



August makes me grumpy. It always has. Not only are we knee deep in swampy, soupy summer now, but we know what's coming – September... with all its false promise. We never learn, do we? Every year, we look to September with renewed energy and hope in our hearts (back-to-school! first-day-of-fall!), only to have that hope crushed out – mercilessly – by a month even hotter and more oppressive than August.

And so, my friends, in my ongoing endeavor to be perfectly frank with you – to “keep it real,” as the kids say – I’m afraid I must do a little grumbling this week. As always, I’d prefer to write something delightful and uplifting, but as of deadline, my mood just wouldn’t cooperate. My friend Barbara will tell you that’s because Mercury’s in retrograde. I’m just blaming it on August.

And so, a few observations from the hot and bothered...

- Conservative pundits have been giving President Obama the same treatment for his “You

didn't build that" remark that liberals gave Romney for his infamous "Corporations are people" comment – the one that's still haunting him today. Argh. You can't see me right now, but I am pulling my hair out with one hand while typing with the other. Neither man meant what he's accused of having meant – obviously – but nobody will acknowledge that. Either they're all pretending – in unison! – or they're all genuinely blind in one eye... and unaware of their tunnel vision. I'm not sure which notion bothers me more. (And, no, the possibility that *I'm* the one who's blind is

not

an option. Certainly not!)

- The morning we all woke up to the terrible news of the Colorado theater massacre, the press immediately and irresponsibly began speculating that the killer was affiliated with the Tea Party. (He wasn't.) Next we heard from a Texas senator that the shootings were inspired by recent attacks on Judeo-Christian values (say what?); and then, predictably, the NRA was the culprit. Like clockwork, folks went straight to their political corners and started seizing opportunities, willy-nilly. We couldn't even bury our dead before we started placing our blame. What a culture! Is it any wonder our young people go crazy? (Yikes! I just placed more blame. See what I mean?)

- I was at a reception last week, following the funeral of a dear old friend. This being a *souther*
n funera
l, there was plenty of food on hand, including that faithful stalwart, the Chic-fil-A party platter. Without warning, my unruly brain – which has a mind of its own – began wondering if anybody there in the fellowship hall was offended by the presence of those tasty golden morsels. I was ashamed – and still am – that politics popped into my head at such an inappropriate time and place, but I was powerless to pop it out again. How I resent the fact that I will no longer be able to enjoy my favorite fast food joint – far and above the best around, if quality and service still mean anything – without somebody (maybe even me) questioning my righteousness. As politics continues its relentless march into every nook and cranny of our existence, I will dig in my heels and resist. This, for me, is a matter of principle (just as I know it is for others who take a different stand, like my

[friend Shelley, on page 22](#)

.) I will not give in to peer pressure... and I will not give up my chicken nuggets. I'd like to say more on this topic, but it's August, and I'm afraid my cranky mood might be misconstrued as

“hate.” (Has ever a word been so overused and abused?)

- All summer, I'd been looking forward to the Olympics. It was this shimmering beacon on a bleak horizon – something fine and transcendent to bring us all together, both as a nation and a global community. An Anglophile from way back, I could hardly wait for the opening ceremony, and it didn't disappoint. Not really. But while watching the historical pageantry that took us from England's agrarian era through the digital age, I couldn't help noticing that as technology advanced, the culture kind of... disintegrated. (Or maybe “fractured” is a better word?) We “progressed” from Anglican hymnody, Welsh folk songs and Shakespeare... to a Rowan Atkinson parody of “Chariots of Fire” and some unintelligible rap music. Granted, I fell asleep before midnight and missed Sir Paul McCartney – and I do love me some “Hey, Jude” – but even The Beatles fall short of The Bard. Of course, correlation does not prove causation, and I'm not sure there's any real connection between the rise of technology and the culture of crap. Just throwing it out there for your consideration . . .

- In this, the summer of our discontent – as the presidential election rumbled in the distance like an approaching thunderstorm – there *was* another bright spot worth mentioning... though it was not without its own kind of sadness. There was one event besides the Olympics – one passage – that drew us together from our disparate corners... loosening our defensive crouches, aligning our minds and softening our hearts. For days, my Facebook newsfeed lit up with tributes and memorials, posted by a wide range of people who never agree about anything. It took the death of a beloved American icon to remind us that we're not so very different... that, at the end of the day, we all value the same things. Right, left, middle, wherever... we all crave authenticity, simple decency, gentle humor and loving kindness. Throw in some oddball friends, a few wacky adventures, and guitar music on the porch after supper, and we're in agreement: this is a recipe for happiness.

Where have you gone, Andy Griffith? A nation turns its lonely eyes to you. Woo woo woo.

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