

Fowl On a Mission

Is Chicken Licken a fable for our time?

My husband and I were trading childhood memories about the Chicken Little story where the foolish little fowl mistakes an acorn (or something) falling from a tree as a piece of the sky and rushes off to warn the king by shouting, "The sky is falling!"

My husband remembered a slightly different version of the tale than I did. For him, it was not Chicken Little, but Chicken Licken, and there was no king involved. We looked it up online.

Early versions of the story tell about bunch of birds on their way to warn the king that the sky is falling. The birds believe this because one day, "Whack! An acorn fell from a tree onto Chicken Licken's head," and he started a Bird Movement, a bunch of ducks and turkeys on their way to warn the king. But the birds weren't in a panic; they were very orderly as they went along together. They thought they were doing the right thing. They were not acting on fear alone, on self-preservation; they had some community spirit.

However, they did fail to check the evidence. The story seems to be a fable about how fragile the order that binds together the world is, and it is up to each person to pay close attention to what's really going on, or else we each will step into a danger zone, of which there are many. In this version of the story, the birds end up being eaten, every one, by the fox and his family, and so they fail in their quest. This is a story about failure.

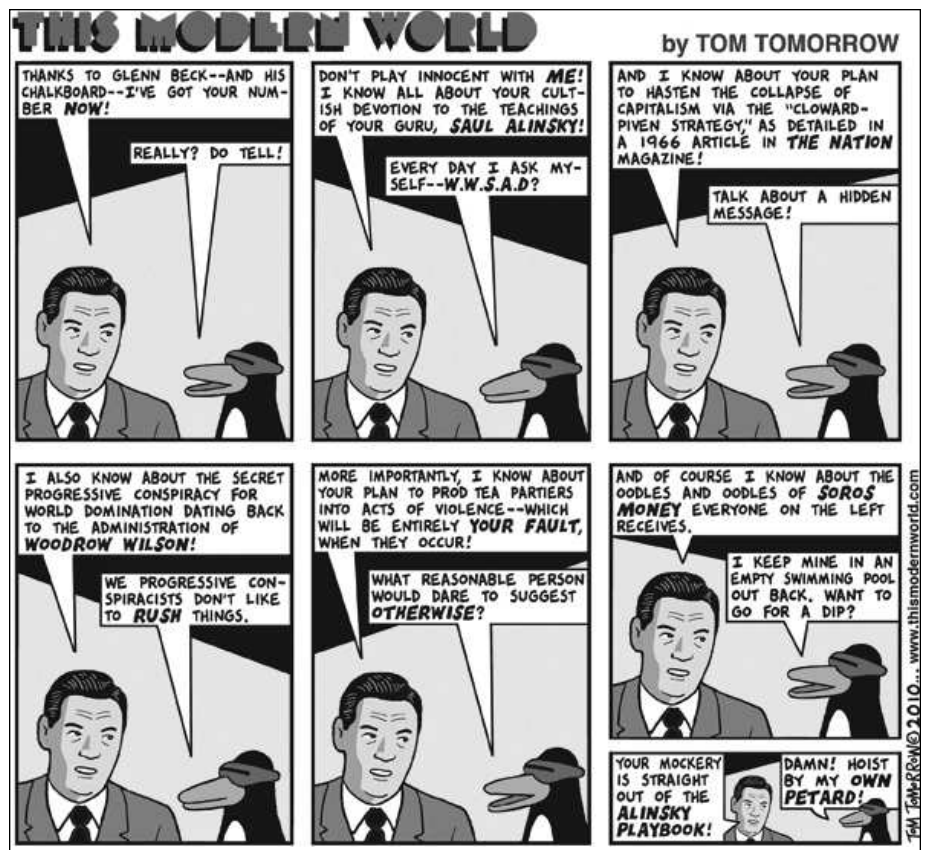
So, how were people 100 years ago (or more) supposed to receive this silly and entertaining little fable that seems to reinforce the fact that the smart and the powerful will always overcome the foolish and the weak, and *they deserve it*? The emphasis of this original story seems to be permission to feel glee in seeing "these foolish birds" get eaten by the fox. The story allows a kind of balance between identifying with the birds or identifying with the fox. If you're feeling powerful, it can be a "stomp on the weak" story. If you're feeling weak, it can be a "you can't win" story. By modern standards this hardly qualifies as a moral tale; rather it's kind of a dead end either way and thus, not very interesting.

In modern times we see it as an example of how everybody should check the evidence carefully before issuing a general panic call because *everybody can be hurt*, rather than just the birds. This was not in the original story. The fox wasn't hurt, nor was anybody else (except the weak and foolish birds).

How do you tell the difference between scientific evidence and poetic fancy? Early peoples (such as the people who wrote the creation stories in the Old Testament Book of Genesis) did believe that the sky was a solid, and thus could break. Today, we modern folks think we "know the facts" about the sky, so if we speak about "pieces of the sky," this would be a metaphor, a poetic use of language.

What kind of story could we tell now? We could tell a story about a volcano erupting or an earthquake. Some people say that global warming is a Chicken Licken story not because it can't happen but because these people believe humans can't influence these naturally occurring cycles of climate change. That point of view would be like believing the sky actually is a solid piece that can break but that it almost never does. We know climate change does happen, but we've never been faced with the full, scientifically accurate, biological consequences of the behavior patterns of our species. We're in the position of being Chicken Licken writing his own story!

Anita Sullivan is a Eugene resident.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RIGGS-HENSON GOOD FOR BOARD

I would like to recommend that you vote for Pat Riggs-Henson for Lane County commissioner when the ballots arrive in your mailbox shortly.

I have known Pat for quite some years, during which I have had the pleasure of working with her as a member of LCC's Budget Committee while Pat was LCC's chair of their board. I was impressed that she made sure that everyone got a chance to express their views while maintaining a sense of comity and civility during the discussions.

The discussions that occur during the meetings of the present Lane County Board of Commissioners are often marked by the lack of comity and reduce the efficiency with which they conduct the county's business. I believe that Pat Riggs-Henson, if elected, would restore some of this missing comity and improve the way in which the board conducts the business of citizens of Lane County.

For those of you who have not had the pleasure of working with Pat, I would suggest that you read the *R-G* Oct. 25, 2009 edition, which contains a profile of Pat when she was selected as the United Way of Lane County's Volunteer of the Month in the category of education. Pat was also profiled in the July 31, 2009 edition of the *Springfield Times*.

Dennis Shine
Springfield

REPLACE MIKE CLARK

Dear Ward 5 liberals/ progressives/ left-wingers/ Democrats, etc:

Please run for City Council! I know the pay is poor and the job is no walk in the park, but your city desperately needs you.

In 2006, Republican political campaign consultant Mike Clark ran unopposed in your ward and has been obstructing progress ever since. Clark is a typical George Bush Republican corporatist, and he's also up for reelection this year. In a ward that voted in favor of Kerry and Obama, there's a real opportunity to

elect a much better representative. With only a few solid progressives on the council, adding one more could mean a fundamental shift to the left.

Ward 5 deserves a better representative than Mike Clark, someone who truly believes in government and will actually work for the common good. I hope that someone will step forward soon.

Joshua Welch
Eugene

FUND THE EXTENSION

A few years ago I wanted to kill the grass in my yard to create a large rose garden without using chemicals or digging up sod. I called the Master Gardener hotline at Lane County Extension, was told how to do it, and got outstanding results.

Once when I was making pickles that needed to remain uncooked in brine for a week, the weather turned hot and muggy. I worried about poisoning my family with spoiled pickles. I called the Master Food Preservers' hotline at Lane County Extension to ask whether I should continue or discard what looked like a mess. Based on what I learned, my pickles turned out crisply delicious.

Extension services are supported with federal, state and local funding. The Lane County portion of that funding ends in June, and the loss of local funding will cost the county the matching federal and state funding.

I probably won't plant more rose gardens or make pickles again, but other people will. I hope that the Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver programs will be there to help them, and that 4H programs will continue too.

I'm voting for Ballot Measure 20-158 and urge others to do so also.

Annetta Forrer
Eugene

REALLY A BARRIER?

I have a deep interest in the issue of constructing bike lanes on major roadways that share the roads with perilous automobiles.

Annual time.. Again?? Ugh!
Who was my friend telling
me about?

- A specialist in women's health
- Be seen on time. Suffer no waiting
- Ask questions without feeling rushed
- Safe, comfortable, and confidential

Anne Marie Moore Gynecology and General Health
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