



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Last Thursday, slightly after lunchtime, everybody and their brother was watching Donald Trump's press conference.

I know this, because I logged onto Facebook right around then and found my newsfeed littered with real-time commentary. I say "littered," because what confronted me was a stream of blow-by-blow reportage from ticked-off armchair critics, and certain words just make you feel battered even when they're not aimed at you. I would quote some of them here, but as you've often heard me say . . . my mom reads this column.

"Why is everybody watching TV at 1:20 pm on a Thursday?" I wondered, exasperated, my equilibrium once again shattered. "Don't you people have *jobs*? Doesn't anybody go to the office anymore?"

Of course, this righteous internal tirade took place at *my* "office" – which, that day, was the *Low country Weekly* table at the Beaufort International Film Festival, where my "job" consisted of watching movies, chatting with filmmakers . . . and browsing Facebook.

Curses. Thrown from my high horse again.

A few hours earlier, a woman I barely know had approached our table and just commenced to Trump talkin', without so much as a friendly how-do-you-do. (FYI: Trump talk is like trash talk,

but with a Trumpian focus.) Her hair sprang wildly from her head and her eyes were glazed, as if, perhaps, she'd been up all night watching C-Span, then slammed four cups of coffee and a half-dozen energy bars. I listened politely to her list of grievances, a spray of machine gun fire, nodding and shaking my head when appropriate, trying to conjure a look of sympathy. Then I made my apologies and escaped to the sanctum of the USCB auditorium to watch another indie film. (Thank God for art.) I think I heard her mumbling to herself as I entered the dark theatre.

Seriously, y'all. I've never seen anything like this national obsession of ours. Has anybody been left unbitten by the Trump bug? People I've known for ages – lovely folks who always went about their business, work and family, never displaying the slightest interest in politics (bless their hearts) – have become raging Trump junkies, updating us hourly on the president's every utterance, his every trip to the White House bathroom. It seems some people just can't get enough. They gorge on indignation and anger and fear, then vomit it back up into the public square. And vomit smells. Despite their virtuous concerns – and I do believe they're virtuous – the energy they radiate feels anything but positive.

Incidentally, my favorite line from *The Avengers* keeps running through my head of late: "I am Loki of Asgard, and I am burdened with glorious purpose." Just sayin'...

What about all those high-minded universalists who once scoffed at quaint concepts like "patriotism"? Who poo-pooed the Constitution, calling it "just a piece of paper," "a living document," "not carved in stone"? Suddenly, there are strict constructionists everywhere! They're waving flags. They're quoting the Founding Fathers. Heck, they're even quoting Scripture.

(If my newsfeed is any indication, Trump is single-handedly reviving the Christian faith as our national religion. Irony abounds.)

Trump Fever has infected this humble publication, too. While once I was the only columnist here who dabbled in things political, I now have a stable full of Trump critics and apologists. Jack Sparacino, who once wrote gentle essays about dream jobs and war heroes, is now all Trumped out, all the time. My etiquette columnist L.A. Plume took on the "Trump talk" theme last issue, and in this issue, my advice columnist Aunt Bossy addresses Trump Hate and the way it can damage the hater. So far, my gardening and food writers have kept their columns Trump-free, but it's only a matter of time. We may have to change our name to *Trumpcountry Weekly*. Or
would Lo

wcountry Trumply
be catchier?

We're only human, after all. Caught up in the zeitgeist (Trumpgeist?), like everybody else.

And it's all very unsettling for this sweet southern girl who guzzled the 'If You Can't Say Anything Nice, Don't Say Anything At All' Kool-Aid from early childhood . . . and who was taught to "respect the office," even if you don't like the man. In fact, I've spent the last 16 years as a columnist cajoling my readers to do just that. Respect the office. It was easy for me, frankly, because *I'm* easy. I judged George W. Bush *and* Barack Obama to be fundamentally decent men with good intentions, and that's basically all it takes to win me over.

Sure, they had different worldviews. And different policy goals. And they both made mistakes. A lot of people hated them for those worldviews and policy goals and mistakes. Me? I've never been able to muster up hatred over politics.

And to be honest, I don't think Trump Hate has that much to do with politics, either. It's too visceral. Too scathing. Too full of bile. I believe Trump Hate is personal. It's about the man.

Not that he hasn't given us plenty of policies to criticize . . .

But I would argue that's what we *should* be doing. Criticizing his policies. Or supporting them, if that's where your values lie. But all this bristling vitriol . . . this rank, animalistic spleen-venting? It's chiseling away at our foundations, I think. The foundations of our country . . . and the foundations of our very humanity.

When you fill your social media pages daily with talk of "Agent Orange," "the Cheeto Monster," "the Nazi," and "all those bastards who voted for him," you're not just publicly condemning a massive group of Americans you don't even know – and driving that wedge just a little bit deeper into the heart of our nation – but you're poisoning your *own* heart. Binging on hatred is like swigging poison . . . or spewing toxic gas. You're not just putting those fumes into the air for others to breathe . . . that's the air

you
breathe, too.

I'm going out on a limb here. And I know I'll get irate emails for it – oh, Lord, save me from the irate emails – but I'm asking everybody to try an experiment. Next time you sit down at the computer, feeling all Trumped up and dying to “get it out of your system,” try thinking of Trump supporters, the Trump family, and – yes – even Trump himself, as human beings. Just human beings. That's all.

If you don't think you can manage it, it always helps me to remember the words of the great Lemony Snicket, who wrote, "People aren't either wicked or noble. They're like chef's salads, with good things and bad things chopped and mixed together in a vinaigrette of confusion and conflict.”

Presidents come and go, and our system of government is built to last. But if we Americans can't find a way to start communicating again -- with grace and humility – I fear we may be in for a series of unfortunate events.

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