

Trying to Find Sense, Using Both Hands and a Flashlight

Written by Alex Baer

Friday, 23 November 2012 19:50

"This year I wasn't about to kill people."

That's a pretty good attitude to take in general. It seems even more fitting when talking about a squabble over a Tinker Bell sofa with another Black Friday shopper, as Elizabeth Garcia had done, at a Toys-R-Us site in Times Square last year.

Even without the Body-and-Door-Crushing Super Savings Specials, and shoppers brandishing pistols and other weapons high overhead, trying to get other shoppers to back off from a prized shopping bargain, many people would call today Black Friday anyway.

And not just from the need to make funeral arrangements for a loved one who may have died at a shopping center for the shabby privilege of trying to save a few bucks. And, not just from referencing other calamitous feeding-frenzy aftermaths, like the stock market crash of 1929. Just from the sense one gets from the zombie-like compulsions to shop -- from the mindless, automatic need to consume, and from the senseless, bottomless greed grating and grinding along today.

We continue to be, in this year of 2012, prisoners of primal urges and forces often beyond our ken, too easily contradicting the smear of civilized veneer we dab on and re-apply daily.

An e-card somebody made said it pretty well, and in phrasing I cannot now precisely remember. But, it was perfect, insightfully cobbled, saying something like: *One day, we stuff ourselves with food to give thanks for all the stuff that we have, and the very next day, we heave ourselves back into pitched battle to get even more stuff.*

(This is the part where we pause, consider the truth of that thought, giggle nervously for a second or two, and then pinwheel back into the fray, panicked we might miss out on the Miss Honeytree Mystery Sock Curler, in purple plastic, with real imitation cubic zirconium peg tweakers, for only \$3.98 each.)

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Even in the midst of the overdressed, overheated, over-celebrated madness of the in-store crowds, why, a reasonable person would have to be an idiot to let a Utility Hand Straightener by DeMashCo slip away at only \$2.49 each, or just \$20 for seven -- right?

Math and aftermath, twin American downfalls. A couple among many.

Well, charge on, anyway, shoppers -- this is your lucky day. There's another pallet of Happy Lucky Person Popcorn Wallets and Watermelon Rind Purses, like on that cartoon show, coming out from the storeroom right now!

Psst! Hey! Over here! Yeah, you folks! How much dignity and civilized veneer would you be willing to trade for this super-rare Captain Alphonzo and Doctor Betty Gonzo Hero League action figure play set by Barko-Batzo Brothers? There's none on E-bay, and only two in the whole state -- and you're looking at one of 'em right here.

Let's start the bidding at a thousand, shall we say...

* * * * *

At least the Black Friday experience isn't a complete waste: It shows us what it takes to get Americans out into the streets in vast numbers, all ginned up, ready to go, ready to do whatever it takes...

Not the suspension of democracy for a de facto right-wing coup and presidential appointment. Not the porous security -- or theft, or intolerable conditions -- of elections. Not two wars tripped by lies, and fed by war crimes. Not the fattened corporations and overstuffed billionaires fed to bursting on taxpayer subsidies, all while public services and infrastructure go begging...

Nah, getting all riled up and marching in the streets over political stuff is for third world countries and banana republics.

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You want a reaction like that, pal, you're gonna have to start talkin', oh, like a 75% off sale, on a Little Man 3000 Championship Pro-Level Haircut and Poker Pocket Set, with add-on fishing rod, tennis racket, crossbow, and seafood steamer and pants-creaser attachment, from RealMenCo. □ Something like 'at.

* * * * *

Seems like for every step forward humanity makes, there's a ref with a armload of flags who screams on in out of nowhere, hurling penalty markers everywhere, commanding us to go three paces back -- 17 if we talk back.

And, we usually do.

Example, if needed: How about getting shot and killed by a man you'd earlier asked to stop urinating near your building's entrance?

In other cases, the one answering nature's call is the one who is shot and killed.

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Other times, your nation will be starving to death under the uncaring guidance of a titular leader, and your society decides it's the perfect time to laud that fearless leader in an 1800-foot-long, 65-foot-high message that can be seen from space. *Naturally.*

North Korea. *Long live the Shining Sun*, you know.

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While we're in the neighborhood, how about a stop at the *Hotel of Doom*, where it's taken 26 years to construct even the barest-boned skeleton. That 16 years in which work was completely abandoned on the monolith-behemoth probably didn't help much.

The interior is completely unfinished, just concrete and steel. You can almost feel the wind whipping on through in such barren settings -- along with the tourists and honeymoon vacationers, fleeing for their lives.

And for their refunds.

* * * * *

We're still pretty much a monkey-see-monkey-do bunch, we humans -- sometimes with mixed aspirations to discover our better natures, and sometimes with burning and primitive, warring desires that debases those same dreams.

Other times, we're just caught hapless and flat-footed, caught suspended somewhere between our technological prowess and our talent for boneheaded stupidity.

Sad case in point: Yesterday's southeast Texas pileup on Interstate 10 involving 140 or more vehicles in which two people died.

Going too fast for conditions, say officials, noting heavy fog in the area.

Sure, the fog could have come up fast, without any warning, and without any chance to react. It's also possible the fog went from fairly light and pretty slight to pea-soup thick slowly, gradually, allowing for a reaction time.

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On gradual changes, we humans aren't much good -- change is happening so slowly, what's the big deal? There's too much time between action and reaction to allow us to see changes and make corrections. Suddenly, *It's Too Late*.

Think: *Democracy falling into fascism, tobacco smoking after a quarter-century, global climate change starkly demonstrated for decades -- and going way too fast for conditions.*

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Now, to try to make sense of all this, and to leave us feeling unabashedly un-bashed and feeling better for having dropped by, a few quotes and some musings:

Time is relative, as Einstein said. "Put your hand on a hot stove for a minute, and it feels like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, and it seems like a minute. *That's* relativity."

And, Gandhi, regarding life's focus: "There is more to life than simply increasing its speed." Here, Gandhi reminds us of what is important, even as the world insists we all go faster, all the time.

This must partially explain why it is that waiting for a web site to load on your computer seems like months in those intervening groups of three seconds each. Or how it is that driving 20 miles an hour over the speed limit, in order to arrive somewhere 59 seconds faster, seems well worth the risk.

It also helps explain, to some degree, why it is I feel the nearly-uncontrollable impulse to snatch up my computer and toss it through the window when online advertisers crowd out, distract from, and utterly delay the core reason I arrived at the site.

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(Those auto-start-up video ads have moved into first place on my Foaming-Mad Hit List, moving up one slot from the former holder of the top spot, the busily changing-flashing-dancing-spinning-whirling-twirling graphics that are parked the whole length of a long and complex block of writing trying to hold its ground long enough to engage my understanding.)

Here's hoping all our favorite websites manage to figure out another revenue model, other than slicing and dicing us with ads or subscription fees.

And, here's hoping humans will keep advancing, step by step, and without interference from penalizing referees. I dunno about you, but I could stand to see the species get up and run really hard for a while, moving us all down our course a lot farther, and down our figurative road a lot further.

Meanwhile, Oscar Wilde comes to mind once again, providing some comfort: *We are all in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars.*

Even more of us are just trying to go from Point A to Point B without the world, ourselves, and loved ones imploding.

Thing is: The worst way to get through a field of land mines is placing your hands tightly over your ears, and running like hell, going *la-la-la-la-la* the whole way.

And yet, this is the way most humans travel.

Pretty much describes my own journey so far, even while trying pretty hard to pay attention and relocate that lost batch of common sense.

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Black Friday: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20458895>

Black Friday's origins:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/11/21/165662876/why-black-friday-has-dark-roots>

Taking to the streets in Egypt: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20458148>

and:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/11/23/165765488/egyptians-take-to-the-streets-after-president-expands-powers>

Updating that (sometimes fatal) call of nature: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-20457616>

... and an earlier tale: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8286326.stm

Hail, Fearless Leader! <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20461822>

Hotel of Doom: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20178985>

and: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryugyong_Hotel

and: <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/11/02/north-koreas-hotel-of-doom-open--2013-n-2064455.html>

Texas pileup:

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<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-150-car-pileup-texas-highway-20121122,0,3316743.story>

and: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/sns-photos-deadly-texas-pileup-20121122,0,6982542.photogallery>

and, with many pics: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/22/texas-highway-pileup-crash_n_2175909.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular

and, with some video: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/22/us/texas-highway-pileup/index.html>