

So, why are we 'wasting' our votes, me and the other 4 to 10%? Well, I'm voting for Mr. Nader because I have met the man and have seen the difference he has made as a private citizen. Recently he disclosed his financial statement, something he had refused to do for years. He had always said that as a private citizen it's nobody's business how much money he makes, as long as he pays his taxes. A lot of people were surprised that Nader is worth around \$3 million dollars, and he was called a hypocrite for investing in high tech stocks. Excuse me? The man is no fool, he is a responsible adult who has husbanded his resources wisely, and he donates the majority of his income to the various environmental and consumer groups that he has helped create. He lives on \$25,000 dollars a year.

Much has been made of Mr. Nader's 'rumpled suit' as though it were his hair shirt of saint-hood. No, it's just that unlike the other two candidates, who are dressed by professionals, Mr. Nader dresses himself. He also thinks for himself, another obvious difference. It has been said that anyone who has gathered enough power to be nominated for president has by definition been corrupted by and compromised by the process. And yet, here is Mr. Nader. There are no sex or drug rumors floating around, no questions about his fund-raising practices. He has spent his life trying to improve the lot of the common people, and he is a tireless worker. He is not a saint but he comes pretty close to being what used to be called an honest man. And we are reminded that you can't cheat an honest man.

So, can an honest man be elected President of the United States of America? Some would say it hasn't ever happened before, but they are cynics. If we do as we are told to do, and accept the choices given us, things will go along pretty much as they have -- no matter which of the major party candidates wins. But if we exercise our freedom and accept the responsibility to vote for someone who could really make a difference, we might be able to begin to change things for the majority of this country. Only half of the people voted in the last presidential election, and most of them held their noses while they did it.

I've decided to vote for Mr. Nader because I think he can win. Oh, it won't be easy. He'll have to convince millions of people that they have a choice and that they have a responsibility. So, I'm voting for Ralph Nader because it's a free country, and I can. So can you.

Things have never been more like they are now, and all in all it seems quite possible that freedom, that word over-used in July, might just rear its silly head once again on the planet. I offer as evidence the words of a 90 year old woman who calls herself Grannie D.; who, having walked from the west to east coast in a personal plea for, of all things, campaign finance reform, spoke at the Lincoln Memorial:

"The beauty of this memorial we take from the ancient Greeks. Inside this temple of democracy, however, is no god of Olympus, but a man of Illinois -- a country lawyer with a talent for self-government which we all must share if a government of the people and by the people and for the people is to not perish from the earth.

"We all have our own religions to guide us, but we share a common civic belief, and this is one of the temples of that shared belief. It is the belief in our ability and the responsibility to manage our own government as a great people. It is the belief in the human scale of things. We have sculpted Mr. Lincoln large in stone, but only so that this solitary man is not dwarfed by the columns of our institutions; only so that we might remind ourselves that those who would overwhelm any of our individual voices in matters of our self-governance with their money or with powers we have granted them, are the enemies of all good things represented in this place.

"If our experiment in self-government is to survive in reality as well as in name, we must defend the position of the individual. That is what we march for today, and Mr. Lincoln's great smile of enduring optimism for his people encourages us onward. So let us now go to our own Capitol, just up the hill from here."

And be aware, it is not just about Freedom, it is certainly about responsibility and that day to day dignity that one tries to maintain as a free person. I would like to share with you a story from St. Liz, who is a 'forest ranger' or something, and who sends us jokes and stories. This story made my heart soar like an eagle.

On a British Airways flight from Johannesburg, a middle-aged, well-off white South African Lady had found herself sitting next to a black man. She called the cabin crew attendant over to complain about her seating. "What seems to be the problem Madam?" asked the attendant. "Can't you see?" she said, "You've sat me next to a kaffir. I can't possibly sit next to this disgusting human. Find me another seat!"

"Please calm down Madam," the stewardess replied. "The flight is very full today, but I'll tell you what I'll do -- I'll go and check to see if we have any seats available in club or first class."

The woman cocks a snooty look at the outraged black man beside her (not to mention many of the surrounding passengers).

A few minutes later the stewardess returns with the good news, which she delivers to the lady, who cannot help but look at the people around her with a smug and self-satisfied grin: "Madam, unfortunately, as I suspected, economy is full. I've spoken to the cabin services director, and club is also full. However, we do have one seat in first class."

Before the lady has a chance to answer, the stewardess continues. . . "It is most extraordinary to make this kind of upgrade, however, and I have had to get special permission from the captain. But, given the circumstances, the captain felt that it was outrageous that someone be forced to sit next to such an obnoxious person." With which, she turned to the black man sitting next to the woman, and said: "So if you'd like to get your things, sir, I have your seat ready for you. . ."

At which point, apparently the surrounding passengers stood and gave a standing ovation while the black guy walked up to the front of the plane.

... people will forget what you said ...
... people will forget what you did ...
... but people will never forget how you made them feel ...

I was so moved by that simple story. I replied:

Dear St. Liz,

Thank you for yet another smile that you have brought to this old face. And even some hope to this battered old heart. It's important that we hear these things from each other since the media will rarely tell us any 'good' news. It is the best kept secret in the world, that the good guys are actually winning more than the bad guys; well, because the bad guys have better press agents. In just my lifetime the changes brought about by common people seeking common decency and sense are beyond belief; and thus seldom mentioned.

When I left High School, black people could not vote in most Southern States, and lynchings went unpunished. Women could not vote in Switzerland, and were legally subject to rape by their husbands in most states. There was no such thing as an environmental movement, a women's rights movement, and gays were regularly beaten up by cops as well as by 'regular citizens' who claimed they were 'propositioned.' Farm workers had no rights, DDT was sprayed on everything including people to kill parasites. Day care and Head Start programs were still years away, land use planning and parental leave hadn't even been thought of. The government officials accepted cash in paper bags for their services. No one talked about child abuse, or domestic violence. Sexist and racist humor were the order of the day on television as well as in private. Today, African women are fighting the tradition of sexual mutilation in countries where they were chattel a decade ago, the world conference on Women's Rights celebrated it's fifth anniversary recently, openly gay people have Network television shows, and the most successful golfer in the world has a racial profile that defies definition. A woman was on the ticket of the Democratic party as a vice presidential candidate, and a woman made a serious run for the Republican nomination for president, and a black man has been courted by the Republican party to seek the office. We've banned DDT and saved the Bald Eagle from extinction. The Grey Whale is rebounding, and we are discussing breaching dams to save Salmon.

I could go on and on about just the changes I have seen and am proud to say I fought for, often in the streets, but always in the voting booth. But your simple story about the people at British Airways dealing with the 'bad guys' is so very important, not just because they had to wisdom to recognize who the obnoxious person was, but because the rest of the passengers in the plane stood up and applauded. We, the people, know what is right and what is wrong, and never doubt for a minute that we will ever give up trying to make this a better place for our children and grandchildren. We learn perhaps a little too slowly some times and we will forget every once in a while, but all in all we are winning.

Thanks for reminding me.

Mac's book begins with an episode in the rice paddies. His partner on patrol gets picked off by a VC sniper and the commanding officer called for an air-strike against the nearby village. After the strike the platoon went in to mop up. Suddenly Mac and a buddy stopped in their tracks. In the center of the village was a circle, and in the middle of the circle was a pile three feet high of the charred bodies of the village children, burned to oblivion by napalm. In their last moments before fleeing to certain death in the paddies, the survivors had collected the bodies to confront their tormentors.

Mac's buddy just stared into the pile. "Mac, I can't take this shit anymore. It's no good, Mac." That's all he said. They had to forcibly pull Mac away from the circle. He couldn't take his eyes away.

The commanding lieutenant, freshly arrived from district headquarters, tried to put out the story that the Viet Cong had murdered the village children. The grunts just stared at him. That episode, Mac says, was the turning point. He was never the same again. In the paddies of the South, the marines were used as bait to flush out the Viet Cong so air-strikes could be directed against their strongholds. But most of the highly touted body counts of the military were Vietnamese villagers, like the children he had seen.

Mac's book talks about the experiences of men put into a hell-hole of our civilization, their attempt to comprehend how they got there and the costly effort of trying to tell someone else about it. We did your dirty work, he says, and you hated us for it. It's no wonder then that the media portraits of Vietnam vets only see deranged rapists, murderers and crazies. We project our own guilt upon them. What we have failed to see is the incredible humanity, humor and sense of responsibility that emerged from many of these men who survived one of the most awesome horrors ever created by Western Civilization.

Now Da Nang has fallen, and they're taking some of the orphans out of the war zone. Fine. But over a million lives were obliterated in Vietnam during the last 12 years. The Government of the United States has decided, after all, that the unification of Vietnam does not constitute a vital threat to its empire. Fine. But if anybody ever gets the idea again of imposing American will on a people with its own mind and aspirations, let's hope that Mac and his friends are around to set them straight. Let's hope that nobody ever has to do our dirty work again. By the end of spring, there will be a united People's Republic of Vietnam.

(This story originally appeared in the Portland State University Vanguard, Friday, April 4, 1975. It is reprinted by permission of the author, David Horowitz, who is now a Professor of History at Portland State University, and should not be confused with David Horowitz, the conservative columnist for Salon.com.)

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Justice Louis D. Brandeis

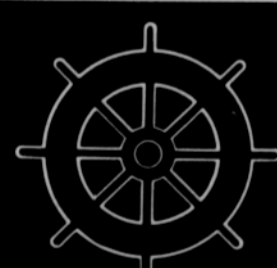
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It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspcakably precious things; freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.
~ Mark Twain

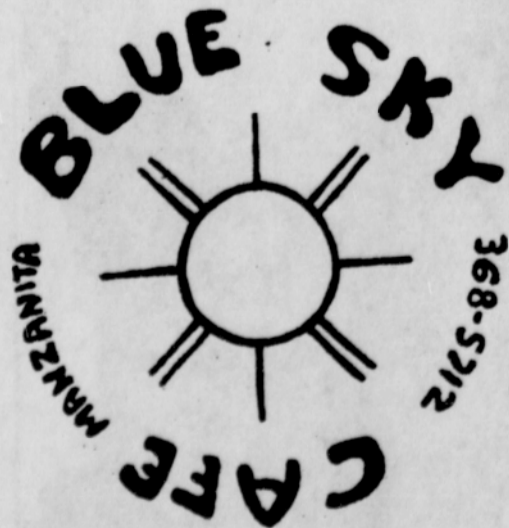
Since 1965, 11 million Americans have been arrested for possession of Marijuana. As one of the 11 million, I feel free to comment on the situation. It's stupid.

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