



HERE COMES YOUR GHOST AGAIN*

Years ago I was moving an old couch for a dear friend who was many years my senior. The couch had been stored on a porch for several years and had been exposed to quite a bit of moisture. As I lifted an end of the couch I noticed a paper bag between the cushions. I picked the bag up and began to throw it aside, when my curiosity kicked in. I opened the sack and was very surprised to find the likeness of Adolf Hitler staring me in the face.

I showed the stamp collection in the bag to my friend who said, "Take it and see if you can get a couple of bucks for it." There was something strange about the tone of her voice, and I didn't question her about the stamps. It was obvious, however, that someone had collected the stamps in Nazi Germany and they had somehow ended up on Jeanne's back porch. She would have been about 25 when World War 2 ended.

Nearly all of the stamps were badly water damaged, but the story they told was fascinating. There were stamps commemorating Hitler's 55th birthday (April 20, 1944), and stamps meant to immortalize the assassinated second in command of the SS (Heydrich). Hitler and Mussolini stood looking out over a town, like shepherds of men, benevolent leaders. The symbol of the SS was on another stamp. Images of Hitler and swastikas were glorified throughout the collection. As I looked through them, the strange tone in Jeanne's voice didn't seem so odd.

The troubled economy in pre-Nazi Germany was partially responsible for one of the darkest times in history. The German people were looking for something to blame their troubles on, and a group of people who didn't believe that Christ was the Son of God made an excellent repository for the flood of anger filling the country. Today we wonder how a nation could allow the manifestations of Hell on Earth. A nation of Christians (among others), we wonder how another could allow entire families to be starved, beaten, tortured and murdered.

Thirty-odd years I've watched the log trucks roll out of Oregon's hills. The trucks have steadily become fewer and the

trees they haul become progressively smaller. Oregon's troubled timber industry is one part of the weakening American economy. People are rightfully afraid that our days of prosperity are drawing to a close. The political and economic leaders who have failed us are looking for someone to blame. Unfortunately (for our failed leaders) Americans don't collectively blame Jews these days. Instead, a new immorality must be found: a group of people different from most of us, or another species that stands in the way of progress. The politicians are looking for scapegoats to blame their failures on. Fifty years from now, we will be remembered as the people who were duped into blaming owls and homosexuals for things they had no control over. I look at myself with the rest of you, and wonder: *Can we really be such fools?*

All my life I've tried to understand the differences between people. After all, it's a lack of cooperation that is responsible for most of our problems. No matter how hard I try, I can never understand people like David Duke. How can people be so consumed with hatred and call themselves Christians? Even atheists can see the hypocrisy that so many self-proclaimed Christians are blind to. Darwin would find himself more welcome in Heaven than the self-righteous hypocrites passing judgment around this country. Although I disagree with most of David Duke's philosophy, I believe he chose the right political party to affiliate himself with. David Duke seems to be part of the natural devolution of the Republican Party.

Having no power, money or influence, I often wonder why I bother worrying about guys like Duke, Lon Mabon and the rest of the people Gandhi said would eventually fall. Then I think of the alternative to opposing the oppression of free people. I think of the real story behind those stamps, and suddenly I'm very afraid, but very motivated. Those of us who have known Anne Frank and forgotten her have lost our souls with her memory.

~ROBIN SAWYER (NCTE, 11/1992)

them to the shoulder of the political road where they can rot in the ditch with the rest of the roadkill. We're still driving, but we need to know what we should hit and what we should brake for.

Contrary to popular beliefs, almost none of the news media reaching our eyes and ears is involved in the business of providing us with useful information. Some gets through, but the main business of most periodicals, radio and television stations is selling space for ads. Take an example: Say a town has built a convention facility where events come, often placing ads to promote the things they are doing. The operators of the facility can direct promoters and advertisers to the newspaper, often placing ads themselves. Does anyone suppose the newspaper (or radio or TV station) is going to be receptive to reporting anything that may offend the people who butter their scones?

Probably the greatest myth Americans believe is the one about civil rights. You have no rights unless you can afford to defend them. Let's consider free speech. Suppose you know something about the government and want to tell people what you know. So you tell people what it is you know and people working for the government retaliate, maybe fire you if you work for them. Going a step further, suppose they admit they are retaliating against you for saying things they don't want to hear? What is it you are going to do to protect your right to speak against the government without fear of reprisal?

The government has far more resources than you do — the best lawyers money can buy, money to pay expert witnesses, everything to launch a full scale attack on you. You may be able to find a lawyer who will take your case on a contingency basis, but the expenses associated with a lawsuit are not covered under the contingency agreement, meaning you must be able to at least be able to match the government dollar for dollar. If the case is a slam dunk or the lawyer really believes in what you are doing, they may front you the expenses. More likely they will invest little time and few resources into the case as they try to settle out of court.

If you happen to work for the government and are covered under a collective bargaining agreement, the small chance you have of defending the rights you are supposed to have has been handed to the union. It should come as no surprise there is really no contention between public employee unions and employers. If public managers give employees more money and benefits, how much more are they themselves entitled to?

Through the years I've always believed in nonviolent activism, and still do today. But seeing the doors of our courts slammed in the faces of those calling for what's right has left me more sympathetic to those who throw bombs. Does anyone feel it is right to shoot a woman in the back while she is holding her child? No, of course not. Admitting no wrong doing, the government gave Randy Weaver and his children about \$3 million. I'm here to tell you, the government does not give any plaintiff \$50 if officials have not done anything wrong. Was the person who shot the woman in the back held accountable? No.

One of the most blatant examples of how corrupt our government is comes from Congress. With little to no money for audits, the IRS has been instructed by Congress to focus audit attention on the working poor — those who take the earned income credit. Of course, I'm sure there is some grand justification for using limited resources to audit the poor. Horrendous abuses of the earned income credit may exist, low income folk taking terrible advantage of the rest of us. More likely, Congress is redirecting the attention of the IRS, much as a shoplifter might yell, "Hey look over there" while putting pilfered items in a pocket.

What are the great things we, as a species, have done? We have cured and prevented illnesses, built great structures and machines, harnessed much of our environment, created conveniences unheard of only a few years ago. What we haven't done is decide what we are going to do about too many people with too few resources to continue as we have. It does no good to increase life expectancies if those who live long must live broken and tired, separated from their families. Without health and vitality, life becomes an exercise without benefit.

The interrelationship between humans and the earth cannot be ignored too much longer without dire consequences. Even now it may be too late to avoid great suffering as the barrage of chemicals and technology we have released into the environment begin taking the toll on us we have taken on other species. We haven't taken the time to fully consider the long-term consequences of our actions, choosing to focus instead on our immediate desires and things we perceive as needs.

Less regulation is not the answer. The cattle rancher with 5000 steers shitting in the stream does not care about what goes downstream unless we make him swim down there. Likewise, corporate profit junkies, without intervention, are not going to do anything to limit their fix. Good government looks out for the interests of its people — in all respects. There has to be some give and take but balance can be the result of teetering back and forth without falling one way or the other.

Only a generation ago our resources seemed limitless, like the buffalo. Today we know they are finite, just like the carrying capacity of this planet. We were raised after the buffalo vanished from the plains, never knowing the great wonder we might have known standing in awe as the great beasts roamed before us. Today the buffalo are mostly confined to museums. We must reflect on what we've lost, what it might have meant to us and where we're going.

I think of two men: Bill Gates and a young man named Chris McCandless who died young in the Alaskan wilderness. McCandless, a man with more education than Gates, chose to abandon his trust money, his car, and his upper class background. He became a hobo, wandering about the country, living simply, finally moving into the Alaska back country before dying after making a mistake identifying a plant. Chris lived his life on his own terms, knowing freedoms most of us never will. His life was fast, but full. Considering Gates and McCandless, who is worthy of our admiration? The operating system I am using to type this is nice, but I managed quite well with a typewriter before, and a pen prior to that. The pen and the typewriter didn't become obsolete every year or so. No, McCandless didn't give me such handy things as cut and paste, but he gave me something far more valuable: the knowledge that people still exist who are not afraid to stand alone for what they believe in. Chris would probably still be around and the world would be a much better place if a few more of us had stood with him rather than Gates. We know in our hearts where justice lies, what we need to do now to make our legacy a good one — simplify. Be it creation, or the result of evolution, our world is home — one home, one people, one gift to be passed along to our children's children.

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