

Three Teachers

Lessons come from unexpected sources.

Looking back over 60 years the other day, three good teachers and their lessons returned in quick succession: Jimmy, the bear, and Monica.



Jimmy. Freckled and living next door, Jimmy was my best friend from ages 3 through 8, until he went off to Catholic school and our daily worlds diverged. Jimmy and I never argued. When we would join up to play together outdoors (which is where we nearly always played), Jimmy would suggest an idea for what to do. If I didn't like that idea, it was my turn to suggest something to do. If he didn't like *that* idea, it was his turn again, and so on until one of us had an idea that sounded good to both of us.

We walked downtown to swim in the local public pool; buried treasure to dig it up the same day a year later; read comic books; rolled around the neighborhood on metal skates clamped onto our shoes; built tents with covers, ropes and clothespins; and hung from my backyard jungle gym. Sometimes we joined other neighborhood kids to play in the street, but it was Jimmy and I who daily appeared in each other's yard to holler when it was time to come out and play.

Keep sharing ideas until one that works for all comes up.

I was astonished in kindergarten when a girl named Patty, whom I thought was a friend, would be nice one day and mean the next. But Patty came too late. From Jimmy, I had already learned with whom to hang out for friends as well as the best way to make decisions with others: Keep sharing ideas until one that works for all comes up.

The Bear. When I first started backpacking, I loved the days, but the nights were my nemesis: Bears might come. One night in a campground before a Sierra Nevada Mountains trip, my long-feared bear materialized in a nearby campsite. Someone had left bacon within reach. There was commotion, yelling, flashlights.

"Uh-oh, O'B," I warned my husband. "I left marshmallows out on the table. Can you go put them in the car?" (Just what I thought I was going to do if the bear got O'B isn't clear.)

O'B got out of our double sleeping bag and retrieved the marshmallows, but he was having trouble opening the trunk down at the car. Meanwhile, I burrowed into the sleeping bag to avoid what was happening. Then I felt O'B pushing at my side of the sleeping bag. I peeled back the top of the bag to see why he was getting mixed up. The bear was looking down at me. She had been pushing the sleeping bag with her nose.

"OK, Mary," I told myself, "for once, stay quiet." I moved out from under the looming head, sat up, looked at her; she looked at me, then turned and ambled off. O'B returned in time to see a bear disappearing into the nearby shrubbery.

I had learned a good lesson that night: Not all bears want to eat you up. I have slept well outdoors ever since.

Monica. Monica is co-director of the North American office of an international environmental organization. For 10 years I served on its board, and over the years we worked in common with numerous people. Some few of these I didn't like and detested one or two. But Monica seemed to move with equanimity among all.

"So, Monica," I would ask, "tell me why I shouldn't be annoyed by [this or that person]." Or, "I don't like [this or that person]. Tell me what's good about her."

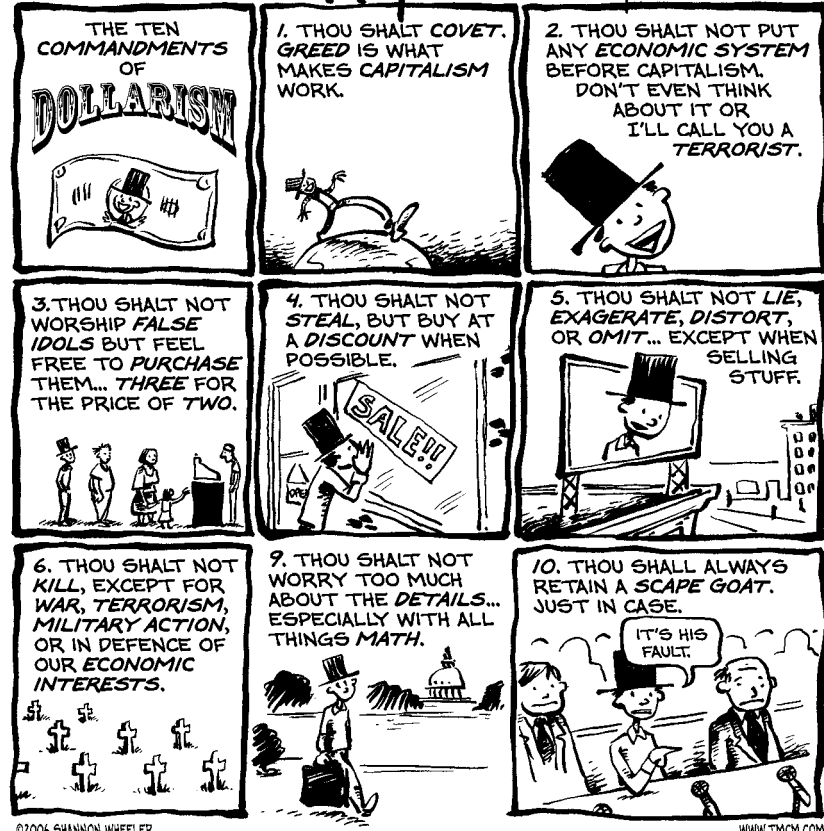
And Monica would tell me. It always had to do with recognizing some helpful role that person plays; some admirable quality possessed; some point of view I could well consider. I eventually learned how to think more like Monica, and life (like Sierra Nevada nights) became just that much more comfortable.

I think it would be good if our president would ask some wise person why he shouldn't hate citizens, democracy, and people who live on top of oil far away.

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PUZZLING CHALLENGE

John McVickar (3/16) claims my disdain for Mr. Urhausen's Tax Court victory brought against the 4J and Bethel School levies was a case of liberal angst when we don't get our unconstitutional way.

Unh-uh.

4J's levy was fashioned after a similar one in Ashland which cited (Measure 5's) ORS 310.155(3), banning property levies over Measure 5's limits "only if the sole purpose of a particular levy is for educational services." Like Ashland, we had a percentage (7 percent) of our levy dedicated to services apart from the school district.

Ashland's levy had stood for several years without being challenged, even with the scrutiny of anti-tax activists. A bipartisan group of politicians, led by former Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey, vetted the levy here; put it to a vote; and, had it approved by a majority of our citizens. Pretty democratic so far.

And, I must add, so is Mr. Urhausen's challenge. His initial victory in the Tax Court is now being appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court, in keeping with the constitutional process.

Where I must concede a personal frailty is my inability to fathom why a citizen who had his own children educated in our district (pre-Measure 5), which prepared them sufficiently to progress on to colleges, would seek an outsider to finance a nuanced challenge to a local school levy. The levy was an added tax burden this community voluntarily placed onto its shoulders because Eugene nearly always supports the schools — Democratic Eugene, Republican Eugene, independent Eugene, whatever Eugene. I'm also guilty as all get out for resenting the direct consequences Mr. Urhausen's actions have caused for our students.

When it comes to education, I'm a tax-and-spend liberal. I freely admit it. I wish these neo-cons would have the grace to allow some ad hominem responses when their agenda triumphs over kids. And when we respond with anguish and emotion at the damage done, I wish they would not insult us, saying we were

idiots not to have seen their worldview from the beginning.

Joseph H. Alsup
Principal, Crest Drive Elementary

BACK OFF & RELAX

On the drive home from work the other day, I noticed the traffic in front of me starting to slow down. Peeking around the cars, I saw a large cluster of bicyclists riding in the street. Knowing a bike has the same legal right to the road as a car, I just shrugged my shoulders and kept on driving — albeit somewhat below the posted speed limit. I figured I might be a few minutes later getting home, but knew it wouldn't amount to much.

While I, myself, and most of the other motorists were resignedly driving along, I observed a few cars toward the front blaring their horns at the bicyclists, revving their engines, and tailgating them dangerously close. One of the cars even swerved right through the middle of the group, nearly running over several panicking bicyclists in the process!

I personally felt threatened by that sort of reckless driving (I'm sure most of the other motorists did too), as any resulting accidents would cause a pileup that I might not be able to avoid. Had I gotten the license plate number of that particular reckless driver, I would've immediately reported it to the police.

It's just plain foolish for an impatient driver to risk the lives of these bike riders — not to mention the lives of other drivers — when all one has to do to avoid the whole situation is simply turn off on the next side street and bypass the entire group with ease. I, on the other hand, chose to reduce my driving speed for what couldn't have been more than a few minutes, until the bikes turned off onto another street. I didn't have to risk anyone's safety, and I still made it home on time for dinner.

Paul Hilbert
Eugene

SAME OLD COPS

Within the last year there have been more than a dozen burglaries in my neighborhood.