

A forum to encourage independent thinking

TheThinkClub

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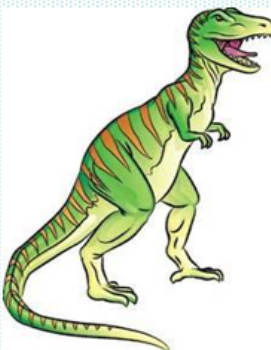
Published Quarterly



**It's the Hair
Stupid!**



**Not My Father's
Dinosaur**



**Why Did Chicken
Cross the road?**



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Editorial

Disable the Label by Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"

We have a tendency to label people just because they are not like us. This social malady seems to be wide spread and precariously expansive during the present election cycle. Folks always try to put a label on anyone who utters or pens something. I am a victim of this social practice.

Labeling is used to categorize people and ideas with linguistic wrath. This



NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI (1469 – 1527)

**THE ENDS
JUSTIFIES
THE
MEANS**

defies
critical

thinking. We seem to hold views on every social issue with harsh rigidity. For example, arguing that the white cops are not the only ones involved in recent shootings may be viewed as a racist reaction to the current events. At the same token, agreeing with banning the ownership of military weapons by civilians may be deemed as unpatriotic.



As a matter fact, most of us are raised with both liberal and conservative values just like we are taught to be both kind and tough depending on situations. If we remove the veil of labels, we'll find that most of us are liberals on some issues and conservatives on others. Disagreeing with homosexuality should not be viewed as homophobic and favoring regulations should not be identified as radicalism.

If we view the meaning of liberal as flexible toward change, most of us have to admit that we are all looking for a change. At least we seem to think that way. Conservatism is maintaining the tradition and believing that job of government is to protect its citizens' lives, liberty and property. I don't think there can be two views about that too.

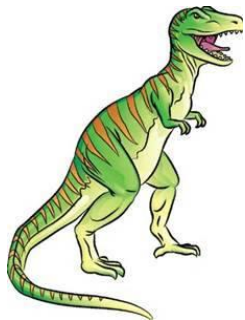
In a democracy we should judge the politicians' views in relation to where they stand on issues which matter to us, but when labels are used as weapons to attack and discredit a person or idea, they become disingenuously Machiavellian. They exploit base emotions and bury reason along with its victims. As fellow countrymen we should come together to advance our democracy not bury it.

Commentary

Not My father's Dinosaur

By Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"

For the first 26 six years of my life I didn't know that dinosaurs existed. I never saw any pictures or heard any mention of Dinosaurs while growing up in India. Dinosaur were



never introduced to me by my parents, teachers, siblings, friends, or acquaintances. After coming to the U.S. in the early seventies I was shocked to find an inordinate allusion to dinosaurs everywhere. I couldn't believe that I

was kept in dark all those years about these creatures that roamed on our planet 320 million years ago.

Our children started learning about dinosaurs in nursery schools. They used to bring coloring papers home to introduce us to Brontosaurus, Albertosaurus Tyrannosaurus, and stegosaurus. We bought various replicas of dinosaurs from toy stores for our children's 'show and tell' at school. Soon they started watching dinosaurs on television. We also joined them in watching shows like 'The Flintstones' and actually fell in love with adorable Dino. We liked Dino, especially, for assuming an uncomplicated name.

When our children grew older, they were introduced to Sesame Street which had several dinosaur characters such as Elmo and Big Bird. They were also advised to read Elmo's book to learn about the traits of dinosaurs. We were learning along with them something that was inconspicuously missing in our education. We were making up for the lost time.

A few years later my father visited us from India and wondered why there were so much emphasis on dinosaurs in this country. I lamented about the poor education we

received in India where dinosaurs were kept out of the spotlight. My father replied, "Dinosaurs are fictional; that's why," he continued, "If they were true, Shakespeare would have mentioned them in his plays.

"But Dinos were discovered in in 1824, by William Buckland. Before that they were unknown to the world."

My father was unyielding. According to him, Shakespeare mentioned every animal in his plays that ever existed on earth such as dog, bear, horse, lark, cat, ewe, ram, ape and all the rest.

"How about elephant? Did Shakespeare ever mention an elephant," I questioned.

"Yes, it was mentioned by Antonio in Twelfth Night," my father contradicted me.

"Well, I am pretty sure that Shakespeare never mentioned a rhino in his play," I tried to outwit him.

"Not so. He mentioned rhino in Macbeth," he replied.

That was then. Dinosaurs are now getting popular in India too. There is a rush of finding dinosaur relics in the Indian state of Gujarat, home state of prime mister, Modi. They have been named Rajasaurus, (King of dinosaurs) and Majungasaurus. They roamed there 65 million years ago, the same time they became extinct in North America. No wonder, India follows everything that trends in America a little late.

Now I am a grandfather. Unlike my father, I don't question my grandson's admiration for dinosaurs though their existence is dubious to me. During our last visit, he wanted us to buy him a dinosaur toy. We bought him one without caring about what my father or Shakespeare would say.

Humor

Out of My Mind By "Musafir"

Our long national nightmare is over. Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are not at each other's throat any more. This is also a relief for Bill Clinton. He doesn't have to move back in with Hillary. It's bad news for Trump as he'll have to move out of his opulent mansion and live in a public housing, the White House.

Regardless of what happens to Bill, Hillary and Trump, the 2016 presidential election has caused great anguish, confusion, and damage to our psyche. Whether we want to believe it or not, Donald Trump, a man many deem unqualified for the position, will soon be the leader of the Free World. That thought alone has sent many folks into a deep depression. Just the other day, my wife heard me



shouting curse words in shower instead of singing 'YMCA' by my favorite band, 'Village People' and demanded, "Get your head checked."

I invited my wife to watch television where a shrink was giving advice to educated and respectable (as opposed to uneducated and deplorable) who are suffering from PET (Post-election Trauma). The TV said, "You have every right to be mad, upset, furious, frustrated and any other feeling for the rest of your miserable life. You are free to drop curse words in your social media group or text those words to your mom, brother, mother-in-law and friends. Don't worry about consequences. You are protected by Second Amendment and no one can put you in jail for that." My wife didn't buy that. So I went to see a psychiatrist.

First thing she (shrink) suggested to me was to quit my job as I was a security threat to my fellow employees. She asked me to apply for disability at

once to protect my income without working for the rest of my life"(a blessing in disguise).

"You must also stop writing humor pieces because your jokes are so terrible. You have to accept that you are not a sane person anymore due to PET (Post-election Trauma). You have a serious case of witzelsucht, a mental condition characteristic of frontal lesions and marked by the making of poor jokes and puns."

She further suggested me to take the following steps to keep myself from going to an asylum:

- Gather with like-minded friends on social media such as Facebook to talk through disappointment. Birds of same feather should flock together.
- If you find yourself with someone who agrees with the election outcome, just say, "Giddyup."
- Distract yourself by doing something you enjoy like watching grass

grow or just meditating (That's better than doing nothing).

- If someone says, "Congratulations, your candidate won," say, "I accept your apology!"
- Apologize to anyone you've hurt. Don't just call them. Search their phone number, email address and postal address on the Internet. This will keep you busy and away from brooding over.
- Get a real estate license. There are plenty of opportunities there as millions of disappointed folks are about to leave the country because their candidate lost.

Meanwhile, solve this puzzle. "How many politicians does it take to change a light bulb? See the answer below:

Answer: Two: one to change it and another one to change it back again.

Perspective

Progress or Regress By Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"

As a five-year-old, I used to gaze at the stars on clear nights. My imagination would run wild through the obvious and arrive at the obscure. I wondered what was beyond the pristine sky and stars above me? If the sky ended then what began after that? How long and how far could that go on?

I was ten when the Soviet Union launched the first satellite in space, Sputnik 1 on October 4, 1957. It was an exciting time. I remember tracking Sputnik 1 that moved across the sky like a dot. That was the beginning of the space race between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

In 1959, the Soviet space program took another step forward with the launch of Luna 2, the first space probe to hit the moon. In April 1961, the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person to orbit Earth traveling in the capsule-like spacecraft Vostok 1.

The United States was falling behind in the space race until John Glen became the first American astronaut to circle the earth on February 20, 1962.



His journey into space was full of perils. Problems arose that could have spelled disaster due to a failure of the automatic control system. Instead of aborting the flight, Glen decided to use manual control. With him was also riding the prestige of America into the space. Glen was in no mood to let his country down. Encouraged by the success of Glen's mission, later that May, President John F. Kennedy made the bold, public claim that the U.S. would land a man on the moon before the end of the decade (the 60s). The rest is history.

*"We know what we are, but
know not what we may be." –
Ophelia in Hamlet*

Years later, I had an opportunity to hear John Glen and Buzz Aldrin (the second person to walk on moon behind Neil Armstrong) in person during an R&M (Reliability and Maintainability) Symposium in Los Angeles. Aldrin praised Glen and said, "Today's astronauts are mere space tourists in comparison to the risks Glen had to take."

Thanks to John Glen and other brave space explorers like him for making the impossible possible. Going to space was a dream for humankind. We are the beneficiaries of their adventures. While I was growing up, it was unimaginable that our ovens could heat food without fire that we would see and talk to each other across the globe instantly. It was inconceivable that a computer could talk to a car remotely and guide its route in addition to diagnosing any problems.



It's a pity that many of us are wasting our time in brooding over election results. We have better things to do than living in the past and complaining about the

future. Let's channel our imaginations towards achieving things that seem impossible today but will be here in this century such as tele-transportation (traveling in the waveform), telepathy and time machine. We have two choices. We can either progress the human race to achieve what seems impossible today or drag ourselves in non-value-added partisan politics and regress. It's better to choose the former.

Point-Counterpoint

School Athletes Should Be Paid By Musafir

Not paying college athletes for bringing hundreds of millions of dollars to their schools is an exploitation of labor. I won't hesitate calling this a modern day slavery. This is specifically true for football and basketball.

College athletics is a big business. The student athletes are supposed to spend a minimum of 20 hours a week practicing their games. In reality most of them spend 40 hours a week in addition to the studies. In return, they receive a meager amount (a few thousands of dollars) in scholarship money for their contribution.

Imagine an employer giving free tuition benefits to its top employees, but paying only \$5,000 per year in salary. How many of us would like to take that job? Yet, we expect the college athletes to do so. If the schools want to maintain the purity of game (that's why they don't pay the student athletes) then they should charge only five to ten dollars per ticket from the spectators. That should provide them enough money to maintain their stadia and pay the coaches.

The fact is that they charge an excessive amount of money from the spectators, TV networks and other sponsors. To give an idea, it costs more than \$1,500 per ticket to attend the NCAA Men's Final to sit among a crowd of 1,500. The coaches of winning schools are paid five to six million dollars per year. I will not call that the purity of sports. It's a business no matter how it's looked at

The above businesses are successful because the student athletes put their life on line. The players themselves still make zero (not counting the scholarship). Somehow, this doesn't seem right. College sports is a multi-billion dollar business where the only people who are restricted in their earnings, in any way, are the athletes. If an acting major can earn for acting in movies and a music major can sell records and get royalty, why can't an athlete be paid for his/her contribution? I think it's actually immoral to restrict only one class of person from benefiting to their level of worth.

School Athletes Shouldn't Be Paid By Bala Prasad, MD

In our capitalistic society, everything is judged against capital, A.K.A., money. A related topic of discussion, that has been going on forever and perhaps will never be resolved, is whether college athletes should be paid for representing their university in athletic games.

The very word amateur means that they are not professionals and thus, should not be paid. That is because this status as an amateur opens up many other doors for them, including participation in the Olympics. Many college athletes attend university on scholarships, and have different studies and score requirements. Receiving a salary of any kinds will change that. Furthermore, there is no easy way to fix the salary of a college athlete. What criteria can there possibly be? All athletes are not equal. Many of them will not make it to the professional level (and perhaps, do not strive for this). Other than basketball and football, few college teams actually bring profit to the school. I imagine there are some teams that universities actually lose money on. So where will the money come from and who will pay it, and how much? The individuals who do well, in a team sport like basketball and football, do need the effort of the whole team to thrive. So how to calculate the money to all the players, without causing heartache or rancor?

The average full athletic scholarship is about \$65,000, which covers living expenses and tuition. In order to have this much money to spend, the salary would have to be at least \$100,000. While this may make little difference to the player, who will make up the difference and how?

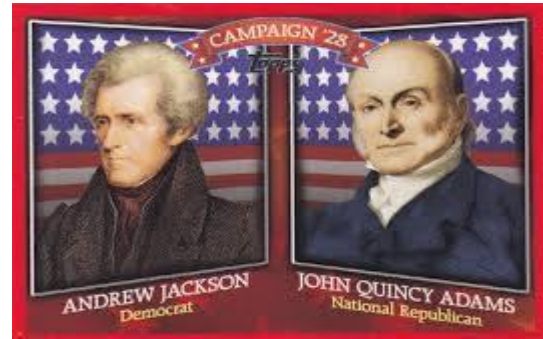
Moreover, college athletes are only part of the source from which famous professional athletes rise. As we have seen time and time again, every great college athlete does not become a professional athlete. It takes hard work, diligence, and training. This will not happen quickly and often takes many years. The college years are formative years and should be used to develop a bright future.

And if somebody has a high opinion of themselves, matched by superior talent, they should seek positions with professional teams, which they often do. But, while in college, athletes who represent their school should be left pure and untainted by money, and the many problems that would bring to their team.

Observation

And All Will Be Well

By Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"



All's well and all will be well on November 9, 2016. Water will still be flowing down the Mississippi; the sun will also rise and America will remain the greatest nation on earth, no matter who wins the presidential election. America is no more united or divided than before. We express different points of view because we are free to do so. No matter who becomes the president, he or she will protect our liberty. There is no reason to fear as "Only thing we have to fear is fear itself" –FDR.

The dishonor of dirtiest presidential campaign in history goes to the Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams contest of 1828. It was a sleaze fest to say the least.

Jackson was a commoner; Quincy Adams was an elitist, the son of our second president, John Adams. The Adams camp revealed and publicized many damaging facts about Andrew Jackson. For one, he was violent. Jackson remains the only president ever to kill a man in a duel. For another, the Adams camp accused Jackson of killing six black officers and hiding the fact. John Quincy Adams even

attacked Jackson's family alleging that the latter's wife married Jackson before divorcing her previous husband. Thus their marriage was illegitimate. One newspaper even claimed that Jackson's mother was a prostitute. Jackson's wife, Rachel was so disgusted with the dirty campaigning that she soon died after the election.

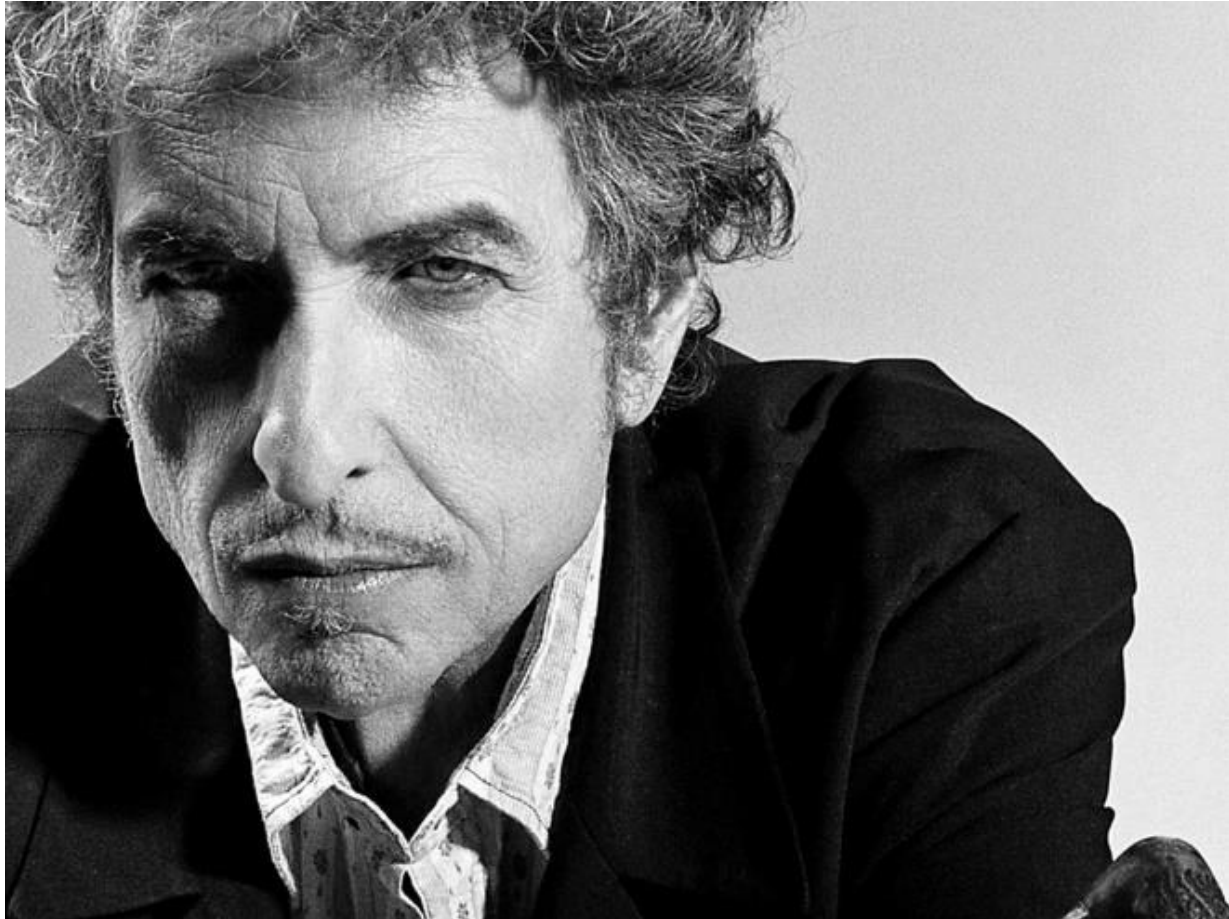
Adams himself was accused of corruption and favoritism as he allegedly favored his friends in North by granting them federal contracts. The Jackson camp spread the rumor that Adams had provided the Russian czar with the sexual services of an American women while working as a diplomat in Russia. The Jackson camp called Adams a pimp.

The history of presidential elections are full of worse campaigning than what we see today. The earliest was, probably, between Thomas Jefferson and Quincy Adam's father, John Adams in 1800.

Fortunately or unfortunately, there were no media coverage, opinion polls or talking heads in those times. So, relax. Things are not that bad. All will be well on November 9, 2016.

Essay

A Nobel for the Masses By Anil Shrivastava



My first reaction was 'disbelief' on hearing the news of Bob Dylan winning the Nobel for literature. Once I recovered from the initial shock, I decided to study Dylan's lyrics. I must say that I was impressed with his writings especially 'Blowin' in the Wind, Forever Young, Tangled up in Blue and many more.

The newspapers are full of articles about Bob Dylan's lyrics. I spent last few days digesting the commentaries on Mr. Dylan's works. Of course, there are as many critics as there is applause for the Swedish Academy's surprise choice, yet the selection also points to changed thinking - art and literature are no longer the



domain of the high-brow. There has also been a narrowing of the gap between the intellectually sophisticated and what enjoys popular appeal - a determining factor being the positive impact on the masses that the “upper crust” prefers to overlook.

One of the articles concluded, “Hence there is universal need to note the Academy hailing Dylan for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition. Take away the music from Dylan’s writings - if that is humanly feasible - and they would still stand alone as poetry.”

A reputed critic has noted that “the old categories of high and low art, they’ve been collapsing for a long time, but this is now being made official. In previous years, writers and publishers have grumbled that the prize often goes to obscure writers with clear political messages over more popular figures. But in choosing someone so well known, and so far outside of established literary traditions, the Academy seems to have swung far into the other direction, bestowing prestige on a popular artist who already had plenty of it.”

All the above comments make sense now as I always wondered why some of the folk artists never got recognition by the Nobel Committee. Their messages were as good as Whitman, Pound, Frost and Eliot. The difference in my mind is that they talked about masses whereas Dylan talks to the masses.

Why I don't smile

By Ashok Lal

I am handsome, I am smart
smiling is for me, a fine art
but it makes the heart flutter
of fat ladies who eat lot of butter
their husbands who lazy
out of envy just go crazy
they try to bring out their old rusty gun
and take shots at me ,just for fun
I have now become nonviolent ,after getting old
though still retain smile worth pots of gold
just making sure that I don't rile
an aged pair of husband wife
I keep my face straight ,hide my smile
and let everyone go on with their life

Current Affairs

Why Did Chicken Cross the Road?

By Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"



I think that I may have found the right answer to the age old question of why the chicken crossed the road. The chicken was in “danger of violent death” and her life on this side of the road was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”

Therefore, the chicken took the chance hoping that life would be ameliorating on the other side.

The chicken represents Syrian refugees. (Many of them are radicals and dangerous but that is a topic for another day). These despondent human beings are the victims of a civil war going on in Syria. These men, women and children see their fellow human beings slaughtered every day and

they live in terror like chickens in cages waiting their turn to be massacred.

Just last week Syria’s leader, Assad along with his co-conspirator, Putin of Russia declared victory over Aleppo, once the largest city of Syria which is now totally annihilated. Aleppo once was rich in history and was the most vibrant city in the Middle East along with Beirut, Lebanon. Now it’s an open death chamber, a victim of our indifference towards its citizens. If there be a hell on earth, it’s there; it’s there; it’s there.

For more than four years, Western governments and the United Nations stood by, watching, as Assad and his backers ostentatiously ignored the laws of war. The rest of us



watched their extermination on live TV and social media. Now, with tens of thousands of civilians dead, the credibility of the powerful countries and institutions that could have helped them remains dubious, to say the least.

In addition Syrian and Russian aircraft spent the past few months dropping leaflets over eastern Aleppo, warning that anyone who didn't leave the area would be wiped out. But the unfortunate citizens there had nowhere to go, except into government-held districts, where they would be detained, tortured, and killed. The leaflets continued to rain down on them. "You know that everyone has given up on you," the leaflets said. "They left you alone to face your doom." That's the perfect state of nature described by Hobbes in Leviathan.

Any person having kindness should wonder what were the international community and the UN thinking during this Syrian apocalypse? The displaced citizens of Aleppo have the right not to believe in any institution



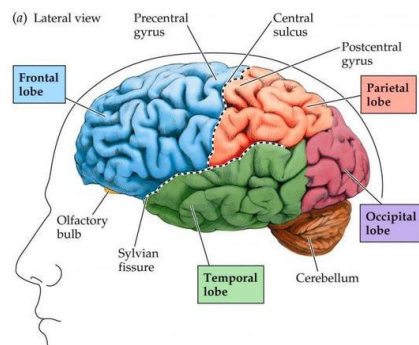
anymore. So, before you break bread with your loved ones on this Christmas Eve, think about those chickens crossing over to our side of the road in desperation. Some of us talk about creating a safe area for them in their own homeland with a no-fly zone. Whatever be the solution, let's not forget them. Tell our leaders to do something about them. Merry Christmas to all!

Your Health

Seasonal Affective Disorder by Niru Prasad, MD

This is a type of depression that affects an individual during winter months, also known as winter blues.

Incidence



This is a type of depression that affects individuals of all ages starting from teens to elderly, and is linked to darkness during winter the winter months. Furthermore, researchers have proven the fact that people living far from the equator in locations such as Alaska, where daylight is very short, are more susceptible.

People between the ages of 15 to 55 years are more susceptible to seasonal affective disorder. Elderly people living alone are also more prone.

Sometime people with close relatives with similar entity are pre disposed to depressions.

Stress and anxiety always precipitates and aggravates depression.

What Are The Causes?

1. Our brain secretes a hormone melatonin from the pineal gland in brain. This helps other hormones in body thus regulates the circadian rhythm. During darkness body secretes more melatonin which causes depression. An exposure to bright light during winter reduces the production of this hormone, hence mood gets better. Also, researchers have proven the fact that melatonin level is related to aging, and young children have the highest level of night time melatonin. Hence, their night time sleep is longer compared to the elderly population.
2. Melatonin also has an anti-oxidant effect hence boost up the immune system.
3. Our brain cells send chemical messengers through three neurotransmitters. Serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine control the activities in an individual. Serotonin plays a role in controlling our mood, sexual activity and sleep.
4. Norepinephrine is a brain chemical that plays important role in attention regulation of blood pressure.
5. Numerous studies in past have also proven the fact that sunlight play an important role in production of melatonin and serotonin, which are both are responsible for mood disorder in winter.

What Are The Symptoms Of Seasonal Affective Disorder ?

1. Feeling of sadness, anxiety, grumpy mood.
2. Decreased interest in daily activities and feeling tired.

3. A craving to eat more carbohydrates and gain weight.
4. Have trouble sleeping and concentrating.
5. During winter months especially during holidays people miss their dear ones, have financial pressures and different stresses of life predispose further to depressions. Some genetic factors such as family history of depression, low thyroid levels, and anti-hypertensive medications furthermore contribute to depression.

Treatment Of Seasonal Affective Disorder

- 1 Light therapy, counseling with a psychologist, exercise, and life style changes such as yoga, regular exercise, and good eating habits all help with this disorder.
- 2 People who are treated for seasonal affective disorder in a timely way tend to recover well.
- 3 An attempt to prevent future episodes of depression depends upon using light therapy and psychological support on regular basis.
- 4 Holiday depressions anxiety and stress.
- 5 The stress, anxiety, unrealistic expectations, financial pressures, and excess commitments all contribute to anxiety, leading to depression during the holidays.
- 6 People feel depressed during winter holidays due to seasonal affective disorder due to lack sunshine exposure.
- 7 Holidays parties, drinking alcohols, over eating and lack of sleep also linked to anxiety and depressions.

Coping With Depression During Holidays.



1. Set up realistic goals and expectations , reach out to your friends, find inexpensive ways to enjoy yourself such as window shopping, and helping others in need all these are very rewarding and will make you happy.
2. A regular exposure to bright light, particularly fluorescent light at home, and raising the window curtains during day time, significantly improves depression in those suffering from SAD.
3. Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension and fear characterized by physical symptom of heart palpitation, sweating, irritability, and feelings.
4. Remember that life is full of ups and downs. How we react to life struggles plays an important role in overcoming our feelings of sadness. A positive attitude in life protects against depression.

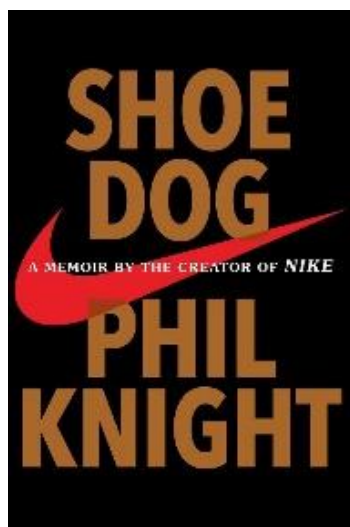
April showers bring May flowers. The Winter Blues are followed by Spring Joy!

Book Review

Shoe Dog –A Memoir by the Creator of NIKE

Author: Phil Knight

Published in 2016 by Scribner (p. 381)



Shoe Dog is the story of Phil Knight's struggle in establishing brand Nike and overcoming failure against all odds decked against him. It's an autobiography, a novel and a thriller all rolled in one. Knight's message in the

book is clearly summed up in his own words, "Let everyone else call your idea crazy...just keep going. Don't stop. Don't even think about stopping until you get there, and don't give much thought to where 'there' is."

Knight, who attended University of Oregon (later Stanford), started selling running shoes in mid-60. He imported those shoes (not Nike yet) from an unfamiliar Japanese manufacturer, Onitsuka who had no idea that Knight's company, Blue Ribbon was just a registered name in Portland, Oregon. However, Onitsuka liked the idea of starting selling shoes in the U.S and agreed to make deal with Blue Ribbon. That was only the beginning.

Knight ran his operation on a shoestring (no pun intended) struggling for cash to pay Onitsuka for delivery of shoes. He lived hand to mouth and in debt while holding a nine to five job for the survival of his company and his nascent family. Knight was lucky to have Bill Bowerman,

a well-respected running coach at University of Oregon on his side. Bowerman, took Onitsuka shoes apart and attempted to enhance them. He also experimented with better materials for comfort. His ideas proved to be popular with his athletes.

The book's chapters are organized by year, and much of the book is spent on the first 10 years of the company (launched in 1962). Knight is able to convey the fear and frustration of living on the edge even as his company continued to grow. For example, Knight describes receiving the "pair count" (how many pairs of shoes shipped) from the warehouses every day. Because he depended on daily sales to generate the cash he needed to keep the business alive, "the daily pair count determined my mood, my digestion, my blood pressure, because it largely determined the fate of Blue Ribbon," he writes. "If we didn't sell all the shoes in our most recent order, and quickly convert that product into cash, we'd be in big trouble."

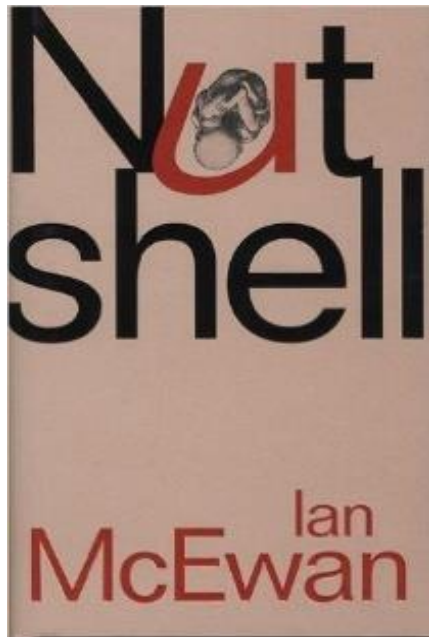
Shoe Dog is a compelling read. While many business biographies offer a litany of deals and sales figures, Knight tells his story through the people of his company — especially the motley crew of the first Nike employees who fought to keep Blue Ribbon afloat year after year. *Shoe Dog* (a term that refers to people "who devoted themselves wholly to the making, selling, buying or designing of shoes," Knight writes) is a textbook on the immense challenges and potential rewards of entrepreneurship. If you need some encouragement beyond "Just Do It" then read *Shoe Dog*.

-Reviewed by Anil Shrivastava

Nutshell

Author: Ian McEwan

Published by Jonathan Cape (Paperback)



Apart from the fact that this is a take on "Hamlet", this novel, undeniably (!), has its own matchless merit.

"Between the conception of a deed and its acting out lies a tangle of hideous contingencies".... Quite a premise: a fetus is watching and commenting (in a most sagacious way!) on the drama unfolding around his mother's life... My first instinct was to wonder: is there a "pro-life" message in that? But that was probably the paranoia from the ongoing elections here in US - which was then explained in an interview that I read, where McEwan said that the "pro-choice" vs "pro-life" thought never entered his mind in writing of this novel. He even said that only Americans might find this thread of

thought in it. Ha! No wonder...

And even before I read that interview, I had to abandon that idea - simply because so much else was overpowering in this book: first of all - McEwan's striking eloquence, where exceptional humor meets the most serious of discussions ; secondly - a riveting plot; and thirdly - an ongoing commentary by the author (through the mind of the unborn child) about the world's political scenery, global changes: a succinct but astute analysis of everything that's wrong with the world today... "Revenge unstitches a civilization" - how about that for summing it all up.... His thoughts about Europe are compelling: "Old Europa tosses in her dreams, she pitches between pity and fear, between helping and repelling. Emotional and kind this week, scaly-hearted and so reasonable the next, she wants to help but she doesn't want to share or lose what she has." A thoroughly captivating read.

-Reviewed by Irene Rudra



Thinking Out Loud

Food for Thought

By David Beagan



Food is an integral element of any culture. Historically the production of food has preoccupied the American labor force. In 1790, nine out of ten workers were employed as farmers. People's primary job was getting enough to eat. Just 50 years later, in 1840, it had shifted to merely two out of three workers who were employed to grow food. Another 40 years saw this drop to less than half, and another 30 years after that, in 1910, it was less than a third. At the end of the last century we were witness to this figure dropping to less than three workers out of a hundred.

This remarkable achievement of industrialization and ingenuity also coincided with the transformation of food as an occupation to food as a preoccupation. In extreme cases, this preoccupation becomes deadly. The mental condition known as anorexia nervosa compels its victims to control their food intake to the edge of starvation, sometimes resulting in death. At the other extreme are people who are morbidly obese. Some of these people weigh in

excess of hundreds of pounds over ideal body weight -- in the most extreme cases topping out at over a thousand pounds. The term "morbidly obese" is not just hyperbole, it describes a very real consequence of this lifestyle.

In between these extremes are millions of people who struggle to lose weight. One estimate is that thirty billion dollars each year is spent on the weight loss "industry." The facts are simple, food intake and physical exercise are responsible for an individual's body weight. (Though evidence is mounting that there can be significant variation from individual to individual). But too many people have trouble accepting these simple facts and are looking for some trick, some way to fool the basic biological mechanisms. Hence we have a multi-billion dollar weight loss industry that is there to either trick us into losing weight or to trick us into believing that they can. This denial of reality along with capitulation through acceptance of being "fat and happy" is leading to an epidemic of obesity in America.

This epidemic has huge consequences. Resources are wasted in the production of the extra food. More resources are wasted in dealing with the health consequences of the weight gain. Beyond these economic physical considerations, are the emotional and psychological effects of carrying an excess amount of weight. It might seem ironic that just when Americans are heavier than ever that television, movies, and magazines bombard us with images of bodies that are hyper-perfect, sometimes a perfection achieved through digital manipulation. Is this causing the American psyche to enter a state of profound inadequacy, a feeling that, "no matter what I do, I'm not good enough?" Dr. Phil McGraw, host of the like-

named television show has stated what I think is a rather profound insight. He says that we should not confuse body image with self-image. This might seem an overly pithy, trite saying, but despite its brevity, what he is saying embodies a profound truth. Each of us need to recognize our own value regardless of our physical appearance, whether that appearance embodies an overweight body or a body that is perceived to be inadequate in any way. But to say we need to recognize this is not to state it strongly enough. This recognition of the value of oneself needs to be ingrained into each of us the same way that we know how to speak or walk, it must be something that is part of us and comes automatically. This is something more fundamental than the superficial and sometimes destructive notion that everyone needs to have self-esteem.

Of course for many of us, it is an ongoing process of growth, and is not easily acquired where it is lacking. But three things we can do to promote this, treat each person we meet with dignity and respect even returning unkindness with kindness. To extend this courtesy to others is to also extend it to ourselves. The second thing, for those who have kids or have a young person that looks up to them, is to instill in children a sense of self-worth and the worth of others. Yelling, criticizing, and ignoring children can destroy a child's sense of worth. Speaking

calmly, but firmly, setting boundaries, praising accomplishments even little ones, and interacting with them builds their self-worth. This will help insulate them from food issues and will form them into adults who in turn pass the good influences forward. Lastly, all of us need to lead our children, by example, into healthy eating and exercise habits. I know there is a movement out there that wants to push people into correct eating choices -- this will never work, people must freely choose their course.

America's dysfunction with food is a symptom of an underlying sickness in the minds of the American people. Obesity is not a root cause, it is a consequence of people who use food to deal with loneliness, disappointment or even simple boredom. I wonder if in the coming century, we will look back at present day eating habits with a bit of surprise about what was considered normal eating habits. Perhaps something like we now look back on the general acceptance of smoking that was prevalent several decades ago. We now look back at the absurdity of someone being able to freely smoke right next to another person, perhaps without even a cursory, "mind if I smoke?" Hopefully then we will look back and say, "You mean back in 2017, people would actually eat themselves into a condition of obesity and sickness back then?"



From the Publisher's Desk

Impressions of Cape Town and Tokyo by Bala Prasad, MD

My wife and I have the fortune to travel around the world while we are still in good health and are able to enjoy these travels. Having done so, and looking back, we wanted to see which country we liked the most and the worst.

By far the best city we liked was Cape Town, South Africa. There were elegant hotels in good areas, good old world service

With great deferential style, and good food and a clean surrounding. Of course, one has to keep away from some areas. But this is true in any city in the world. Being on the edge of an ocean, sea food in Cape Town was plentiful and fresh. We enjoyed fresh oysters and lobster every morning for breakfast in our hotel. This was a new experience for me, which I took full advantage of. Wonderful beverages were readily available, although I was very surprised by the modest price of alcohol. Beverages that cost twenty dollars in New York, London, and Rome, cost only five dollars in Cape Town. And you did not need to wait for happy hour for special prices.

Poverty was rampant but I did not see much pan-handling. People appeared to be well-mannered and hardworking. Of course you still had to be careful about your safety and well-being.

We also had the chance to go to Soweto, at once time the world's largest apartheid ghetto (just outside Johannesburg). But it was surprising that it had a lot of tin shacks like any other poor country. It was equally surprising to see magnificent mansions with blooming flowers and well-manicured lawns. We also saw the Nelson Mandela museum, his home and where he was imprisoned.

As a country, Japan was the epitome of good manners, by far. Two examples will always remain in my memory. We were looking for a particular restaurant in Tokyo. We reached the area but could not locate the building. I inquired of a gentleman who I thought would speak English, but he did not. I gave him the written address. He could not figure it out. So he pulled out a map from his briefcase but still could

not find the location. So he called a friend on his cell phone, which still could not help. He was with us more than thirty minutes to no avail. But this time we saw a restaurant where the line was twenty deep. One did not need a recommendation! We bowed to each other and I had a wonderful meal. Take note: I speak no Japanese and he spoke no English.

Another stop in memory lane was a Japanese bank. In those days in Japan, there was no ATM machine. We went to a local bank to get local money. Somehow, we reached the wrong floor. The bank teller directed us to the right place. A gentleman was listening to our conversation and offered to take us there. Later, I thanked him and asked for his business card. He was president of the bank!

And finally, with the yen in hand we went to a local store. My wife wanted something that this store was out of. The manager asked us to wait and got the items from another store down the road, in the pouring rain!

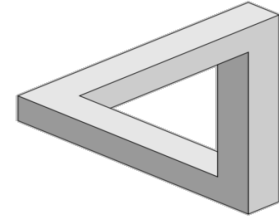
I also remember two occasions during my travels when we had to change our plan to eat fried local fish on the sidewalk, fresh out of a frying pan, served on a newspaper. Once at Vienna Railway Station in the evening, and another in Nassau. And then there was the time we were on a local train in Belgium without local money to pay for it, and another time when we reached the end of the line in the train depot, with no way out!

And finally, in Stockholm we left our tote bag (which contained my wallet and passport) in a taxi. But remember when one door closes, destiny always opens another. So, we ate all kinds of street food and survived, got out of the train depot, was able to pay for the train ticket, and got my wallet and passport back! My travels around the world have certainly been interesting. Next stop: Cuba.

Sincerely, Bala Prasad, MD

Mental Exercise

By David Beagan



Kerry and Kelly, don't tell the truth, however they are orderly. One of them lies on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and tells the truth on the other days. The other one lies on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, and tells the truth on the other days. At noon, they have the following conversation:

Kerry: I lie on Saturdays.

Kelly: I will lie tomorrow.

Kerry: I lie on Sundays.

What day of the week are they having this conversation?

Cube Cutter. You have a cube made up of smaller cubes, $3 \times 3 \times 3$. You need to divide it into 27 single cubes with a cutter. But the cutter can only cut one piece at a time, you can't stack up multiple pieces to cut. How many cuts will it take you to get to 27 individual cubes?



Sam Loyd, the Puzzle Master himself, created this one:

While enjoying a giddy ride at the carousel Sammy propounded a puzzle which reflects much credit to his mental abilities.

"One third of the number of kids riding ahead of me, added to three-quarter of those riding behind me gives the correct number of children on this Merry-Go-Round" is the way he puts it; but it will puzzle you quite a little to tell just how many riders there were at this whirling circus.

Answers

Kerry and Kelly. No one lies on Sundays, so Kerry is lying today. That means it's *not* Saturday, but rather Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. Kelly, who is telling the truth today, says he will lie tomorrow, so today must be Wednesday.

Cube cutting. It's simple if you hit on the right strategy. Each cut adds one to the total number of pieces. It takes 26 cuts to get to 27 individual cubes.

Sam Loyd.

There had to be a multiple of 3 as well as 4 plus one children. So, the minimum number of children riding on this Merry-Go-Round could be thirteen. Those who rode ahead of Sammy at the same time came behind him. If there were twelve, we simply add three-quarter of twelve to one-third of twelve, which gives thirteen, the total number including Sammy himself.

In Retrospect

Well Said Rogers! By Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"



We have mainly three candidates to choose from in the 2016 presidential election, corrupt Hillary Clinton, megalomaniac Donald Trump

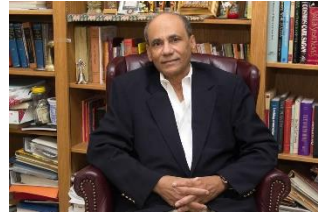
and ignorant Gary Johnson. That's quite an eclectic array of candidates. Uh-oh! "But they pretty well represent who we are," said Will Rogers (1879 – 1935).

Will Rogers was both a philosopher and a humorist who talked to the masses in plain idiolect. I don't have to wonder what he would have felt about 2016 presidential nominees, if he were still alive. As a matter of fact, what he said then holds true now.

Many of us are fed up with the long election cycle. It's time consuming. All our president and legislatures do for two years is campaign to elect a new president. It's so frustrating that Will Rogers suggested, "Every time we elect some fellow we think he's terrible and then when we get another one in he's worse. So, I am always in favor of keeping the one we've got."

Well, my suggestion would be keep them for eight years straight.

And who thrusts these three candidates upon us? The real business of the conventions is settled in backroom by party luminaries. Will Rogers observed, "Our national conventions are nothing but glorified Mickey



Mouse cartoons, and are solely for amusement purposes."

These current candidates are so ludicrous that more and more viewers are tuning in to Saturday Night Live and late night comedy shows to really understand them. "Everything is changing. People are taking their comedians seriously, and the politicians as a joke, when it used to be vice versa," lamented Will Rogers.

Mrs. Clinton pretends to favor recovery from the bottom. Mr. Trump wants it from the top. They both are insincere and have two faces, one for the elites and another for the commoners. "I've never heard of anybody suggesting that they might start it in the middle. Recovery should start halfway between the two, because it's the middle class that does everything anyhow," said Rogers.

Mr. Trump wants to make America safe again but he turns a blind eye when it comes to gun control (reform). Will Rogers aptly said, "They want peace. But they want a gun to get it with."

Mr. Trump has made more than his share of illogical and offensive statements against women and minorities to suggest that he may be a misogynist and misanthropic. At the same time, Mrs. Clinton has given all the reasons to believe that she acted illegally to hide her improprieties. She destroyed her evidence; Mr. Trump Couldn't. Rogers correctly assumed, "Many a politician wishes there was a law to burn old records."