



Embracing the Disenfranchised

(Posted to the "My Notes" section of my Facebook page)

What follows below is an excerpt from an e-letter to a young woman struggling with an insidious neurologic-vascular disease who is wrestling with depression born of having many of her cherished dreams in life dashed; of having been handed the rubric "sick" and then stuck in a corner as have many in her predicament. It is my way of introducing her to our community or tribe -- "Lefties united" (You'll understand what I mean once you get into my missive)

Sadly, the American culture is a jaded, cynical one that lives by a "gridiron mentality" that sorts people out via competition and marginalizes most of those found to have failed to "live up" to some inflated Madison Avenue or Ivy League standard. It sickens me. It is almost as though we have done Nazi Germany one better -- taken their social Darwinism and retooled it to be more palatable. "Right, Left" screams the jack bootied thug to lines of hapless souls on the train platform. I often wonder how many get sent to the left almost out of diapers!

Didn't go to the best schools? -- Left. Aren't prosperous? -- Left. Not cutthroat enough for the world of the 3-piece suits? -- Left. Don't have a model's looks or body?--Left. Too shy?--Left. No husband/wife? Left. Getting old? Left. Sick? Left. And so forth *ad nauseum, ad infinitum*.

Is it any wonder films like "Mr. Holland's Opus" and "It's A Wonderful Life" so captivates people's fancy? The sad thing is, after the swell of emotion subsides most folks realize that "Mr. Holland" only momentarily eclipsed their deep-seated fear that they somehow missed the boat in life, and furthermore George Bailey endings happen only once in a blue moon. And how can people maintain these warm feelings (anyway) when they must wade into a social order that tells them they are misfits or losers and it's anything but a wonderful life?

One of my passions is history and I always found it highly telling that many people who lived through the Third Reich speak fondly and in glowing terms of the "gemutlichkeit" -- the "good times" (Pre-war Nazi Germany). But of course they felt this way -- after all, they had a *volk* (folk) community that provided them with powerful feelings of belonging and being special despite being predicated on racist nonsense and warped values . Here in America we like to trumpet being a society that brings out these feelings, but we seem to bring them out very seldom and when we do seem unable to sustain them. Perhaps it's because the foundation is rotten -- too competitive (Greed based laissez faire capitalism), too "John Wayne"-ish (i.e., being overly independent vs. helping one another), possessed by too great a willingness to discard our wounded, et cetera.

Thankfully there are some signs of modest change afoot. However, I think for all of us down here in the trenches we can't wait for the rate of social and political transformation to catch up


with our needs. We must, in my opinion, form communities or tribes without the vast American social order that are predicated on the kind of all inclusiveness that leaves no one feeling a misfit, marginalized or second rate. And this is exactly what I have been working to do on a small scale -- starting with my students and friends in Japan and continuing on here stateside in lockstep with my colleagues, associates and such. Indeed, those I work with share this *weltanschauung* -- such that we refer to our collective as family and act for the good of all.

So, as they say, welcome to a family whose ethic is built on the notion there are no misfits and the highest good is to help one another! Some might see us a leper colony -- the ones who were told to go "Left" -- and that's OK. The *ubermensch* and elitists can remain in their Ivory towers and plush penthouses and raise the drawbridge and catapult stones at us, while we grow in numbers and stronger in our shared vision that (to paraphrase from Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan -- Capt. Spock) "the good of the many outweighs the good of the few." Make that "greedy, elitist few."

Can we solve all the problems of those who are part of our little collective? Hell, no. Anyone who believes that is delusional. However, we can steer some aspects of our individual and group lives away from the darkness and into the light. In your case, maybe we can work to help improve your health and, with this, other aspects of your life will begin to change and improve. If nothing else, you'll have an army of fellow "Lefties" to walk beside you and help you when you stumble.

Onward in the joy of sharing,

Dr. Anthony G. Payne

facebook		Name:	Anthony G. Payne
		Email:	attachi-mailbox@yahoo.com
		Websites:	http://www.healingcare4u.org
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