

Friday, July 11. 2008

Life as a lemming

Apparently today is iPhone-day in Canada, and this is one of the smaller line-ups for them, out near my place on the way into work. Bear in mind it has been raining fairly hard all morning and from what I've heard, the data pricing on the Rogers iPhone isn't the greatest.

Readers of this blog know I've been using a an unlocked iPhone on fido for quite some time now - I have a very old contract with Fido, unlimited data transfers that's been grandfathered in ever since. You can't buy these anymore, which is why I faithfully renew this contract with Fido and just use whatever phone I want on their network by only buying GSM unlocked phones, or in the case of the iPhone, finding out how to unlock them.

My former CIRA-Board colleague Michael Geist has pointed out that if Bill C-61 passes, GSM unlocking your (repeat YOUR) own phone will become unlawful. (I was unaware of this, which is why I recommend everyone subscribe to Michael's blog feed, he keeps on top of this stuff).

Suffice it to say, this is retarded but life is sometimes a tale told by idiots, especially when we implicitly feel like we couldn't get through our daily lives without installing a few of them to govern us.

This morning's post basically comes down to three themes for me:

People are lemmings. The ones that really wanted an Iphone waited, and waited, and waited until somebody told them "now is the time but you have to use Carrier X" and they will wait, in the rain, for hours to get it on terms dictated to them by somebody else. A cursory cost/benefit analysis by any of these people would have led them to the conclusion that they would have been further ahead buying one off of Ebay, or even right here in Toronto at a place like Bongo Wireless, already unlocked and able to use under one's own existing cellphone contract.

Apple is making the same mistake again. They originally lost the desktop market to windows because they wouldn't open up the licensing, yes, they've bounced back in recent years but not too long ago, they were on a deathwatch. All it takes is somebody (*cough* google *cough*), it doesn't matter who, to come up with the next "sexy must have wireless device" and release it unlocked and unrestricted and Apple will take it up the nads again. The sheer volume of the "grey market" for iphones should have telegraphed to Apple that there was far more upside to selling the damn phone unlocked to anyone who wanted it with any carrier.

For good or ill, for the right reasons or the wrong reasons, Artificial barriers create opportunities. If Bill C-61 passes, I will not sign some NDP petition, I will not picket in the streets, I will not go egg Jim Prentice's car. I will go into business. I have already been researching GSM unlocked, Wifi-enabled, dual-mode SIP/VOiP smartphones: there are a bunch being manufactured in China, there are a few Linux based ones - I'm going to start selling these things and running my own sip proxy to route the VOIP traffic. I am betting that over the long term, people will choose open access and mobility over lock-in - we built easyDNS on this concept - the telecom landscape is ripe for it.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 10:31

Friday, May 30, 2008

What would Eckhart Tolle do with incontrovertible proof that 9/11 was an "inside job"?

Today's post considers far-fringe deep-politics within the context of individual spirituality and consciousness cultivation. It doesn't aim to come off sounding apathetic (9/11 was an inside job? So what?), but it takes a serious look at the "what if it were true" consequences from a viewpoint of "what could we do about it that isn't as bad as the mindset that precipitated it in the first place"?

I come to the conclusion that retribution-oriented finales, be it a blood-in-the-streets revolution or a neo-Nuremberg spectacle where the guilty are hung from meathooks en masse, though understandable, entirely predictable and possibly even probable, are not the enlightened choices. Rather what is needed is a mass exodus from the Herd. It is the Herd that makes these crimes against humanity possible, and it is the Herd which must be fled from and dissolved. Without it, corrupt power mongers are absent a pack of lemmings to drive off a cliff.

I'll then end the post with 7-steps anybody can take to quit the program and say goodbye to the Herd. Bon Voyage! Having been a long time reader of Eckhart Tolle's works and frequently listen to his audio books when driving I find myself wondering how somebody like him would react under certain conditions of stress or high emotion. How would "Power of Now" factor in, say, if Eckhart Tolle was stopped in traffic somewhere and somebody drove by and lobbed a hand grenade into his vehicle? Would an adrenaline rush ensue? Wild manic thought? ("Run!") Would the unthinking observer to his own thoughts slow things down? ("How interesting, there is a grenade in my car and my ego and my pain body are having a party"..."kaboom*..."and that's...ok")

Then as a lifelong junkie for conspiracy theories and fringe science I find myself more often asking myself the question "so what if it's true" with a completely different tonality lately. I used to think that if certain things were true it would be a travesty of unspeakable proportions and somewhere, somehow, there must be hell to pay for it! Now I wonder how I can just be free of these things and ask myself how I can be sure I'm not making a given situation worse. As a result, I find myself questioning all kinds of things that I think people are assumed never to question.

Many things we take for granted today are sustained by that lack of awareness, in fact they rely on it. Things like patriotism. Why is my particular country great and everybody else's morally inferior? Is it because I was born here and that's it? It seems pretty tenuous when you think about it, but we are encouraged from a very young age not to. Every political state, every power structure has a bunch of bodies buried in the backyard somewhere. Here in Canada, the land was taken from its original inhabitants in a pretty one-sided manner, the treatment of the Japanese during World War Two, and our complicity in various black-bag ops around the world (I won't name them here) all come to mind. Our hands are dirty, so is every other country's. But we are trained to never look at this with a critical eye. Suffice it to say that we are the greatest hockey nation on the face of the earth, our beer rocks and we are not Americans and that's about all it takes. Canada, number 1, eh.

My country does stuff and has done stuff that we would use as justification against another country for war. Happens all the time and every country does it. When we do it, it's ok. When you do it, it's war! It's a type of culturally ingrained one-sidedness I've heard called "American exceptionalism" that applies to everybody. It seems to make patriotism an absurd belief that $2 + 2 = 4$, but only when we're the ones adding it up.

After 9/11 it became off-limits to critically examine patriotism. Bill O'Reilly told us if we didn't agree with the pre-emptive war on Iraq we should just shut up. It was on all "loyal" Americans to do so. Loyalty is as interesting as patriotism in this context. What are Americans expected to be loyal to? That's another question which takes people into off-limits territory.

The "9/11 was an Inside Job" meme is sure to earn anybody who even entertains it a whole handful of labels they wouldn't readily invite on themselves. If the prospect of that possibility is too disruptive to your worldview to even consider critically, how about looking at some other less disturbing "fact" that you're expected to swallow without reservation, like Consumer Price Inflation is currently running 2.4% annually. Start there, see if any of your direct observational experiences in your own life seem to contradict that. Start doing that more often.

The 30-second guide to the "Inside Job" meme is this: The Project For a New American Century published "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces, and Resources For a New Century" a year before 9/11 that almost wishfully hoped for "some catastrophic and catalyzing event â€" like a new Pearl Harbor"... and then it happened. And the same

guys who founded PNAC (Rumsfeld, Cheney, etc) happened to be running the administration at the time. Odd that.

If I posted on this blog "my life would be a lot easier if something 'happened' to my business partners" and a year or so later they were both in a cab that exploded or a plane that crashed, that blog post would come back to haunt me. Especially if I also took out sizable insurance policies on them shortly before the event.

So I read an interesting overview of the 9/11 as Inside Job which cites Edward Luttwak's Coup D'Etat: A Practical Handbook a book which practically lept off of a used-bookstore shelf into my hands many years ago. Luttwak mentioned 3 preconditions to a successful coup, we have been looking today at number 2, the second requirement of a successful coup d'etat is....(drumroll please)

a passive people not likely to react to a takeover

And that is certainly what we have today. We have a populous so docile, so tamed that not only would they not react to a takeover, it would be surprising if they noticed it.

But, then there are those people who do notice it, or at least suspect it, or perhaps even consider the possibility that it has taken place. What are those people to do? Personally when I hear "calls to arms", most of them fall flat for me. Go out into the streets as part of a mob with a placard that reads "9/11 TRUTH NOW!" Give me a break. It seems as mindless to me as "They hate us because of our freedoms". It doesn't matter what's written on the placards - slogans numb thought. It's the secret sauce the advertising industry pays billions to maintain.

Which brings us to the true dichotomy of today's post, if I'm such an Eckhart Tolle fan, shouldn't I welcome that which kills thought? Shouldn't mindless conformity be encouraged, promoted and cultivated? Is Eckhart Tolle an agent of the New World Order? Hell, who isn't.

I've a long held cliché "one man's sewing circle is another's shadowy cabal". It means that from the Herd's perspective, anybody who manages to separate themselves from the Herd and achieve any kind of noteworthy repute, will be suspected by some sub-section of the Herd as being an Agent of the New World Order or The AntiChrist.

Would Eckhardt Tolle be out in the streets with a "9/11 TRUTH NOW" placard if he knew that the whole inside job meme was true? For some reason I would expect not. I don't think he would say "So what?", but I wouldn't be surprised if he said "Is that so?". Would a vengeful mob form around the thought body "Is that so?", calling those responsible onto the carpet and paying retribution? I doubt it.

So does the Eckhardt Tolle approach give us anything useful in response to this hypothetical construct? I think it does. I think where we arrive if we look at it is a place where mobs don't exist if everybody is present and conscious within their own lives. It's not that the correct response to "9/11 was an inside job" may very well be "Is that so?". What is more important is the correct response to "Those people over there are evil, we must do something!". If everybody responds "Is that so?", then the 9/11's stop happening and we'd live in place where the government was a purely administrative functionary - keeping the traffic lights operating, etc. They wouldn't spend their time calculating what has to happen "out there" because everybody "in here" just wouldn't buy into the hysteria. "Iran is run by a sub-human!" Now that's a "So What? Have you fixed the damn levee yet? It's almost hurricane season here"

My personal suspicion is that the mob, the populace, the Herd, can by definition only be motivated into doing the wrong thing and to make things worse. If they're all fired up about something and ready to act on it, it can only end in trouble.

Those who truly wish to do The Right Thing™; can only be present, get grounded and not allow themselves to be swept up and away by other people's agendas.

Part II: How does one become present and grounded in a world full of hysterical mobs?

We are told to begin becoming aware of the "spaces". Eckhardt Tolle advises us that a good first step is to start paying attention to the short silences between the words you hear. My first exposure to the concept was in Daniel Goldman's Emotional Intelligence where he discusses the "space" between a stimulus and your reaction to it. I read that book a couple years after getting sober and it was literally the first I had ever heard or even thought or made aware of that space. "There's a space between a stimulus and my reaction to it?" I exclaimed. I had no idea. My entire life until then had simply been one long reaction to things. The revelation that there was a small gap, no matter how imperceptible it was at the time, between an event or stimulation and "my" response to it meant that there was some space there for me to enter the situation, by "me" I mean my real being, not my automaton self which, when oblivious to that buffer zone of

Blog Export: Exile From the Herd, <http://www.privateworld.com/>

consciousness would just fly off on auto-pilot and react.

Event/Stimulus -> [Insert you here - take a deep breath - analyze situation - acceptance] -> response = A world where everybody goes around leading their lives in relative peace and prosperity

or

Event/Stimulus -> Response = a world of lemmings where the masses are perpetually pushed around by those who know which buttons to press.

So here are my 7 steps toward being able to increase the size of the gaps between the stimulus and the response, 7-steps toward functioning from your own internal being, how not to be "among leaves blown on a furious wind"

Watch less television. Every successful person I've ever studied from the modern era has little use for it and they all advise against it.

Get your news privately: by this I mean seek out specialized, competent news and analysis that is not really for public consumption. In my case this varies from The Privateer to Marc Faber's Gloom Boom Doom Report and Stratfor. CNN and CNBC are just comic relief for me.

Eliminate Debt: While Television was the opiate of the last generation's masses, insurmountable debt is how the next generation of slave mobs will be grown and controlled. Avoid consumer debt like the plague. Get rid of any you have. Use productive debt (leverage) with caution. Don't over-leverage.

Shed your addictions: Identify what your most debilitating, life limiting addiction is. Make a decision to leave it behind. Do so. Repeat as required.

Think!: Analyze those things you are expected to swallow without question. Are the premises true?

Don't think!: Your mind is a tool, don't confuse it with who you actually are. Your thoughts are not you, they're just thoughts.

Avoid Mobs: General Rule of Thumb: Most members of most crowds are followers. If you're following something or somebody, how closely have you examined what you're actually doing?

All of which is easier said than done, but if you spend your time on the above, at least you won't have time to screw up anybody else's life.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 10:35

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

YABR: Yet Another Blog Rebranding

I've changed my blog name again. I realized I really like the "private world" meme and plan to expand on it at length and that "privateworld.com" was just a way better domain name than "mark.jeftovic.net".

I also ditched the "Under the Radar" caption because I found out awhile back that there is another tech blog that calls itself that. So after some consideration I've gone with "Exile From the Herd" because it follows on some thinking I've been doing about the very rough division of all people into three groups:

The Herd If you're aware of it, you do not want to be in it. This is the vast majority of the population who live in a comatose dreamworld, delegate their thinking to others and will happily follow their next door neighbour or somebody they perceive to be "in charge" off the edge of a cliff if they think everybody else is doing it.

Predators These guys love the herd because they prey on them. For the most part it's like shooting fish in a barrel or clubbing baby seals to death. Amoral, easy and lucrative. Predators can be found in many guises: televangelists, snake-oil salesmen, cult leaders and all politicians are predators. If everybody got smart, these guys would all be hung from meathooks. An informed citizenry is the bane of the predator's existence.

Sovereign Individuals These are people who have separated themselves from the herd and have built up suitable defenses around themselves to be largely free from predation. Predators for the most part leave these guys alone and move onto easier pastures. Sovereign Individuals don't care who thinks they're in charge of what. All that matters is that they can run their own lives. For the most part, they write their own tickets and mind their own business.

I of course aspire to the third group. It is largely an ideal and can only be progressed toward but never truly attained.

In thinking on this I also came up with another one of my silly "socialist, conservative, libertarian" jokes because the three groups align very roughly along those definitions.

Question: What happens when a libertarian, a conservative and a socialist witness a fisherman overturning his boat on a lake?

Answer: The libertarian tries to help the guy. The conservative pontificates that the fisherman needs to take responsibility for his own life circumstances and the socialist argues that the fisherman suffers from an unfair disadvantage compared to people on shore and suggests we should all jump into the lake to make everybody even.

Anyway, this is more or less a test post, people subscribed via the old URL RSS feed should still see posts, and new subscribers should end up under the new URL.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 16:09

Thursday, July 12, 2007

Another day, another singularity

I've been pondering a post for sometime about the pure implausibility of capital-C Conspiracies. The one's where everything under the sun is orchestrated and executed by a behind-the-scenes power block "at the top" THAT CONTROLS EVERYTHING.

Bear in mind that everything is relative: One man's knitting circle is another's shadowy cabal.

Whether it was Alfred Pike meticulously planning three world wars over two hundred years ago, William Guy Carr's Luciferian-Communist conspiracy which engineered every significant event of the 20-th century, or even David Icke's "we really do live in a Matrix controlled by lizards" fantasy, there was an obvious impossibility to it that I was having a hard time articulating.

Then I saw a reference on Boing Boing to fiction themed around a "post-singularity" of some sort from authors like Verner Vinge (Not being a huge SF fan, I've only read his True Names anthology) and after doing a little reading on what the technological singularity is supposed to be, it finally occurred to me:

Various types of "singularities" have already occurred throughout history, and they make Capital-C "Conspiracies" impossible. Sure, various people will try to control the world, but it can't be done. Nobody is doing it. Nobody has ever done it. The world is by its nature, uncontrollable. We live in an out-of-control world.

The one line descriptor of a singularity, courtesy of Wikipedia is:

"a theoretical point in the development of a scientific civilization at which technological progress accelerates into infinity or beyond prediction"

The fallout of this can be described appropriately in the following two passages:

1) It is a point where our old models must be discarded and a new reality rules.
(Verner Vinge)

and

2) In futures studies, a technological singularity represents a hypothetical "event horizon" in the predictability of human technological development. Past this event horizon, following the creation of strong artificial intelligence or the amplification of human intelligence, existing models of the future cease to give reliable or accurate answers.

[...]

as one approaches the Singularity, models of the future become less reliable, just as conventional models of physics break down as one approaches a gravitational singularity.

Both courtesy of The Singularity is Nonsense

There are entire movements both pro and con debating whether an approaching technological singularity, or rather The Approaching Technological Singularity is a Good Thing(tm) or a Bad Thing(tm). The argument revolves around AI (artificial intelligence), and the theory/fetish/dread of a moment when it emerges and begins a self-iterating feedback loop, supplanting human intelligence in a few measly billion cycles.

Personally, I think if you distill a singularity down to it's basic feature, it is a buildup and escalation of events to a point after which nothing is ever the same, and beyond which prior conventional wisdom breaks down. Perhaps we are really

talking about seminal moments and their unexpected consequences after they play out over time, especially if they feedback on themselves. Technologies that become so ubiquitous nobody can imagine, life before it emerged. (i.e. "How did people survive without radio, telephones, television, fax machines, email, ipods?")

If we look at singularities this way, then as the old detergent commercial used to remark: "You're soaking in it". Singularities are another word for history. Or maybe a subset of history called revolutions.

H.R Clements called the discovery of "perspective" as the context shift which touched off the Renaissance and spelled the end of feudalism and the Church as the central power structure of the day. They weren't too happy about it, (hence the Inquisition) but by the time they realized there was something to be unhappy about, it was already too late. The singularity had already happened and the writing was on the wall.

So if there were any wide ranging conspiracies to control all facets of mankind's existence, even if they were enjoying a degree of success at the time, they were turned on their ear by the discovery of perspective, and the accompanying context shift. The Matrix of the day was upended by it. Any plans the shadowy cabal had for the future of mankind had become meaningless, and in retrospect, almost comical. Best laid plans, and all that.

Future historians may reflect that today's War on Terror is the modern parallel to the Inquisition. Breathy tech evangelists may gush "yes! the internet is the singularity which spells the end of the nation state!", but they're wrong. It was the invention of the Corporation, hundreds of years ago, which started that snowball rolling.

That creation out of thin air, of a separate legal person, created a logic of it's own, and once capital formation and investment began their long iterative feedback loops into the future, the days of the nation states became numbered. It was only a matter of time before Corporate entities emerged with GDPs larger than countries. Analogous to the fictional Aspen Research Corporation in Brian Fawcett's 1990 Public Eye: An Investigation in to the Disappearance of the World - after awhile a logic of its own asserted itself into the affairs of men and of nation states. The corporate twin imperatives increase profits and minimize taxation spun out a multitude of strategems and tactics which iterated over the fiscal years, and if successful, compounded. Placed into the primordial soup of an ostensibly free market the feedback loops reinforced themselves (and each other) and it's making national sovereignty as obsolete as fealty.

What all this means is that it is inherently impossible to project any kind of control structure forward indefinitely. Sooner or later something comes along that makes it impossible to keep a plan on the rails. There may well be Freemasons, Illuminati, Bilderbergers, Trilateralists, little grey aliens and reptilian overlords running around trying to control things. But they don't have the ability to assert control over the next paradigm's control structures because nobody knows what they're going to be until it's already happened.

A new conspiracy could be initiated when these bifurcation points occur, but they won't be Capital-C Conspiracies, they'll just be little baby small-c conspiracies. Small-c conspirators compete in an open market like anything else. Whether it be P2, PNAC, Triads, Al-Queda, biker gangs or the Flat Earth Society: these small-c conspirators may become powerful, for a time. But none of them will ever achieve Total World Domination.

Because singularities happen.

The emergence of perspective in European art created a context shift which made feudalism unworkable, gave rise to a merchant class and ended the hegemony of the church.

The advent of an organizational singularity: the corporation eventually made it impossible for nation states to "make reliable or accurate assessments about the future" (which is why I always chuckle when I see straight faced congressional testimony about how best to "manage" things like the macro economy).

Not to leave the breathy tech evangelists flat from my earlier remark, an informational singularity did occur on the internet. With the advent of dynamically created web pages, cross site API's, XML, SOAP et al, the number of web pages in existence has at some point become essentially infinite, and I couldn't tell you what the other end of that looks like, it's still pretty new and I'm no futurist - I'm just along for the ride.

But at the end of the day, if a tree falls in the forest, or a plane crashes, or you got passed over for that promotion at work, it isn't because some all-seeing, all-powerful cabal has ordained it.

If these entities truly did exist and truly "ran the world", we would have never seen things like the free enterprise, capitalism, freedom of speech, property rights, private savings or the internet. The hegemon would simply run a well-oiled command economy, leaving nobody any illusions about their ostensible freedoms. There would also be no

conflicts, anywhere.

Conflict means disagreement and as long as they occur, it means nobody is really truly "king of the world". Fortunately.

It appears as though we're faced with another one of those paradoxical tradeoffs which define the human condition. I've read that the ultimate price of sexual reproduction was death, (as opposed to those asexual reproducers which spawn perfect copies of themselves and have a type of de facto immortality as a result), the presence of worldwide freedom brings with it out-of-control conflict everywhere you look.

The old maxim is true, don't ascribe to conspiracy what can be explained by stupidity.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 14:23

Tuesday, July 18. 2006

Life At The Margins

The elevator in my office building hasn't been working since last week. I meant to do this yesterday but today I finally called building management to report it. It turned out nobody else had done so. I overheard a lot of people in the halls complaining about it, but none of them actually did anything about it, even if it only required the most innocuous of actions to set a remedy in motion. So eventually, I did something about it. What's the difference between me and everybody else? About $\pm 10\%$ I figure.

That means most of the time I'll go an extra 10% over the crowd, one extra mile out of ten, or maybe my exasperation threshold is 10% lower than everyone else's.

Over a lifetime, this not only adds up, it compounds. The Daily Reckoning crew often point out that "Life is won or lost at the margins". What separates successful people from the mob isn't one or two mind blowing qualities nobody can compete with, like an IQ of 192 or a trust fund the size of a third-world GDP. It's the margins, consistently going just a little bit further, being a little bit more thorough, acting just a little bit sooner, most of the time, over time.

These little differences feedback into each other and as I said, compound. After a few years you notice the person who goes the extra 10% is a little ahead of his peers. He may be self-employed while the others are working up the corporate ladder. She may own her condo outright while the rest are chisling away at 10% down mortgages. At this point it still looks like little things and subtle differences.

Fast forward a decade, or more. The picture changes dramatically and the consistent margin player (not to be confused with the consistently marginal player) seems light-years ahead of the pack. "Why are they so lucky?" People around them wonder. "Goddamn horseshoe shoved up his ass I tell ya. What's on TV? Pass me the cheesies, why is the remote way over there?"

I probably didn't invent this expression, so I apologize to whomever I picked it up from

Overnight Sensations are often 20 years in the making.

What makes it seem "overnight" are those margin plays, compounding for decades, 5% more dilligence here, 10% more elbow grease there, 7% more perserverance over there and a dash of extra tenacity all got together and exploded past critical mass at some point.

And the nice thing about it is anybody can put in an extra 10% anytime, anywhere. Do it all the time and you will come out ahead of the pack.

So the next time you ask you yourself "Why are they so lucky?", the answer is "Because you haven't built up a big balance of 'luck' in your own life".

But you can start now. The sooner you realize that you are the "somebody" in "somebody should...", your luck in life will abound.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 11:42

Monday, April 24, 2006

Life's inevitable ironies, twists and turns

I haven't blogged for quite some time. The longer I'm away from blogging, the harder it is to get back in because I feel a need to adequately write about all the events that transpired in the interim, those which kept me from writing. It's such a daunting task I put it off until I break down and usually dispense with the entire gap in once sentence:

I'm a daddy, I have baby daughter now.

Enough said.

Now that I'm a parent, I find myself marvelling at the twists and turns my life has taken to get me to this point. The point where I find myself looking into the 7-week old eyes of a newborn infant who flashes that dazzling smile of hers which simply floors me and thinking: there's a little baby soul in there, and that soul needs her daddy, and that's me.

Speaking of life's ironies and twists, I choose today to resume blogging because Bob Rae is expected to announce his candidacy for the federal liberal party. The man led the socialist NDP to a one-term government in Ontario which took the province from a surplus to about a 27 billion dollar deficit in 5 quick years wants to run the surplus running, federal debt-reducing libs. Man that's weird.

The other weird thing is when Rae was premier he wrote a little song called "We're in the Same Boat Now", a joyful ditty about multi-racial harmony, and submitted it to Sony Music for publication and was laughed at publicly.

Always the opportunist, I jumped on the situation and the heavy-metal band I was in at the time, Landslide, recorded a power-punk version of that song and released it to the media for a very fun, albeit short-lived, moment in the sun for our band. (We predictably distingrated shortly after that).

I still have 7" singles of our rendition of Bob Rae's song, and I recently managed to snag the landslide.ca domain name, so I think I will quickly throw a website up there and put the old Rae ditty and the other Landslide tunes up for posterity.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 15:16

Saturday, October 29, 2005

Who is this Atavist guy anyway?

A lot of my blog entries reference Sieg, the Atavist and you may wonder "who is this guy?". He is not a peer, he's from a different generation than I am. More of a mentor, he gave me my first job in computing back in 1993. His software company was getting near the end of the list in the phone book, and I was cold-calling them all looking for a job (and getting nowhere). He agreed to see me, and had in mind the task of porting his courier company's COBOL applications and data from an old Tandy microcomputer (with 8" floppy drives) to a shiny new 486 running SCO Xenix. Did I know anything about it? Nothing. "Sink or swim" were his parting words to me as he loaded me up with a stack of manuals and sent me on my way.

It was the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship (I hope for both of us). I spent many an afternoon in his office combing through source code, figuring out how stuff was supposed to work and Sieg would teach me about investments, economics and a crazy political theory he subscribed to which turned out to be Libertarianism. It sounded like workable anarchy to me and it made no sense (I was still pretty left-leaning in those days, having been a recent student, and when you're safely nuzzled away in an academic cacoon, you inevitably turn into a raving pinko. I'm probably still further to the left today than most capital L Libertarians if only for the simple fact that I haven't left Canada) Sieg, pictured above at age four, came to Canada from Germany (as did my own mother), but I didn't know about his early life until I read his blog post about it today. The fact that his family spent their first winter in Canada living in a chicken coop in Alberta is a testament to the principles Sieg embodies: self-reliance and personal responsibility. Something we're woefully short of in today's world full of entitlements and reluctance to accept responsibility for one's own actions.

So quote Sieg: I have never felt disadvantaged because of the less than perfect circumstances during some parts of my life. I never wanted anyone to feel sorry for me or to help make things better. I learned that from the example of my parents. They just wanted to be left alone to succeed on their own. That is all I have ever wanted. Don't help. Just get the hell out of my way. Don't give me anything, but don't take from me what isn't yours either.

Amen to that.

This is not to say that people shouldn't help each other, and I don't think Sieg means to say that. I know this because several times over my life, he has come to my aid in one manner or another but I think the key point here was that at the time, I asked for his help.

Self reliance doesn't mean nobody co-operates and you let your fellow man starve to death or drown, but it does mean picking up the cards you are dealt and playing them.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 12:29

Thursday, October 20, 2005

Between Batgirl and a Monkee

Friday night/early saturday AM, around 12:30 EST am I'll be doing a segment about WEHT.net on a special "Where Are They Now?" show on WBZ NewsRadio 1030, which I'm told goes out across 38 states. Word is that I'll be on after Micky Dolenz and before former Batgirl Yvonne Craig. Kinda cool.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Life, the Universe and Everything at 16:58

Tuesday, June 7, 2005

Stupidity, mentors and bye-bye to the CIRA Board

I'm sitting up late in my hotel room in St. John's, Newfoundland having just completed two things:

- 1) A few hours ago I left my last Board meeting as a CIRA Director, aside from a short teleconference slated for next week, as of June 22nd, my term is over and I'm done.
- 2) Because I can't sleep, I just watched Albert Nerenberg's documentary Stupidity which just aired on CBC's Rough Cuts.

I'm glad I watched it. Something I've been trying to do over the last few years is come to grips with my own stupidity. Being on the CIRA Board didn't help. It was an honour and a privilege to serve on the Board, but it was also one of the my more intimidating experiences. The CIRA Board is stacked with incredibly smart people who really know what they're talking about and most of them are drawing from intellectual wells that are far deeper than my own.

I could go around the table and individually cite each person's acumen and intellect but that may drift this post into "fluff job" territory. Suffice it to say that there is a formidable array of intelligence there.

As for myself, I have a talent for seeing patterns amongst the obscure and an ability to extrapolate present conditions in a non-linear way to come up with unexpected and sometimes surprisingly compelling predictions or models. Because of these knacks I sometimes appear to be of above-average intelligence.

But I also have a problem with what I call being "oblivious to the obvious". I overlook things which are right in front of my face and from time to time I appear to be dumb as a post because of it. I suspect it stems from a variety of factors ranging from a short attention span to genuine lack of comprehension skills but I've come to recognize it as my own personal disability and I have to constantly compensate for it.

My primary method of doing this is through trusted mentors and advisors who I constantly barrage with a steady stream of ideas and notions to "reality test" and "sanity check". My wife is the closest and first line of defense against my own dull-wittedness. Then I have layers of friends and advisors expanding outwards in concentric circles. Most of my stupid ideas will get null routed somewhere along those shells before they can hit the real world and do any real damage.

The documentary briefly touched on expectations driving results and in one interview scene a fellow described how he was branded an "idiot" as a child, and as a result he acted and felt like a dolt for a number of years. He managed to shirk the confines of those expectations and went on to become the president of the American Psychiatric Association (sorry, his name eluded me).

My childhood was driven by the expectations of intelligence. My parents nurtured my sister and I in an atmosphere of "can-doism". We were constantly reminded that we were exceptionally bright children and thus could accomplish anything we set our minds to. These attitudes spilled over into our school environments and we were both fast-tracked into enrichment programs for our entire primary through high-school careers.

I used to concur with all this and thought I was a pretty brilliant person. As of a few years ago (it started around the time I stopped drinking and smoking grass) I began to suspect that maybe I wasn't as smart as I thought. Today that "maybe" is a "probably". I suspect now that the expectations of high intelligence enabled me to rise to a higher station in life than had I been left to what would have otherwise been average potentials.

So in effect, expectation drove accomplishment which outstripped capability.

If it wasn't for awareness (or at least suspicion) of this, I would be a textbook example of the Peter Pyramid. Fortunately my friend and mentor Sieg, the Atavist explained the Peter Principle to me many years ago, when I was doing my first computing job for his courier company. He told me how 95% of the efforts of mid-to-top-level managers are spent hiding their own incompetence. I was younger and dumber then but I gleaned enough to promise myself that I would never fall into that, and if I found myself in at the apex of a Peter Pyramid, I would put a stop to it.

If I wanted to boil this down into the Lowest Common Denominator^{™}; I would say something banal like "Embrace Your Incompetence" and maybe even wrap a management theory around that and wait for someone like Fast Company to elevate it to a new management fad.

But more realistically, and less sensationally I will say "Be Aware Of Your Inadequacies" and deal with them. Part of the way to deal with them is to get help, seek mentors and bring on people who are smarter than you are to be part of your team^[1].

Closing the loop on this insomnia-powered post I can say that one of the factors driving my decision not to run for re-election on the CIRA Board was that at this time I don't think I'm smart enough to be sitting at that table.

The other thing is that now is the time for me to devote my full attention to running my own company. So...

[1] If anybody is interested, I'm currently looking for a Director of Marketing and a Director of Software Development to join my team. Qualifications are that you have to be a smarter than me. My email address is my firstname at my lastname dot net.

Wednesday, June 1, 2005

Booktagged: I'm it

My friend The Atavist has tagged me in some booktag thing making the rounds across the internet faster than a Star Wars bootleg. Maybe one day Sieg will notice I've long since changed the name of my blog from Blah Blah Blog to Under The Radar

At any rate, here is my book tag thing: Number of books I own: A lot. At least a few hundred and when I figure the boxes in storage it may go over a thousand. I come from a long line of bookworms and now that I'm married to another one, it makes for lots of books piling up around the house. Most of mine are non-fiction, economics, history, futurism, social issues, technology, culture. Last book I bought: I go on binges. If I'm logged into Amazon, look out. Although I think the last one I grabbed was the Crossing the Rubicon: The Decline of the American Empire at the End of the Age of Oil. I'm about halfway through (watch this space for my review). Last book I read: I just finished Leading at the Speed of Growth: Journey from Entrepreneur to CEO and recently finished my friend Jim Carroll's What I Learned From Frogs In Texas. 5 books that mean a lot to me: Here's a few I remember devouring more than once over the years, off the top of my head (since I can't see my bookshelves from here) In no particular order:

Rees-Mogg and Davidson's The Sovereign Individual

Alvin Toffler's Future Shock

Financial Reckoning Day

Jame's Gleick's Chaos

Colin Wilson's The Occult

And 5 other bloggers I have to now "tag":

Ross Rader

Rick Segal, Post Money Value

Jim Carroll

*and my bandmates Noise, and Mark Collins.

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