



The Perfect Storm has captured the interest of the American public this past year. We have a veteran Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer residing in Cannon Beach these days. He is a modest person who asks to remain unnamed. Deeds of quiet courage and heroism often go unnoticed. I thought my readers might enjoy a brief account of one incident that occurred during his tour of duty in our area. He describes that event in his own words:

"I think it was about 1990. Six a.m. Sun just coming up. An EPIRB (emergency position-indicating radio beacon) indicated a capsized vessel 20 miles off Gray's Harbor, Washington. They're salt-water activated, so we knew the EPIRB was in the water. The crew left Air Station Astoria in our HH-65 Dolphin Helicopter for the site: pilot, co-pilot, flight mechanic, and myself, the rescue swimmer. The Dolphin is a French air-frame helicopter, American avionics, fast, computerized, with a 300-mile range. The crew maintains its own helicopter, kind of like a paratrooper packing his own chute. You make sure everything's right that way.

When we arrived on scene, we saw the capsized fishing vessel, gear tangled in the water. I saw a man in a T-shirt clinging to a piece of wood. The boat wasn't broken up. I was lowered into the water and talked to the man on the wood. He'd been in the water about 2 hours. I found out from the survivor that there were two other crew members, and sent him up in the basket to the helicopter. I located one body five feet underwater, untangled him from the rigging, and sent him up too. I couldn't see the other guy.

The crew decided to return to Astoria with the helicopter and survivor. They lowered an LR-1 life raft, deflated. I inflated the four by two foot rubber raft with a carbon dioxide cartridge. It failed to inflate fully, and water sloshed around me when I sat on it. The thing was gym-bag size. I floated, but was far from high and dry. No land visible, 20 miles offshore.

Then they left me all alone on the sea. With the EPIRB in the water, they knew they could return and locate me. A Coast Guard 41-footer launched from Gray's Harbor with an arrival time of about an hour.

The water was really clear. I could see 50 feet down into the water. I swam a wide lap around the boat and gear, trying to locate the other body. I didn't want to get too close in case the vessel went down, sucking me with it.

I floated on the raft for what seemed an eternity, a little scared and seasick. I vomited in my own lap, afraid to put any bait in the water that might attract the wrong fish.

I finally spotted a tiny speck on the horizon, what I hoped was the 41-footer. I popped a smoke flare, and it zeroed in on me and took me on board. Half an hour later the helicopter returned. They spotted the third body in the water and directed the 41-footer to that location. I recovered it and placed it in the basket lowered by the helicopter crew. They picked me up and we returned to Air Station Astoria."

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In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life. It goes on. Robert Frost

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From The Lower Left Corner
Victoria Stoppello

Troubling

I find the aftermath of the presidential election in Florida very disturbing. I have uneasy feelings which I haven't been able to pin down. A lifelong Democrat, I've lived through other Republican administrations, so that can't be it.

The fact that the Republican party sought to limit voters' access to the polls in St. Louis, followed by legal efforts to limit hand-counting of ballots, plus the mob scene in Miami-Dade County are part of what has made me uneasy. These feelings go beyond simple party politics to something deeper, a concern that our democratic processes could be at risk.

As a writer, I would find George W.'s inability, or refusal, to speak the English language properly quite amusing—if he were another columnist or a late night humorist. But that's not the job he went after. He doesn't appear to be competent to run one of the largest organizations in the world. If his intent is to dismantle part of it, he may be successful, but I wonder if he's capable of even doing that effectively. I've heard his brother, Jeb Bush, is more intelligent and a harder worker—but George W. is the older brother, so perhaps this is a modern version of primogeniture.

These concerns make me wonder if there is some other "power behind the throne" that will actually be running the country. One very skeptical person suggested to me that this would actually be George Bush Senior's fourth term—two running the Reagan administration, one term of his own, and now his son's.

Then, while visiting friends in California, one of them showed me a memo he'd received from a colleague at Cal Poly. It summed up my concerns so adroitly, I'm passing it on in toto:

Our Election From A Third World Perspective:

"A history professor from Uppsala Universitet in Sweden called and pointed to this article she had read in which a Zimbabwe politician was quoted as saying that children should study this event closely for it shows that election fraud is not only a third world phenomenon.

"1. Imagine that we read of an election occurring anywhere in the third world in which the self-declared winner was the son of the former prime minister, and that former prime minister was himself the former head of that nation's secret police (CIA).

"2. Imagine that the self-declared winner lost the popular vote but won based on some old colonial holdover (electoral college) from the nation's pre-democracy past.

"3. Imagine that the self-declared winner's 'victory' turned on disputed votes cast in a province governed by his brother!

"4. Imagine that the poorly drafted ballots of one district, a district heavily favoring the self-declared winner's opponent, led thousands of voters to vote for the wrong candidate.

"5. Imagine that members of that nation's most despised caste, fearing for their lives and livelihoods, turned out in record numbers to vote in near-universal opposition to the self-declared winner's candidacy.

"6. Imagine that hundreds of members of that most-despised caste were intercepted on their way to the polls by state police operating under the authority of the self-declared winner's brother.

"7. Imagine that six million people voted in the disputed province and that the self-declared winner's 'lead' was only 327 votes. Fewer, certainly than the vote counting machines' margin of error.

"8. Imagine that the self-declared winner and his political party opposed a more careful by-hand inspection and re-counting of the ballots in the disputed province or in its most hotly disputed district.

"9. Imagine that the self-declared winner, himself a governor of a major province, had the worst human rights record of any province in his nation and actually led the nation in executions.

"10. Imagine that a major campaign promise of the self-declared winner was to appoint like-minded human rights violators to lifetime positions on the high court of that nation.

"None of us would deem such an election to be representative of anything other than the self-declared winner's will-to-power. All of us, I imagine, would wearily turn the page thinking that it was another sad tale of pitiful pre- or anti-democracy peoples in some strange elsewhere."

A friend asked me recently why I think the Republicans are responsible for all the craziness surrounding the election in Florida. My quick answer was, "I'm not blaming the Republicans, a rather diverse group of people, many of whom I admire and like; I'm blaming the Bush family."

Victoria Stoppello lives at the lower left corner of Washington state.

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