

Swap meet turns junk into treasures

On Willie and I made our annual quasi-vacation “gearhead pilgrimage” to the automotive holy land of the 55th annual Portland Swap Meet last weekend in an attempt to convert this man’s personal excess inventory of junk into someone else’s newest treasure. Perhaps more importantly we got our daily constitutional in by walking several miles scouring other folks’ collections in search of our own new “treasures.”

Upon returning home, I was happy to report to the Boss (my wife) that we had quite uncharacteristically sold far more items than we had purchased. Indeed, there is a first time for everything. When factoring in travel expense, parking, lodging and meals we still likely were only at a break-even level — thereby upholding my tradition of maintaining my status as a nonprofit entity.

Like so many of life’s endeavors, the best part of our car hobby is the far too-many-to-count number of friends we have made and the stories we have shared.

A recent visit with one of my favorite nonagenarians revealed that his first car was a 1928 Chevrolet two-door purchased in the early ’40s for \$25. My friend Bob enlisted the help of one of his friends to negotiate the purchase price somewhat clandestinely due to the fact that Bob’s father was engaged in a business endeavor that lead to the perception, be it real or

imagined, that the family possessed cash reserves. This sentiment, by the way, permeates my thought process in negotiating vehicle or farm-equipment purchases and the perceived impression we make on prospective sellers.

When going to inspect a potential purchase, it is imperative to represent oneself accurately. If you show up driving a new vehicle or dressed in fancy duds, it might appear as though you are able to pay full retail price; conversely, if you pull in the driveway in a wheezing, rusted hulk it may appear as though you have no money and are not worthy of the seller’s serious attention. Also, in the unlikely event that your clunker breaks down in the seller’s driveway or lot, you may be forced to buy (at their preferred price) whatever rig they are selling just to have a means by which you can drive home.

Anyway, back to the ’28 Chevy. After procuring his new car, Bob decided it needed a paint job and he deemed that he had the requisite skills and equipment to perform the task. He borrowed his mother’s vacuum cleaner and cleverly reversed its airflow to make a paint sprayer. All was well until the paint became too heated and began to dry before it was smoothly applied to the body panels, resulting in an uneven finish that Johnny Bench would not endorse (remember “no runs, no drips, no errors?”) Bob resorted to spraying for



MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

a few minutes and then waiting for a time to allow the paint to cool down. I forgot to ask who cleaned the vacuum when the project was completed.

Bob’s Chevy provided transportation for he and many of his high school friends as the rear seat and trunk were almost sufficiently spacious enough to be let out as a small apartment space. The principal shortcoming of Bob’s buggy was its then-standard lack of any anti-theft devices. The ignition was controlled by a simple toggle switch on the dash and the stomp-to-start button was in plain view on the floor (My Farmall M is the same to this day). Bob said he had to frequently run from class upon dismissal to be sure none of his friends beat him to the school parking lot.

Unfortunately, in the waning years of the Great Depression, Bob couldn’t afford Prestone antifreeze and had to mix alcohol in the radiator as a substitute. When the car ran a little hot, it boiled out the alcohol — leaving only water in the cooling system. During a particularly cold spell, the water froze and cracked the block. The Chevy was sold to a wrecking yard for \$5.

Bob went on to (literally) pilot other means of conveyance — namely B-25 bombers in World War II, flying 70 missions in Europe. But that’s another story.

Matt Wood is his son’s hired man and his daughter’s biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.

OTHER VIEWS

It’s not the collusion, it’s the corruption

The Mueller report is like a legal version of a thriller movie in which three malevolent forces are attacking a city all at once. Everybody’s wondering if the three attackers are working together. The report concludes that they weren’t, but that doesn’t make the situation any less scary or the threat any less real.

The first force is Donald Trump, who represents a threat to the American systems of governance. Centuries ago our founders created a system of laws and not men. In our system of government there are procedures in place, based on certain values — impartiality, respect for institutions, the idea that a public office is a public trust, not a private bauble.

When Trump appears in the Mueller report, he is often running roughshod over these systems and violating these values. He asks his lawyer to hamper an investigation. He asks his FBI director to take the heat off his allies. He tries to get the relevant investigators fired. I don’t know if his actions meet the legal standard of obstruction of justice, but they certainly meet the common-sense standard of interference with justice.

The second force is Russia. If Trump is a threat to the institutional infrastructure, the Russians are a threat to our informational infrastructure. We knew this already, but

it was still startling to see the fact declared so bluntly — that the Russian government interfered in the 2016 election “in sweeping and systematic fashion.”

It may not be bombing buildings or shooting at people, but if a foreign government is attacking the factual record on which democracy runs, it is still a sort of warfare. The Russians are trying to undermine the information we use to converse, and the trust that makes conversation possible.

The third force is Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. They are a threat to our deliberative infrastructure. Any organization needs to be able to hold private conversations in order to deliberate. Whether it is State Department cables or Democratic National Committee emails, WikiLeaks has violated privacy and made it harder for institutions to function. We’re now in a situation in which some of the worst people on earth get to determine what gets published.

The Mueller report indicates that Trump was not colluding with Russia. But it also shows that working relationships were beginning to be built, through networkers like Paul Manafort, Donald Trump Jr. and Roger Stone. More important, it shows that many of the Trumpists, the Russians and the WikiLeaks crowd all understood that they

were somehow adjacent actors in the same project.

I would say that’s the report’s central importance. We are being threatened in a very distinct way. The infrastructure of the society is under threat — the procedures that shape government, the credibility of information, the privacy rules that make deliberation possible. And though the Chinese government does not play a big role here, it represents a similar sort of threat — to our intellectual infrastructure, the intellectual property rights that organize innovation.

It is as if somebody is inserting acids into a body that eats away at the ligaments and the tendons.

These forces are motivated by self-interest, but their common feature is an operational nihilism. They are trying to sow disorder at the foundation of society. The goal is not really to convert anybody to a cause; it is to create cynicism and disruption that will open up the space to grab what you want to grab. They rig the system and then tell everybody, “The system is rigged!” And therefore, all values are suspended. Everything is permitted.

As I was reading the report I thought of a podcast called “Against the Rules” by Michael Lewis. A recent episode jumps off from the way athletes are getting more vicious toward referees. But that’s not just true in sport; it’s true in society. In all soci-

eties there are rules defining good conduct, and there are supposed to be impartial, honest referees that enforce those rules and make sure the game is fair.

And today, across society, two things are happening: Referees are being undermined, and many are abandoning their own impartiality. (Think of the Wall Street regulators, the Supreme Court, the Senate committee chairmen, even many of us in the blessed media.) Things begin to topple.

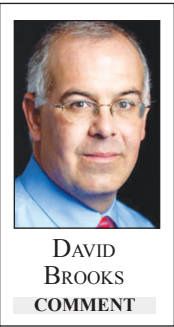
The system more or less held this time. But that’s just because people around Trump often refused to do what he told them to do. And we happened to have Robert Mueller, who seems to be a fair referee.

The Justice Department has not been defended from political assault. William Barr’s news conference before the report’s release eroded any claim to impartiality and trustworthiness.

Trump doesn’t seem to have any notion of loyalty to an office. All power in his eye is personal power, and the government is there to serve his Sun God self. He’ll continue to trample the proper systems of government.

It’s easy to recognize when you are attacked head-on. But the U.S. is being attacked from below, at the level of the foundations we take for granted.

David Brooks is a columnist for The New York Times.



DAVID BROOKS
COMMENT

Notre Dame will rise again



Debris are seen inside Notre Dame cathedral in Paris on Tuesday.

AP Photo/Christophe Petit Tesson

The Telegraph (UK)

There are few more iconic buildings in the world than the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris. The fire that has ripped through the great building is not just a tragedy for France but for the whole of Europe.

The church, with its familiar double towers and spire, now sadly destroyed, is a masterpiece of European medieval Gothic archi-

tecture, though modified on many occasions down the centuries. It is also a centre for worship for the Catholic faith filled with priceless artifacts, paintings and holy relics, including a piece of the true cross.

These past few years have been difficult for France. The spate of terror attacks two years ago in Paris, Nice and other cities left scores dead and plunged the country into a state of emergency.

In recent weeks, the centre of the French

capital has been ravaged by street protests staged by the so-called gilets jaunes movement. Each weekend they have smashed up the centre of the city around the Champs Elysee, wrecking cars and shops.

President Emmanuel Macron was due last night to address the French people on the outcome of the national debate he launched to address voters’ concerns. Instead, he was on his way to witness his country’s most cherished building engulfed in flames.

Here in the UK we have seen Windsor Castle gutted by fire and parts of Hampton Court and York Minster badly damaged. As with Notre-Dame they happened while repair work was under way. Mercifully, those buildings were rebuilt though the damage to Notre-Dame may be more extensive.

This is a dreadful moment for France and its people. We share their pain. Notre-Dame can and must rise again.