

7/10/05

getting something for yourself out of all those miles.

West Palm Beach High School

↘ I am not going to bore you with a long report of the adventures I've had more recently — though they have been many. Instead, I'll just tell you about what happened in my hometown this past week. ^{OCTOBER}

For one thing, the leaves turned. It is not the kind of autumn you many understand. It is not the turning of leaves and a crisping of the air. In New Hampshire, it is the descent of heaven and all its arts, and it fuels a real kind of bliss that literally colors everyone's life. The rivers sometimes run red and gold with carpets of leaves, that flow over the old waterfalls where the mills used to be. My campaign office ^{W.A.S} is in one of these old mills, and the atmosphere around it glows ~~now~~ as if the whole roadside area, and its pond and waterfall and stream, and its old red bricks, were the main office of heaven itself. Throughout the region, people smile when they drive or walk down the streets. Sometimes, when you come around a turn, it is emotionally

overwhelming and you feel the tears in your eyes. Some artists, such as the photographer Ansel Adams, have attempted to provide images that express the truth of things as they see them, for Adams it was the fact that the divine is in all things and he waited until he got the images where God revealed Himself quite clearly. And so it ~~is now~~ in New Hampshire.

WAS IN OCTOBER

~~All this explosion happens rapidly. On Friday it was beautiful. But on Sunday it was beyond description, as it remains today.~~ We are a religious people in New England, but it is not because we require leaps of faith: it is easy, in New England, to be a believer, for we are given such proof all around us.

Tourists come from all over, which also tells you that our Autumn is not the same as other Autumns. These tourists are called Leaf Peepers, and I'm sure they must all go back home and directly join a church. While we do not like to see the colors fade to brown, it does mean that the Leaf Peepers go away and we can drive fast

again, so Heaven provides its compensations, as always.

My home, which is in the hamlet of Dublin, just a few miles up the mountain from our market town of Peterborough, happens to be along a creek where the colors are so intense that they redden the light inside the house.

I want all of you to know that there ^{WERE} ~~are~~ four couches in the living room and two in the basement and an extra bedroom, and you always have a place to stay in New Hampshire, if you don't come all at once. Just send me a note on GrannyD.com and say you are from ~~Cal Poly~~, ^{PALM BEACH} and you have a home for as long as you can stand staying in a place where an old woman gets up at 4:30 and clangs around in the kitchen before her morning walk, and where my son, Jim, might show up at 5 A.M. with his black dog, Uda, and his brown, three-legged dog, Mindy, and you might get your hand licked if it is hanging off the couch. Then will come some volunteers for this or that, and some townspeople to help in some project. Otherwise,

it will be — well--complete pandemonium most of the time, though you can do what I ^{DID} do, and take a long walk in the privacy of the dark woods for some real peace.

~~THE~~ ^{FIRST OF OCTOBER} LAST WEEK IN OCTOBER

Now, ~~this past~~ weekend, in addition to the turning of the leaves, there was a play in the community playhouse, and I want to tell you about it.

Over the past year or two, Peterborough has faced some controversies. The town has faced change before, as when the great textile mills came in to harness the energy of the two rivers that come through town, and when electricity replaced water power and the mills could be relocated anywhere else. And change came when there were dormitories full of mill girls, who came in from the hills so that their farming families could survive hard times. And through all this change, the same church steeples pointed toward our God and the same little stores gave us places to visit and to be friends with each other.

But change keeps coming, and in the last year or so, the town had great arguments about the possibility of a fast food hamburger restaurant that wanted to build in town. And a exotic dance club and bar, and, a Wal-Mart.

Well, you have to accept the fact that things change. Yet, you also have to respect the fact that a Wal-Mart could destroy all our neighbors' little stores, upon which their families depend, and in which, as I said, we live our lives among friends. And the burger place—would that hurt Nonies Restaurant, were our grandchildren work from time to time so they can afford to go to school? And would the exotic dance bar mean that the men of the town would have an insufferably happy smirk on their faces more often than we could stand? These were all serious issues.

HAVE

For those of you who ~~did~~ read my book, you may remember my friend Duffy Monihan, who came out to help me in Arizona when I was walking across the country. She thought she had lost me at one point, but three Native American

men, who at first frightened her, told her that I was ahead on the road. She is an architect and a wonderfully creative woman. She was one of the people who fought against the fast food restaurant.

And she is a good fighter.

Our civic struggles take place in our town hall. In New Hampshire, we gather in our town halls and in our planning board meetings to decide these things together. It can get quite heated, but we do stay friends, usually.

Now here is the magical part about last ^{OCTOBER} ~~weekend~~.

Someone had the bright idea, many months ago, to make a musical play about all our year's little battles. And so, on the stage of the Peterborough Players ~~this weekend~~, there was singing and dancing and fairly accurate representations of the year's battles. The part of Duffy Monihan, I am happy to say, was played by Duffy Monihan, who, it turns out, has a

lovely singing voice and can dance very well. She also played one of the dancing girls when they did the story about the exotic dance bar. And the part of Nell Conkright, who runs the little restaurant, Aesop's Tables, in the Toadstool Bookstore, and who ^{WAS} ~~is~~ running for the New Hampshire House of Representatives, as most people in New Hampshire do sooner or later, was played by Nell herself, and she, too, danced with Duffy as a dance girl during that memorable and scandalous scene.

And those on the other sides of those issues danced and sang, too. And at the end of each scene, they joined arms and sang about the fact that they all just wanted what was best for our town and were glad to have worked it out.

(from the program ~~the~~ song)

Now, a short walk through the woods from the barn where this play was performed—and to full houses of cheering and laughing ~~the~~ townspeople—is the little stone cabin where Thornton Wilder wrote Our Town. That play,

which you may have come across in High School and which is always worth a fresh read, is about a girl who only sees the magic of everyday living after her own death, when she comes back and sees the sea of love that life is, every, every day.

Thornton Wilder would bring the townspeople of Peterborough and Dublin into visit with him as he wrote that play, so that he could better understand their attitudes and their voices. And you will excuse Peterborough if it considers itself to be Our Town itself, though Mr. Wilder was careful, in the first scene of the play, to describe the longitude and latitude of his fictional town as being far out in the Atlantic, if you would bother to check. That does not deter Peterborough, whose biggest real estate company is Our Town Realty, among other prideful indications.

But I imagine Mr. Wilder's spirit in those woods, hovering near the barn of the Peterborough Players, and seeing the politics of love, the community of love, and saying to

himself, well, maybe I'll move that latitude and longitude right back on land. Maybe it can happen. Maybe this is Our Town.

I think so. I think it is just that. And that many towns in New Hampshire and around American and the world are just that, Our Town, where people live in love and respect, trying to make things better for each other and trying to protect the loving heritage that has been given to them by those who came before.

If we have an advantage in this regard in New Hampshire, it is the Town Hall system of governance. Politics is not an every-two-year affliction in New Hampshire. Politics is not a dirty word, it is just another word for democracy and freedom, self-governance, the working out of issues between friends and neighbors. You can't meet very many people who haven't served in the House, served on town councils or committees, met all the presidential candidates, put up signs for friends running for office, and who have well-reasoned opinions on a vast array of civic issues.

This freedom can fall down. This freedom can be eroded, and the most toxic and most corrosive element is the oversupply of money--the interference of special interests and ideological extremists who give too much money to candidates and then steal them away from us. It is certainly the case with the people we send to Washington, which is why I ^{was} ~~am~~ ^{RAN} ~~running~~. ~~I don't stand much of a chance of winning,~~ but I have ^{HAD} an opportunity to talk about the problems facing our democracy, and that opportunity to speak is a kind of victory, for it gives you the opportunity to change many minds and open many minds, and something will come of that in the future. We have seen so much of that in this ^{PASS} campaign--so many young people and old people stepping up because, by God, they get it. They see democracy. They see it, sometimes suddenly and brilliantly.

My young volunteer, Blue, wrote ~~over~~ the weekend that she wanted to feel democracy under her like a motorcycle. It is that exciting

and personal and dangerous. It is a tool that can give your life great meaning.



The great uneasiness of life in our times is an ache that something of deep meaning is missing in our lives. In fact, civic institutions enable us to make a difference with our lives, to improve the world with our lives, to find great meaning with our lives, and when they are dysfunctional, we lose an important way to make our lives additionally meaningful in the world.

When our political representatives are stolen away from us by wealthy or special interest donors, we lose that ability to have our lives make a difference in the world. So the repair of democracy is critically important in our lives.

If you sit at a lunch table out in front of Aesop's Tables or Nonies in my town, you will be talking with people who shape the present and the future of the town by their own actions and voices. What is that? It is being in control of one's life, and that is power and freedom, and it

has been stripped away from too much of American life.

If we do not have the power to shape our own communities, how can we expect to influence the great crises and issues of the world? Are we to stand idly by as the great ice sheets melt away from the North and South poles? As slavery and hunger and disease and genocide rock the world anew? And how can we protect our families, our children, from the violence of the world except by ending the dire conditions that give rise to global desperation and anger?

Our freedom is the tool of our survival. It is the range of our action in the world to let our values improve the condition of the world.

we cannot move the world toward our wisdom and love so long as we permit political systems that run on greed and fear instead of love and ideas.

Now, you may think I have a dark view. ^{but} I do not. I travel this nation, I walk through its

housing projects and dark places, and I meet every year with tens of thousands of its dear, sweet people, who are filled with justice and love and great ideas for a better society. I have seen that they have ~~to~~ power to reshape life around them simply by stepping forward and expressing their beliefs. They find they are not alone, and great things begin to move.

So our nation will move from leadership of the heart that will only after a time move our great parties and our great institutions. True leaders at the top would be useful, great souls to lead us with light and wisdom, but we find ourselves in a time when they are not there for us, and we are summoned to lead from where we are, from who we are, and that is not a bad thing to be so challenged and to find ourselves creating deep meaning for our lives.

My candidacy for the U.S. Senate, as you must know, ~~is~~ ^{isn't} not likely to succeed in the normal way. But I am ~~in~~ ^{not in} the ~~example~~ ^{real world} business, and I am telling you today that democracy is our little boat to the future, and we all must row. We all

must run for office, help candidates, make speeches to express our hearts, and turn the ineffective system of occasional elections into the effective life of everyday organizing for our human needs. We must return our political life and our civic life to the human scale, and there are ways to do that—especially by taking the big money out of politics and by letting smaller, more local groups of citizens make more decisions.

If you have the soul of an artist, let the world be your canvas, too, and make the world better for your brief presence here. If you have the soul of an engineer, don't be satisfied to be a cog on the wheel of the great social machine. Take time to stand apart from the gearworks to see if it might be improved. And then give some leadership to that improvement.

I challenge you to step up to do what you know ~~what~~ must be done in our world. If I, at my age and infirmity, can express myself and move things along an inch or two, imagine what a

roomful like this can do in the world. And will do in the world.

Don't let anyone stop you. Don't let the gray routines of the world hypnotize you away from the truth of the matter, that this is a great adventure we are on, and that we have heroic parts to play in this theater of the soul.

My young volunteer, Blue, was a tattoo artist in North Carolina when I met her on my cross-country voter registration journey last year. Her eyes have opened to the power of democracy to bring meaning to her life and the lives around her. ~~Last week~~, she spoke at a large school gathering and this shy girl electrified the audience, just talking about the power we have if we will only take it. She was warming up the crowd, in fact, for a Mr. John Kerry, who spoke after her. But for many in the audience, Blue was the memorable speaker.

My friend Dennis has pushed reforms in his Arizona. Candidates can now run for office without having to raise funds, as the state now

has money for those candidates who will agree to not raise or spend large sums from special interest donors. It is changing who can run and who can win. He also pushed a successful reform to make the political district remapping process more fair, so that more people can compete for office and so that communities can have better representation. He is the president of the Community Housing Partnership in Phoenix, which houses over 350 families each night who might otherwise be on the streets. He does this without payment or much comment, because he takes life seriously. /

[Our politics is not just about our opinions, it is our way to help each other in the world.]

As you come into the adult years of your life, you have the choice of lurking back and being half-alive, or of stepping forward as a great participant in the show of the century.

As Americans, we are blessed with the tools of action that our democracy provides.