

The light of winter

Engraved on the chunk of Formica pinned to her blue smock was the word “Delphine.” She was one of a dozen clerks handling the Saturday crush in a grocery store with aisles wide enough to accommodate forklifts. Delphine was not smiling the industrial smile that company finks and mystery shoppers have forced upon the workers.

She slapped the bacon down like she was squishing scorpions. She hammer-threw five pounds of spuds against the backboard, scooted the catsup with enough force to score against a Canadian goalie, smacked that bottle with the maple syrup, bowled a strike on the orange juice with a back-handed grapefruit, then helicoptered a dozen eggs into the pile.

“That’ll be 17 dollars and 35 cents.”

I don’t want to become a grocery clerk when I grow up. Even a union clerk doesn’t draw enough of a wage to compensate for standing in a laser-infested stall, handling raw chicken, greeting cards and grouchy patrons for eight hours a day. But Delphine was cranky beyond the realm of occupational peeve, so while I was smoothing the creases out of a 20-dollar bill, I stomped on thin ice and asked her how she was doing.

“Not worth a nun’s fanny. I have SAD.”

I said I was sorry to hear that and asked why she was sad.

“I did not say I am sad, Ding Dong, I said I have SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder, get it? That’s \$17.35, forty, fifty, eighteen, and two’s twenty. Have a nice day.” Delphine and I weren’t good enough pals for me to ask if this disorder got any more severe, so I just retrieved my bag of mangled food, and began looking for my pickup in the icy parking lot.

When I reached my writer’s sanctuary, I fired up the magic box and began to study Seasonal Affective Disorder, which is thought to be caused by the lack of sunlight in mid to polar latitudes during winter months. The operating phrase is “Latitude is Attitude,” meaning that in North America the farther north one lives during the period between September and March, the more likely one is to go bat guano haywire. Somehow, those who were born and live above the 65th parallel like the Inuit and Sammi don’t seem to be affected.

The typical symptoms of SAD include depression, lack of energy, increased need for sleep, a craving for sweets, and weight gain. Symptoms begin in fall, peak in winter and usually resolve in spring. Some individuals experience great bursts of energy and creativity in spring or early summer. Folks who work in buildings without windows may experience SAD-type symptoms at any time of year. Some people with SAD experience periods of mania. If the symptoms

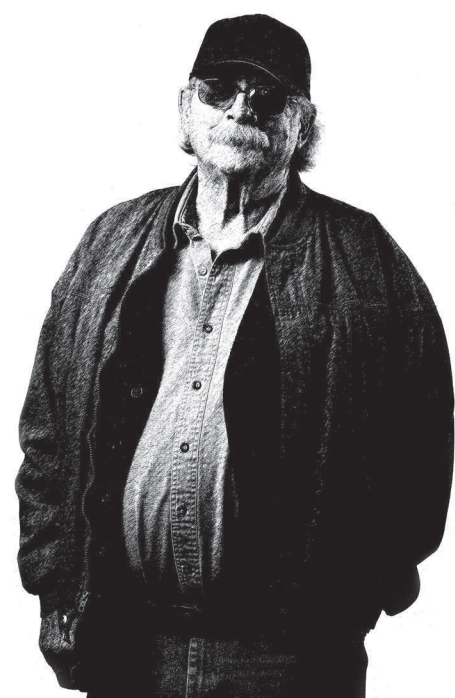
are mild, no treatment may be necessary. If they are problematic, then a mood stabilizer such as lithium might be considered. There is a smaller group of individuals who suffer from summer depression.

About 70 percent of those with SAD are women. The most common age of onset is in one’s 30s, but some cases of childhood SAD have been reported. For every individual with full-blown SAD, there are many more with milder “winter blues.”

Let us leave aside the possibility that we are being fed another slice of scientific cowpie. If we do need to suck down a couple of shots of Jack Daniels with our French fries, can’t finish a sentence without someone butting in, or have trouble getting from the couch to the toilet without knocking over a lamp, does this mean that we are sick, and if it does, what can we do about it?

Phototherapy is the cure. We need light. The smarty pants folks on the web recommend 10,000 lux for two hours a day. One lux is the amount of light that one candle sheds on a square meter. The average room is lit to the tune of about 500 lux. The medical device to generate all this healing light is a box containing eight to ten 100 watt incandescent bulbs if you can still find them.

Some individuals who use a 10,000-lux box may only need 30 minutes of daily light treatment. However, the



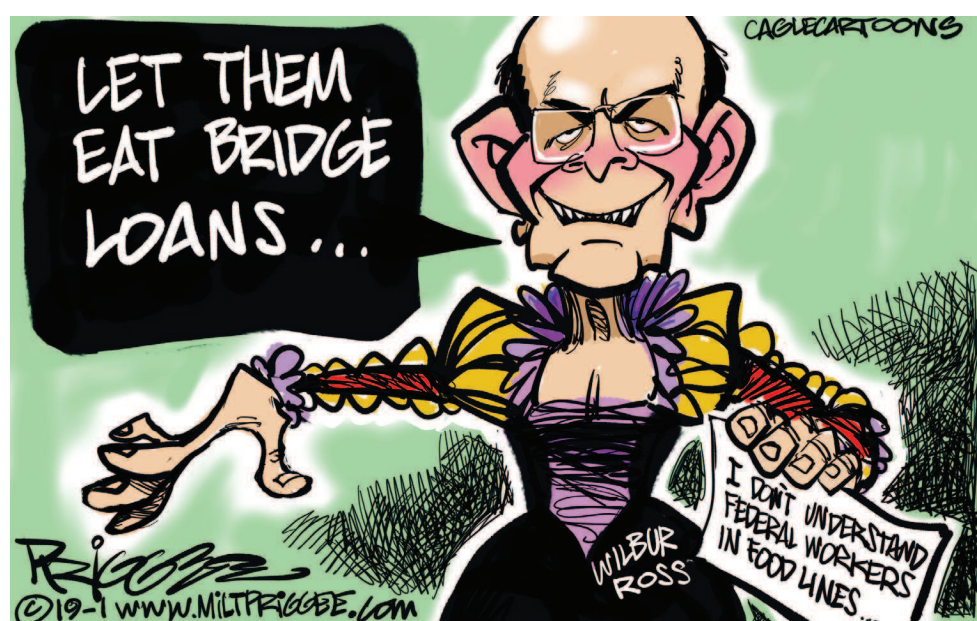
J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

using light therapy for PMS, obesity and non-seasonal depression. When I checked the mirror this morning it looked like Delphine and I both need to stare into the light.

J.D. Smith is a columnist for the East Oregonian.



“WE’RE GETTING AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT FROM ANONYMOUS SOURCES MAKING UNVERIFIED CLAIMS IN AN OUT-OF-CONTEXT VIDEO, WHICH-IF TRUE, IS HUGE NEWS, AND IF NOT-UTTER HORSE HOCKEY...”



The embargo on Cuba failed. Let’s move on.

HAVANA — It has been 60 years since Fidel Castro marched into Havana, so it’s time for both Cuba and the United States to grow up. Let’s let Cuba be a normal country again.

Cuba is neither the demonic tyranny conjured by some conservatives nor the heroic worker paradise romanticized by some on the left. It’s simply a tired little country, no threat to anyone, with impressive health care and education but a repressive police state and a dysfunctional economy.

Driving in from the airport, I saw billboards denouncing the American economic embargo as the “longest genocide in history.” That’s ridiculous. But the embargo itself is also absurd and counterproductive, accomplishing nothing but hurting the Cuban people — whom we supposedly aim to help.

After six decades, can’t we move on? Let’s drop the embargo but continue to push Havana on improving human rights, and on dropping support for other oppressive regimes, like those in

Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Let’s make room for nuance: Cuba impoverishes its citizens and denies them political rights, but it does a good job providing basic education and keeping people healthy. Cuba’s official infant mortality rate is lower than America’s (its real rate may or may not be).

I’m not a Cuba expert, and I don’t know how this country will evolve. But Cuba has a new president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, who is associated with experiments in opening up the economy. Fidel is gone and his brother Raúl is fading from the scene.

In the 1960s, we were scared of Cuba. We feared that neighboring countries would tumble like dominoes into the Communist bloc, and the Soviet Union attempted to place on Cuba nuclear missiles that could have threatened America. But today even as those fears have dissipated, our policy has ossified.

President Barack Obama took the necessary step of re-establishing diplomatic relations and easing the embargo, but President

Donald Trump reversed course and tightened things up again out of knee-jerk hostility to anything Cuban and anything Obama.

Cuba is changing, albeit too slowly. About one-third of its labor force is now in the private sector, and this is just about the only part of the economy that is thriving. I stayed in one of the growing number of Airbnbs in Havana, and people were friendly, even if governments are not: When I said I was from the United States, I inevitably got a big grin and a reference to a cousin in Miami or New York or Cleveland.

Plus, extra credit goes to a country that so lovingly preserves old American cars. I rode in from the airport in a pink 1954 Cadillac.

In another sign of flexibility, Cuba recently hammered out a deal with Major League Baseball that will allow Cuban players to travel legally to the U.S. and play on American teams.

Yet, sadly, the Trump administration is threatening the deal.

Consider the persistence of North Korea and Cuba, and there’s an argument that sanctions and isolation preserve regimes

rather than topple them. China teaches us not to be naïve about economic engagement toppling dictators, but on balance tourists and investors would be more of a force for change than a seventh decade of embargo.

Moreover, trade, tourism, travel and investment empower a business community and an independent middle class. These are tools to destabilize a police state and help ordinary Cubans, but we curtail them. America blames the Castros for impoverishing the Cuban people, but we’ve participated in that impoverishment as well.

Cuba’s government is not benign. It’s a dictatorship whose economic mismanagement has hurt its people, and Human Rights Watch says it “routinely relies on arbitrary detention to harass and intimidate critics.” But it doesn’t normally execute them (or dismember them in consulates abroad like our pal Saudi Arabia), and it tolerates some criticism from brave bloggers like Yoani Sánchez.

It is revising its constitution, and my hope is that over time — despite ideologues in both Havana and the United States — relations

will continue to develop. Some American seniors who now winter in Florida could become snowbirds in Cuba instead, relying on its health care, low prices, great beaches and cheap labor. You can hire a home health care aide for a month in Havana for the cost of one for a day in Florida.

China’s economic boom began in the early 1980s partly with factories financed by Chinese overseas, and after the American embargo ends, Cuba will have similar opportunities to forge mutually beneficial business partnerships with Cubans overseas.

That would benefit both sides. For 60 years we’ve been feuding, like the Hatfields and the McCoys, in a conflict whose origins most Americans don’t even remember clearly.

So come on. We should all be bored by a lifetime of mutual recriminations and antagonisms. Let’s put aside the ideology, end the embargo, tone down the propaganda and raise a mojito together.

I propose a toast to a new beginning.

Nicholas Kristof is a columnist for the New York Times.

The next test for Kamala Harris

San Francisco Chronicle

The rise of Sen. Kamala Harris was made possible by her ability to navigate between the poles of politics. She was elected San Francisco district attorney by unseating an incumbent to her left, became state attorney general by defeating a Los Angeles prosecutor running to her right, and won a U.S. Senate race in 2016 in a landslide over a 10-term Democratic congresswoman.

Now comes the big test: running for the Democratic nomination for president in a rapidly growing field in which she will be neither the furthest left at a moment when the party’s base is agitating for purity, nor the most experienced choice for voters desperate to bring seasoning and stability back to the White House.

But Harris, who announced her candidacy Monday with the slogan “For the People,” has always managed to find a winning lane. She begins the campaign among the upper tier of contenders, though the support is so diffuse at

this early stage that it would be foolhardy to anoint anyone a favorite.

That Harris made it official on Martin Luther King Jr. Day was an unmistakable signal that she planned to accentuate her multicultural heritage — Jamaican father, Indian mother — as an asset for voters who have been repulsed by the racism and xenophobia tolerated and even encouraged in the Trump era.

Not surprisingly, her announcement drew a few shots from the left (focusing on her role as a prosecutor), and the Republican National Committee put out a statement scoffing at her as “arguably the least vetted Democrat” and “unqualified and out of touch.”

And so begins her quest to answer those and other questions sure to arise about her experience and ability to connect with voters far from San Francisco, in geography, culture and ideological perspective.

Those of us who have followed her career from the start expect her to be prepared, determined — and formidable.



AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta

Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., speaks to members of the media at her alma mater, Howard University, Monday in Washington, following her announcement that she will run for president.