



Winter solstice in the northern hemisphere signals the termination of a year past. Yggdrasil, the World Tree, casts long shadows on the landscape from its bare branches. Dark ice forces from the north are held at bay by the sunshine legions of the south and gradually retreat toward Arctic climes. A new year approaches. One reflects on time past and seasons ahead, assesses and evaluates, criticizes, and posits suggestions for improvement.

The professor has experienced certain perturbations of spirit within himself this past year, a biliousness brought on by what he considers to be a creeping tendency amongst our citizens to shirk or deny responsibility for their actions. More alarming yet is the apparent trend in this country to condone, and even reinforce this behavior in court decisions, formulation of law, and the national psyche. The practices of unscrupulous attorneys, awards of substantial sums of money by insurance companies for redress, and widespread use of lawsuits in the court systems contribute in significant ways.

A young woman leaves her car in the parking lot of our state park. She walks some distance along the park's trail system, stumbles, and augers into the bushes at the side of the trail. The State of Oregon finds itself the defendant in a court of law, accused of ignoring hazardous conditions in its park.

A college student, despondent at the loss of his girl friend, consumes a pint of whiskey at his apartment. He drives to the neighborhood tavern, sits quietly by himself, and drinks several pints of beer. On his drive home he strikes and kills an elderly couple. The tavern and its service personnel are held libel for his negligence.

Two hunters driving on private forest lands sustain injuries when their pickup truck leaves a gravel road and overturns. Insurance settlements and legal fees irritate the corporation holding these lands resulting in complete closure of the area to public access.

An attorney sues her fiance for breach of promise after he breaks off their engagement. The courts assuage her bruised feelings by awarding the jilted attorney an enormous financial settlement.

In the construction industry, an injured worker immediately seeks financial compensation from someone -- his boss, a general contractor, the homeowner, his union.

One could cite examples ad nauseam.

We, as citizens and voters, have begun to accept these occurrences as right and proper. Hardly an eyebrow raises when criminals receive light penalties for their transgressions. Parental neglect, troubled pasts, childhood abuse, war memories, and various "co-dependencies" are dredged up to explain intolerable behavior.

These may be reasons, but they are not excuses.

We live in the era of the "man-child" and "woman-child", a perpetual adolescence with its concomitant irresponsibilities, few willing to accept the consequences of their actions, pointing elsewhere for causes.

I recall an anecdote related to me by a past professor. He and his wife spent many years among the Navajo people in the Four Corners area of the Southwest. The professor invited a 17-year old Navajo girl to spend the coming summer with his family. A decision was necessary. Local

tribal members gathered together. Each stated reasons for and against the girl leaving for a visit to the East Coast. The girl then presented her views of the matter and made her decision, carefully weighing the consequences. She bore ultimate responsibility for her choice, not her parents or relatives. Had she chosen poorly, she would have risked tribal ostracism. Perhaps we can learn from the Navajo.

Ours has been dubbed a youth culture. I fervently hope we will quit whining and snivelling and grow up this year.

self-consciousness beginning at about twelve years of age, mothers who work rush home in a mad panic to prepare dinner for their family, homeless warm themselves over heat vents, men try to bed women with amazingly stupid lines, people work hard to improve their economic condition, groups of strangers are uncomfortable in elevators, people die of AIDS. Christmas is a festive time of year.

By way of a story let me illustrate this "sameness of place." Leaving the severe beauty of Chartes cathedral I want to sit and collect my thoughts. I wind through the narrow cobblestone streets, ah! There is a merchant of coffee, beans, teas and accessories. There is a small table which accomodates about 5 people. I enter, take off my gloves, and greet the two rather formidable looking clerks. "Bon jour, Cafe creme" "sil vous plait." In unison they bark at me. "Cafe Noir!" (I'd asked for cream in my coffee and they emphatically told me I could only have it BLACK!)

The folks huddled at the table appear a little disgruntled at the interruption of a tourist asking for, of all things, cream in her coffee. They move to allow room for me and continue their discussion. So -- "City Hall does not understand the needs of the merchant community. We pour money into their coffers by licenses and taxes but when it comes time for City Hall to give back - they have a short memory."

With general agreement they return to their own shops with a laughing reference to coffee and cream and nod in my direction. There's an anecdote from sameness. Those frequenting "Pat's" in Cannon Beach might see a similarity or two.

Now, look at the character of expression which (I find) is so different.

People linger. Although they walk fast and work hard - they linger over coffee or wine. They take several hours to eat a meal. I asked for coffee to take with me and the clerk was horrified. "Oh, no! You must sit here and drink your coffee so you can enjoy it." (Hmmm. Now there's a thought.) I have yet to see anyone walking about with a thermo-insulated travel mug.

I made a purchase - a little gift. It was wrapped in colored tissue, tied with a ribbon, placed in a bag which was closed with curled ribbon. Then a business card was placed in a decorated pocket on the front of the bag. An exception? No. Nearly every purchase, even little bonbons, are handled like masterful gifts. Flower shops stay open late and are crowded. Paris fashions come in 3 sizes and 3 colors, sizes 3.5, and 7, and black, grey, and red. (This is only a slight exaggeration.) Nearly everyone smokes. Non-smoking sections are now required in public places - many consist of 2 or 3 tables. There is a whole lotta kissing going on. Men kiss women - certainly. Men kiss men. Women kiss women. I have only observed 2 handshakes. As near as I can tell, it's one kiss per cheek. It's what I call a "grandma kiss." This is, lips are thrown somewhat to the side while the sound "mwah" is made. If it's an enthusiastic greeting the sound is extended, more bovine-like and ends with a pop. "Mwoowahp!"

Bad food is close to a sin. It is not tolerated. A restaurant serving poor food simply will not survive. (Unless they serve only tourists who either don't know any better or only come once anyway. Oops - perhaps I put this example in the wrong category!)

Contrary to many warnings, I have been treated with courtesy at nearly every turn. Of course, some people have been rude. But I can think of at least 2 people in Cannon Beach. I wouldn't want anyone to conclude that because 2 people are rude, all Cannon Beach is rude.

So, the expression of humanity here is different. More gracious, perhaps with a greater attention to the small details of ordinary life. Paris is at once entirely itself and larger than itself. It is an honest city full of workers, families and common struggles. It is to these people whom the city belongs. A city whose history crashes upon the shores of many countries. It is an excruciating city where antiquity, intrigue and revolution are squeezed from the pores of its stones. It is a place of mysticism where pilgrimage, worship and infathomable spiritualities have a place. Art realized and young hearts full of exquisite hope roll together to form an unequalled creative atmosphere.

Hemingway said it so well.

"If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast."

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Out of the Way in Paris

Mary Ann Radmacher-Hershey

There are many reasons I chose to go so far from home to remind myself that all the world is essentially the same. Having said that, I also attest that the expression of that humanity varies so wonderfully from place to place.

I observe the sameness - children sin and struggle insufferably with