

Up The Aspidistra

Rants, Raves, and Reviews that
didn't make it past the editor

By Mark Andrew Busby

For those that may yet give a hoot!

Introduction

What happens when one gets married, has kids, and moves to the other side of the world in what feels like a solitary heartbeat? I can only answer that question for myself, of course.

In 2003 following a period of volunteering in Indonesia with Voluntary Services Overseas, I married. In 2005 carrying just two bags and a cardboard box, my wife and I moved from England to the west coast of Canada, and in 2008 and 2010 respectively our children were born.

In between all of this was a world gone mad. Afghanistan, Iraq, Wall Street, Bush, Blair, Katrina, Disaster Capitalism and a lot of bloody idiots ripping up the environment. What do you do when it feels like life has dropped a ton of bricks on you that way?

Anger it seems is a word many people like to avoid. To associate ourselves with it is to betray to others the possibility our poise and balance is a trick acted out in bad faith. The picture we prefer others to have of us is one of rock steadiness and that human

emotions, like wayward children, are to be corrected. Funny that.

Certainly, one-dimensional anger can often be a reactive and very destructive force. This might be labeled 'red mist' anger whereby perpetrators habitually claim to have been provoked in some way, and their actions, if not entirely justified, unquestionably beyond their choice. Anger can also be vital insofar that when something fundamental to us is in danger, a child perhaps, we respond without deference to higher reason. How could we? The child might get hurt, or worse.

Across the lifespan most people at some point experience a 'narrowing' of life as their freedom to choose, or to act, or to exercise some other touchstone of the good life becomes impaired. If we subscribed unwaveringly to the logic of the 'red mist,' then it would follow that most of the time our everyday reality would resemble a Mad Max movie. It doesn't. Clearly, there are other ways we vent our fury at the world's ills without adding to its suffering.

In 1937 Pablo Picasso's outrage at the terrible bombing of the Basque town of Guernica compelled him to paint what is probably the most famous of all his work, 'Guernica.'

Guernica shows the tragedies of war and the suffering it inflicts upon individuals, particularly innocent civilians. This work has gained a monumental status, becoming a perpetual reminder of the tragedies of war, an anti-war symbol, and an embodiment of peace. His work helped bring the Spanish Civil War to the world's attention.

Picasso's response, like a great many civil movements spanning the Suffragettes to CND to Occupy, demonstrate that even when life overwhelms us to the point of seeming despair, there remains a 'gap of freedom' that permits us to channel our rage to the good. No matter how small the possibilities may seem, choice does exist along with the freedom to exercise it.

In 2005 I didn't just arrive in Canada, the place I oft refer to as my first love, but on Vancouver Island, a very odd spot at the outer margins of the Anglosphere. During the ensuing period of adjustment to life in a faraway place, and the ever-maddening global situation around me a rebellious attitude crept in. That's when I began to pen the letters appearing in this book.

"Up the Aspidistra: Rants, Raves, and Reviews that didn't make it past the editor" are, as the title suggests, a collection of writings born from the outrageousness of finding oneself disorientated and disarticulated at the same time. Perhaps it

was the sense of disquiet conveyed through my words that caused several gatekeepers to pass over my best efforts at communicating something vital. Who knows? What I do know is that while I endured the miniaturizing effects of feeling isolated, I was nonetheless able to break free and oppose the madness around me in small but important ways. Every word that left my pen, and for that matter any word yet to come, carries with it one, basic message: "I'm still here!"

The soon-to-be-enjoyed letters have one thing in common - they were all once insurance policies taken out to guard against the danger of losing myself. If I hadn't 'shown up' even in the smallest of ways, then I'd be long gone by now, abandoned to complexity vainly trying to find a way out.

Crackpots and crackpot ideas continue to menace the world even as I write down these last few lines. Brexit, Trumptown, ISIS, Forbidden People, Popularism, Neo-Nationalism, Climate Change Denial, Epi-Pen Cartels, and more bloody idiots ripping up decades of political consensus building rifle through our lives. My advice to anyone bold enough to stick their head above the parapet is to write a few letters of their own, and maybe even ask a friend or neighbor to do the same!

I hope you find at least as much pleasure in reading these letters as I did drawing the collection together.

Happy reading!

Mark Andrew Busby, 2018

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All inquiries to: mabusby@shaw.ca

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