

Distance (From a Sea Change)

By Carl Nelson

"No man is an island," unfortunately.

I've always loved that passage in Fiddler on the Roof where the inquiring student Talmud scholar asks of the rabbi: "Rabbi. Do we have a blessing for the Czar?"

The Rabbi pauses to consider a moment and then declares: "May God bless and keep the Czar... far away from us."

This would also seem to be the cardinal prayer for the traditional American, who would only endeavor to live left alone enough to carry out their life as they would, and to practice the values which have kept them in good stead. Indeed, in this latter sense, we're all Jews now. If you believe in the principles enshrined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights you are a right wing extremist, and our newly weaponized government has their eye on you.



The more I've considered it, the more it seems that a *suitable distance* seems a prime strategy of most life. Trees need it or they haven't enough sunlight. Gazelles need it or they get eaten. I need it or my community might get the better of me, or my family might drive each other crazy. Grass would seem immune, but that would only be because it is homogenous and so comes with a natural distancing mechanism observed by all leaves – perhaps the same as trees, albeit at a much more grassroots level. At any rate, as I think around me at the world out there, it would seem that all living things have a necessary and a preferable distance between themselves and the other living things, with this disclaimer, that 'these distances can vary, depending'. My friend and I on Facebook joke back and forth. He's a Canadian who lives near Niagara Falls and inhabits an apartment just across the hall from a woman who was removed from her apartment for having it so stuffed with cats it made the national news. He re-shared a Facebook picture of a small lone white cottage – in the midst of a green field which covers the total surface area of a small rocky protuberant island all alone in a blue ocean – in which he wished he lived. You may have seen it. I commented back: "Nice, but needs a fence."

Which came first to life within our biggest cities, becoming culturally unintelligible or unlivable? Certainly, crowding is characteristic. But whichever follows initially, settled on my porch afternoons, I sigh with pleasure gazing out towards the hundreds of miles of forest between myself and a big one. We've planted ourselves nearer the origin of our food and further from the origin of our problems. There's even the Ohio River a few blocks away for a constant source of water. A poet I knew used to stand, as a little girl, with her Grandfather on their porch upriver and stare out across to the hills of West Virginia in the 1960s, at where her Grandfather said the first nuclear strikes would hit. These times may have come again.

Socially, whenever I encounter another person, the problem of distance is a first and continual consideration. Even with a good friend, it must continually be gauged. I asked my poetry friend Marty (who I've always known with a shaved head), if he knew what his hair color was? Initially, I sensed indignation. He defused though, once I told him that I had been thinking there might be a good poem in that, and he went on to discuss the matter in some length. With my neighbors it is always a concern. I've some, I prudently do not become too entangled with, whose personalities have sent them to prison. I'm reminded of another poet friend who told me of his father who used to have many members of the mob as his patients in his little burg in New Jersey. The little burg had little crime, and things moved smoothly. But his father never mixed socially nor curried a favor. It was 'strictly business' and a prudent distance.

A method of maintaining a comfortable distance is the one employed by gangs. Each has their turf. And, in truth, our current area is conservative and politics aren't discussed much. I wear my MAGA hat with impunity everywhere. I'm often thanked (as people here are not much for display) for my service, as if I were a veteran. A minority will stare at me as I remember the Muslim women who worked at the Thai orphanage lined up and staring from across the way, when we were visiting immediately after the assassination of Bin Laden.

People are fairly hands-off around here when it comes to interfering in one another's lives. They might grumble about a neighbor's junk-filled yard, unmaintained home or comings and goings, but nothing is done. And you might think this would portend neighborhood decay. But, au contraire, over the decade spent here, there has been gradual improvement. It's quiet and law-abiding. The ex-felons have quit their youthful ways and generally watch their Ps and Qs (listen to their parole officers). Moreover, most neighbors have and use their guns

regularly. I imagine burglars and other sorts driving right past (and burglarizing elsewhere). The disreputable neighbors seem to deteriorate and eventually vanish like decaying stumps.

There's probably nothing quite as acrimonious as small-town politics. But the titular power brokers generally scrap amongst themselves leaving the rest out. If their cronyisms and misdoings become too outré and publically apparent, the blow-back at council meetings usually causes them to reassess.

Like the Jews in Czarist Russia, we hereabouts bear the most difficulty is in getting enough distance from our State and Federal Government. But we do have some natural barriers. Being a rust belt area means there isn't much fat nor opportunity for the newly arrived. Very few of the illegal immigrants head for Appalachia. Reversely, the wealthier urban areas are rather cliquish to newly arrived foreign medical professionals, so we get a fair share of high quality Indian physicians.

Nevertheless, the Left will not leave anyone alone, and this includes us. Whereas traditional Americans believe politics is a part of civics, and the personal is to be handled by an individual and their religion, the Left believes "the personal is political", or otherwise that politics is their religion. They do not honor distance, nor privacy, in their political evaluation of everything we do – much like a Tartuffe. Nothing is left to personal discretion, but welded into a web of rules and regulations, immense, vague and contradictory. Basically, to the Left, everybody is illegal. Just as in church, we're all sinners, and prosecution depends on obtaining and maintaining a state of grace with the Big Guy. My church will leave my personal space well enough alone, but the Left will not. Distancing myself from the Left is my current pressing need; probably every traditional American's pressing need.

But how?

Some ideas are to first not let the government know what you are doing. Assume a low profile, like peasants at the side of royal parade, stay under the radar. Pay cash. Move to some mountain aerie. Keep spying electronics out of your home. Have a disconnected computer for personal use. Stay off the grid. Be self-sustaining. Understand bartering and the black market. Move to a red state. Possess skills which are locally marketable (barterable). Don't speak out. Don't be the nail which stands up. Collect cornerstone literature in unedited, published versions stored in a back room within your home.

But whereas a lot of these distancing techniques make sense, they can also make you statistically more prominent. To Sauron's search algorithms, you are beginning to look like that nail sticking up. One of the problems of escaping the Left's punishments is that America traditionally has been a very good place for allowing people to pursue their personal happiness. As the Left turns this all upside down, the new ways of blending in also leaves out those same ways in which you used to make yourself happy! In short, become miserable or become conspicuous and vulnerable.

So where to cast my creative energies and lodge my hope in these times?

Gardening and husbandry would seem to be a safe practice, and also generate some good eating, even beauty. Knitting and home crafts are probably safe. Writing is only safe, probably if kept to oneself. We writers must all become Emily Dickensons – or perhaps Cervantes, beginning our great books while imprisoned. And then there are a lot of things around the home which could be fixed, which would please the wife. And that would please me. Hopefully, it will still be okay to have a dog. Socializing is bound to pose real risks, but so would being cast as unsocial or a 'loner'. Other people are a more sticky wicket than ever in this scenario.

Satisfied and happy might be too much to hope for – and could certainly mark someone as a radical. Undistinguished and fed (but not too well) could probably be realistic goals. (Trying to meet your nutritional needs – now there's a goal, and a useful area within which to expend one's energies.) I need to read more about North Korean daily life and life hacks.

The realm of fantasy could be a sure area of daily expansion.

Themes of violence and applied justice might fill my wee hours. Thinking of the many ways to kill with a paper clip or swizzle stick could probably fill a sleepless hour. Or deciding who to kill... Making lists! Surveillance? How to kill without getting caught? I'm awfully tall. This could work against me as I'm inherently remarkable. Nevertheless, though I've never killed anyone – I might be good at it!

It's pleasant to think so.

These are all ways to pass the time when I can't sleep. But what most holds my thoughts nowadays is this spell a multitude of our citizens seem under as if transformed overnight from normal citizens into the un-dead, or formed from out of the worst sort of impulses and envies into vast armies of raging Orcs shouting certainties, flying in the face of all common sense. Absolute lunacies, such as that healthy children should be removed from their families, fed chemicals and surgically altered to become Frankenstein duplicates of the opposite sex, or that money can be printed in unlimited amounts without creating raging inflation, or that people can be any sex they desire to be merely by thinking it so, or that we should become a re-segregated society, or that we are and have been in an imminent ecological collapse, a climate crisis apocalypse! ...for over the past forty years, or that Biden is a credible, even intelligible President, or that people should be denied their source of livelihood for disagreeing with the government, or poked with needles and given biologically reactive substances whether they want them or not. The list gets stranger everyday. But what I keep wondering is how this

all came about seemingly out of the blue. Victims suddenly saturated the legacy media, horrors out did one another day after day, and the young became mesmerized by a despair , wherein previously all boats were floating on a rising tide and it was morning in America!

I keep wondering if there isn't a reversing chant I could pen, or a Mountain of Doom to toss a golden ring into which would make the un-dead immediately pink up, walk and talk normally and return to their former lives, and the vast hoards of Orcs disintegrate before our eyes and dissolve back into the dirt. And we would all awake, as if from a dream.

And then this past Sunday, I decided, that since it is Sunday, I'm going to go with the glass is half-full scenario. To wit, I would really miss going back to a time without Microsoft Word, downloaded TV shows and movies, and all that is interesting on the internet. These things really make living in a small, out-of-the-way community very pleasant and intellectually bearable. And since I like understanding things much more than correcting them, our current political low-tide revelations are tremendously interesting. It's like a totally immersive spy show. Plus the weather hasn't changed! Mother Nature is still good. Climate change was a hoax.

Recently a Facebook friend, who likes to write op-ed e mails, wrote a long, detailed analysis of our current situation in an effort to elucidate the true driver of our current dystopia. Who's heading all this up? Whether, Soros, Gates, the WEF, CIA, NSA, Obama, Chinese, Russians, the EU, Islam, the Cartels... it's a longgggg list! It recently occurred to me that what we see might be just what we've got. That no one is in charge – very much like our President! That what we are experiencing is a mind numbing network of events, with each of the players being like the drifting tentacles of a Portuguese Man of War. Where none is in charge, but rather each reacting to a sea change – and we are all in the soup with them.