



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman
Columnist

Thanksgiving blues

Sunday morning we killed the turkeys.

This is an important fall ritual because it brings us a level of intimacy with our own lives that we find sorely lacking in the Age of Robots and Artificial Intelligence. It's the same impetus that drives our effort at growing vegetables, and hunting for protein when we can: Because it moves us off of the crass and mindless consumer X and comes with a refreshing dose of participation and personal responsibility that are continual teachers.

But killing our own Thanksgiving turkey and raising a few carrots and beets isn't the life for everyone. It will never be easier, and in the history of the world it has never been easier, or cheaper, to drop in at the corner market for a frozen turkey and a 20-pound sack of potatoes. The produce comes in from that giant supermarket in the sky almost without fail, fresh even when it's out of season, and in ridiculous abundance.

Mostly, we don't know how any of that happens, because the systems that prop up our super-abundance of consumer goods are a complex and fragile mystery. But we expect the shelves to be stocked, and when they aren't, when the veneer of convenience gets rubbed off,

the ease and independence of modern living are suddenly reduced in frightening ways.

This year, the Camp Fire in Paradise, California, is a stark reminder of just how much we rely on those systems, and how grateful we should be for them. Without them, because of the way we've settled up the country, many towns in the modern West would roll up like an old rug. In Paradise, where most of the city's 27,000 people are now displaced, many of them suddenly unemployed, schools destroyed, vehicles melted into the asphalt, restaurants, businesses, and official buildings reduced to ash, and with more than 10,000 homes burned and nearly 80 people (probably more) killed, the scale of that catastrophe is hard to contemplate.

That sort of horror is likely to get worse, not better, as we settle up every last fold in the land with people and their stuff.

And that horrible fire was on our minds as we gathered with friends here on the Figure 8 to kill turkeys. That's because, like so many others, we have a personal connection to Paradise, a school in my high school athletic league where I played football and wrestled in countless tournaments. The quarterback on our football team one season was Kory Honea, who is now the sheriff of Butte County, a man doing an admirable job in the face of unfathomable horrors.

We lost every game the year Kory was our quarterback, which wasn't his fault — we just weren't very good — but if you've ever lost every game in a season you know how that sort of adversity can expose and harden certain aspects of your character for years to come.

It was also on our minds, as we scalded and plucked our birds on a cold, bright

morning down by the barn, that here in Sisters we are subject to many of the same forces that produced the Camp Fire tragedy. We live surrounded by forests that by some combination of management practices and climate change are in a constant state of peril. That's true even though I still see morons tossing cigarettes from car windows, which is a behavior so utterly stupid and reckless it serves as the perfect metaphor for ingratitude.

I don't care if you smoke — burn down a carton of Pall Malls every day for all I care — but at least have the courtesy to swallow your filthy butts.

There were other tragedies in the air too, of course. Yet another mass shooting, this time in Thousand Oaks, where Sgt. Ron Helus and 10 young people were killed

by another nutjob — product of our throw-away cultural temperament. Which produced yet another aching personal connection because I was born in Thousand Oaks, back when they still made Westerns in the Conejo Valley, and like Sgt. Helus I graduated from the Ventura County Sheriff's Academy.

The clamor for more laws isn't going to prevent this sort of thing in the future. It will keep happening because we aren't addressing the real issues at all, which have far more to do with the kind of disposable culture we are building, and the kind of sociopaths we are filling it up with. And as we spend even more time conditioning our youth to talk to robots, inviting them into our homes to turn off the lights and share our conversations with AI "Fulfillment Centers," we

can fairly expect that kind of disassociated lunacy to keep getting worse.

In the end, we killed four turkeys. We kept one for us and gave three away to our friends to enjoy at their own dinner tables. We kept one back because over time a little bronze hen penetrated my cold heart and I was moved to spare her. Probably forever.

That hen serves as a reminder, I think, of the Biblical adage that warns us to be mindful of where we store up our treasures. In the good book we are told that where we store up our treasures so will our hearts be also. But it's more than that. It's also a warning to be careful about what those treasures actually are.

Which remains excellent advice in the season of giving thanks.

BE READY FOR ANYTHING.

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