! June-September, when retrograde hordes of entitled baronial agribusiness swine from the San Joaquin Valley surge in from both ends of CA 1, occupying architectural monstrosities they call “vacation homes” as respite from Central Valley heat as oppressive

as their labor practices – is still many weeks away. Champing at the bit as local merchants and hourly workers always are for the annual deluge of tourist dollars, the protracted calm before the storm of a sometimes-verdant spring, quiet streets, empty beaches is usually one to be savored.

And two weeks into lockdown – especially for the few of us active members of the workforce whose paltry (and now suspended) livelihoods are not tied to

local commerce – it still is. I am not one to romanticize small-town life, nor am I one to cast anything but a leery eye on humanity. But for the moment, everyone here, it seems, couldn't be happier making the best of a weird situation and, with a few exceptions, embracing the better angels of their nature in the process.

An anonymous local of means and empathy made a donation to the venerable diner down the street – now open only for carryout and unprecedented delivery service – to cover delivery of one hot meal every other day to anyone in town who falls in the higher-risk categories. The town's only market – a smallish affair recently bought by a young Syrian couple who've toiled at reclaiming it from years of neglect by its previous owners and restocking it with quality goods – is offering free delivery as well. So, too, is the pharmacy. And the couple who own the pizza shop - who often joke that staying open at all in the off-season is less a sound business strategy than a public courtesy - have now found themselves

heroes-in-public-service simply for having marinara, bbq, pesto and peanut-sauce pizzas reliably at the ready.

Though they have no choice but to stay evictions for non-payment of rents for the next 60 days per state and local edicts, at least some landlords and property managers are telling their renters not to worry about

There's nothing to worry about. They're young and they have antibodies.

whatever happens, as we're all in this together. Neighbors are offering store runs and streaming cooked meals to the most vulnerable, for the duration. The local nextdoor.com page's membership and posts have expanded with as much exponential explosion as the dread Covid-19, and reflect a near-universal consensus that everyone should hew to the letter and spirit of every county and state directive issued in this our



time of crisis.

The only flies in the ointment have been some of the aforementioned Valley baronial ag families coming east to occupy their summer homes months early, as well as some AirBnB types of obnoxious cast from Behind the Orange Curtain (aka Orange County, for those unfamiliar with Golden State internal nomenclature) – and bringing with them an appalling contempt for everything from social distancing rules to acknowledgement of reality. One half of our intrepid pizza-slinging couple reported being gobsmacked at fielding and delivering an order for ten pizzas to a steroidal McMansion occupied by an approximate thirty people for whom the six-foot-rule and consideration of the virus as anything but “a hoax” were foreign. (Turned out to be a wedding party relocated from Fresno. Where do you register for Covid-19?) Another local has rented his AirBnB to a similar throng of yahoos, telling his neighbors he could care less about their concerns as “it’s all a conspiracy.”

And then there’s the local merchant who quietly opened up for business for a few hours one night, inviting a coterie of young locals and out-of-town interlopers to help clean the place in exchange for bootleg hospitality, holding that this arrangement made the joint not so much “open” in violation of orders, but just a gathering of “temporary staff” doing maintenance work. There was nothing to worry about, after all, as “they’re young and they have antibodies.”

Many a storefront philosopher I have known, but never a storefront *virologist*. All the young have antibodies, huh? To look at the stats in our county, you’d know that’s not true: Three cases are kids under 17, and another 37 fall in the 18-49 swath. The proprietor *did* fret a bit about the batch

of now-illicit AirBnB invaders who had wandered in and who were handed rags and, uh, “temporarily hired” on the spot. But this local sage of epidemiology and commerce was more concerned about, of all things, the CARES Act: “This is going to fuck everyone who has money and is going to do exactly what you fucking socialists want – put everyone on the dole so no one has to work.”

Noting that no one crossing the threshold of this local one-percenter’s emporium has ever done so seeking edification from its



ownership on diseases, politics or economics, I added that whether it be as a future infamous creator of a vector where there was none; a penalized scofflaw; or as a Fox anchor of Trish Regan’s astute analytic gifts; doubtless an exemplary future beyond mere retail was at hand for this, our new resident Typhoid Merchant.

Remember, Fellow Workers: Just as wage-slavery vs starvation is not a choice, but a threat, so, too, is wage-slavery vs health (personal and public). In the current coronavirus context, never has my One Big Union’s slogan of “An Injury To One Is An Injury To All” been truer.

Who Was That Masked Man?

Our Shah-of-the-Tanning-Bed-Throne, Viscount of Vector Mar-y-Lago and Duke of Delusion announces, as we go to virtual press, that new guidelines regarding masks will shortly be forthcoming. We at *The Ryder*

Reading Robinson Jeffers In This Our Time of Plague

I've taken to either staying up all night until dawn, or getting a conventional good night's sleep and waking up around first light, and either way then walking to the north end of town before heading back towards home, with a stop at a favorite escarpment of earth jutting out into the Pacific for my daily mediation. As the county has put every coastal public parking space off-limits behind some form of barricade to inhibit stupid mass gatherings on the beaches from out-of-towners who should be at home sheltering-in-place – and as just about every business on our *strada principale* is necessarily closed for the duration – truly all that's missing from the streets, especially during morning and evening Magic Hours, and especially for an on old cowboy town, are tumbleweeds blowing through.

There has not been a morning I haven't done my walk literally in the middle

favor subsidies for the rapid production of – and, for anyone who wants one, tax credits for the use of – Orville Peck masks. In every color and variation.

of the street, entirely alone, and blissfully so. I spend a lot of time exhuming our little town's history, and per old Sanford fire maps from different eras (including pre and post various infernos in the 1800s), vintage photos and newspaper accounts, walking the central thoroughfare under these circumstances is when it's easiest to imagine the feel of residency in bygone eras.

Our town started as a shipping point in 1867, with an English sea captain building a long pier for this snug little bay conveniently situated for local Swiss-Italian dairy farmers to ship their wares, as well as for schooners to move passengers by sea up and down the Pacific coast. Where now stands a block



ROBINSON JEFFERS RENDERED
DARK COASTAL FOLK TALES
INTO EPIC NARRATIVE POETRY.
PHOTO BY NAT FARBMAN/THE
LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION VIA
GETTY IMAGES

of shops was, over a century ago, a huge lumber yard and timber operation, complete with a tram system that extended to the pier. In the 1910s, we even had a Japanese-owned and staffed abalone processing plant stood halfway out the pier.

The town was also on multiple stagecoach lines - the overland component of travel local and coastal - and had a bevy of hotels and saloons to accommodate passers-through. One cluster of hospitality structures still standing and operating can claim regularly playing host to everyone from General Arthur MacArthur (daddy to General Doug) to William Randolph Hearst to John Cleese

Remember, Fellow Workers: Just as wage-slavery vs starvation is not a choice, but a threat, so, too, is wage-slavery vs health (personal and public). In the current coronavirus context, never has my One Big Union's slogan of "An Injury To One Is An Injury To All" been truer.

during recurring pass-throughs of the 20th Century. (Hearst and his many celebrity visitors to his castle at San Simeon, a bit farther up the road, always stopped here before completing the final leg of the by-train-from-Los Angeles-to-San Luis Obispo, by-auto-from-SLO-to-the-press-baron's "La Cuesta Encantada".)

These buildings also hold a special place in my heart for having included one of the county's most recalcitrant speakeasies in the 1920's, once being raided three times in the same week by a particularly zealous Prohibition agent. And though they're now blocked and filled in, there are also old bootlegger tunnels running from the

oceanside front street to the venerable tavern on the other side of the avenue. (Almost completely forgotten, our little town was a major transit point for offloading Canadian seaborne liquor from ships to LA-bound trucks run by a major Angeleno bootlegging gang.)

Hike about a mile north on the headlands along the coast and, though overgrown, not far from an old windmill you'll find the trenches that are all that remain of a WWII Aircraft Warning Service lookout post, hastily thrown up after Japanese subs attacked two ships a few miles out just after Pearl Harbor, sending one to the ocean floor.

Hike about a mile south on the beach and you'll be standing in the same spot where, as kids in the twenties and thirties, the youngest members of the only Japanese farming family in town frolicked in the surf, and watched tankers come and go from a long-dismantled Standard Oil pipeline pier that was

the end of the line for black gold suctioned up from Kettleman Hills 85 miles inland and sluiced to the coast.

But it's the fifty-foot high cliff-finger of earth that juts out over and into the ocean where I do my meditation that I love more than any other spot in town - not for any historical significance it has, but just because, like The Dude, it abides. To sit there at dawn or dusk, or under a clear night of California stars, and especially at high tide, when all you can see and here are elements or earth, air and water utterly indifferent to human existence, is sublime.

A hundred and forty-two miles to the north, on the other side of Big Sur and the

southern end of Carmel, sit Tor House and Hawk Tower – stone structures quarried, carved and assembled by one of my heroes, the late Robinson Jeffers. As gifted and brilliant a poet as America has ever seen, Jeffers renderings of dark coastal folk tales into epic narrative poetry earned him, among other things, an Ansel Adams portrait on the cover of *Time* in 1932, and a place as hardboiled crime fiction godfather Dashiell Hammett’s favorite storyteller. Jeffers’ deep appreciation of the primordial California coast also produced not just passionate poems in celebration and defense of nature, but cogitations that led him to craft a quasi-philosophical anti-religion he called Inhumanism – essentially a celebration of nature’s insouciant primacy over humanity’s relative triviality and inevitable extinction. Or, as he put it,

...a shifting of emphasis from man to not-man; the rejection of human solipsism and recognition of the transhuman magnificence. It seems time that our race begin to think as an adult does, rather than like an egocentric baby or insane person. This manner of thought and feeling is neither misanthropic nor pessimist, though two or three people have said so and may again. It involves no falsehood, and is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times; it has objective

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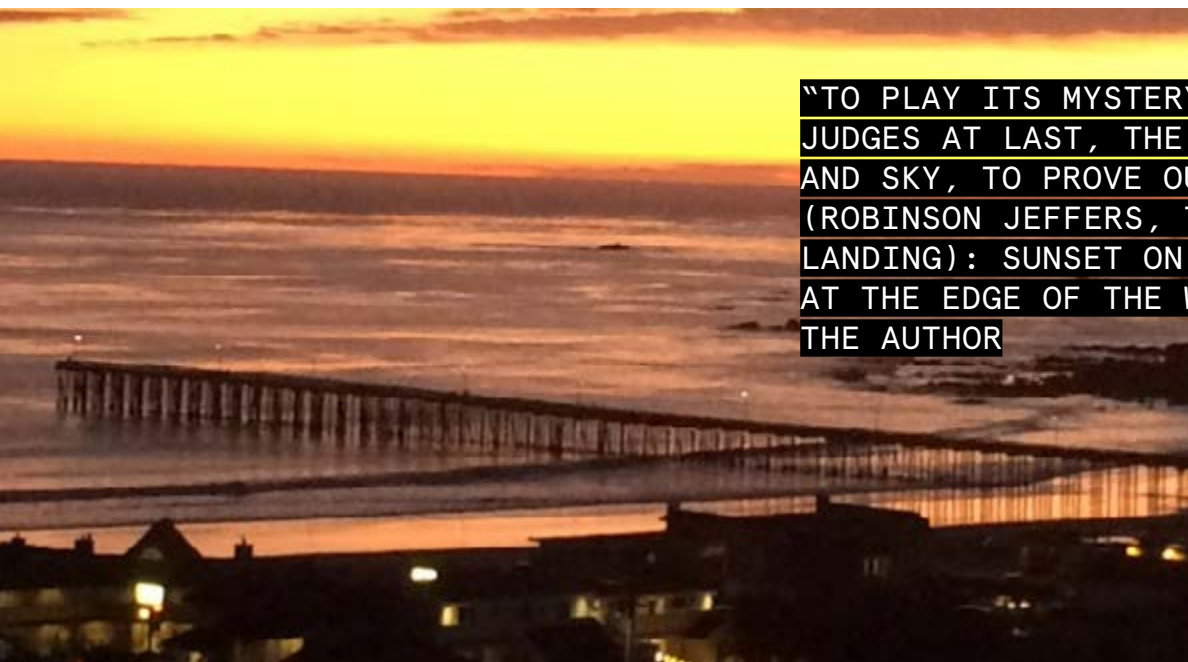
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"TO PLAY ITS MYSTERY BEFORE STRICT
JUDGES AT LAST, THE FINAL OCEAN
AND SKY, TO PROVE OUR NATURE..."
(ROBINSON JEFFERS, THURSO'S
LANDING): SUNSET ON PANDEMIC'S EVE
AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD / PHOTO BY
THE AUTHOR

truth and human value. It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate, and envy. It neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes; but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty.

Jeffers fell into national literary disfavor not long after World War II, having chosen to publish unrepentantly anti-war poems written during the war that he would neither revise nor withhold. But Jeffers still stands as a spiritual progenitor of modern environmentalism in and out of California – it's no coincidence that the first book published by the California-founded Sierra Club was a collection of stunning photos by an A-Team of California photographers like Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Steve Crouch and Phillip Hyde, entitled *Not Man Apart: Photographs of the Big Sur Coast, Lines by Robinson Jeffers* – and if one's of the mind to, in the best Buddhist sense, make friends with things like pandemics and other natural disasters, no time like the present to get acquainted with the author of such verses as "Rock and Hawk":

*Here is a symbol in which
Many high tragic thoughts
Watch their own eyes.*

*This gray rock, standing tall
On the headland, where the seawind
Lets no tree grow.*

*Earthquake proved, and signed
By ages of storms: on its peak
A falcon has perched*

*I think, here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,*

*But this: bright power, dark peace;
Fierce consciousness joined with final
Disinterestedness;*

*Life with calm death; the falcon's
Realist eyes and act
Married to the massive*

*Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down
Nor success make proud.*

Watching the Dark Cinematic Wit and Whimsy of Werner Herzog In This Our Time of Plague.

Hardly shocking that film writers are revisiting and recommending the likes of *Outbreak*, *Contagion*, *The Andromeda Strain*, all three adaptations of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (I endorse *The Omega Man*, as watching Charlton Heston chew the location-shot scenery of a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles and make out with an Afrocentric sister is a hoot), Netflix's well-timed *Pandemic* series, *The Thing*, *93 Days*, the more cerebral *The Seventh Seal* and, of course every zombie-type film and franchise ever made.

But if there's one fictive film apologue that perfectly captures what's going on right now, it's German auteur Werner Herzog's 1979 *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. Eschewing strict remake of the 1922 F.W. Murnau classic for loose homage and recasting characters to suit his idiosyncrasies, in Herzog's *Nosferatu*, Count Dracula's primary function isn't to drain damsels of their blood (though he does that too), but rather to serve as field marshal to an army of 10,000 plague-carrying rats to unleash on Western Europe from the German port town of Wismar.

What unspools over 107 minutes is, among other things, a beautifully-shot, darkly comic allegory exploring how base bourgeoisie materialism, complacent citizenship in tragicomic denial, incompetent leadership, and apotheotic decadence fall like dominoes to leave Wismar all but descended into Bruegelian pastiche,



NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT
TO WATCH WERNER HERZOG'S
NOSFERATU: A BEAUTIFULLY-
SHOT, DARKLY COMIC ALLEGORY OF
BASE BOURGEOISE MATERIALISM,
COMPLACENT CITIZENSHIP
IN TRAGICOMIC DENIAL, AND
INCOMPETENT LEADERSHIP.

with Dracula's minions riding forth to prepare other cities for the coming plague.

I vividly remember when I and many others saw Herzog's *Nosferatu*, all probably for the first time, on a Ryder night at Bear's in the early 90s. The audience couldn't have been more in sync with Herzog's sensibilities, marveling at the shots and cracking up at things like Herzog's juxtaposition of a subdued, emo-like Dracula as played by uber-weirdo Klaus Kinski channeling Max Schreck, nimbly prancing with coffins through Wismar's town square with Wagner playing in the background; townspeople totally apathetic to streams of rats disembarking from the *Demeter*; the town fathers belatedly putting two and two together (hmmm...rats...lots of sudden death...plague?); and Bruno Ganz's re-imagined Harker's priceless expressions as he first hears his master staked, and then improbably turns the tables on Van Helsing with a move like something out of a Zimbardo or Milgram's experiment.

The film is available on various streaming services (all of which are offering various free trials per current circumstances) in both German and English. There's a free bootleg in German you can find on YouTube, but its quality does such a disservice to the film it's not worth the price of free. But for those either looking for a preview of sorts, or who just want one good, brief, visual hit, there are YouTube

clips of the iconic town square *dance macabre* / feast-of-death scene that was exactly what I thought of two weeks ago when I beheld California's beaches suddenly clogged with knots of people none-too-swift about social distancing.

Herzog's an artist and thinker very much in the Jeffers mold, and given current circumstances – and lest he be known only to kids as the baddie in *The Mandalorian* - it's also worth revisiting or checking out his documentaries like *Encounters at the End of World*, *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World* and *Grizzly Man*. Herzog's voice is such that he could read the phone book and you'd be rapt, but his by-turns-earnestly-droll, earnestly-empathetic, matter-of-fact, deadpan delivery in any of the languages he speaks, when in concert with images, is priceless, and couldn't be more appropriate to the moment.

As he considers film footage recovered in the Alaskan wilderness of the marauding mammal that will shortly kill grizzly-obsessed, Thoreau-esque Timothy Treadwell and his girlfriend Amie Huguenard, Herzog could just as easily be Jeffers: "What haunts me," he confides, "is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed, I discover no kinship, no understanding, no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me, there is no such thing as a secret world of bears." Either Jeffers or Herzog could say the same of the equally-fascinating, visually-arresting and potentially deadly world of germs found in nature's elements, too...which is exactly what Herzog does in a deft moment in *Encounters at the End of the World*. In one scene he trains his camera on Antarctic marine biologist Sam Bowser and his team watching *THEM!* after a dive under the ice to retrieve microscopic cellular samples that might be the femme fatales of microbiology:

[Voice from *THEM!* as giant radioactive ants attack]: "I tell you, gentlemen, science is agreed that unless something is done and done quickly, man as a dominant species of life on earth could be extinct within a year."

Herzog: Sam Bowser likes to show doomsday science fiction films to the researchers. Many of them express grave doubts about our long-range presence on this planet. Nature, they predict, will regulate us.

[Voice from *THEM!*]: "Stay in your homes. I repeat, stay in your homes. Your personal safety, the safety of the entire city, depends upon your full cooperation with the military authorities. Yes cities, nations even civilization itself, threatened with annihilation..."

A virus, of course, need never mutate into anything larger than itself to be globally fatal. And in concert with just a few degrees rise of the global mercury, all the more so. (Herzog's interviews with a guy who studies Antarctic iceberg cleavings and meltings, and what they mean for global ocean rise, is a poignant reminder, complementing other observations from Bowers, as to just how brutally unyielding the ocean and everything in it is to human existence.) Well, as Jeffers once wrote, "Shine, Perishing Republic" ...

On the other hand, if there's ever been anything more terrifying and intractable to manage than fatal pandemic germs and global warming, doubtless it would be Klaus Kinski. For a dose of Herzogian comic relief, coronavirus cinephiles are advised to check out Herzog's *My Best Fiend*. If neither Herzog's recollections nor Kinski's insanity captured in outtakes and other film ephemera doesn't have you laughing with incredulity, like the Trumpian figure of Aguirre on the raft at the end of *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, you're on your own, good luck.

I Can No Longer Shop Happily.

Apologies to The Clash for cadging that line, but while I can find bemusement in my time-of-crisis forages, there's certainly no joy to be found in this-the-time-of-collective-neuroses-of-consumers.

Compared to the nearby Albertson's or Ralph's (yes, there *is* one around here), our down-the-1, half-of-a-two-store-local-chain is a smaller affair; no danger of getting lost in the supermarket. But disoriented based on what locust-like descents of item-specific shoppers do by way of denuding shelves?

The bread aisle had been pillaged, with the rice and pasta half-aisle not far behind. Empty boxes of bath tissue and paper towels were piled in disarray. In the meat cases, slabs of pork ribs stood in as understudies for absent iterations of chickens.

Yes. I made it a point early in the coronavirus interregnum (when our now hot-zone of a county had a zero-to-single-digit number of cases – so long ago, it seems!) to proceed apace an hour before close over several nights - both to minimize contact and contently pick over the remnants. (The best? The freshest? The Jedi needs not these things.)

The first night I went, the staff looked like they'd come off a day's work as Agincourt extras in Branagh's *Henry V*, and described what the nickelodeon in my head saw as Benny Hill-like undercranked reel after reel of restocking, restocking, restocking – all successfully, except on the toilet paper shelves. "People started to get kind of nasty, especially when we started putting the signs up," a pal who works there told me, gesturing to a hastily-scrawled sign appended to a diminished tower of generic paper towels asking patrons to limit their

purchases to only truly necessary amounts. "It's the toilet paper I don't get. I just don't understand it."

Neither did I – but, I thought, as I perambulated through the aisles, even if it owed more to the intrepid staff's relentless restocking, the reassuring presence of consumables elsewhere seemed to telegraph that relative sanity reigned. Didn't take long for that illusion to disappear in a sneeze. The next day, the second Covid-19 case in the county was announced; the governor also

issued a strongly-worded voluntary statewide advisory about staying home and shutting down. Minutes later began a days-long onslaught that by close of business that night had certain aisles of

North Morro Bay's neighborhood grocery channeling Cold War-era cousins of Soviet provenance.

When I arrived just before close that night, the bread aisle had been pillaged, with the rice and pasta half-aisle not far behind. Empty boxes of bath tissue and paper towels were piled in disarray. In the meat cases, slabs of pork ribs stood in as understudies for absent iterations of chickens. The next night, the entirety of case-ready meat was picked clean - save a lonely-looking cluster of Irish sausages and an even lonelier linguica. Though the fresh produce section wasn't entirely harvested, all that remained of frozen vegetables were two frosty bags of Asian medleys. And wherever canned goods go when raptured – old fallout shelters returned to service? bunkers and camper shelves of preppers hoping for full-on apocalyptic validation? – there they must have went. (I found the literal last cans – five

of tuna, four of Chef Boyardee lasagna – spared only because they were so far back on low shelves.)

Conversations people (strangers, mostly) would fall into with each other seemed to echo a sort of magnetic attraction between the like-minded. Of those I talked with on each night, all save one marveled with me at the madness of crowds. (One was a fellow pre-Bernie socialist of X'er vintage and Berkeley origins; another was a teenager from a local farm. Should either ever choose to run for anything, they'll have my vote.)

I think it was on night three I ran into two guys, friends down from the Bay Area who worked in tech, one of whom was mildly freaking out about a near-future bereft of Charmin.

"Go grab some coffee filters – still plenty left," I said, gesturing down the aisle.

He looked at me quizzically for about a quarter-minute before his eyes went wide with understanding. "Coffee filters...my God, that's brilliant!" he said. But then his countenance darkened with concern. "But what'll we do if we run out and don't have enough for coffee, too?"

"Bra cups will work just fine. Lace is best for pour-over cones and even machines. Don't even need a cone for a mug if it's a padded cup, but you'll need to wring it out a bit. T-shirt and socks will work, too. Cheesecloth, or any burlap-type bag material."

It took a second or two for all the images and notions to click, but again eyes lit up. "How do you know this stuff?" one asked.

"Dude, this isn't rocket science, but look, if you've ever spent any time in the bush under any circumstances, or in a refugee or internally-displaced persons camp, or in a disaster zone, you know going in everyone's going to find themselves bereft

of perfect-match paper products, so you multipurpose what you've got - paper, cloth, everything else," I said. "I mean, look, in those circumstances, the most important thing is that you've got good latrine systems dug and maintained, and that there's enough water for everyone; worst comes to worst, you either use a rag or your hand and wash accordingly."

The faces they made also made it clear these were not people with whom to be necessarily confined to restricted spaces with finite resources. "I dunno, man, it's just like, there's something I just find unsettling about not having toilet paper, about not knowing if it's going to be there," one said. I asked if either of them had spent time in Bolinas, the funky Shangri-la surf town in West Marin where you either have to be incredibly rich or incredibly poor to live. They nodded excitedly.

"There are people up there, rich and poor alike, who, to spare their septic systems, wipe their asses with just about anything, put what they use in a plastic trash bag, and dispose of accordingly," I said. "I mean, look, man, it's not like what's happening right now is taking critical utility systems down. You've got running water. Even if you don't have a bidet or wouldn't recognize one, you can also just step in the shower and wash your ass."

If there's ever been anything more terrifying and intractable to manage than fatal pandemic germs and global warming, doubtless it would be Klaus Kinski.

They didn't much like that thought, either. Come Drought in the Age of Corona, maybe dead oak shavings from Paso's Justin Winery – whose creepy, aquifer-hording owners the Resnicks cavalierly decimated groves of live oaks on their vineyard spread a couple years back - for them and their ilk.

Minor Reflections of Events To Date, Dark Portents of Things to Come.

Not quite as vivid as a black-winged gull with a broken back, but on this, my penultimate morning walk before deadline through the empty old main drag, a flock of hefty seagulls were kicking up one hell of a kerfuffle, wings a' flappin, gullets a' screechin', talons bearing down all on another sea-rat-with-wings who was fighting back like a berserker before dispersing the avian mob. The cause of the ruckus? The mobbed gull had a slice of sourdough, and no one in the squadron wanted to share.

Considerations of Great Depression flicks and scribbles to come next month (we're pretty good in the department, California is), but if you feel like getting ahead of one curve while you're home flattening another, go ahead and cue up, say, *Sullivan's Travels*, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime* and - if only for the "Remember My Forgotten Man" number - *Gold Diggers of 1933*. While the Pandemic Express will eventually run out of steam, passengers aplenty will find themselves all aboard for the loooong train--in cars and clicks of stationmasters' stopwatches--that is the New Depression Express. Hell, maybe you should give *Snowpiercer* another watch, too.



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Bank of America: You'll Get a Month and Like It!

One would have hoped that per its humble Golden State origins before it became the multinational monolith of rapacity and evil it is now, the Bank of America – once a longstanding point of California pride for having been started and initially patronized by San Francisco's Italian immigrant community as the Bank of Italy–would, in honor of its roots in innovatively serving the hardworking-but-marginalized-by-circumstances--have gladly accepted our Governor Newsom's invitation to join US's other four largest banks from putting the screws to their California mortgage-holding clients for at least three months.

But no. Only *one* month for those in hock to BoA! You'd think that along with JP Morgan Chase, CitiBank, US Bank and Wells Fargo, BoA would appreciate that anyone who lived through 2008 still has a bad taste in their mouth about the banks' role as economy-crippler twice over, first as a key sets of hands that maintained the ticking dirty time-bomb that was mortgage-backed securities, and then again as one of the laxly-overseen beneficiaries of a horribly-executed bailout. Indeed, for BoA, between those and other '08 meltdown-related maladies *vis a vis* its Countrywide and Merrill Lynch acquisitions (including manipulating minority borrowers into unnecessary sub-prime loans and secretly paying Merrill execs who helped put the country in dire straits billions in bonuses); and, more recently, defrauding public institutions in bond sales and charging customers for services they never got; you'd think BoA would cotton to any opportunity

to take a little stink off itself.

But the BoA of today is a long, long ways away from its forebearer of old. Back then, ubiquitous ads for its predecessor Bank of Italy in California newspapers truthfully sold the bank as a democratic egalitarian branch of the American civic tree of life. "Characteristic of the Bank of Italy: Democratic as the Constitution," the display ads always commenced, with a Liberty Bell and a Constitution left of the script. "This Bank prides itself on expressing the true spirit of democracy. The so-called 'common people' have made this institution and therefore it will ever remain the servitor of those same people."

When Bank of America impresario A.P. Giannini expanded into Los Angeles from San Francisco in 1913, he was unabashed about being a lender to the little guy. "We consider the wage-earner or small business man who deposits his savings regularly, no matter how small the amount may be, to be the most valuable client our bank can have." he told the Los Angeles Examiner. The BoA of today is a long, long ways away from its forebearer of old.

Hell, when Bank impresario A.P. Giannini started expanding into Los Angeles, he was unabashed about being a lender to the little guy. "We consider the wage-earner or small business man who deposits his savings regularly, no matter how small the amount may be, to be the most valuable client our bank can have." he told the Los Angeles *Examiner* in August of 1913. "We have money to loan at all times to the man who wishes to build on property that he owns. We have no money for speculators, however."

Of course, this was from a guy who knew

you had to move fast to help out the hardest hit of the lowest of the low in a time of extraordinary crisis. After San Francisco and environs stopped shaking but only started burning on April 18, 1906, Gianinni walked and hitchhiked the 17 miles from his San Mateo digs to crumbled, burning Baghdad-by-the-Bay with one purpose: Secure his customers' assets so there would be capital available to start rebuilding pronto.

Sneaking the entirety of the bank's cash and gold out of SF under the noses of looters by using garbage wagons and making his Peninsula home the temporary vault, while every other SF banker was wringing his hands over disastrous losses, on April 28, 1906, there at the corner of Van Ness and Lombard was ol' A.P., behind a makeshift desk of two barrels and a board, making back-of-the-envelope handshake loans and taking vest-pocket deposits, laying the financial foundation for SF's recovery. Over the next few months Giannini even stopped waiting for shattered workingmen to come to him, but randomly went up to them in the streets and proffered loans on the spot.

But Giannini liked people who both built and appreciatively used things like homes, schools, roads and bridges. No surprise that when the nascent Golden Gate Bridge District couldn't find a taker for its bonds

in 1932 during one of the Great Depression's darkest hours, Giannini's BoA stepped up. No surprise that Giannini was an ardent New Dealer as well, given the prong of FDR's effort that put facilitating private investment into public works to good effect. Also not a surprise that as California's wine industry emerged from one national nightmare (Prohibition) into another (the Depression), Giannini's financing jump-started one of the hardest-working agricultural industries this side of the Mississippi.

It's not news that Brian Moynihan ain't no A.P. Giannini – more than a few years back Bernie put Moynihan's BoA at the top of a corporate chicanery and tax artful-dodger list – but in the age of the United States of Orange Man, when no eschewal of optics or humanity for crass gestures, active or passive, is too brazen, Bank of America couldn't be more aptly named. So add to your Coronavirus Playlist the Mojo Nixon and Skid Roper classic "I Hate Banks" (timeless, the lines "lend me a nickel and lend me a dime / repossess my house any old time" and "somethin' smells mighty rank / we must be near a stinky bank"), and crank it up BoA's honor. While Mojo "ain't too fond of the phone company, neither," at least our business-as-usual price gouging telecom companies are giving their customers 30 more days of stays than BoA is its real estate serfs.



THE OLD MACARTHUR/HEARST/JOHN
CLEESE WAYSTATION AND 20'S ERA
SPEAKEASY / PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

Let Them Drink Cab Whilst They Pet Their Home Workstations – Everybody Can Do That, Right?

Indispensable as *the New York Times* is; force for good that it is; employ some friends of mine as it does; and enjoy reading much of it as I do; the fact remains that the paper is fundamentally of, by, and for the youthful and/or well-heeled. While its age and financial demographics are proud selling points for the paper (it touts the fact, as advertiser catnip, that 60% of its US audience is “made up of Gen Z and Millennial readers,” and that its “digital affluent

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KINSHIP, NO
UNDERSTANDING,
NO MERCY.
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OVERWHELMING
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visitors wield over \$1 trillion in total buying power” – their bold, by the way, not mine),

manifest in prose from their scribes, it can be obnoxious and off-putting.

Regardless of their age, politics or paychecks, this is particularly true of almost every *Times* columnist, and is unsurprisingly amplified when they decide to collaborate, effectively converting mere column inches into a more acute barometer of the banal than usual. Such would be the Gail Collins/Bret Stephens recurrence-in-insipidity known as “The Conversation,” specifically its March 24, 2020 installment, in which Stephens – after doing a little preening-as-handwringing in response to Collins’ logrolling about his latest regular column – sadly reports on life under Covid-19 restrictions:



Bret: ...On Friday, I went out to get a bottle of white wine for dinner but my friendly neighborhood liquor store was closed. (Fortunately it still delivers.)

Gail: Don't know if I could get through this without wine. Some people hoard toilet paper; we're hoarding cabernet.

Well, here's to the problems of the privileged pundit class (wings right and left), with my duo of Mason jars and break-glass-in-case-of-absolute-emergency-Carlo Rossi. (Clink.) Get on the horn down to my pal Linda Poteat's neighborhood liquor

Even a bottle of Two Buck Chuck or a Sierra Nevada tall boy is looking like an extravagance right now. The best I've been able to do since this started is a kind of low-rent variation on Pimm's Cup, dumping blackberries and slices of local Meyer lemons, key limes and cucumbers into a pint glass with cans of black cherry hard seltzer a pal left on my porch.

store in DC, Gail! [editor's note: see our interview with Linda, page 12] I don't know that I'd be spending my food stamp money on cab if buying hooch courtesy the CalFresh EBT card was an option, but I *do* know that for those of us in the category of "already-economically-insecure-and-uncertain-who-just-got-moreso" - and for our recent-arrival comrades in the category of "newly-economically-uncertain-and-insecure" - even a bottle of Two Buck Chuck or a Sierra Nevada tall boy is looking like an extravagance right now. The best I've been able to do since this started is a kind of low-rent variation on Pimm's Cup, dumping blackberries and slices of local Meyer lemons, key limes and cucumbers into a pint glass with cans of black cherry hard seltzer

a pal left on my porch standing in for the Pimm's.

To be fair to Collins and Stephens, they *did* actually hash out some good ideas, in concept and practice, for coronavirus stimulus. But if they're so damned concerned about their buttery chardonnays and cab francs, they least they could do is devote a column to, in one of the next relief bills (yes, Virginia, there will be more to come), **getting Washington to either incentivize or compel every state to allow for the unfettered interstate shipment of wine.** Thanks to Caudillo Naranja, winemakers over the hill

in Paso Robles (yeoman small business folk of the land, mostly, as opposed to the financially elite, estate-dwelling vintners you might have in your mind's eye when you think "California wine country") have taken multiple shellackings in recent years as collateral damage in government shutdowns and trade wars. And winemakers

elsewhere in the state have also had to contend with the devastation of corporately-induced conflagrations. (I still favor trying Pacific Gas & Electric's high command for its most recent crimes against humanity and nature.) While fermenting, brewing and distilling can continue apace under statewide restrictions, tasting rooms and the like are down - and with a number of California's dispo-deliverers switching production from swill to sanitizers with more alacrity and effectiveness than Detroit is from autos to ventilators, they've earned a much-overdue break interstate commerce-wise, and letting small-to-medium-case producers ship good vino, especially given what lies ahead, would be in everyone's best interest. Pinot to the People, we say!

Other Viewing Notes: Doesn't This Seem Kinda Familiar?

Elsewhere in our pages, Linda Poteat notes the challenge of changing certain simple behaviors in a pandemic – specifically, getting Africans to don personal protective gear when tending to their dead during Ebola outbreaks, something that makes a helluva difference in cutting down on transmission.

The guy who figured out that particular practice out many years ago is a San Francisco Bay Area and international epidemiology superstar – Dr Don Francis, who's worked every form of viral nastiness from Ebola, Hepatitis B and HIV / AIDS over nearly fifty years. While Herzog's *Nosferatu* might be the best fictional metaphor for the news of the day, if you want to see a dramatization that really isn't a dramatization of how a real-life, inscrutable, slow-moving virus initially inches along when it might be slowed or stopped but isn't – by, in unequal parts, a prejudiced and myopic right-wing Presidential administration, a group of vulnerable citizens who don't want to make a simple changes to certain behaviors, and swaths of the general public that believe there's no way it could happen to them - and then suddenly starts gathering momentum, with people realizing it can, in fact, happen to them, and initially unconstructively overacting as it becomes a decades-long pandemic that kills millions...well, you're in for a damn good screening, available via Amazon Prime.

I've been telling people since early March who either remember it well (we of the slouching-towards-"OK, Boomer!" hood X'ers on up), or have never heard of it as they were still in diapers or twinkling-eye glints back then that, as far as virus movies set in modern times go, far more appropriate to the moment than thriller race-against-time or post-apocalyptic survival fare is *And*

The Band Played On. It's a superlative 1993 HBO adaptation of the late *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Randy Shilts *magnum opus* of investigative reporting on the beginnings and rise of the AIDS pandemic.

In addition to hewing remarkably close (if not at times, verbatim) to actual exchanges and events, the film also boasts a stunning array of talent, with Matthew Modine doing a spot-on rendering of Francis in his all his outraged outspokenness; and exceptional turns by everyone from Lily Tomlin, Saul Rubinek, Charles Martin Smith, Richard Masur and Richard Jenkins playing the real-life public health professionals fighting battles against microbes, bureaucracies, politicians, fellow scientists and vulnerable populations to marshal an effective response. Richard Gere, Steven Martin, Angelica Houston and Swoosie Kurtz also show up in turns that, were there an Emmy for Best Maximization of Minimal Screen Time, would have seen them all as contenders.

But Modine's turn aside and everyone else's ensemble acquittals, also exceptional are two fine actors playing different sides of the same San Francisco gay / AIDS activism coin: a young and skinny Donal Logue as activist Bobbi Campbell, who tried to balance HIV / AIDS activism with unabashed defense of unencumbered sexual freedoms; and, in his American breakthrough role, way-pre-Magneto-and-Gandalf Ian McKellan as San Francisco-based gay Democratic Congressional staffer Bill Kraus, a Harvey Milk protégé struggling with the Sisyphean tasks of securing greater political support for more crisis research and medical funding in Washington while arguing for more necessarily restrained sexual practices in San Francisco's gay community. (A reminder that viruses don't discriminate: Despite

their differences, both men – and Shilts as well - fell victim to the disease, which, about 40 years after it rode in on a pale horse, has killed over 30 million people worldwide.)

It's a great film, though it echoes a critical flaw in Shilts's book that's a cautionary tale in doing what book editors and publishers pressure authors to do with an eye towards sales. Though the myth of AIDS "Patient Zero" French-Canadian flight attendant Gaetan Dugas has been effectively debunked, because Shilts' publishing overlords saw the jazzed-up notion of a borderline sociopathic, single-source vector far more exciting than Dugas' more prosaic reality, they successfully got Shilts to render Dugas as such, and while the film is considerably more restrained on this score, viewers should be mindful of the Dugas reality, well-documented elsewhere.

Shilts, of course, also did some fine work on the struggles of gays and lesbians in the military, *Conduct Unbecoming*. But for those interested in considering the arc of modern infectious disease that covers some of the same ground and characters as *And The*

Band Played On, Laurie Garrett's 1994 *The Coming Plague* and 2014's *Ebola: Story of an Outbreak*, are engaging and informative reads. But

before you dive into any of those, watch *And the Band Played On* first. Especially for what has already transpired and for what lies ahead, corona-wise, the scene where Modine-as-Francis calls out blood bank executives for not wanting to spend money on test kits to screen the US blood supply for HIV / AIDS will probably forever be seared in your memory.

Until next month, from the Edge of the Bear Flag Republic,
--JV

[editor's note: Jason Vest is *The Ryder's* West Coast contributing editor, and like many freelance writers everywhere this past month, has seen virtually all paying work, real or potential, temporarily disappear. Though he'll have a Patreon up soon for his forthcoming e-zine/print quarterly project, any Ryder readers who want to support Jason's work, for this magazine or in general, are encouraged to send contributions to either Jason-Vest-8 via Venmo, or BywaterLLC@gmail.com via PayPal.]



**MATTHEW MODINE PLAYS
DR. DON FRANCIS IN *AND
THE BAND PLAYED ON***

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