

Connecting Some Dots

Written by Jack Sparacino

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“Dissociation is a disconnection between a person’s thoughts, memories, feelings, actions or sense of who he or she is. This is a normal process that everyone has experienced. Examples of mild, common dissociation include daydreaming, highway hypnosis or “getting lost” in a book or movie, all of which involve “losing touch” with awareness of one’s immediate surroundings.” – American Psychiatric Association

Aside from grad school, no other time in my life has found me more immersed in fascinating reading than the past few years. My disassociation remains under control, though there are times when apparently unconnected thoughts or ideas need to be put under the microscope. This might start by simply writing some of them down. Yes, cue the spooky music.

My condition can scarcely be compared to the president’s: he who misspeaks almost by the sentence (he topped 3,000 untrue or misleading statements in 466 days in office) and was heard last month “venting” across a dizzying array of disconnected subjects on Fox and Friends. As *The Economist* put it recently, “Donald Trump’s presidency . . . reflects the still-dumbfounding reality that one of the world’s oldest democracies elected a fully formed rascal to its highest office” (April 14-20, 2018).

Not long ago, for example, he claimed that “We have the worst laws anywhere in the world” and “We don’t have borders.” Well, if that’s true about our laws, then what about those “sh**h***” African nations he denigrated? And if we really don’t have borders, where is that big beautiful wall really supposed to go? One can only imagine the head spinning that must occur across his cabinet members when he speaks. ‘At what point do I interrupt with a shameless accolade to his majesty? That might settle him down and help get us the *heck out of here*.’

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Although with former secretary of state Madeleine Albright's new book *Fascism: A Warning* making the rounds, we really ought to be ready to duck and cover when he gets to the part where she claims that Trump is modern day America's first "anti-democratic" president. But wait! The president is well known to not read much as opposed to swallowing oceans of cable TV. Read: "Fox News." Is that why several of Trump's senior players have referred to him repeatedly as a "moron" and an "idiot"?

My own head will spin if I don't move on. Here are a few issues that percolate to the surface when I least expect them.

Them danged phones. Less than twenty years ago, there were still some two million phone booths in the United States. Only 5% of those are left today. According to the FCC, 20% of these remaining 100,000 pay phones are in New York. (Well, when you need a great pizza . . .)

I'll bet many of the people who still use them are very senior (and apparently not claustrophobic). Maybe we should be talking about very very senior. Regarding the 36 known "supercentenarians" (ages 110 and over), half of them are Japanese. Speaking of getting really old, recent studies show that people who lack social connections assume increased risk that may be comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Take that into consideration the next time someone wants to talk, no agenda.

Olden food. Eating in the 19th century in this country meant mostly basic, hearty fare that folks caught, grew or shot. Like venison, pork, corn, beans and milk. Back when, say 200 years ago, beef ran 6-8 cents a pound and milk went for 32 cents a gallon. Hey, who wants steak and ice cream tonight? Today, we've regressed to the point where hardly anyone eats properly and weighs what they should.

Can we talk more about getting old?

Help is On The Way (maybe). Many people – including most doctors – have remarked that they don't want to die in a hospital but rather at home, comfortably surrounded by loved ones. Though only a handful of states (including California, Vermont and Colorado) allow assisted suicide, fully 75% of Americans (per Gallop) now support assisted dying for the terminally ill. Perhaps they have been with a beloved dog or cat when they had to be put down before their

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suffering became unbearable. Maybe one day America's laws will more closely reflect their views on this horrifying subject.

Pets. Regarding hunting dogs Daisy, Lola, Max and Charlie, under current U.S. law, one can only be a "person" or a "thing." Professor Jeff Sabo of New York University and his colleagues submitted an "amicus curiae brief" to the New York Court of Appeals that supported legal personhood for Kiko and Tommy, both chimpanzees. No, they're not being called "human," but "person" is consistent with most Americans considering their dog to be a member of the family. When Jane tripped coming down the stairs and yelled out in pain, our best ever Yorkie, "Maggie," ran to her side and wouldn't leave until help arrived. "Nurse Maggie" we called her afterward.

Read 'Em and Weep, Bookstore Rendition. Looks like I'm a member of a rapidly shrinking group that gets its news largely from print sources as opposed to television, phones or hearsay. It just feels more natural and "connected" to read my way through the events of the day via newspaper and magazines. I have much more flexibility regarding where I read and can readily mark up pages for future reference. Barton Swain, opinion editor of the *Weekly Standard*, offers a series of cogent insights into print media in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, "In Praise of the News on Paper." For one thing, "I remember almost nothing I read online. I must have read scores of online articles in 2016, say, but I can hardly remember one."

Swain also likes to economize. "The newspaper, and especially the serious metropolitan daily, allows you to ingest the news on an array of topics—and be done with it." Sure I feel twitchy about rendering beautiful trees into newsprint, but hey, I recycle every paper I buy, either by passing it to a neighbor or the neighborhood recycling center. The daily paper made for a nice prop, recently, when I had to wait for the police to finish their paperwork after a minor fender bender. Made me look relaxed and serious and knowledgeable, all at once. Still got a ticket, but no doubt I impressed everyone in sight with my cool, calm and collected exterior.

Kids Today Seem To Be Acing Us, But . . . The tragic Parkland kids, most of them too young to vote, have given all of us a few civics lessons and rekindled the hopes (fantasies?) of many that more sensible gun laws can be enacted and effective. This is all the more important since civics classes seem to have fallen out of the school bus in America.

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A study by the Center for Information and Research on Civil Learning and Engagement at Tufts University found that most states fail to emphasize civics, encompassing citizenship, government, law, current events, etc. Only nine states require students to pass a social studies test to graduate from high school, including South Carolina, New York, and Virginia. Furthermore, only eight states administer standardized, standardized tests statewide, specifically focused on civics/American government.

There, I'm now un-dissociated enough, at least for the moment. A neat trick. Maybe one day soon you'll read about it in the paper.