

Commentary



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Our Views

Bentley muses about Labor Day

As the kids get older and move away, either to school or to work, I have fewer conversations to relate.

That's where Bentley comes in. He is content to talk about anything and everything.

Just think about it. He spends a lot of time around the house. He listens to the radio 24/7, and we play mostly news and talk shows—I will reduce your anxiety to know who he listens to: It's mostly NPR, but he does get doses of some WTIC programming when I'm not home.

TV time is mostly of the "Law & Order" variety, although there are a few quirky ones like "Warehouse 13," for instance. Of course, Lifetime and "reality TV" get more than their fare share.

He probably is more highly informed than well-rounded teenagers. I do think NPR gives him an advantage. What makes him different is his nose-right-in there, down-to-earthiness.

As a talker, Bentley likes his comments relatively short, pithy, if you know what I mean. I like to call him the "Philosopher of Goodwin St."

He blushes when I call him that, kind of hides his head under his paws, and refuses to come back up for air unless I knock it off.

"If any of the guys heard you say that they would mock me. If Kiska or Molly or Nutmeg or Chico or Kodiak, man, my name would be chopped liver."

Bentley will go off on a few topics. He is big on kindness to strangers, not biting the hand that feeds him, and the joy of work.

He is very big on work. Not busy-ness for the sake of busy-ness. Since he is a Mississippian by birth, he takes issue with the New Englander penchant for



David Fortier Around the House

busy-ness. Busy-ness is different from work, he told me and quoted Martin Luther King Jr.: If you are street sweeper, sweep streets the way Michelangelo painted paintings. (He has a remarkable memory for catch quotations.)

I learned in doggy kindergarten that dogs, like people, need stimulation to reach their potential. Say, your dog does not get the proper stimulation, mental as well as physical, the dog just might turn to destructive behaviors.

"Every dog knows that," Bentley told me when I consulted him on this issue as I was tossing a tennis ball across the lawn and he was retrieving it, "I could have told you that."

"If I sit around doing nothing," he said, "I sometimes catch myself with the most distressing thoughts: peeing on the kitchen floor, for instance; gnawing on the legs of the kitchen chairs; pulling out the stuffing on chair cushions. It just goes on and on."

"What do you do?" I asked him.

"I focus. I find my chew toy and go to town. It soothes me. But there is nothing like following my instincts either. The nose knows. You know. Squirrel, cat scent."

At that point, he got nostal-

gic. I can only imagine a time when he turns one-year old.

Anyhow, he said that he sees nothing wrong with work programs.

"Remember," he told me, "when your great-grandfather moved here from Brooklyn, he was looking for work and he found it as a mason on Memorial Boulevard. From there he started his own shoe repair business. He wasn't looking for a handout. He was looking for a way to support his family. All those people who talk about the effectiveness of the policies that were at play during the Depression have redacted things, gone back and taken what they want to make sense and forgotten the important stuff."

"Do you know what the government program was called?" I asked him.

"Of course," he said, "the WPA, or the Works Progress Administration. Functioned between 1935 and 1943 and put a lot of people to work, including artists. Set them free to chronicle the country in photos and words."

"Okay," I said. "I guess you know what you are talking about."

"Some people did not like the government doing that back then, same as people who complain today. Giving away the store, they said. I guess I have a different perspective."

We had been talking about Labor Day.

"Americans are good workers," he said. "Work like a dog, that's a good thing, right. They deserve a day to celebrate. Once in a while, a helping hand can't hurt."

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Millionaires on the march

There was a time in the bad old days before the 20th century that across most of the world, in the majority of cases, you could only rule a nation if you were born of royal blood... and subsequently worth oodles and oodles of cash.

It didn't matter if you had any leadership skills or administrative skills or any kind of usable talents. If somewhere you could trace your lineage to someone else who claimed royal blood, and you still access to the royal bank and the royal jewels, you were good.

Fortunately, the days of monarchies and the preference for royal blood have waned and hold little interest these days outside of tabloid headlines. And except for a few minor hold outs, royalty does not rule the roost in national politics across the globe.

But, in the United States, a new kind of royalty has taken roost and it has learned to aggressively market itself to lure in the American electorate.

We're talking about the resurrection of the millionaire in American politics.

This comes to our mind as we read the news coming out of Florida about the Republican primary to see who was going to get the chance to represent the party in the race for governor in November—the party's choice current Attorney General Bill McCollum or self-confessed political outsider, Rick Scott, millionaire. In the end, money won out as Scott outspent his opponent in a historic negative campaign during an exceedingly negative campaign season.

Now, being a millionaire, in of itself, is not a bad thing. We'd all love to be a millionaire. How's that song go on the radio now, "I wanna be a billionaire so fricking bad, Buy all of the things I never had."

That's part of the American dream, to be a millionaire. It's why we buy lottery tickets and play the slots. It's why we start our own businesses. That's why we go to college to learn a skill to make us smart enough to find a way to make our millions.

And millionaires have never been strangers to top political offices. The Roosevelts, Kennedys and Bushes never met a silver spoon in their mouth they didn't like. But they all made their marks on the White House.

But lately, the millionaires are capturing the attention of voters—but not by being millionaires or portraying themselves as great men of skill. They are spending lots of money to market themselves as "not the other guy."

Additionally, they are marketing themselves as people who are rich enough that they don't need any donations... the implication being that campaign donations are the equivalent of pay-offs and bribes.

If you take cash from someone when you run for office, the latest marketing strategy argues you'll be predisposed to support the causes of your donors.

Yes, we agree, millionaires don't have to kowtow to special interests to raise money for the perpetual campaign that has become American political life. But does this make them a candidate for all the people? Not necessarily.

We all have biases. And they are shaped by the people we socialize with, not just those who give us cash.

The millionaires imply they want to be the representatives for all the people, and not the special interests. But will they be hanging out at the local Wal-Mart to talk to the working poor? Or will they continue to keep centered in their gated communities and the board rooms of America?

Being self-sufficient on the campaign trail should not be a candidate's sole qualification for office. And if a candidate needs donations to run an effective campaign, this should not be viewed as some sort of political mark of Cain.

Money, in a republic such as America, should not be one of the qualifications for serving your country. Frankly, if you had to be a millionaire to run for president, we never would have had the likes of Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, or Ronald Reagan.

With luck, the public's fascination with political millionaires will wane when they ask, what do these guys really stand for?

Letters

Fellowship Center offers thanks

To the editor:

The Christian Fellowship Center Storehouse located at 43 Prospect St., Bristol, would like to express its sincere thanks to the Clinton S. Roberts Foundation, Inc. for a grant awarded to their agency in the amount of \$20,000. Monies received will benefit the CFC/Storehouse Soup Kitchen

and Food Pantry to help to continue to feed the hungry in our communities. Over 900,000 pounds of food was distributed from the CFC/Storehouse in 2009, as many more individuals and families are struggling to make ends meet.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support. It is such a blessing, not only to us,

but also to the clients that we serve on a weekly basis. God bless you all for awarding the CFC/Storehouse with this much needed grant. We truly appreciate it.

Michelle Palmer
Promotional Director
Christian Fellowship Center