

Portland **Opinion** Observer

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The faith of our farmers

BY JOE KLOCK, SR.
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

I haven't a clue regarding the source of this story, which I have revised and retold hundreds of times in hundreds of speeches all over the Free World for the past half-century. It's a story about the power of belief...of faith, if you prefer to call it that. People who don't believe in God, or much of anything else, will scoff at it...but no matter, because it is just a story, after all.

People of faith, whether in God or just in positive visualization will find it both reassuring and, perhaps, a bit discomfoting at the end.

Anyway, here's how it goes: This had been the worst drought in anyone's memory, and no end was in sight. The fields were parched, the creeks had run dry and the crops were literally dying of thirst. The entire economy of this small, isolated Midwestern town depended on farming, and a failed crop spelled nothing short of disaster for every family in the area... All possible avenues of relief had been tried, from airplanes seeding the distant clouds to the divining rods of hired dowers and even, in desperation, a rain dance by the Shaman of a nearby Indian tribe; but all of this had been in vain.

Clearly, only a miracle could avert the financial ruin facing this ill-starred town. As a last resort, the clergymen of all faiths summoned everyone to the Town Hall for one final appeal to the Almighty for realization of what had become a seemingly impossible dream. A few resisted the idea as a form of pietistic self-torture. After all, people had been praying for months in their separate Houses of Worship and it had done no good at all...so what could this joint effort accomplish? A faith-filled majority, though, prevailed and the whole town agreed to participate. Thus it was that every man, woman and child was in attendance at the prescribed time and place.

Inside the packed Town Hall, the scene was, arguably, hellish. It was mid-day and, despite the heroic efforts of a few fans, the heat in that small auditorium was nearly unbearable, as an angry sun broiled unmercifully everything and everybody in its path.

After a few formal prayers had been murmured, ecumenical homilies delivered and a couple of hymns intoned, silence

descended on the gathering, a silence born of the fact that all the words had been said that could be said and additional utterances would serve no discernable purpose.

So, each of them, in their own words and in their own ways, silently screamed from the very bottom of their hearts and souls for the Act Of God which they saw as their only hope. Minutes grew to an hour that seemed like a day to some and a lifetime to others, while the silence was broken only occasionally by a wailing child, a muffled cough, or a sobbing adult.

Hanging over the congregation, despite their deep-rooted faith, was a nagging fear that all this was an exercise in futility, yet they prayed on through the stifling stillness, because nothing else could be done. Then one man, whom they later recalled was reputed to have the best hearing in town, thought he detected the sound of distant thunder, but he dismissed it as a hopeful figment of his imagination.

But he heard it again a few seconds later, this time more distinctly...and he saw that a woman across the aisle seemed to have heard it, too.

Soon there could be no doubt, as a gentle rumbling from above announced that the rain had arrived at last! And this was not a mere drizzle, nor a destructive cloudburst, but a steady, gentle downpour that blanketed the fields and quickly turned the dusty Main Street into welcomed puddles of mud.

They streamed, all of them, from the Town Hall like unruly kindergarten kids at recess time, thrusting their happy faces skyward, licking blessed raindrops from their lips, stomping through the puddles, splashing each other with mud and even rolling in it like piglets at play.

It was a scene of totally unrestrained hilarity, as pent-up tensions were released and the air was filled with shouts of praise and gratitude to a God who had answered their impassioned plea. Their faith had, in spectacular fashion, been vindicated. This was a time to throw inhibition to the winds and celebrate, which is exactly what they did for several wild minutes! Then, one by one, they fell silent and stood motionless, as their eyes encountered one small girl who was smiling quietly at the rain...from under her umbrella. Punch Line: She was the only person in that community of "believers" who had brought one with her to the prayer meeting at Town Hall!

Black eye for black leaders in Mississippi hanging

BY EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It's hard to see how many other official probes it will take before Jesse Jackson and black leaders accept the bitter truth that black Mississippi teen Raynard Johnson was not lynched but committed suicide. The latest to come to that conclusion is Michael Baden. The world-renowned forensic expert visited Johnson's home and thoroughly reviewed two autopsy reports one of which was privately commissioned by Johnson's family. He found no solid evidence that Johnson was the victim of racist violence. Baden's findings were made public by the commander of the Mississippi Highway Patrol, an African-American.

But even this probably isn't enough to persuade Jackson and other black leaders that white racists didn't murder Johnson. Not surprisingly, Jackson when told of the latest result did not return phone calls from reporters for comment. Hopefully, Mississippi's governor won't hold his breath waiting for Jackson and other black leaders to heed his call to apologize for smearing the state.

There's a reason why Jackson can easily fuel the flames of racial paranoia about Johnson's death. The civil rights meltdown, assaults on affirmative action, racial profiling, the wave of police shootings in black communities, the grim economic plight of many young black males, the grotesque disparities in the prison and criminal justice system, has made more and more blacks convinced that terrible atrocities are being planned for them. That was painfully evident to me recently when I spoke to a large group of African-Americans. During the question and answer period the issue of the burning of black churches came up. I pointed out that nearly one-third of the more than 100 arrests made by the FBI and Bureau of Alcohol and Tobacco Force agents in the burning of over 200 churches were of blacks. While in some cases there was strong evidence of a loose conspiracy by a disjointed group of racist whites to burn these churches, this should not let the blacks that burned their own churches off the hook. There was nothing racial about their motives. They burned their churches out of: revenge, anger, to conceal thefts or to perpetuate insurance fraud. They were criminals and no one should try to excuse or justify their shameful and debased acts. Disappointingly, several blacks did. They immediately angrily shouted, "How do we know that they actually burned the churches? The only thing we have to go by is the white man's word." Their blindness to reality was the ultimate in collective racial denial.

Time and again when an African-American winds up in front of a court bench more than a few blacks will shout that they are victims of a racist conspiracy. It is a good, if not well-worn, ploy that some black personalities have raised to a state-of-the-art enterprise when they are accused of, or nailed for, sexual hijinks, bribery, corruption, drug dealing, and possibly even murder.

Here's some tragic examples of this. Reverend Henry Lyons, president of the National Baptist Convention USA, the country's biggest and most influential black religious organization was convicted of racketeering and grand theft in 1999. The evidence was overwhelming that Lyons was a crook. Yet even after Lyons admitted his guilt many black ministers still wailed that he was the victim of a white conspiracy.

Even more damaging when Jackson and other black leaders claim racial plots, as in Johnson's death, with little or no evidence to back them up, they lay themselves wide open to the charge that black leaders are more interested in snatching racial one-upmanship than in promoting racial harmony and achieving tangible racial gains. This is just the kind of charge that gives them, blacks, and worst of all tragic cases such as Johnson's a black eye.

Letter to the editor

Dear Editor

In light of the upcoming World Conference on Assisted Dying Sept. 1-3, in Boston, I wanted to bring attention to what I feel is a greatly important cause. My name is Erica Hanlin and I am a 20-year-old college student from Illinois. I would like to say thank you for supporting a cause, which I have been adamant about for quite awhile now. In 1992, my paternal grandfather, whom I was very close to, committed suicide after a battle with emphysema and cancer. My grandfather had always been a spunky, and that is an

understatement, man with an acid tongue and razor sharp wit. It made me so sad to visit him after he started becoming ill and each time I saw him seemed to get weaker and weaker. The weeks went by and soon, my uncle, with whom he made his residence, started to do everything for him, including feed him, when he actually could eat, change his bed linens, bathe him and even change his disposable adult undergarment. I could tell, since my grandfather had always been very independent, that relying on someone else made him very uncomfortable. He was on

oxygen almost 24 hour a day and during his last couple weeks of life, was completely bedridden. Losing his dignity was not an option and around midnight on a night in August 1992, my grandfather put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger. He made a choice that I know any one of his sons would have made in order not to see their father suffer. Again, I would like to say thank you for all of your dedication to this cause and I know I speak for many of those who have seen the suffering of family members or friends with terminal illnesses when I say God bless you all.

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