



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Y'all know I keep my eye on the passing parade, right? I like being on the scene . . . in the loop . . . having my finger on the pulse . . .

But lately, the parade is passing too quickly to comprehend. The “scene” lacks focus; the “loop” is an endless spin cycle; the “pulse” is in afib.

I try to keep up. I really do. But the harder I try to stay on top of current affairs, the further behind I seem to fall. There's this enormous, all-you-can-eat buffet of information, but the more I graze, and even gorge, the less I seem to digest. And what I *do* digest may, or may not, be nutritious. It's hard to know anymore.

Forget “fake news” – which is a real thing, and bad enough – but even those distinguished sources we're supposed to trust, like CNN, WaPo, and the *New York Times*, are so

// in with the Resistance now – bless their hearts – that they've become sloppy and unreliable, spinning grand narratives out of amateur street videos, fake tweets, wishful thinking and whole cloth. And every time they get it egregiously wrong, not only does their credibility diminish – along with our trust – but an angel loses its wings. (Actually, I believe every time the media rush to (mis)judgment,

a la last week's “evil Catholic School Boy vs. saintly Native American” story, a few dozen – or thousand – new white nationalists are born. Oh, goody.)

The media. They mean well, but they're only human. Actually, I should say *we're* only

human; I'm a member of this hapless tribe. Of course, I'm just an *opinion* journo. But who isn't these days? Is anybody even *doing* straight reporting anymore?

So I'm exaggerating. And I will not give up my quest for truth! I will continue to observe the passing parade, however fast it flies by, offering up the occasional snapshot, no matter how blurry.

Speaking of which . . . trying to follow the political scene is like looking through a kaleidoscope. Everything keeps shifting.

For starters, Democrats are furious with their former progressive hero, Starbucks founder Howard Schultz, for announcing on *60 Minutes* that he might run for president as an "independent centrist." (Personally, I shed tears of joy at the sound of that phrase – the way it rolls off the tongue, like some beautiful hybrid of punk rock and elevator music. Ah . . .) The Democrats don't seem to want Schultz on *their*

ticket – they're having a progressive moment and don't fancy an "indie-centrist," even one who's actually a progressive – and they sure don't want him siphoning votes from their nominee. Many are threatening to boycott Starbucks if Schultz doesn't back down. But with 42% of Americans now identifying as Independents, I think he might be onto something.

As for the Republicans, it seems they've reconfigured their identity in the Trump era. Remember when the GOP was a "three-legged stool," made up of social conservatives, economic conservatives, and foreign policy conservatives? Yeah, it seems that ship has sailed. Now you've got globalists vs. nationalists – aka establishmentarians vs. Trumpists – and the stool seems wobbly at best.

In fact, the "establishment" Republicans seem more like the "establishment" Democrats now, with each party bowing to its anti-establishment "populist" faction that's pushing it toward its extreme. For the Dems, the face of that populist faction is the telegenic young congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ("AOC" as the kids call her), while Trump heads up the populist faction of the GOP. AOC is a democratic socialist while Trump is a . . . well, I'm not sure what Trump is, exactly, though he calls himself a "nationalist." Meanwhile, Tucker Carlson

over on Fox News is beginning to sound like a Bernie bro, and I'm confused.

These are not your grandparents', your parents', or even your big brother's political parties. We're not in Kansas anymore.

For instance, Marianne Williamson is running for president! The bestselling New Age author/spiritual teacher/friend-of-Oprah threw her halo in the ring last week. After hearing the news, a friend of mine on Facebook quipped, "Who will be her running mate? Deepak Chopra?" I responded, "I'd rather see Deepak run with Oprah so the bumper sticker could read 'Oprah/Chopra 2020.'" I don't mean to belittle Marianne, Oprah, *or* Chopra. As far as I'm concerned, the world needs more spiritualists and fewer politicians. I'm just not sure about spiritualist-politicians. Can that actually work? Can those who are 'in the world but not of the world' successfully *run* the world? Should they even try, or are their gifts better used outside the political arena? 'Tis a great Bacharachian truth that what the world needs now (and always) is love, sweet love; but it's equally true that power corrupts. Stay gold, Marianne. Stay gold.

It seems nothing stays gold in the US anymore. There's nothing left untainted by our politics, nothing that doesn't divide us. I'm writing this on the Saturday before the Super Bowl – once a great American uniter – and I've just read a story about the halftime performance. Apparently, they had a hard time getting anybody to sign on for what once was every musician's dream gig, because . . . politics. Maroon 5 took the challenge, and now there are calls for them to "take a knee" on stage, in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, which they may – or may not – have done by the time you read this. Whatever they decide to do – or not do – there will be outrage. Of that you can be sure. And even the game, itself, has been tainted. Thanks to Donald Trump's oft-tweeted affection for Patriots owner Robert Kraft, coach Bill Belichick and quarterback Tom Brady, what should have been a friendly rivalry between Patriots and Rams fans is now an unfriendly rivalry between red and blue America.

Next up, the Academy Awards, another tradition that has always brought Americans together around their TV sets on a chilly Sunday in late winter. Last year, the Oscars lost 26.5 million viewers, a devastating ratings plummet that industry insiders attributed to changing viewer habits, the lack of "blockbusters" among the nominated films, and politics.

"Any strong political statement has the potential to alienate audiences," wrote Tony Maglio at The Wrap. "No, the Oscars weren't advertised on political terms, but host Jimmy

Kimmel has increasingly used his ABC talk show 'Jimmy Kimmel Live' as a political forum. At the same time, Hollywood at large is going through an extremely political period, as evidenced by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. Audiences therefore had good reason to expect politically charged content at the Oscars as well, and some of them — particularly Middle-America viewers who propel 'Big Bang Theory' ratings or put Donald Trump into the White House — might have tuned out."

Duh. Ya think? I don't begrudge Hollywood actors their chance to "speak truth to power" in front of a large TV audience, but if we're being honest about power differentials, they've got it backwards. When beautiful, wealthy, celebrated movie stars lecture Joe Blow from Peoria about his toxic masculinity, they're punching down, not up, and Joe Blow knows it. And he turns off the TV. And here's the main thing: Actors are so much more effective when they *show* us instead of *telling* us

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While receiving his Lifetime Achievement Award from the Screen Actors Guild last week, the great Alan Alda — who gets it — used his time to inspire his fellow actors instead of shaming Joe Blow.

"When we get a chance to act, it's our job, at least in part, to get inside a character's head and to search for a way to see life from that person's point of view, another person's vision of the world. And then to let an audience experience that," he said. "It may never have been more urgent to see the world through another person's eyes. And when the culture is divided so sharply, actors can help, at least a little, just by doing what we do. And the nice part is it's fun to do it. So my wish for all of us is let's stay playful, let's have fun, let's keep searching. It can't solve everything, but it wouldn't hurt."

Hawkeye Pierce will never steer you wrong.

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