

The United States of Crazy

Written by Margaret Evans



Normally, I title my column after it's written. It's the last thing I do – my final flourish. Every now and then, however, the process reverses itself. This is one of those times. As deadline approached, the title you see before you invaded my mind so suddenly – and with such ferocity – I had no choice but to commit to it (actually, it felt more like *submitting*), and see where it might take me.

Even now, I'm not sure where that will be. But come along, if you'd like. It'll be a lark!

For at least as long as I've been paying attention, the USA has been a wee bit... psychotic. Okay, maybe neurotic is a better word. And it's not surprising, really. In a country this big – and one that celebrates freedom of... um, everything – there's bound to be a touch of multiple personality disorder. As someone who plays happy hostess to a whole roundtable of opposing voices – right here in my own head – I have no problem with that. Sometimes, I even find it charming.

But doesn't it seem crazier around here than usual? Lately, don't you just sit watching your TV, or reading your newspaper, or scanning your computer, and wonder to yourself: *Have we completely lost our minds?*

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Most weekday mornings, I spend an hour or so at the Y, where I walk, run, climb or stride on one of several nifty machines. What I love about these machines is not so much that they raise my heart rate... but that they have TV screens attached to them. Thanks to the Y, I am able to burn my calories and tone my calves while feasting my eyes upon the United States of Crazy. Guilt-free. (As opposed to doing it from my couch with a bag of chips...)

To experience the full impact of our national insanity, imagine you're me, on the elliptical machine, changing back and forth between channels 18 (Bravo) and 19 (MSNBC) while working up your morning sweat. On the Daily Rundown, Chuck Todd solemnly intones as horrific images of tsunami-devastated Japan unfold before you. Tears fill your eyes... your heart is in your throat. Suddenly, Chuck cuts to a commercial for Cialis – major mood swing – and you find yourself wondering, once again, why all those attractive seniors keep risking four-hour erections only to end up in matching outdoor bathtubs. On to Channel 18. Now you have before you – in all their sculpted, implanted, enameled glory – The Real Housewives of Orange County. There's no tsunami in sight, but they seem to be drowning in misery. Vaguely miserable yourself, now, you leave cable behind and switch down to Regis and Kelly; they've got Michelle Obama today. No wait, that was yesterday. Today, it's Justin Bieber. You watch for minute – cute hair, weird voice – then it's back to Chuck Todd and the Libyan rebels. You watch long enough to say you did, then sheepishly return to Bravo, and the ignominy of "Bethenny Ever After"...

Okay, maybe it's not America that's crazy. Just me. But you get my point.

Back home, the crazy is all over Facebook. Someone's posted an article about a Virginia congressman who's calling for a resolution to affirm "In God We Trust" as our nation's official motto. *What is this guy smoking?* "In God We Trust" already *is* our national motto, and has been since 1956. Plenty of people don't like that fact, and frankly, they have a good case. By

forcing this resolution to come up for a vote in the House, all Congressman Randy Forbes has accomplished is to ensure that “In God We Trust” will now be an issue. (Like we need another one of *those*.) He may also have very well set that harmless, unassuming little phrase on the road to permanent oblivion. Well done, Congressman. Now, how ‘bout those jobs?

Another FB friend has posted a petition from MoveOn.org, and a conversation is brewing. Complete with moral outrage. And cuss words. Seems the U.S. House of Representatives has voted to de-fund NPR. This doesn’t sound like a good idea to me – I love NPR – but I need time to research both sides of the argument. I scan my FB homepage and see that many have skipped that step and gone straight for their high horses. (The fate of Garrison Keillor hangs in the balance!) Meanwhile, over on state senator (and occasional *Lowcountry Weekly* contributor) Tom Davis’ page, the de-funding of almost *anything*

– especially NPR – is hailed as something akin to a dragon slaying. There are lots of tea partiers here in the comboxes, all verbally jousting with their favorite evil foe, Big Government. It’s clear they believe their cause is righteous. Just like the champions of publicly funded NPR. I see strong arguments and true hearts on both sides; I just wish they’d cut each other some slack. For two groups who don’t listen to each other at all – and seem to get completely different news from completely different sources – they sure think they’ve got each other’s number. The images they project of each other (“straw men,” I believe they’re called) are not just largely unfair... they’re almost unhinged. Crazy. (Or, again, maybe it’s just me.)

And what about the congressman from Georgia who wants to make miscarriage illegal? Methinks someone has just flown over the cuckoo’s nest. As a woman who’s reluctantly pro-choice – the right to safe, legal abortion seems a necessary evil to me – I have a certain amount of respect and admiration for pro-lifers. My position is purely pragmatic; theirs is idealistic. I like idealists. Having said that – this idea of charging a mother who miscarries with a *crime*

unless she can prove there was no human involvement? It’s not just insulting to every mother who’s ever lost a child. It’s flat out crazy.

And here's one that's less obvious: The new edition of *Huckleberry Finn*. Surely you've read about it? It's been purged of all 200-some-odd instances of The N Word. (Am I the only one who feels like an overgrown kindergartner every time she uses that term?) I hesitated to include Huck in my "crazy" column; the publishers of this new version have nothing but good intentions. Though I reject the popular premise that the road to hell is paved with those, I

do

buy into the law of unintended consequences, and I fear this new

Huck Finn

might lead to some bad ones. Do we really want to be in the business of cleansing our great works of offensive language? Huck and Jim are specific characters living at a specific time and place in American history, speaking the specific language given them by their creator, the inimitable Mark Twain. Huck uses The N Word because that's how a boy like Huck, living at that time, in that place, would have spoken. Do we really think our nation's youth are too callow – too unintelligent – to understand context, given a little guidance? Do we really want to throw away the opportunities this word could open up in a classroom – opportunities for honest engagement, reflection, and growth? When we treat a word – a mere word – as taboo, we give it too much power. Seems a little crazy to me...

I could go on all day – for instance, I wanted to mention the Pole Dancers for Jesus, over in Texas – but I'm starting to feel petty and mean. After all, who do I think I am? What do I know from crazy? (Don't answer that!) As I draw to a close, however, I'll leave you with one final thought: Recently, while Japan staggered and wept, and Libya burned, Charlie Sheen continued setting world records for the most followers on Twitter.

That's pure, 100 proof, all-American crazy, right there.

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