

## Musing & Confusing

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor

Monday, 30 October 2017 12:46 - Last Updated Wednesday, 01 November 2017 05:58

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It's 3:27 AM, and I'm awake.

Because it's 3:27 AM, nobody else in my house is awake, which means I'm alone with my thoughts. At 3:27 AM. This is a state of emergency.

I fumble for my glasses, roll from the bed, pad into my office/breakfast nook and get the coffee started.

Meanwhile . . . the thoughts. They keep coming. If you're anything like me, entertaining thoughts at this godforsaken hour can be dangerous. You never know who - or what - will show up at the party. Best to take control of the situation - the "guest list" - by seeking out the thoughts of others.

At my computer, I breathe a sigh of relief as ancient anxieties, familiar fixations, and memories best left *unremembered* start slinking from my mental dance floor, making room for the flashy new kids on the block - the "trending" topics.

There's been some good stuff out there lately . . . stuff that really hits my sweet spot.

For instance, I'm entranced by the story of the former CEO of NPR who bravely journeyed into Red America for a year-long anthropological study, and emerged from that alien land with a new understanding and affection for the exotic creatures who dwell there - conservatives.

Ken Stern writes in the *New York Post*:

*"When you are liberal, and everyone else around you is as well, it is easy to fall into groupthink on what stories are important, what sources are legitimate and what the narrative of the day will be . . . This may seem like an unusual admission from someone who once ran NPR, but it is borne of recent experience. Spurred by a fear that red and blue America were drifting irrevocably apart, I decided to venture out from my overwhelmingly Democratic neighborhood and engage Republicans where they live, work and pray. For an entire year, I embedded myself with the other side, standing in a pit row at a NASCAR race, hanging out at Tea Party meetings and sitting in on Steve Bannon's radio show. I found an America far different from the one depicted in the press and imagined by presidents ('cling to guns or religion') and presidential candidates ('basket of deplorables') alike."*

In fact, Stern's experience in red America was so positive - nay, transformative - he's written a book called *Republican Like Me: How I Left the Liberal Bubble and Learned to Love the Right*. I don't think the guy actually changed parties - and honestly, I couldn't care less about his politics. It's the phrase "I learned to love" that captured my heart. This rare story of cross-cultural outreach literally brought a tear to my eye.

And that's not the only example I've stumbled on lately. Just the other day, I shared an article published in *Redbook* (that nice women's magazine), and republished in *Cosmopolitan* (that not-so-nice women's magazine), that had floated across my Facebook newsfeed. The title? "Maybe Don't Dress Your Kid Up as Moana This Halloween."

Apparently, all the little girls wanted to be Moana this year - she's the Disney Princess *du jour* - and it's been causing a great deal of angst across the country. The problem, you see, is that Moana, besides being an animated character, is a Pacific Islander. And most of the girls who love her are *not*.

In case you missed the memo, the old adage that "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery"

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has been nixed by the current gatekeepers of our cultural norms. "It's Imitation" now means "It's mockery," they say. According to *Redbook/Cosmo*, "It's on you to teach your kid not to be racially insensitive," and there is no better time than when a kid is in their formative years to teach them that it's not OK to mock other people's cultures."

Where to start? I won't bother kvetching about the use of "their" as a singular pronoun - that battle has been lost - but I'm not going gentle into that good night of misplaced racial sensitivity. When I posted the piece on Facebook, I commented, "This article infuriates me on so many levels, I could write a whole manifesto about it. But instead, I'll just say this: Far from wanting to 'mock her culture' - as this writer claims - little girls want to dress up like Moana to honor her. . . because they want to be her . . . because she's freaking awesome. I will never give in to this stupid, myopic, destructive mentality."

Yep, I was ticked off. Spoiling for a fight. I was ready to take all comers.

But something shocking happened. Something astounding and magical, the social media equivalent of a lunar eclipse or a meteor shower. This phenomenon occurs so rarely on my Facebook page I had to sit back and marvel at the sheer wonder of it. I worried that I should be wearing special glasses.

Here's what happened: Everybody agreed with me.

People of all races, religions, and political persuasions rose up to cry, "Enough! This must not stand. We mustn't drag the children into the silliness we adults have created, albeit with the best of intentions. Let the little girls dress like Moana."

That's a paraphrase. If I had more space, I would share all their brilliant comments, word for word - but I don't, so I won't. The point is that everybody agreed. And it was a beautiful thing.

Other examples of cross-cultural kumbaya-ing have come to my attention lately, though some of

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them, I suspect, are not what they seem. For instance, George W. Bush - long considered a monster at best, a modern-day Hitler at worst, by my progressive friends - has suddenly become a statesman in their eyes . . . almost a hero. So have Senators Jeff Flake and Bob Corker.

Each of these men rose in stature with Democrats by speaking out against President Donald J. Trump. Fair enough. But if you listen to their speeches, each of them espouses the same basic values and principles Republicans always have . . . and nobody seems to mind. Which makes me wonder if politics has *ever* really been about values and principles - or even policies - in the first place. The question becomes even more intriguing when you consider how many of my conservative friends - people who have always embraced those Republican values, principles, and policies - are now furious with Bush, Flake and Corker for dissing Trump . . . for his failure to represent Republican values, principles, and policies. Huh?

This is a Gordian knot too complex for my untying, here in the dark at 3:27 AM. But rest assured I am grateful for the distraction. Whatever keeps me from dwelling on my pink taffeta prom dress - what was I thinking? - and that thing I said to that guy at that keg party back in 1987.