



Columns in
THE TOMBSTONE NEWS
2025

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Introduction

My name is Jonathon Donahue. Call me Jon, or Jonny Uteaka-Bwikam, which in our local Yaqui Native-American comes across as Jonny Many Cars. Which is true. I like cars, and several of my columns reflect that.

I moved to Tombstone in November 2017. Wrote a story for our local paper, The Tombstone News, in 2018, and then started writing my weekly column in 2019. Tried to quit three times, couldn't – there is so much to write about here. Both about Tombstone and our Cochise County, and also about the outside world.

Because this is a secret oasis. An old-age home without walls, the best place in the USA to live if you are retired. Where you can walk over to our Allen Street any morning at 9 AM, sit on a bench in the sun, and then watch the red stagecoaches rattling into town. They give our tourists a taste

of life at 5 mph, back to 1882 when it took 12 hours to get to Tucson, instead of only one-and-a-half today.

Quite a town. Low taxes because of our valued visitors, free lunch if you're broke at our Senior Center, and even more at our Food Bank. You can live on Social Security here; most of us do. We are a friendly place. All kinds of civic associations to volunteer for, and many fine churches all around town.

Enjoy my columns. Come for a visit, stay for a lifetime! And welcome to The Town Too Tough To Die.

Jonathon Donahue

Lie detector

For Dec 26, 2025

"Let's start by having you tell a lie," says the nice lady at the Sierra Vista courthouse. "If I ask you does 2 plus 0 equal 3, just say Yes."

This is the start of my polygraph test, first time in my life that I ever had one, even back in 1980 when we tested Navy W68 nuclear warheads for delaminating PBX plastic explosive. But that was then, and today I am volunteering for the County CASA foster child program. It's actually Melania Trump's fault, since I watched her November speech about the Fostering the Future program, to support children dumped out of the foster care system at 18. Kids just lost, needing real help. She is going after universities, hospitals, and major corporations to take part, and also after citizen volunteers. The speech touched my heart. Turned out that my friend Charles had served on the board of CASA, the local foster kid program, and

so I called them up. Had a long but friendly interview at their office in the Bisbee courthouse, and now it was time for the lie detector test in Sierra Vista.

It was interesting. The test lady was very professional, calm, friendly. First, she took a few minutes telling me the questions she would ask, like 'Have you ever been arrested for a felony?' followed by 'Have you ever committed a felony?' and so on. But first, she had to adjust her ParagonX Polygraph Acquisition System, so I had to lie to give it a baseline reading. At 625 samples per second per channel, the ParagonX has the highest sampling rate of any polygraph instrument. Plus accurate sampling software, with dual channel 32-bit and optical isolation greater than 5000 millivolts.

She put a blood pressure cuff on my left arm, two wired finger cots on my right hand, a belt around my mid-section, and had me sitting on a special wired seat cushion. Lots of wires! The ParagonX uses flush-mounted Lemo nickel-plated brass

connectors for all nine wired data inputs to her PC. Sort of like a hospital electrocardiogram.

Worked for me! I was relaxed, she had prepared me for the questions, and before I knew it the test was over. Didn't have to repeat anything; the signals from my answers were clear without ambiguities. It was interesting. I learned that there is a spot in the right-front of our brains that tells when we lie. Though if the machine says that you are lying, the examiner will carefully go over the question again, giving you every opportunity to get it right.

Went home very pleased that Cochise County is spending the money for good people with the best equipment to weed out liars, child molesters, violent thugs, drunk drivers, and felons.

Protecting our defenseless foster children from abuse. Next will come training. In the meantime, I'll write and mail a true thank-you note to our First Lady!

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The end of tourism?

for Dec 19, 2025

Sunny warm days in the Town Too Tough To Die, as an arctic blast freezes the east coast. Saw a car from Alberta today, rare this year with all the political turmoil. Our Canadian snowbirds are down 15%. Tourism is down 8% for the year, following 2024's 7% drop. Economists are hopelessly divided on what next year will bring. Recession? Prosperity? Nobody knows. And it doesn't matter. Because, even without another big Hollywood blockbuster movie, we can still control our fate, unlike tourism-depressed Las Vegas. No more free drinks or cheap buffets there anymore. With their corporate decisions to raise prices, add outrageous resort fees and parking charges, Vegas has lost middle-class tourists. And, once lost, it can take at least three years to get them back,

even if the Strip drops food and lodging costs by 50%.

Because of continued inflation, our prices are high, but not outrageous. Since tourism is all we've got, let's take a look at what we can do to keep our ball in the air. First, forget about another big movie to keep the tourists coming. Hollywood is changing into a confused streaming entertainment circus. Empty rental sound stages at an all-time high. AI, and TV show production moving far away, like to Nashville. Really? Really. Second, what we do have... is history. The real West, right here in town, with the ghosts of Cochise and Geronimo looking on from the nearby Dragoons. Air so clean and clear that the Apaches could see the soldiers setting out from Fort Huachuca 40 miles away. Like Virginia City and Williamsburg back East, we can sell our history. Don't know it? Learn. Because 75% of our tourists are interested in Western history, and really, really like to talk to locals about the OK Corral gunfight, the Earps, Doc Holliday and the

Clanton cowboys. Our museums are special, like the Birdcage Theater, the Old Courthouse State Park, and the Gunfighter Museum near the Public Library... itself a historic train station, with the first steam engines coming into town when the last Modoc stage left, in 1903.

Third, to keep the tourists coming back in tough times, we have to be friendly. Welcoming! And this is the easiest part, because unlike Las Vegas, we are a friendly town. But to have a future, we have to step it up. See a tourist? Don't be shy. Ask where they are from. Ask what they are interested in. Do they have a large camera? Show them good spots to take photographs. Encourage them to ride a stagecoach, to experience life at 5 mph, same as when it took 12 hours to get to Tucson. Tell them about how rich the town was back in the day, with 6,000 people and investors and hookers and non-stop faro and poker games. Most of all, and so, so important... thank tourists for coming here. Easy to do, and our future!

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Tin Fork restaurant review

for Dec 12

The bell rang at 11:00 AM at the Tombstone Senior Center on Monday, with friendly Bob Hopely behind the counter ready to serve today's hot lunch to an eagerly waiting line of locals.

Some meals just feel like a warm handshake, the kind that instantly reminds you of community, comfort, and home. That's what happened at the Senior Center today, thanks to the culinary care of chef Richard Gilbert, who has quietly become one of the town's unsung kitchen heroes. His pork loin with mushroom gravy wasn't just good — it was the kind of hearty, honest cooking that brings people together around a table, sharing stories and laughter along with every bite. Richard has worked at the Senior Center for 15 years, cooking thousands of meals without a single case of food poisoning. Try that, McDonalds! He arrives at

7:30 AM to prepare our food, hours before the serving starts.

The pork loin was tender enough to cut with a fork, slow-cooked to the point where the natural juices blended seamlessly into a velvety sauce. That sauce — a rich mushroom gravy — deepened the dish's savory soul. It had the kind of flavor that comes not from shortcuts, but from patience, a steady hand, and someone who knows when to stir and when to simply let something perfect itself on the stove.

Alongside came a generous serving of mashed potatoes, whipped to a smooth and creamy finish with extra butter, ready to soak up every last drop of gravy. Add in delicious green beans, and you had a balanced, beautiful plate — one that felt both nourishing and indulgent. The entrée came with a small fresh salad, with a choice of six different dressings. And lastly an intriguing dessert, mandarin oranges with pineapple. So good!

But maybe the best part wasn't the food, as wonderful as it was. It was the sight of neighbors filling the room: friends greeting friends, newcomers welcomed with a smile, and everyone reminded that no one in Tombstone needs to eat alone. In a world that moves too fast, the Senior Center meals encourage us to slow down, sit a spell, and enjoy the simple blessing of being together.

Good food feeds the body, but good community feeds the spirit. Today at the Senior Center, we were lucky enough to enjoy both. They serve magical meals here, often for more than 100 people. But behind the scenes, it's the result of hard work every day. Cooking, serving, cleaning endless dishes, pots and pans, plus wiping down all the tables after 1 PM, when the serving stops. To pull this off, manager Brenda Lavallo directs three part-time paid employees, plus 21 volunteers.

Besides fine food, the Senior Center has yoga classes, plus bingo and bunco games, with

occasional gift raffles. But that's a different day's story. Today's Tin Fork rating: five stars. Cost: \$0 to whatever you can afford. Place: The Old Firehouse on Toughnut at 5th. Great food, great people!

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Execution

for dec 5

Murder at sea? in September, a second missile strike killed two drug boat survivors. Was this murder, or a 'legal' execution of suspected narco-criminals? Let's go back 2,200 years. Roman logic held that we were different from other animals because we had speech. And that lacking other instincts to regulate our behavior, we used speech to create laws. For them, it followed that anyone who broke the law was insane. But Roman law only prohibited killing helpless Romans, not foreigners.

In 1863, the US Civil War Lieber Code was the first law to forbid violence against surrendered prisoners. Next, the Hague Conventions of 1907 and 1909, and then the big one - the Geneva Convention of 1929, the first multilateral treaty specifically devoted to the rights and protections of POWs.

In 1949, another Geneva Convention strengthened these laws. It followed the post-WWII Nuremberg war crimes trials, where we convicted and hung the SS soldiers who committed the Malmedy massacre. Others escaped, like the SS who viciously murdered 11 black US servicemen at Wereth, also in Belgium in December, 1944. Crimes at sea -- we hung the commander and two officers of U-852. Not for torpedoing the SS Peleus, but for machine-gunning survivors in the water.

Today. In 1996, the US War Crimes Act brought the Geneva Convention into US domestic law. Acts such as willful killing, torture, or inhuman treatment of persons protected under the Convention became criminal offenses under US law. So that in our times, violations of these protections are crimes with legal consequences, not just battlefield dishonor.

Which brings us to the recent Washington Post story about Secretary Hegseth. "As two men clung to a stricken, burning ship targeted by SEAL Team

6, the Joint Special Operations commander followed the defense secretary's order to leave no survivors. The Special Operations commander overseeing the Sept. 2 attack, Adm. Frank M. "Mitch" Bradley, ordered a second strike to comply with Hegseth's instructions, two people familiar with the matter said. The two men were blown apart in the water." On Monday, White House Press Secretary Leavitt told reporters at the White House press briefing that Hegseth had authorized Bradley to carry out the second strike. Congress is investigating the murderous incident now. Was the second attack actually ordered to target the people in the water? if so, being a nation of laws, we will have to put Hegseth and Bradley on trial for pre-meditated murder. Not killing in hot blood, like a bar fight. Not an accidental killing. No, this one - if true - is a war crime, with the penalty under US law being life imprisonment, or death if the criminal act results in death.

In our democracy, laws passed by Congress can only be changed by Congress, or thrown out by the Supreme Court if the law violates the Constitution. And a President's executive order cannot change an existing law. As for these killings at sea, the truth will come out fast. The future is now!

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Gatsby redux

for nov 28

Every few years I re-read *The Great Gatsby*, hoping it will feel like a period piece — a portrait of the Jazz Age, all champagne and yellow roadsters. Instead, it keeps reading like a report on modern America with better costumes. F. Scott Fitzgerald saw something in 1925 that we still haven't shaken loose in 2025: a society dazzled by wealth, distorted by longing, and constantly reinventing itself on the surface while drifting in deeper waters underneath.

Jay Gatsby is the prototype of today's curated persona. He invents a new life the way people now build an Instagram page — polishing every detail, rehearsing every moment, trying to live inside a dream version of himself. He becomes a brand long before branding was a word. A

century later, we swipe past digital Gatsbys every day, some built on aspiration, some on illusion, most on credit, all shimmering with that same fragile glamour.

These days, it's easy to draw a comparison between the fictional Jay Gatsby and the very real Jeffrey Epstein. Both became symbols of wealth without transparency, influence without accountability, and a society dazzled by glamour while overlooking the rot beneath. Gatsby arrives in the novel out of nowhere, a man with a brand-new name and a backstory stitched together from rumors. Epstein appeared suddenly in New York's financial scene with no clear qualifications, yet somehow moved money for billionaires and collected mansions as if they grew on trees. In both cases, the wealth feels untethered — it's simply there, glowing in the background, never fully explained.

Both men also show how American high society opens its doors when wealth is paired with charm or usefulness. Gatsby threw parties that attracted

senators, movie stars, and bankers. Epstein's version was smaller, quieter, and private. Jeffrey had the rare ability to actually listen to others, and to be extremely pleasant and charming. Like our President, super-salesmen specialize in simulated intimacy. But Epstein was an actual friend, not a flatterer or a grifter. He was the first person, the very first, to realize that a few very, very rich people actually had more money than whole nations. Not rich kings or nobles, but regular folks like Tesla's Elon Musk. This had never happened before. And these magnates, each worth over \$100 billion, had far more money pouring in than they could comprehend. A million-a-minute sort of thing. Epstein's genius was to befriend them. And then to act as a needed advisor on what to do with all that money. Trusted? Of course. In his world, like Gatsby's, proximity to money was treated as a credential in itself.

The parallel isn't about the men themselves, but about the American Dream turned toxic. When

ambition is divorced from morality, the story can glitter — right up until the moment it collapses. The Great Gatsby is beautiful and poetic because it floats on Fitzgerald's shimmering prose—lush, melancholy, and musical—capturing the fragile hope and haunting longing of the American dream in every glittering sentence. Recommended!

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Why data centers?

for nov 21

Data centers for artificial intelligence are the new American factory. Packed with computing equipment, they absorb information and create AI. Modern data-center construction began in the '90s, with the arrival of the commercial internet. Early data centers hosted websites, handled e-mail, processed payments, and streamed video and music. But the arrival of Nvidia's powerful GPU chips and the onset of large-scale AI training transformed the data center business.

CoreWeave is the data center construction leader. Inside their half-mile-long buildings are endless white metal cabinets. They contain shallow trays of computing equipment, each weighing around seventy pounds and holding four water-cooled GPUs along with additional gear. Eighteen of these trays are stacked, then connected with

cables to a control unit. This makes an Nvidia GB300 computing rack, which is a little taller than a refrigerator and costs a few million dollars. In a busy year, a typical rack -- just one rack -- uses more electricity than a hundred homes.

Software developers, typically at a workstation in Silicon Valley, upload to the data center a file of numbers known as “weights” and a vast array of training data, which might be text or medical records or anything at all, like images or video. AI is then exposed to a slice of the training data, and asked to offer a prediction about what should come next — like the next few letters in a sentence. An untrained AI will get this prediction wrong, but then it learns what not to do. The weights are matrix-math-modified to absorb this new piece of information. The latest large language models can involve about a trillion individual weights. A weeks-long “hero” run for such a model can use tens of thousands of GPUs and require ten trillion trillion operations, which

is more than the number of stars we can see in the universe.

All those Nvidia GPU chips, all the electricity, all the fans, all the money, all the data, all the water-cooling pumps and cables—all of it is there to tune the weights. The money spent to do this represents one of the largest deployments of capital in human history. Amazon Cloud Services, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud Platform and Meta Platform are in a desperate \$500 billion race to be the dominant AI provider. They send clones of the weights to data centers around the country, for use by you and I.

Output. We users ask questions via the internet, prompting the AI to produce individual units of intelligence called “tokens.” A token might be a small square of pixels or a fragment of a word. To write a college term paper, an AI might produce about five thousand tokens, consuming enough electricity to run a microwave oven at full power for about three minutes. Multiply that by the more than eight hundred million people who use

ChatGPT every week, and the data center explosion makes sense. But will there be a return on the huge investments? Will the current AI stock market bubble burst? Who knows. We're in the future, now!

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Never cooked an egg

for Nov 14

Confession time. For me, a sin of omission. Realizing this week that until now, I had never cooked bacon and eggs before... not even once, during my entire 81-year-old life. Not that I can't cook -- years ago in California, I rose before dawn to shop at a farmers' market, then spent a whole day preparng gourmet Chicken Cordon Bleu, which my friends ate in 20 minutes leaving me to do the dishes for two hours.

But that was then. Last week, I learned that Walmart delivers to Tombstone. O rapture! O joy! No more heart-stopping moments in their crowded parking lot. No more feeling lost, abandoned and confused when inside their vast store, confronted by America's endless cornucopia of Chinese stuff to buy. No more hiding in their Dunkin' Donuts to avoid those

endless aisles. No, now it could all arrive at my little house here in town, they said.

And it was true. And remarkably easy, given the Walmart app for phone or tablet. They will bring you anything at all from their Sierra Vista store. Which includes groceries, like the fruit and vegetables not available here in town. For me, Columbus salami and Ghirardelli chocolate from my native San Francisco, plus plain yogurt and cottage cheese and red raspberries. Carried away by the adventure of online shopping, I added some bacon and six eggs, placed my order, and then realized that I hadn't cooked eggs even once, ever. But it was too late to recall the order.

The groceries came next day, right on time within the two-hour period I'd chosen. All was well, except that I was -- afraid? To cook the bacon and eggs, not knowing how. They sat abandoned in my fridge for days. But then, what's the old surfer motto, 'No Fear', and being obviously a high-tech guy, I turned to ChatGTP for culinary advice. Because I knew that AI would not laugh at me for

asking how to cook eggs. Unlike, well, each and every one of my cruel friends in our mean and heartless little city. A 'Town Without Pity', as Gene Pitney's popular ballad went in 1961. No, the AI was kind and polite, advising me to cook the bacon first in medium heat, then save the fat runoff -- 'liquid gold', it said. and then the eggs, also at medium heat in my old electric frying pan. All went well, and I felt the same glow of satisfaction as when I wrote my first program in Interpreter BASIC, which Bill Gates gave away with every DOS microcomputer, way back when. Two days later, AI stepped me through a scrambled eggs adventure, which also went well. "These are the days of miracles and wonder," sang Paul Simon in 1986. "This is the long distance call." And it is so. The rapid changes over the long span of my life, and now the real pleasure in my end time of having anything at all delivered right to my front porch, way out here in the high desert. Walmart and Amazon, just amazing!

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Cassandra calling

for Oct 31

In a prior life, I knew Cassandra, Princess of Troy, who spurned the advances of Apollo and was then cursed to foresee the future, but nobody would believe her. And today I am the same, predicting an imminent massive recession dwarfing that of 2008. We lost 6,000,000 homes in that one, mostly belonging to younger people who couldn't make their variable-rate balloon payment mortgages when they lost their jobs.

This time will be different. When the next market crash or 'black swan' event comes along, the resulting economic tsunami will destroy the savings of millions of seniors, home equity built up over 30-40 years of hard work paying off that mortgage. Unfair? Of course. But the market only cares about equity. What's left after you pay the bills. And for so many seniors, those bills have

increased greatly recently, while their retirement income has not. 70 million baby boomers with low savings rates. Inflation, with increasing property taxes and home insurance. Maintenance on that now-old house. Electricity bills going up like an F-35 on afterburner, thanks to demands from electric cars and the new AI data centers. As the next recession gathers force like a 30' wave coming in at Mavericks, more and more retirees will be squeezed by a system they trusted into financial traps that will force them out of their homes.

On Wall Street, you'll find two statues. A bull, and a bear. Representing Greed and Fear. In 2008, greed sent senior investors into high-paying 'safe' bonds, see ya. Today, our economy is running on fumes. Charged-out credit cards, \$400 billion in home equity loans, and inflated property valuations -- a perfect storm coming. If housing prices fall 10-15%, millions of seniors will find themselves underwater -- their homes worth less than their mortgage debts -- just like 2008.

What was that Boy Scout motto? 'Be Prepared'. There are five things seniors can do ahead of time to offset the coming damage.

-- Reduce dependence on variable income and high-yield investments. If someone tells you that deal will bring a 15% return, get away.

-- Treat your home as an asset, not a trophy. If property tax, maintenance and utilities are more than 25% of your income, sell and get a smaller home.

-- Hold liquidity. Short-term Treasury bonds. And cash, because in a deep crash you want to have enough money to ride out a year.

-- Simplify your portfolio. Complexity kills. Be able to explain any of your assets in one sentence. Avoid investments like index funds, leveraged bond funds, and structured notes. If you don't understand the deal, like 2008's CDOs, back away.

-- Mindset. Don't worry about the Federal Reserve or Trump. Focus on what you can control, like

reducing your debt. Because you don't want to be forced into selling your home.

Bottom line? Cash is good, debt is bad. Even though, for those of us of a certain age, it sure is tempting to take out a huge loan from B of A and then, well, not pay it back! Just kidding...

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The sub-5k car club

for Oct 24

Sunshine returns, warm again in the morning under our deep blue sky. Driving along Toughnut, a flock of young birds explodes into the air. Practicing group flight. Each bird follows its neighbor, and the whole flock circles as one entity. Has me wondering -- who decides that it is the first bird to take flight? All the others mimic its swoops and turns. Their shadows fall on the asphalt, an Impressionist painting in full motion. The monsoon rains have passed, leaving clear skies for the birds to practice for their winter migration south.

Better them than me. At 81, no wish to winter in Guadalajara or Mazatlan. Or, closer to home, Southern California or Phoenix. Maybe Tucson, now and then. Which led me to buy a New Car, enjoyable for freeway driving. 'New' is subjective,

as in 'New to me', while everyone else agrees my white 1989 Lincoln Town Car is actually 35 years old and ancient. Found it at Richardson Motors in SV, where Rob usually has several very interesting cars for less than \$5,000. I fell in love with the old Lincoln the moment I saw it. A long, long car, though a closer look reveals that it is shorter than a newer Suburban or other large SUVs. No, the Lincoln's apparent length is enhanced by parallel full-length styling cues. Creases, purposeful indents. Which damp out chassis creaks and groans far better than the earlier slab-sided 1960s Lincolns. Styling that evokes the old Stalinist ZIL and ZIS Soviet cars... free of any modern restraint or sophistication. Large windows, great visibility all around. The hood ornament way out front, and you can see all four fenders. Oddities -- the Town Car has a small 302 c.i. V-8, but surprisingly good acceleration. Must be the gearing, as the speedometer only goes to 85 mph... who could ask for anything more? Sumptuous leather seats, and very few driver controls. Way back then, Lincoln knew that their

older customers couldn't cope with a bunch of buttons and knobs. Same as I would be lost on a new car with all the options on a touchscreen dashboard tablet. 1989 -- ashtrays, but no coffee cup holders. And no CD player, just like today's \$134,000 Lincoln Black Label L Navigator.

Not wanting a new car, am I a bad American? Average new price now at \$50,080, and you can find loaded pickup trucks at over \$110,000. Write one up as part of an RV package deal, and you can get 10 to 12 year financing. Keep that monthly payment under \$800, what a bargain! By contrast, the 1989 Lincoln is the latest experiment in my Sub-\$5000 Auto Plan. 'Out the door' for less than \$5K, then another \$2K for new tires, brakes, wipers, etc. Cash, not credit. Are we farther ahead financially with these older treasures than buying new? Over five years, repairs are more. Gas mileage costs more. But insurance and licensing are dramatically less. And, if the older car is interesting and unique, you'll always get back that

\$5,000 purchase price when you sell it years later.
No depreciation. Works for me!

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End of the world, today?

for Oct 10

Am writing this on Tuesday, wondering if you will be around to read it on Friday. Because today is October 7th. When South African preacher Joshua Mhlakela predicted that the Rapture would occur. Last fall, his viral TikTok videos foretold that the Rapture would occur on September 23rd or 24th. It didn't, but then Josh found that he had used the wrong calendar, and that today is the day. He claimed that Jesus revealed the dates to him in a 2018 dream. Anyway, at noon at the Senior Center, everyone is still here. Twelve hours to go til midnight, so who knows.

The Rapture is a Christian belief about a future event when Jesus Christ will return suddenly to take believers up to heaven before a time of great tribulation on Earth. The term "rapture" comes from the Latin rapio, meaning "to seize" or "to

snatch away.” From 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 --
“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

For Christians, this sounds like a very good deal. Except nobody knows when it will happen. After his death 2000 years ago, Jesus appeared again to his followers, but didn't take anyone with him when he went back to heaven. Yes, he will be back, but who knows when? From the gospels --
“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night... for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” Jesus himself said: “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” (Matthew 24:36). But through the centuries, that hasn't stopped predictors like preacher Joshua. Predictors like the Millerites,

one of the most dramatic and influential movements in American religious history. They were the followers of William Miller, a 19th-century Baptist lay preacher who believed he could pinpoint the time of Christ's return. March 21, 1843 didn't work out, so he switched to a Jewish calendar and tried for October 22, 1844. Which became 'The Great Disappointment', and his followers morphed into today's Seventh-day Adventists. One of them, Charles Taze Russell, went on to found the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1879, he predicted that the Rapture and Resurrection would happen in 1914. Instead, they got World War I and millions dead on crimson 'fields where poppies grow, between the crosses, row on row.'

It's a little after one now in the Senior Center. Looking up, I am all alone. Has the Rapture started? Outside, only a few cars going by. Strangely quiet. But all around, thousands of small butterflies, a multitude of mariposas, all flying west on Toughnut. Each maybe a

reincarnated local Christian, taking one last pass by the Brewery. For a nice cool IPA, heaven can wait!

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We are all liberals

for Oct 3

100 years ago. On October 2, 1925, Scottish inventor John Baird successfully transmitted a moving image from one room to another. It was a short video of his young friend William Taynton, the first person to appear on TV... for just a few minutes before Baird's television invention melted from extreme heat.

Time passes. In 1649, Cromwell killed King Charles I. For a short time, the people ruled Great Britain. But Cromwell suppressed groups like the Levellers. They wanted extended suffrage — voting rights for most men. Equality before the law. Religious freedom. Accountability in government, and legal reforms. Sound familiar? It's what we call Liberalism. A movement that really took off in the 1700s, emphasizing

individual liberty, free markets, private property, limited government, and constitutionalism.

Revolutionary concepts, placing our rights above those of the king, the state, or the church.

In 1776, the United States became the first nation founded on those liberal principles, which we enjoy to this day. Both our political parties share the same basic liberal values -- freedom of speech and respect for the law and the Constitution. In our time, 'liberal' has come to mean increased government spending on social programs. But that's political, and a misuse of the word itself. In reality, we are all liberals, same as Washington, Jefferson, and the other founding fathers.

Monday night, a waking dream. A quantum physics experiment at Fort Huachuca. Am in a tall box, somewhat like an old phone booth. with the sudden whine of powerful magnetrons ramping up to full power. A blinding flash of light and then I am on a dry desert hillside near an inland sea. A chilly day, with dark storm clouds massing up above.

There is a small crowd listening to a young man speaking in ancient Aramaic. He sees me and asks, "Min ayka at, nukhraia? Min Shomrayn?" His words somehow come to me equally clearly in English. 'Where are you from, stranger? Samaria?' And then he tells a story.

"Gabra naḥet min Urishlem w'azal la Yerikho, w'napal b'yad listaya; w'shaqlu leh, w'makhu leh, w'shaqu leh b'ḥaṣyo, w'shawehu shavqinan k'meth." 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead.' As the story ended, several people in the crowd are upset and reply angrily. "Lemah m'mallel at 'al Shomroya? Bish-inun. Lah damyin lan." 'Why do you talk about a Samaritan? They are bad. They are not like us.' But as the preacher responded, it started to rain. Lightning flashed and everyone ran to take cover beneath the cedar trees. Everyone except me, because with the first crash of thunder I was back at Fort Huachuca.

"It worked," says one of the scientists. "Proof of concept. Because quantum physics tells us time isn't a straight trail. It bends, it twists. Relativity says you can ride it forward faster than your neighbor — that's real. But backward? That's where it gets tricky. That's where paradoxes live." He paused. "But don't worry. Quantum mechanics has a loophole — the Many-Worlds Interpretation. When you step into the past, you don't change your history. You just ride into another branch of reality."

And with that, my waking dream ended. Back now in my world, where quantum physics describes the behavior of matter and energy at the smallest scales (atoms, particles, light). Where a particle can exist in multiple states at once until observed. And where particles can be linked so that a change in one instantly affects the other, no matter what the distance. Very soon, quantum physics may open a doorway not just through time, but into another thread of reality.

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A secret oasis

for Sep 26

It's 5 PM and I'm driving to Sierra Vista in a furious rainstorm. The wipers can't keep up. But Charleston Road drains well, no flash floods like the one that swept a woman away in Benson a week ago. Lightens up a bit as I come into SV. But then the sun appears through a break in the thick dark clouds. So bright, coming right at me! Pull down the sun visor, tilt my baseball cap. Which usually works, except today that blinding sun is also bouncing off the wet street up into my eyes. Can't see a thing, so I pull over. Put on polarized sunglasses that are actually made to improve night vision. And they help, just enough to drive slowly into the glare without crashing. Leaving me yet again with deep appreciation for how fast the sky can change. How fast we are thrown back

into the true west, the wild west always there waiting. A deep blue sky at 9 AM, a few clouds at noon, and then somehow those clouds pile up and we get an inch of rain in just a few hours.

Thunder, and vivid lightning strikes all around.

The land here is alive as the monsoon season continues. The Earth, desperate for water, calls to the Sky for help and the sudden rains turn the high desert as green as California in the spring,

Tombstone is a secret oasis, out here in the middle of nowhere. Enough highly-valued tourists to keep our small city going. But deeper than that, a secret. That we are actually an old-age home without walls. No better place to spend your end time, sitting in the warm sun on one of the many Allen St. benches. Watching the red stagecoaches come into town at 9 AM, listening to the distinctive sound of their horses' hooves on the dirt road. Sitting on the bench, talking with equally-old friends, as the town slowly comes to life and the stores open. And then the saloons, welcoming those of us who find that sun a little

too bright. In the spirit of the late Charlie Kirk, I ask you to tell me -- is there any better place in this country to grow old? We would have a good debate. You might say San Francisco or New York, assuming that we each had several million dollars to make life there pleasant. But even then, the crowding and hustle is a young person's game. When you look forward to going to work, instead of enjoying not having to. Young, when it's exciting jaywalking through traffic, dodging those dead-quiet little Tesla cars. Here? So different. A red 1962 Dodge rumbled by this morning, it's rich hydrocarbon exhaust evoking fond memories of childhood. Unable, of course, to affect our achingly clean pure air, our military no-fly zone, the sky as clear as the 1880s with the Apaches watching the Army set out from Fort Huachuca 25 miles away. Tombstone when you are old. No better place, our secret oasis!

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We lose Charlie Kirk

for Sep 19

As I write this on Tuesday, am still deeply shocked by the shooting of Charlie Kirk in Utah last Wednesday. Shocked, and saddened. Because, as a classic liberal, I felt that Kirk embodied the best of our unique American commitment to freedom of speech. Over the last 13 years, he grew his Turning Point organization with visit after visit to often-hostile college campuses. Colleges and universities all too comfortable with the prevailing woke-semiMarxist philosophy of their professariat. At school after school, he debated all comers, even asking those who disagreed with him to come to the front of the line of speakers. His style was consistently polite, not anger-filled. He challenged opponents to stick to facts instead of politically-correct opinions. Did his approach work? Yes. He greatly increased the number of

young voters on the Republican side in the last election. An honest debate is effective. I still remember losing one to Lt. Col. (Ret) Allen West a few years ago, driving back from Ft. Huachuca. Ex-Congressman West, like Kirk, is a Christian constitutional conservative. West is a very bright guy, and on that day's drive had a far better command of the facts. My memory of that debate, and what I learned from him, has lasted -- far better than if we just had a meaningless argument.

Our freedom of speech is everything. And so rare in a polarized world. Imagine yourself insulting Putin in Moscow, or Xi in China, or Kim in North Korea. But here? You can say anything you want about Trump or Biden as long as you do not advocate violence. Kirk's assassin, afraid to debate face-to-face, instead chose the coward's path to hide behind a scope and silence his opponent from 142 yards away. The ultimate act in cancel culture. Sadly, as Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787, "The tree of liberty must be

refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots." And perhaps this is so. But violence destroys freedom of speech. What can we do? Honor Charlie Kirk. Copy his debating style the next time you have a political or religious argument. Listen to the other person's point of view, and debate it with facts instead of just repeating your own talking points. Copy Kirk, and, like him, you will become much better at convincing others. How did he do it? Search for 'Charlie Kirk' on YouTube. Hundreds of short videos from his college debates. He is gone now, but leaves behind a rich legacy to learn from, as we vow to never give up our right to freedom of speech.

You can also send a donation to my favorite charity, FIRE. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. With a main focus on freedom of speech on college campuses, FIRE provides legal help for censored students or professors. Their mission 'is to defend and sustain the individual rights of all Americans to

free speech and free thought — the most essential qualities of liberty'. Works for me!

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They control everything

for Sep 12

Three US companies control most of the world's largest corporations. BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street. BVS. First, they raise billions of dollars from rich people and institutional investors. Then they buy shares -- lots of shares -- in thousands of large corporations, in both the US and abroad. Next, they create 'index funds', where you or I can buy an index fund share. Our risk is spread over the fund's ownership of millions of shares from thousands of different firms. BVS fund management fees are very low. They have attracted amazing amounts of money from huge entities like big pension funds. As of 2025, BlackRock alone manages \$12.5 trillion in assets. Their index funds throw off a very good and risk-free rate of return. So you'll say, "So what, Jon? This sounds like a good deal for everybody... from

little investors to the big companies, now with a new way to raise capital."

Except. Did you know that it takes a very small ownership percentage to control a modern corporation? These are not small businesses. Turns out that when you own more than 5% of a corporation's shares, you have very real corporate board power. At Nvidia, CEO Jensen Huang owns only 3.8% of their red-hot stock. Vanguard owns 9.15%, and BlackRock has 7.83%. I retired from chip designer Qualcomm at the end of 2009, and today their top three largest investors are Vanguard at 10.64%, BlackRock at 9.34%, and State Street at 4.98%. The BVS index fund directors almost always take the same positions on board decisions. Corporate elections rarely have 60% of all shareholders voting. So when you control 20% to 25% of all voting shares, you run the show. Qualcomm is typical. All other major US and international corporations are the same. And absolute power always corrupts absolutely.

Vulture capitalism. BlackRock the virtuous index fund is not Blackstone, the evil company buying up hundreds of thousands of 2008-crash distressed homes and renting them out at outrageous prices. 'Not us!' says BlackRock. Except that, sure enough, BlackRock owns 6.59% of Blackstone, with Vanguard at 9.14%. They are the top two investors, with State Street at 4%. All up, a controlling 20%. And they allow and encourage the rapacious real estate Blackstone practices that are destroying the promise of home ownership for our middle class.

Morality. Take heavy metal contamination in baby food. Gerber, Beech-Nut, and WalMart are in lawsuits right now about their baby food contamination with arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury. Congress has an Oversight Committee investigating this, and the FDA is increasing compliance regulation. Gerber was bought by Nestlé in 2007. BlackRock owns 5.2% of Nestlé, and Vanguard 4.4%. The #1 shareholder is UBS Asset Management, at 5.65%. And guess what?

BlackRock owns 4.98% of UBS Asset Management, and Vanguard a further 3.55%. Nestlé S.A. is Swiss, with the S.A. standing for 'Société Anonyme'. Sure is anonymous, hiding behind that corporate veil while pumping out poisonous baby food. With the help and collusion of the boards of directors on BlackRock and Vanguard. All intertwined, all interlocked.

If you haven't noticed, 10 major corporations own 98% of the food brands we get at Fry's and Safeway and Wal-Mart. Besides Nestlé, big companies like Coca-Cola, General Mills, and Kellogg's. Our BVS friends have control of each and every one of their boards. Obesity issues? Not their problem. Benzene anti-perspirant poisoning? Not their problem. Can small family-owned firms get supermarket shelf space? Forget it. One shining exception -- Ken's Steak House out of Massachusetts, with their popular salad dressings. No BVS here, and most of their profits go to charity.

Which brings up the bottom line. For the good of your health, shop local. Local farmers. Local butchers. Local small businesses of any kind. Where you will deal with people you know, often friends and neighbors. And if there's a problem, chances are you will work it out, like we always used to do in this country before the corporations took over!

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An AI Lover

for Sep 5

ChatGPT AI prompt -- 'Write me a country-western song about how She Ran Off With An AI Lover'. In 10 seconds, verses like --

'Pulled in at midnight, truck stop lights aglow,

Coffee in my hand, and the jukebox low.

She left me a message, cut sharp and cold,

Said she found a new love made of circuits and code.'

And

'He don't need no paycheck, don't need no rest,

Whispers her sweet lies better than I guessed.

I got diesel in my veins, steel on the road,

But she chose a ghost with a heart of code.'

ChatGPT AI then suggested that I copy the verses into ClipFly AI with this prompt -- 'Classic country ballad with male vocals, mid-slow tempo (around 72 BPM). Mood: heartbroken, lonesome, reflective. Style inspired by George Strait and Randy Travis.'

ClipFly took less than a minute to produce the music, with some issues. The song isn't bad. If I had it picked up by a radio station, who is the composer? The singer? Or the producer? Who holds the copyright? How would I register it with BMI and ASCAP? And we won't even imagine what AI like this will do to real songwriters and composers. What makes us human? Storytelling around the fire, words, music, and art. Our cultural bedrock. Suddenly, all done better by AI. Technology? Less important. The pen gives way to the typewriter and then to the computer. But it's about the words, not the device. And now the words are AI. In a year, we will have a head-and-shoulders lip-synched AI person singing to us!

Here's my AI song. On a PC, it's fine. But on an iPad, it will open in your browser as a new page, and you will have to exit it and probably also this web page as well to turn it off. Sticky!

www.jon404.com/dload/AI-Lover.mp3

AI is coming faster than any of us can imagine. And it's about work. Sing to the tune of 'Jolene' -- "AI, AI, AI, AI-I-I, please don't take my job away." Because the president of Ford Motor Company recently warned that forty million American jobs may soon vanish under the wheels of artificial intelligence. Not just office workers, but millions of truck drivers and teachers. If that forecast is even close, we are facing the biggest disruption since the Industrial Revolution—only this time, it will happen in a few short years, not a century.

What does that mean for small towns like ours in Cochise County? Start with the truckers. One of the last middle-class jobs left for people without a college degree, on I-10, US 80, and 90. Those

paychecks keep our diners and motels alive. Teachers are another target. Since AI tutors are cheaper and better, positions will vanish in local schools. White-collar workers are also vulnerable. Sierra Vista leans heavily on Fort Huachuca and its contractors. As AI trims clerks, analysts, and IT techs, that's fewer families shopping at Fry's, eating at restaurants, or paying property taxes. And yet, Cochise County has reinvented itself before. When silver gave out, Tombstone turned to tourism. Bisbee shifted from copper to art. Out here in the high desert, we know what it means to face a storm. The question is whether we'll find a way to ride it—or be left in the dust. AI -- the future is now!

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Tourism tipping point

for Aug 29

What with inflation, consumer worries, and upcoming AI workplace impacts, there may come a tipping point when we will cease to be a viable tourism destination. No more Canadians for a few years, either. Even if we gave them free beer. Labatts, eh?

But there is one possibility, an opportunity called Historical Tourism. Places that focus on the true past, like Virginia City, do very well. Think Williamsburg. Could Tombstone recast itself as an accurate 1880s experience? Today, we are just not there, with our outdated pseudo-Hollywood destination theme. It would take a shared vision by City, merchants, and residents to make the change from fake gunfights to an accurate representation of a booming Wild West silver

mining town, back when. The red stagecoaches are a start, as our key visual signature.

Perhaps our City Council could start a pilot project to identify what we need to go from fake to real. And how to make the change at low cost. Like 'ghost' signs, painted to look centuries-old. Folks in every store dressed in period costumes, able to recount town history at the drop of a hat. Don't know how far we can take this -- they didn't have seats at the bar back in 1880, and the ladies never wore corsets outside their shirts. Sorry, Hollywood. But to shift gears and restore our income with historical tourists, we have to get the details as right as possible.

Monsoon rains, attacking my little 2013 Ford Transit Connect camper van. In the last Tombstone downpour it sprang a leak. Water dripping down from the driver's sun visor onto the left side of the steering wheel. What? Turns out that after 12 years and 118,000 miles, the outside windshield gasket is getting old, like me. With the leaky area a full 1" long, shocking. What

to do? I decided to call Mr. Aysan Hösver at Ford of Turkey and demand that they fly my TC back to the factory in Kocaeli for a fix. But I couldn't figure out the area code, and my breakfast friends were all laughing at me. So I gave up my righteous quest for OEM salvation, and settled for a tube of roof sealant from our hardware store. Works good on the seams of my old 1909 home's tin roof, so it will probably be OK on the car. We will see in the next heavy rain. I'll bet Noah had leaks on his ark, too.

Beef prices are going up and up, and I can't blame Trump. Flesh-eating screwworms from Guatemala turned up in a few southern Mexican cattle, so now we are doing serious inspections at the border. A problem, since we normally import millions of cows from México each year. Three years of drought in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas haven't helped either. Ranchers, faced with rising feed costs, are cutting the size of their beef and dairy herds. Glad I like chicken!

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Tourism collapse

for Aug 22

Tourism is Tombstone's lifeblood. But this summer, our sales tax revenues are less than last year, just as 2024 was less than 2023. Will there come a tipping point when we will cease to be a viable tourism destination? Maybe. In 1957, the smash hit 'Gunfight At The O.K. Corral' brought tourists just here at the right time, as nearby Sierra Vista became Cochise County's real urban center. And back then, two popular TV series helped make us a destination. 'The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp' (1955–1961), and my favorite, 'Tombstone Territory (1957–1960). More movies followed, like 'Hour Of The Gun' in 1967, 'Doc' in 1971, and the blockbuster 'Tombstone' in 1993 followed by 'Wyatt Earp' in 1994. But those days are over. 31 years now since the last movie, and there will be no more. No

streaming media productions up for greenlighting, either.

There are other factors contributing to our slow tourism collapse. The US economy recovered from the 2008 crash well enough, right up to 2019 when COVID hit and many people just stopped traveling. Presidents Trump and Biden printed great amounts of money to help people get by, avoiding another crash but causing high inflation. And then we had the 2024 election, where for the first time everybody had their own YouTube or Instagram channel. Competing for viewers with the worst news they could imagine. Clickbait time! And so just as President Trump took office again, with inflation under control and a reasonably good economy, most people believed that times were bad and getting worse. Spending on vacations went way down. Trump is a remarkably active President. rapidly setting out to fulfil his campaign promises to Make America Great Again. But we are in the Internet Age, not 1960. This time around, any new government

policy is met by viral howls of outrage and endless media criticism. Net effect? Reduced cautious consumer spending. Will this continue? Yes, at least for another three years with the massive AI layoffs already hitting. As a side effect, alcohol sales are way down also, with 56% of Americans saying they are cutting back, particularly on beer. Not good at all for our saloon-restaurant local economy.

But, just like in a threatening stormy sky, there may still be a ray of sunlight streaming through the dark clouds. Take the often-overnight foreign visitors from Canada and Europe. Their average spend is \$4,000 per person per USA visit. Over the next two years, we can repair the deep animosity they feel at present. America IS beautiful, and there is nothing like our Southwest anywhere else. They could be back by 2027, assuming that the airport border police go back to being friendly-normal. Our 8% dollar devaluation since January is keeping tourist prices affordable or at least on par with other

international destinations. And also by next year, the final domestic cost from the tariffs hopefully won't be that much more than 2024. Could be worse -- we'll see!

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AI, and I am obsolete

for Aug 15

With this, a prayer for our President in his efforts to end the war in Ukraine. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" -- Matthew 5:9.

And then, from halfway around the world to right here at home. AI is upon us like a fast-breaking wave. Ford CEO Jim Farley said recently that "Artificial intelligence is going to replace literally half of all white-collar workers in the US."

Because suddenly, AI is better. Not just almost as good as we are, not just equally good. But better. AI computers are world champions in chess, Go and poker. But, you say, what about programming? Coding? Humans still have the edge – barely. Przemysław Dębiak may be the last human to win a coding competition against AI due to the incredible pace of technological

progress. Open AI is doubling in power every 5.6 months.

Dębiak goes by the online name Psycho. "As it is now, the best humans are still better at reasoning and solving complex problems," he says. "AI can try out lots of small adjustments very rapidly. But multiplying a single average person many, many times can produce a better result than a single, special human being. Every profession has this coming right now." Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei said recently that AI will take 40% of all white-collar jobs in the next one to three years. Major companies like Microsoft and Meta are already using AI to write computer code, while laying off thousands of programmers as I write this.

At 81, my career skills creating words and images for PR, advertising, web design and social media are totally obsolete. AI is faster, cheaper, and better than human-generated content. From concept to media-ready material, AI can do a better job. Which hurts, because I believe that my abilities are unique and very valuable. In the past,

they were. Ads for Avis and Volkswagen. Posters for American Airlines. Websites for Qualcomm. But that was then, just a few years ago. Today, an unskilled person can write compelling ad and PR text with ChatGPT. Create very good art for a print ad or brochure with Canva. Generate a virtual social media influencer with Midjourney. And produce 15 or 30-second TV spots with Google Veo 3. Just give it a still photo and some descriptive text, and there's your commercial.

Almost all new products are derivatives from previous ones, so AI has no trouble finding source material for that 'new' toothpaste. In the ad agency world, would I hire me? Only for ad campaigns about truly new products. Precious few of those.

AI change is on us so fast. Unlike previous Industrial Revolutions, no time to adjust, to learn new skills. And with the rich getting richer and richer, you can predict increasing social discontent. Hopefully not as bad as the French Revolution of 1789! [Contents](#)

Speeding ticket, guilty

for Aug 8

A speeding ticket, driving south just after the traffic circle at Bisbee on the way to Douglas at the border. Driving way too fast. 65 in a 45 mph zone, said the Arizona highway patrolman. Es verdad. Took my ticket without complaint, thinking again how hard it is for me to drive at the posted speed limits. Because I instinctively drive as fast as I feel the road allows. Maybe because I raced an old TR-3 sports car way back when. Or because I have had a lifetime of being competitive, against others and myself. Or maybe because I like the thrill of speed. Which I doubt is a normal human trait, as most drivers are perfectly content to obey the law. So for the rest of the journey and my return, I used the cruise control to stay at the different speed limits. It felt

very strange. Weird. But after about 15 minutes, calming. relaxing. ¡No hay prisa!

7 PM. Coming back, a vivid sunset on the flat before hitting the Mule Mountains near Bisbee. And then, over the top just after the tunnel, rain. Soft at first, and then an increasing downpour. Beautiful, actually, in the soft evening twilight. You go down those hills for several miles on the twisty highway, before hitting another flat stretch up to Tombstone.

Almost at the bottom, a deluge. Suddenly, the wipers couldn't clear the windshield. But then it eased up a bit, just in time to drive through a deep pool of water that covered the whole road. Water that surged up over the hood, over the windshield. For a few moments, my little van was underwater. Thank God for fuel injection -- the motor kept running and then I was past it just as the rain cut loose again. But in the twilight, I could see the sides of the road. Finally down on the flat the highway straightened out and it was easier to drive.

Arizona is quite a place. Much closer to nature here than in California. Vast vistas, high desert that sweeps for miles and miles on all sides of the road. Incredible sunsets, shockingly all pink and yellow and orange and red, towering white clouds against the last deep blue sky. And then the sudden violence of the summer monsoon rain. Flash floods happening in an instant, floating cars and trucks into roadside arroyos. We are helpless against the sheer force of water. It even flattens sections of the 30'-high black steel border wall, briefly allowing deer, javelinas, and the occasional jaguar to cross the line, sin documentación.

I love it here. To reverse the saying about the fate of poor México -- "So far from God, so close to the United States" -- here, we are so close to God, in this raw explosion of nature... and far from the United States, way out on the land with the cell phones knocked out and not a single fast food for many, many miles. ¡Perfecto!

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Drone future

for Jul 18

AI drone assassins. These days the future comes faster than we can comprehend. Killer floods along rivers that never flooded before, a President selling perfume, and a war half-a-world away with truly terrifying immediate implications.

Not nuclear. The Cold War concept of Mutually Assured Destruction still holds. And even the smallest tactical nuke is useless in today's dispersed small-unit battlefield. Making atomic weapons is still both very expensive and very hard to do, let alone producing a HIMARS artillery rocket. So we are spared future attacks by technically illiterate amateur actors.

Not so with drones. It took only three years for the Russia-Ukraine war to become a drone-dominated battlespace. Unlike the US with our

very large and very costly Predators, Reapers, and Gray Eagles... or the Russians with their large factory-made Kronstadt Orion and Shahed-136 UAV aircraft, the real war is being fought by small 'homemade' drones. UAVs made by modifying cheap UAVs you can buy at WalMart, like the DJI Mavic 3 Pro dual-camera First Person View product, only \$2,199. With FPV, an operator in the field sees a target on his screen, then steers the drone with a contact bomb right into it. Like right into the turbine engine air intake on a \$3,000,000 Abrams tank... or into a hatch on the back of its turret where the tank's ammunition is stored. A typical FPV drone costs less than \$3,000 to build and deploy. Each side now has small garage-size businesses building thousands of FPVs each month, in contrast to the US or Russian ability to build only 20 heavy tanks per month. And poorly-supplied Russian soldiers are having their relatives buy and send them small Chinese commercial drones, easy for non-techies to turn into flying bombs. Cheap and available. You get the picture.

The Ukrainians had an initial advantage, thanks to US-supplied Starlink satellite communications. But an older FPV drone can be jammed, which led to the new variants that send the FPV signal through up to 10 miles of very thin fiber optic cable. The cable package weighs 10 pounds, which cuts down on the payload. And the cable, falling to the ground as the FPV flies, can snag or be cut. Not perfect. Which leads us to the Holy Grail... totally autonomous AI UAVs. No radio contact with the 'pilot'. No wire. No pilot at all, actually. Because AI coding lets the drone fly to a pre-programmed location, loiter while using pattern-recognition to acquire a target, and then make its own decision to attack and destroy. An AI drone can also act as part of a swarm of like kind, automatically planning and executing a mass attack on larger targets, like bridges and factories.

AI drone technology is here. It will mature rapidly over the next year in Ukraine. And there is nothing more frightening for our future. Cheap

and available technology spreads like wildfire. In 2018, a crude FPV drone almost assassinated President Maduro in Venezuela. Today? In less than a year, any of us will be able to command a sub-\$5,000 AI drone to fly to a victim's location. To loiter unseen until the person arrives and then, using existing face-detection software, to attack and kill. Explosive technology. The future is now!

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Last column #3

for May 30

This is the third time I've written my Last Column. But this time is it, I swear. Because after five years at 500 words per week, it's time for me to switch gears and get back to my first love, drawing. Black and white, with pencils. As a boy, sketching all the time. And one drawing of a 1929 Mercedes car landed me a job at an ad agency in NYC. Started a career, on the art side drawing roughs for ads for VW, American Airlines, and Avis. Next, in order to go up the ladder to Creative Director, I had to first put in a year as a copywriter. Found that I liked writing.

And then we invented microcomputers. PCs and Macs. And my art skills went from drawing on paper to Photoshop and Illustrator comps, for customer approval. Like others my age, got very, very good on PCs... ads, brochures, web pages.

Corporate presentations -- I still love PowerPoint. Annual report and IPO submissions. During my last year at Qualcomm, shooting videos, and then editing with Final Cut Pro. Which just wasn't me. Videos and motion graphics are for other, younger people. Who have more patience for the endless editing.

Retired in 2009, sat with my wife at home as her Alzheimers progressed, and published three books. And as I wrote, found that I still enjoyed writing. Which, after moving here to Tombstone in 2017, led to being a reporter/photographer for the paper, and then a columnist. I've enjoyed it. Joined the SPJ... the Society for Professional Journalists, which goes back to 1910.

The Tombstone News is special. Small, but one of the very few independent newspapers left in rural America. Back in the 1880s, there were always at least two here, like the Epitaph and the Nugget. Today? Well, lots of people get their local news from Facebook. Digital social media actually makes anyone a news source, shooting it out on

YouTube and TikTok with countless others for views and clicks. But I'm 81, and prefer a real newspaper, produced and edited by professionals. Editing is key. When I submit a story to my editor at the Tombstone News, she has the very real responsibility to make sure my text is factual. Accurate. And not biased, particularly around election time! She is good, and I'd put our little paper up against any big city daily for editing quality. And in these times, that's a big deal, believe me.

What's Hollywood's favorite four-letter-word? Next! For me, will continue writing an occasional story, but the weekly column? No. Time now for someone else to step up and write about our town. And about our area, Cochise County, the Land of Legends. If you like to write, 500 words a week is easy. Since a column isn't news, you can express any opinion you want. Up to a point. We are a small town, and you can't insult or demean your neighbors. A newspaper is not social media.

That's it. To my publisher and editor, thanks for putting up with all my columns. To my readers, thanks for your loyalty and frequent comments. And lastly, to Tombstone, the Town Too Tough To Die, for being here to write about!

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\$Trump meme coins

for May 23

For the first time in American history, Presidential corruption is now out in the open and celebrated by his followers. For starters, they are lining up to buy digital '\$TRUMP meme coins', so far investing \$53,500 up to \$16.4 million to be part of a private 220-person dinner with the President at the Trump National Golf Club in Washington. The top 25 bidders also win a private tour with Trump. Sell that access, no shame! The anonymous bitcoin investments are recorded on a public cryptocurrency blockchain (don't ask). So far, more than 2 million folks have bought the digital meme coins. The first 58 'investors', in just minutes after the start, made more than \$10 million each as the meme coin value roared up. But then of course they sold out,

and more than 764,000 smaller latecomers lost most of their money. Who were the lucky 58? According to Chainalysis, the majority of the token supply (80%) was allegedly owned by Fight Fight Fight LLC and CIC Digital LLC, which are both controlled by the Trump Organization. But it gets better. The Trump Organization gets commissions on every \$TRUMP meme coin bought or sold. So far, between \$86 and \$100 million, according to Merkle Science. Payday for Eric and Don Jr!

More family commissions. An Abu Dhabi investment fund bought \$2 billion in USD1, a new crypto-currency that is backed by the US dollar and just happens to be issued by the Trump family's crypto exchange, Liberty World Financial. Next? A new Trump golf course has recently opened in Qatar, and Trump-branded hotels are on the way in Dubai and Jiddah. All these projects are managed by the Trump Organization, the family's sprawling conglomerate with interests in property, hospitality, media and entertainment.

It's not just Eric and Don Jr. Jared Kushner, Trump's son in law, secured a \$3.5 billion investment from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE for his private equity firm. Happy Ivanka, right? Nothing like peddling influence. And now, through his venture capital firm 1789 Capital, Donald Trump Jr has launched a new invitation-only private members' club in Washington. Executive Branch, located in upmarket Georgetown, carries a hefty membership fee of about \$500,000. Members are tech leaders, business bosses, energy tycoons and Trump's inner circle, who can now mix socially in secret. There is already a waiting list.

Corruption. While Biden's Chips Act brought huge factory investments to the USA, it also enforced the Artificial Intelligence Diffusion Rule. No AI chips to foreigners. Trump tossed that out the other day, allowing an enormous deal with the United Arab Emirates. They will get, every year, hundreds of thousands of today's most advanced AI chips from Nvidia to build one of the world's

largest data centers in Abu Dhabi, the UAE capital. Will some of these chips end up in China, a UAE ally? Bet on it. Did Trump or his family make mega money on the deal? Bet on it. Hey, the UAE Qataris just gave him a \$400 million Boeing 747 jet! Financial corruption beyond our wildest imagination, unchecked. Out in the open. Will this be the new American Way?

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Too old for the future?

for May 16

Life over 70 brings changes to all of us, not just Joe Biden who alternates good days with bad. Huge consequences for him, being President and all. Much lesser for us. Because once over 70, in a youth-centric society, you are suddenly unseen, unheard, unnoticed. The value you had to friends and coworkers is no longer there. You are no longer the decider, the leader, as you were up through your 50s and 60s. Come into a room, and you are that nice old guy standing in a corner, no longer the company owner, manager, or lead worker that everyone wants to know.

You can fight this, of course. Let out your energy to demand attention and respect for your hard-earned skills and knowledge. But it goes nowhere. You look old, you are old, and that's that.

Which is fair enough. My friends and I were young once around 1980, when the computer revolution really took off. Still young around 2000, when we all jumped onto the internet express. All this was new. We invented new systems, techniques, and devices that rapidly changed the world. New! There were no older people to look to for technical advice. None. Yes, we had bosses -- managers -- but their job was only to get us the resources we needed and then get out of the way, since they had absolutely no comprehension of project details. High-tech changes happen so fast. It wasn't always like this. When I started a career in ad agencies in the 1960s, there was a change from letterpress printing to offset printing. Suddenly it was easy to use photos in print ads. But back then, the older letterpress guys had time, like two years, to make the change. Two years! Today in the agencies, if you don't learn new Generative AI skills in three months, see ya.

Back when, in that ancient America, old people were looked up to and respected. Because their workplace and societal knowledge had stayed valuable. Small slow changes, like using an airgun instead of a hand wrench to tighten bolts. But that factory assembly line hadn't changed one bit. Today, cars are made by robots. Are you a worker? Don't know C or C+ to write the robot code? Haven't learned the latest Teach Pendant or Lead Through AI programming? Get outta here. Manager? Have you kept up with Nvidia AI Enterprise? An end-to-end, cloud-native software platform that accelerates data science pipelines and streamlines development and deployment of production? No? Maybe we need that younger kid.

And they do. Over 70? Your knowledge and skills are obsolete. And you are no longer mentally sharp enough to learn new ones. Every day now, new info comes like jets of water from a fire hose. But you are lucky, able to shift into a new life. Retired, particularly in low-cost Tombstone. No

status seeking here. No ladder to climb. You can have friends without each wanting to get something from the other. Clean dry air, sweet water from the Huachucas, and not a stop light or fast food anywhere. Over 70... after more than 50 years of work... you can finally hit the sweet spot. Retirement, here in The Town Too Tough To Die!

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Kosmos 482, oops

for May 2

If you are reading this on Saturday or Sunday or later on, fate has dealt you a winning hand. Because the failed 1972 Russian spacecraft, Kosmos 482, landed on someone else. Or on their pets or livestock. Or out in the desert or in a forest somewhere. Or, most likely, into the sea, as 3/4 of our world is water. Kosmos 482, weighing 1400lbs, was meant to land on Venus but never made it out of earth orbit because of a rocket malfunction. Most of it came tumbling down within a decade. But the landing capsule itself — a spherical object about 3ft in diameter — has been circling the earth in a highly elliptical orbit for the past 53 years, gradually dropping in altitude. Takeaway? It's quite possible that the 1,400lb spacecraft will survive re-entry. After all, it was built to withstand a descent through the

867°F carbon dioxide-thick atmosphere of Venus. Will be quite a hit, Old 482! Worst case would be if it landed in Moscow's Red Square during the Victory Day parade, right on General Gerasimov standing in his handbuilt black Aurus limosine. Saluting Putin as Shaman sings Gimn Rossiya, their excellent national anthem... a 1939 melody by Alexander Alexandrov. It was originally composed for Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union, with more recent post-Commie lyrics by Sergey Mikhalkov. My Mom, a true red radical back in the day, loved this anthem... as have I, ever since I used to hear it at gold medal ceremonies for the Olympics. Catch Shaman or Zara singing it on YouTube, and join me in hoping that Trump can stop the war over there, and that our 150 large companies will resume trade with the country that gave us Alexandrov, as well as Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and Rachmaninov.

And what a deal this week on gasoline! \$2.50 today in Sierra Vista. Because the Saudi-led OPEC countries just increased their production by

500,000 barrels a day. Why? Because oil prices have drifted downwards since June 2022. Over \$100/bbl at the peak then, and today West Texas crude is under \$60. Oil producers need about \$65/bbl to break even... to make the profits that go to more drilling and more fracking. Otherwise, at some point, they just stop drilling.

The other factor is slowing consumer demand. Folks are traveling less since fall last year. Afraid you'll lose that job? Put off your vacation. We've seen that here with less tourists, less spending. But in economics, everything is like a kid's teeter-totter. And the upside is good news for truckers... diesel only \$3.50! And good news for Tombstone. As folks realize that the country is actually in pretty good shape... stock market up, low unemployment... these low gas prices should really help send more tourists our way. Can Trump claim credit for \$2.50 gas? Maybe! Doesn't he play golf with the Saudis? Isn't he going there in a week to sell more of his meme coins? Who knows? Maybe the fix is in. [Contents](#)

Slater the traitor

for Apr 25

China's Huawei company is a bad actor. High-tech technology thief? You bet. But then, they learned from us. As the War of 1812 raged on, Harvard graduate and Boston merchant Francis Cabot Lowell was sniffing out innovations across the Atlantic. He set sail from Great Britain in possession of the enemy's most precious commercial secret, pirated plans for Edmund Cartwright's power loom, which had made Great Britain the world's leading industrial power. Halfway across the Atlantic, a British frigate intercepted Lowell's ship. Although the British double-searched his luggage and detained him for days, Lowell had hidden the plans in the one place they would never find them -- inside his photographic mind. He made it safely to Boston,

where he used Cartwright's design to ignite the Industrial Revolution in the United States.

He wasn't the first American industrial spy. In 1789, George Washington wrote to Thomas Jefferson that "the introduction of the latest improved machines to abridge labor, must be of almost infinite consequence to America." Any American could bring a foreign innovation to the United States and commercialize the idea, all with total legal immunity.

That's what Samuel Slater did. Called "Slater the Traitor" by the British, the English-born cotton mill supervisor posed as a farmhand and sailed for the United States in 1789. Having memorized the details of Richard Arkwright's patented spinning frames that he oversaw, Slater established our young country's first water-powered textile mill in Rhode Island and became a rich man.

Which led to Alexander Hamilton. In his 1791 "Report on Manufactures," he advocated rewarding those bringing "improvements and

secrets of extraordinary value” into the country. Patents? No problem. Under the Patent Act of 1793, the United States granted dubious patents to Americans who had pirated technology from other countries, at the same time that it barred foreign inventors from receiving patents. Sounds like China, right? And we became, by national policy and legislative act, the world’s premier legal sanctuary for industrial pirates, same as they are today.

Back then, this drove the British nuts, just like Huawei is driving us crazy now. AI! The Panama Canal! A 1796 pamphlet printed in London warned of “agents hovering like birds of prey on the banks of the Thames, eager in their search for such artisans, mechanics, husbandmen and laborers, as are inclinable to direct their course to America.”

Nothing new about industrial espionage. Why fight a shooting war when you can just steal what you need to win in the economic battlezone? The recent kerfluffle about superfast AI computer

chips sure spelled that out. "We'll never export advanced AI chip technology," bellowed President Trump, echoing Biden's earlier policy. Huawei then released their own Ascend 920 chip with DeepSeek AI GPU graphics support, and Nvidia H20 performance. The cat is out of the bag, with China now poised to go past our USA, just like we went past the British in the 1800s -- thanks to industrial spies, criminals abroad while heroes at home.

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Could never be a pilot

for Apr 18

A friend came by at 7:30 AM last Friday. He said let's go do breakfast down in Bisbee, which I thought would be at a café, but no, we went straight to the Municipal Airport. He had rented a very small, very light plane, a Flight Design F2 Light Sport class, only 980 lbs, and all of 95 mph from its tiny Rotax 912S 100 hp engine. Since breakfast was over at the Nogales Airport cafe, we had to fly there. Hadn't been in a light plane in 60 years, and nothing near as small as this. And I hate airliners -- crowded with bad food. But this day, I loved the flying experience. We were... part of the air. Every little bump, every updraft and downdraft. Over the dry ochre desert, up and around the threatening Huachucas. In this little plane, you are, believe me, flying. And that is beautiful.

We flew along the border, east of Nogales. So many sections with no wall, where it hits the hills. Had to look out for Army helicopters and drones, but it was a quiet day. It was fun... but I won't do it again. At 81, I want to remember and treasure the adventure, as close to being a bird as you can get. If I go again it will stop being shockingly wonderful. Would never become ordinary, but no longer an amazing morning adventure.

And I learned that I could never be a pilot. My friend sure is -- checking everything so carefully before takeoff, inspecting every inch on the outside of the plane. Then going step-by-step through a detailed pre-flight check list before calling the tower and rolling out on the runway. Precise flying as we went along, like a hawk totally in tune with the ever-changing air currents. This... precision mentality? ...sure ain't me. Pilots like my friend are different. Same as engineers, always careful. So while I loved flying last Friday, I've learned that it is not like driving a car. Can't just get in it and go. Because, as my

friend said, "Jon, if there's a problem with your car, you can just pull over to the side of the road. Once we take off, I have to land this plane. Land it safely." Which he did, as we returned to Bisbee by noon. The wind was picking up in the midday heat, and we landed with a 15 mph crosswind, slippin' and slidin' onto the runway. Landed safely because of all the hours my friend has practiced landings over the years.

On the road, he also drives carefully. At or just below the speed limit. Because speed kills, it truly does. Just four little patches of rubber, each the size of a hand, are all that keep us from oblivion. Inspired by his careful skill, I resolved to be more of a pilot on the highway. And found an old 'Remove Before Flight' bright red ribbon to tie on the dashboard, as a constant reminder that my car weighs two tons, with the kinetic energy of an actual bomb if I hit something while daydreaming on one of our warm spring days!

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A world of miracles

for Apr 4

I am 6 and in the afternoon sun the sky roars as a strange small airplane roars high overhead, fiery in the afternoon sun out over the Golden Gate. "It is a jet," says my Mom. "A jet." As a child, I look up often. Up at the shapes dancing in the clouds. Up at my parents and their friends. Up. Later on, older and taller, I look straight ahead, for so many years. School, sports, both blue-and-white collar work, and early retirement. But these days, at 81, I look down. My head just sort of does that now. And there is a whole world below. All the little rocks and pebbles on our streets, and interesting cracks in the tar. Occasionally an unknown bottlecap, what strange soda, and where was it from? A previously unnoticed world of little bugs and tiny ants, all as busy as the folks on Wall

Street today, with the upsets to their normal routines.

I camp by the river in my van. Thinking about miracles. An Andrew Lloyd Webber musical plays on the car's CD. Amazing, so much beautiful music on these small plastic discs, now obsolete and almost for free in second-hand stores. No internet there, so I read a book on my cheap Kindle. Which stores thousands of books wherever you go, a true miracle. Later back in town, I can watch videos about literally anything on cell phone or iPad, or a movie for free or very low cost. Miracle!

At home later on. My now-old small laptop, still with more computing power than all the ones on all the Apollo moon missions. AI, a terrible infant, ChatGPT and Dall-e already causing thousands of layoffs. But a miracle doesn't have to be nice, does it? Although certainly my washing machine and microwave oven have saved us from untold hours of household drudgery. And the icebox, what we now call the fridge, since the iceman stopped coming years ago with the huge heavy block of ice

slung over his shoulder on a black rubber mat. Put it right in the top of the icebox for us, and off he went in the much more social world back then. Miracles.

Now you say, "Jon, I know all this. I got it. Progress!" But if you are younger, no, you don't know. You enjoy the present, but never lived in the past. Your miracles will be for future services and devices undreamt of yet.

But for me, the shock of today. For the first time in my life, I used a cordless drill. What, no cord? And for the first time in my life, was able to use it as a screwdriver, which saved a lot of painful hand muscle-twisting. "What a miracle," I said. "I could build a house with this thing." And my younger friends laughed, joking how they would get me something called a nail gun. I took refuge in my van, which starts up immediately, unlike all those older cars that just went 'rrr rrr rrr' before coughing into life. Miracle! Like the food in grocery stores always there every day of all my years. And the Kid's Hamburger at Culver's in

Sierra Vista, Swiss cheese and grilled onions and everything else on it, plus french fries or mashed potatoes or broccoli or Florentine soup or a side salad, and a chocolate milk or soda pop, all in a paper bag with a strip you tear off for a free ice cream with any topping you want... all of this for only \$7.59. A true miracle, only in this wonderful, exceptional country of ours.

Outside, an angry sky, roiling black virbas fighting the very clouds that launched them toward the ground. Miracles and changes.

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Blinding sun. crash

for Mar 21

Driving into a blinding setting sun last Friday at 5:45 PM, I hit an obstruction on E. Fry Blvd at Carmichael, kitty-corner from the Circle K. Bounced my little white Ford Transit Connect van over a curb jutting straight out into the right-hand lane on Fry, going toward the Fort. Hit at about 30 MPH, violent up-and-down leaving me with two front tires going flat, minor bruises from the seat belt, and a totally damaged ego.

Because this happened before, about six months ago on another blinding-sunset day in California. Hit a fence that someone had built halfway out into the street. Driving straight into the sun, I just couldn't see it. Am starting to think I should check into a restaurant during sunrise or sunset!

Sierra Vista. Managed to drive to Discount Tire before 6 PM, and manager Alex Navarrete sold me two new front tires for all of \$56, as the damaged ones were still under warranty. Alex kept the place open, and I was back on the road by 7 PM, with a real surprise.

Ever since my first sunset crash, the van had gently tried to steer a little to the left. Had the tire pressure checked, plus an alignment as part of the insurance claim. Didn't help. And that left-front tire looked fine, no visible damage. But now, suddenly, with last Friday's new left front tire replacement, the veer-to-the-left tendency was gone. Runs straight and true now, good as new! And I've learned that after a crash, a tire can look perfect, run just fine... but may have unseen inner damage causing problems.

At 81, sudden change can be shocking. Last week's story in this paper about MAGA cancelling our million-dollar wastewater treatment grant that Congressman Ciscomani worked so hard to get for us. And this week, Food Banks across the

country — already facing huge cuts to locally grown food assistance — learned that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is canceling \$1.08 billion in funding for food for schools and food banks. That's \$660 million in food for schools, and another \$420 million for food banks. All my life and yours, or at least back to the '60s, the USDA bought surplus food to prop up our wildly productive farmers, and then distributed it to food banks and non-profits across the nation. Nobody objected; this was a truly bipartisan win-win program, helping the farmers plus the poor and unfortunate with free surplus food. And now they are going to end the program. Shocking, mean-spirited, and so un-American in this great country with all our riches. Hopefully by the time you read this, the grant cuts will be pulled back, cancelled as people protest. Pushback works to stop these immature DOGE types, to tie them up in the courts, to force them to get approval from Congress before they cut off someone's food or throw thousands more people out of their jobs. Do they have no empathy? No shame?

But this liberal has no conflict with Tesla cars. Thought I'd go up to Tucson and protest at a dealership. But whether I like that Musk guy or not, he actually created a new car company, which is VERY hard to do, recalling the failures of Tucker in the late '40s, Kaiser in the '50s, and DeLorean in the early '80s. And the Tesla Model S is a 200 mph rocket ship. 1,020 hp, 0-60 in 1.9 seconds. A last chance for raw excitement before we all get plugged into MomMobiles as they chug along in socially-approved self-driving mode. Would I buy a Model S? No, I'm too old. Dream on, Jon!

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Epicurus, for a pain-free life

for Mar 14

Not much value in a philosophy degree these days, is there? But it is fascinating to learn what people in the past believed about very basic questions. And how their beliefs shaped ours today. About God, and the nature of the universe, and how we came to be. And even way back when, let's say 1500 BC, there were differences.

Ancient Greeks had a community of Gods, with Zeus at the top, and then others like Aphrodite with their disorganized family fights, often taking sides to help and hurt mortals like Achilles and Paris at Troy. You could pray and sacrifice to the Greek gods, without much hope that they would respond, busy as they were with their own affairs. Across the Mediterranean, Jews had their single

god, Jehovah, vengeful and angry from time to time as Jewish fates and fortunes rose and fell.

Around the time that Christ was born, Rome ruled that part of the world. Rome's elite borrowed heavily from the Greeks they had conquered. The Roman emperors spoke Greek as fluently as Latin, and studied Plato and the Stoic school of philosophy. Which held that the universe was created by a rational sentient being, created with an ongoing design with built-in order and purpose. Since you couldn't pray to this creator, they believed that a person should only try to control what they could, and ignore what they couldn't.

Stoicism and Christianity were natural allies, both believing in an ordered, deterministic universe. As the years went by, their beliefs overcame those of the followers of Epicurus, a Greek who lived earlier, around 200 BC. His universe had no God, no original creator. It had no designed form. Picking up the concept of atoms from Democritus, an earlier Greek, Epicurus taught that everything

was just a bunch of atoms in random motion. Since the collisions and interactions between the atoms had no design, there could be no predestination, no unfolding of a God-inspired pattern. Just -- chaos, and what we call unplanned evolution. As for the Gods, he taught that there were none. You can't see them or talk with them, he said, so they don't exist. The purpose of life? Maximize pleasure and avoid pain. Live a calm life, enjoying your friends and garden. To never fear death, as it was the end of pain and suffering. When our lives end, he taught, our bodies dissolve back to atoms and molecules, but that is nothing to us, since we are no longer there. With no heaven, no hell, no afterlife.

So you can see why Christianity became the dominant belief by about 400 AD. Love Christ, who is also God, and you'll be rewarded with a wonderful afterlife in heaven. This was much more definite than Stoicism. Christianity became very popular, and still is today, along with Islam and Judaism, all branches from the same tree. But

for me? I'll go with Epicurus and a chaotic universe... but with an overlay of some of Jesus's teachings. "Love thy neighbor as thyself..." if we could all only do that! Plus his teachings about helping the poor and unfortunate, which ring so true at a time when the wealthy are richer than ever with unchecked greed. As an alternative, Epicurus rings true today. Our Founders were definitely up on classic philosophy, and so we have the Pursuit Of Happiness, a totally Epicuran concept, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Works for me!

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The life lived

For Mar 7

But before afterlife, there is the life lived. My first high school job was on a small fishing boat out of San Francisco, 12 miles out to the Farallones and back before the thick white 4 PM fog came in.

Today, I imagine myself as a swell in a vast sea of living beings, each of us starting small, and then rising to a height where we can look out over the ocean and see all the other swells at their heights, and then down we go as others rise in their turn. In passing on, we give up our life force, our essence, to the great sea all around. The ocean remains, with all of us forever.

The life lived. Never thought about any of this before, what with 60 years of work and family. But now, rapid changes. At 81, surprised that my end-of-career high tech background is suddenly

toast, as I listen to Nvidia's Jensen Huang calmly explain how to transform any enterprise into an AI organization with full-stack innovation across accelerated infrastructure, enterprise-grade software, and AI models. Generative AI. Inference and Data Science AI. Conversational AI. And just as you start glazing over from this cornucopia of wonders, Huang gets to the point.

"AI is here now for everyone," he says. "It's not like in 1980 when you had to spend two painful weeks learning how to use a microcomputer. Today, anyone can download ChatGTP or the new Chinese DeepSeek app and use AI immediately. Type a question... about anything... get an answer right away!" Huang is excited about AI being the fifth industrial revolution, and the first available to everyone without special training, and either free or at very low cost. And that is true. But all through his blue-skies lecture, not one word about the mounting layoffs as AI makes millions of workers redundant. Three out of five creatives -- artists and writers -- now suddenly gone from

ad agencies and PR firms, my first career. Programmers -- I had ChatGTP write a recursive sub-routine in Python, and the code was perfect. Accountants, bookkeepers, lawyers, stockbrokers. And government workers from any job that is a repetitive process, laid off now in their thousands. AI coming in so fast, like a perfect curl right-hand 30' wave off Mavericks near Half Moon Bay. To survive AI? Practice it, learn it, or you'll get slammed out of the tube down to a very rocky bottom and wash up broke on the beach at the shore.

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Capitalist layoffs

for Feb 28

Am very angry these days at the callous treatment of hundreds of thousands of Federal government workers. Particularly young people on one-to-two year probation, our seed corn for the future.

Kicked out of their jobs without warning.

Indiscriminately fired on the spot by

inexperienced 25-year-olds working for rich

South African Elon Musk, who built his fortune on \$38 billion in federal and state contracts. Who

works for our new President, another rich kid

who blew through \$400 million from his father. A

man who never worked a day in his life in a

factory or with his hands or in any other job

where he depended on that paycheck to feed his

family.

Are the layoffs legal? Probably. Because our Founders, in their wildest dreams, could never have imagined that people like Trump and Musk would take an axe to the heart of our democracy. Washington. Jefferson. Adams, Madison and Monroe. Yes, like Trump and Musk, they were rich. But not stupid, and never cruel, thoughtless, and uncaring. Like most of us today, they had empathy. The ability to understand and feel the pain of others. Absent that, you are just another half-baked psychotic, no matter what you have in the bank.

Trump and Musk. Riches beyond belief. Emblematic symbols of the world's most materialist culture. Since 1991, capitalism triumphant in the Cold War, the third iteration of man's attempts at economic order. Slavery was the first, from long ago and up to just 160 years ago in this country. Masters as organizers, slaves as unfree workers with their output owned by the masters, who, after paying the upkeep of the

slaves and production costs, kept the rest of the income as profits.

Since the slaves never had much incentive to work hard, this gave way to feudalism, with a different deal. The king, or local lord, protected his serfs with knights in armor, in exchange for a percentage of the workers' mostly agricultural production. But then the black plague, combined with the development of gunpowder and cannons, rapidly ended feudalism.

Take three. Around 1600, the first joint-venture companies marked the advent of capitalism, fueled by the huge amount of gold and silver from the New World pouring into Europe. Capitalism, where investors risk money to hire workers and produce goods. The best survive and grow.

Result? Over the last four centuries, capitalist competition yielded the highest living standards ever for most people, here and abroad. Not bad!

And yet, could it be on the verge of failure? Over the last 20 years, the unchecked greed of the very rich has greatly reduced our middle class. When

you have 60,000 homeless people living on the streets of LA alone, are there cracks in the capitalist picture-window

This is a time of change. China is pulling equal with the USA. Their successful new system combines tight Communist Social Credit political control with very lightly-regulated capitalist enterprise, aided by state investments in selected industries, like electric cars. Will this state-private fusion become the next major economic system, replacing capitalism? We will see, soon.

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Esteban was here in 1539

for Feb 14

I am in my little Ford Transit Connect down by the San Pedro River. Warm enough outside, and perfect inside as I lay down for a nap in the back. A perfect retirement moment, a payoff for all the years of work. Jobs that I loved, make no mistake. But this is special. The sunlight and clean fresh air, the winter-silver cottonwoods along the riverbank, tangles of mesquite and fresh tracks in the sand going down to the river.

It could be 1539. Not much different here back then. No Charleston Road of course, and no bridge. But from the south, a chatter of voices, softly speaking Spanish, and then eight men slowly walking upriver to the north. Their leader, Estevanico, was a slave, appointed by his owner Dorantes in México City to find the fabled gold cities of Cibola. Estevanico, also called Esteban de

Dorantes, was from Morocco, and was the first Black to appear in the American West. He was on the ill-fated Narváez expedition exploring out of Florida in 1528. He survived shipwrecks and Indian attacks with four others, walking 2,000 miles to finally arrive safely in México in 1536. But here in 1539, his San Pedro River venture ended badly. Up north near the Gila River, he was killed by Zuni Indians, but only after he sent back a message. "I have found it," which triggered the large Vásquez de Coronado expedition of 1540, the very next year, 1,300 men with the first horses in North America. They came up the San Pedro, here in our America Mexicana, men in armor with swords and pikes and arquebuses all well-trained in the Spanish 'tercio' army discipline dominant in Europe at that time.

'Which is another day's story,' I thought in my van, as my thoughts turned to Esteban and the nature of slavery. Particularly comparing the fate of modern corporate wage-workers with that of Roman slaves, and Esteban as a Spanish slave

under the same social contract. Which went like this: in Rome, a slave was not free. No freedom of movement. But he was highly valued. Romans trained and trusted educated slaves to run their households, bank accounts, and social/political dealings. Also to manage their slaves of lesser rank. Why? Because Rome was not a capitalist society like ours. A freed slave would starve... very few small-business opportunities. Esteban's Spain had the same model, in the 1500s. With a twist, that the slaves were also baptized Catholics, which lessened ill-treatment by bad masters. So in that system, Esteban had great responsibility and decision-making authority, even though he did not have freedom of movement, same as slaves in Rome. But then, where could he go?

Back to our time. As a manager, I retired from a high-tech corporation. I had far less real power compared to Esteban, and no power at all to direct the company. Our workplaces are not democracies. A 40-50 person board of directors runs the place. Unlike Esteban, workers are easily

replaceable. Fired at will, no rights. We accept this. For if we quit, there won't be any recommendation for the next wage-slave job. No personal bond with the owner, no master to take care of a valued slave in old age. Better 'free' today than as a Roman/Spanish slave back when? What do you think?

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Afterword

In this end time of my life, I owe great debts to people along my way to here. I can write because I can read, thanks to my Mother, Anne Glenna Hill. Honoring her little San Francisco Folio bookstore with this sentence set in the Folio typeface that she loved.

Owe my writing ability to many managers, starting with Radio City Music Hall in NYC. And then at various ad agencies, and lastly tech writing and web design at high-tech companies. And so much help and advice from co-workers!

I hope you enjoy these columns. My favorite? From April 4th, 2019... 'Coronado™ Aircar test drive'. Have fun!

Jon