



A Blonde Moment

column by Lisha Van Nieuwenhove

The naked truth

“Oh, you have no reason to be nervous. Just get out there, and picture the entire audience with no clothes on. That will help, and all your fear will disappear.”

So said my grade six teacher to her students when she was preparing us to make speeches in front of the class. Some of us loved the annual speech-making lesson, but others felt sick at the thought of standing in front of the teacher, let alone a roomful of classmates. But that was the advice she gave, and no doubt many of you have heard the same adage time and again.

News flash. It doesn't work.

On Saturday night, I had the pleasure - nope - opportunity - nope - occasion to step out onto a stage and face a theatre full of people with no clothes on. And trust me, it does nothing to alleviate fear in any way. Rather, it induces it.

We (as in the cast and crew) knew that the closing night of a show that we'd been running since the beginning of July would be in front of a group of naturists. It would be the third time that this group had come to the theatre for a show - they like the venue because it allows them to do what they feel comfortable doing in a closed (no general admission that night), respectful environment. We were forewarned, and had plenty of time to gear ourselves up mentally, if necessary. Some of the cast had performed before a naked audience before, but it was a first for me.

Although it fascinated me, I didn't think that the show, or myself, would be that affected by the fact that the audience was just like any other audience, but naked. And no matter how much preparation I thought I had done, nothing prepared me for the moment when we drove into the parking lot and I glimpsed some guests standing in the smoking area. One was on his cell phone, perhaps making a business call, or talking to his mother. He was starkers, save his socks and dress shoes. As we walked into the building, the other guests were milling about and getting their food, much like any other night when we arrive. All very friendly, all very personable. All very naked.

I got my food, ate, went and got ready for the show just like any other night. Aside from the momentary shock when I arrived, I was cool with this.

Before the curtain went up, we were warned that there were people sitting in the front row - good to know, as they are more visible to those of us onstage than the rest of the audience. I don't generally look into the audience

during a show anyway, but sometimes you can't help but see the front row, and in this particular play, I had to interact with the audience at the end of the final act.

I'd be lying if I said that those of us backstage weren't peeking through cracks in the set, trying to see whatever was on display. We're none of us perverts - this wasn't something you get to witness everyday, and we were all looking for a good story to tell. Who wouldn't? I didn't have my glasses on, and thus obtained no good story whatsoever while backstage.

Onstage - a different story. This particular theatre has front row seats that are quite close to the stage. In fact, if one wanted to, one could put one's feet up on the stage and sit quite comfortably. Now, on any night of the year, it is incredibly bad form to put your water cup, or your programme, or your feet on the stage during a performance. But it happens, and it only makes us, the actors, want to kick off full cups of water or boot the bottoms of the patrons' feet as we go about our business on stage. But what do you do when you see that feet on the stage, and they're attached to legs that are attached to ...? Well, you've likely created a visual for yourself now that you can't unsee. I'm sorry for that.

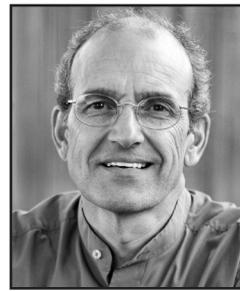
What were they thinking? Were they trying to throw us off? Were they taunting us, somehow? Or were they just so relaxed on their beach towel-covered seats that they blissfully forgot about the bits and bobs they were revealing to those of us onstage who had to concentrate and try to do a play?

Wow. Just, wow.

We, being the consummate professionals that we are, just carried on, but that was the story we told after the show, at our private cast party, away from the theatre. We compared our reactions, we talked about what we'd seen (oh come on, you know you would too), and we marvelled at the audacity.

Although the whole thing was a bit surreal, the show was probably one of our best ever - but we were very happy we didn't get a standing ovation at the end. I did the closing night speech, and was oh so proud of myself for not making any slips of the tongue that could have gotten me into hot water. We all took it in stride, and chalked it up to yet another bizarre experience in our theatre lives. I am glad, however, that I didn't see anyone I know.

Take heed the next time someone instructs you to “just picture them naked.” Tell them it's not all it's cracked up to be. Pun intended.



The Barris Beat

column by Ted Barris

What's the problem

They'd just turned off the lights and cameras. The Rogers on-air microphones had gone silent. I'd finished my wrap-up of the second candidates' forum over at the arena on Monday night. But we still had people standing in line at the floor mike eager to pose a few last questions. Then, with the broadcast done, a woman stepped to the mike and began to describe an eye-sore - a grain elevator - in her part of town. I wanted her to bring her concern to a question for the candidates, so I butted in.

“And the problem?” I said, expecting her to pose a question to one of the mayoral or councillor candidates.

“You're the problem,” she said.

“How is that?” I asked.

“Because last week, when the same issue came up, you said it was a Ward 1 problem,” she said. “It's not a Ward 1 problem. It's a community-wide problem!”

It's true. Too often, over the past few months of covering current affairs on the air, in the papers, online and even in public discourse, we - in the media and elsewhere - seem to have lost our way. Or, more correctly, perhaps we've missed the point. Whether the issue was international trade talks, sexual harassment in the workplace, nuclear weapons, pipelines, collusion or an eye-sore in this woman's neighbourhood, somehow we've felt compelled to condense everything to 10-second bite on TV, a one paragraph brief in the newspaper or a presidential tweet on Twitter. And too often they fall short.

Take, for example, this past weekend. With winds and rain battering and flooding coastal communities in the Carolinas last Thursday and Friday, the Cable News Network folks and the White House got into another rumble over news coverage and the president's reputation. During the storm, CNN's Anderson Cooper left the confines of his New York City studio and travelled south to the cover Hurricane Florence first-hand. At one point, a report showed Cooper up to his waist in water in a Caroline community, he said, “to illustrate how deep the flooding was.”

In response, Donald Trump Jr. quipped, “It's a shame that CNN's ratings are down 41 per cent. What's worse is there's a simple solution that they refuse to accept. Stop lying to try to make (President) Donald Trump look bad.” Another Trump supporter claimed that Cooper was actually down on his knees to make the water look deeper than it really was. Hang on a minute! Have we lost perspective here? Have

the media and its critics overlooked the fact that 32 people died in this storm? That flood-water has submerged or carried away thousands of people's homes? Or that rivers and lakes are still overflowing their banks and sucking the waste from livestock farms and landfill sites into ground water and community water plants? It's the proverbial can't-see-the-forest-for-the-trees scenario.

Then, there's the recent re-emergence of Jian Ghomeshi with his essay “Reflections from a Hashtag,” in the *New York Review of Books*. It's now about four years since he was last in the public eye when 24 women accused him of sexual harassment, followed by an explosive court case and, in March 2016, his acquittal on four counts of sexual assault and one count of choking involving three complainants. Anne Kingston in *Maclean's* magazine quotes Ghomeshi's essay in which he suggests he deserves credit: “One of my female friends quips that I should get some kind of public recognition as a MeToo pioneer,” he wrote. “There are lots of guys more hated than me now But I was the guy everyone hated first.”

We in the media seem obsessed with getting to these guys - whether Harvey Weinstein, Bill O'Reilly at Fox News, Les Moonves at CBS, or Jian Ghomeshi at CBC Radio - to discover their mental state, their rear-view mirror impressions and whether they feel any sense of remorse. Has anybody thought to interview or publish essays from their alleged victims? Have we moved the discussion of respect, consent and violence against women past the front pages of tabloid news or YouTube? Where is the evidence that corporations, government departments and entertainment houses of power have begun to root out the problem, not just sensationalize it?

Oddly, one of the problems I had with the candidates' forum last Monday night, was what the media coverage did to the format of the discussion. At one point, late in the Q-and-A session, one of the Rogers crew handed me a note. They wanted me to bring the meeting to a conclusion for the broadcast. No matter that there were still half a dozen people waiting to ask questions of the candidates. Of course, one of them was the woman who called me out on the Ward 1 eye-sore issue. In the interest of time, I had hurried the issue to a conclusion, not hurried to find the answer.

We need to do better, go further.

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A Blonde Moment

column by Lisha Van Nieuwenhove

Modern technology is killing me

Modern technology has it in for me. In fact, I think it's trying to kill me. I'm not referring to the little radioactive waves that are likely emanating from my cell phone while I talk on it, or are wafting over my face while I sleep because I left my phone on my bedside table. No, my grey matter is still intact (ish) and unaffected, to the best of my knowledge. It's the rest of my body that's taking a beating from all things new-fangled.

At the risk of sounding like an old, old person who has nothing better to talk about, I'm going to list my complaints. Cracked ribs. Sore lungs. A hip that's out of whack, and something tendon-y going wrong in my right foot. All bent out of shape because of gadgets and machines. Allow me to, again, be like an old person, and elaborate.

I live on a dairy farm just outside of Uxbridge. Said farm looks after in excess of 450 Holstein cattle on any given day. Because of this huge number, and because of increased milk quotas and a bunch of other industry stuff that I don't try to understand, a spiffy new barn the size of a football field was put up last summer and fall on our farm. It is white, it is glossy - it has 200 plus cows in it and smells *nice*. Two robots have quietly taken over the milking of these cows (the effect *that* technology has had on the farmers is fodder for another column), and the whole operation is as up-to-date and shiny as you can get. But it's still trying to kill me.

In the old barn, in the old milkhouse, now sits the old milk tank. That milk tank and I were friends. If we were out of milk at the house, any one of us could run up to the milk house, just a few hundred metres away, and quickly unscrew the cap located at the bottom of the tank, place our milk jug just beneath the spout, slowly pull a metal spigot, and fresh, cold, whole, delicious milk would spill into the container. Close off the spigot, hose off any drips, replace the cap, and we were on our way, tripping back to the house with a container of white wonderfulness.

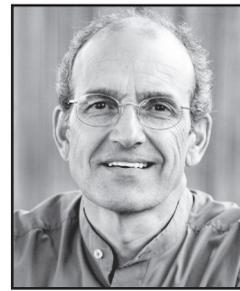
Now, now everything has changed. I woefully pass by the old milk house on my way to get milk from the glossy new barn, the barn that is trying to do me in. I mourn the good ol' days as I plod on, milk jug in hand. The new barn is at least 100 kms further away from the house than the old barn is. Ok, fine, only 150 metres or so, but it's been a cold winter, so one metre, one kilometre, it's all the same. I've stumbled and fallen on the slippery driveway, causing bruising in unpleasant spots. I accidentally kicked a hidden stone once, causing the ten-

don-y achy thing in my foot. I do try to enjoy the journey as much as my dog, Bella, but she likes the new barn far more than I.

Now, I step inside the shiny, new milk house, wherein is housed a tank so large it sits in two separate rooms. In this milk house, a wall-mounted computer proudly, constantly and loudly displays the current temperature of the tank. Hoses and tubes and gadgets of all sorts hang off the bottom of the tank, resembling two or three octopuses that can't untangle themselves. There is no cap. No spigot. Nowhere to gain access to the precious liquid inside. Ah, but wait. A ladder climbs up the end of the tank, leading to the only darned place anyone can get at the milk. A man-hole sized door held down by a latch, lined with a rubber O-ring that isn't attached to anything at all. Climb the ladder, undo the latch, carefully slide the cover off to the side, don't let the O-ring fall in (seriously, don't. It sinks like a stone and ends up at the other end of the tank and your husband has to partially undress and go in when the tank is empty and fish it out, and you have to face the family afterward. It isn't pretty). If all is good so far, let down your milk jug by the rope that is attached to it, and try to keep it in sight as it descends into milky whiteness. Wait till it fills up to the desired amount, and lift it carefully out of the tank again. Set the jug precariously on the edge while replacing the O-ring and the metal man-hole cover. Descend the ladder, clean up any and all drips and drops, and leave everything just as pristine as you found it.

It all sounds fairly easy, how can it be the least bit dangerous, you ask? Well, one of the first times we tried collecting milk from the new tank, the milk level wasn't high enough, and I leaned in through the large hole all the wrong way and wound up cracking two ribs and bruising all around. Climbing down the ladder, I missed a step and knocked a hip wonky. That was before Christmas - the hip is mended but I still can't take a deep breath or go in for a bear hug. Getting milk has become a solitary expedition for me (besides the dog) - no one else dares.

I think that, if I tread carefully in this new world and talk really nicely to all the machines and robots and tanks and tubes, if I proceed with caution, I may be ok. I refuse to live on a dairy farm and pay for milk (before anyone writes letters, we *are* allowed to drink our own milk). Yes, pride put me in the position I am in. It may yet kill me, but for now, I think I'll milk it for all it's worth.



The Barris Beat

column by Ted Barris

Accounting for more than numbers

The new year brings annual habits. Some of my friends are already eating crow about their promises to eat less, workout more and save somewhere in between. Others are still writing cheques (remember them?) with 2017 in the date box. Me? Well, I ran into my annual problem at the franchise stationery shop.

"Do you have any ledgers?" I asked the clerk. "You mean like lined-paper ledgers?" she said as if I had just asked her to fix my typewriter, give me a roll of pennies or fill 'er up. Then, she shook her head unsympathetically and I realized this was a no-go.

Yes, I said "ledger." You know, those big flip-open, blue-covered books that allow you to fill all those columns with daily, commercial entries and at the bottom of each column, total up your profits and losses? Remember, in the Christmas movies we watched a couple of weeks ago, as Ebenezer Scrooge sat hunched over his desk, scratching his ink quill across the pages of his accounting ledger? That's what I'm talking about. Now, I have moved beyond the ink quill, but as a lifelong freelancer (i.e. small business person) I'd always used the shoe-box method of accounting, until Brian Mulroney came along; in 1991, when the then prime minister brought in the Goods and Services Tax (GST), overnight I became a part-time accountant, submitting quarterly profit-and-loss statements to the Revenue Canada. That's when I started using a ledger book, a new one every year.

Which was fine until computers, digital and the Internet made ledgers obsolete. However, as an old dog, bound and determined to abide by my methods of accounting, each New Year's I've gone searching for a paper ledger. This year, for some reason, it was particularly difficult. I mentioned my problem to a friend a couple of weeks ago, and she pointed out that when her family ran an orchard in what is now Mississauga, she remembered her grandfather's ledger. It was a kind of history of what raw materials were required to run the farm, how much they cost, and ultimately how the apple operation fed her family. At one point, she said she remembered seeing an extraneous entry in the ledger.

"This day a baby boy born," the ledger read, revealing her grandfather's noting the day a son (my friend's father) was born. So, for her, the farm ledger was a diary of two generations before her, a living history on a ledger page.

As a kid, I remember when my parents had a hobby farm (instead of a cottage) over near the

Manvers Township transportation sheds where Hwy. 35 and 7A meet. For a few years, each spring, I planted thousands of Christmas trees there with the intention of harvesting them. Never did. Now there's a mature forest there. Anyway, one of my favourite outings was a weekly trip to the village of Bethany to do our weekly shopping at the general store (I think run by the Reid family). It truly was an all-purpose general store with everything from soup to nuts in stock. And all along the counter, the Reids kept mini-ledgers for each family who wanted to run an account for several visits and then square up at the end of the month. The commerce of Bethany was all documented right there in those general store ledgers. How civilized, eh?

A ledger of another kind came in very handy once in the early days of my military history research and writing. Every pilot I've ever known keeps what's called a flight log. And like a ledger, the pilot enters every flight on a single line across the ledger left-to-right, noting the date, aircraft registration, purpose of the flight, and total time in the air. A wartime log today is worth its weight in gold for historians. Once, when interviewing RCAF fighter pilot Charley Fox, I noticed a red check mark at the end of the entry for July 17, 1944. When I probed Charley, he revealed that was the day he strafed an open-top, German staff car on a road in France. The officer turned out to be Erwin Rommel, Hitler's field marshal in France. What a story I got from Charley ... thanks to his flight ledger.

Now, you're probably wondering, did Barris ever find his ancient ledger? Sure did. After giving up on all the usual locations, I happened to pass a shop in Toronto that specialized in writing paper, handmade cards and such. As I walked in I suddenly noticed on the counter behind the cash register lay a huge, open ledger with pencil entries in it.

"You use a ledger?" I exclaimed. "Always have," the proprietor said and she directed me to where I could find exactly the kind of ledger I needed. Someday, somebody (certainly not Brian Mulroney) will thank me and my antiquated ledgers for my dedication. For nearly 30 years, I've been doing my bit for the economy, line by line, in a paper ledger.

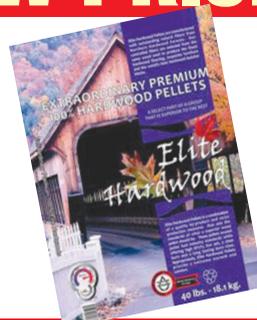
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A Blonde Moment

column by Lisha Van Nieuwenhove

Chick #1 leaves the nest

I've known I was going to write this column for a long, long time. But I couldn't write it until just this moment, because the events that are involved in the telling only happened this past weekend.

I drove my first child to university. I knew it was going to be a momentous occasion, I knew that there were going to be tears. Heck, I've been running the gamut between getting just a little moist in the eyes (when we bought her first set of cookware) to being really quite teary (when she graduated high school back in June) to all out sobbing (when my brain got the better of me; those ugly cries only happened in the privacy of the bathroom or in my pillow). But no matter how many people I chatted with about it, no matter how many times I pictured it all in my head, it wasn't a reality until Monday afternoon, around a quarter past one.

I had predicted that I would be a snivelling, snotty mess in those final moments before driving off. I was wrong. Instead, my daughter was the one who was a snivelling, snotty mess. And her youngest sister, who had come along for the ride, was no better. My motherly "I gotta keep it all together for them" instinct automatically kicked in and I found myself doling out tissues to the two of *them*, telling them that no one had died, that everything was going to be great, that it was all part of a new adventure - all the things that various people had said to me when I found myself getting melancholy over the whole thing.

We told a few jokes, had a couple more hugs, and I finally drew in a deep breath, said "Ok, we have to hit the road," and I jumped into the driver's seat before anyone could grab me. My youngest and I clicked on our seat belts (to the soundtrack of great sobs on her part), put the car in motion and pulled out of the parking lot.

It was, by far, one of the most difficult things I have ever done in my life.

My daughter is at Brock University in St. Catharines, and it has a gigantic roundabout as a central feature in its landscape. It took every ounce of willpower that I had to not loop around the entire circle and go back to my daughter, to where she still stood, waving as tears coursed down her cheeks. Even though we had planned this, and looked forward to it, and were/are as excited as anyone can be about her going away to school, I felt like I was abandoning her, somehow, like I was throwing her to the wolves, leaving her to fend for herself, which I was, in a sense, but in the most unkind way possible. I felt physically ill.

I managed to drive home with relatively few tears - can't afford blurry vision on the 401 - and

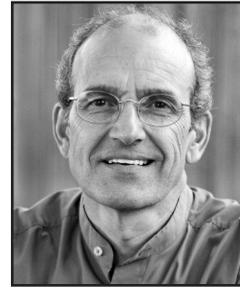
tears are still there, as we're only a few days into it and it's all still pretty raw. Friends who have been through this already say it gets better. My friend here in the office, Sue, promises that it does get better. I'm not trusting her word though - she did two back-to-back weekends of moving her two daughters off to two separate universities, and she's a hot mess. And I completely get it.

Sue and I (when we should be putting a newspaper together) have discussed this whole kids moving away thing at length, and we have completely justified ourselves feeling the way we do. We have, while working full-time, devoted our lives to our children. She's now got the proverbial "empty nest." My nest isn't empty, but the knowledge that my nest will never be the same is quite jarring. The daughter that comes back at Thanksgiving will not be the daughter that I left this weekend. Already she'll be different, a teeny bit more worldly, a tiny bit more savvy. A bit more grown up. And we all know that when we recognize that our kids are grown up, we ourselves have grown older. It all boils down to facing our mortality. Rather morose, isn't it? But it's true. Kids marching off to school, starting the next grade...it's just all putting us one step closer to when it's all over. And that just plain sucks.

So, instead of looking forward to the inevitable end - because that's just horribly depressing - I find myself looking back. Looking back to when we lived in Sunderland, and a neighbour would always tease me about traipsing around town with my three girls in tow like a mother hen with her chicks. I had several people say that to me, actually, and I realized that that was how I thought of them. My chicks. Now one of my chicks is fluffing her feathers and, to beat the metaphor to death, leaving the nest. I'm so excited for her, to see what she'll become, to watch her grow as a woman, and if I know her, to take over Brock University single-handedly. Good on her.

I am all for letting my girls discover their futures and will support them every step of the way. But in the manual I received when my kids were born (what, you didn't get one?!), the chapter on them moving off to school was strangely omitted and I find myself a little unprepared. Thank heavens for texting and all the social media. My daughter and I can connect in ways my mom and I never could when I was in school. Maybe that was a good thing...

To the parents out there who are going through kid withdrawal - know you aren't alone. Let's all be hot messes together. Kleenex, please.



The Barris Beat

column by Ted Barris

The U.S. war chest

About halfway through Meghan McCain's tribute to her father last Saturday in Washington, D.C., the director of TV coverage of Sen. John McCain's funeral cut away to a shot of the middle rows of mourners in the National Cathedral. Beyond the three former U.S. presidents - Obama, Bush and Clinton - and past the Republicans who *were* invited, sat row on row of American military people. They didn't appear to be military brass, but relatively young Marine, Army, Navy and Air Force veterans seated in solemn tribute to their hero.

"Look at the military ribbons across those chests," I thought, and then mused, "what a powerful statement of the man, the politician, the *real* state of America."

When the camera switched back to Meghan McCain, the terribly grief-stricken daughter was just hitting her stride in her eulogy. She called her father's death the passing of American greatness, appropriately pointing out her father's service as a U.S. Navy pilot, shot down in the Vietnam war only to endure five years of torture, deprivation and attempted brainwashing at the hands of his captors; but she hastened to compare her father's stoic, steadfast patriotism to "men who will never come near the sacrifice, those that live lives of comfort and privilege while he suffered and served," a clear and deft reference to the current president.

While she didn't review Donald Trump's military credentials, no doubt those mourners were reminded that the son of real-estate wealth, Donald went to New York Military Academy when he was 12, staying through his senior year in 1959; when he claimed he ascended to the leadership at the school, "in charge of all the cadets," the *Washington Post* discovered he was removed from his position because he allowed hazing of the boys in his command. He did not serve beyond the academy, receiving five deferments from the Vietnam draft, four for being at college and one medical one for bone spurs in his heels.

"The America of John McCain," his daughter said, "has no need to be made great again, because America was always great."

Amid the hymns, the prayers and eulogies offering appropriate commemoration for Sen. McCain (81 and just the 31st person to ever to lie in state this way) I think there emerged on Saturday a battle cry more powerful than even the lyrics of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," sung by the U.S. Naval Academy Glee Club choir that morning. "He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword/His truth is marching on." The confluence of such emo-

tion and push-back against the man currently running America, made those of us watching stop, feel moved, and even frightened at the intensity and power of the protest emerging.

Following McCain's daughter, former president George W. Bush was escorted to the pulpit to speak in tribute, sometimes in memory of great debates they'd had during elections, sometimes over international policy, often as fellow Republicans crafting policy. Bush said the senator always recognized, despite all, that his opponents were still patriots and human beings. It was perhaps Bush's greatest piece of oratory. But it was also, I think, a throwing down of the gauntlet against the kind of isolationist, racist and inflammatory rhetoric Donald Trump has unleashed in nearly two years of administration.

And when president Bush said, "John (McCain) detested the abuse of power," and that, "he could not abide bigots and swaggering despots," was he alluding to Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un? Or perhaps a man just a few doors up the road on Pennsylvania Avenue? "(McCain) respected the dignity inherent in every life - a dignity that does not stop at borders," Bush said. Was Mr. Bush alluding to the Ural Mountains of Russia, or perhaps the Rio Grande and even the 49th Parallel. They were fighting words, I think.

Finally, the man who said he was truly surprised to be asked to speak at the funeral, former president Barack Obama, spoke more subtly, more theatrically, more lethally than any of the eulogists. The words he chose had little to do with patriotism and tribute, but more with fervency and challenge. President Obama, whose name Mr. Trump doesn't even know how to spell, laid out the clarity of John McCain's America, a nation where anything is possible and where those who are citizens have an obligation to keep it that way.

"There are some things bigger than a party or ambition or money or fame or power," Obama said. "There are some things that are worth risking everything for, principles that are eternal, truths that are abiding."

As the funeral concluded, and I thought about the sorts of staged, campaign-like events President Trump addresses, in front of his base - rust-belt plants, gun lobbyists, and Republican hopefuls - I remembered the array of military ribbons of the mourners at Sen. John McCain's funeral. They - the so-called silent majority - may be the proverbial war chest that changes thinking, restores civility and turns the tide in the second half of Trump's presidency.

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