

Granny D

From: "Dennis Burke" <burke@goodgovernment.org>
To: <grannyd3@verizon.net>
Sent: Wednesday, October 15, 2008 6:40 PM
Subject: Granny D offers some assurances

Friend,

Doris "Granny D" spoke over the weekend in Philadelphia. She was sharing the program with Whoopi Goldberg, which I understand was quite a bit of fun for both of them. Doris's remarks are copied below.

Yours,
Dennis

Philadelphia: October 12, 2008

Thank you.

It seems that the world is changing around us this autumn. I know that some of my feistier friends have been hoping for big social and political changes -- for a revolution of some sort -- to get us on a new path to a better future on a healthier Earth. I do not think they imagined that the revolution might take the form of strange torpedoes called credit default swap derivatives, exploding our banks and bankrupting our governments, but revolutions rarely arrive or turn out the way you expect. This society has run its course. We the people have long been ready for fresh growth, greener growth, scaled more to the needs of human beings and their communities.

I have been thinking lately of my old Texas writer friend Molly Ivins, who passed away not long ago and left us with an insufficient store of good humor to see all the amusing and satisfying turns of justice in the present economic collapse. She would remind us that Freedom's just another word for no retirement money left to lose. Yes, the walls have crumbled, but now we are free from all that anxiety about losing all our money. There's not much left to worry about. Molly would have been the one to take a few flat busted CEOs out for a scotch and water somewhere toward Greenwich Village and laugh with them and tell them they were all being sons-of-bitches anyway and had it coming. And they would laugh and have to agree. She was an American and never forgot that we are all equals. So what would Molly do? I have a little rubber bracelet that asks that question. She would remind us that the treasure of America isn't in our banks anyway. It is in our families and friendships, in our brotherhood and sisterhood as a free and creative people.

Sticking together, none of us will starve. Besides, we can always grow enough zucchini for everyone, can't we?

We need not fear Fear Itself this time around, for fear is a humbug. If we have learned anything in all the Aquarian splendor of the last few generations, it is that fear for the loss of material things is but the jitters of an addict, and the jitters go away once we relax into whatever new world we find ourselves

come into.

You will hear people on television worrying about the return of the Great Depression. I have heard that several times during the last week or so.

I am old enough to have memories of that time, are any of you? Maybe we were hungry sometimes, but did we starve? No, because we had our friends and family and the earth to sustain us. The earth may have been reluctant to feed us in some of those years, but never our friends nor our families.

If you lived through that time, and if now you hear some young expert on television saying the term "Great Depression" as if it were a great monster who might return, let me ask you - you who remember the last time - there are a few of us left - let me ask you if your memories of that time are not more round and golden than sharp-edged?

My husband, Jim, made an ice rink from a little meadow, and he made a few dollars extra those winters of the Depression. I learned to put on one-woman plays, and performed in women's clubs here and there, making the rest of what we needed. We were fountains of creativity. We were fountains of friendship to our neighbors. As a nation, we were a mighty river of mutual support.

That same Great Depression made some people in other countries ready for violence, genocide and war. But, somehow, through the exceptional miracle that is America itself, the hard times only made us more willing to help the world when our help was needed.

I am not advocating hardship, and I am not cheerleading for poverty. Indeed, prosperity is the green wreath we cherish most, though it means little without the times between.

Imagination! Let me suggest that a generation raised on books and storytelling, where one's own imagination had to fill in the colors and details, made us a generation quite able to imagine marvelous ways to fill our family dinner table in those years. Let me suggest that the power of imagination was essential to the rise of all the grand improvements we achieved for each other and called our New Deal. Imagination allows the citizen and the politician to connect with people of every situation and condition.

I have often heard it said that the more right-wing members of our present political order will not bend on a difficult issue -- say stem cell research -- until someone they love needs that bit of medical magic. Well, I think that suggests that the foundation of right-wing politics is a grand absence of imagination. If you cannot imagine what people need until it happens to you, then I suggest you have never read a mystery book under your covers by flashlight. I do not mean to pick on my more conservative friends, but imagination and its product, empathy, are necessary in a democracy, if it is to survive and prosper as a just and happy system of life. Imagination, empathy, education and moral leadership are the essentials of a good and humane democracy.

Nine years ago, at the age of 90, I walked 3,200 miles across the United States. I was promoting a specific political reform that did in fact pass Congress later. I was also cleaning out my heart after the death of my husband, Jim, and my best friend, Elizabeth.

I met the old America along that road - the America I hadn't seen since the 1930s and which I had almost forgotten.

Toyah, Texas, is an old railroad town just west of the Pecos, where the ruins of a once-beautiful main street stand like a crumbling movie set. Berta Begay offered shelter to me on the night I walked into

Toyah. She didn't know me but was glad to greet me on her porch and welcome me to stay in a little shack she had across the road, if I would please give her time to clean it up and put some fresh linens on the bed.

It was a little yellow bungalow near the tracks. The kitchen floor had linoleum creatively held down in strips to the wavy wood beneath by upholstery tacks. The house was cooled by the open doors and a few fans. The yard was dirt with a little grass, and everything about the house was well-ordered and clean. She said I was welcome to stay for as long as I needed.

Berta is a beautiful Native American and hispanic woman who, each evening, prepared a beautiful basket of bread and a casserole dinner. She told me about her family. Her daughter, whose name is Misty Moon, was about to graduate from a local public college as an agriculture scientist. Her son, whose name is Dearheart, was a medical assistant at a community hospital. Her husband, Steve, was an expert machinist. Berta was at that time the postmaster of a nearby town. She was rightfully very proud of her family, as they had come a long way in one generation, thanks to their hard work and their imagination in a land of opportunity. You must understand that this town is a dusty place on a great stretch of dusty desert. They had made it their Garden of Eden.

There was a collection of lavender antique bottles in the little house. Berta collects them in the desert as her mother had done before her. The pharmacy in Pecos, thirty miles away, has a nice collection of them also, left over from the days when Berta's mother traded bottles for medicine for her children. That's how far and how fast they have come, and how even glass strewn on the desert had been swept up into prosperity by the force of their imagination and love for one another. The pharmacist, too, was in that circle of love, as one can see by the bottles still in his window.

Berta helped introduce me around at Toyah's tiny city hall, which also serves as a church for the town. The two women clerks invited me to speak the next evening. The next morning, they had already created and installed hand-made posters at the gas station and in the general store out on the highway, beautifully promoting my talk on political reform.

Townpeople brought food to the evening event. Berta brought delicious cold snacks made from prickly pear cactus paddles. I saved some for breakfast the next morning. If I ever doubt that I am a tough old nut, I can remember that I had cactus for breakfast in Toyah, Texas, west of the Pecos. Very tart and tasty, by the way.

In the back of the hall during my talk, there were a few patient children trying to make sense of what we were saying. It made me remember when I was a child in Laconia, New Hampshire -- I was that child in the back of the room. Visiting speakers came to town all in a summer crowd of experts and entertainers called the Chautauqua meeting. A big tent was erected on the Pearl Street playgrounds, the largest open space in town. Speeches, entertainment, and pot luck dinners were planned for the whole week.

I went for two reasons: The fun reason was that there were dramas performed-like the villain foreclosing on a mortgage and putting the farmer's pure daughter in harm's way. I loved drama, and got myself a part in any play put on by the women's club, the Elks, or the Grange of Laconia. This would later serve me well when we had to survive by our wits.

The adults listened to the political speakers. They learned how the railroad monopolies were ruining the small farmers. The great Progressive-Populist Movement had begun at such meetings in the early 1890s. Great fist-waving speeches at these meetings kept people informed, interested and fired up.

My Mama didn't know if her children would ever be able to afford proper educations, so she made us

listen to the lectures so we would at least have a few thoughts in our heads. Well, those Progressive thoughts are still rattling around up here. I thank my Mama's imaginative university.

After my talk at the Toyah city hall, which was about the undue influence of lobbyists and large donors on the political system and what we might do about it, there were heartfelt comments from the townspeople about how they could no longer defend their own town and how it was suffering. At the end of the evening, Berta folded a letter into my hand. It was a long and beautifully written letter about her spiritual beliefs and about her town. The letter detailed how political corruption was literally dismantling the town, selling off the beautiful historic buildings for their bricks, and changing the rail service that had once been the lifeblood of the town. Her letter concluded "God has a mission for all of us, through we often don't know the details, so therefore we trust. When you pray, please remember this little town."

Well I do indeed remember in my prayers this community of kindness and reverence, and I remember also Berta and her family and her neighbors and the imaginative and loving America that is Toyah times our hundred-thousand neighborhoods and villages.

I have continued in the years since meeting Berta to work for the public financing of political campaigns. In these years we have seen the rise of the small donor through the Internet, which is an unexpected antidote to the fat-cat donor's influence. If we can get rid of the industrial lobbyists, there may be hope for all of us yet.

But on this occasion, here in the warm presence of your friendship, I wanted to take a special time away from all the politics to tell you - especially if you are young and have not experienced true hard times - that there is nothing much too it, if you will insist on creatively and ferociously loving the friends and neighbors around you. And fifty or seventy years from now, if you are blessed with a long life, you will count those years as being some of your best, as indeed I do.

And by the way, I am not predicting that we are heading into anything like a Great Depression. In the 1930s, the rhythm of the economy was marked on the yearly calendar. Today it is measured on stopwatches. The faster pace of today's economy, so disconnected from the harvests of an agricultural nation, means that we move through history and through disasters much more quickly. We digest things and move on, with news cycles substituting for seasons. Also, we are now a much grander beehive of activity than before. The upside of overpopulation is that our economy is incredibly resilient, and this is true all over the world. We really no longer have the time or patience for a Great Depression. Ten minutes into it, people would already be making fortunes selling commemorative tee-shirts, such as: "My parents lost everything in the Stock Market, and all I got was this second-hand tee-shirt."

You may be worried that your 401-K retirement stocks are losing value, but here is the way to think about that: If you own stocks, you own a small percentage of the nation's economy. It's like owning a family business. Some years your shares will be worth a lot, some years they will not. But they are your piece of the action and you should hold onto it. You might even use the current low prices as an opportunity to increase your share of the pie. Remember old Bernard Baruch, once the richest man in the world, who said he made his fortune on Wall Street by accommodating people: by selling his stock to them when they wanted to buy, and purchasing it from them when they wanted to sell. It was his way of advising you to buy as the market falls, and sell as it rises, rather than waiting for tops and bottoms. It is good advice and I wish I had always been wise enough to follow it. It is the kind of advice that might give you some courage and assurance.

I am not suggesting that all the world is rosy pink. We may be in for some trouble, but not for long. Our real challenge is not the disaster caused by the deregulation of Wall Street, for which my friend Senator

McCain must answer, but instead it is the dislocations -- economic, population, food supply, coastline, and weather dislocations -- caused by our continued use of fossil fuels and the resulting warming of our atmosphere that is our real emergency and the true challenge for our character. It is the real driver of the revolution coming, which I pray will be a happy and peaceful sort. That is where the opportunities await your courage and heroism.

Whatever comes, I do want you to remember that the hardest of hard times are not necessarily unhappy times if you will keep to love and empathy and imaginative living.

And I want you to understand that you must see beyond the distraction of these present headlines to the true challenges ahead, which have little to do with Wall Street and everything to do with changing the very ways we live, so that intelligent life on earth might prosper and survive.

Thank you.

NewEnglandReformSchool.org
<http://newenglandreformschool.org>
Cobb Meadow Road
Dublin, NH 03444
USA

If you do not wish to receive this message please remove grannyd3@verizon.net:
<http://www.rttr3.com/eis-cgi-bin/u?c=3938,3903&e=grannyd3@verizon.net&m=081015.1539.0001>

Powered by Relevant Tools.
If you have any problems with this message please see:
http://www.rttr3.com/contact_email.html

No virus found in this incoming message.
Checked by AVG - <http://www.avg.com>
Version: 8.0.173 / Virus Database: 270.8.0/1726 - Release Date: 10/15/2008 7:29 AM