

More Great Peeps, Even After Easter

Written by Jack Sparacino

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"I had dinner with Vladimir Putin once. He made me lose my appetite... Katy Couric asked about his bloodless behavior in the wake of the Kursk submarine disaster in the summer of 2000, when the boat sank and all 118 on board were killed. She pressed him on why he didn't come back from vacation when all those Russian sailors were suffering and dying in the submarine at the bottom of the sea. His face completely changed, almost as though he had ripped off a "Mission Impossible" mask. Suddenly, he stared coldly at Katie, every inch the minacious K.G.B. agent. He looked like Richard Widmark playing a psychotic thug in a 50's film noir. Just beneath the surface of the leader was a killer."

Maureen Dowd, "Trump, Having a Bawl in Europe" (7/15/18 *The New York Times*)

Seen any good horror or thriller movies lately, perhaps a James Bond flick? You know, the kind where the villains' glances (putting Widmark aside, since he's been dead for ten years and would be over a hundred if he was still alive) seem to be able to sear holes through a titanium vault or cause their adversaries to confess at will. Perhaps you've just been watching Russia's President Putin smile at President Trump while the flowers in the vase over Trump's shoulders wither and begin to vaporize.

Like many folks, I suspect, I've probably been guilty of spending too much stressful time following political developments and, in particular, the recent summit in Helsinki and its contentious aftermath. What to do about that, where is an antidote that doesn't come in a bottle, can or pharmacy? Aha, crank up the man-about-town-guy, that friendly fellow straight from the

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Mr. Rogers' Niceness Academy, and get him out there in the real world of the Lowcountry in all its summer glory. My recent gambits in this direction have been terrific: relaxing, inspirational and even (yikes, how dare one focus on money at a time like this?) free!

One of my best encounters was actually embedded in an accident. Driving home from Port Royal last week, we destroyed a tire. The car began to shake like a tractor with a broken gear, chunks of rubber sprayed the highway behind us, and we searched desperately for someplace to pull over. The turnoff for Cat Island beckoned ('it's fine you guys, you don't have cats but leaving food for the strays is almost as good') and we exited at about 500 decibels on another hot though thankfully breezy afternoon. I called AAA for roadside help and about 45 minutes later along came Richard. The first thing I noticed was his completely blown out jeans, as the hole at each knee was so severely gaping that heaven only knows how he was still wearing pants as opposed to cut-offs (literally). Richard was mid-thirties, sturdy, a lot more energetic than me, and ready to pitch in.

As he exchanged the deconstructed tire for our spare, I put on my 'man about town' hat and asked him a few questions. *Jackpot*. What an interesting fellow. We were two former aerospace guys shooting the breeze on a lovely day. Against my decades at Sikorsky Aircraft, Richard countered with seven years as a mechanic servicing U.S. Army Apache gunships. Yup, my kind of guy and in seconds I was back at Sikorsky. When I mentioned the 'excitement' of running a management training class for pilots, he smiled in acknowledgment of how 'interesting' they could be. Not exactly passive recipients of the course du jour. Within moments, both of us were whisked back to our glory days serving our country. Overlooked were the stress, noise, dirt and frustration. To the fore jumped the excitement and pride associated with being right where we were supposed to be, working with terrific people who usually cut you just as much slack as you deserved . . . nothing. Hey let's grab some pizza for lunch and shoot the . . . yeah, enemy.

But I jumped ahead of myself recalling Richard. Before he arrived, a delightful senior named Linda came up to our car and asked if she could be of any help. Did we want some water? How about a couple of Cokes? Did we want to grab some lunch with her? Could she show us some properties (nah, I made that last one up). I couldn't help wondering about the impact that race might have on such an encounter. What if we had been of different demographics? What if it had been late at night? What if I was covered in tattoos and wearing a Mohawk? Oh knock it off, my better self countered, save that for later and just thank this lovely soul for her marvelous gesture.

When Jane and I worked in New York, or gone on vacation to a city, grabbing a taxi was a fairly routine experience. That may, in fact, account in part for why we like the show "Cash Cab," a

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unique game show that converts your time in a Manhattan cab into an opportunity to make a few hundred—or even a few thousand—dollars while answering trivia questions. The host, Ben Bailey (47), is a funny guy and the show goes by quickly.

The taxi situation is a little different in Beaufort. Whereas Manhattan has some 13,000 commercial cabs, Beaufort has about a bazillion less (sure, go ahead and do the math). So what were the odds that Jane and I would get the same cab *and driver* when we made separate, uncoordinated trips last week? (Right, a half bazillion to three!) Acacia was delightful. Sleepy by her own admission, missing two easy turns, especially at 2:00 am, but wry, sensitive, and cheerful. I put on my ‘man about town’ hat and gently quizzed her for the half hour ride. It was a total success, defined by our (1) getting to the house in under an hour and (2) not being called a nosy *wiseacre* along the way (a person with an affectation of wisdom or knowledge, regarded with scorn or irritation by others; a know-it-all). [Who, me?]

A rabbit browses outside my office window as I write this. It makes me happy. So does meeting new people in our (thankfully) non-booming metropolis. My natural inclination is to keep my own council, which I counteract with a stronger drive to reach out any darned way.

As my grandfather used to say, “Whaddyagottalooze?” Anyway, I’m too old to even have to *think* about turning the whole process into a psychology experiment, like by monitoring stress chemicals and such. How about we just measure smiles?