

COLLAB ORATE

Peacemakers #8

Tailgating

Just after dark, to keep him safe, I drove my friend Tom and his bike home from Shoreline. Our club, Rain City Rotary, had been bagging roadside trash on 15th NE. Tom and I traveled McAleer Creek Road, a narrow winding streamside goat track through Lake Forest Park. The speed limit was twenty-five miles per hour, a limit about which the City of Lake Forest Park seems quite serious. With darkness and blind curves, even that minimal speed may have been optimistic. Headlights barreled up behind me, dipping as the motorist braked sharply. He hovered feet behind my bumper, edging closer to goad me to pick up my pace. I stuck to my pottering guns. My much-delayed nemesis also persisted. Five minutes later, we rounded a corner to a one hundred yard straightaway, still double-yellowed with limited visibility and invisible driveways. Mad Max gunned it, swirled past me, lurching back into the right lane with scant clearance at my front fender. He arrived at the first Lake Forest Park stop sign seconds before my rusty little Nissan pickup. My unkind thoughts mirrored those of that hurried local, or so I surmised.

America cherishes productivity. In its name, we hurry. We work too much and rest too little. We act, then think. Our exhausted bodies lag behind our aspirations. We kick-start metabolisms with morning caffeine jolts and afternoon No-Doz. We get our bodies so ramped up that they demand sleeping pills to nod off. America's rush may reflect economic demands and aesthetic preferences. Every low-hanging limb must be lopped, every dollar plucked, every tooth askew straightened. Or perhaps the rush reflects our national character; we descend from dawn-to-dusk farmers and compulsive non-conformists rankled by doddering European tyrants. Haste can appear, to American eyes, reasonable, even patriotic.

Fragments of America's haste are deeply, trans-culturally human. In 1853 Britain, Matthew Arnold similarly complained of "this strange disease of modern life, with its sick hurry, its divided aims, its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts" (*The Scholar—Gipsy*). We humans have programs and don't want them jostled. Most of us are especially intolerant of delays caused by the idiosyncrasies of others. We rail (for the most part silently to ourselves, as propriety demands) at impeding human oddness. When our agenda is derailed, we rant about others' religious practices, sexual orientations, race, hair cuts or colors, cultures, national origin, diseases, disfigurements, mental illness, odd hats, stupid tee shirt slogans, bumper stickers, or football enthusiasms. The misshapen agendas of others discompose equanimity. We want such obstacles obliterated—now. Flickers of delay, doused with combustible impatience, inflame smoldering conflicts. Embers become conflagrations. Some fraction of intolerance is impatience singeing social etiquette.

Peacemakers extol patience, but struggle to quell their own bustle. Suffering clients often tell their heartfelt story over and over. One glazes. Aggressors frequently rant about opponents' inanities. Tick tock. Peacemakers themselves want client disputes to conclude neatly, say, by 4:00 p.m., so that dinner can be timely consumed. Conflict resolution demands fortitude before tumults of banality. Peacemakers take a deep breath, and ask if there is more, silently hoping there is none. Peacemakers wish their hearts spoke otherwise. With patience, client torrents of verbiage eventually abate. Occasionally, listening commences.

Law schools teach civil procedure and analysis, but not longsuffering. Peacemaking demands more forbearance than many lawyers muster in their legal labors. We lawyers can unlearn our hurry and insistence. Patience and peacemaking skills often solve problems that defy legal resolution. A good day for peacemakers contains a long-litigated morass settled by supra-legal, intimately human, approaches. Peace demands that the peacemaker fold her hands, take a deep breath, and bide her time. There comes the right moment to bridge chasms. One waits. One watches. Good will cannot be coerced.

Back at McAleer Creek Road, I might have seized a wide spot, pulled over, and let Mad Max careen past to confront his celerity demons. The quivering little peacemaker in me tells me I should have relinquished the lane. Unaccountably, I ignored that voice. Lessons in patience yet to learn....

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