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River Park Community Graduation Parade

see page 5



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Perfect storm

Commenting on the stark divisions in this country, someone on Facebook noted, "I haven't lost friends over politics. I've lost friends over morals." I wish I could identify this person to credit him or her for a precise observation.

On our block, a microcosm of urban Northern California, we make moral choices daily. Most of us avoid crowds, not only for our own safety, but because we don't want to endanger others. Most of us wear the masks. We don't care if the president mocks us. We know the virus did not observe the shutdown and is as potent and patient as ever. We know we could have it with no symptoms, but pass it on to someone who could be dead in a week. So we mask up.

When restrictions were lifted, chiefly for economic reasons, I watched a news show featuring a crowded beach extravaganza somewhere in the South. A prodigious mass of humans squished together, few observing the distance requirements. A reporter tromped across the sand to a young woman applying tanning lotion and asked if she was afraid of violating requirements and getting Covid. "I hope I don't get it, and I wash my hands a lot," she said. She bestowed a sweet, wide smile on the reporter. "But if God wants me He'll take me."

So I ended up talking to the TV again. "Hey, what if the guy next to you doesn't want to go to God right now? What if he wants to live to 96 so he can learn what Mars is like?

What did this girl not understand? Her religion seemed small and personal, and didn't appear to include a concept of responsibility for others. A more humane value system was needed on that beach, and in all the overcrowded beaches, bars, and gathering places in this opened-up, infected country.

Then, propelled by sorrow and fury, came protests for the death of George Floyd. Unlike the armed, white protesters who stormed state capitols with guns, Nazi and Confederate flags, these African American protesters were unarmed. Many unarmed white supporters joined them. These initial demonstrators provided another feast for the virus. Then came right-wingers like Boogaloo Bois and Proud Boys (two of current white nationalist and anarchist groups who infiltrate demonstrations to turn the public against them), to provoke arson and mayhem. And then the random looters arrived. And then the police and National Guard, all massed together in smoky cities in the dark. Covid doesn't care who's right or wrong. But it knows a banquet when it sees one.

On the Sunday, May 31, Johns Hopkins reported a Covid increase of 20, 000 cases. Minnesota governor Walz said, "I am deeply concerned about a superspreader type of incident. We're going to see a spike. It's inevitable." One sad irony is that African-Americans are a uniquely vulnerable population for this virus, and some demonstrators may return it to a community beset by the health susceptibilities linked to structural racism. And, as noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, "racism is a public health issue." It is a public enemy that, unlike flood and blizzard, does not go away.

In this country we haven't been able to unite against this common enemy for the public good. We haven't been able to unite against Covid 19 either. This is a demonstrable failure of national leadership, but also shows flawed moral choices on our part. We haven't made this a safe country for everybody. Driving while black, walking down the street while black, jogging while black--these can still be deadly hazards in racialized America. And today in the USA we have 109,580 Covid deaths and nearly two million total cases. There will be more tomorrow, of course, and in two weeks we'll learn if super spreaders will have triggered skyrocketing numbers of highly contagious infected.

Some people, like the girl on the beach, trace their morals to religious belief. Others say moral practice derives from reciprocal altruism, which in evolutionary biology is a supposition that nature has programmed us, for the survival of our species, to sometimes behave unselfishly, and to presume fellow sapiens will reciprocate. That's how we learn to count on one another. "If I weren't for this Corona disease, I'd be out there protesting the other disease," neighbor Marie said. "And I'd resent the hell out of those looters and provocateurs who tried to make us look bad."

It reminded me of what I seen on TV. A tall, muscular man in dark clothing, including complete head covering so you couldn't identify him, used tools to break through a shop door. Two female protesters ran to him, shouted to him to stop. He grabbed the first young woman and brutally flung her to the sidewalk. She scrambled up, and by then others had run over and the man merged into the crowd. It was a perfect moral snapshot of depravity and courage. And of course Covid saw it all.

Then came Trump and his use of American troops to rout peacefully assembled American citizens so he could take a theatrical stroll to a church where he smirked and waved a bible. This was creepy because we don't so far have a state religion in this country. Or do we? Or was the spectacle supposed to make us forget that we endure this administration's multiple failures, first to recognize the disease threat (remember the "hoax?"), and then to combat it with a national testing and tracing program? Or was the bible display supposed to make us forget that Trump refused to apologize for the full-page ads he took out in '89 calling for the death of the innocent Central Park Five (one Latino kid and four African American kids wrongly imprisoned for rape)?

I don't know. But I know we are plagued. The whole world is plagued with these diseases. As I write the White House is barricaded like a palace in an authoritarian state, and troops without insignia formed around protesters. No insignia means no identification and no identification means no accountability. I don't know how secret police fit in a free country.

I do know this: race hatred is a mental deficiency that retards humanity. I know the USA has 4% of the world's population and 24% of its Covid 19 (Johns Hopkins/Washington Post). I know we should trust science. I know our constitutional freedoms need protection. I know our burdens are ancient and complex. I know if some of us get Covid, we die. I know black lives matter.

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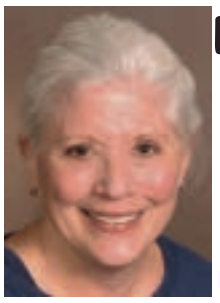
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THIS 'n' THAT

by Carol Bogart

Closing Down the Stress Valve

There are times I'm glad I'm not a street reporter anymore. This is one of them. It's all gotten to be just too much, hasn't it? A pandemic like we've never seen in the last 100 years. Pandemonium in our streets. Heat waves and curfews that make us stay inside, just when we thought we might get out a little.

I'm on stress overload and maybe you are, too.

So this week, I'm taking a break from all of that, because, well, because I need to. Instead, I'll share with you my possum stories (opossums, to be accurate, although growing up, everyone I knew just called 'em possums).

So, anyway, if you'll forgive the shorthand, I first learned about 'possums when, looking under the hedge for a lost ball, I found, instead, a long-dead kitten. The neighbor kid (who'd thrown the ball), exclaimed, "Possum!" "Possums," Tommy, 7, said with certainty, "will kill a kitten."

Well, being 5-years-old and gullible, I took that statement to be fact. For 30 years, I hated possums. When I was driving and spotted something lying in the road, I'd stop if I thought it could be saved. Even saved a stunned fox once. But, if, when I got close, the pile of grayish fur turned out not to be a cat, I'd swerve, while thinking to myself, "just a 'possum," and keep on going.

(Truth be told, a possum is a different animal. Cuter. Looks a bit like a koala. Lives in Australia.)

My antipathy toward opossums softened when I met 'Marcie.'

I was freelancing for a Cleveland TV station. The assignment desk needed a story for me to do. I said, "How about I do a feature on the Nature Center?"

Most such places love free publicity and the Nature Center was no exception. It's wildlife guide introduced us (me and my shooter) to long-time residents of the center: a crippled hawk, and Marcie. Each had had an unfortunate encounter with a car couldn't survive in the wild. Instead, the two educated and entertained grade school kids. And clueless reporters who knew squat about opossums except that they killed kittens.

That day, I learned that opossums are the only 'marsupial' in North America. "Marsupial" means that, like a kangaroo, opossums have a pouch. In that pouch, again like the kangaroo, the female opossum carries, and suckles, offspring. They do NOT eat kittens. They gorge on ticks, thus protecting dogs from heartworm.

"Okay," I thought. "Not such horrid creatures after all."

I asked the center's wildlife guide if he'd stand with me with Marcie as I did my live-shot. He said, "Wouldn't you like to hold her?"

Masking my reluctance, I said, "I'll need a chair." (I didn't want to drop her or otherwise upset her.) Involved stand-ups were popular, I knew. Viewers like it when you DO something.

So, I cradled Marcie in one elbow and we went live. As I was explaining about opossums being North America's only marsupial, I looked down to smile at Marcie.

Her face split open in a big wide yawn. Teeth. All I saw was teeth. LOTS of teeth. I shrieked. The nature center guy retrieved Marcie, the producer cut back to the anchors, and they wrapped things up.

I went back to the station to rework the piece into an anchor voiceover for a later show. The minute I walked in, the news director said, "Let's go in my office." "Oh boy," I thought. "Here we go." With his back to me, he cued my liveshot. With Marcie and I facing each other, our mouths wide open, he turned, laughing, and told me, "Best standup in the show!"

Forever after, I've been a true fan of 'possums.

I love that there are wildlife rescue and rehabilitators in Northern California who specialize in raising joeys. They look for mama opossums on the road. If the mama doesn't make it, the rehabilitators remove the tiny joeys from the pouch and then hand-raise them. Amazing, given that they look like newborn hamsters. Or maybe popcorn shrimp. Anyway, they SAVE THEM! Only such rehabilitators, with permission from the state, are allowed to release them when they're grown. And regular people, like you and me, are not allowed to own one as a pet. However nice they might prove to be.

So, I hope you haven't minded my not writing about virus deaths and looting. I needed to share something that brings me joy. Like 'possums and their little joeys.

Carol Bogart hopes, if you ever see an opossum in the road when you're driving, you'll try not to hit it. It may only be stunned, plus opossums really do 'play dead' when they're really scared. Given a few minutes, the opossum might get up and amble off, saving herself – and her babies. Questions, comments? Contact Carol at carol@bogartonline.com.



PHOTO COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

An opossum has 50 teeth but, if cornered, is more likely to feign a heart attack than try to bite you.

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Faces and Places: Black Lives Matter protest

Photos by Monica Stark

After a week of worldwide protests and acts of rebellion against police brutality in the aftermath of the homicide of George Floyd and all victims of police violence, on Saturday, June 6 there was a march that began at the Golden 1 Center, ending at the capitol. Here are photos from the end of the march.















Faces and Places: River Park Community Graduation Parade





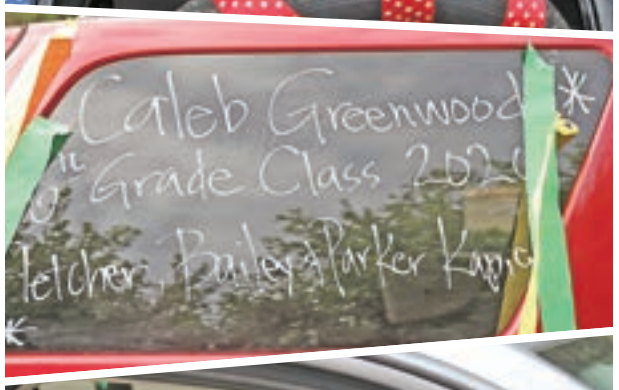














Photos by Stephen Crowley

The River Park Neighborhood Association held a Community Graduation Parade in the neighborhood for all graduates (K, 6th, 8th, 12th) on Saturday, June 13 to be celebrated for their achievements even in the times of COVID-19. Cars with graduates and their families assembled at the Scottish Rite Center and then moved along a parade route through the neighborhood. Neighbors came outside of their homes, and lined the streets to cheer on and celebrate the graduating classes of 2020. Due to COVID-19, all members of the community were advised to wear masks and/or maintain appropriate social distancing of 6 feet or greater.















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