

The Smedley Review

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Happy Easter

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The jester wore his thorny crown ...

So, let me regale ya with the tale of my regalia.

You can find yourself doing strange things when the job market dries up. Such as, dressing up as Lady Liberty, and doing live street theater at a major intersection.



Well, that wasn't exactly what I had in mind when invited to take tax prep training. The Raleigh classes got me out of the house for two weeks, and introduced me to the high drama and low comedy you can find in the IRS regulations.

For example: if you break up your family, don't expect to do so with impunity. The tax code is weighted to favor married couples who file jointly. Kids can be negotiated for fiduciary benefit in mind-boggling ways. Daddy can claim a child as a dependent, while Mommy uses the same child to establish her claims to EIC ("earned income credit," a kind of reverse income tax) as a "head of household" filer. Gambling losses may reduce your taxable income, but winnings definitely will boost it.¹ And by the way -- if you stole anything last year, the IRS expects you to dutifully report the value of the items stolen on your form 1040, so that Uncle Sam can tax your ill-gotten gains.

Well, the dust settles, I pass my on-line certification tests, acquire an official "Tax Preparer ID," and watch my email for The Call. Which does not come. Turns out that the class included experienced tax preparers, and accounting majors. The franchise philosophy is to over-prepare, and over-staff.

Plan B. Ping the local office of the

¹ A cousin married a clueless girl. A guy at the racetrack claims to be too busy to collect his winnings -- "I'll pay you \$20 collect them for me." She waits at the window, hands in the winning ticket, and gives the clerk her social security number. And is so proud of having made \$20 by standing in line for five minutes.

franchise, and see if they had anything for me to do.

Yes, I did get to process a few tax returns. When one became complex, I handed it over to the franchise owner, then went back to don my uniform. Had to explain on my way back through the office, "I am actually a trained and certified tax preparer. You didn't start out with the office clown!"

Live theater can be fun for the narcissist. The name of the game is to attract attention, and make people smile. Shake the money tree, and do your bit to make sure that your tax service is the one that comes to mind when people want to find help. When you get your chance to perform as Lady Liberty, you are welcome to use some of my shticks:

- **Smedley Shrugged:** Go down on one knee, and hold the sign on your shoulders, like the guy on the cover of an Ayn Rand novel. Discontinue when your knee goes on strike.
- **Smedley Was Here.** Hold the arrow sign against your mustache, with overlapping fingers on either side of face. Smile!
- **Golgotha Gig:** Hunch forward, hold sign on back, and trudge back and forth in view of traffic.
- **Blustery day:** Mime the act of struggling forward, then being blown back, by the wind. Think Sisyphus.
- **Lady Liberty.** Stand erect, and hold the sign overhead with one hand like a torch. Be sure the arrow points towards the office.
- **Tightrope.** Hold sign at waist level, while walking the curb. Jiggle and topple when the light changes.



Four cousins

Once you develop a repertoire, vary it in time with the changes of the traffic signal. The name of the game is to achieve maximum visibility in all four directions, while providing enough variety so that people will notice you day after day.

It's been fun. I got to know and respect Joe Casale, the franchise owner and a Christian gentleman. I

had an excuse to buy an Emerson mp3 player for \$20 that plugs into a USB port. If you don't mind a mechanical voice, fill in the gaps in your culture by listening to Edgar Rice Burroughs novels downloaded from Project Gutenberg. When guilty pleasures cloy, listen to a sermon. Or, when truly ambitious, listen to a chapter or three of John's Gospel in Turkish. Time flies when you're having fun!



Four sisters

Then again, if you are 58 and closing in on a PhD, this job will also embarrass your pastor and friends into praying with increase fervor for your gainful employment in a more lucrative, less visible job.

Wheat Valley Lodge

Meanwhile, Dad and I continue to meet the nicest people while we advertise and rent out his two vacation properties. The VRBO (Vacation Rentals By Owners) web site steers people our way. I chat with them on the phone, e-mail some information, keep up the reservation calendar, and make sure the money comes in.



One of these properties is the log cabin Dad built with Brian while he nursed Mom through her final illness. It was a sanity saver for him then, and is a masterpiece for guests now. The poplar logs and lumber were sawmilled on site, along with cherry planks for interior walls.

With three bedrooms, 2½ baths, and incredible craftsmanship, the cabin is perfect for couples and small families.

Or, if you have ten or more people in your group, we also offer a lodge that has six bedrooms, two baths, a

great room, and a conference room.
Here are the relevant web sites:

- <http://www.vrbo.com/254886>
- <http://www.vrbo.com/245475>
- www.wheatvalleylodge.com

Can entropy be reversed?

What do you do when your world comes unglued? It's easy to complain. [This youtube video](#) captures the demoralization of the UK's subjects. The opening line is unforgettable:

*Oh, the stories, have been told,
of kings in days of old,
but there's no England now.*

But how do you push back? The cynical American proverb says "you can't fight city hall." The Turks have a saying that expresses the same sentiment, *İt ürür, kervan yürür*. (The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on)

Sometimes, though, people resist.

In his epic novel *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo reflected on the difference between revolution and *émeute*. One event transforms the social landscape. The other is swallowed up by the smug status quo, which then goes on its way as before, with, perhaps, a brief case of cultural indigestion (burp!!!)



Traditional Easter picture, 2010

If you find yourself inside a mass movement, how can you tell the difference? Will the world be transformed for the better by the songs you sing and the signs you wave? Or will The Powers That Be tolerantly chuckle, pat your smart little head, and pursue their own agenda with more self-assured verve than ever?

The indifference of the elites, the ruling class, works for a while. As Israel discovered in 70 AD however, **societies do have their breaking points**. Long before the Romans

breached the walls, the citizens of the doomed city committed unspeakable atrocities on one another. Three implacable sects turned Mount Zion, the glorious ritual center of the earth, into a polluted, smoking war zone. One group defiled their own temple by bringing in foreign troops from Idumea, an abomination of desolation that gave faithful Jews one last warning to head for the hills.



Pippin among the cousins

In 1533-1535, John of Leyden and the Anabaptists brought apocalyptic hysteria to [Münster](#), along with the community of goods and of wives. They considered themselves to be the vanguard of the revolution, the elect theocratic rulers of the earth. They were wrong, but a lot of people died.

A unique youth movement of 1968-1971 looked, to its participants, like the apocalyptic inauguration of a whole new era. The old, discredited order was on its way out. Church and State, the rook and bishop gambit, had failed. A new King was about to sweep the pieces off the board, and **REDO FROM START**> And we would be there to see it happen!

Well, Jesus failed to come down to earth in 1975, so we had to. True, worthwhile things had happened. Individual lives were miraculously transformed. Juice freaks and acid freaks became Jesus Freaks.²

Yet, the impact upon the larger society was minimal. Three decades later, a few million graying saints ponder what happened to them way back when. All that fervor, effort, excitement, resulting in – what?

Well, the fastest growing segment of American Christianity, independent Pentecostal churches, now model their services on rock concerts. They prefer simplistic and repetitive choruses to the majestic and content-rich hymns of the church. Nearly 50 million of our peers are now dead, slaughtered before they could see the light of day. The public as a whole has messianic expectations of government agencies and agents. People are more inclined to look to The State for answers, rather than to the folks who keep

² In the vernacular of that day, *freak* meant *enthusiast*. People were passionate about alcohol, LSD, or Jesus.

asserting that "Jesus is the answer."

If that's all there is, my friend, then let's keep dancing ...

One of Isaac Asimov's most memorable short stories centers around the question, "Can entropy be reversed?" **Can we be more than spectators to our decline and fall?**

Worlds end. Often, folks who experience the end of *their* world confuse it with the end of *the* world, and fall into a disabling apocalyptic hysteria. During tough times, going inert is also easy to do. Denial hath its charms. We assure ourselves, "Surely Hitler didn't *really* mean what he wrote. Surely *our* neighbors wouldn't betray us to the KGB."

Yet, once in a while, someone in the midst of a collapsing world will salvage debris from the maelstrom, and create a new ark, a new social order, a new way for people to understand their place in the universe.

My dissertation, *Diagnostic and Repair Manual for Civilizations*, will study one such achievement, the creation of the Turkish Republic, as described in Atatürk's *Six Day Speech*. I use open-source text analysis software to compare this document to Augustine's *City of God*, another successful paradigm-changer. What do these texts have in common?

I also compare Atatürk's work to two influential documents that went nowhere, Plato's *Republic* and Thomas Moore's *Utopia*. It's like when you sit in the optometrist's chair, and click various lenses in place. Select **these** words. Filter out **those** words. Discuss the remainder, in context.

Stay tuned, friends!

Robust high-fiber breakfast

1. Soak 15-bean blend 8 hours.
2. Crock pot beans overnight.
3. Empty a 15-oz. can of diced tomatoes and a 12-oz. jar of salsa into a mixing bowl.
4. Add four cups of oatmeal.
5. Add the beans.
6. Stir in several tablespoonfuls of curry powder. Cumin has cholesterol-lowering properties, especially if you goose it with a pinch of pepper.
7. Ladle 8 oz. servings into sealable plastic containers.

The resulting "robust oatmeal" cooks up nicely in two minutes in a microwave oven. When attending a men's breakfast at church, garnish with meatballs, and label it "manly oatmeal."

I am looking for work.

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