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the dirtbag times



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sun in my heart - word to the words*



the dirtbag times
the dirtbag times is a
magazine for dirtbags
by dirtbags.

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MAKE AMERICA GET ALONG AGAIN?

I read a piece in *The Atlantic* last month wherein the columnist was shocked to see that Hollywood gossip website *TMZ* has been occasionally reporting on hard news recently and has also occasionally gone after the Trump regime directly. The columnist believes that this is a first for entertainment magazines and websites, that this is just a reflection of the times that we find ourselves in, that things are so unprecedented and outlandishly illegal/immoral that even gossip rags have to report on them. I think it's more that it is all that is on anyone's minds these days and to not report on the obvious elephant in the room makes you seem tone deaf and like maybe you're on the wrong side of things.

It's getting harder and harder for people to ignore the news. The news now comes to them every time they drag a cart around a grocery store, every time they fill up at a gas station, whenever they have to pick up their prescriptions, when they look at their mortgage statements, etc. It's hard not to talk about politics even on radio programs about golf, let alone about team sports. I've even heard the politics of tariffs be discussed on a show about local horticulture. It makes sense that even *TMZ* would be forced to get in on the action as well.

But it reminds me of another recent article I saw that was likely written by AI but I think there is some truth to it. This article claims that 4 out of every 5 Americans thinks we are too divided right now and these Americans wants us to go back to getting along again. I hear this often from people who aren't into politics. I hear this all the time from people who do not agree with my politics but do not have cogent arguments. I hear this often from people who feel guilty about voting for the current American shitshow.

Well, I'm tired, boss. I am not the argumentative sort. I don't really like to discuss politics unless it's with people I feel absolutely safe with. That is one of the few pieces of advice I recall my mother ever explicitly giving me, that one should never discuss religion or politics in mixed company. I don't think that should be a hard and fast rule necessarily but I can understand why one might want to use such an approach. I believe that is what people are saying without saying it in that poll. I believe people are also tired and would like to go back to not talking about politics with anyone they are sure won't agree with them. Especially now when it's becoming harder and harder every minute to continue to justify agreeing with the politics of President Donald Trump and his regime. The War in Iran is deeply unpopular, leveling the East Wing of the White House to build a ballroom is deeply unpopular, not releasing the full Epstein files is deeply unpopular, people who thought they were for banishing illegal immigrants from America have found that maybe they only really wanted the bad ones sent away and

not everyone scooped up in a giant net and most certainly didn't like white Americans being detained and sometimes killed, and having a president whose public press releases have f-bombs in them on Easter Sunday is deeply unpopular.

Donald Trump is a deeply unpopular figure right now. That is like saying water is wet. Anyone associated remotely with this regime is finding out they are nearly as unpopular as Trump is. People who have been vaguely supportive of the general Fox News party line have never truly had to justify the things they supposedly stand for. Sure, their liberal neighbors were wrong but you know you just don't talk about politics and act polite and you *really* don't want to drive your daughter to every soccer practice and carpooling with the liberal mom is really enticing. What this poll is telling me is that people want to go back to being completely selfish and not having difficult conversations. They want to go back to "oh honey, you do you" which is perhaps the nicest "fuck you" this side of "bless your heart". And I get it. Arguing can be uncomfortable, but if you really believe it then you ought to really be able to explain why.

I do support bringing the national temperature down somewhat. I don't have to agree with everything the people I have to deal with believe. But we are also dealing with where decades of "don't talk politics in mixed company" have delivered us, to the point that we don't know how to talk to one another about politics without devolving to name calling, pretty much because the only model we have for such conversations is on Fox News, Sunday morning talk shows, and late night comedy shows. People are either yelling at one another or making fun of one another. I find that where we are right now could be a massive teachable moment for our country in how to really communicate with one another about our differences, our assumptions, our stereotypes, and our commonality. But like everything else in this country that is truly difficult and requires true attention paid to it, we will let this teachable moment pass us by. We will continue to fight with one another and continue to not apply our anger and activism towards doing things that could really help one another. We will continue to ignore the basis for why our buying power has decreased. All because it is easier in the short-term to do so.

We in this country are always at our best in a moment of crisis. We saw this in the Asheville area in the wake of Hurricane Helene. No one cared about each other's politics when we were digging people out of the mud, feeding them, and cutting a path through fallen trees. We did what was right for each other because we believe in community and are called to help each other. We need to find that kind of cooperation when things aren't so literally on fire in front of our faces. We might be able to get some things done that really need doing. — *KELLY MENACE*

THE BEST PROTEST SONGS NEVER AGE

While in awe of Bruce Springsteen's powerful "Streets of Minneapolis" protest song, I am amazed at how prescient Neil Young's *Living with War* album from 2006 is concerning the current war with Iran.

I had just popped in the Young cd the other day (yes, I'm that analog guy), and it's somewhat amazing how many of the lyrics resonate still ... and Young's album was aimed at the Bush Jr. administration. Naturally, the music is still solid and gripping, but how could Young have known?

Check out "Let's Impeach the President" (I know, for the third time please). How about these lines: "Let's impeach the president for lying/And misleading our country into war. Abusing all the power we gave him/And shipping all our money out the door." And my favorite: "Who's the man who hired all the criminals?" as well as "They bend the facts to fit with their new story/Of why we had to send our men to war." One more: "Let's impeach the president for hijacking/Our religion and using it to get elected/Dividing out country into colors/And still leaving black people neglected."

Then there's "Shock and Awe" that harkens to that time, but with this timeless lyric: "Thousands of children scarred for life/Millions of tears for a soldier's wife/Both sides are losing now. Heaven take them in/Thousands of children scarred for life."

Or in "After the Garden" with "Won't need no strong man/Walking through the night/To live a weak man's day."

Then there are the killer lines in "Flags of Freedom" that states "Have you seen the flags of freedom?/What color are they now?/Do you think that you believe in yours/More than they do somehow?"

The strongest anti-war song is the devastating "Families" that echoes Young's classic "Powderfinger" in its simplicity and power of a soldier aching for a home forever gone.

Finally, there's "Looking for a Leader" that won't bring 2028 any faster, but the lines still apply: "Walking among our people/There's someone who's straight and strong/To lead us from desolation/And a broken world gone wrong." But there's a warning: "Yeah, we've got our election/ But corruption has a chance/We got to have a clean win/To regain confidence/America is beautiful/But she has an ugly side."

We may be living with war, but we don't have to take it without protest. — *MIKE L. DOWNEY*



LATE TO THE PARTY, RIGHT ON TIME

WHY SHRINKING FEELS LIKE A HUG WE DIDN'T KNOW WE NEEDED

Bethany and I are late to the party ... again. I know, I know. Some of you are probably saying, "when isn't this true?"

By the time we discover a show, most everyone else already has opinions, picked favorite characters, and probably moved on to something else entirely. Meanwhile, we're on the couch like, "Wait... has everyone seen this?"

Which is exactly how we found ourselves, nearly three seasons deep into *Shrinking*, looking at each other somewhere around episode eight of season one and saying, almost in unison, "Oh... this is special."

And now here we are, getting ready to finish up season three, already a little bereft, and ridiculously excited that a fourth season has been confirmed. Because once you settle into this world — messy, funny, achingly human — you don't really want to leave.

What I love most about *Shrinking* isn't really the plot (though it's fine). It's not even the phenomenal cast of Jason Segel, Harrison Ford, and Jessica Williams. It's the way the show insists — gently, continuously, sometimes even comically — that people are worth understanding.

Even when they make it difficult.

Especially when they make it difficult.

The premise, if you haven't seen it, is deceptively simple: Jimmy (Segel) is a therapist unraveling after the death of his wife, who decides to start telling his patients exactly what he thinks, boundaries be damned. It's reckless. It's unorthodox. It is, in many cases, wildly inappropriate. It is also, occasionally, exactly what someone needs.

But the show isn't even really about therapy, not really. It's about grief and friendship and the strange, circuitous ways people try to find their footing again when life seems to be trying to kick them down.

Here's where *Shrinking* does something different from most shows: it doesn't give us a villain.

Oh, don't get me wrong — there are characters who make terrible decisions. People who hurt each other. People who, in the first few episodes, you might actively dislike. The kind of characters you think, "Ugh, I would cross the street to avoid this person."

And then... the show lingers.

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better. — Maya Angelou

It gives them a moment. A backstory. A crack in the armor. And suddenly, you're not crossing the street anymore. You're standing there thinking, "Oh... that's why."

It's not that the show excuses bad behavior. It doesn't. Actions still have consequences. Apologies are still needed. Growth is still required. But it does something we're not particularly good at right now as a culture: it makes space for context.

For humanity.

For the idea that people are not just the worst thing they've done.

There's a kind of tenderness baked into the DNA of this show that caught me off guard. It's in the way characters show up for each other — imperfectly, sometimes clumsily, but consistently. It's in the small gestures. The awkward conversations. The willingness to try again after messing everything up the first (or fifth) time. If you've watched the show you also know it's in the rocks. It's also very, very funny.

Not in an inserted laugh track, sitcom way, but in a really real way where humor shows up right alongside grief. We've all lived through hard things and we know that laughter sometimes shows up (sometimes at the most inopportune times) through all of it ... and sometimes it makes it all just a little more bearable.

Bethany and I have gone from laughing out loud to reaching for a tissue to wipe away the tears within minutes. It's a balance that occurs in life, but is often missing from television: conflict, humor, tenderness, sitting together side by side. *Shrinking* delivers that balance beautifully over and over again.

There's a moment — no spoilers, I promise — where a character who has been, up until that point, deeply frustrating suddenly reveals something vulnerable. Not in a grand, speechifying way. Just a small, honest moment.

And it changes everything. Not because it erases what came before, but because it adds dimension.

That's what this show understands so well: people are layered. Contradictory. Capable of

being both kind and careless, generous and selfish, brave and absolutely terrified.

People like us.

In a time when it feels like we're all being sorted into neat little boxes — good or bad, right or wrong, worthy or not — *Shrinking* pushes back against that instinct. It says, "What if we looked a little closer? What if we tried to understand before we dismissed?"

And honestly, that feels... revolutionary.

Or maybe just necessary.

I think that's why it's landing so deeply for us right now. The world feels loud. Quick to judge. Eager to flatten people into headlines and hot takes.

And here comes this show, moving at a different pace, inviting us to sit with discomfort, to laugh at ourselves, and to recognize our own messiness.

It doesn't ask us to approve of everything these characters do. It asks us to care anyway. That's a big ask. And also a beautiful one.

We a couple episodes shy of finishing season 3, and I've realized something: I'm not just invested in the storylines. I am invested in the people. All of them. Even the ones who drove me a little nuts in the beginning. Maybe especially those ones.

Because that's the magic trick, isn't it? Turning "I don't like you" into "I see you." Turning frustration into empathy. Turning a room full of flawed, fumbling humans into something that feels like community.

So yes, Bethany and I are late to the party.

But honestly? I think we arrived exactly when we needed to.

Because right now, a show that believes in the possibility of growth, the necessity of compassion, and the quiet power of just showing up for each other feels less like entertainment and more like a reminder.

A gentle one. People are complicated. Healing is messy. And kindness — real, inconvenient, sometimes hard-earned kindness — still matters.

Even now. Especially now. — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

MICROMUSING

The best thing about watching the Olympics (and I normally don't care for the Winter games, but when in Rome ...) is that the performances themselves, shorn of the babbling commentators, were as pure as ever before.

The emotion, the pain, the losing, the winning, the striving — all those things were etched on faces of all colors and beliefs in performances that could have been a century ago. The Olympic ideal is still alive despite all the ugliness apparent from many of the participating nations, unfortunately including ours. Next time ... — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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ODE TO CINCO DE MAYO, A HAIKU

Three tacos, two shots
Why is the room spinning now
Worth it, absolutely.



TISH JACKSON

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O DAMN



WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

THE SUN IN MY HEART

Back when I was first divorced from my daughter's mother, I was a somewhat rabid fan of a song by the Manic Street Preachers: "You Stole the Sun from My Heart" for obvious reasons.

But we survived. Time heals most wounds. She remarried. I remarried. Our daughter married. And, well, she did pretty darn good. She also made me a grandfather yesterday.

(NOTE: lately, in every group I'm in, I always seem to be the resident old guy, so sorry if this is not yet in your purview. You'll grow into it perhaps.)

Many of my friends are already grandparents. My brother has six grandkids (a complete aside: I have an uncle with 17 GREAT-grandchildren). But this is my first grandchild, the first for my wife as well (who also has two adult children).

First, I have to admit I'm guilty of the perennial saying that I've heard for decades from my friends and family: "That is the cutest baby I've ever seen." I know it has to be because of the familial link, but darn it, that IS the cutest baby I have ever seen, bar none (well, except for my daughter and son when they emerged).

The baby was just one day old this afternoon, and the grandparents were having a field day wanting to hold the baby. It's been decades since I held a newborn, and it's one of life's more astonishing feelings. Here is a living thing that doesn't have names for fingers, feet, sky, love, hate, boogers, brainfreeze, crosswalks, or has heard "The Middle" by Jimmy Eat World at just the right time in their lives.

I'm privileged to be at a point in my life (and logistically) that me and my wife will be able to

assist in these early years of development. Our well-being will benefit the most since the likely reality is that our grandchild will never recall any of these first years at all. I think all of us family members are looking forward to those single-digit years to build some memories that will last long after we are gone (and of course, that's mostly me as the oldest).

Heck, the dad wants to take her shooting, the mom is leaning horseback riding ... or maybe it's baking and then riding ... or was that reading? Anyway, this kid has potential for so much.

"Potential" is key here. In today's climate (not the weather kind), the future looks not as rosy as it has at other times in our nation's history. But hey, it's almost always had that harsh tint.

I lived through the Vietnam years with LBJ and Nixon and Watergate and the Clinton scandal and on and on. Pretty bleak stuff — Nixon negotiated with the Viet Cong to not come to a peace accord with the Democratic administration since it was apparent he — a Republican — would win the presidential election. He wanted the glory, who cares about the Americans who died in those months that didn't have to? How callous can one man be, right?

Anyway, the potential of this new life, and the new life being built by my daughter and my son-in-law — all that fills me with such hope that it outshines all the crude, cruel and shoddy swill of many of those mindlessly caterwauling for attention. You know who.

Now I just have to figure out how to live an extra decade or three to see about some great-grandkids. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



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THE KIDS MIGHT BE ALRIGHT

MORE THOUGHTS FROM THE HIGHER ED FRONT

things are not looking good for higher education here in howdy arabia.

our pals down in college station and out in lubbock have been in the news this year, and are currently bearing the brunt of the legislature's wrath. they, however, are not the primary target: UT austin is. the proverbial shit just hasn't hit the fan yet in austin. last month the UT system regents finally broke their silence and offered some guidance on how faculty should teach in the current climate: don't teach anything controversial. but, what's controversial?, we might ask. the regents simply hid behind the notion of "vagueness being our friend." yeah, right. YOUR friend, not ours.

so, here in my branch campus of the howdy arabian flagship university system, i'm supposed to avoid controversy, undefined by the powers that be.

this week, in my undergrad research seminar on buddhism in medieval china, we read and discussed two 1000+ year old primary source documents. those should be safely uncontroversial, right?

the first document was an imperial edict from tang dynasty emperor wuzong, issued in 845 CE, ordering the persecution of buddhist monasteries, monks, and nuns. in the order, the emperor criticized buddhism for being "foreign" (despite, at the time of the order, buddhism had been thriving in china for 700+ years), and accusing monks and nuns of "freeloading." the edict ordered the confiscation of monastic land, precious objects (gold statues and bells, silks, jewels, etc), and forced a return to lay life of over 200,000 monks and nuns, many who had been clergy for most of their lives. the document itself is quite short: barely two pages of text. its impact was massive. the order was enacted and large-scale monastic buddhism never recovered.

the second document was the final chapter of a travel diary written by a japanese buddhist pilgrim named ennin. ennin was in china at the time the edict was issued, and witnessed firsthand the implementation of the order and its impact on the buddhist community, and himself. ennin narrates the events leading up to the edict, describing the increasingly belligerent actions of the emperor, egged on by his daoist spiritual advisors, who hoped to see buddhism eliminated from china entirely, and his confucian political advisors. while attacking the buddhists, the emperor threw money and support to his daoist friends, who enriched themselves from the state treasury. ennin frequently notes the emperor's sexual

depravity, and cruelty toward women who rejected his advances (ex. he personally shot his stepmother to death with bow and arrow after she refused to become his concubine). after the edict was issued, ennin found himself caught in legal no-man's land: forbidden to be outside of a monastery after midday, and ordered to leave the country, yet not given travel passes to leave. even as ennin reported on the emperor's death ("his constitution was weak") from daoist elixir poisoning, he lamented the suffering caused to the buddhist community and its non-buddhist supporters (the state executed a crazy number of buddhists and people accused of helping or hiding them). in the end, ennin was able to board a ship and return to japan. his diary is a powerful account of life during oppressive times.

as we discussed these historical texts in our class, i could see the metaphorical lightbulbs turning on above my students' heads. they began to articulate connections between the historical records we had just read and the times in which we live: an unstable ruler, manipulated by religious and political fanatics, attacking "foreign" ideas and people, hating women, etc. i didn't have to overtly or subtly point them to these connections. they had developed the ability to think critically, and recognize patterns in history. this gives me hope.

wrapping up the class session, i explained to my students that although i've read these two texts numerous times over the past three decades, they have never felt so relevant, or hit so hard emotionally, as they did this week. this is a byproduct of learning and growing. each time we revisit a text, we read it differently. for me, this time, the context of current events cast a new light over the historical texts and story they narrate. more importantly, i'm not the same person i was the last time i read these texts. i've been changed by reading more, learning more, and understanding more than i did the last time i read the documents. this reflection, hopefully, reinforces the need to revisit books periodically, to reread with fresh eyes, new contexts, and as the new version of ourselves, ever growing though the process of education.

this week's seminar gives me some hope that our young people are "getting it," or learning how to "get it." and it makes me sad that the young people of howdy arabia may not have opportunities like this in public colleges and universities much longer. when word gets out that my students are learning how to think through history, the powers that be will figure out how to shut it/us down. —

PROFESSOR FUZZ

THE SHADOW WORK

What was once a silence moving through our country is now an intense scream.

The rage of a dying king, the cursed echo of King George's last breath carried across the centuries. His warning of an inevitable collapse.

We overthrew him, right? Yet, his ghost still rules our instincts: a hunger for conquest, a worship of power, a crown now replaced by the star-spangled banner. And in the distance, chains rattling; a preacher slams a hellfire fist to brimstone pulpit; a hungry baby cries ... and we ignore it.

We act as bystanders to this unraveling but the truth, we are the very cells of America's anatomy.

The fever burst through the skin, and this infection can no longer be disguised as strength.

Everywhere, the symptoms show: invaded cities on the edge, people dying, courts corrupted, screens glowing bright with cruelty and propaganda. We pretend though. These are surely isolated crises. Nope, the truth is simpler and harder: this a body of the nation convulsing and collapsing under the weight of its own denial and pretending "This is fine." The myths are burning, and we are close enough to smell and even, at times, taste the ash.

We bounce between outrage and apathy, between fight and flight, between hiding and helping. Some of us pray. Some of us drink. Some smoke. Some of us shit-post. Some practice comedy. But beneath every one of these mind-numbing coping mechanism is the same fearful question: as we watch our country rot, what, if anything, can be saved?

There's one thing nature teaches us, that atrophy and decomposition are not an ending. When one thing ends, another begins. The breakdown is the beginning of something stronger, more beautiful.

As Lao Tzu says: "New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings."

The systems built on domination and denial are now cracking, yes, and the light is coming through the fractures. Now is a revelation. Not the Judgment Day rapture we were promised, but something else. It's a mirror shattering and we have shadow work to do.

Similar to when individuals must "do the work" to face the parts disowned, and too must our nation.

America's shadow is not just in its policies or its politics; it lives in our collective psyche — myths we tell, the oppressive power structures we excuse, and the pain we refuse to heal. The practice of turning toward what we fear most, of bringing the unconscious into the light so it can no longer rule us from the dark.

For generations we've clung to a story of exceptionalism. America the Beautiful: optimism, freedom, and self-made destiny. But, the old infections never left: indigenous genocide, narcissistic worship, racism unatoned, power without accountability, an allegiance to profit so blind it treats empathy as inefficiency. What we're witnessing now isn't the creation of rot; it's long-overdue exposure.

Pema Chödrön wrote, "Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know."

Every outrage, every headline, every scandal is the lesson knocking harder. We run from it — into distraction, into denial, into misdirected outrage — but the shadow follows.

And more.

White-washed myths are collapsing under the weight of omissions. Patriarchal hierarchies crumbling even as they thrash. The "free market" now a religion with gods demanding endless growth as our veterans sleep under bridges. Screens with promised connection but instead they corral us into market segments of isolation.

America needs a reckoning. It needs a pause long enough to hear the echo of the people and places it has silenced.

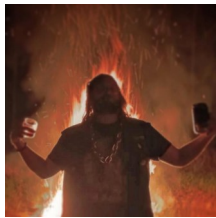
Joseph Campbell said, "The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek."

This is our cave. It smells of history and denial and despair. But the treasure is real: clarity, compassion, and renewal.

I'm going in. Come with me. Let's do this work.

The only way out of the shadow is through it. And the only way through it is together. — *TISH JACKSON*

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WORD TO THE WORDS

Words are supposed to mean something when said. They used to mean so much than they do now.

Words carried weight with an impact that could be felt instantly or subtly depending on one's diction. A message from one person to another was a sacred communication of one's inner most sanctums being briefly shared with another passing soul whom of which we are otherwise isolated from and generally indifferent too. Vernacular meant something, as did annunciation, and general dictation. What used to be the general guide rails for civility have eroded with time and brain rot to drool laced quips from the lips of those who are paid to and who should know better – the bearers of general civil standards and discord whose words are etched in stone tablets or digital ones for those less astute to reference to get their bearings once more or ever while learning. These once elegant linguists and painters of words have slowly been replaced one by one with inferior enunciators rushing for approval so desperately they fail short of even the most base level remedial tasks.

The pose and prose that once accompanied both the most noble and nefarious people equally through the halls of higher learning and higher offices and general discord practiced and knew the dance of words equally well. It was the standard load bearing wall of civility, culture, class, religion, and commerce. Leaders could comfort those they've never known with the right tone and choice of words and their sincerity seldom questioned via the eloquence of their tongues. This standard then permeated down to the general business sectors and so on. With each making an effort to show their vitriol. i.e. speeches and words generally proofed, fact checked, and spellchecked and their body language in check as well when observed. Their was at least some tether to structure and some semblance of pride.

Sadly, however this is no longer the case as even the most common commercial products and "news" sources are absolutely unapologetically riddled with simple errors that make both the producer and purchaser look bad and lazy for ignoring. I get it, the pandemic sucked. It was hard and a lot things changed. I mention this as a lot of standards went the way of the Buffalo during that window of time. Stores no longer ever again had to keep shelves full for appearances making many otherwise nice places look depleted and doomed as if we were no longer the first world nation we claimed to be. Where is the abundance of wealth we so proudly boast time and time again in general US vs THEM rhetoric? Being hoarded by those same people who used to claim about they were concerned about keeping up appearances. It mattered long enough for

them to say have look over there, and while they "drained the swamp" and practiced the noble protections of the originally named "Operation Iraqi Liberation" and beyond as mass desensitization has unfolded and eroded or general syntax on the highest of stages back to that of a grunt.

I cannot express how many times I am reading something from *New York Times* or *Scientific American* or some such ongoing legacy run arm of literary publications and there are typos. Image my disdain when our politicians and elected officials can no longer pronounce even the most basic of words on whim, whose poise and diction are sloppy at best and seethe with animosity instead of anonymity while using divisive childish rhetoric that would never be taken seriously other than as sign of being unfit and yet here we are ten years later with a completely inept national assembly and regime and a global order that is gutting the middle class at an alarming right – some speculate much it could be gone in the next handful of years as wage disparity grows and on the global elite continue to squeeze every last coin out of the pockets of those who have or had even the slightest degrees of comfort. There used to be the jokes about new money and old money and the differences of class and character and of how the new money almost always squandered it because they didn't have the restraint and financial foresight to maintain their wealth instead typically choosing to squander it and try again. Our current commander-in-chief is one such guy and a bit he comes in hot showing the world and those really watching just who his is. He is new money in the suit of old money. He has filed bankruptcy six times and talks like a wanna be thug. His diction is deplorable and his enunciation abysmal. The guy cannot pretend hard enough to be the old money he so admires. He surrounds himself with gold and talks like a bully on a kids playground and wants people to respect him and his practices while doesn't practice what he preaches. The guy dodged the draft but feels fine sending your kids off to a not a war that he mad simply because wanted to play tyrant because he's mad he appears in the Epstein files more than anyone else and rightfully so – because that's who he is. He's the guy who eat your steak while you're in the bathroom and blame it on the dog and then complain to you when you return that his stomach hurts and the food must be bad to make you feel bad because he feels bad for being a horrible person but just not bad enough.

When person holding the highest office in the world and your country talks and can not factually address or articulate cohesively enough his constituents or the world with a straight face we are in deep trouble. His words of all our words must be scrutinized more than others as he is whether wanting to be or not a bearing standard. One that is eroding in the sweaty soup he exudes

while sweating under the pressure cooker of his own lies. The oligarchs surrounding him are happy to look the other way while he pretends to be old money and not the 34-time convicted felon who bankrupted a casino and couldn't sale a steak with his name on it as long he keeps gutting the middle class and dividing up previously untouched resources in the name of profit. Little does he realize they will turn on him the second it suits him. The wealthy and powerful and their underlings have always abused their powers but they did so most of the time with an eloquent yarn spun in such a way it would seem they had no other choice but to do the dastardly thing they did and were caught for. Now these people couldn't lie their way out of a paper bag which is good, but it also nice to know there is some form of competence somewhere along the lines. There once was a competent dance of words that at least was comforting to some degree. Now the quiet parts are being said out loud and instead of changing course or correcting brash unhinged poorly spoken fractured sentences they are doubling down on them in the name of honor and glory and greed. Doublespeak and INGSOC are in swing and Big Brother is indeed watching you – just ask Peloton

This of course trickles down to all other areas of life. Why if it is in fact good enough for them then why not should the same be for us. This unfortunately left unchecked along with the over use of AI will only lead to worse dialogue and discourse among ourselves till we wont be able to discern fact from fiction or those of intelligence versus those leaving people wanting more. Another downside to this much loss of language is the use of text messaging and it's shorthand speak and most actual thoughts being limited to 140 characters or risk being deemed TLDR. This fundamentally cuts discourse to playground grunts. Furthermore, the impacts are felt throughout. How is a person supposed trust another when they cant take the word of their doctor, or preacher, or councilman, or elder? These have long been eroding but the proverbial watershed washout is real and happening in real time. We owe to ourselves and the world of those to come to hold ourselves accountable and setup and in when those that do can not. We can be accountable to ourselves and practice what we were taught before it all goes the way of the steam engine and lies and slang in formal settings further becomes the standard and we move closer to the Jerry Springer dystopian dream world of Idiocracy.

Let's make a deal to no longer elect reality stars to offices, just as you would hire a mechanic to be your dentist. It's just not in your best interest to do so. By all means, I mean you can, but that alone doesn't mean you should. — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

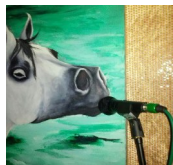


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ASK CREEPY HORSE

Reality is a construct and we're inside a black hole or we're protected by the baby spin-off Universe created by the universe being sucked into a black hole.

A couple of days ago I was digging through my coat for change. I counted out the dimes and pennies. 97 cents. I walked into the hospital store and saw what I was going to spend the last of my money on, Banana Laffy Taffy.

I made my way back to the waiting room. I sat in the only empty chair, directly under a TV blasting world news. To my left sat a neglected pot of coffee, about a cup or two of coffee left hours before.

I began peeling back the wrapper on my taffy. Bright yellow and glossy. That very artificial but reminiscent smell of banana. I smiled in a moment of recollection from my youth as I ate my cheap confection.

I was 12 years old when I discovered punk rock. To be honest, it may have been the only thing to save me. It's the mid 90s and I've got no parental control. Punk found me and became my new family. Now, I never got crushes on celebrities growing up. I would idolize certain musicians but it was never a school girl crush. They were much too old for me and I knew then, I wasn't in their leagues.

One of those early idols for me was Steve Jones of The Sex Pistols. I had stolen money from my mother, ordered *The Great Rock N Roll Swindle* from some Xerox paper order sheet. Now back in my day we didn't have internet yet so I had to learn about punk rock by reading about it in the library.

The day came that the movie arrived. For whatever reason, I was enamored with Steve Jones's presence. It was also my first time seeing a, um,, uncircumcised peen. I assure you at the age I was, I wasn't interested in that. I just liked how tough he was. He came across like someone that would shit on his gold records.

With all my musical crushes, it wasn't I wanted to be with them, no, I wanted to be them. Sigh. Look I was a kid living in BFE Florida. I remember shoplifting a London of Fog trench coat from the local thrift store. I wore Chelsea boots from the

same store and really, truly believed all four foot something of me walking the streets of Eustis, FL that I looked hard AF.

The same would happen for Mike Ness, Dave Vanian, and Joe Strummer. Steve Jones was always special to me. I felt a kinship to him that would be decades before I realized exactly how much kinship we had. When he released his book *Lonely Boy*, I would discover we had both been exposed to sexual abuse in our childhood and would spend years getting clean and sober in our own ways.

I've read some not so wonderful things about the guy and he'll share openly on most of this himself. He keeps to himself, works his program and plays songs in his bathroom for social media.

I never got to see the Sex Pistols in concert. I remember thinking how cool he looked on the '96 Filthy Lucre Tour with his guitar clad with pin up girls. I remember reading his experience with learning the guitar by doing speed and playing until he could play.

I recently listened to his isolated tracks on *Never Mind the Bollocks...* and they fuck hard. That droning and it just chugs along. So many forget these were not sounds of the music landscape back then. It's raucous and heavy. I don't feel he truly gets the credit he deserves. He never stopped creating music but we all know Sex Pistols will always be first on that list. He'd go on to do music for Sid Vicious's "My Way" and a band I really enjoy, The Professionals.

I really want to encourage everyone, despite what your feelings to punk rock may be, hell, even punk rockers don't like The Sex Pistols. Give his work a chance. It's solid. This man created a genre with three chord progressions. I think he deserves his due. — CREEPY HORSE



LIGHTER SIDE OF NUTHIN'



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