

# SUNFLOWER SEEDS



## *Kansas Sunflower Mensa Virtual Meetings*

Cut and paste the following address:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/72081034487>

Every Saturday - 01:00 PM

Meeting ID: 720 8103 4487      Password: 8T0Jrt

This will be the last issue of the Kansas Sunflower Mensa Seeds that I will be publishing as editor. It has been an interesting ride these last few years, and many memorable events have unfolded. More than a couple of tales worth relaying to future members have been forged. Most editors start with high ideals and loftier aspirations, but like Icarus, ultimately have their wings singed by the harsh, searing realities of the World. One inevitably grows tired, and what was once challenging and exciting inexorably slides into being a chore and losing its sense of fun and adventure. It is time to pass the torch to the next editor. It is also time for new ideas that will help maintain our chapters direction and fading cohesion in these most of troubled times. I will continue to be active, supportive and assist in whatever ways will be of benefit to Mensa.

December 2020, Volume – 48, Issue # 12

Kansas Sunflower Mensa Newsletter



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Editor: R. Klaus Trenary, [editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

## Officers for 2020:

**LocSec:** Larry Paarmann, 316-209-3752,  
[locsec@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:locsec@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Asst. LocSec:** Bill Barnett, 316-214-3330,  
[asstlocsec@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:asstlocsec@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Treasurer: POSITION OPEN -**  
[treasurer@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:treasurer@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Program Chair:** Bill Barnett, 316-214-3330,  
[programchair@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:programchair@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Publications Chair: POSITION OPEN -**  
[publications@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:publications@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Editor, Seeds:** R. Klaus Trenary, 316-648-6536,  
[editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Recruit & Test:** Dan Gollub, 316-322-3087,  
[testing@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:testing@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Associate Proctor: POSITION OPEN -**

**Mem. at Large:** Ronnie Lee Ingle, 316-631-3514,  
[memberatlarge@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:memberatlarge@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Ombudsman:** Mike Dickson, 316-651-4707,  
[ombudsman@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:ombudsman@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

**Region – 7 VC:** Rich Olcott, 720-390-7889,  
[rolcott@mindspring.com](mailto:rolcott@mindspring.com)

**American Mensa Ltd.:**

1-888-294-8035

**Chapter's Official Web Sites:**

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## LocSec Korner December 2020

Bill Barnett

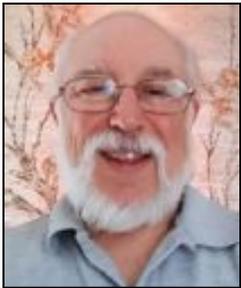
In our December 5th meeting we appointed new officers for the rest of the year. They are expected to continue to next year. We are looking at taking Seeds to a new level. The editor has done a good job and at times it has been a struggle to get it done, printed, and mailed. In this time of the virus, we are currently only putting it online. The publican chair and editor are looking at options to publish hard copies and working on a budget.

The virus has been a challenge for all of us. To me it seems maddening at times. But it will pass. The online Zoom meetings will continue until people feel safe to gather in person. There will be online guest speakers coming up soon.

As LocSec I am a leader of equals. My table is a round table, and I am the facilitator. Please send me ideas for Seeds and speakers and anything Mensa you find important.



### Heartland Mensa Region 7



January and a new year, at last, at last. Year 2020 was such a wretched time for everyone, topping (or bottoming) off with a suppressed holiday party season and losing so many of the kinfolk and friends who would have been attending those parties. Year 2021 has GOT to be better, please.

Sorry to say, I already have a problem with writing next year's dates. Whenever my mind says "twenty twenty one," my fingers type "20201." May that be the worst thing that happens.

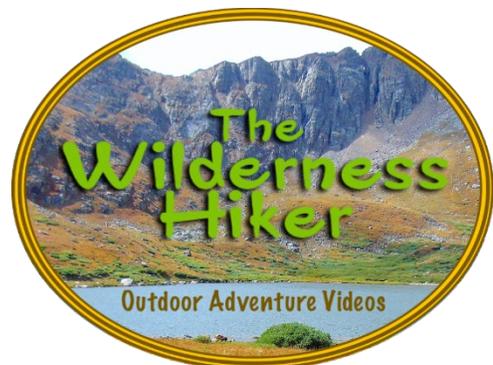
This year is Mensa's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a formal organization — check [ag.us.mensa.org](http://ag.us.mensa.org) for the big party coming up in Houston. It's also the third anniversary of Mensa Connect ([connect.us.mensa.org](http://connect.us.mensa.org)) using the local and national officers as guinea pigs for this online service now open to all American Mensans. Fortunately, many of us had gotten well up the learning curve before the virus struck and shut off the face-to-face conversations we value so much.

By email or online, you can join the active conversations going on in Communities at the national, Regional and Local Group levels. Or start a conversation of your own. The good news is it is not Zoom or Facebook; the bad news is it's not Zoom or Facebook. If you have not yet sampled Connect, logon and give it a whirl.

If you or one of yours is looking forward to starting a course of post-secondary education, January is the deadline for Mensa scholarship applications ([mensafoundation.org/what-we-do/scholarships](http://mensafoundation.org/what-we-do/scholarships)) and the start of the essay judging process. My hat's off to the Scholarship Chairs who manage all those 550-word essays, and to all the Local Group and Regional judges who carefully score them. Because of their efforts and the contributions of our generous donors, American Mensa will once again ease education finances for more than 150 deserving winners.

So many things to look forward to with hope for the coming year — a reduced level of public acrimony now that we're past the election season, a successful coronavirus vaccination campaign that confers the herd immunity we need to end this thing, kids back in school with their teachers and friends, an improved economy on Main Street as well as Wall Street, so much more. May at least some of that come true.

~ Rich



## Chapter News of Interest:

Gracie Ulrich

Hi from the new Publications Chair. I'm Gracie Ulrich, and I was first a member of Mensa probably just before my children were born, and they are now in their mid-40's. At that time, I lived in western Kansas, and I loved all the SIGS. When I first joined, I did not know what a SIG was, and the acronyms drove me to distraction, along with the assumption that OF COURSE everyone knows what any set of random letters stands for. For those reasonable people like me who did not happen to know, SIG stands for Special Interest Group.

A rule of journalism is that any acronym is to be spelled out in full during every first usage of every publication, or even of every article. This rule shows respect for intelligent readers of diverse backgrounds, cultures, nationalities, and training specialty areas.

I dropped out after moving to Wichita and stayed out until I had lived in Australia for a decade or more. Then I joined Australian Mensa and attended a few meetings in Brisbane.

Having just moved back to Kansas a year ago, now I have rejoined American Mensa, and somehow, I've been thrown into a frenzy of meetings and newsletters and Covid-19 inspired Zoom meetings. All these things (except live, person-to-person meetings) were completely unknown at the time when I first explored Mensa's delightful and varied SIGS. Now it can be all electronic.

Please send your articles, jokes, stories, and editorials, as well as ideas of other interesting tidbits to the new editor, at: [editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org](mailto:editor@kansassunflower.us.mensa.org)

### How to Write Something

We were floating around the Zoom screen when Klaus raised the perennial Editor's lament. "People aren't sending me stuff for the newsletter." Dave looked at me. "Your blog posts are pretty nice. How do you do that?" Gracie looked at me. "Why not write that up for Klaus?" I was trapped.

Dear Reader, you have just read The Hook, the introductory paragraph that puts things in context, maybe sets up some suspense, and gets you interested. I can tell you are interested because you are still reading.

The essential parts of a newsletter piece, whether it is informational or a story or an opinion statement, are The Hook, The Content and The Kicker. Get the three of them in there, in proper order, and you will have your Editor smiling.

The Content is the words you wrap around your central idea(s). There are people who sit down to write without having a central idea. The words may flow nicely from one sentence to the next, but it rarely ends well. Having at least one idea is important, but once you have got that you're on your way.

How many words? Depends on what medium you are writing for and how many ideas you want to include. For newsletters, 350-450 words is a convenient size for the Editor because that fills about a half-page. In my blog ([HardScienceAintHard.com](http://HardScienceAintHard.com), thanks for asking) my target is no more than 700 words, the usual limit for an Op-Ed column.

How many ideas? That depends on what you are trying to get across. You may have noticed that my RVC column generally runs three or so, one at a time in separate paragraphs. In the blog I often run two story lines in parallel — a science arc and a dialog arc, plus a few dabs of characterization.

How about writing style? Up to you. I like informal — author and reader and a couple of glasses of tasty beverage; short paragraphs; may or may not follow The Rules of Grammar. Follow your own path but the Editor may provide some guidance.

At the end there's The Kicker, the final sentence or two that hark back to The Hook. Could be a summary of the information, could be the punch line of your story, could be a ringing statement of what you want the reader to do. Type it in, let the work cool off overnight, polish it up a little, send it in to the Editor and you are done.

See how easy? Now it is your turn.     ~~ Rich Olcott



# BEAUTY, THE EXPERIENCE

## OF THE BEHOLDER

Gordon Bakken



At one time in my career, I was assigned the task of designing parking lot light fixtures. An important aspect of that was to make them look attractive. That caused me to ask, “What makes a shape attractive?”

That is not an easy question to answer. There are many shapes we consider attractive, and some that we do not. However, it seems that those we like have little in common. For example, rarely do I take my 1929 Mercedes Benz out for a drive that I do not get compliments on how good she looks. What makes her “good looking?” She has the general shape of a shoebox. No one would consider making a car today that looked like that. In contrast, consider another shape we like, a 20 something female. They hardly look alike.

After considerable thought, I have concluded this. Essentially, there is no shape that we inherently like better than another. We like a shape because we previously had a good experience with something of a similar shape. Thus, a winning racecar, whatever its shape, is considered handsome. A car that is constantly breaking down is considered ugly. We like the shape of an antique car because the experience of riding in one years ago was wonderful compared to riding a horse. A horse is still considered more beautiful than a cow. It at least carried us around. A cow usually meant work.

Other shapes we like are trees, buildings, and lakes. They are all useful. Trees give us shade. Buildings protect us from the weather. Lakes provide drinking water, partially protect us from attack, and attract animals that make good food.

Let’s consider females again. Why do we think their shape is beautiful? Well, it is useful. The wide hips allow a child to be born. The small waist gives it a place to grow. Breasts provide food in its early days. How useful! That makes us think the shape is beautiful! Our reproductive instincts could even be the reason we like younger women. Older women can’t have children. Thus men who think they are looking for a fabulous lover are actually trying to find a good mother for their children.

How about the face? Generations of experience have taught us that girls that look a certain way are the best. The best ones had blonde hair. (The joke that blonds are dumb comes from the fact that so many “blondes” today, are actually dark-haired females in disguise.) The facial features of these girls eventually became considered “beautiful” (though there is no reason to think they are any better than those of an “ugly” person).

How about muscles? Most of us think they look great on men, but not on a woman. Why? Well, a man with muscles is more useful than one without them. Not so for a woman. Why does she need them when she has a man around to do the heavy work?

One exception to all of this seems to be flowers. They are quite useless, yet we consider them beautiful. Why? Could it be we know they attract bees and honey is useful?

### Freedom of Speech

Larry D. Paarmann

Alexander Hamilton, in Federalist paper No. 84, expressed his opposition to a Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution on the basis that they “are not only unnecessary in the proposed Constitution, but would even be dangerous. They would contain various exceptions to powers not granted . . . For why declare that things shall not be done which there is no power to do? Why, for instance, should it be said, that the liberty of the press shall not be restrained, when no power is given by which restrictions may be imposed?” In other words, his opposition was that the Bill of Rights cannot be intended to grant rights to people by the government, for those rights were declared in the Declaration of Independence to be unalienable rights endowed by the Creator, and the Constitution is not a document declaring what rights the citizens of the U.S. are granted, but rather the Constitution grants certain powers to the federal government and only those powers. Nevertheless, against Hamilton’s concerns, the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution were approved by Congress and ratified by the states.

The First Amendment is as follows: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Today, however, while law still upholds freedom of speech and freedom of the press, things have changed dramatically. Today the assumption among the people of the U.S. is that only “politically correct” speech is to be permitted, and that even on college campuses, where freedom of speech and of the press should be championed the most, students supposedly need their “safe spaces.” Today, to be offended by something someone has said or written is an intolerable crime, and the perpetrator must be ostracized, punished, excluded, etc. These are the marks not of a free society, but of tyranny. One of the first things a totalitarian society must do to achieve power is to do away with all opposing voices, and to control all media. Clearly, we have moved in this direction as a society.

Years ago, when I became active again in Mensa, at the local level and at Annual Gatherings, it was so refreshing and stimulating to witness the openness to ideas and opinions that was already beginning to close down in most of our society. I remarked at the time, almost bragging, that “there’s no political correctness in Mensa.” The range of topics, some quite bizarre, at AGs, were fun and invigorating, and our local group meetings, Kansas Sunflower Mensa meetings, were often remarkably interesting and lively. But the closing down of free speech, and perhaps freedom of the press in our Sunflower SEEDS as well, has been following the trends in our overall society. This saddens me and tends to take away the excitement of being a Mensa member.

We members of Mensa, and of Kansas Sunflower Mensa, can resist this closing down of free speech, and oppose the tide of our larger society if we wish. Is not Mensa one of the last bastions of free speech? Can we not see the value of it and hold out against societal trends? Maybe we can if we will. Maybe.

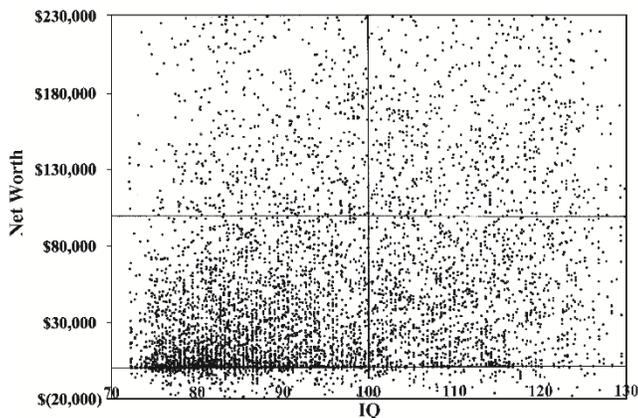


Figure 1: A scattergram showing the correlation of low IQ and socio-economic status. They are poor because they are stolid, not stolid because they are poor.

## Record Your Life

For those of us who are getting close to the end of our lives, here is something to consider.

After you are gone there are probably some who will wonder what you did with your life. Those will probably be your children and their descendants but might also include friends and acquaintances.

In this modern age it is quite easy to do this. One option is to create a CD or DVD. These are both quite easy. One, of course has only sound and the other includes video. They can also be uploaded to YouTube for no charge, though it is a bit difficult to do so.

One member who has done so invites you to look at his video on YouTube (address below). You may find it too boring to watch to the end, but it may give you ideas of what can be done.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLvQMyqd1F8>

## An Introduction



I moved from Wichita, Kansas, USA to Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. And then, I moved back. Quite a lot went on in the intervening years between going and returning.

As far as the more sophisticated sister cities and pundits are concerned, both cities are basically overgrown Cowtown’s, unworthy of praise and likely to be overlooked on their own merits. Though on two different continents, located on two different hemispheres of the globe, and parted in time by the opposites of day and night, Kansas and Queensland really do have much in common.

In Queensland, Australia, Rockhampton is a better-known Cowtown than Brisbane, with such features as bull riding contests held at the local pub on a regular basis in season—and except for when it rains, it is always in season in semi-tropical Rocky. Yet, amongst the big cities in Australia, Brisbane probably gets the least respect, and has a Cowtown-type reputation earned from the early days of Australian frontier settlement.

Wichita is no longer so particularly favored in Kansas as a cowboy mecca as it once was, despite such attractions as Historic Cowtown. We no longer herd Texas long-horned cattle down Douglas Avenue. Six-shooters are no longer heard on the city streets; we use semi-automatics these days, instead.

Dodge City continues to uphold the Wild West tradition, if only by virtue of Boot Hill, and the added legacy of having been a feature of the TV show Gunsmoke. Never mind that the actual Gunsmoke show was filmed in Johnson Canyon near Kanab, Utah. Anyone from western Kansas knows that there is no canyon like that within 200 miles.

Still, despite the accessibility and relaxed pace of my two hometowns, Wichita and Brisbane, neither is as respected as she deserves to be by those who set themselves as arbiters of culture and style. Both have wonderful and probably under-utilized rivers, though Brisbane's is a bigger river with more intricate and ornate historic and modern bridges. But Wichita has the functional and historic Rainbow Bridge—the John Mack Bridge—as well as the striking spired modern footbridge near the Indian Center. Both are filled with good restaurants and eateries. Both have every sort of service available to people for housing, transportation, recreation, and generally messing-around. Both are currently under some form of restriction due to covid-19.



Brisbane is located within an hour's drive of two fantastic and world-heritage-listed beaches, and Wichita has, nearby, two of the finest migratory waterfowl stop-over destinations in the North American continent, the Quivera National Wildlife Refuge, and Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve. Swimmers and surfers might say there is no comparison, but beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Wichita has one skyscraper, and Brisbane has lots of them. Both have beautiful limestone buildings from the

late 1800's. Both cities have fine museums, libraries, and a diversity of university settings from which to choose for enlightenment. Both have performing arts facilities, and both have hosted the same international stars: Cher, Elton John, Bon Jovi, loads of others—all performed at both venues. I think that Wichita attracts a disproportionate number of great artists for a city of its size.

Wichita does not have a river taxi, and Brisbane does, but you never know what the next decade or two might bring to Wichita. After all, Brisbane has a greater metropolitan area of some 2.5 million, with Wichita populated at a little more than 20% that number, around half a million residents distributed among four counties.

Wichita has more diversity than it did when I left here a couple of decades ago, and Brisbane had some 280 separate and distinct ethnic and immigrant groups in just one part of that area, Logan City, which is a lot of diversity. However, a place like London or New York City leaves Brisbane in the dust when it comes to a home for a great many, quite different people.

Now I am back at the farm. There was a bit of culture shock at returning here, though fortunately I had grown up with strong Kansas values. This is my first and probably also my last hometown. I hope that I am, and will remain, diverse of thought and attitude so that I can see more possibilities than I would have seen or imagined without my exposure to different people and places. I hope my experiences add to my versatility, resilience, and compassion

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Three guys are busy using the urinals in a public bathroom.

The first finishes and shakes. He scrubs up all the way to his elbows meticulously & uses 20 paper towels to clean up. "I went to Michigan State. They taught us to be exceptionally clean" he said.

The second wets his fingertips, using one tiny sliver of a paper towel saying "I went to UCLA. In California they taught us to be environmentally conscious"

The third guy finishes, zips up & heads for the door. On the way out he calls back "I'm from Texas A&M. Down there in Texas, they teach us not to piss on our hands"

## Announcement

Folks -

Do you have members who have lost their employment because of Covid-related issues (company shutdowns, lay-offs or even their own or a family member's illness)? I cannot help with the job situation, but I can help to keep them in Mensa.

As you know, the RVC has funding for certain specific purposes, one of which is "Support for members requesting dues assistance." Obviously, it's too late to cover dues for this year, but we can cover a limited number of those individuals for next year as a tide-over. In my view this would not be charity but rather a gesture of goodwill and an investment in the member's future contributions to Mensa.

Ask around. Send me notes case-by-case or bale them up. I will make the appropriate arrangements with the National Office.

Thanks. And stay healthy yourself. – Rich

## Notice

Effective immediately, I've appointed the following people as officers for Kansas Sunflower Mensa.

Local Secretary: Bill Barnett  
Deputy Local Secretary: Igor Ponomarev  
Treasurer: David Fetherston  
Member-at-Large: James Zongker

They will hold office *pro tem* until January 1, at which time they will continue in the same positions as duly elected officers.

In addition, please update your records as necessary for the following positions:

Editor: Klaus Trenary  
Publications Chair: Grace Ulrich  
Membership Officer: Dan Gollub

KSM's designated auditor, John Pechel, has reviewed the records he received from the prior Treasurer, pronounced them clean, and transferred them to prior LocSec Larry Paarmann. It is my understanding that Larry, Bill and Dave will work with their bank to update the bank's authorization records.

My thanks to Larry, who has navigated the group through a very rough time and, from what I saw in today's Zoom meeting, into smoother waters ahead.

Thanks.

- Rich



## **EDITORIAL: The “Kuwaah” Mantra.**



**These words are rather harsh, though always ringing true. The needs of the many, outweigh the needs of the few.**

**It is basic simple logic, a fact to heed each time, to expect special treatment should be considered a heinous crime.**

**I sympathize completely, do not judge me right or wrong. I, however, must insist that you be proud, dignified, and strong.**

**Do not burn me with your anger, as it is peace that I applaud. If you must blame for your infirmity, then place it squarely with your God.**

Remember that there are not only the deserving dignified disabled who feel uncomfortable about the special treatment afforded them, but there are also the undeserving. Posers, scammers, and all manner of negativity belching detestlosi. It is to them that this paper is dedicated too.

Seems any and every sort of outlier with a special interest and an agenda expects to be pandered to in this current society. “Everyone is special” seems to be an almost ubiquitous mantra. Right, if everyone is special then no one is special, and therefore no one deserves special privileges or treatment. I cringe at having to resort to such shop-worn clichés, but everyone reading this might not be, dare I say, Mensa material.

Kuwaah, I will insist on being treated better than everyone else because... Simply fill in the blank, really doesn't matter what sort of justification will be employed.

At the risk of seeming cold, it disturbs me when a person because of an infirmity, or for whatever reason or pretense, expect that they warrant and deserve special treatment.

In Germany they have a saying: “Du kriegst keine extrawurst gebraten”. Loosely translated, it means that “You get no special dinner”. Must be a cultural thing as in that country to be a whiner and expect extra things is considered beneath one's dignity, for whatever proclaimed reason. Another instance that I am glad to have been born a German.

In this country the louder one whines and complains; the quicker actions will be taken simply to shut them up. The Chinese would react quite differently as they have a saying: “The nail that sticks up will be hammered down.” Perhaps this sort of wisdom is why they are one of the fastest growing economies.

**The tale beginneth** - I am reminded of a past event that sticks poignantly in my memory. Years ago, I was a board member for a Masonic Youth organization. We met in an old three-story house converted to a lodge long, long before. It was far from anywhere near ADA compliant, but none of the hundreds of members ever complained, or would even consider such. Mind you, the membership was generally well advanced in years. Even so, there were many infirm people who regularly attended events there for decades without incident.

To even imply that the lodge be closed because a few of the members might be handicapped was utterly unthinkable. When someone in a wheelchair needed to go upstairs to the meeting room, one or more younger members would gladly wheel them up. No one was embarrassed, everybody was happy, nobody complained. There was peace in Eden, at least until the snake appeared.

All good things must come to an end, and so it was with our beloved lodge. Someone got the bright idea that the lodge building must get an elevator so nobody would possibly have cause to complain. Odd that in the 70 or so years in the same location, it had never been a problem before. Up until then the chapter was solvent because they owned the building outright. That situation would soon change.



Since there was now potentially big money to be made, dark forces began to stir. Of course, to put in an elevator required massive and expensive remodeling of such an old and historic structure.

Estimates ran into the several hundred thousand dollars, which the

lodge simply did not have. Dues would have to be tripled, which would have severely cut membership, destroying what had managed up to that point to survive for 150 years.

To make a long story short, the lodge was eventually forced to move to an outrageous and expensive newer ADA compliant building after spending hundreds of thousands on renovations anyway. Due to being massively in debt and the cost of maintain a building of that size becoming crippling, the lodge went under. A lodge that had brought joy and comradery to thousands of people over a dozen generations was eventually shut down by the incessant whining of a few detestlosi.

**The story continues.** Over the years I got to know two seriously handicapped girls rather well. One was born with a birth defect that deformed a foot and made walking extremely difficult. We will call her “Missy”. The other young woman that I admired was totally wheelchair bound, being paralyzed below the waist her entire life. We will call her “Candice”.

Have known Missy, her parents, and siblings for years. She was never viewed or treated any different from anyone else. The only hint of any behavior that could even be remotely construed as special treatment was the fact that I would walk slower when going somewhere with her. She would consider it shameful to expect anything she did not earn or be treated differently than the average person.

A girl and later a woman of quiet dignity, she accepts the fact that there are some things she simply cannot

do and harbors no malice against the rest of the World because of that undeniable reality. A lot of people could learn a lot from her! A lot of people!

She grew up standing on her own two feet ( no pun intended ) and asked for nothing not already due her. She now owns her own house and is a manager for a large retailer. She could have taken the easy road, complaining, and asked for hand-outs, but she rather took the more rocky but honorable path.

I saw Candice at a few of the meetings but never talked much with her. There is a singular instance that comes to mind that solidified my respect and eternal admiration for her, however.

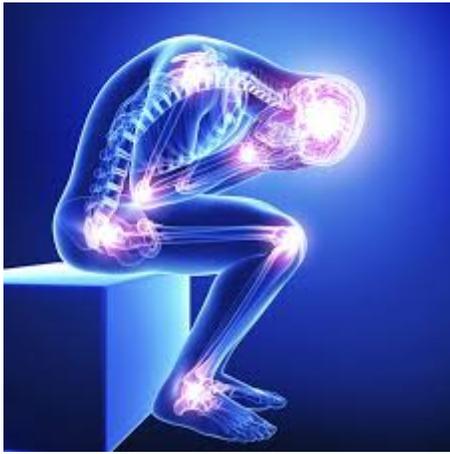
A lodge meeting was about to begin on the second story, in the large central meeting room. I had forgotten something and went back down the stairs to fetch it. The stairs were carpeted, very wide and made in an L shape going down. Halfway down I notice a shape towards the bottom of the stairs. It is Candice clawing her way up the stairs by herself, the wheelchair poised below her. I remember intense feelings welling up, a mixture of admiration interspersed with horror.

Admiration of her having the strength and fortitude, to have the dignity to never ask for help. Then there was the horror and self-loathing of allowing such a scene to transpire in the first place. Why didn't I make sure there was someone there to lend a helping hand? She would surely not ask for it if not offered first. Perhaps I am foolish and grossly naive to think that other handicapped people would show the same resolve and determination.

Candice is now married, has an adopted child and is a professional with a Federal agency. To this day she would recoil in utter revulsion if someone tried to treat her like a cripple.



At the risk of sounding egocentric, as I get older and the body fails me, you will not ever hear me whining about how mean the World is for allowing my suffering and not specifically catering to me and my perceived needs.



Though I am technically handicapped by a debilitating chronic condition, you will never hear me making fervent demands that every building has a toilet stall placed every two meters, to conveniently service myself and a few others who are crippled by Crohn's.

Perhaps the list of demands should include a porta-potty in every Taxi and Uber car as well. Ground the airlines until they install 12 extra restrooms per plane. Toilet paper would be tax deductible and there must be a discount vendor on every block. We can mandate laws Federally and call it the AMSA, "Americans with Multiple Shitters Act". I could go on ad nauseum, but you surely get the point.

My view on the subject is this: Is it right and just that a hundred other people must pay so that the one might not be slightly inconvenienced? It grieves me that you suffer but remember this; it was not I that caused your condition. I refuse to accept responsibility for what was not done by me, and that I had no part in. Unfortunately, it is I and the many who must pay the price for the few.

**Moral of the story:** At the risk that my calculating logic be construed as callousness, I proclaim that there are basically two ways to deal with the crushing burden of an infirmity or disability.

**Option – 1,** Be strong, be tough, and as the British love to say, "keep a stiff upper lip". Have the mental discipline and fortitude to admit that the World was not built to pander to you, and deal with that inalienable fact. Taking responsibility for our decisions and actions along with self-reliance are almost extinct virtues in our debased culture. This must change, be you disabled or enabled.

I clearly remember the words of my old Karate instructor and World champion, Roger Carpenter who chided me with the phrase "suck it up Klaus" whenever I was knocked down, hurt and ready to give in.

His philosophy was simple, forward, and unerringly true. All people can be broken down into two basic categories: You are weak, or you are strong. You are either a survivor, or you are a victim. You are either a doer, or you are simply a whiner.

**Option – 2,** Complain incessantly about how fate has done you wrong, how unfair your situation is. Try to drag the rest of World down to keep you company in the private little hell of your own construction. Hey, if you must suffer, everybody else is going to burn right there next to you. The Germans have a word for this attitude as well. It is called "schadenfreude", which translates into taking joy from other-people's suffering. Thanks a lot!



Narcissism is defined by Google as: "Selfishness, involving a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration, as characterizing a personality type".

Selfishness, in my opinion, yes. Self-entitlement, most definitely, nearly the text-book definition. A lack of empathy, apparently. A need for admiration in that they expect everyone else to feel sorry for them and make them the center of attention, absolutely.

**In closing** - Yes, admittedly I do paint a rather bleak, bitter, and un-sympathetic picture of the state of World affairs. I think, live, and speak the cold, hard truth as I see it, who can do more? The ugliness of reality and truth is often painful to grasp, but it must be nonetheless embraced with fervor. Without truth there is no honor, and without honor there can be no trust. When we as individuals or as a race have degenerated to such a vile condition as living in fear and distrust, then we have utterly lost the last vestige of what is commonly described as the virtue of "humanity".

**Definitions:**

**Detestellosi**, a contraction of the Latin detestabilis querellosi, meaning hateful complainers.

**Kuwaah**, a shrill and grating form of a cry. Characteristically, a loud and furiously annoying sound a baby makes when it demands its whims be complied with immediately and at any cost.

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*So ironic, and such a contradiction. While the ones that suffer the most usually complain the least, it seems that so many who suffer so little complain the most.*

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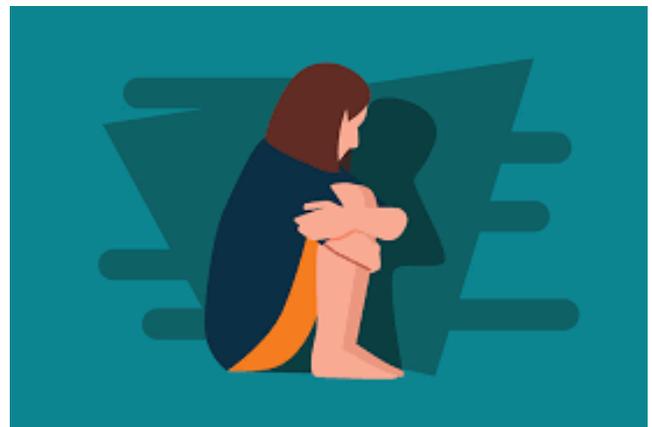
## Vashti

Bill Barnett

Her eighteenth birthday was approaching. Just two weeks. Joan had a party planned that Vashti did not care for. It was all about Joan’s ego. The birthday would be the great escape. She will be an adult and able to do what she wants. Time to get the hell out of Dodge. There would be the new car. Dave and Joan would make it the most decedent car possible to prove to everyone how blessed by God they were. Give and you shall receive and bullshit and bullshit, etc. It only strengthened her atheism. She was as committed to her atheism as she was unconvinced. Dave and Joan did not like her calling them by their first names, they wanted her to call them mom and dad. After learning about her adoption history, she would have no more of that mom and dad stuff.

Soon it would be time to find her real parents. Dave and Joan thought it was teenage phase. They did not realize how much she knew or how much the real story affected her.

The week before she was in a session with Selah, her therapist. It was the same discussion, but it made her feel better to have someone who would listen and understand. PTSD and Reactive Attachment Disorder were the diagnosis. It came from the time she was in a cage for six and a half months. She still had nightmares; they would not go away. All she had to do was close her eyes and there was the cage. Selah helped her find her way through the minefield of emotions. It was the only way to keep from going crazy. She was an adult with a child therapist, but it was really the opposite.



In reality she was a child with an adult clinical social worker. Joan took her to a church councilor years ago. It was a disaster. He blamed her for disrespecting her parents and told her she needed to repent of her bad attitudes. Then there was the guy at church who tried to cast a demon out of her. If anyone had one it was him. That is if someone believes in gods and devils. But she was sure they did not exist. So, she found a therapist online and went to visit.

The social worker was a nice lady. After filling out the paperwork the lady said she needed to get her parents to sign the papers too. So, she said she would and never went back. When Selah gave her paperwork to fill out she lied about her age. No problem. It worked. The PTSD reactions were diminishing with help from Selah. Slowly her brain would rewire itself, partly, not totally. The RAD was there to stay. She just had to learn how to manage it. That was tough. She felt alone, except with Selah.



The trip was planned. La Flor, Mexico. She had never been out of her hometown since she was in the cage at the border. Her Spanish was childish. The books and cartoons she was looking at online were helping her remember. It was eleven years since she spoke Spanish to another person. As a home school student, she could study what she wanted, if it was religious and not Spanish. Spanish was as forbidden for her as porn. The internet solved that. Everyday when she went to work and passed the high school where there were students like her, sort of.

She so wanted to talk to them. It was forbidden. She could never meet them. They were all white. She was almost white. Not white or brown, something in between. That is why Dave and Joan picked her. Red hair, freckles, and almost white. She could pass as white if not for the Aztec nose. Joan swore that would be fixed. If Joan hated the nose Vashti loved it. She wanted to meet brown people. Maybe they were like her. She found a box of old papers in the attic that had her immigration papers. She read about the family she was born into. She remembered them and missed them. Manuel and Rosa Auglia of La Flor had been deported. Juan her brother went to jail for assaulting an officer. Maybe he was in La Flour too by now. She was the only one born north of the border and could not be deported. So she was put up for adoption.

She missed Juan so much. He was her protector. At ten years older he made her feel safe, even in the cage. She was frightened and held onto him all the time. That made her feel safer. The guards prohibited touching and took him away. When he was gone, she was terrified. He was not allowed to touch her, they said. He fought with the guards to protect her and stay with her. They beat him and took him away in chains. That was the worst day of her life. One of the others touched her after he was gone, but not the same way. It was bad.

When Juan protested that she needed her brother to care for her they did not listen. There were more months alone in the cage squeezed between strangers. The nightmares were a vivid memory of the cage. If only Juan was here to protect her. She searched the internet and even hired a detective agency to find him, but to no avail. The kindly private detective warned her that Juan may not be alive.

Dave had all the records hidden in the attic and did not know she found them. That was from his and Joan's former jobs. Joan worked in the detention facility. Dave was a contractor for ICE. He would pose as a delivery truck driver and spy on people at the factories he visited. He was making two incomes. One from ICE and one from the delivery company. When she found out she told them they were devils for doing that. It was a big mistake to say that. She was whipped and grounded for months with nothing to do but sit in her room and do home school homework.

The next day was another meeting for the '200 Plan' and Vashti had to be there. It was more give and get. The Bible had a story about people planting seeds and get forty, sixty, or even a hundred-fold return. Dave received a vision from God that there was now a way to get a two-hundred-fold increase. People were excited to come learn how. The people who came would give a big offering. The people who came to these meetings were all salesmen and all very religious. This is why she was an atheist. If god was real, why did he let people do this. She could fake it for two more weeks until the birthday. Dave had his church and made more money than he ever managed as a double dipping immigration spy. It was a sole proprietorship church. Dave controlled everything. The board did what he said.

She wanted to speak out. It was not possible to have any conversation about her past or Dave's church. Sometimes she thought "perros" when she looked at her adoptive parents but could not even mutter it under her breath. Dave would have killed her. That was the Spanish name for corrupt police, dogs or perros. It was time to get back to her studies. She could show up at work, not clock in until later and use her computer. Her boss was good with that. She was almost an online college junior in physics. The day she bought a cellphone Dave confiscated it. Too worldly. They did not trust her. She never took the computer home. It had everything from real biology, and astrophysics to sex ed and everything else at her fingertips. Those courses were the pagan courses that Dave had forbidden.

Jeremy would be there at the '200 Plan' meeting. Dave wanted to arrange an marriage between Jeremy and her.

She told Jeremy he could go to hell before he would touch her. Dave told Jeremy in a reassuring way that she was just waiting until they married. When Jeremy talked to her about marriage she screamed: “I will send you to hell myself before that happens!” Jeremy backed off. Dave assured Jeremy it was just because she was virtuous and had not been with a man, not to worry.

The travel agency had the passport, maps, and travel brochures. All she needed was some cash and a birthday. The meeting was terrible. She wore the frumpiest clothes she had hoping they would leave her alone. Joan told her to dress better. Dave’s assistant pastor told her she was being too suggestive and should not be tempting men that way. She could feel the eyes of the ‘200 Club’ men crawling all over her body. It was not her fault she was sexy even in frumpy clothes. She got more respect everywhere else than at the prosperity meeting. Dave was excited, he did not enough money to buy a jet or even start a TV program, but he was getting there. The next morning, she saw the high school track team out early. God how she wished she could join them. There were deliveries to make to the processing center after the meeting, a whole stack of new ‘200 Plan’ commitments plus the mail in prayer requests.

Time flew. It was birthday time. The party that was at church was the most decadent thing that Vashti had ever seen. “I am a little cynical,” she muttered to herself in an understatement. After the music and cake the big moment came. In the middle of the parlor was a hump covered by a sheet. After a long speech Dave pulled the cover off the Executive Lexus and gave her the keys and title. Paid for in full. Everyone cheered. God had blessed Vashti for giving. Vashti was getting her ‘200 Plan’ increase. And it was just a start. Vashti could not wait until it was over. It was as if the eyes of the ‘200 Club’ men were raping her. Nowhere else did she feel this way. At midnight they went home. It was too late to hit the road.

First thing in the morning she was up with a suitcase in the trunk and off to the certified preowned lot. They laughed her to shame. She insisted, so they made an offer. Dave told her that a new car loses \$4000 in value when you drive it off the lot, but not to worry, with God nothing is too good for a member of the ‘200 Plan’. The offer was \$8000 under. She took it. She did not care. She signed the papers to their astonishment, took the check and left. The Uber was waiting for her. A trip to the bank, a trip to get her computer, and she was off to the airport. The flight to El Paso would only take four hours. She had to wait two hours for the plane. The timing worked out. The world around her was surreal. She had only seen the world outside her house in pictures.

When the plane landed it was beginning to feel real.



The Uber driver said she should spend the night in a hotel and get the early bus in Juarez. And he told her not to travel alone. Not to even consider doing that. After some heated discussion he dropped her off at a hostel.

There was a friendly lady there, looking about sixty-ish who asked her what she was doing. Hanna, the lady, was a retired schoolteacher and defiantly the alpha type? Vashti confessed the whole story. She wanted to see her birth parents. Hanna said she was going that way and they could travel together. There was no stopping Vashti.

Of course, they had Mexican food. But it was different. It was so good. Way back when Vashti first realized her birth parents were from Mexico, she wanted to learn everything about their history and even learn to make the food, wear the dresses, and everything else. Dave and Joan would not let her cook Mexican food. They were concerned about her finding her roots. She had to make Mexican food secretly at a friend’s house. As a small child she did not think about where she was from or anything being different. Now it was all she could think about.

Hanna told her story. She was a reverse wetback. She was born on the north side of the border. Her parents had crossed north back when it was easy, and nobody cared. She was born on the north side and had been back and forth hundreds of times. Her husband, Raul, was a businessman and owned a factory on the south side of the border, so they lived there. She was going to visit a friend and could stop by La Flor. She knew people there too. It was such a beautiful place, but a small, poor town. “You should not travel alone.” she told Vashti.

“But you are alone?” Vashti asked.

“I know the place.” she replied defiantly. “And I know what to do with bandits. They don’t scare me.”

It seemed like nothing scared Hanna. Which made Vashti feel good.

“And I understand your name too.” Hanna declared.

“But no one understood.” thought Vashti.

“We are birds of a feather.” Hanna continued. It was dark thirty and they were off crossing the border to get the bus.

“What are you doing here?” barked the immigration officer.

“Spending money.” barked Hanna back at him. He stamped their visas and let them through.

The bus was a shiny new executive bus with comfy seats, food service, and good air conditioning. It was hot outside already and would be hotter when the sun came up. The desert landscape was amazing to Vashti. She had only seen it in pictures. The bus seemed to fly down the highway, not stopping in the small towns, and going airborne as it crossed the speed bumps.

It was a different world, but exciting and beautiful. At lunchtime, the bus stopped in one of the larger towns. The town was densely populated. There were no ranch style houses. Next to the bus stop was a fruit stand full of exotic fruit Vashti had never seen. Hanna helped her choose a variety to try on the trip. The restaurant was open door. They sat at a table on the side of the street and ate a delicious exotic meal. It was wonderful. Down the street were the same fast-food places as where Vashti grew up. And a mall just like the one at home. Somehow this was better.

The bus was off again flying through the desert and bouncing over speed bumps. The driver did not care. He just kept going. In the afternoon they came to another bus stop. It was time to change buses. They would ride a local bus line. It was an older bus, much like a school bus. At least it looked in good repair. The bus left the interstate highway and took off on a winding blacktop road.

There were farms, livestock, and people walking everywhere. Everyone seemed happy and friendly here. “Where were the bad guys?” Vashti thought. She asked Hanna and the reply was: “Killing people and selling drugs.”

“Aren’t you afraid?” asked Vashti.

“We are not worth bothering with.” was the reply. “Just don’t go where they are.”

“How do I know that?” thought Vashti. “Good thing she is with me.”

It was getting late when they came to another bus station. They bought the tickets. The bus would leave before the sun came up, so they slept in the station. Not the best place to sleep, but Hanna thought it was ok. There was an announcement for the bus. They scurried up to the gate.

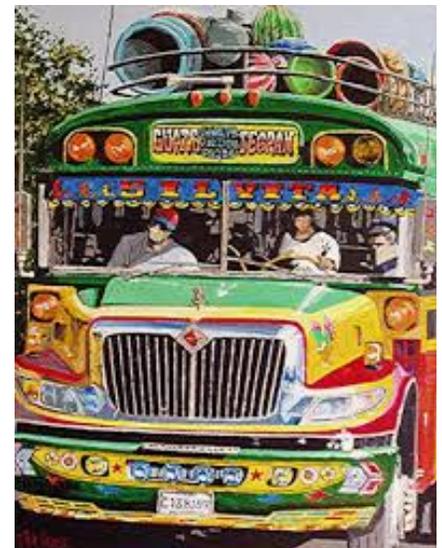
The most miserable excuse there ever was for a bus was waiting for them. It looked like it was from the dinosaur time and had never been repaired. It must have been in fights with trucks and cactus and drunks. But it was running and waiting for them. The toothless driver smiled and welcomed them aboard. Vashti was glad to have Hanna with her. She realized that Hanna had lied. She never came here before but did not want to leave the young woman alone.

Off the bus went down a dirt road. It seemed well maintained for a few miles, but after the first village it was rougher. It did not need speed bumps. The ruts in the road functioned just like speed bumps. The driver did not care. He sped on. The next station was an adobe farmhouse.

The lady of the house invited them in to eat. As they were eating the bus took off back to where it came from. That seemed scary. They were truly in the middle of nowhere and had no transportation. As they finished lunch another bus came up looking like the worse twin of the bus that brought them.

“How much further?” asked Vashti.

“It’s not far. A couple of hours.” The landscape was amazing. And frightening. What a place to be lost. The bus blew out a tire and they had to wait for a repair. The driver removed the tire and hitched a ride to the tire shop in a small town.



The cows came up to check them out. As well as a few chickens and a donkey.

There was a farmhouse nearby. The lady there gave the bus driver a ride to the town. An hour later he came back with a new tire and they were off again. This was beyond any adventure she imagined.

Finally, they came to La Flor. It was a small sleepy town with a gas station, a store, a school, and four houses. Vashti's heart was racing. She was going to see her parents that she lost twelve years ago. The bus stopped at the store and she rushed out and into the store. Surely in a town this small everyone knew everyone, and they would know where her parents lived. She had mailed letters but there was never a reply. Her Spanish was coming back to her. She finally had people to talk to in Spanish. But her Spanish was a child's Spanish. It did not matter; the people were friendly and welcomed her. After what seemed like a forever greeting, she finally got to ask her question.

"Where do Manuel and Rosa Auglia live?" she asked in Spanish.

"I do not know." the young girl at the counter said.

"I will send Luis to get my mother. She will know." and she sent the small boy sitting beside her to one of the houses. In a few minutes a middle-aged lady came.

"You're the daughter of Rosa." she exclaimed. "I never thought I would see you again. How, in the name of God, did you get here?"

Vashti told her story, feeling impatient to see her mother, but happy the lady was interested in hearing her. After hugs and introductions Emma, the lady she was talking to, told her about her parents.

"They are on a ranch two days from here." said Emma. "In a couple of days Raul, my husband, can take you there. You can stay with us. Emma filled her in on what was happening with her parents and everything in La Flor.

Hanna gave Emma some money for food and the two of them went off to the house to prepare dinner. Vashti was left with the young girl. They talked for hours about where they lived and where they traveled. The girl had lived in California for a while and knew some English. She had been more places than Vashti.

When it was getting dark, they closed the store and went to the house. It was a small house with everything neat and clean. What a contrast from where Vashti came from. There the houses were big and messy. The dinner was ready and wonderful. It was a delight to meet all these people.

The older ladies became immediate friends. After dinner and more talk it was bedtime. Vashti and Hanna had a small bed to share. Raul was off driving the truck. The two kids wanted to talk to her all night, but their mother made them go to bed.



A rooster was crowing at dark thirty. She had never heard anything like that. A living alarm clock that did not care what day it was or who was there. With sleepy eyes Vashti crawled out of bed and looked outside. The sun was coming up. They never watched sunrises where she had lived. It was something new to see. Luis was up doing chores. He took Vashti with him to show her around. There were chickens with eggs and a cow the neighbors took turns milking. They collected some avocados, limes, and bananas. Everything was new for her. There was a living grocery store all around them.

Breakfast was another wonderful meal. Better than the five-star restaurant she was used to. She helped clean the dishes. There was no dishwasher, and they did not have a maid. There was always a maid in the house she lived in for so many years. Joan would never clean anything. That was the maid's job, and she came twice a week. Everyone talked for hours. She learned the story of her parents. They moved back here to be safe and then into the mountains on a ranch just to be sure. After being deported the Narcos came after them. They were demanding money from anyone who had been in El Norte and killing people who did not have any. La Flor was so far back in the outback that no one made it there. Not even the Narcos. No one would answer questions about Juan.

There were two days until Raul would be there so Luis took her to meet the neighbors on the nearby ranches. She learned about cows and goats and pigs and everything on a farm. They had a garden with corn and beans and squash. There were so many different kinds of fruit. The time flew and suddenly two days were gone, and Raul drove up in his big truck. Everyone was happy to see him. He had supplies for the store and was happy to see his family. He said he would take them in the morning. She was too excited to sleep. Finally, the rooster crowed, they had breakfast and were ready to go.

With six people crammed into the cab of the truck they headed toward the mountains and stopped at another small town for gas. Vashti offered him money for gas, but he said she did not have to. She insisted so he accepted it and smiled. They went through a gate and onto what seemed more like a trail than a road. After a day of traveling slowly up a winding road into the mountains they stopped at dark. The women slept in the truck and the men under a tarp beside the truck. This was the strangest thing Vashti had ever seen. But these people were happy. Dave, Joan, and their friends would never have done this. And they never were never happy. They were always worried. And stressed. No one here worried or stressed.



At dawn they were up and packing to go. Raul was putting diesel in the truck from gas cans he had. She could smell the exotic aroma of the desert. There was sage and pinions and creosote and more. The kids explained every kind of cactus and desert plant. She never imagined there was so much there.

They took off and the landscape changed. Soon there were bigger pines and mountain wildflowers. The truck slowly wound its way uphill into the mountains. There was enormous green tree covered mountains on each side. And a meadow full of cattle. It was like a dreamscape.

Soon the truck stopped in a small village. It did not even have a name. Vashti rushed out to see who was there. A lady was standing in the garden. They stared at each other in shock. The lady screamed: “Mi ninita!” with tears running down her face and grabbed Vashti in a bear hug. The two of them cried and held on for dear life. A man heard the scream and came running around the house. He could not believe what he saw. When the two ladies let go and stood back holding hands he came up and hugged Vashti.

“Mi papa!” Vashti exclaimed in tears. It was all coming back to her. She could remember everything. She was a small child again and in her father’s arms and it felt so secure.

After everyone met and hugged, they went into the small house to talk. It was a simple house with simple furnishings, but everything was perfect and neat and clean. After talking for hours, they all realized it was past lunch time and began to prepare a meal. Her father took her to show her their garden. He worked on the ranch nearby. He had red hair and freckles and green eyes just like her. That is where she got them. Her mother was fair skinned, and her grey hair had been blond. They talked about everything as they walked the garden. He even discussed Aristotle with her. She had no idea he was so educated. He had been a teacher. It felt so wonderful to have a real dad. Then the dinner bell rang, and they rushed into the house.

The food was wonderful. It always was here. After dinner she went for a walk with her mother. Her mother had been a teacher too. She felt at home, not with the place, but with her parents. The place was an exciting exotic place to visit, but not to live, not for her.

“Why did you name me Vashti?” she asked.

“That was from your aunt. We will talk to her tomorrow.” Rosa said.

It was impossible to sleep. There was so much excitement in Vashti’s heart.

At what seemed like dark thirty the rooster crowed.

“There must be a million roosters here.” thought Vashti. “And they must be waking the sunup.”

The truck took off after breakfast leaving just Vashti and her parents. They said they would be back in a week or so. There was nothing in sight except a small farmhouse and three people. She wondered how they would see her aunt.

“Let’s go.” said Rosa packing a lunch and water. And the three of them headed up a path into the forest. After an hour of walking, they saw a small house on top of a hill. A lady was watching them come up the path. She looked like she was hundreds of years old, but spry and happy.

When she saw Vashti, she came running up to meet them and bear hugged Vashti while gibbering in Yiddish.

“You are here.” she said. “The chosen one. I have so much to tell you. You must listen to all of it.” she exclaimed. “Come in and have some tea.”



They went into the small cabin. It was unlike anything Vashti had ever seen. There were jars of herbs on shelves on all the walls. And candles in gold stands. And pictures of prophets. She felt like she was going into some place sacred. But not like the fake stuff she was used to seeing. The tea was enchanting. After some time of tea and small talk her parents went for a walk.

“Why am I named Vashti?” she said.

“It came to me in a vision.” her aunt said. “You must be Vashti. You will say no to a king. He will persecute you, but you will prevail. It is your destiny. You said no to one man, a man who stole you, so you could learn. That was just training. The real contest is yet to come. You have great beauty so you can attract the king. That is your curse, but you must bear it. And wisdom so you can defeat him. But that you must learn. Don’t think your intelligence gave you wisdom.” and with that the aunt was quiet. She sat there in shock for what seemed like forever. She just wanted to see her parents and now she was here and this crazy witch was telling her fortune.

“You spoke Yiddish?” asked Vashti. “That’s Jewish. What are you? A witch or Jewish or what?”

“It is the old religion. What we practiced before the Spaniards tried to kill us all. I never left it.” replied the aunt in perfect Hebrew. Then she translated what she had said into English, knowing that the girl recognized the language but barely understood.

Vashti was even more shocked. The old woman knew everything. She spoke four languages perfectly. She did not know what to say and stared off into space for another eternity.

When she could finally talk again, she asked half afraid of what she would hear. “So, I am Jewish, I knew that. Why do I have a Persian name?” “It is in the book. Vashti had more guts than any other woman. She was brave. They tried to kill her, but she escaped. She was the alpha of the alphas. You are too.”

Now Vashti was really afraid. This was too real. It should have been unbelievable, but it seems too real, like she was talking to a prophet or something.

“But I am an atheist.” Vashti sheepishly whined.

“Hahahaha!” the old woman laughed her to scorn. “We will talk more tomorrow.”

It had been hours. It was time for a late lunch. Everyone was having friendly conversation at lunch, but Vashti was quiet.

After lunch Vashti went for a walk with her mother. “Who is this woman?” demanded Vashti. “Where did she come from?”

“She is Rebecca, your five times great aunt. She has traveled many places but moved here after we did. She has always been a help to the family. She always knows what to do when there is a difficulty or people have questions. You saw her when you were two years old. She thought you were special then but did not say much about it.”

“Is she ok?” asked Vashti. “I never heard anyone talk like her.”

“You were with church people. Didn’t they talk like that?” said Rosa.

“Never!” exclaimed Vashti. “Everything they did was different. Like day and night. I never believed them. I am scared to believe Rebecca.” “She wants what is best.” said her mom. “You can trust her.”

Vashti did not know what to say after that. They spent several more days visiting. Rebecca explained everything. What was the meaning of every plant, rock, and animal? Which herbs did what? What the patterns in the sky and landscape mean. Everything had a pattern and it always had a meaning. People had patterns too and they all had a meaning. She was to learn what those patterns were. It would take time, but she would. On a Friday afternoon Rebecca made tea as usual and then began mixing herbs. They had a wonderful aroma. It was just her and the old lady in the cabin. She took flowers from a plant in the garden that looked like marijuana, but different. And then she mixed them all together crushing them in a bowl and draining an amber oil from them. The aroma was now intoxicating.

“Come with me.” the old lady said, and they walked to another garden not far from the cabin. “It is time to anoint you.” and she put oil on top of Vashti’s head. It was almost dark.

Suddenly Vashti was in another world. She did not understand anything, but she dreamed all night. The dreams were more conscious than when she was awake. The next day she stayed in the garden. She was not hungry or thirsty and the dreams were as real when she was awake as when she slept. At dark she went back to the cabin. They had dinner ready and now Vashti was very hungry. She did not say anything. Everyone else had friendly small talk.

When it was time for bed Rebecca came up to her and said: “Now my work is done.” and kissed her on the cheek. They all went to bed. Vashti did not know what to make of all this. It was beyond her imagination.

When they woke up Rebecca was not there in the kitchen. She was always first. When they looked in her bed, they saw she was gone. Her old body was there but her spirit had left in the night. No one said anything. They just made breakfast and buried the old woman’s body. And then just sat by the grave saying nothing. It had been conversation the whole time until now and there was nothing more to say.

Just after noon Raul came up with the truck. They all got in and rode in silence. Raul knew what happened, so he respected their silence.

It was a long way back to where Vashti came from and it was time to return. She promised to bring her parents to live with her when she could. But before she left, she bought them a small house. It was now safe to move back to the city, so she bought them a house in the city.

There would be a phone and a mailbox and even internet so she could talk to them.

Finally, Rosa told her about Juan. He spent five years in prison for hitting the guard that beat Vashti. When he got out, he was left at the border. The narcos met him and offered him a job. He knew a little English so they said he could be a mule. They told him it was plomo or plata. He said no and they killed him. They all cried. Juan was Vashti’s best friend and now she knew he was gone. She cried all day. That was the worst part of everything.

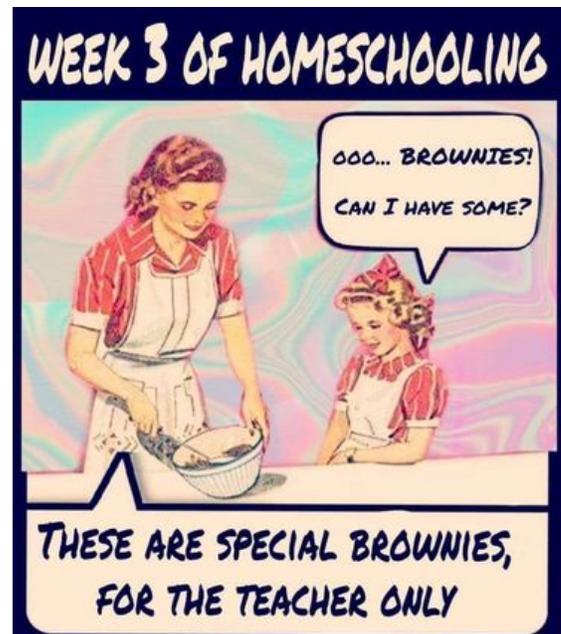
At the border the guards asked her everything. “Where have you been? they demanded. “Spending money.” she said.

They searched everything she had and then searched her. She felt like she was being raped. They were angry when they found nothing. and asked more questions.

“Am I free to go?” she replied.

They said nothing and walked away to the next person crossing the border.

It was time to attend college and find a lawyer. And wonder what would happen next. She knew she was not going back to the house where she spent the last twelve years. There was nothing there.



## A Stroll in The Snow



It was the great escape. The love hate election obsession was in the rear window. No more 12-hour days. No more 7-day weeks. The Jeep was heading east, winding through Kansas, heading for the Ozark Trail. It was time to purge the mind of all the clutter. It was easy to clean up the office. Now the real task of cleaning up the mind was at hand. Meditation classes were good, but I was never good at it. A fourteen-mile run sometimes worked better. A couple of full days in the woods alone is best. It would be good to have a friend along if I was not babysitting them, but none was at hand. The interstate was coming up. After the interstate the road was snaking through Missouri. There was nothing straight about this route. The knife outlet was on the left, but it would have to wait for later. Maybe there would be time for toys on the way back.

Johnathan was probably on a beech in Florida by now. We met in his office a few weeks ago. He showed me his map. The county was divided into 3 areas. The Thompson campaign had about half. The county office had about half. And I had a state house district. Maybe 1/25th of the county. He never asked, just made the map. It was fun and miserable and a good place to meet new friends. Got to meet an animal trainer who worked with orcas and elephants. And a very intelligent muslim lady. She had no tolerance for any of the Misogynic ideologies from and religion or politics. It was delightful. They were better at it than I was. My ability here was to not quit. It worked well with ultramarathons. I was never good at them, but finished a lot of them because I would not quit.

Finally, I was at the River Resort. The shuttle service was ready, and I was off to the trail. It is a beautiful place. I always think I will stay there someday, but always go into the woods. It was hunting season, so I wore bright orange. They warned me. A hunter offered more orange stuff, but I was ok with what I had.

Some comment about stupid rednecks with guns. He admitted he was a redneck and obviously had a gun, but did not seem stupid, at least smart enough to tell the difference between a deer and a hiker. It was a nice cool autumn day, and I was off. I forgot the map back in the Jeep, but the trail was well marked, and I had been here before. This is where they run the Ozark Trail 100 Mile Ultramarathon and they maintain the trail well here. In some places it is darn near impossible to find the trail, but not here. Was it 36 miles back, or 26, or more? I planned on 36. The sun was setting, and I made 3 miles. Three Garmin step miles.

There is no way to accurately measure a trail through the woods. There are map miles where someone just marked the map. They are one to one and a half miles on the ground with all the switchbacks and ups and downs. There are GPS miles. They are very accurate on a straight course or gentle curve. The algorithm inside the machine cannot account for the curves that are smaller than the measurement accuracy. So, they come up short. There are Garmin step miles. They are very close to GPS miles or a little longer, so probably more accurate here. The GPS is the most accurate on a road. A racecourse is measured with a wheel. And certified. A trail race cannot be certified. Too much variance. They probably measured the ultra with a wheel. And finally sign post miles. Who knows where they come from? So, it is a ways back to the resort and Jeep.

Well after dark I found a somewhat flat place to put the tent. It was getting cold. It was too early to sleep, but the tent and sleeping bag were warmer than outside. Building a fire after dark would have been real challenge. There were dry leaves and brush everywhere. The ground needed to be cleared, a stone circle needed to be built, and water needed to be collected to control the fire. Or just set the woods on fire. So, I tried to meditate and tried to sleep. It was good. I could get as much sleep as I wanted. There are few established campsites with fire rings here. I woke up early with lots of sleep and was off down the trail just after sunrise.

This is a mixed forest, and it is beautiful in the fall. Most of the leaves are down and visibility is good. There is a light dusting of snow scattered around. No sign of hunters or deer. There were a few coyotes singing the night before. The streams are running but not flooded. It is not necessary to carry lots of water because there are so many places to collect it. So much to see that the hours pass quickly. Everywhere the trail is clear. They even have signs for the side trails and distances. My feet are dry. Usually, they stay wet here. Dry because I am wearing boots for the snow instead of running shoes and the streams are not flooded my feet are staying dry.

There was not even a ford here. The sandals usually used for fording rivers stayed on the pack.



The second night there was plenty of daylight to set up camp and build a fire. My best guess was 18 map miles from where I started. The rice and chicken soup was delicious. I was full. Nuts and fruit and crackers were tasty all day and now hot food made things right. It was getting even colder. There were no stars, it was cloudy. Meditating in the tent went better. And the time in the woods was taking effect, like a natural cure for everything. I woke to a sprinkling sound, like someone pouring sand on the tent. It was snowing. I wondered how it would be to follow the trail in the snow. Would the trail disappear in the snow? With all my years in the woods I had little time waking up in a lot of new snow. I kept shaking the snow off the tent, but soon it pretty much had the tent surrounded and sealed off at the bottom. I had to unzip the door at the top for fresh air. Many tents have a vent at the top, but this ultralight tent did not. It had nothing to add weight and weighed only 2 pounds.

There was five inches of snow. It was beautiful and the trail was even more obvious. This was going to be the best day. It was a cold night and a cold morning. The fall clothes and gear were doing well in the winter weather. Even in cloudy weather people need sunglasses for snow. Snow can blind someone by reflecting all the light and making everything twice as bright with light coming up from the ground. The remains of the fire were covered with snow. Every footprint was like a giant trail marker. There would be no stealth travel in anything like this. It would tell the whole story of the deer hunters, deer, and wild turkeys. I was off in the snow making a clear trail.

There were lots of deer trails in the snow. All night the deer traveled silently marking their path. They traveled through the woods as effortlessly as walking a trail. Uphill and downhill do not seem to make a difference. And hunter footprints. They were up early, ready to get a deer at sunrise. But there were no gunshots.

The deer were better at stalking the hunters than the hunters were at stalking the deer.

Did the hunters know the deer were all around them staying out of sight? There were turkey tracks too. And turkeys. They were not as skittish and could be seen. They know. Their calendars are marked too. They know the hunting season. Turkeys and deer may be clueless to what a car is and what it does, but each knows their hunting season.

There the resort is. Circle around the bend in the river and there it is. So, it was 26 miles. I hike past the resort and go to the top of the hill. It is time for more rice and chicken soup. Soup is good for a hiking meal. It is too easy to burn the food on a camp stove. The stove is like a small flame thrower. Really good for boiling water fast but difficult to control the heat. Soup does three things: The water is boiled so that sanitizes it. The food does not get burned. It hydrates the hiker. I did not have to look for a stream. There was plenty of snow to melt. A hot dinner for lunch and a hot dinner for dinner caught up the calories. Hiking in the woods in winter never requires people to watch calories or worry about getting too many. The hiker needs to be sure to get enough.

I can see for miles. It is a beautiful spot. And a perfect place for a campfire. And it was a beautiful campfire. There is no setting the woods on fire tonight. It is the warmest night. Now I am getting too much sleep. The plan is to get up at 6 to hike the half mile to the Jeep. I wake up before that and get going. It is still dark at the resort and no one is out. The temp in the Jeep is 18°. That was the warmest night. It was 6° colder than the weather report in town. It was 6°, 2°, and 18° the three nights. It is winter no matter what the calendar says. A few miles down the road I stop for breakfast. It is 50° and sunny. The warm front has blown in and it is getting warmer.

The knife outlet on the interstate is fascinating. It is a big box store full of fishing, hunting, and kitchen knives. And it has all the best knives made at a discount price. It takes a while to escape this toy store and only a little money for the less with gifts for friends and me. At home I review knife laws again. They are the most bewildering array of legal shenanigans imaginable.

Where I live there are almost no laws, thank you. In New York City it is essentially illegal to own a knife. What the law says and what it means are completely different. The courts say it is ok for the statute meaning of the knife laws to be completely different from the common meaning. So if you read the law and try to comply you can be arrested. The police there run knife traps just like speed traps except they are more expensive.

I imagine a restaurant has to smuggle them in. Good reason not to live there.

It is good to be home. Catch up on life with a renewed brain and plan the next adventure.

## A Temple Not Built by Man

Bill Barnett

July 30, 2019



Early morning, more like the middle of the night, I was crawling out of my sleeping bag. The night before I hiked up the trail from the trailhead. The river was flowing as I crossed the bridge. If it was any louder it would have been deafening. I have been here before, but not on this path. Half of the trail was the same. After the avalanches it looked different. A large portion of the forest was replaced by a tangle of destroyed trees. And the streams were flowing heavily. No more just stepping over them. They were swollen with extra snow melt. It was just above freezing, but a couple of wool t-shirts felt comfortable. An uphill hike produced enough body heat to stay warm.

Packing the summit gear in the small backpack and carrying the camcorder I left the campsite and headed up the mountain. The trees glittered in the light of the headlamp. The heavy dew had them covered with water droplets. Maybe this was where someone got the idea of Christmas tree lights. But no Christmas tree could compare. If only the camera could capture this. Knowing it would not work I tried anyway. Nothing but dark in the camera viewfinder. Another reminder that a better camera is needed.

The trail led me to a stream that looked like a river. That is not the way, I thought. Another trail went up but was soon blocked by a snarl of fallen trees, so back to

the river. A few logs lay across the river. Now I remembered the crossing, but it was a small stream last year.

Ahead was a meadow, but there was no meadow there before. It was a forest last year. The whole slope was cover with destroyed trees and the trail crew cleared a path for the hikers. They had warning signs where they were working. It was dark and difficult to see anything, but the trail was clear. The way down in daylight revealed the disaster scene. An avalanche had wiped out a whole slope of trees.

Back in the forest there were more switchbacks and a larger river. Some logs were in the middle, but they did not cross to the shore. No trail was visible on the other side. There was a side trail that disappeared into the forest ending after a few hundred yards. The trail I rejected was the good trail. It was the crossing. After returning it was not as difficult to cross as it looked, and the continuing trail was clear when I reached the other side. Lesson learned. The forest had changed, and the streams were bigger making the trail look different. Later in daylight it would be clear.

More switchbacks in the forest led to another stream. It seemed as unlikely a crossing as the others, but I crossed it. The continuing trail was visible only after crossing the stream. That was the last forest stream crossing. The switchbacks continued through the forest. The trees began to look small, like the fairy forest at tree line, but then more big trees appeared. There was 2200 feet elevation to gain before leaving the forest. As the sun was coming up the trees thinned out and became small for real. Now this was the fairy forest. Tiny old trees looking like something from a magical kingdom surrounded me. It was as if elves and fairies should be coming out dancing and flying around. Just fairy tale stuff. It was good to begin to see everything. The camera could only make dark pictures now. That is better than in the forest. Soon it would see everything.

The tundra lay before me. I have never seen an arctic tundra. Maybe it is like the alpine tundra or maybe not. Flowers are everywhere and the short grass is vibrant green. The switchbacks continue lined with rocks that are hidden by grass everywhere else. There are some rock outcroppings to scramble over. People are catching up. I am too slow. One guy is running up hill. He has a strange stuffed animal tied to his small backpack. He topped out and passed me running back down before I could get near to the top. The summit before me is a false summit and the trail turns right and later left. Finally, the trail joins the ridge going to the top. There is a line of false summits on the ridge.

The great size of the temple is now becoming imaginable. Getting close to the top it now has scale, no longer being a speck in the distance. There is still a way to go. Rounding the corner of the last false summit the top is in sight. There is a ridge of rocks looking impossible. And to the right is steep loose dirt. The steep dirt descends a few hundred feet and below that is a thousand feet of steep loose rock. Some people walk confidently on the loose steep dirt and some very cautiously. It would have been good to bring spikes to cross this. They are at home. Carefully I crossed the loose dirt. Now there is just a couple hundred feet of elevation gain to the top. The top is secure rock. A crowd has gathered there.

4,450 feet of elevation gain. Like a 445 story building. No elevators. No stairs. Five miles of trail. This is halfway. The top is not the end. It is not a successful climb until the climber is safely back at the beginning.

The summit is majestic. A thousand cathedrals cannot compare. A thousand choirs could not compete. No man could make this. Mecca may draw a bigger crowd by a thousand times. It does not compare. No Pope, no Vatican can come close. Few will see it because few will make the ascent. There are too many worries and distractions in life to go there. The tyranny of the urgent has stolen the experience of the majesty of the mountain from most of humanity.

Imagine a yoga sitting on top meditating and training his followers. The mountain does not need one. Everyone is in the meditative state. Hypoxia, runner's high, the power of nature, it all adds up to a changed state of mind. An herbal or chemical drug cannot produce this high. The addiction is not with the body. The body loathes the hypoxia. The addiction is limited by how long a person can stay there and when they can return. Quickly everyone will be gone, and the mountain will stand in solitude again.

This is truly a temple. Man could not build it. Not even come close. He is less than an ant in comparison. Even his biggest machines are like an ant next to the mountain. The best he could hope for is to make a few tiny scratches.

Is God here? We are told He is everywhere, but we seldom feel it. The mountain is different. The ascent is like a fast from all the distractions of life. Some say there is no God. But their moral compass belies their statement about God. They are as awestruck by the majesty here as the believers. And sometimes more awestruck. People tell me there is no spirit, no soul, no free will, no consciousness. They say the only consciousness is what arises in man and then ends when

he dies. That is all there is many say. Before science proved differently people believed in spontaneous generation of life.

Flies, mold, and everything just came alive from nowhere. That was disproven. Is it not as silly to assume the soul and spirit in a man spontaneously generates and came from nowhere?

Time to leave. The visit was too short. But the soul is fed, and the body disciplined into the fast it did not want. Even consuming water and trail food is a fast here. The body screams for more food. It rebels as the soul is ecstatic.

Down is easy. The route is always clearer looking down from above. The same in life as on the mountain. Soon the alpinist will be back in the routine of life. But he will never be the same.

There are videos of this mountain and others in my Youtube channel: The Wilderness Hiker, How to See the World.



**GRAPHICAL DESIGN**

418 State ST, Augusta

(316) 648-6536