

Guest editorial

Want jobs? Vote in candidates willing to pay for clean water

By James Ehlers

With election day fast approaching, we are certain to hear more about “jobs,” “growing economic opportunity” and “building a stronger economy” from candidates for office at all levels. As we should. There is only one problem. How do we attract and retain employers, and with them jobs, if we do not invest in drinking water and wastewater treatment? Short answer: We don’t.

It is fundamentally impossible for Vermont to create and retain the jobs as virtually every single candidate running for office supposedly is pledging to do without the most basic of human needs: clean water. Yet, practically none of them even mention the current crisis facing Vermont communities — inadequate water and wastewater infrastructure. One major party candidate for governor makes no mention of it at all on his website. How do we address and correct a problem we don’t even acknowledge? Of course, we don’t.

Water is a special interest to all of us, Republicans, Democrats, Progressives and independents alike. Clean water is even needed for a tea party. We don’t, we can’t, live healthy lives without access to safe drinking water and recreational waters. It is also of special interest to the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, so much so that a major portion of its 2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy report was devoted to the issue.

Why then are the candidates seeking to represent us so silent and or blind to the need? The reason is that we, the people, don’t hold them to account. Or at least we have not in previous elections. This we can change.

The Agency of Commerce states clearly in the 2020 report: “New building and economic growth will depend on adequate water and sewer capacity, which is limited in many areas.” Noting it is “limited in many areas” is an understatement. Such is the reality for 200 of the 251 communities in our state. If current attitudes prevail, many of these communities will be left behind because the state strategy has been to focus job growth in the remaining communities.

Is your community one of the fortunate ones or one slated to be abandoned? That is a question best answered by your city council or select board. Have they read the 2020 report? In listing “Challenges for the Vermont Economy,” the agency spells it out clearly: “Aging infrastructure, in particular wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, are making it increasingly difficult to build or expand,” noting later in the report, “Tackling these issues is not easy, but is critical to Vermont’s future.”

The agency concludes, “Inadequate, aging and failing wastewater and stormwater infrastructure is the principal barrier to reaching a host of state and local goals, from building more housing for all income levels, to revitalizing communities, to protecting the environment. For Vermont communities to thrive and grow, this issue must be addressed,” acknowledging, “Such limitations can lead to locating new business outside of villages and town centers, consuming more land, harming natural resources, and eroding the character and centrality of villages and town centers.”

Perhaps most honest but alarming are the agency’s observations in the area of drinking water challenges.

- Continuing and escalating maintenance costs make the long-term viability of drinking water supplies problematic.
- Small communities do not have a publicly supplied water system, and each resident and business relies on a private, often less reliable, water supply, the lack of which inhibits new residential or business activity.

The complications around drinking water are only further complicated by quality issues, the growing issue of nutrient pollution, and the associated cyanobacteria and its related neuro and liver toxin issues chief among them. University of Vermont researchers and others found cyanotoxins in the raw and finished drinking water samples of Lake Champlain water supplies. Little to nothing has been done to address this, despite urgings dating back to 2002. The Vermont Department of Health notes that 23 public drinking water supplies are contaminated with the agricultural pesticide, atrazine — a chemical banned years ago in the European Union.

In the latest report to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation notes 825 drinking water violations for contaminants as far ranging as radioactive isotopes to arsenic and coliform to nitrates. And there are thousands more for which we do not even test.

The spate of sewage dumps from antiquated and or inadequate municipal systems, 133 to date, and the associated public-health risk should be enough to focus the attention of would-be lawmakers and governors. If not that, then in a state where more than five percent of gross domestic product and nine percent of our general fund are attributable to tourism, the escalating beach closure crisis should be.

The Agency of Commerce summarizes it well: “Indeed, without addressing the many issues surrounding water quality, runoff and availability, construction and growth in Vermont will be limited and our natural resources — so key to our brand and the industries such as tourism which rely on clean water and lakes — will be negatively affected.”

Want jobs? Then the picture is as clear as clean water. We must elect candidates who have a plan for restoring and protecting swimmable, drinkable, fishable waters if we also desire a thriving economy. Any candidate who promises jobs without a plan to invest in a clean water economy is stuck in the mud, and depending on their district, quite literally so. If our elected officials remain mired in muddy waters, we will remain there with them, and we only have our own reflection in the blue-green scum to point at.

James Ehlers is executive director of Lake Champlain International and a director of Rights & Democracy.



On board

PROTESTORS POSITION THEMSELVES on an excavator on a Vermont Gas Systems pipeline construction site in New Haven Tuesday. For more photos and a full story, see page 3A.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Looking at 9/11 from atop the Alhambra

When our oldest daughter was just a baby, we lived for a time in Sevilla, Spain.

At the south end of our postage stamp-size apartment was a single window. And just outside that window and across the street were the walls of the Alcazar, a Moorish palace whose oldest walls date to the 9th century.

When we opened that window, we could hear the world passing by. Literally, the world, as crowds of tourists who had come to visit the Alcazar strolled by. Fast-talking tour guides and chattering tour groups speaking French, German, Japanese (our baby daughter’s favorite) would pass by that window in wave after wave of sound, often punctuated by the percussive strumming of a Flamenco-style guitarist, busking for a few euros.

Built and rebuilt in successive centuries, the Alcazar is one of a series of monuments in Andalusia that remind us of Spain’s Moorish past. And the Alcazar itself isn’t just Moorish but mudejar, a kind of architecture that looks Islamic but was built by Christian rulers who imitated the intricate and graceful art and architecture of Spain’s Islamic civilization as they made the Iberian peninsula safe for the One True Faith of Catholicism.

During our time in Spain we visited the Alcazar more than once. And we went further afield to other Moorish sites, most notably the magnificent Alhambra in Granada, an expansive complex of buildings, built atop a hill, where you can still wander through the extensive palaces, pleasure grounds and gardens, past the fountains and look up at the intricately decorated interiors of this fabulous palace city built in the 1300s.

Having grown up fundamentalist in Oklahoma, I felt

that I really got Spain: Just like my red dirt Okie ancestral stomping grounds, Spain has a lot of Jesus, a lot of blood (of the Lamb, that is), and a lot of pork. I loved the orange trees everywhere. I loved the sound of flamenco. I loved the Holy Week processions 24/7. I loved that we could go downtown to the Corte Inglés department store and buy real American Sugar Smacks cereal, which I ate by the boxful and which still, oddly, remind me of that time.

But among the many things that fascinated me most was uncovering a cul-de-sac of history I had never before known. From the middle of the eighth century until 1492, much of Spain was under Islamic rule.

And in that place, in that time, the Islamic kingdom of Al-Andalus was a place of tolerance — unlike anywhere else in Europe — where Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived side by side, Christians and Jews protected as People of the Book by Al-Andalus’s dynamic Golden Age in which art, literature and science flourished.

So when my husband, two teenage daughters and I took a long-planned-for trip to Europe this summer, we decided to take our daughters to see the greatest of all monuments from Al-Andalus, the Alhambra. But we didn’t go just because it’s a UNESCO World Heritage site or because it’s one of the most visited places in Spain or even just because it’s beautiful.

My 17-year-old doesn’t remember a time when we were not at war (declared or undeclared, call it what you will). And our extended conflict in the Middle East has spanned

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Clippings

By Gaen Murphree



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(See Clippings, Page 5A)

Aging appliance applying the heat

Our dishwasher has been acting up lately. One day, it works fine. The next day, about halfway through doing whatever it does (all the while making a sound like a 737 taking off), it goes silent, offering nothing by way of explanation beyond the “clean” light flashing endlessly off and on.

I know nothing about dishwashers, but I do know about the Internet. And the Internet said the flashing light means the dishwasher thinks the water isn’t hot enough. So it quits.

The water is plenty hot. The dishwasher is being a diva.

The Internet also told me that by pressing several of the buttons on the display panel in a certain order at a certain speed while also shouting “Expelliarmus!” I could reset the hot water sensor and trick the washer into starting from scratch.

Which I did.

And which I have continued to do every other load or so, for several months, whenever the washer stamps its foot and says, “I don’t care if the water is hot, it doesn’t feel hot to me.” What a whiner.

If you’ve ever had an appliance go on the blink, you know there’s a standard procedure to follow:

1. **Fix it yourself.** I had already established through my years of mechanical training (well, minutes of online searching, anyway) that my dishwasher was having computer issues. I could reset the computer, but I couldn’t prevent the error from recurring. So I tried the next logical step.

2. **Wait and see if the appliance fixes itself.** I love this approach. I always hold out hope that a machine, given

time, will heal on its own. While this didn’t pan out with our defunct toaster or our spontaneously combusting microwave, I suspected that the dishwasher was just going through a phase. Most people by this point would have moved on to step three.

3. **Call a repairman.** Actually, I did this — not because I lacked faith in the dishwasher’s odds of recovery, but because in the meantime, my oven had stopped heating up. That’s the oven’s only job, really, and I count on it. A working dishwasher is a mere convenience; I need a working oven.

While the repairman was here to fix the oven, he took a look at the dishwasher. But he couldn’t replicate the error. The dishwasher, in an enthusiastic but, frankly, transparent attempt to discredit me, showed off by washing, rinsing and practically turning cartwheels for the repairman’s enjoyment. Luckily, he had seen this kind of thing before and wasn’t fooled.

Which brings us to what should have been the final step.

4. **Have the problem fixed.** It sounds obvious. But it wasn’t that simple. In our case, it came down to numbers; specifically, 10 and 200. The dishwasher is more than 10 years old. The cost of a new temperature sensor is over \$200. Did we want to put hundreds of dollars into an appliance that could drop dead at any time?

“Let’s just get a new dishwasher,” my husband said. A shiny new appliance? Yes, please. I mean, why put \$200-plus into a lame-duck dishwasher when we could just buy a new one for a little bit more money?

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Letters to the Editor

Senator merits her fifth term

We have been very fortunate over the last eight years to have Senator Claire Ayer representing us in the State Senate. In her four terms, Senator Ayer has been an effective advocate for all of us, and on both health care and fiscal issues, Senator Ayer has been a legislative leader. Chairing the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, she has championed health care reforms — always with an eye to making health care more accessible and affordable for the public.

As a member of the Vermont Child Poverty Council, she has worked diligently to protect the most vulnerable among us. And, as a leading member of both Senate Finance and the Joint Fiscal Committee she has always kept her eye on the public’s resources to ensure that they are used wisely and not wasted.

We should support Senator Ayer in her bid for a fifth term in the State Senate this November. Our county is very lucky to be represented by such an effective, compassionate and dedicated legislative leader!

Ellen Oxfeld
Middlebury

Bank settled for less with paint

Such a disappointment arriving at the National Bank of Middlebury drive-up window today discovering that the recent uplifting spectacular recent paint scheme was now gone! Apparently some people complained about the new colors and suddenly it was painted all over again in the present non-feel-good scheme.

Wish those who did enjoy that spectacular paint scheme had an opportunity to register and compliment the bank about it. Surely that would have out-numbered the complainers. Too bad that a few can alter what the majority seems to be pleased about.

P.S. — Sent this same message to the National Bank of Middlebury.

B. Landon
New Haven

Bristol rep shone in first two years

In 2014, the voters of Bristol, Lincoln, Monkton and Starksboro elected an outstanding community leader, Fred Baser, to represent them in Montpelier. I am writing to urge them to re-elect him.

Fred has an impressive record of accomplishment in his first two years in Montpelier. He picked right up on the workings of Vermont state government. He listened, worked hard, asked a lot of questions and used good common sense as he navigated the many bills that went through his committee and onto the floor of the House.

Fred gets back to constituents promptly to answer their questions and help them with their problems. He’s well-known for working collaboratively across the political aisle to develop bills in the Commerce and Economic Development Committee.

This year, Fred sponsored a significant bill to create more housing for middle income Vermonters. The measure would also have helped lower the cost of existing housing. The lack of affordable housing is a real problem in many parts of the state, including Addison County.

For a first term lawmaker to advance a major bill, which had tri-partisan support, was quite an achievement. Unfortunately the Legislature ran out of money to fund it in the eleventh hour, but Fred is planning to push the measure again next year.

We need experienced, independent thinkers in the legislature, people who are in touch with the real needs of Vermonters. Fred fits the bill perfectly. His temperament, intelligence and experience make him a true leader. Re-elect Fred Baser in November.

Jim Douglas
Middlebury

Letters to the editor

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Spinoza: Examining the powers and limits of God and Nature

Editor's note: This is the fifth in a series of essays on Dutch philosopher Benedict Spinoza.

During his lifetime, Spinoza was vilified as an atheist. A century and a half later, he was celebrated as someone whose thought is the supreme expression of theism, as a "God intoxicated" thinker. Which is true?

To begin with, we should note that Spinoza equated God and Nature. In doing this, was it his intention to exalt Nature or to diminish God?

Perhaps he intended something of both. He exalted nature by showing that there is nothing beyond it, neither realm nor being, nor heaven, nor spirits; there is no supernatural power.

He exalted God by equating God with the only thing that could truly be said to exist. Hence, Nature or God is "a being absolutely infinite," encompassing everything, "a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, each one of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence."

What does this mean?

Here's an analogy. Suppose you're given the task of explaining music, what it is. You might begin by surveying all the variety of things that could be labeled musical, and if your imagination is rich and your mind open, it will gather up a great variety of musical things, or artful variations of sound — according to genre: classical, country, religious, secular, ragtime, rock (punk or new wave), hip-hop, blues; or varieties of performance: instrumental or vocal, solo, combo, orchestral, and more. And you will keep going until you are satisfied that you have exhausted every imaginable kind of music, and every sort of musical event, and every imaginable instance of both. Nothing must be left out, for your task is to explain what music is.

Next consider that there must be something in all this that makes every member of this totality musical. So you sift through the collection searching for recurring qualities or attributes such as rhythm, tempo, harmony, melody, dynamics, tone, color, texture, which on reflection seem to be essential — that is, their presence or absence makes a difference as to whether a thing should be

called musical or not, and therefore each in its own way is an expression of what music is. All the varieties of music, every musical event must have some of these qualities, otherwise they would fail to count as instances of music.

However the totality, music itself, must possess these attributes absolutely and without limit or qualification, otherwise it would not be the totality of everything musical, something else could rival it, something musical beyond music.

If this is carefully done, then not only every song or symphony, but every particular musical performance of it and all the rehearsals leading up to it, every variation on a theme, or whistled tune, including "whistling Dixie," may be said to belong to the totality — music. They inhere in it, and any true explanation of one and all of them involves showing that each is an expres-

sion of music through its essential attributes. It requires only one small step to conclude that "music" is the only musical thing, the only musical substance (remember Aristotle's term for a thing that exists in its own right separate and apart), all other things deemed musical are merely instances of it, musical events or modes, that is modifications or variations of the thing itself (music).

This is the way Spinoza imagined Nature, whose very idea he went in search of. And by Nature, he imagined the totality of all there is.

Nature is the only substance, the only thing that exists separate and apart; it depends on nothing else either for its existence, nor must we rely on something else to understand it — it is conceived through itself, whereas all other things are conceived through it, because they are parts of nature. Thus he diminished God — the God of traditional theism — by denying that there is any realm beyond or above Nature for this God to reside in, or any power beyond Nature's power, or any universal rule beyond the regularities of Nature. He defined freedom as the capacity of a thing to exist according to the necessity of its nature, and he equated God's nature with Nature's laws, which govern everything.

As he diminished God, so he exalted Nature, by representing it as a

thing self-sufficient, complete, eternal, and infinite. Thus, he denied the divine creation of the world — for how could God create something that had no beginning, and with what power, for all creative power resides in Nature? He also denied that Nature has any purpose or Good other than achieving its own, self-sufficient, unsurpassable totality. Nature's only purpose is to produce. On this he echoes Lucretius. And, like Lucretius, he considered it a mere prejudice to suppose that God or Nature "made all things for mankind, and created mankind that he might worship God."

To summarize: Spinoza denied key articles of the theistic tradition: that God is a separate being, unique, transcendent, exalted, the author of Nature, its provider, governor, and absolute sovereign, free to do whatever he pleases; that whatever exists does solely by God's pleasure and decree and for no other reason. Does this make him an atheist? If judged according to prevailing orthodoxy, yes.

However, Spinoza accepted without qualification that God is an independent being, self-caused, eternal, and infinite, and these are properties traditionally ascribed to God. He also believed that the knowledge of God "feeds the mind with a joy entirely exempt from sadness," and he did not make this claim idly, for, as we shall see in subsequent essays, his system of ethics depends upon it.

The effect of knowing God or Nature is that the mind becomes free from anxiety, all dread is dispelled, a quiet joy descends upon it, and the gentle passions of our nature prevail, so that reason is restored and enabled to judge things impartially. But these benefits accrue only when we recognize that God and Nature are the same, and only when, in the light of this, we acknowledge the character and limits of our own existence.

This saving knowledge of God or Nature is not a momentary thought. Spinoza describes it as "intellectual love," which is not a stormy passion but reason fully engaged with the sum of reality. He also described it as "ecstatic," an individual mind standing outside of itself (which is what the term means), gaining a vantage place outside of itself. It could also be called "eccentric," or "off-center," a place of knowing, where the parochial self is not the center of things, where the mind is drawn out of its particular surroundings and contemplates the universe from "the standpoint of eternity."

Raymond

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I'll tell you why: because it turns out new ones cost significantly more than \$200. The top-rated models, in fact, come in at \$800 or more. (For \$800, I expect a dishwasher to load itself.)

Unable to decide, I've added one additional step.

5. **Hem and haw.** Fix the old, or buy new? I don't want to sink money into an item that might pack it in

tomorrow. But replacing it would leave a huge hole in our budget and, by extension, my tightwad heart.

So for now, the dishwasher continues to goof off every other day, and I find myself regularly pressing elaborate combinations of buttons and yelling incantations to get the thing back on track. My friends have mentioned, in concerned tones, that this is not a normal way to live.

Maybe not, but it's something to

pass the time while I'm hemming, not to mention hawing. I'll probably keep doing it until the dishwasher fails altogether or a self-loading model comes on the market and justifies its price tag.

And if neither of those happens, fine. If, in 20 or 25 years we downsize to a smaller place, we'll simply leave the old dishwasher behind.

Problem solved.

Clippings

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my younger daughter's entire lifetime.

At a time in our country's history in which the word "Muslim" immediately conjures up for all too many of us the word "terrorist," we wanted to teach our children something different. We wanted to show them something from the time when Muslim-ruled Spain was, as New York University professor Maria Rosa Menocal calls it in her book of the same name, "The Ornament of the World," an all-too-rare example of different peoples living together, fruitfully, in peace.

We took our daughters to the Alhambra so that they could see the beauty and vitality that came out of the best of Islam's 800 or so years of rule in Spain — in the same way that we took them to the Holocaust Memorial museum in Paris to contemplate what can happen when seemingly good people and seemingly advanced civilizations commit the unthinkable.

This past Sunday being 9/11, let me now say the obvious that must be said.

Those attacks and subsequent attacks elsewhere in recent years are the barbaric acts of violent extremists and should be condemned. Period.

But — and from here on out I will likely offend at least someone with every word I write — having grieved the tragedy of 9/11, having expressed outrage at barbaric acts of terrorism, can we also now reflect on how to best move forward at home and in the world? Can we ask difficult questions about our own motivations and actions?

In reading Malala Yousafzai's autobiography about growing up in Pakistan and speaking out for girls' education before being shot by the Taliban, she wondered from her then-teenage perspective why America sent drones and bombs instead of books and schools. For anyone reading "I Am Malala" it is chilling to observe how the Pakistani Taliban gathered force and followers as the drones and bombs escalated in nearby Afghanistan and in the Pakistani border area.

In her sweeping and masterful examination of religion and violence, "Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence," theologian and historian Karen Armstrong reminds the reader that Osama bin Laden was among the "freedom fighters" that Reagan backed to combat the Evil Empire that was the former USSR. A Cold War conflict, played out in a faraway land contributed its own small part to the toppling of the Twin Towers.

Armstrong also notes that earlier still in the 20th century, the United States and other Western powers were all-too-happy to support the brutal regime of the Shah of Iran because it helped them extend their hegemony in the region, even going so far as to topple genuine democratic leadership at critical moments.

Armstrong also makes the convincing case that not only do Muslims worldwide reject the extremist violence of IS, al-Qaida and the like, they want no more to be identified with it than most white, North American Christians want to be identified with the KKK.

Indeed Armstrong points to numerous in-depth analyses showing that many of the most violent and barbaric acts of terrorism aren't truly rooted in Islam at all, but in a twisted ignorance or a perverted version of the religion. Writes Armstrong, "Many of the Muslims convicted for terrorist activities since 2001 have a woefully inadequate

knowledge of Islam ... two wannabe jihadis who left the UK for Syria in May 2014 ordered 'Islam for Dummies' from Amazon."

Of the Charlie Hebdo attackers, Armstrong notes that none were "traditionally devout: all had criminal records, and until he was radicalized by the Abu Ghraib photographs, [one of the Charlie Hebdo attackers] could not distinguish Islam from Catholicism."

In Malala's story, many of the young boys orphaned by war were welcomed into religious schools run by hardliners, who deliberately raised a generation of young men to hate the West and oppress their own people with a twisted version of Islam.

Where Armstrong's analysis gets a little tougher to face up to is in her lengthy analysis of how much of the current violence coming out of extremist groups is about history and politics and economics, out of the West's own past and current exploitations of once-colonial lands.

None of this is particularly comforting. It's certainly not an easy sound bite. Who wants to hear that "our policies have helped to create widespread rage and frustration, and in the West we bear some responsibility for the suffering in the Muslim world that Bin Laden was able to exploit"?

It's tough to think about history and politics and economics in far-off lands. It's prickly and unpleasant to unpack how our current or past actions might in any way, small or large, have or might be contributing to actions we find rightly repugnant. And it's easier to label entire groups as The Enemy, and make an uneasily gray world look black and white.

But we remain ignorant at our own peril.

Being a former nun and world class explainer of religion, Armstrong brings her discussion back to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel and Cain's question after he killed his brother: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

She gives the example of Mamana Bibi, a 65-year-old midwife, married to a retired schoolteacher, who was blown apart by a U.S. drone while picking vegetables alongside her nine grandchildren.

"We are now living in such an interconnected world that we are all implicated in one another's history and one another's tragedies," says Armstrong. "As we — quite rightly — condemn those terrorists who kill innocent people, we also have to find a way to acknowledge our relationship with and responsibility for ... the hundreds

of thousands of civilians who have died or been mutilated in our modern wars simply because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time."

So on a 104-degree day in late July this summer, we snagged four tickets to the Alhambra. We walked through its gardens and palaces, fanning ourselves with our Alhambra maps. We walked through its gracefully curving doorways. We gawked at its thousands — who can even count — of intricately decorated tiles in geometrical patterns, and at the name of Allah, written thousands of times in flowing script. We tried to imagine how life might have been lived here over 500 and more years ago.

Then we snagged four more tickets and came back for the night tour and watched the moon glimmer and flicker in the long reflecting pool of the Nasrid Palace. Watching the moon float on the dark water, I thought back to the end of kingdom of Granada, Islam's last stronghold in Spain.

Granada fell in January of 1492. That same year, on Aug. 3, Columbus set off for the Orient and instead discovered a New World. But on Aug. 2, 1492, another group fled Spain with heavy hearts.

Within months of toppling the last Muslim kingdom in Spain, the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews — who were forced to convert or leave. Not too long after, Spain's Muslims were given the same impossible choice: conversion or exile. Persecution of those who remained soon followed.

Spain struck it rich in the New World. It gained new lands, enslaved many people, and brought back untold gold and riches. But at home it developed a kind of a siege mentality. As the Inquisition pursued its never-ending work of rooting out crypto-Jews, crypto-Muslims and heretics of all stripes, the vibrancy, tolerance and accompanying advances in arts, technology and science of Al-Andalus became things of the past.

So what about us, on Sep. 15, 2016? What about us, four days after 9/11 rolls around?

No one country or faith or people or civilization has the market on good or evil. We have our history of democracy and decency ... and we have our Abu Ghraib. But history teaches us that societies that adopt a siege mentality, that mark all one group as good or bad, that label entire faiths as enemies, that turn their back on the "better angels" as Lincoln put it, of their natures pay dearly and lose the best of what they are.

Covered Bridge

A black skeleton spanning across Otter Creek,
Its former self gone,
In a blaze of fire encompassing its entire span.
Gone in an instant.
All that is left is that black skeleton.
And memories in all the people who crossed the bridge,
By car, truck, foot or bicycle,
Either daily or every now and then.

On its eastern side the road cut a straight line across the farm fields straight onto the bridge.

Sometimes the fields were full of water as the creek overflowed.

A haven for wild ducks and birds.

Once in a while the farmer got in a crop of hay or maybe some corn.

Never knew from year to year what those fields would hold.

At the farthest end near the railroad track the fields often had cows grazing.

On the western end of the bridge there was a slight curve in the road as it came off the bridge.

One had to always be careful either coming or going to make sure there wasn't another car entering or exiting.

Then you were once again in a straight line down through the middle of the swamp.

The swamp too was ever changing down through the seasons just like the farm fields.

In the summer it was often like going through a tunnel

with the canopy of trees reaching across the road.

In the winter it was a wonderland when snow and water and ice did its magic,

As the snow came down, the water rising up and down freezing and thawing leaving ice tables clinging to the trees.

I wondered if winter fairies ate at those tables.

Spring often caused flooding over the road.

Fun to ride through the water before it got so deep the road had to be closed.

Fall of course brought color and maybe more flooding — one never knew.

It was a bridge to be shared with family and friends.

How many times I stopped with grandkids and friends to walk across the bridge.

How many pictures taken.

It was such a beautiful stretch of road with the bridge right in the middle taking you across the creek into two very different pieces of land, one the farm one the swamp.

There was just some type of magic going through the old wooden bridge and coming out into the farm land or the swamp land.

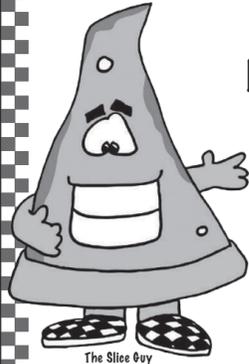
It almost always just took my breath away.

It's gone now.

A black skeleton with only memories within our grasp.

The End

Frances Stone
Orwell



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