

Springtime in Santa Barbara

Written by Bob Alexander
Thursday, 18 July 2013 22:03 -

Back in 1971 a couple of good ol' boys grabbed me outside of a bar in Amarillo Texas and pounded me into the ground like a human tent peg. They didn't like the length of my hair.

A couple of years later I was walking down De La Vina Street in Santa Barbara in the late afternoon when a guy sped by me in beat-to-crap white pick up truck, screamed out, "YOU EFFING HIPPIE," and threw an unopened bottle of coke at my head. It missed by inches, exploded against the rock retaining wall on my right, and instead of a concussion ... I was covered in broken glass and dripping soda pop.

The beating in Amarillo was pretty bad. It could have gotten worse but luckily for me, the bartender had an idea about what the good ol' boys were up to, and came out and stopped it. But the "Pop Bottle Incident of 1973" had a greater impact on me. The thing in Texas I chalked up to, "What the hell do you expect? You're in Texas for chrissakes," but the lucky near-miss in Santa Barbara really shook me up. I was in Southern California, one of the "sane" states, where a long hair could walk around without getting stomped.

It was one of those Golden Blustery afternoons of Springtime in Southern California. A great day. The wind was in the palms, clouds scudded across an impossibly blue sky, and I was feeling just fine. I was having one of those moments where you feel absolutely 100% comfortable inside your own skin and with the rest of the world. And instantly everything completely changed. Everything changes when you realize someone hates you, I mean honest-to-god hates you, just because of the way you look.

The guy in the pickup decided that he was going to hurt me. Two-three inches to the right and I would have taken a 30 mile an hour coke bottle to the temple. How badly would I have been hurt? Could it have killed me? The guy in the pickup didn't care one way or the other. He made his decision and was gone. The moment where I felt completely at ease was ripped from my mind and stolen by that A-hole. But I got over it. And the main reason I could get over it was because I'm a White Guy.

I don't know anything about being oppressed. I might have a shred of a glimmer of an idea about it though. But I have to use my imagination ... y'know ... make stuff up. I have to take those two isolated instances and extrapolate them, stretch them out over a lifetime, and imagine decades of that kind of treatment. And y'know what? I can't imagine what my life would be like. I've been steeped, marinated, and slow-cooked in White Guy Privilege for so long I can't imagine anything else. I can feel outrage but it's White Guy Outrage. If somehow you could take this white ass and magically put me inside a black guy who had to live inside this White Empire ... I don't think you'd end up with somebody who would necessarily embrace pacifism. But y'see that's still White Guy Outrage talking. Because I really don't know anything about being oppressed.

Within the confines of this empire, on a day-to-day basis, I can pretty much do whatever I want.

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As long as I follow the rules of empire: Work, Consume, and Die, I face no oppression whatsoever. It's only if I stray into anything other than Work, Consume, and Die, would I face some level of oppression.

The cops beat on dirty effing hippies all the time at anti-war demonstrations in the 60's and 70's. We got glared at by Gawd-fearing Americans who disapproved of our dirty effing hippie lifestyle. But by the time Jimmy Carter was in the White House, the dirty effing hippie hatred had pretty much dried up. And when Ronald Reagan affably strolled into office, just about everybody I knew had normal-ed up, cut their hair, got a real job, and started buying crap like everybody else.

I didn't end up following that ... um ... career path. I've been pretending to be a normal person for years. And the main reason I could get away with it is because I'm a White Guy. You gotta trust me on that. I only know about 10 things and that's one of them.

Except for a couple of miserable instances I've been pretty much self-employed. It didn't pay all that well but at least the hours were good. And here I sit, clacking away at a keyboard, and even after living a life (according to "normal" people) of a screw-up ... saints be praised ... Social Security checks have started showing up.

I exist on the skinny end on the left of the Bell Curve of Oppression. All women and non-whites make up the Big Bulge in the middle. And anyone standing immediately in the way of the voracious appetite of the empire is on the skinny end on the right side of the Bell Curve ... They're oppressed to death.

Which brings us to violence.

Harlan Ellison wrote about violence better than I can. He wrote,

"VIOLENCE. Not the pale, pallid nonsense Starsky and Hutch indulge in every week. Real violence. Sudden, inexplicable, ghastly. How seldom we see it. How unhinged we become in the face of it. Because when it really happens, when it manifests itself on its most primitive, amoral level ... we understand just how fragile is the tissue of social behavior.

... Violence, real violence, not the Jack Armstrong nonsense we all play-act at ... genuine, mindless violence is very important.

Because there is no knowing when it will strike.
And there is no escape from it.
I warn you, it's terrible."

Outside of a beating in Texas, the "Pop Bottle Incident of 1973," and some cops rioting at anti-war protests, I don't know too much about violence. But I can try to imagine it. If some amped up, paranoid, racist cop wannabe sonofabitch stalked and shot my kid through the heart

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... then everything is buried underground. Even the sun.