

A case for tolerance

by P.M. Scott

For horses they call the color "liver chestnut;" for cockroaches they simply call it ugly. Actually, Fred was a very handsome cockroach and quite intelligent. His fellow roaches followed their dreams in the confines of sewers and occasionally the corners of cupboards. They were denizens of the dark. Fred on the other hand had an intensity about him and a quirk his fellows warned would be the death of him... curiosity. His antennae continually explored the world around him. Eventually, it was curiosity that caused Fred to strike out alone from the hordes. Curiosity, obsession, and a sense of integrity.

Fred had found himself student housing. It was a meager existence: crumbs from 3-for-\$1 white bread (almost unhealthy), stale potato skins (not very satisfying), Stop Roamin noodles (hardly digestible). He perched on the runners of kitchen drawers and lurked between springs of the overstuffed sofa. But gradually he made his way more and more into the light. It wasn't food that drew him. There was little enough of that anyway, stuff even a cockroach found pretty unpalatable. It was the conversation he found fascinating.

Many nights his student would be out of the apartment — conserving heat, Fred heard him say once. Other nights the student would be home silently studying — and it was good to have companionship. But other nights and weekends, a parade of friends would drop in bringing popcorn and chips and donuts. Fred would peek out a little further those times. The names Reagan, Gorbachev, Mao and Malcolm would fly through the air, thrown heatedly from tongues. Socrates and Plato shared the flight. B.F. Skinner, Kant, Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Mead, Alice Walker, Jane Goodall took wing as well. There was such a verbal barrage of heated argument that most of the room's occupants, including Fred, seldom noticed the chill in the room. (Weaker hangers-on came dressed in puffy jackets, never took off their gloves, and often clapped hands and stomped feet, not necessarily in appreciation.)

But Fred was always mobile. His antennae moved at breakneck speed. Sometimes so excited was he that he feared his antennae would create friction and he'd be mistaken for a cricket. He grew positively hot from the ideas and concepts bandied throughout the room.

His fellow cockroaches soon ostracized him as a dangerous eccentric.

"There's great diversity out here. Wonderful ideas and concepts; counter-concepts. F. Scott Fitzgerald said, 'The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.' It's challenging, stimulating!" Fred cried. "Robin Morgan says, 'We needn't settle for impoverished choices!'"

His friends nodded but never came back.

And Fred continued to learn. One must have "money and a room of one's own" in order to be creative, Virginia Woolf; "Three passions have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind," Bertrand Russell; After a certain point, the more labor you put into something the less you get out of it, "The Law of Diminishing Returns," Paul Samuelson; "Death is the last limit of all things," Horace.

Fred grew more and more fond of his roommate too. Here was a kindred spirit. Fred shared the student's struggles for knowledge and his struggles too to avoid starvation. Adversity shared brings intimates closer together, it's often said. There came a time when Fred decided it was long enough that he'd been a passive partner in this relationship. The need for "money and a room of

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one's own." They shared that. The thirst for knowledge too. The "law of diminishing returns..." during long nights of study they shared that.

Fred decided to greet his roommate. One night, long after midnight and the studying was over, while the student slept, Fred made his way over the nappy blanket, the stained and yellowed sheet. He took up a perch on the grey pillowcase above the student's right ear.

The morning alarm rang, ringing only a short time as the battery was running down, then shut itself off. The student slowly opened his right eye. He blinked quickly several times as though to clear his vision; then his attention was riveted by Fred.

Fred had taken his chance. This was it; all or nothing. His little antennae began feverishly weaving their communication. "To the eye we are different but we are kin. We have diffe-

rent methods but share the same purpose. A room of one's own... thirst for love and knowledge; unbearable pity... it is a far far better thing I do...; the sun also rises...."

The student quickly arose, taking with him the grey, flaccid pillow. Without ceremony, he dumped Fred the cockroach onto the floor, and squashed him with the heel of his foot.

The way less traveled

by Jim Anctil

The first few times it happened, I couldn't believe my ears. Here in Portland? My new home with its beautiful downtown, its civic pride, quiet neighborhoods, and much-raised livability? But, yes, gradually I became aware that one aspect of life in Portland was not quite as rosy as its nickname implies. And it is something I can no longer refuse to speak about.

I adjusted relatively quickly to a new city with its weather patterns, while building a new circle of friends and colleagues. Then I gradually began to pay more attention, at first with surprise and then with growing consternation, to the amount of racism and religious bigotry I was hearing. Certainly, throughout all those years "back east" in New York City, I never heard from my peers the blatant epithets I have heard in Portland. To gather with friends for relaxing social occasion and then have to endure racial jokes or religious slurs being bandied about in the most insensitive way occurs only too often, I have discovered. Because I belong to one ethnic group does not mean I am automatically enthusiastic about listening to ugly invective or casual put-downs against other groups. The casual assumption that I would condone this is what I find most troubling.

I am deeply concerned about this because it reflects something less than healthy about the community I have chosen as my home. Because I associate with generally well-educated and reasonably sophisticated people on a certain social level, I was unprepared for what I have perceived to be all too common here. The fact that mature, family-oriented, otherwise caring individuals, many of whom have traveled extensively, can casually utilize such insulting terminology indicates something wrong. This is already the 1980s — shouldn't we have moved beyond the dark ages of the 1940s and 50s in civil rights? Yet I wonder what our young people are learning about other groups and cultures. We have had by now numerous examples of incredibly talented, valuable and wonderfully giving persons of every ethnic and cultural background imaginable. We have them right

here in Portland! Are we now going to let all that hard-won social progress of the 1960s and 1970s go for naught and settle back into stereotypes and complacency?

But let me ease up now a bit. I would never want to paint a picture of Portland as a place of backwater Southern mentality. I have also met many people who are as concerned as I and who care about these very same issues. They too want Portland to be the great city it can be. They desire not only a quality environment and aesthetic amenities, but also full opportunity for development of all people in Portland. If Bob Hicks can praise Seattle for its ethnic diversity and cultural offerings, our own Portland sense of pride ought to give us the stimulus to build ourselves into the "leader among cities and a national model for civic equality," as Herb Cawthorne wrote in his October 24 Oregonian essay.

We have so much to be proud of here. I can say with sincerity that I love Portland, and I love it much more than I ever did New York.

But I want it to live up to its own dreams. I have seen what this city has — a beautiful setting, an enlightened and progressive city administration, a staggering abundance of creativity, talent, and energy. I am so proud of what my city has accomplished in so many areas. Now I would like to see that same commitment to its people with their varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Is it too much to ask that every one of them be allowed a fine education (with equal opportunity to develop his/her individual gifts), as well as quality housing and health care and a meaningful, adequately-paid job? This is the only way to fight prejudice effectively in the long run. I still believe all this is possible. And it is doubtless more possible here than in most cities. We have less far to travel to get there. If we can build a major performing arts center and revitalize the whole central core of the city, we can certainly nurture our cultural diversity. We can even glory in it!

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