

In a Glass House Throwing Stones

*The Episode
In Which the
Free-Range Human
Realizes That His Life
Has Been But
One Big Feedback Loop*

By Basil Joe Rocker
5/17/2003



Always Wear a Helmet When Bicycling

It was a Friday morning at the end of yet another miserable week. But I doth protest way too much. I've actually been getting a kick out of my job lately. There have been successes that have inspired clients to toss immense gratitude my way - big verbal words of "thanks," Starbucks gift Cards (Yes, I fart in the general direction of that corporate overlord, the homogenizer of what was once cool about espresso, but I was gracious toward my very pleased client, nonetheless, and accepted the offering with a gratitude equal or greater than that with which she rendered it), thank you cards, dozens of bagels and doughnuts, and, my favorite, introductions to beautiful, yet feckless daughters in hopes that I will marry them and take them off the client's weary hands. Believe it or not that does happen. It has happened a few times, in fact. It's flattering, yet weird. My first words are usually, "you do understand that I'm NOT a lawyer, right? You realize I make a measly \$14/hour, right?" They just shake their heads, and say "Yayz, Yayz. But you are good man. Good American. Very clean, upstanding."

"Yes, but I bike to work, and have only driven my clanging car 3 times in six months. I hate domesticity. The thought of marriage and middle-classness makes me itchy. No Babitry for this kid. Nuh-uh," I want to say, but refrain. The key word is American. All they want is a blood test and a license and the potato-thieving days in Kiev are long gone. The daughters will be Americans. Citizens of the USA, undeportable.

It's why I'm glad we don't have more Russian and Ukrainian clients. The temptation to keep a harem of ripe Slavic maidens in their late teens and

early twenties to cater to my ego, and all my spiritual and physical whims is just too much. Perhaps this is why I have grown so harsh, or "hardened" as I stated in *Open Letter to All My Friggin' Friends*.¹

I'm in the stoppage time of life, about to hit forty. Chances are the next relationship will be the last, or at least one of the last, so I'd best choose wisely. Believe me, I fear by the minute that it will never happen at all. The thought of such an Eastern Bloc harem sounds fun in theory, but in practice would likely become quite monotonous. The poor scattered young women can barely read their own language, much less carry on an intelligent conversation which I could understand. I'd wind up being more of a father or big brother than anything else, not that I haven't been down or minded such road before. I'd probably wind up giving them all the Pygmalion-sending them to college, then off to better, younger husbands, and careers to better themselves and the world.

But back to the morning- that morning. This week is a little different in that I am physically drained by midweek. The thermometer in the Sac Valley has gone from comfy 60's to mid-80's overnight, and the unexpected heat,² along with the plethora of allergens in the air has me on edge. I'm grumpy and snapping at people all week. I've been trying to hit the keyboard to respond to the responses to the *Open Letter*, but my energy level is nil upon getting home. In fact, some unintended "Hot Yoga" had me completely out of sorts on Wednesday, despite a rousing *BtVS* ep³ following the session.

So Friday, I'm rolling off to work. Essentially, it is a pathetic crawl to the last day of the workweek. My usual cool and breezy mellowness is reduced to hot and steamy grumpiness. I'm zipping the usual route west on V Street when some asshole in a big Dodge Ram pickup rolls out in front of me like I wasn't there. How can one not see a 225 pound chunk of humanity in a screaming yellow jacket rolling along at 20-25 miles an hour? I would have blown this off 99.9% of the time, thinking, "Oh hell, honest mistake, guy's in a hurry. It's cool. No harm, no yellow card." But the guy pulled out really slow and was casually smoking a cigar, wearing some kind of asshole gimme cap. He may as well have been some West Texas Redneck casually showing his superiority in engine size, implicitly indicating the inferiority of his genitalia. Somehow I blew a gasket, and yelled at the guy, "Thanks fucking asshole."

He heard this plain and clear through the rolled down passenger side window. It got his attention, but he barely broke out of his mental and cigar smoke haze. He just sort of glanced and rambled on at maybe 15 miles an hour down 17th. I flipped him off and he saw the whole thing in his

rearview. I was not pleased. What if I'd been some kid from William Land Elementary stuck to his grill? Dumbass had better wake up. The jackass probably would have started a riot, especially if he'd hit one of the Asian kids from the surrounding neighborhood. That smug redneck attitude would have dissipated right out of his ears as hundreds of angry Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai nationals pulled him from his truck and stomped the shit out of his arrogant Auburn, Folsom, Placerville, or whatever lame Nazi foothill suburb you care to choose, cracker ass.

Why was I so pissed off? What did I have to prove? Sure, I was cranky as hell, but if one of the Asians in the neighborhood had done the same, I would have just smiled, waved, and gestured for them to go ahead. Was I so politically correct now after two years in Northern California that I hated white people? Not really. What pissed me off was this redneck reminded me of someone from Texas, a breed ubiquitous in my home state.

What I hated most about the guy was how I could have been just like him. I was just a rural Southern working class white male whose parents made a living either directly or indirectly in the oil business, or bidness, as they say in the Lone Star State. It was the picture of what might have been - what I may have been like if I had not launched myself as soon and as far as possible from where I had been born. It was like crossing paths with a parallel universe. This guy pissed me off because he reminded me of where I came from and what I hated so much about it. He was my inverted doppelganger- the redneck, cigar smoking, big truck driving, work boot sportin', gimme cap wearing, beer belly growing- quite plain and simple, anathema to all things good, cultured, refined, enlightened and civilized as opposed to my real world incarnation- bike-riding, tree hugging, hippie girl lusting, fresh air chain-inhaler, levy running, no beef no pork eatin', GW Bush-despising, upholder of all that is good, pure, and hopeful in the world.

Sure, some of my boot-strap mentality evidences a kernel of redneckness at the core, but damnit, I went to college, a top flight state university funded by lots and lots of oil money. I've slept with women from River Oaks to Greenwich Village to Denver to Dallas to Alamo Heights to DC to Lubbock to Detroit, to Llano, to Yuba City, and back again. I'm well-read, and I look good in red.⁴ If you want to call me a redneck, I challenge you to a game of Trivial Pursuit.[®] I will culturally and intellectually kick your ass. Whew. There, how's that for internal turmoil, huh?

As I rode on, picking up speed, crossing South Side Park, greeting "the gentlemen" in front of the Old Pioneer home on P Street, zipping down the I-5 tunnel into Old Town, all of this dawned on me. I realized just how vulnerable I was, not just physically on my bike, but mentally, spiritually,

passing through life- how vulnerable I was to fate, choices, and the intersections of people, places, and things.

I saw a circle. A small town in Texas- flat, arid where I started, and the flat, patchwork overgrown farm town where I landed- a veritable Kansas with a mountain view⁵ - these places were not different at all, but rather the same. Somehow, I was back where I started, but completely different nonetheless. I was finding again the joys, the adventures, and even the helplessness of my kidhood. I was starting over, but better equipped for the journey. As the rock ground and crunched beneath my fat ATB tires on the American River levy, I was suddenly thrust onto a back county road in Wise County, Texas. When I was a kid, I'd bike for hours on those roads, just listening to the gravel beneath the tires, the wind in the cottonwoods, the birds, taking in all the benign solitude of country life. Now here I was, surrounded by 2.2 million people, the Sierras in front of me, the Coastal Range behind me, feeling the exact same thing.

As I put my bike over my head and scrambled down a path cut through the weeds and wildflowers on the south side of the levy, I could see dozens of people gathered outside the state office buildings crouching below. Numerous cars zoomed down Bercut Drive about 50 yards beyond the levy. There was activity, but no energy in the air. This is the great conundrum of Sacramento. So much is going on, but nothing is happening.

Which brings me to my own conundrum. I have arrived back home, but cannot wait to leave again.

¹ See *Open Letter to All My Friggin' Friends* www.basiljoe.0catch.com

² Can you believe that a native Texan is calling mid-80's hot?!?!?

³ This was the Penultimate Episode, "End of Days." Ep 7.21. Buffy's final ep is Tuesday 5/20/03. I will be terribly sad, crying over *le fin de Buffy*.

⁴ This is one of the more memorable lines from the Kids in the Hall series. "I'm well-read, and I look good in red." As one of the kids playing a businessman browbeats some poor shipping clerk my phone, this line is part of his litany of accomplishments which includes, "the very hand holding this phone shook Pierre Trudeau's hand."

⁵ I got this term from Marc Reisner's *A Dangerous Place*. All due credit to him. God rest his writerly soul. If you ever want to know just how vulnerable LA and SF are to environmental disaster, especially from a quake, check out this book. This

is where I learned that the 880 overpass and SF's Marina District are on dirt dug out of the bottom of the Bay. Perhaps this is why they both sunk in the Loma Prieta quake of 1989. The book also describes in terrifying detail just how precarious the Sacramento Delta levies are. An 8.0 or higher in the Bay Area could turn SF Bay into Sacramento Bay. It's a frightening concept, considering the potential loss of human life in such a scenario.