

Who Goes There - Friend or Faux?

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 15 May 2014 21:27 - Last Updated Friday, 16 May 2014 13:37

Not counting the things that looked like mushed M&M's or maybe some cushion-dried salsa chunks, the best I've ever done is a couple of hard-shell taco divots, a remote control for an oscillating fan, enough unpopped popcorn kernels for a hamster's tea break, a ripped bus transfer, half a poker chip, a pizza crust that could double as a drywall hammer, two wallet-pocket buttons, the keeper-part of ticket stub for a 1993 charity auction, and a dollar-seventeen in change.

Talk about being outclassed. Three roommates in northern New York state found \$40,000 in *their* couch. The one they bought. Second-hand. For twenty bucks.

It was a major oops. The daughter sold it, when her mom was in the hospital for a surgery. But, it all got straightened out. The roommates tracked down the original owner somehow, maybe through the charity shop that had sold them the couch, and then, the original owner and the original cash were all restored to original condition. And they all lived originally, and happily, ever after.

Yes: Good works were done, a smidge of confidence was restored to the bucket of human nature, and the roommates received a thousand bucks for their effort -- a profit of \$980, one could say, providing one wanted to focus on the upsides here.

It's heartening to have news that helps buoy the heart in these storm-ravaged times, or some equally reaching, preachy stuff. Yes, it's good news, happy news, uplifting news, and all that -- but the timing is crap.

See: I had just started to formulate an hypothesis I'd been mulling over, based on decades of anecdotal nature and stinging personal experience. The formula went roughly like this: As time goes on, here in America, people are becoming less patient and more selfish. Less considerate and more self-centered. Less authentic, more artificial -- and in that sticky, clinging, clammy sensibility once referred to by some as *Preppie Yuppie Zombie Puppies*.

(Granted, not *many* did, not outside my crayon-based therapy group, but, still...)

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Timing is everything. Another big chunk of life, and observational trend-charting, down the drain. I doubt I will need to start over, though, or even want to, for that matter. Before long, this wisp of bright, sparkly karma will be trashed, dented, scowled at, humiliated, rusted out, patina-drenched, and hurled into the landfill with other items that should have been recycled, if only the people involved had had more time in their lives for such things.

Always something.

* * * * *

Luck is a great part of anything, you have to admit, here in the human family.

What else to expect, from a laughable animal descended from gasping lungfish and chittering marsupials, lugging around a primate chassis, with new-model opposable thumbs, and bearing up under the traumatic, psychic weight of an overdeveloped central nervous system and stem ending, complete with a spooked, solid-reptile center, struggling to build calmer logic pathways to the forebrain, like pioneers in thought-filled Conestoga wagons, scaling the primal backbone of the Continental Divide.

We're pretty busy animals, doing well to just wake up every morning and understand where we are, what should happen next, and sleepily wonder why coffee isn't something our bodies produces as easily as hemoglobin -- say, and in the salivary glands, maybe, to help percolate things along toward dawn, and help ease us into the day with a head start into the morning mix of lurch-and-launch.

Thank goodness we don't have to concentrate on all the automatic business of our bodies, like digesting food, and separating out and then routing solids and liquids this way and that, and all the other helpful housekeeping our bodies do, like building immunity to harmful threats...

Um, except when we don't, and when we mistakenly consider Rush Limbaugh is really a swell

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guy, for a maid-endangering addict, say, or choke up at the pride we feel at the GOP championing the Little Guy against the rabid rich and the bullies of big business, or when we get all misty-eyed at Fox news carrying forward the Great Flaming Gauntlet of Tough, American Truth-Telling and Hardball Journalistic Integrity.

- This part would be when the DNA from the shallow end of our gene pool flairs up, and poisonous, hallucinatory toxins are pumping through the system faster than you can say " *What I wouldn't give for a sane Supreme Court, and political system, and organizing national principle, in my life time, along with even more consumer uses for bacon.*"

When I say *gene pool*, by the way, I am trying very hard to *not* wade into the depths of the thought, that, thanks to the Rush and Fox and the rest of the GOP clown show, most of the country may now be made up of almost *all* shallow-end of that pool...

Well, except for an area about two and a quarter inches wide, and running the whole width of the pool, but at the far end of the pool. There, in that one narrow spot, the water is nearly as deep as the Mariana Trench, but it offers such a hairline surface slit, that trying to dive into it, or access it in anyway, is sheer suicide, right up there with Labor Day traffic, and is a guaranteed, long-term removal of your own genes from the game.

To force you into that, the Universe would have to dislike you tremendously, as much as Donald Trump's comb-over, or more. The Universe would have to realize that steering you there would rid itself of the fabulous parting gifts It could receive in your name, and keep It from playing the home game of *Run For It! You, As You Really and Truly Are*.

- (I would like to pause now and implore everyone with the last name of Trench to please consider changing your first names to *Mariana*, just so you can help us all prove to the rest of the world that Americans *can too* be as deep as any other well-read, thoughtful citizen of all those fancy European and Asian countries routinely kicking the SATs out of our folks back home. Failing that, *Mariana Trench* could also be an intriguing name for a TeeVee spy or detective series in trench coats, say, and better than it would be as a World War One medical series involving trench foot / feet / foots. Unfortunately, it might also make a good title for a show about the origin of personal injury lawyers, when they first started out, chasing battlefield ambulances at the slightest whiff of

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mustard gas.)

Where were we? Oh, right: *Luck*. It's OK, this Luck business. It's getting me through cancer, it got me through a heart attack, and it helped me not have to delay graduation and take summer school, in spite of all craziness in high school Health Class, and in the Cafetorium, when the Chemistry Lab accidentally burned straight through the floor above it. (I am also very lucky the fire chief went to bat for me during that stressful time, and also pleased that the taxidermy department and the head of the Lunch Ladies managed to bury the hatchet somewhere neutral, too. And not in me. Or each other, as far as that goes.)

Luck was great once again, as I was trying to say, for an entire German family blasted by lightning. Some members of the family still have headaches, which is not unexpected, once you realize lightning is almost five times hotter than the surface of the sun -- way hotter than

- [enter here the name of a currently popular, talent-challenged, Auto-Tuned, multi-millionaire singer you love to despise for working that gimmick before *you* could].

You need a great amount of luck to dodge a Universe with a lethal sense of whimsy. How much luck? Well, let's see now. Put it this way: The Sun rotates, shooting off particles at almost 2 million miles an hour; the particles plow into our atmosphere, making the Northern Lights, but, triggering increased lightning storms, too -- which then do their best to remove an entire German family. *That* level of persecution will keep the Las Vegas supercomputers humming for some time on an algorithm of that pedigree.

While I have no idea if German measles would help that poor family fend off lightning, I have heard that regular measles, or rather a massive dose of measles virus, has cured one woman's blood cancer. That's impressive and stunning -- on the order of, say, a baby surviving a drop from the 11th floor, which, to further confound Vegas supercomputers, also happened.

And, if you want to look toward the horizon and spot a bright flash, signifying the end of supercomputing ability in and around Las Vegas, feed in this one, too: What are the chances of striking oil in Los Angeles... with the gusher requiring a strip club to close? (Lost from too much *Los* and

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Las,
there? You are not alone
.)

Too bad to feed all that into those fragile machines, you know. They were just rebuilt after the great "*Omigod -- what if we run out of Velveeta*" computational emergency a while back, and now, with lime shortages threaten to loom and lurk in and around our country's precious natural bar supplies, and in our nation's pantries.

No, we shouldn't get our pantries all bunched up in a wad -- our greatest scientists are currently working on the problem, desperately trying to curtail the twin threats to the Nachos-and-Margaritas Continuum. Now, there is a triple-threat, of a hops shortage, for our fine craft beers. But, hold tight. A breakthrough is expected any day now, on the order of / *Can't Believe It's Not Marketing*, the propaganda spread that tastes and sounds just like brainwashing, but with fewer calories. But more side effects.

Meanwhile, I'm having a hard time believing anyone about anything. I mean, everything's getting as unreal as can be. SCOTUS says if you have enough money, you can buy your choice of political office, right out in the open, on the open market. The richest 10% owns two-thirds of America. We've pushed toward 200 children shot to death since Newton.

Belief in evolution is down, as are math and science scores -- again. Demand to teach faith as science in public schools is up. There is no climate change. The Earth is 6,000 years old. The GOP acts in the best interests of the everyday American. Adam and Eve rode dinosaurs. Having no scientists -- in fact, having anti-scientists -- on the GOP House science committees is a great idea. The job creators, and profit-choked corporations, deserve more public money. Slashing taxes during multiple wars is a great idea, and it should be permanent, forever. The minimum wage should be rolled back to five dollars a day. Child labor should be re-authorized. The second amendment has nothing to do with well-organized militias...

Everywhere you turn, we are living The Big Lie. To ourselves, to others -- our kids, our families, those we love. I'm not sure we care anymore. I'm not sure we even notice it anymore.

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I didn't get my free rose tinting for my glasses. Must have missed it somehow. So, I still notice. Maybe it's all those years of military training. It's everywhere: it's fake, it's false, it's bogus -- our lives and land are filled from one end to the other with lies, mistruths, prevarication.

Even without an automatic rifle, even without guard duty, years later, I can still hear that voice inside: *Who goes there -- Friend or Faux?*

Thing is: The challenge words don't stop anyone. They just keep coming, more all the time. And my passwords? All my passwords are as outdated as me -- valuable as freeze-dried dust, brittle as misspent time, cracked and fevered as hot, sun-baked earth.

Good match, maybe, for a country that's been *rode hard by plutocrats, and bein' put up dessicated* . Tough as a boiled owl, it is, and every bit as palatable.

Magic couch: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27429911>

Flash heated: <http://news.discovery.com/earth/is-lightning-hotter-than-the-sun.htm>

German lightning: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-27426526>

Solar hiccups: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-27406358>

Measles dose mops up cancer: http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/05/15/womans-cancer-killed-by-measles-virus-in-unprecedented-trial/?tid=pm_pop

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Bouncing baby boy: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27412909>

LA strikes oil, sort of: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27426220>

Velveeta crash dive:

<http://www.latimes.com/food/dailydish/la-dd-velveeta-confirms-liquid-gold-cheesepocalypse-shortage-20140110-story.html>

Lime dis-ease:

<http://www.thewire.com/business/2014/05/heres-how-the-lime-shortage-is-affecting-bars-across-america/362049/>

Hops to it: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-27421779>

SCOTUS and the highest bidders: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/03/us/politics/supreme-court-ruling-on-campaign-contributions.html?_r=0

Inequality:

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-america-chart-graph>

Newton: <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/12/children-killed-guns-newtown-anniversary>

Today's Bonuses:

Neil and the auto-tuner: <http://www.wimp.com/autotuning/>

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Lightning 101: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H MG 53wsM>

Upward bound: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDDfkKEa2ls>

Don't do this at home: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hORUSzOvUfM>

or this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycg1w6HIQEO>

You put the lime... : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tbgv8PkO9eo>