

Safe Haven

We owe a debt to those who do not turn away

A 60-year old man, disheveled, overweight, shuffles to our breakfast table in a Madison, Wis., café and sits down. He eats rapidly, speaking only when spoken to and then in short, clipped sentences. His name is Chuck, he's schizophrenic, and he's on his meds. He's just been awakened in his group home on this March 2010 morning by his sister Jane urging him to join us. Jane is just now retiring from a professional career with the State Department, including many years managing the U.S. embassies in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Damascus, Syria. One of Jane's two sons, as well as her brother Chuck, is schizophrenic.



My husband O'B and I have come to Madison for a weekend with one of my heroines, the 92-year old mother of Chuck and Jane. Chuck and Jane are my cousins, and Harriet is my aunt.

When he was an 18-year old activist with Students for a Democratic Society in the Vietnam War summer of 1967, the year my husband and I moved to Madison for graduate school, no one saw Chuck's schizophrenia coming. Late that autumn, Chuck lay on a couch in his parents' home watching leaves fall from a tree outside the window. He likened himself to that tree, losing everything. In that heartbreaking moment, he revealed that he sensed what had been taken from him, forever.

In the wrenching years that followed, Harriet learned much about what was and wasn't known about schizophrenia. She also learned that the main choices in Wisconsin for Chuck or anyone else's schizophrenic child was living in a mental hospital or living (or dying) on the streets. She learned of another Madison woman with two schizophrenic sons. They met for lunch, and then assembled others. They linked up with a young attorney whose advocacy focus was – and still is, 40 years later – services for disadvantaged folks. Together, they formed the Alliance for the Mentally Ill in order to advocate for support services for Wisconsin families with members suffering mental illness. Purposefully, the acronym, AMI, is "friend" in French.

On the heels of successes in Wisconsin, they organized a national meeting in Madison. By the end of the meeting, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI, later named the National Alliance on Mental Illness) had been formed. Today 1,200 NAMI state and local affiliate organizations provide support "for people whose lives have been affected by serious mental illness." In other words, for the Chucks, Harriets and Janes of our nation.

When Harriet died unexpectedly 18 days after our enjoyable breakfast in Madison, Chuck spent time with his sister Jane, back from Washington, D.C. When Jane asked if he would like to spend the night with her, he said he wanted to go back to his group home – which is precisely the type of safe haven for which Harriet had advocated so effectively.

The other night I was listening to author Charles Bowden talk of Ciudad Juarez and its multi-decades descent into ungodly murder rates via NAFTA policies, maquiladoras, the absence of free public high schools, 40 percent youth unemployment, and the prospect of Mexico becoming a failed state due to primary dependence on three unsustainable sources of income: oil exports (due to dry up in nine years), delivery of drugs to the U.S. (with the aid of the Mexican military) and remittances from Mexicans working hard in the U.S. to support their impoverished Mexican families.

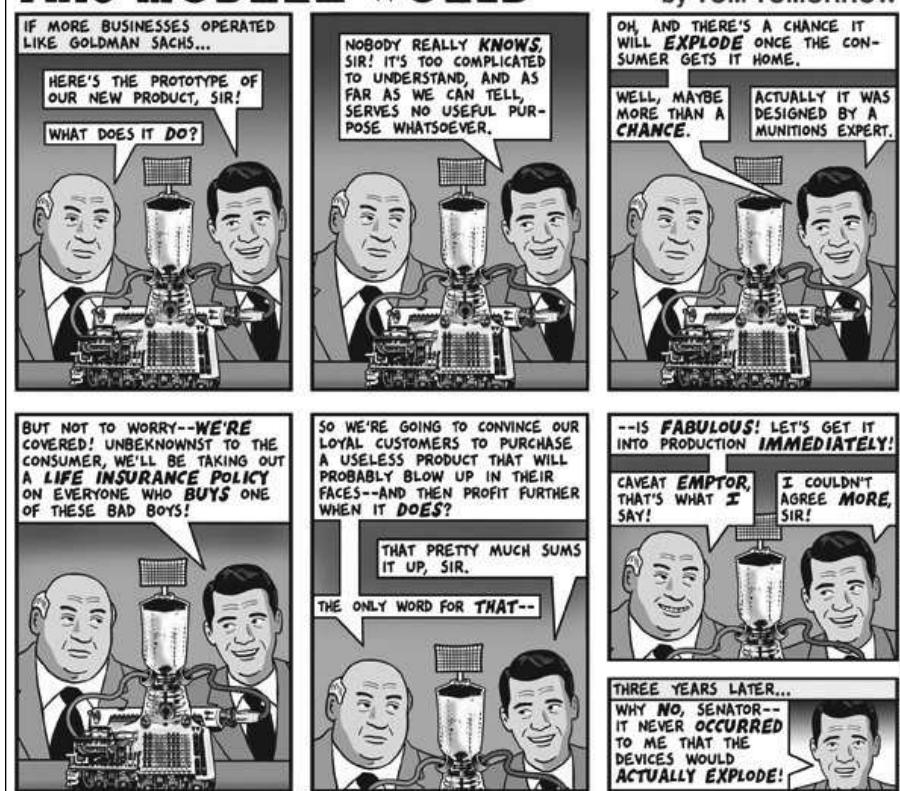
Bowden mentioned that he would like never to visit Ciudad Juarez again because of the misery there, but the U.S. media still fails to inform Americans of the realities and needs of Mexico, so he must. Similarly, Rachel Carson repeatedly said she would rather not have spent her last years delving into wildlife and human miseries caused by profligate use of pesticides, but someone had to tell us what pesticides were doing. Would Harriet have chosen to spend 40 years plumbing the hell of schizophrenia in the U.S.? She had been happily employed as a journalist when Chuck suddenly lost much of his self.

But it is to those who do not turn away from sad or terrifying aspects of humanity that we owe our community institutions for compassion, safety, and health. Which is why Aunt Harriet is one of my heroines.

Mary O'Brien has worked as a public interest scientist since 1981. She is currently dividing her time between Eugene and Castle Valley, Utah.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NO TO EXTREMISM

Good article on the Rust-Bozievich race (4/29), one of the county's key contests. Given the political realities of the time and place, one could assume the "conservative" would win, if Rust were a typical liberal and Bozievich a typical conservative. But neither is typical.

Bozievich is a hard-line Tea Party ideologue, not just a follower, but the organizer of Lane County's April Tea Party protest last year. Though he attended a recent Tea Party gathering in Florence, he is trying to keep his extremist views under wraps during this campaign. You won't find any mention of his Tea Party leadership roles in his Voters' Pamphlet information, nor his website.

Jerry Rust, on the other hand, is probably the best county commissioner I have worked with in Lane County. He has a creative and good natured way of working well with people from all points of view. Growing up on the beautiful North Umpqua, a valley much like that of the Siuslaw where he now lives, he's a perfect fit for our heavily timbered west Lane County.

Rust was up to his elbows planting trees for Oregon's future when Bozievich was still playing games back East. This vote is an easy one: Just say no to extremism.

Doug Card
Veneta

BIPARTISAN BOONDOGGLE

The controversy over spending a quarter million dollars to rename Beltline highway after Randy Papé overlooks the state's plan to spend a thousand times more to widen our Beltline.

ODOT is spending millions to study expanding Beltline to 11 lanes wide, which would be the biggest road between Seattle and Sacramento. In November 2008, the Governor's "Transportation Vision Committee" said this would cost \$250 million, part of an \$18 billion plan for new and wider state highways.

In June 2001, Randy Papé, Jim Torrey and Bobby Green were part of the "West

Eugene Charette," an intergovernmental summit that concluded the West Eugene Parkway was illegal and overpriced. Papé and other promoters then changed their minds and pushed through an advisory vote which split 51-49, claiming "the money is there" even though it was not. He then had ODOT spend \$3 million to "study" the WEP despite knowing it couldn't be built — money that could have fixed the West 11th intersections.

Global oil production peaked in 2008, so planning bigger highways for the downslope of energy production is a waste worse than signs to honor a campaign contributor to the governor. If governments were really concerned about "sustainability," they would cancel plans to widen highways. ODOT doesn't even have the funds to study upgrading the railroad between Eugene and Portland to have high(er) speed rail, which would be more useful during the twilight of the oil era.

Mark Robinowitz
Eugene

TIRED OLD IDEAS

Sure, we're in an economic mess, with some important elections coming up. It's critical that we use our votes to elect people who can help get us out of this quagmire.

And what seems sorta weird is that we're being asked to elect on many levels — national, state, county, city — more of the kind of folks whose ideas and actions led us to this condition. And they're running on the same tired old patter they used to hold offices for eight solid years, or until they had run the national and local economies off the cliff. When the Bushies took control of government (oddly, on an anti-government platform) in 2000, they inherited a budget surplus of nearly \$1 trillion. When they were run out of offices eight years later, they had looted the national treasury to the tune of a \$2 trillion deficit. Are we really so forgetful that we'd return to office the very folks whose policies produced those results?

We need to remember. We need to elect experienced, capable people who

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