

Getting Used To It

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor

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I'm not sure what to say about this summer, except that it's been kind of . . . heavy. People keep dying. My father-in-law. A friend's mother. A couple of folks in my own generation, both with young children at home. I guess this is what happens when you hit middle age; people start shuffling off their mortal coils with alarming regularity. I have to say, it takes some getting used to.

Also, my daughter – you know, the light of my life? – has plunged headlong into preteen culture, with nary a look back. Last summer, I could still entice her to join me for a bike ride to the boat landing, or a trip downtown for some ice cream, or a walk to the park. But those halcyon days have come to an abrupt halt. All she wants to do *this* summer is sit in her bedroom, listening to Justin Bieber while painting her toenails some unearthly color and/or "snapchatting" on her phone. (Google it. I'm in no mood to explain.) She might as well have posted a sign on her forehead that reads "No Moms Allowed." While I'm assured that this is perfectly normal behavior – and even have a vague recollection of engaging in it myself, minus the snapchatting – that knowledge doesn't do much to soothe the ache in my heart. My "little girl" is gone, and she's not coming back. Just something else to get used to, I suppose.

And then, there's the Zimmerman trial. What a drag *that's* been on the national psyche. I'm sitting here rewriting this paragraph early on a Sunday morning, because the verdict came down last night, long before I thought it would. I'd assumed the jury would deliberate for days – maybe weeks – and I had no idea what their verdict would be. All I knew was that there were
way
too many people on Facebook taking
way

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too much pleasure in this trial – almost like it was a sports tournament, or a TV miniseries the whole country was following. (Seriously, I haven't seen this much chatter on one topic since *Downton Abbey* was in season!) Depending on their politics – and it always come back to that, doesn't it? – my FB friends all chose their sides early on, and each side was absolutely certain of its rightness. (

How could that be,

given the evidence? Me? I was just glad not to be on the jury!) Y'all know these "culture war" battles frustrate the heck out of me. I can't bear the way complex stories about real human beings are manipulated and reimagined to fit pre-constructed narratives about race, class, gender, etc. When that happens from the get-go, it becomes almost impossible to ferret out the truth of any particular situation. (And

all

situations are particular.) When real live, flesh and blood people are turned into cultural/political symbols, we lose sight of their humanity, and, I would argue, our own. But, whatever. I'm getting used to it.

Take the Paula Deen dust-up, for instance. (Seriously! Please take it! Make it go away!) I really don't want to stick up for Paula Deen. I take no pleasure in defending a multi-millionaire mogul who deep fries mac & cheese chunks and misquotes the sage philosopher Pop-eye. ("I is what I is"?) But, see . . . the media went and turned her into a symbol – of the Old South, of institutionalized racism, of "hate," and of every other bad thing on God's green earth – and that just ticked me off. So, defend her I must. (Dammit.) She's said some things she shouldn't have, and – yes – she's probably even got some remnants of racism rattling around in her noggin. But who among us has no cultural/historical weight we need to shed? No waste that needs removal? No trash that needs taking out? Paula Deen's not perfect – and as a symbol, she's pretty odious – but she seems like a nice enough person to me. When somebody who's nice enough – and fully 3 dimensional – gets flattened into a symbol, then hoisted up the flagpole of public opinion like some banner of shame, chances are I'll defend her. It's what I do. You're used to it, right?

One thing I'll never get used to (I hope) is the unmitigated glee, the flat-out giddiness, some people exude when those they've deemed "evil" – or even just "other" – get their comeuppance . . . or the rage that explodes on the Internet when they don't. The blood-lust I've seen directed at George Zimmerman – especially now that he's been found "not guilty" – and the torches-and-pitchforks mentality aimed at Paula Deen . . . these responses chill me to the bone. At what point does a healthy desire for justice become something much darker? When does a righteous community turn into an angry mob? Where's the line?

Last weekend, I heard a good sermon based on U2's song "One." (You didn't know Presbyterians were so hip, did you?) The preacher read the whole song aloud, like a psalm,

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coming back, over and over again, to the refrain: *We're one, but we're not the same. We get to carry each other . . . carry each other.*

I've always loved that song, and I knew there was a lot going on with the lyrics, but as I listened this time around, what jumped out at me were two little words: "get to." We *get to* carry each other. Not "got to" – as in "have to" – but "get to." As in . . . it's a privilege. Taking care of each other, helping each other, wishing the best for each other, lifting each other when we fall . . . Carrying each other is a privilege. I wonder what would happen – how the world, or even my household, might change – if we all embraced that privilege with gusto and gratitude?

This life is hard. Children grow up and leave us. Those we love die. Terrible things happen to people, and other people are often responsible. It's the human condition. What if, instead of grabbing our pitchforks and circling the houses of those "other people" in self-righteous anger, our immediate group response was . . . sorrow? Concern? Grief? What if we let the justice system handle the justice – that's what it's there for – and those of us without gavels and robes went straight for the mercy? What if forgiveness, not judgment, were our collective default mode? *Can you imagine?!*

Easier said than done, I know. But I think I could get used to it.

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