

You're never really lost

There's a lot of homelessness going around these days. I'm not only speaking of those hundreds of thousands of lost souls who are sleeping in doorways and in makeshift tents and pushing grocery carts around. I'm talking about the millions of Americans with permanent addresses who are feeling lost, estranged and disenfranchised and who wake up each morning in a fog, shaking their heads to remove the cobwebs of life in modern-day America. They feel adrift in a borderless sea with only their memories of a once proud, once strong and once united country to keep them afloat. They dog-paddle from one day to the next, hoping to find the homeland they left before being capsized by the storm that seemingly appeared out of nowhere and that robbed them of their bearings.

This is usually the point where I digress back to 'better days' so I will not disappoint. Back in the fifties I was a Boy Scout, busily learning about the natural world and discovering what it meant to be part of a team. One of our challenges was to get lost and then figure out where we were with the aid of a map, some coordinates and a compass. Our scoutmaster explained the basics of map reading and told us that a "compass is our best friend" when traveling in unfamiliar territory. We believed him. Later, when I realized that I'd never reach Eagle Scout I left the troop but kept the compass and remembered what I'd been taught, that nobody is ever really lost if they know where they want to go.

That piece of wisdom has been echoed throughout history by authors like Lewis Carroll whose character, the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland, tells Alice about her choices of which path to take: "That depends a good deal on where you want to go." Robert Frost had another take on direction in his poem, "The road not taken." He spoke of the one he took...the road less traveled.

For many of us, the America of today is almost unrecognizable. And our path through the political woods has been fraught with peril. Like Ichabod Crane in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" we're constantly looking over our shoulder, afraid that the headless horseman will remove OUR head. Our fear has caused us to veer from our familiar path that we took when we were younger. The well-worn dirt trail, shaped by our feet has been replaced by a tangle of weeds and bushes with sharp thorns just waiting for us to become impaled on them.

In a sense, it's understandable. Because we've been busy, we haven't taken the time to retrace our footsteps, back to those simpler days when our sensibilities were in their infancy and when the world was new to us. We've forgotten what the forest we grew up with looked, smelled and sounded like, so it was no wonder that when we visited many years later everything seemed different, changed. Yes, the *forest* of our society has changed, and our once familiar path is now barely recognizable. It's been re-routed by 'progress,' replaced by the empty promises made by several generations of self-serving politicians and other people who want our moral compass to stay buried in the bottom of our drawer. In their haste and desire to remake our cultural landscape they have forgotten one very important thing... their efforts to convince us that we're lost and only they can lead us to safety will fail if the destination they have in mind for us is not some place we're interested in living.

All allegories aside, America is in trouble, and by extension so are all Americans. Last month, on the occasion of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, our President stated that we're at an "inflection point" (in our history). Though he was talking about economic justice and civil rights, he could have been addressing the deeper more dangerous malaise that is affecting millions of us who believe that the train of liberty and freedom has left the station with our luggage...and we're not on board with it. Sooner or later everybody is going to lose their way, and there's no crime in that, but to knowingly force people off course and then convince them that it's their fault they're lost AND that their only hope for survival is to follow YOU, is. America has most certainly lost its way. It is confused, disoriented and scared. If you're one of its lost souls, you must not despair and you must not give up.

You do have choices, but each requires you to locate your own moral compass, dust it off and see if it still works. Then, and only then can you find your own true north.

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