

A Romantic Evening

A romantic evening used to be a fabulous dinner, terrific wine and irresistible dessert. Romance was time on a sailboat in the tropics or swimming out to the reef off Jamaica with the love of my life. The times have been indescribably good and without question, we have lived a life that would be the admiration of anyone.

Fast forward to December of 2021. We are sitting at our kitchen table trying to figure out how to use the Covid-19 self-home test. "Sweetheart, would you like me to stick this long Q-tip up your nose or do you want to do it yourself?" The love of my life responds, "Well, I'll stick one up my nose and let me stick this one up your nose as well; I am better at this." A minor argument ensues as to who is the better nose sticker upper. After some debate and dissention, we each take our own sample.

Now the excitement and arousal start. What will our tests show? We nervously watch the clock knowing that we have 10 entire minutes. Ms. Lovely did her test first, so she will get her results first. The minutes slowly pass, she announces "I am negative." Now, I really have to worry. What happens if mine is not negative? How will I live with myself? What have I done to deserve a positive test? I too am "negative!" Hallelujah – a small celebratory dance around the island in the kitchen ensues.

Having discovered our new passion of self-testing for Covid, what are we to do next? TV is boring by comparison. Our kids have moved on with their lives and doubtless are doing their own Covid-19 testing, or whatever young people do these days, but we still have the old cats around to feed and keep us company. I think the cats are probably more aged than some of our better antiques but somehow, they seem healthy enough. In any event, they are willing to put up with us.

My how life has changed. Instead of romantic interludes at the movies, on vacation, or over dinner, we now think about who we have been within 6 feet of within the last few days. Who among our family or friends have Covid? Which of those Covid patients were vaccinated or unvaccinated? Why is everybody so angry at each other in this country, and no doubt in the world, that we cannot even talk about the efficacy and sensibility of vaccines. "It is not even a vaccine" somebody said to me. "What is it then, a fruit cocktail?"

Tons of ink, or electronics for those of you who do not read newspapers, have been spilled over the question of how we have come to so politicize fighting a disease.

During the Thanksgiving week, my wife was away visiting one of our kids who had not been feeling well. I went to visit my sister in our hometown. At one point, I parked in what was an old school parking lot. As I drove in, I instantly recognized the small building with its faded but still brightly colored exterior. I remember that building from second grade. The panels on the outside of the building were bright yellow, red and blue. The colors still come through the acid rained-on exterior. That was the building where I was ushered in with what seemed like a million other kids to have my polio shot. The kids were supervised by my mother's teacher friend and golfing buddy, Claire Gold. Our parents were absolutely thrilled that they could save us from the

plague. The inoculation rates were extremely high, and an almost universal vaccination program made the disease of polio virtually unknown to the current population.

Today, the matrix of society has changed. The real question is how to take an issue and so distort it that media sales will be enhanced by the outrage of our citizenry. In other words, the game today is to make every issue so contentious that people will rely on the media, read and see the advertising, and be drawn to a particular point of view like a bug to a bright light in the middle of summer.

Remember Newton Minow? He was a member, maybe even the chairman, of the Federal Communications Commission. He referred to television as a "vast wasteland." The same could be said today of social and electronic media. However, what Minow missed is that the vast wasteland was a breeding ground for selling products and opinions to the American public. Today, we do the same thing with electronic media. Manipulation of tastes, buying habits, opinions, and behaviors are the goal of those who successfully utilize the print and electronic media for their own personal and financial gain.

America used to be called the great melting pot because of the diversity of people attracted to our shores. Today, we are the great sewer. What should be discarded by any reasonable person, grows and feeds on the waste product of a disgruntled society.

Education used to be the answer for America's future. Today, even education, has become something else to argue about and has become a source of acrimony. I was talking to a college professor not too long ago who I have known since the seventh grade. On the one hand, he told me that colleges are no so infested with left-wing liberal motif as one might think. In the same breath, and literally without taking a break, he pointed out that White male graduate students in his department cannot get a job because those positions are going to women, people of color and others currently favored by educational institutions. "It's not fair" he said. I asked him how he squared that with his earlier statement concerning the balance that he believes still exists in the educational system. He did not try.

Who knows what will become next as we explore new ways of communicating? Will we go from sticking Q-tips up our noses to laser lights revealing our most inner thoughts? The future is only imagination away.

Returning to the old world of racism and bigotry, and there was plenty of that, is no answer. Replacing that awful behavior with a new kind of bigotry, is not a solution to our problems either.

Hopefully, the tough times we are going through may be a catalyst to help people reacquaint themselves with the basic truths of tolerance, decency and an America informed by moral values. Who knows; it is worth considering at any rate.

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