

One More Once

Written by Alex Baer
Monday, 13 July 2015 16:27

It's not like I was gone long. Nor was it likely I'd be missed. (My ego's at the opposite end of the spectrum from Trump's, say. You know, down in the deep dark blues of reality, not the riotously bright, day-glow flamingo pink champagne shades of all the little Bushes and Palins and Romneys.)

But, it had been done. I had hung up my keyboard. I was all done.

I had decided to do something less painful with my time than offering curmudgeonly commentaries in my stubbed-toe, schadenfreude-rich, Freudian-packed missives on the woe-packed state of the universe.

I thought about taking up something more comfy, like firewalking, maybe, or bungee jumping (with the bungee tied around my neck), or simply sitting on the sofa, pounding sticks of string cheese into my ears with little rubber mallets while humming "*I've been working on the railroad...*"

Pretty much anything is a fabulous time, filled with wonder and awe, compared with checking out the day's news. Compared with news headlines of what we humans have done *now* -- well, even the exciting, rewarding world of home sump pump repair can seem irresistible.

But, then it happened. Against all odds, some of my childhood energies were accessed, tapped, and given a blast of fresh electrical juice: *Berkeley Breathed was back, and so was Bloom County.*

Suddenly, all things were again possible, even the impossible.

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How can this be? I thought. *Can Calvin and Hobbes and The Far Side be far behind?*

I hope they'll also burst back upon the world scene, like giant, cool drops of fresh water landing, *ka-splat!*, on hot, dusty, cracked and caked ground, but I don't think they will -- even though the universe seems to be enjoying working things, good and bad, in trios, in threes, in honor of triangles and pyramids everywhere.

So, as impossible as it is, I am putting back on the dour cloak of humanity, having shed it for only a short while, then drug it back out of the garbage can, and I will rearm for the good fight, for the struggle of helping me, and maybe you, insert a little counterbalancing sanity into the frayed edges of our forays into *The Daily Fray*.

- (Sidebar: If there were still newspapers, *The Daily Fray* would be an excellent name, I'm thinking.)

Count Basie -- who still co-owns the world with many others, including Frank Zappa, Sade, Benny Goodman, Sarah Vaughan, Pink Floyd, Andreas Vollenweider, Ella Fitzgerald, John Barry, Sarah McLachlan, Raymond Scott, Peggy Lee, Carl Stalling, Melody Gardot, Glenn Miller, Jimi Hendrix, Bob James, and so very, very many more -- had a fine line he'd call out in his band's reprises during the multiple tail-outs of his signature tune, *April in Paris*.

One more once, he'd say, smiling, giving a nod for another rich flourish from the band, Basie at the keyboard, running keys toward the end of the song, and the end of the song running back toward him, doing exactly what it was told.

I'm no Basie or Breathed, but I've got a *One More Once* left in me, I think.

- So, here we go: One. More. Once.

And, as I'm just starting out again, wobble-legged, after a microscopic break between rants, I'll simply mention in passing the depth of sadness which is possible to creep up on a body, all of a

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sudden, when you find yourself paying attention, again, to the many medical tests humans make upon other humans, secretly, and not-so-secretly.

No, not just the Nazis, in WW2 concentration camps, but those by the U.S. government, and many others, all tinkering with their populations, not telling a soul, waiting for the truth of the actions to come out long after the test subjects had moved on to the Big "What Next?" Waiting Room in the Sky.

- Nuclear, chemical, biological, medical, diseased curiosity -- you name it. We've done it all, and given every possible excuse when caught and made to confess.

How did they expect to not be caught? I wonder. What did they plan to say when someone found out? I ask myself. Did they think people would just scratch their heads, shrug, walk away, disinterested?

- I wonder the same thing about America's wide-eyed, wild-eyed forays into torture.

I also ponder all the plots and the plans along the way, then and now, the lies told participants and the public, the withheld truths, the secrets guarded so well and so long, the unspeakable acts, done and forgotten. I think about the lies the politicians and practitioners told themselves every step along the way, at every point of the plan, about their undoubtedly doing more good than harm, about everything being all right...

And I try to imagine that peculiar moment in time:

I guess there was a downside to America being King of the World at the end of WW2, to being the only industrial power still completely on its feet after a massive, world-wide melee -- the inevitable (or was it?) downside to welcoming back its survivors and troops, to cranking up its population, to re-launching its massive industrial might from meeting military hungers, and now civilian desires, to the production and consumption of showers and streams of goods, for use in The Good and Happy Life everyone had so long battled for, hoped for, and longed for...

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The blessings of hubris: ***We can do whatever we like, if we make ourselves a good-enough argument for it.*** And so, we did. We still are. *We still are.*

We got better at hiding truth, at telling convincing lies, and now, it's all simply second nature and daily damage control -- a routine day at the propaganda office of our newly-improved and vastly-relative American Truths.

- Strange, isn't it, how the beginning speckles and seeds of our great failure as a country and a people and a government were sown from the incredible, limitless fruits of our incomparable, unending victories...

- Oh, sure -- we're still alive, we're still getting by, but we've left something precious behind. Something necessary, something missed. We've left behind who we *could* have been.

Equally peculiar is how our once-automatic trust and unshakeable beliefs have flown the coop, gone to roost somewhere else, and doing so for many, many decades. Regret is a terrible thing. Mourning lost opportunities is a smothering, clinging thing, sticky and saccharine sweet, with a scent of mouldering death.

OK -- *One More Once*, I'll try to change gears, and try a better reboot with someone's help:

- "Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it comes to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh." -- *Henry David Thoreau*

Good words, great thoughts. Of course, Thoreau also said one of my all-time favorites:

- "Beware any enterprise requiring new clothes."

Sometimes, I wish I'd concentrated on that one a little deeper, before signing up -- even if the sound of tumbling dice was loud and rampant in my ear, shouting the nearness of the draft

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notice coming on me fast, seeking me out, special delivery, aiming right dead at me...

Yes.

Still, for me, and for you, and for us all, the biggest blessing in this crazy life may well be the smile behind Basie's *One More Once*, and the tone of his voice there -- the warm, playful tone that says, *Let's Kick It, We Can Do This, We're Pros, and, For Crying Out Loud, Let's Do It With Some Joy.*

Here, I leave you to it.

As for me, I have a whole bunch of string cheese, and about 19 little rubber mallets, to take out to the trash.

Resources:

Bloom County reblooms: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/07/13/422545636/bloom-county-2015-berkeley-breathed-revives-comic-strip>

Basie, *April in Paris*, and his *One More Once*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCmcoZktZG4>

The latest Big Reveal on human experiments:
<http://www.sfgate.com/technology/businessinsider/article/One-of-the-largest-human-experiments-in-history-6375917.php>