



Margaret Evans, Editor

This spring, it seems there's no escape. You can't get away from it. It's everywhere. All over the place, all the time, making us all feel lousy.

No, not pollen. Politics.

A friend recently posted on Facebook: "I observed people being mean to each other out in the world today. I think FB hate is bleeding into WalMart hate and Chick-Fil-A drive-thru hate. Get a grip, people, and just be nice to each other. It's much easier."

Attempting a bit of "nice" playfulness, I commented: "Noooo... Not the Chick-Fil-A drive thru! That's one of the last bastions of civility!"

To which another friend replied: "If you're not gay, Margaret."

Ouch.

Same day, different Facebook friend. He posts a quote by Alexander Hamilton: "I think the first duty of society is justice."

Again, trying to lighten the mood, I ask, "Did he rap those words?"

"No, I think this was a quote from the *actual* Alexander Hamilton, not the bastardized one," my friend replies.

Another friend chimes in with, "The so-called bastardized one won the Pulitzer Prize for drama and is probably the best play since Shakespeare."

Friend #1 says something snarky to Friend #2 about being "entitled to his opinion," and they're off to the races. A couple of others who hate *Hamilton* for its politics join in to chide the guy who likes *Hamilton* for its artistry. (And maybe its politics, too?) Artistry Guy finally leaves the conversation, but not before dropping a link to the *Hamilton* soundtrack. It's a rap called "The Ten Duel Commandments."

I click. Can't help myself. Listen 'til I hear my favorite line:

"Can we agree that duels are dumb and immature?"

□□□□□□□□□□ *"Sure, but your man has to answer for his words, Burr."*

Well-played, Artistry Guy. Forget Facebook. I'm off to stream some *Hamilton*. I prefer my political duels set to music.

It's not just social media – or the Chick-Fil-A drive thru, or WalMart – and it's not just

other people. I do it to myself all the time. I'm my own worst enemy when it comes to poisoning everything with politics.

Recently, I've even let it invade my spiritual life. At choir practice, we're working on an anthem called "Christ Has Broken Down the Wall." It's a wonderful number, if slightly Up-With-People-esque, and we've done it before, to powerful effect. It features lyrics like "we're accepted as we are" and "peace and love freely offered here." Uplifting, right? Inspiring. Only now, whenever we rehearse the refrain – "Christ has broken down the wall" – all I can hear is "wall," and all I can see in my mind's eye is a certain controversial world leader with big hair.

I'm not talking about Jesus.

Even if Donald Trump were my favorite president ever, I wouldn't love seeing his face while singing the Sunday anthem. It just takes one out of the moment.

I'm tired of being taken out of my moments. Who knows how many of them I have left?

I would like to enjoy a cheerful exchange with a polite, chicken-peddling teenager in a visor without the word "hater" or "boycott" drifting through my mind. I would like to see *Hamilton* one day – assuming I win the lottery – and when I do, I don't want to miss crying over the beautiful song "It's Quiet Uptown" because I'm stewing over Lin-Manuel Miranda's perspective on history. I long to chat with a friend on Facebook without having my every word parsed for its darker implications.

(Truth: The other day, I had actually forgotten that buying a chicken sandwich is a political statement. Is the boycott still going? How long do I have to be angry that an old southern man supports "traditional" marriage? How long before I can forgive and forget and enjoy my waffle fries in peace?)

When, in God's name, can I let my guard down? It's hard to live in this world where the personal is *a/ways* political . . . this land of a thousand landmines, all just waiting to explode in your face.

If Alexander Hamilton was right that “the first duty of society is justice” – (and who knows if he even said that? who can trust the Internet anymore?) – then it’s safe to say that society isn’t doing its first duty. Not perfectly. Not yet. And those who are always on “justice watch” are pursuing a noble goal. We should all be pursuing justice.

But in our pursuit of Big Justice, I think we could all be more careful about perpetrating little *injustices* that impede that pursuit. I’m talking about little acts of misjudgment and misrepresentation. Little acts of pettiness and meanness that drive people farther apart . . . that don’t put folks in a “justice” kinda mood. I engage in these little acts all too often, myself, so I’m preaching to my own psychic choir.

I just finished watching the much-buzzed-about Netflix series *Thirteen Reasons Why*, about teenage suicide. My own teenager was watching, and I thought I’d better follow along, in case we needed to talk about it. Which we did. And we have.

One thing about the series that captured my imagination? The students at the fictional Liberty High School are completely post–identity politics. The “popular kids” are black, white, Asian, and mixed race. There are several well-liked gay teens, and all but one of them is “out.” (The one who isn’t has two gay dads and is struggling with the fear of being stereotyped.) In short, race and sexual orientation are not issues for these 21st century kids.

And yet. At Liberty High School, there is tribalism, bullying, cruelty, peer pressure, insecurity – all the same dark forces I remember struggling with in high school, over 30 years ago. It’s almost as if the achievement of social justice didn’t bring about high school utopia. The kids just found new ways to arrange themselves and continued being awful to each other. Huh.

Social justice is a worthy goal. A necessary goal. But while we’re moving toward it – and we’re getting closer all the time, y ‘all – let’s not give up on peace, love, and understanding. Let’s not sabotage ourselves by acting like teenagers at their very worst. Teenagers will grow out of that behavior, if we adults show them the way. We did, after all.

But sometimes, it feels like we’re backsliding.