

How the End Comes About

by [Carl Nelson](#) (August 2020)



Title Unknown, Peter Herrmann, 2017

French philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, a Christian

existentialist, contends that values are discovered, not invented. –Pedro Blas Gonzalez

Many years ago, I lived in the very diverse neighborhood of Columbia City in Seattle. I didn't move there because I valued diversity, but because diversity tends to find inexpensive housing. You want cheap housing? You can either opt for crime ridden or mix it up a bit and make it organic. I bought my fixer upper for fifteen thousand, and made monthly payments of a hundred and nine dollars. I was very upset when taxes and an insurance reassessment increased my payments to a hundred and thirty nine.

My home was on a hillside overlooking Rainier Valley, which ran from Dearborn Street just south of downtown in what was formerly known as Garlic Gulch to Rainier Beach, a southern neighborhood abutting Lake Washington, a distance of about eight miles. At the time the Cripps and the Bloods vied for dominance throughout the Valley. Drug dealers and loiterers decorated the sidewalks in the small business districts. Walls were tagged.

The gangs brought changes. The neighbor kid I'd known as he grew suddenly gazed at me sullenly from a group of bangers, as I sought to turn the corner to my home one. Our relationship had changed. The Valley developed an even rougher reputation. My friend had to crouch on the floor of her car when picking up her son at the local school several blocks south of me. A shooting war erupted the same time as school got out. Bullets were flying overhead.

An attractive, but quiet single mother with her similarly quiet son moved into the rental kiddy corner to my home. Black men dressed like Super Fly and driving big shiny cars seemed to come out of the surroundings like feral dogs to court her, several at a time. One night in the early morning hours I was awakened by the sounds of a torrential rain and someone shouting loudly. I remember turning over in bed and

muttering, "I wish someone would just shoot that son of a bitch."

The next thing I heard was a *Pop! Pop! Pop!* And silence.

I didn't even rise to look out.

Another evening I was awakened to horrendous screams travelling from across the valley's far side. I rose to see flashlight beams combing the vacant lot. But it was late, and I figured I could read about it in the paper at work the next day. The only report though was of a fellow shot seven times in his car while settled outside the Happy Valley Restaurant about a half mile south. And that was just a small squib, hidden in the back pages. Apparently what sounded like a horrendous rape or violation of some sort wasn't news—at least in Rainier Valley.

The pressure was continually on the police to do something about the drug situation, though the real causes were cultural and demographic. When enough media pressure had been exerted, the police would do a sweep. And the crime would move elsewhere for a bit. It reminded me of fumigating for roaches.

Dale was an older merchant seaman who worked the warehouse with me. He and his sailor buddies would drink beers in the Two Bells Tavern. His buddies had a downtown Seattle map stuck to the wall of their flat on which they kept track with stick pins of the current working stations of the hookers. But that's another story. Dale lived in a brick building of apartments in the Belltown area north of downtown. There was always pressure upon the owner of his apartment house to rid it of the roaches, which the owner would do, one unit at a time. When they fumigated one apartment, the roaches would move on to the next, and the next consecutively, 'round and 'round. It would remind me, in later years, of the

struggle to remove moles from my yard.

When you're caught in impotent situations such as these, you're apt to wonder just why drug dealers, roaches or moles don't take over the world? What's stopping them? It's a puzzle.

Then, some years later, I noticed while driving back through the Valley that the gangs and the drug dealers had all disappeared. What had formerly seemed an indelible stain worked well into the warp and weft of the cultural mix, suddenly had disappeared.

I never found any reason for it. I never read any local article examining it. It was if early one morning all of the gang bangers and wannabes went to bed, only to wake up without any interest in pursuing such a lifestyle anymore. Where had the tent revival taken place? This was certainly a reason for optimism, but also a mystery. What had occurred?

I've thought about this over the years and decided that though this particular event remains a mystery to me, activities that just stop aren't that uncommon. It's only too natural to have had enough of something—and quit. Certainly we work until we're tired, and then rest. Then rest until we're revived and begin again. How many times have you yourself, or heard someone else exclaim fervently that they would never, ever give up, as they attacked some problem furiously—only to return shortly, to find that they had given up—or have awoke to the futility of it yourself? This seems only too common.

Currently in the U.S. we are experiencing riots, near insurrection, and intelligent, seemingly sane people supporting those who are spouting the most inane, foolish pronouncements with an ardor that is going far beyond unhinged. Indeed, no reasonable comment seems to halt it. The cultural chaos would seem unstoppable, even infesting the corporations. And yet, as the economist Herb Stein determined,

"I recently came to a remarkable conclusion which I commend to you and that is that *if something cannot go on forever it will stop.*" There are lots of things that just stop, plagues, profligate spending, sex, cars, my poems . . . some for mysterious reasons, and others not.

But why? Or rather, how can we tell when? And can it be influenced?

And here is where I fear I must head out into a postulated reality. I know. The Progressives do this all the time what with racial problems, sexuality and climate indicators—and Conservatives just detest it. But it seems there is no other way to discuss things for which we haven't an answer. (Progressives do this with things which *do* have answers. In fact, you might say that they postulate *against* reality. But, here again, that's another story.)

Usually I persist in my activities as long as the goal seems obtainable, and I believe this is generally true of others. When we see continuing on as futile, we generally stop or surrender. I finally gave up on one internet supplier and switched to another. When I can see in an argument with the wife that being right is going to cost me more than being wrong, and if I'm still thinking clearly, I quit. The pipeline protests of the Obama years vanished with the advent of Trump. The current rioters have trashed Democratic bastions but not Republican.

During my viewing of the TV show, "The Vikings," the hero was asked what would make the Vikings quit their assault, as they seemed totally bent towards one end only: vandalizing and looting until they ascended to Valhalla. (Surely a show for our time.) The answer was that a Viking leader would not attack if he thought that a victory would cost him too many men. A Viking leader who loses too many men, victory or not, loses his leadership. So there was this. Which is a good first step, I would think. But it only tells us what will make the

opposition quit—and to know that, we must know their mind. And what if they are un-hinged?

Is there some tell-tale regarding our own state of mind that might also give us an insight into when our opponent might cede? Opponents are surely joined in a relationship. And certainly the strategy of one opponent is largely determined by the strategy of another. Whereas we may not have much knowledge of our opponent, we should have some knowledge of ourselves. How might we use this?

I used to ride the Metro busses to and from work along the #7 Rainier Beach route. As I've said, this is a most diverse area of Seattle. At the time we had been receiving quite a few recent Vietnamese immigrants. Rather than to stand waiting for the bus, it was common to find them squatted. And they stood out in other ways. Riding a city bus on a rough route, all of the passengers tend to keep to themselves and stare ahead with a flat affect. This was especially true of the recent immigrants whose knowledge of how things worked was limited. And it's also important to understand that in this era there were quite a few gang members circulating around, and even more wannabees who often carried knives or guns. A conflict with a stranger—of most any age—could easily be dangerous.

I was riding the bus to work one day and seated near the back third of the bus where a group of near a dozen teenagers were bothering the passengers with insults. They had especially targeted this one Asian man, who I took to be a recent immigrant. One of them began flicking little balls of paper to pelt the fellow as he sat staring straight ahead, bearing it all stoically. I watched for a bit, imagining how much danger and abuse this one poor immigrant most probably had to endure in his life to make it to American soil only to have to than endure this callow humiliation, and it enraged me. I eyed them all. I was on my feet and shouting before my innate prudence could intervene, "Does anyone back here have

something they want to get off their chest?"

I'm not a brave person. Nor am I a fighter. And I've lied to escape some punishments and avoided dangerous duty. God, in His wisdom, has given me quite low hurdles to clear throughout my life. But I am 6'8" and I was wearing a thick sweater which would barely squeeze into the small uniform jacket my employer offered and I weigh near 300 pounds. I've often found that if I say nothing, most trouble will leave me be. So that was probably it, or it could have been divine intercession. But . . .

There was silence throughout the bus as the bell cord was pulled and chimed. The bus stopped and then the rear sections all flew for the stair well. It even looked afterwards as some had opened a back window (as they will snap open from the bottom to swing on their top hinges in an emergency). Then the doors shut and the bus proceeded towards downtown with the rear seats emptied. I resettled myself, surprised by what I had done.

My point would be though, that when we will simply not let a situation stand, the opposition tends to melt away.

And what is that line? I don't know, but it's very telling. For me it is some arrogant disregard for the manner in which people *must* treat each other. But that's quite abstract. The only other time this happened on the #7 bus was when a young kid who obviously thought he was the best thing God ever made took to ridiculing various passengers and who on his way up the aisle to leave, tried to stomp a puppy that was on leash in the aisle way. This time though an elderly Black man also leapt from his seat and chased the kid right out the door and down the sidewalk. We had to wait a bit for the old fellow to pick his way back up the steps and into his seat. But this is what it seems to take. Some things can just not be allowed to happen and the urgency of this grips us, risk be damned.

Virginia Woolf noted, "Circumstances compel unity." It will be interesting to see what the nature is of that sacred line Americans will not allow to be crossed; what national spirit defines us which we won't allow defiled—or if this line never appears, or if an American nature still prevails.

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Carl Nelson has recently published his newest Self Help Book, *The Poet's (30 Year) Marriage Plan*, which is a useful collection of interlarded poems and prose advice (schemes), all celebrating the hallowed institution of marriage. To learn more about the author and peruse his work, please visit