

## I AM BACK

### *With Nothing To Offer But A Band-Aid*

No, the book is not finished — but almost! It is going to be what a publishing friend from years ago would refer to as “one of Toby's quiet little books.” The working title is *Three Gifts For Spiritual Wayfarers: Courage, Faith, Doubt*. And it is going to be short, probably only about 10,000 words. I've had a lot of help in getting this far and I thought it would be good to take a breather before finishing it off. But that's not the main reason I'm putting it aside for a brief time.

This country is being ripped apart. And judging from my mail, quite a few of you are in deep pain. The events happening in the nation's capital are having powerful negative effects on the emotional well-being of many of you who form the important spiritual circle which surrounds us here at Starcross.

I really don't know if I can help, but I want to try.



10 years ago Thomas Frank (1965- ) wrote a book which more or less outlines what is happening to our country today. He entitled it *THE WRECKING CREW*:



*How Conservatives Ruined Government, Enriched Themselves, And Beggared The Nation.* If Frank were writing today I doubt that he would use the word “conservatives.” The people we knew as conservatives 10 years ago, Mitt Romney, the late John McCain, the Bush clan, etc. have pretty well been pushed out of the picture. Perhaps Frank would consider using a term like “the alt-right.” Full disclosure: when I was in college I was a Republican for one year, (I was dating a Republican). Otherwise I have generally been comfortable on the left-wing. I am registered as an Independent, generally vote Democratic, and sometimes Green.

Thomas Frank is a columnist for the Wall Street Journal, not generally thought of as a far-left publication!



The Constitution of the United States begins with the paragraph that states, among other things, that it and the government it outlines is “*to promote the general Welfare.*” So it is simple logic that if you prefer to promote your own welfare rather than the general welfare you just become part of “The Wrecking Crew” that sets out to destroy the government.

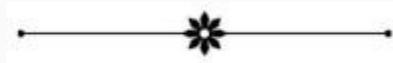
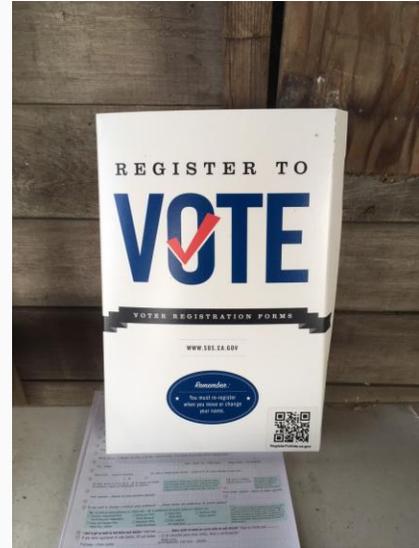
Our government is imperfect, even the Constitution is imperfect, but we haven't got anything better. Our first obligation is to get out and vote! Don't think it doesn't matter. Every person's vote matters. I have been encouraged that the young people around me are very committed to voting. That's different from a few years ago when so many refrained from engaging in a process they thought was too corrupt to support.

I know from the mail you send that many of you are working feverishly to get out the vote. What I'm about to say may strike you as odd. I want people to vote whether

they agree with me or not! One of the things we have lost in these past few years is the sense of being neighbors. I know many of the people who live around me probably have political views that are quite different than mine. But being neighbors comes first and politics comes later on. We can discuss differences while respecting the dignity of people who differ.

Joe Alioto, a famous mayor of San Francisco, once said that the political climate was formulated on the playground by how kids who disagreed with each other resolved their differences. Now Joe went to school where someone was monitoring that playground and making sure every disagreement ended with a handshake. We don't have that monitor on the playground we have set up in Washington, D.C. We could have better results by electing good and decent people who have more than their own interest in mind — here we are back at that “General Welfare” clause again.

So we vote. But the present situation is not going to get healed overnight. In the meantime people are suffering just by being near that political contagion. How do we get by in bad times?



The delightful writer Anne Lamott (1954 – ) uses the metaphor of a cocoon. I want to borrow that. She feels we are wrapped in all sorts of harmful layers and then comes the day when we poke a couple of small holes in the cocoon and the real us feels strength, pushes the harmful things away and flies into this magnificent universe.

The confirmation hearing of Brett Kavanaugh (1965 – ) and all the things that went with it put harmful layers around us. But it's very important that we realize it is only a small part of the existence that we can experience.



Remember the wonderful linked haiku of Cliff Edwards that was sent to you a few days ago? His wife wants to know why he hasn't left for work, as a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. He says he is watching something. He's watching the dog, who is watching the cats, who are watching two ants drinking from their water bowl. When Cliff got up from the breakfast table, he was in a much healthier state than those of us who had been watching the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings.

When I go up to the Chapel, I am surrounded by redwoods. I'm told they have a natural lifespan of 300 years, if we don't do anything to harm them. I can't get my arms around one of them and it is still in a preadolescent period. These trees are going to live cooperatively with each other. They are going to provide environments for all manner of plant life. They will gently shake millions of needles onto the ground. Right now a couple dozen quail are scratching among the needles to see what they can discover.

This is the sort of thing I see when I throw off the harmful cocoon. At a nearby fountain tiny birds are drinking and showering under the watchful eye of hovering parents. I see some of our interns go by with seeds that have fallen from sunflowers. These will be planted and more sunflowers will come to feed those little birds and their many descendents— bringing joy to all who see and hear them.

When night comes there are the stars, the eternal mystery and miracle of the universe which we cannot totally comprehend but where we feel at home. This is the sort of thing we experience when we throw off the harmful cocoon.

I know it is inadequate, but this is my spiritual Band-Aid for the hard times we are passing through right now.



As I have mentioned Anne Lamott, I would like to close with something she wrote about hope,

*It begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.*

Don't give up!

***Brother Toby***

