



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Not too long ago, a friend made a pithy comment on my Facebook page – so pithy, in fact, I immediately wished I'd said it myself.

“Oh, no!” he wrote. “Is it already that time again, when we all start insulting each other while pretending to insult the candidates?”

It's back, y'all. In all its gory. (No, that's not a typo.) Much like Halloween – which is probably on full display at Walgreen's by now – Election Season keeps starting earlier and earlier, and with the presidential election still way over a year off, we are already in the thick of it.

And I'm girding my loins.

(Isn't that the oddest expression? Sounds vaguely dirty. It's not, but I don't have the space to explain. Google it; it's interesting!)

I am bound and determined to have a peaceful election season this time around. That's right – peaceful. Calm. Relaxing, even. I'm not going to let it get to me.

But how will you do that, Margaret? you ask. You, with your thin-skinned, over-sensitive, balance-seeking self? You, who cried every day, several times a day, during the last presidential election? You, who crave nothing so much as the great, collective Kumbaya?

Well, I'm working on a plan, see. It started coming to me during my walk the other day.

It was the morning after the Republican debate, and my sister and I had been IM'ing about it on Facebook. "I tried so hard not to like Jeb," she said, "because I really don't want another Bush. But he kept reminding me so much of all Mom and Dad's friends when we were kids..."

I laughed, because I knew exactly what she meant. Jeb Bush looks and sounds like all the dads I grew up around – jovial, clean cut, no-nonsense white men who wore ties and carried brief cases to work, came home at 6 for a drink and the news before supper, played tennis and grilled burgers and cut the grass on the weekends. They always showed up for school plays and ball games, never missed a Rotary meeting, went to church on Sunday, donned a tux once or twice a year, and smelled like Aqua Velva. Granted, Jeb Bush hails from a very different tax bracket than I do – and probably has to put on the monkey suit more often than my dad – but still. That old school, genteel-yet-regular-guy decency just radiates from his pale, fatherly face. I find it comforting.

But that's just me.

I understand all too well that, for people who didn't grow up with that particular kind of dad – and even for some who did – Jeb Bush is not so much a comforting presence as a discomfiting one, a symbol of WASPY privilege and dynastic politics. I get it. And like my sister, I don't want another Bush. But still. I can't help liking the guy.

We all bring our upbringing to the table where politics is concerned, I think. Maybe you grew up the child of 60s activists, going to protests and marches and political rallies. Maybe that's *your* comfort zone. Or maybe, like me, your parents are just a wee bit older – five years can make all the difference – and you missed all that. My mom and dad were 30 years old with three children by the time Woodstock rolled around. They were working hard to put food on the table, raising their brood, and serving as church and community volunteers while friends a few years younger were tuning out, turning on, and sitting in. I'm not making apologies for my parents. Frankly, I don't need to. There are many ways to work for good in this world, and I often think the little ways – not showy, not radical, not even political – are every bit as important as the big ones. (But maybe that's just my upbringing talking?)

And it's not just our upbringing we bring with us. It's our nature. And this is what I was thinking about on my morning walk. I was watching birds – you know I love my birds – and I was struck, once again, by their very different personalities. (Bird-alities?)

And I started thinking about my Facebook friends – the way they behave during election season. Some are dive-bombers, like blue jays, dropping an explosive comment then darting away. Others flit about cheerfully, like cardinals, paying little attention to anything serious. Some gather together in a discussion thread, all dark and broody and apocalyptic, like crows on a power line. Still others circle over Facebook in gangs, waiting to swoop down and pick the flesh off anybody who crosses their ideological line. Vultures.

I started to wonder about my own bird-ish nature. I've taken several (100% reliable and totally scientific) FB quizzes that tell me my "spirit animal" is the owl. This feels right to me, especially during election season, because: A) I am extremely wary of truth claims (doesn't the owl just *look* wary?); B) I am without a party, alone in my tree; and C) I don't sleep much at night.

Departing from the owl . . . I also have a very low threshold for spin and an even lower threshold for gratuitous meanness. So election season, for me, is a nightmare wrapped in a roller coaster. (I hate roller coasters.)

But I love watching birds, right? So I've had this idea: This election season, I will watch Facebook – and all of social media, and even the election coverage, itself – like I watch birds. I will treat it like an experiment. I will be very scientific about it. Detached. Impersonal. I won't get my feelings hurt or my heart broken or my dander up. This time around, election season will be a hoot. (Sorry, my spirit animal couldn't resist.)

I will delight in watching birds be birds. Or I'll try my darnedest, anyway.

I get carried away with these metaphors, don't I? Clearly, we are not birds. But we *are* creatures of habit . . . and of nature. And human nature can be a fascinating thing to observe, if you can keep your own in check. For me, that means keeping my hyper-sensitivity turned down and my

over-active empathy at bay. (I've actually been known to feel Donald Trump's pain on the rare occasion. Seriously.)

I have to get past the feeling that every time somebody makes a nasty crack about Jeb Bush, they're insulting my father. Marco Rubio is *not* that cute guy I knew in college and John Kasich is *not* that favorite uncle who always drinks a bit too much at Thanksgiving dinner.

(I know I'm sounding partisan here, but that's because there's not a Democrat in the race – yet – who feels like family to me. That might very well change after their first debate. I can already see Bernie Sanders as that beloved, blustery football coach who also taught Social Studies.)

See, this is my problem. Everybody reminds me of somebody else – typically somebody I like, or even love. And when they remind me of somebody I *don't* like – Ted Cruz, for example, who reminds me of a TV evangelist from the '80s – somebody will point out that he looks like Grandpa Munster. This remark is designed to make me like Cruz even less, but I've always found Grandpa Munster endearing.

See what I'm up against? Once I start feeling like I *know* these people, I start feeling protective of them. I take it personally when they're attacked. And I feel betrayed when they bring the attacks on themselves. When they act like . . . well, politicians.

I know this all sounds crazy. But hey, crazy is my nature. Politicians do their thing, and I do mine. And guess what? You do yours, too. You may think your politics are purely rational – based solely on issues and ideology – but if you do, you're lying to yourself. You, too, are influenced by your upbringing and your nature. Deal with it.

If I'm going to be truly detached this election season – detached enough to observe politicians and pundits and Facebook critics without getting all emotional – I will have to think of them as birds. Birds never make me angry or disappoint me or hurt me. Of course, birds never act self-righteous or judgmental, either. They don't delight in shaming other birds. They don't lie or spin or fudge the truth. Birds are never snarky.

Or maybe they are. Who knows? Only other birds, I suppose. If I were a bird, I'd probably have a very different take on all this.

Alas, I fear I will never achieve my goal of complete and utter detachment, no matter how hard I try. It's just not in my nature. Perhaps the best I can hope for is to keep that nature in check. I will probably feel everything – I'm just a natural-born feeler – but maybe I can control my reactions. Not just for my sake, but for everybody else's.

Have you ever seen the owl destroy its prey? It's not pretty.

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