



You can probably guess what I'm itching to write about this week. I'm just dying to get into it. But I know better, so I shall resist. I'll practice self-control. I will not succumb to pride or pettiness or schadenfreude or any other base human emotions currently on display throughout Facebook Nation. I will "be the change I want to see."

Oh, who am I kidding?! I'm no Zen master.

In fact, as a friend pointed out last week – at choir practice, no less! – I'm "pretty tightly wound." So I just have to say it: *Nanny-nanny-boo-boo. Mitt Romney's not as mean, stupid and hapless as you expected!*

Whew. That felt good. Had to get it off my chest.

But this is not a pro-Romney column. Nor is it an anti-Obama column. Frankly, I didn't think the president was as bad in last week's debate as everybody else thought he was. It's just that Romney was so much better than anybody thought he would be. It's all about expectations. For one man, they were very high. For the other, very low. In many ways, I think Obama's lackluster performance can be blamed on the very media who are now behaving like a bunch of bratty fan boys who were personally betrayed by their favorite super hero. (Chris Matthews, I'm talking to you.) When you keep a government leader on a perpetual pedestal – never challenging his claims, never checking his facts – you're not exactly sharpening his debate skills. Meanwhile, Romney's been through the campaign equivalent of boot camp over the past year. Is it any wonder he came across as the happy warrior to Obama's peevish professor?

The day after the debate, I noticed a new crop of my Facebook friends were singing my old refrain, bemoaning the “mean-spiritedness” and “harsh commentary” out there. I thought, “And? You guys are just noticing this?” It suddenly occurred to me that all these lamentations were coming from my friends on the left. Maybe they really *were* just noticing the degree to which our political discourse has deteriorated. They simply weren’t accustomed to seeing their candidate criticized, mocked and ridiculed by the media and world at large. They were shocked. And hurt. I felt their pain. I’ve been feeling it for ages, as anybody who reads this column well knows.

Now, some of you will tell me I’m going too easy on the president – that he’s clearly a know-nothing poseur who’s not very bright and can’t function without a teleprompter. This image starkly contradicts the other one floating around out there – Obama as radical mastermind who’s stealthily plotting to turn us all into “slaves on his plantation.” (A direct quote from an email I received recently!) Then there will be those of you dying to inform me that, despite what I thought I saw on TV last week, Mitt Romney is actually smarmy and smirky and a big fat liar whose driving objective is to make the rich richer and keep the poor down. (An enticing goal, no doubt! What wealthy, accomplished, highly-respected man of retirement age could possibly resist such a challenge!?)

With all due respect to those who embrace these theories, none of them jibe with my own observations. And in a world where conflicting opinions swirl around like so many snowflakes in the wind, I’ve decided I might as well go with my own. I figure it’s just as good as anybody else’s.

Let’s face it. Along with the boot camp experience, Romney had the added advantage, last week, of being an actual human instead of the creepy caricature we’d been hearing about in the media. The real Romney was bound to come as a shock to those who were expecting Gordon Gekko or Montgomery Burns to show up at the podium. Obama, on the other hand, had his own media-crafted image to contend with, and it didn’t work in his favor. As it turns out, this is real life, not a Marvel Comics movie. Many forces in our culture conspire to make us view this election in terms of “Hero vs. Villain,” but ask yourself, sincerely – does that scenario really ring true for you? In your heart of hearts? As I see it – and yes, this is just one voter’s perspective – these are both decent, intelligent, well-meaning men who are, nevertheless, just that. Men. And as anybody who’s ever been a woman can tell you, men can be quite endearing at times, and also quite exasperating, but few are full-on heroes *or* villains.

Do the two candidates have different governing philosophies? Sure. And these are what we

should focus on as we head toward election day. Most people already know where they stand. There are still a few of us on the fence. I may be the only person I know who truly likes both candidates. So, as I prepare to cast my vote, I'm trying hard to filter out all the noise and determine what it is I really believe about the role of the federal government. There's been a lot of talk this election season about "caring" – one candidate "cares," we're told, and the other doesn't. Allow me to state for the record that I find that talk to be complete BS. The question is not "Who cares?" but how do we best channel *all* of our caring to advance the common good? I keep coming back to the words of Thomas Jefferson, who said, "The government closest to the people governs best." This was his argument for a less powerful, less-encompassing federal government, and for me, it makes sense at a gut level.

Allow me to demonstrate what I mean, using an example from my own life. I am the editor here at *Lowcountry Weekly*, which means that I am basically the "president" of the publication. (My husband, the publisher, may bridle at this. Don't worry, honey... you're the king!) Every press release that comes to the paper goes through me.

Yes, I have the power!

Unfortunately, we

have very limited space, so not everything that hits my inbox becomes a published story. While I strive to be fair, to give every press release equal opportunity, there simply isn't room for them all. So here's what tends to happen: Press releases that come from people I know – friends, colleagues, etc – catch my attention first. Press releases from strangers that come with notes addressed to me personally are next on the list. People with whom I have an actual conversation – over the phone or via email – have a much greater chance of making it into the paper than those with whom I never speak. Impersonal press releases that come as part of a mass emailing to many publications – unless they spark my interest in some way – are probably the last to be considered.

My point? As much as I'd like to turn every press release that comes my way into a *Lowcountry Weekly*

feature – because I care! I really care! – when it comes down to making choices, the folks with whom I have a personal connection are the ones I care about most. They're the ones to whom I feel the greatest responsibility.

This is human nature, folks. It just is. Maybe one day we'll evolve into a race of people who truly care as much about "humanity" – or even some stranger in Hoboken – as we do about our own families. I have friends who are dedicated to bringing that evolution about, and I applaud their efforts. But I don't think we're there yet. No city official can possibly care as much about that city's children as their own parents do. No state official can possibly care as much about the residents of a small town as that town's local officials do. Nobody in Washington, DC cares as much about the towns and cities of South Carolina as our own state officials do. And on it goes. So, I don't expect my federal government to "care" about me. It doesn't even *know* me. I want

my federal government to do the things it does best – and do them well – while enabling the other levels of government to do what they do best, well.

Don't get me wrong. We all need care. And we all need *to* care. I just wonder if those needs aren't best fulfilled on a more personal level, through our state and local governments, civic organizations, churches, charities, business relationships, friendships, families and so on. I believe this is what our founders envisioned for this country. Is that vision still viable in the 21st

century? I'm honestly not sure. But I know I'll be pondering the question pretty hard over the next few weeks.

My prayer is that we all allow each other to ponder in peace.

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