

# **the matter at hand**



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# **A Retired Policeman Talks About Suicides He's Seen.**

“I remember one lady, we found her in her bathtub, she cut her throat. That’s odd, for women, normally they take pills, they don’t like to disfigure themselves. But she knew what she was doing, cutting her throat in a full bath. Less messy that way. Autopsy said she was full of barbiturates. She was a nurse, that explained how she knew how to do it, but then we found out that she was pregnant, too. And to top it off, her brother was a priest.”

# Couldn't Take it Home

I went out deer hunting once with some buddies of mine. Now, I'm not a big fan of deer meat, but I went for the sport, I'm a pretty good shot. And I saw when I went over a small wooded hill a small lake amongst the trees, and right at the edge of the water was a deer. So here was my chance. I pulled out my shotgun, aimed, pulled the trigger. Direct hit. It was still moving, so I walked toward the deer. I hit the spinal cord, and the back half of the deer was paralyzed. The thing was dragging itself with its front two legs, trying to crawl away.

I knew it was in pain. I looked at the deer. I pulled out my .22 pistol and shot it in the head, and left it there. I couldn't take it home. My buddies asked me why I left it there. Everything felt wrong. I told them I didn't want anything to do with it. Leave it there. Leave it.

# for c ra

this is a man  
a thinking man

he wants to be condemned to hell  
for a change

he feels the plight of too many  
he is blamed for too much

these are the words  
of a man

remember this, my friends:  
this is a man  
a thinking man  
with feelings

this is his pain  
this is his strength

does he know  
that this is how  
he is supposed to feel?

he lives life so fully  
that it ages him

remember this, my friends:  
this is a man

# Golfing with George Eastman

I played a round of golf with  
George Eastman  
Now, George was going on,  
bragging about his game,  
and at the first hole  
my shot was pretty straight  
and his veered sharp to the right.  
And he started swearing  
and cussing, me and the  
other two guys thought he  
was going to pop a vein  
or throw a club at us. And  
every hole was the same:  
George wasn't playing well  
and with every shot he'd  
get more and more violent,  
more and more volatile.  
And finally, at the last hole,  
he lands his golf ball right  
into the water. And he stops.  
Perfectly calm. No jumping.  
No swearing. No throwing of  
of his golf clubs or stomping  
on the ground. George just  
shrugged his shoulders and  
walked toward the water. He  
dropped a new ball down. Not a  
sound. Maybe this was the  
one, we, thought, the one point  
when he realized how useless his  
anger was. And we watched. And  
George Eastman looked at the  
ball he dropped between his feet,  
and then just started stomping,  
and screaming, and waving  
his golf club above his head, even  
more violent than before, as  
if the poor golf ball did some-  
thing wrong. And back a the golf  
cart, the three of us, at a safe  
distance, stood there and laughed.

# helping men in public places

so it was new year's eve  
and we were standing on  
forty-second street and

the avenue of the americas  
we were a few blocks away  
but we had just the right

view of times square. and  
yes, there was freezing rain  
but i didn't really care, since

i was just in new york for  
a few days. it was 10:55, we  
still had a long time to wait

standing with i don't know  
how many thousands of other  
people, some of them were

climbing up the light poles,  
all of us pushing forward  
into the street, despite the

police officers on horseback  
rushing at us back toward  
the sidewalk. and our paper

bag fell apart in the rain, so  
i let the glass water bottle fall  
to the curb, and our friend told

us he needed to go to the  
bathroom real bad, you know,  
so i told him to go right here

in the street, no one will see  
him. but he didn't want to  
piss on someone's shoes, so

he asked if i had a bottle, so i  
picked up the water bottle from  
the curb, and when he finished

his job he closed up the bottle  
and put it back on the sidewalk.  
god, and you, too, getting on

the train after the ball dropped,  
more rain and a bottle of  
champagne later, saying you had

to go real bad, too, so i pulled  
an empty beer bottle from my  
coat pocket, you covered the train

window with your coat and i  
blocked your view from the aisle  
while you took care of the

matter at hand. i'm amazed that  
that bottle didn't tip over on the  
train floor during that hour

commute, our first of the new  
year, while i slept on your  
shoulder. and i'm amazed that

i ended one year and began  
another helping men i know,  
in public places, piss into bottles.

# headache

whenever i get a headache  
it's right behind my eyebrows  
and it's a dull, constant ache

so whenever i say i have a headache  
eugene takes my hand  
and uses acupressure:

he pushes his thumb  
right in the middle of my palm.  
the pain disappears almost

immediately. but eventually  
i have to tell him to stop  
pressing my hand, that my

hand now hurts. he lets go,  
and the headache, almost  
immediately, comes back.



# **i seem to know animals**

i seem to know animals. so here i am  
in the middle of a cafe and there's this  
dog here, it's the cafe owner's dog, i think,  
and he's just walking around trying to get  
some food from the tables and he stops and  
looks at the nachos on my table. and he  
looks at me. and i say, "oh, i know."  
and he looked at me for a second, and  
then he walked away.

# precinct fourteen

it was a long night for us, starting out  
at your apartment with your roommate's  
coworkers coming over and making

margaritas until two in the morning,  
but of course we then decided that the  
best thing to do would be to go out

and so off to the blue note we went,  
found some interesting people to talk  
to, closed the bar, i think that was the

first time i ever did that, closed a late-  
night bar, i mean, and at four-thirty you  
drove me home down milwaukee ave

and i know it angles, and you can see  
the traffic light for oncoming traffic  
as easily as you can see your own light,

but i'm sure the light was green, and not  
red like the cops said, when they pulled  
you over. you could have been in big

trouble that night, no insurance, no city  
registration sticker, a michigan driver's  
license when you'd lived in illinois for

over a year now, a cracked windshield,  
running a red light, probably intoxicated.  
so they brought us to the station at five a.m.,

and all they did was write you a ticket,  
and they gave me a business card, said if we  
had any problems to give them a call.

you drove me home, and the cops met  
us there, too, hitting on me again, and  
although we both agreed that the night

was a lot of fun, even with the involvement  
of the fourteenth precinct, i still believe  
that damn light wasn't even red.

# False Suicide

“A woman called the station once, said, ‘My daughter has been depressed lately, has been talking about killing herself. And she’s an early riser, and hasn’t returned any of me calls. Could you go over there? I’m afraid something terrible has happened.’ So we said we’d go there, and we got in the squad car and went to the woman’s house. All the doors were locked, and we started looking through the windows, and I saw her on the bed, stark naked, with her tongue sticking out, quite dead-looking. Now, this is kind of strange, because women usually commit suicide dressed well. In all my years I ain’t never seen a woman commit suicide naked. Well, me partner kicked the front door down with one kick, and we went back to the bedroom, and I grabbed her hand to see if rigamortis set in yet, if she was cold, if she was stiff. And when I grabbed her hand she jumped up and screamed, and then she saw another police officer and she started to calm down. And we said, ‘Your mother thought you might have killed yourself. She said you were an early riser.’ And she said, ‘Damn mother,’ under her breath.”

# Bring Her Back

I've seen her this way  
so many nights before:  
she's on the recliner  
during prime-time television  
and she just can't stay  
awake any longer  
and she's sound asleep  
and the television's blaring

and so many times  
I've tapped my mother  
on the shoulder  
to wake her, or  
I've raised my voice  
to bring her back

but this time, this time  
I had to kiss her on the cheek

my little way of telling her  
I loved her  
every day  
for the rest of my life

# Catching a Muscovy

One year, Doc Wiggins  
decided he wanted to shoot  
one of the Muscovy ducks  
and have it for Thanksgiving.

As far as ducks go, the  
Muscovies are pretty ugly -  
the males look something like  
turkeys, and in Southwest

Florida, in this heavily pop-  
ulated area, they are so  
used to people that they will  
walk up to you, expecting food.

Well, one year, bless his heart,  
Doc Wiggins decided he wanted  
to shoot one for Thanksgiving  
dinner, so I taught him how to

use my rifle and we went to a  
nearby lake. Then Doc started to  
worry. "What if my bullet ricochets  
off the water and hits something

else?" So he was in a bit of a  
panic, trying to figure out what  
to do. So I told him just to sit  
tight a minute, and sure enough,

a Muscovy walked right up to him  
and looked at him. So Doc looked  
at me, then the duck, and just  
picked it up and brought it home.

# all the loose ends

she bought her son enough clothes  
to keep him tied over for a while,  
made sure everything was in its place;

she went over to her parent's house  
when she knew they would be out of  
town for a few days, and only long

after she died did her parents come  
home and find her in the garage. the son  
missed a few days of school, and all

his teacher could think was that  
his mother bought her son some extra  
clothes; tied up all the loose ends.

# phone calls from brian tolle

I came home the other day to find three messages on my answering machine, each nearly two minutes long. They were all from my friend Brian Tolle, who lives in Indiana and is working on a film. Now, Brian is a friend of mine from high school, in fact, I asked him to go to prom with me as friends, but he turned me down, saying he wanted to save the experience of prom for someone he was dating. But that was eight years ago, I went to prom anyway, without him, but I still think it would have been more fun if he was my date and not Kevin Farrar.

Well I got home the other night and had these messages on my machine and they were all from Brian Tolle, and I listen to the first one:

and he says "I'm sorry I haven't called you in so long, and I hope you don't hate me because I love you, and I've moved, and that's my roommate you hear in the background, I don't think you met him before but he knows who you are and he hears your voice on my answering machine and he thinks you have a sexy voice"

and then he says "oh, I really hope you don't hate me because I didn't mean to not call, there's just a lot going on, and oh, I have a new email address so write to me, and I love you and I hope you're not mad and I might be coming up to visit in Chicago. Well, anyway, call me if you don't hate me, I love you"

and that was one of the messages, and then I listen to the second one:

and he says "hi, it's me again, I forgot to give you my new phone number, since I just moved, so here it is, and did I tell you I'm making a film? I'm finally doing it, I've scraped enough money together so I'm doing that in the beginning of March and did you get my note? You said you didn't before but I wanted to make sure. Well, call me"

and that was the second message, and then I listen to the last one:

and he says "hi, it's me again, and I just wanted to get back to you and



tell you that yes, I'd love to go to prom with you. I'll wear a tux and get a tie and cummerbund that matches your dress. Yes, I'll go to prom with you. Well, I guess that's about all. I hope you're not mad at me, because I love you, I really do, don't hate me, I'll talk to you soon"

And so I called him back and I told him, no, I don't hate you, I love you too, and we all have busy lives and I understand why you haven't called, I haven't called, either, so don't worry. Tell me about your film, I ask, and he says that he borrowed some money and saved some money from his last job and is borrowing equipment so he can do the filming.

"I have the production costs taken care of, but I have no idea where the post-production money is coming from."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know, maybe get some credit cards."

"Maybe there are some companies that could use a tax deduction and would be willing to help finance your film."

So we talk a bit more and I tell him that I wish I could help him out more, and he says that I have because I validate him and what he does in everything I say and that although he had no money he felt like finally he had control over his life. And that now he knows that no matter what he chooses to do with his life, and no matter what happens to him, that he has control over his life and he can handle anything. And I told him I was so glad he felt that way, because I think most people never get to feel that way once in their life. I was proud of him.

And then he asks if he could use a song of mine in his film, and I told him I would be honored, and he said, no, he'd be honored.

I guess it's just nice to know that I will be a part of such an important film.

# Child Molesters and the Government: Big Brother is Watching

I was listening to the radio the other night - talk radio (it keeps me awake when I have to drive a long distance during the night). It keeps me awake, usually because there's enough there to get me so angry that I actually want to yell back at the radio.

Honestly, I actually once heard someone call in and say it was their constitutional right to food, that the government had to give them food if they didn't get it themselves (tell me where in the Constitution does it say that citizens of the United States of America have the inalienable right to "life, liberty and blocks of cheese"). Last time I checked, The Pursuit of Happiness meant that you have the ability to do what you need to in order to acquire the things you need, such as food, not that the government has a responsibility to feed you.

So anyway, I was listening to the radio, and the discussion on this particular evening was about child molesters. Doctors and other experts has pretty much agreed that they are incurable, that castration doesn't stop their urges to hurt children, because it is a power struggle more than a sexual venting. So the question arose: should people living within a community where a child molestor is going to move into be notified that this person was convicted of molesting children?

A similar story arose after a convicted rapist abducted and killed a neighborhood child after he was released from prison and "started anew." The neighborhood was in an outrage; if they knew this man was a rapist, they said, they would have been more protective of their children.

So the question going over the air waves on this particular night was whether or not it was right to notify people of the acts you've been convicted of in the past.

People were talking about the heinousness of these crimes, how these child molesters should be killed, etc. - some also brought up the fact that the

information about these people is already on public record - the only thing this law would be doing is informing people about the child-molesting history of such-and-such, instead of making individuals search out this information for themselves, which they would undoubtedly never get around to.

But first of all, it is not the role of our government to intervene with every aspect of our lives. The government is not supposed to protect “society.” As the closest thing to a capitalist society on this planet, “society” is made up a a group if individuals, and the government should work for the individual. Currently, any individual has the right to find out information about a person (this kind of falls into that “pursuit of happiness” thing), but we should not expect the government to hand it to us on a silver platter.

If a potential law does not apply in all situations, it is not a good law. So let’s apply this idea to other crimes: if you move into a new neighborhood, should all you new neighbors know that you shoplifted when you were nineteen? I don’t think so - all it will produce are negative effects.

People should be more responsible for themselves instead of asking the government to help them out more, then get angry when the gvernment gets out of control and continually hies your taxes to support the massive network of laws created on whims such as this one.

Furthermore, If this law went into effect for molesters already in prison, they could be in essence receiving two separate sentences at two separate times for a crime they were tried for once. That goes against everything this country was founded on. If they need a greater sentence, give it to them when they are sentenced.

# The Christian Coalition & the Religious Right

Because of the religious ties the Christian Coalition has with the republican party, the platform in American conservative politics - particularly when it comes to life-and-death decisions - is riddled with oxymorons and philosophical fallacies.

Not that there are not discrepancies with the theories with the democratic party, but the liberal party - and leftism in general - though nonsensical to some, is at least consistent with its views. The involvement of the morals of Christianity in the conservative party are what give the republican platform the additional inconsistencies.

For instance, the Christian Coalition - and Christianity in general - is supposed to take the stance that all life is sacred, that no one has the right to take a life except for Christ. Hence the pro-life movement becoming a primary political issue. However, the republican party - supported by the Christian Coalition - also is in favor of the death penalty.

Now, I personally can see the reason for an argument on the issue of abortion (though I do not see the reason for the intensity of the debate politically when it is not a political issue, but a philosophical one; besides, there are many other political issues that have to be taken care of that are neglected). People can argue that the rights of a woman are infringed upon; people can say that a fetus is not a viable human being (while others can argue the opposite). However, there is pretty much no argument that a prisoner - a person convicted of a crime in the United States - is in fact a viable human being. I would think that it would follow (with the logic of Christianity) that that life - the life of the prisoner, the person who committed whatever crime our judicial system found them guilty of - is just as viable a life as that of an unborn fetus. It would also follow that since Christians cannot (under their own code of ethics) be the ones to decide who lives and who dies, only Christ can, they cannot give the government or the judicial system the right to decide who can die.

Yet this is the stance the republican party as a whole, which is backed by the Christian Coalition. This scenario also applies to the government's ability to call adraft and declare a war on another country. A Christian cannot

claim allegiance to an organization or a government (according to their doctrines) that commands them to go against their religious codes. A Christian under no circumstances is able (according to the New Testament) to kill another person - even if they have been commanded to do so by another person, organization or government. Yet many people that volunteer for duty with any one of the branches of America's Armed Forces (and are not merely drafted and forced to go) are Christians, and see no problem with following orders to kill someone else. Even if a Christian was drafted, they should, according to their beliefs, peacefully protest and refuse to go into battle. If that required leaving the country, that should be done, because a Christian's allegiance to their country is less important than their allegiance to their God. This reasoning would be the only line of action that would be in accordance with their beliefs.

# Children Flying Airplanes and More Government Red Tape

I was watching the news a few months ago, and I found another story that I couldn't help but question. If you watched the news in the beginning of April I'm sure you caught the story.

The story was about a little girl, a very smart little girl, a seven-year-old girl named Jessica.

She was a darling little girl; she was taught by her mother and was very head-strong and intelligent. She went to a farm to learn how to ride horses and instead learned every aspect of taking care of the farm. A driven girl indeed.

Then she decided that at seven she wanted to learn how to fly. It was her own decision; she wasn't pressured by the parents (this is at least what we assume). The parents concented to giving her lessons.

She could become a pilot after taking lessons and getting 70 or so hours of in-air flight training.

During her training there would be an instructor in the cockpit with her, and she/he would have an identical set of controls so they could take over if there was ever a problem.

Well, Jessica thought that if she was going to learn how to fly at such an early age, she may as well break a world record by doing so, so she decided that she would like to travel around the country on her plane during her training. She received approval from the city council, from her family, from her instructor. And off they went.

The first leg of their trip was a success. From the west coast they landed in Cheyenne, Wyoming. It was raining, and conditions got worse. They decided to take off again, but within two minutes of taking off, Jessica and her instructor crashed and died.

Now, some of the details of this story cannot be verified. The parents say this was her decision, that they didn't pressure her. For our augument, let's say they didn't, and this was all her own desire. In fact, the mother on the news said she asked Jessica what would happen if she crashed in the plane and died, and Jessica responded that her spirit would be in the plane.

We can't be sure if the instructor took over the controls, or when he did so, and we don't know why they took off in hazardous conditions.

It's a very sad story, and it seems as if something should have been done so that this tragedy and loss of life was avoided.

But the next day I was watching the news, and one of the things they said was that there is now a plan to introduce into legislation a bill that would make it illegal for children to learn how to fly a plane. We got to hear activists that believed that the child must have been put under great emotional pressure to learn how to fly. We got to hear other children, some as young as eight, that know how to fly. Those children didn't believe that should be legislation passed, but most everyone else did.

So this is my question: do we need to enact a law everytime a tragedy happens in our country?

After the Oklahoma bombing, anti-terrorist bills were all the rage. We've heard about a law to notify a community about a sex-offender who served their sentence moving into their neighborhood. We see more laws to restrict airplane pilots.

Some people argue that the law to restrict child pilots is not for the safety of the pilot, but for the safety of the people the child pilot could possibly injure. But laws in a capitalistic society are designed to protect us from the force of others, not from the accidents that we may run into in going about our day-to-day business. When we decide to be a part of this society, we agree to take on the risks of interacting with public - we understand that there is a chance we may get hit by a car when crossing the street, we understand that accidents happen.

Have we finally relinquished the responsibility to governing ourselves to the whims of a select group? This country needs less laws, not more. The government was set up to provide basic protection from other, not ourselves. Let's keep it that way.

# the matter at hand



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