

# Dim Tidings of Political Disconnect

The insertion of false narratives is a powerful way to control populations, a technique that today's American Right has perfected in persuading much of the population that global warming is a hoax and "the market's invisible hand" is real, a dilemma of the human condition addressed by poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

As we draw near to the Winter Solstice and the days shorten, one's thoughts are drawn inward. Bright lights, fragrant spices and sprigs of evergreen are appropriated to induce one back into the eros of life. Otherwise, daylight-bereft, in the half-light between the land of the living and the domain of the shades of memory, one can become stranded in impersonal despair or toxic nostalgia.

Cultures, throughout human history, have believed the realms of the living and the realms of spirits are drawn near to each other during Fall and Early Winter. Modern humankind dismisses the notion, yet, within, we feel unease. Enter: the manic compensations of the consumer state – the compulsion to avoid reflection by constant motion and contrived bedazzlement – the proffering of kitsch rather than the bestowing of meaning.

Personally, I would not be the least bit offended by manger scenes in public spaces, if equal space would be allotted to other religious sects. For example, let's say naked, dancing, cavorting pagans enacting rituals involving the Winter Solstice.

I'm not troubled by the mythology of others. It would be propitious to our soul-starved, public space-bereft culture to possess vivid agoras offering eros and a glimpse of salvation. I would be inclined to engaged in more frequent shopping outings if such a social milieu was extant.

Somehow, shuffling around the mall, chewing on an over-sized Cinnabon, does not serve as a balm to my soul.

Enmeshed, as we are, in the meta-storyline of a nearly all-encompassing media hologram, whether spun by the mainstream media or when slogging through a psychologically miasmatic swamp of FaceBook postings, tweets and text messages, it is become increasingly difficult to listen to silence to allow one's innate nature to rise from one's vital center to the fore of one's being.

Therefore, the criteria of the imagination becomes concretized. For example, in

the insular, cracked brain cosmology of febrile, media fantasies, there exists something called a War on Christmas, fought, with Weapons of Mass Destruction supplied by Syria on the chimerical landscape of a Financial Cliff – a struggle being waged, exclusively, in the minds of those who believe in a phantasmal “Invisible Hand of the Free Market” – but who deny the decades of scrupulously gathered data and rigorously proofed evidence of global Climate Change

To subject oneself to the dim, collective imaginings of the current day political and media culture is to navigate through realms of hackneyed fantasy – to make one’s way through storylines that are not only estranged from the daily exigencies of everyday life of the citizenry that they are tasked to serve, but are wholly removed from the rhythms and resonances of life on earth itself.

Throughout the ages, groups of elitists – generally self-serving – have dictated the criteria of the lives of the multitudes. One of the most potent means of maintaining power is to create the stories that dwell within the individual, as palpably present as any living thing, and often as deleterious as a parasite.

This is why it is imperative for an individual to create and tell his/her unique tale. History bears witness to the results of humankind’s collective refusal: a howling hellscape of war and economic exploitation. Any nitwit can seek happiness, and, generally, does. But it requires a cultivated courage of the heart to create comedy and beauty out of the material of constant sorrow.

Do not shrink from the task of dwelling in the truth of your unique being and living your way into the attendant tales spun by your awakened heart. There exist no neutral ground in the realm of soul-making. To demure from your calling – to cede your own power to the forces of unreasonable power – is the stuff of tragedy.

If the dead in their graves could speak as a chorus, they would admonish the living: Resist. Create. Let no other living thing define how you live out your days.

First start with an honest awareness of the world that exists around you, and the factors that create the criteria that you exist in, day by day. Then, in ways large and small, work to subvert the present order. Engage in an activism of your choice i.e., political, artistic, and social. That should keep you busy for a while.

In reality, the “Financial Cliff” is the abyss that yawns before the human soul regarding late capitalism in general. To proceed forward, speed unchecked and common sense unheeded, into the present paradigm, the human race careens, closer and closer, toward the abyss engendered by perpetual war, exploitation, and

ecocide.

Withal, there are austerity cuts that would prove propitious. For example, to cut off the parasites of the One Percent from the means to continue the carnage resultant from the crime spree known as so-called free-market capitalism.

If there was such a thing as a Google Map of the soul, and if you were to perform a search for the term "free market," its location would be revealed to be an array of shoddy structures, an architecture of nada e.g., payday loan outlets, jack shacks, Wall Street firms, meth labs and crack houses, K Street Lobby operations, pawn shops, Chick-Fil-A, Papa John's Pizza and Cracker Barrel establishments tottering on the precipice of a howling chasm with a Climate Change-strengthened hurricane approaching.

We can use drastic austerity measures in the area of greenhouse gases, media consolidation, Pentagon budgets, CEO salaries and bonuses, deforestation, overfishing of the world's oceans, junk food production and the concomitant expansion of the hindquarters of American consumers.

Otherwise, nature introduces eon's old austerity measures. Recently, Sandy dropped by the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions for a little meet-and-greet. The conversation, between humankind and catastrophic natural phenomenon, tends to be a bit one-sided. Accordingly, Sandy delivered a simple message: Continue on your present path and your trip's itinerary will involve a very short excursion in the present direction and then a long, uncomfortable journey downward.

A few years back, my wife and I were driving through south Texas, through a sprawling section of Big Agra cattle ranches, livestock holding pens and massive slaughter houses – mechanized killing zones that bore the quaint name, "cattle country." In reality, the area was an archipelago of misery, cruelty and death.

The reek of curdled blood, dung, urine, and mortal terror was as thick as the seething clouds of proliferate black flies scudding the air of the area; their impact-exploded carcasses stippled our car windshield in a hideous, greasy smear of insectile exoskeletons and entrails. Have you heard this old joke? What is the last thing an insect sees when it collides with a windshield? Its asshole.

Regarding Climate Chaos, we, as a culture, have placed our own heads, collectively, in a rectal blindfold of self-deception. The mass production and consumption of animal flesh is the largest single factor in the creation of the rise of atmospheric greenhouse gasses responsible for climate chaos such as super-storm Sandy.

As I listen to climate change deniers, I feel like my brain is passing through

some sort of parallel dimension comprised of interlinking rectal cavities. In short, the destruction of the ecosystem, and the degraded and declining criteria of our lives is the fate we have sown for ourselves, because, as a people, we continue to allow our lives to be ruled by the caprice of an infestation of fly-brained, elitist, rectal sphincters on two legs.

The Soul of the World's tears are endless. And that is a fortunate thing. Because if the weeping ever ceased – the rage of all things wounded would rise. There are times, when I become one with my wounded heart, my soul snarls like an injured animal. The origin and key to the lexicon of my fury is as follows:

Though I live and breathe, I was beaten to death as a child devoured in the all-encompassing flames of my father's napalm rage. At dinner, flickering on the screen of our portable, black-and-white television, I glimpsed the jungles of Southeast Asia being immolated by the U.S. military. My father would shout at the set, "People – they are so fucking stupid! So fucking stupid! And, boy, if you don't shape up and get good grades, so you can hide out in college, they will send you to those jungles of death. Hear me, boy?"

"You told me you signed up for the AirBorne when you were seventeen, Dad. Were your grades that bad?"

"I'll knock that smart mouth of yours into next week, boy."

"Be sure to get my ears too So that, next week, they will be able to hear an answer to my question."

"I warned you, smart ass." And the blows rained down of me.

Periodically, I have had dreams wherein I came upon two blonde children, brother and sister, who I was informed by an unseen narrator, died in a fire in 1965. In the dreams, I seek to comfort them to bestow a healing balm on their pain and confusion. On our last encounter, my wife and I embraced them, and our beings melded together, as the four of us dissolved into the arms of eternity seemingly, the devouring flames of personal happenstance had been transformed into a warming hearth of a universal and deathless love.

"So all things hobble together for the only possible." ,Samuel Beckett, from his novel, Murphy

It is impossible to go it alone. Wounded, awkward, gripped by fears of our feebleness all who live are all maimed and hobbled in some way. Yet our incompleteness saves us from the fate of sterile perfection, from a heart-negating completeness. Because of my incomplete nature, I need your collaboration. Because of my unsure gait, I need your assistance, so I do not

fall.

Providence has made me ugly so that I can endure being constantly wounded by beauty. I stumble over my thick tongue and you help me to the farther shore of my sentence. More and more, I find that I need to rest and take refuge within your song of bitter grace.

If my heart had not been shattered into ten thousand shards, you would not have stopped to gather me, arranged me anew, and stood me, voiceless in awe, before a chorus whose song was so piercing I felt as though, for a fleeting moment, I might become privy to a furtive memory borne of ever-present eternity.

Fortunately, you sealed my ears in beeswax and spared me the terrible beauty of the perfect music of the grave. You love me as I falter plangent with banality, reeking of lost promise yet daring enough to risk the enduring grace of ungainly devotion.

Do not ask why a person paints, writes poems, makes music, dances, or protests. You might as well make inquiries to the cells of your skin as to why they, every moment of every day, are engaged in the process of regeneration.

Apropos, there is no call to go out in search of oneself, because what we do is who we are.

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## Hijacking the Second Amendment

The American Right and the gun lobby have hijacked the original intent of the Second Amendment, which was designed for a system of citizen militias to provide for domestic "security" without the need for a standing army. But the amendment is now a dangerous relic, writes Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

The Second Amendment was written after a war in which a new nation without a standing army defeated the biggest standing army on the planet. To defend itself, the new country relied on citizens arming themselves in civilian militias.

Ever since Britain had permanently garrisoned troops in Massachusetts to put down the brewing rebellion in 1768, opposition to standing armies ran deep among Americans. The Revolution was nearly lost because the Continental Congress for years refused George Washington's pleading for a standing army. Sam Adams, before he and his class of merchants had won, believed a permanent force was "forever dangerous to civil liberties."

"Soldiers are apt to consider themselves as a body distinct from the rest of the citizens," Adams said. "They have arms always in hand." But, "the Militia is composed of free citizens. There is, therefore, no danger of their making use of their Power to the destruction of their own rights."

Adams amended his position as the war dragged on, realizing the necessity of a trained, disciplined force in extreme circumstances. But once the war was over, he returned to his earlier position, saying a standing army was no longer needed.

Because of this distrust of standing armies the new republic wrote into its Constitution the Second Amendment, ensuring that citizens, and not a permanent state military, would bear arms to protect the land. However, the United States today has the largest standing armed forces ever assembled. The militias are now called the standing National Guard.

Thus, the rationale for the Second Amendment is completely lost in history. It has as much relevance and moral force today as Section 2 of Article 1 that permitted slavery. The Second Amendment means nothing unless we disband the National Guard and America's armed forces.

It is a dangerous absurdity to think it can justify the sale and possession of handguns (and even more lethal firearms). The Framers would surely be horrified by the events in Connecticut and would wonder what had become of their republic. The Second Amendment must be repealed.

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## Japan's Vote Shows Economic Anger

It may appear that Japanese voters have opted for a "back-to-the-future" election, reinstalling Shinzo Abe and his once-dominant Liberal Democratic Party

to power. But the move reflects a desire to move forward out of Japan's economic rut, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

A landslide victory for the Liberal Democratic Party in elections Sunday for the lower house of the Japanese legislature has given party leader Shinzo Abe something no other Japanese politician has achieved in the last half century: a second chance as prime minister.

Abe had the job for a year in 2006-2007, part of a pattern of Japanese prime ministers in recent times (with rare exceptions such as the charismatic Junichiro Koizumi) serving brief stints before usually rotating out amid growing unpopularity. It appears that the LDP along with its coalition partner, the New Komeito Party, will have a two-thirds super-majority, enough to transact business even without controlling the upper house of the Diet.

Exit polls show that economic issues and the need to push Japan out of its deflationary slump were most important to voters. But Abe, usually described as "hawkish," probably benefited some from a public desire to stand up for Japanese interests in the East Asian and Pacific region. The escalating tension with China over the Senkaku/Daiyou islands, as well as a separate territorial dispute with South Korea, may have helped him.

Beyond such observations, the direction in which Abe will lead Japan's foreign and security is still in large part undetermined. There is speculation about how Abe will shape his second premiership in light of lessons or failures from the first but no precedent, since the early days after World War II, of a returning Japanese prime minister on which to base any such predictions.

Abe himself, in a diffident post-election interview from which chest-thumping American politicians could learn some lessons, acknowledged that the election outcome was less an endorsement of any LDP program than a rejection of the incumbent Democratic Party of Japan:

"I think the results do not mean we have regained the public's trust 100 percent. Rather, they reflect 'no votes' to the DPJ's politics that stalled everything the past three years. Now we are facing the test of how we can live up to the public's expectations, and we have to answer that question."

Abe's room for maneuver in shaping Japan's foreign policy may be more limited than the decisive election result suggests. The LDP is on record as favoring some policies that would be consistent with Abe's hawkish reputation, but the government will be restrained by the still considerable pacifist tendencies in

New Komeito and Japanese public opinion.

The United States is unlikely to have much ability to move Tokyo's overall security policy one way or another. But it would at least be useful to have an idea of what the United States should favor, in the event of any opportunities to nudge the new government in the desired direction.

What that desired direction ought to be is not self-evident. The United States does not have any positive interest in tensions and suspicions escalating between Japan and its East Asian neighbors, over the Senkaku/Daiyou dispute or anything else. That would complicate whatever else one might hope to accomplish in the way of regional security, and it would only encourage the kinds of reactions from China that would be unhelpful.

Some such complications are likely to occur in any case. One might be a visit by Abe to the Yasukuni shrine, which memorializes Japanese war dead, including World War II commanders considered war criminals. Abe says he regrets he did not visit the site during his first stint as prime minister (although notably Koizumi, amid complaining from the regional neighbors, did visit it).

But then there is, from the U.S. point of view, an issue of burden-sharing. Japan has limited its military spending to one percent of GNP. The comparable figure for the United States is 4.7 percent. For an LDP government to go beyond the one percent figure could be good for the United States if it meant less of a perceived need in the United States to carry security burdens in the East Asia-Pacific region that Japan ought to be at least as able to carry.

Perhaps the best direction from the standpoint of U.S. interests would be a big (or at least bigger than at present)-stick, soft-voice posture for Japan, in which there would be some shifting of burdens but minimal exacerbation of regional sensitivities about Japanese assertiveness.

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## Reflections on the Unimaginable

After each mass slaughter usually inflicted by some high-powered assault rifle in the hands of a mentally unstable individual Americans search for some explanation, some way to make sense of the madness. That was especially true of



the latest massacre of children in Connecticut, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

We're spending a holiday season weekend at the home of friends in a small Connecticut town just a few miles up the road from Newtown.

Returning from the local store on Saturday, our friend Emily tells us that the talk there is of nothing but the killings; every customer seems to know at least one of the families devastated by the volleys of gunshots. The headline on the front page of *The Danbury News-Times* is the single word, "Shattered," in enormous type.

At *The Atlantic* website, I read a piece by Edward Small, a reporter who attended the school in Newtown when he was a kid and I remember my own elementary school in a small town in upstate New York. In those days, the only emergency drills we ever had were the duck-and-cover alerts that sent us into the hallways or under our desks during the depths of Cold War hysteria; the only violence was getting shoved from behind by a bully, books and binder flying.

An attack like this new deadly assault would have been unimaginable at my school, not unimaginable like it was in Newtown until Friday but unimaginable, *period* – simply because I truly believe that back then it never would have happened.

There were plenty of guns around; deer hunters abounded and as baby boomers many of our fathers had served during World War II and returned home with firearms they kept hidden away.

(Mine didn't have a gun but a small, ceremonial German dagger in a faux-ivory scabbard. He must have bought or traded for it. Dad was a pharmacist and had been a medical supply officer in the Army that dagger certainly wasn't acquired in hand-to-hand combat).

Yes, there were problems and issues galore but no 24-hour news cycle battering viewers with the latest fresh bloodlettings, no video games inuring the young to bullets, bombs and psychosis, no Internet. I always wonder how those two killers of *In Cold Blood* fame found each other; now they would have met via Facebook.

Make no mistake, I'm as big an Internet and all-news-all-the-time aficionado as the next guy and I know I sound like the cranky old curmudgeon I'm rapidly becoming but it was different then.

Today, there's almost one privately owned firearm for every person in America, more than any other nation. We have the highest rate of gun-related homicide in

the developed world, almost 20 times that of 22 other “rich” countries.

There have been an estimated 31 school shootings in the United States since Columbine in 1999. As many as 100 bullets were fired in Newtown; last year, a total of 85 were fired at people by the police in all of Germany and 49 of them were warning shots. We will hear all these and other statistics in the days ahead and in a week or so they will fade until the next time. Unless this time we stand up and say no.

In his *Atlantic* article Edward Small wrote, “I spent all day reading the headlines and the body counts, but part of me is still waiting for the grand reveal that none of this really happened because how *could* any of it have really happened? How could the elementary school where I wrote my first story and got in trouble for calling Ross Perot a butthead also be the site of the nation’s second-deadliest school shooting?”

“I can’t reconcile the memories I have of Sandy Hook School with the events of today. They simply aren’t the same place.”

I read the stories, too, and watch the never-ending TV “updates” that rarely add anything to what little we know. Then another story catches my eye from a newspaper in Michigan about two little boys in a small town, smaller than Newtown, smaller than my hometown, who went looking for crayfish in a nearby stream, the way little boys do, and found what they thought was an unusual rock. It turned out to be an ancient bone from a mastodon, some 13,000-14,000 years old.

“This has been a wonderful experience,” one of their mothers told the paper. “He’s been struggling in school and this has helped him with self-confidence and inspired him to learn more about science.”

I remember how we played and explored when we were young; how we found fossils, too, and sometimes an arrowhead, and I think of all those little kids now dead in Connecticut who will no longer have the chance to make discoveries like those, never imagine, never explore, never be inspired, never get older.

I put down the newspapers, turn off the TV and computer. Shattered.

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