

Marciegurl's Authoritarian Problem – And Ours

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This is not a work of satire or fiction, but rather a true story. Names and other minor details have been changed, for obvious reasons. The dialogue is not precise, as I did not record any of the exchanges described below when they occurred. The services of an editor have not yet retained for this piece.

In the fall of 2016, the general election season of that year, my work took me to Phoenix. I stayed for eight days at a resort in the desert, just outside of the center city.

This was the first time in over a decade I had been to Phoenix. I'd never liked the city at all. "Boring or dangerous, pick one" is a creed of mine when it comes to travel. Phoenix had very much been both boring and dangerous on my last visit; a place that was full of surly people who seemed to have one foot in the (actual, non-airbrushed) Old West and the other in a meth lab.

Happily the resort was a semi-gated community away from all of that. It was meant for golf and swimming and dining at bland, but adequate, Arizona equivalents of P.F. Chang's and Legal Sea Foods.

The dental conference for which I was providing networking and speaker-ready services had me working typically long hours, and I was a one-man operation. I didn't get to partake of the amenities much, but I did shoehorn in a swim every day, and I usually had one of the bland, but adequate, restaurants send up a meal to the meeting room that was my home base as my days and nights wound down.

Of course, I also frequented the lobby bar, the once my work was done for good. On most of the nights I went Marciegurl, a bubbly young trans woman from Jordan, Minnesota, manned it. I first met her on my second day there, after I'd finished setting up the network.

Marciegurl was still early in her transition and not yet fully passable, but she was open about her situation. When I introduced myself and she reciprocated, Marciegurl emphasized the "u" in "gurl" and noted that she was trans. "Marciegurl from Jordan, Minnesota!"

Marciegurl appeared to be about half my age, so I was impressed when I referenced the Big Black song named for her hometown and she revealed that she actually knew of the song and liked the band.

"I liked them too," I replied. "You know, I'd always thought that (Big Black front man Steve) Albini was kind of an asshole, but last year I read somewhere that every Christmas

he goes to the Englewood ghetto in Chicago and plays Santa Claus for poor kids, and I got a little weepy.”

“Weepy? That’s so *sweet!*” She giggled. She was clearly working on developing a more feminine voice, and she over-enunciated. Her hand gestures, too, were a little exaggerated. She was trying though, trying really hard.

We developed a good rapport right away. There were only two other people at the bar that night, who were both squares. Middle age and business dress had rendered me “passable” as a square too, but my twice-broken nose betrayed a hardscrabble past and my being in the convention business, which I confessed to early on in our conversation, betrayed the fact that I was little more than a modern-day carnie.

Eventually, the squares would excuse themselves so they could have a smoke. At the edge of the golf course was a smoking area, festooned with cautionary signage regarding scorpions. I’d been there myself, vaping, just an hour earlier. Marciegurl and I were now alone together.

I ordered an Old Fashioned, and she made it quickly.

“Here you go, Silly.”

I thanked her, writing off her sassiness and over-familiarity with a stranger and customer as the folly of youth. “Silly” seemed a, well, silly sobriquet. I’m gregarious when among friends but otherwise I am reserved and polite to a fault. I was certainly in the latter mode that evening.

Prior to leaving for their smoke, the two squares had been talking about the election. The *Arizona Republic* had just endorsed Hillary Clinton, and it was the first time in its history that the paper had endorsed a Democrat for high office. Our hosts at the hotel must have been #NeverTrump because the *Republic*, opened to the editorial page which featured the endorsement, had arrived with my breakfast that morning in lieu of the usual *USA Today*.

The squares were staunch Democrats, and when they dragged me into their conversation I reluctantly disclosed my own politics. I was a conservative independent who had, pre-Trump, almost always voted Republican and donated to Republicans. The GOP’s willful (and unyielding) ignorance on LGBTQ, women’s, and environmental issues, however, was causing me to rethink my support.

Trump’s nomination was the last straw. As I saw it a novice, and an undignified one at that, had no business seeking the presidency. Not only had the GOP failed to stop him, but it was clear that their bungled primary and their clownish RNC chair had actually facilitated his pathetic victory.

I could already tell I was boring the squares-I must work on my brevity-but I was now with Her, and it was good enough for them by the time they went out to smoke. Being with Her was not good enough for Marciegurl, however.

“How can you support that *bitch*?” she whispered.

“Because she isn’t Donald Trump,” I replied.

“You and those tourists are so WRONG! Donald Trump is the last hope we have!” She was no longer whispering.

“How So?”

Marciegurl dropped her towel and wine key and looked me in the eye.

“America’s broken and Donald Trump can fix it, Silly. He’s shaking things up, just like I am. We are the same. We disrupt. People say he can’t be a president and I can’t be a girl, but it’s all wrong and we *can* be those things.”

Interesting. Maybe I should engage her. Why not?

I asked her if she was aware of the anti-trans sentiment that existed within the conservative movement. Was she aware that Rod Dreher was writing so many trans-critical pieces in *The American Conservative* that we on the right were now calling the publication *The Saturday Evening Post-Op*?

That did not offend her, at all. Why on earth was I even reading *The American Conservative* in the first place? That was what she wanted to know. Was I reading *The Weekly Standard* as well?

I was about to explain that, for a long time, I had a framed copy of the *Standard*’s maiden issue in my possession and displayed it proudly. But I never got the chance.

“*Breitbart*’s all that’s left, Silly!”

“Bannon is going to win this for us. He’s like me! He is a *trans woman*.”

Steve Bannon, recently in charge of *Breitbart*, had joined the Trump campaign a month or so prior.

“Why do you say Bannon is transgendered?” I asked this sincerely, well aware that the clock was ticking, and that I had to be up by 05:00 the next morning.

“Come here and look, Silly.”

Marciegurl produced a MacBook Pro (to her great credit it was not a MacBook Air) and proceeded to show me YouTube videos of Steve Bannon at various speaking engagements.

She narrated his feminine gestures. “He can’t help it!”

She was right, and the clock that was requiring that I be awake at 05:00 was no longer alone among clocks that were menacing me. She also played the inside baseball card and made an otherwise very convincing case that Bannon was among her number.

“He was in the Navy! At Goldman Sachs! What hyper-masculine pursuits, right Silly? That’s what we do. Overcompensate. But we are powerful. We don’t give up, and he’s going to win this.

It will get better the once we elect Trump, Silly. This country will be like Spain was in the 1970s...”

Startled, I put down my drink and interrupted. “Spain? During the Franco regime?”

“Franco had all the right ideas, Silly. The Left puts him down but he was part of a great wave of pro-European thinkers and the leaders back in the day...”

For the next half hour she rattled off a punch-list of mid 20th century dictators, authoritarians, and quasi-fascists, and proclaimed her admiration for all of them. Franco. Salazar. Metaxas. Pinochet. Enoch Powell. Not one stone, not even the one revealing Sheikh Pierre Gemayel of Lebanon’s obscure, Falangist Katyeb Party, was left unturned.

She even had a friend who wrote hagiographies about these sorts of people. She dug into her bulky purse, which was covered with alt-right stickers featuring graphics such as the *Breitbart* logo and memes based around Pepe the Frog.

The little book she soon produced had clearly been bound at a print shop, and was not a mass-produced publication.

It was called *Pinochet, Reconsidered*.

The opening line was not promising.

It is true Augusto Pinochet was not a perfect man, but he was a good man.

I briefly flirted with the idea of asking her if I could borrow it, so I could read the whole thing later for laughs, but this evening was already getting strange and dark enough as it was. I noticed the name of the author as I returned the book to Marciegurl. Katiegurl Collins.

“Katiegurl, as in Marciegurl?”

“That’s right, Silly. She’s like our Bannon. She’s actually in your town this week, finishing up her transition. She chose to go all the way!”

She asked me if the hospitals in Boston were any good, and I recall chuckling for the first and only time during the whole exchange. “Best in the world, for real. But what do you mean by ‘our’?”

An epic story followed as she answered.

Katiegurl was formerly Kevin Collins, a very rich, highly educated man and a relatively well-known figure in Arizona politics. He was a conservative *enfant terrible* who had become a top-tier NRA donor while still an undergraduate. After divorcing at 30, Collins came out as trans and became Katie (the gurl suffix came later for all of them and was never explained to me). The Phoenix hard right was actually tolerant of Katie being trans, as she was a very generous donor to many conservative candidates and causes.

She and Marcie had met at a peer-counseling center for trans people. It was around the time Trump had announced his candidacy, and they had both become early supporters.

Katie was impressed that Marcie was so well read for a younger woman not attending college and, like the others in the group, Marcie looked up to Katie, who was rich and bright and older than everyone else. Not to mention angrier. Marciegurl went on to explain how, for her and Katie and two others, peer counseling morphed into something different, and how they formed an activist group.

“One day a Mexican custodian interrupted our session, and Katie told him to go back to Mexico! The stupid facilitator told her to apologize. Of course she refused! What I like about Katiegurl is that she is so, so brave.” There were many things about Katiegurl that Marciegurl seemed to like. Her fawning portrayals of her mentor that night bordered on sycophancy.

When the facilitator ejected Katie she yelled, “Who is with me?” to the group. Marcie and two other young MTF’s followed.

A new “Sunday Group” was formed, one that was meeting at the same resort that I was then pinned down at, in one of the smaller meeting rooms. It wasn’t meeting tonight though, because of Katiegurl's absence.

“I got to pick up a shift...Katiegurl always helps me!”

Marciegurl was exhausting. She was giddy, loud, verbose, and a fast talker to boot. Yet it wasn’t quite my bedtime and I was, given my interest in politics and given how dark and strange her tale was, ready to hear the rest of the story.

The Sunday Group evolved quickly. The peer-counseling aspect died almost immediately.

“We all have therapists and this is redundant. Let’s work on something else together, something positive.” With that, Katie launched a new, grassroots political organization. The other two young women, unlike Marcie and Katie, were completely apolitical. So it fell on Katie to make them “aware”.

For Katie this meant convincing them that some typical alt-right positions were absolutely correct: support for Trump, opposition to immigration and immigrants, and hostility towards “RINO” and “cuckservative” politicians such as John McCain. Katie had, in fact, supported long-shot McCain Senate primary challengers in the past.

Katie also had a personal crusade that had little to do with the alt-right, or even the right at all.

There are, among some more radical feminists, people known as TERFs, or Trans-Exclusive Radical Feminists. They do not recognize the womanhood of trans women. There aren’t very many of them, yet it sounded like they were Katie’s kulaks. She really, really hated them. She wanted to go to war with them.

According to Marciegurl, Katie was able to indoctrinate these two politically naive young women in the course of an afternoon. Both of them were very angry with Mexicans and very enthusiastic about Trump by the time of adjournment.

The Sunday Group eventually added Marcie’s girlfriend, who was born female, and a host of men from Katie’s gun club and from her pre-transition activist past.

After going on about how great Katiegurl was and how I just *had* to meet her, Marciegurl hastened to arrange for that to happen. “Are you here through Sunday? That’s the day after the dentist thing ends.”

I told her I was taking a red eye on Saturday night. “How late?” she asked.

“Stupid late. 12:35 I think.”

“Perfect, Silly! We’re eating at one of the onsite restaurants on Saturday, I’m not sure which one yet...around 6. That should give you plenty of time.”

I asked her if they were going to wait for a table at the bar. I knew the restaurants would all be crowded due to the size of this conference, which most attendees wouldn’t be departing until the following day.

“Probably, Silly.”

Perfect. I'd worried that sitting through a whole dinner with Katiegurl and her trans cadres might involve harangues, but getting to spend ten minutes with the author of *Pinochet, Reconsidered* seemed an opportunity I shouldn't refuse.

I explained that a whole dinner wouldn't work because I wanted to get in a swim before leaving the resort for the airport, which was true, but that I'd drop by early. Then I bid Marciegurl good night.

First though, she wanted me to see something.

She reached into the Pepe the Frog bag and produced a picture of her and Katiegurl hugging, both in red "Make America Great Again" hats. She looked so proud of her mentor, who appeared mousy and looked nothing whatsoever like the big shot Arizona political kingmaker that she apparently was, or had once been.

My eyesight had been going to hell for some time before this trip, and being new at wearing glasses I often did stupid things like putting them in my back pocket. I had done so at Logan Airport back home, and arrived at my destination without a working pair.

At lunch the next day, the first day of the actual show, after being confronted with technical problems too painful to recollect the previous night, I went to a ridiculous Phoenix "lifestyle center" to buy an eyeglass repair kit and my seltzer water for the rest of the week. I had learned that seltzer was difficult to get in a lot of cities, and Phoenix was on of them. It literally took me almost twenty minutes in this vast and sprawling complex, which boasted the acreage of ten New England strip malls, to find my way back to the pick-up point for the resort shuttle.

At my speaker ready room, as I was about to close up for the night, Marciegurl barged in as I was feebly attempting to repair my glasses. I was unsure of why she was there. I was working, and I assumed if she was on site she must have been working too.

"Hillary won't be able to help you there, Silly. Let me help you. Let's make your glasses great again!"

"What do you have here?" she asked. She gestured, as she had become so good at doing, towards my collection of road-wearied laptops, CAT 5 cables, and Ethernet switches that lived roughly to the right of my chair.

"That's my network. Half of these fucking computers weren't imaged in Vegas. One of the few that was, does not have Microsoft Office. It is in the mix. My own, which has Windows 10 rather than 7, is as well. It's a fucking nightmare."

"Does it work, though?"

“Yes.”

“You’re so SMART!” she gushed as she finished fixing my glasses. She handed them to me. “Here are your glasses, Silly.”

Unexpectedly the talk turned to my hometown of Boston, and to its Jewry. Marciegurl had decided that I was like Mr. Spock from the old *Star Trek* television series.

“My parents loved that show, Silly. We used to watch it all the time when they were still speaking to me. Mr. Spock was always a vegetarian wimp. What a pussy! But this one time, they were in an alternate universe, and Spock had a beard just like yours...”

I barely had the heart to tell her that my goatee was in place to hide my double chin, and served no other purpose.

Nonetheless, she continued on, regarding Spock. “He had a beard, just like yours, and, in this one episode, he laid down the law! He tortured disobedient crewmen! *And they deserved it!*”

Soup to nuts, she was an authoritarian. It didn’t matter that she was trans, or that her presumably estranged parents were left wing Trekkies. Somewhere, during her dark journey of self-discovery, she found out that “authority always wins” and decided to cast her lot with it, rather than confront it. For her, accepting the sinister ideological hand-me-downs of Salazar, Metaxas, and Franco was a choice, not an echo. It was most likely a comfort as well. The idea of absolute order, in places where the trains always run on time, must have been reassuring to someone facing what she was facing. How could it not have been?

As it turned out, Marciegurl had not come to my ready-room as a lark on her way into work at the bar. Instead she had come on a mission, during one of her rare days off, to convince me of Trump’s greatness. She explained this as I began closing up, saying with some chutzpah that closing time in speaker-ready would give me the best chance to hear her out.

I grudgingly agreed, though I had mostly accepted the fact that I would not be re-enacting *My Fair Lady* with this traumatized, hot mess of a child. I would not be heroically convincing her to repent of gimmicky, illiberal ideas, so that she might assume a more adult, respectable conservative posture. I’d played with the idea the night before, but I wasn’t optimistic about it being a good one now.

Still, there is much to be said for the old college try. Boston Jewry had entered the conversation, and it was there that I saw an opportunity for a change-up. There was plenty of classical conservatism, the stronger medicine with which I planned to counter her alt-right talking points, to be found in these reaches of my local history, and it would make a nice bridge to a discussion of classical conservatism writ large.

I patiently listened to her talking points regarding “the forgotten man” and “outsiders” and “disruption”, and her vulgar commentary on Hillary Clinton, as she addressed me as “Silly” all the while.

This “forgotten man” shit had already been making me crazy, even before Trump won the nomination. White men need to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps, too. For anyone on the right to suggest otherwise is to plead guilty to charges of racism. I had spent my whole adult life defending conservatism against such charges, and now the hearts of tens of thousands of self-proclaimed conservatives were bleeding over a few closed factories and making my project look foolish, if not downright insincere.

So I did not rebut when she (finally) came up for air. I returned to the talk of Mr. Spock, which she had initiated when she first sashayed in.

“You know, they are a weird lot, the Boston Jews. Not only did Nimoy die from smoking, he was a compulsive gambler too. Very out of character, considering the role he was typecast in for nearly all of his life.” I had her attention.

Because the hotel had recently made a newspaper choice topical, via the HRC endorsement, I steered the conversation towards journalism as I changed the subject.

“Jeff Jacoby, though a bit younger, is another interesting character from our Jewish community,” I said.

Jeff Jacoby is the *Boston Globe*’s token conservative columnist. I used to read what people in my old neighborhood had once ridiculed as the *Busing Globe* during my lunch hour, after reading the more conservative tabloid, the *Herald*, on my morning subway commute.

Around the same time that the *Globe*’s majestic sports columnist Will McDonough passed away, and the paper had taken to debauching its once-impressive Sunday magazine with a focus on home improvement, Jacoby began writing maudlin open letters to his then toddler-age son in lieu of writing his usual opinion column.

I had always rooted for the *Globe*. It wasn’t on my side, but it had once been a much better paper than the *Herald*. I wanted to be on the side of good journalism.

Aside from that, Jacoby was a lot like me. He was ethnic, libertarian-leaning without being a doctrinaire libertarian (or a Gold Bug), and he didn’t come from money. I loved his writing, too. But when the *Globe* needed his talents most, he did not choose to be part of the solution. He chose instead to out himself as a solipsist.

I explained to her that Jacoby had, in the smallest of ways, committed a betrayal.

Were they all gone? Were McDonough and my mom and my grandparents and the OD casualties of my mid-20s having a laugh at my expense, as I was marooned in a horrible world, in a literally hellish city, where Katiegurl was the intellectual and Trump was the nominee and I was facing a done-up woman who shared not only the five-o- clock shadow of the drag-disguised villains from Pasolini's *Salo*, but their politics? Was I here all alone?

My musings on Jacoby's column were clearly boring Marciegurl.

"Patience, Prudence!" Buckley wouldn't go out like this, not in an orgy of self-pity, and I wasn't about to either.

There was one more Boston Jew in my repertoire.

"Nat Hentoff." I said his name right off, no longer moved to hide my vape from the empty speaker ready room nor to take it to the scorpion-infested "smoking area". I simply locked the door.

Explaining Hentoff, the anti-abortion, heterodox liberal to Marciegurl, as an example of principled thought, proved as exasperating as everything else that had occurred in these conversations thus far.

Nat Hentoff, as I presented him, was a noble figure. He clung to his opposition to "infanticide", as he put it, in spite of being a non-Catholic, beatnik jazz critic. He had actually been arrested at both pro-life and anti-war demonstrations. However flawed as they may have been, he had principles.

That was where I wanted to go next. I wanted to discuss the historical importance of having principles (not Hentoff's in particular) in conservatism, and to persuade her that Trumpism, populism, and the alt-right represented an abandonment of these principles. Tellingly, none of these "new right" movements had even formed principles of their own. They were mostly nihilistic, mired in primitivism, and worse still sentimental.

The proverbial bottle-to-the-head, the proverbial appearance of a handgun in a street scuffle, came next and it came fast.

Marciegurl's own kulaks, the genetic girls, couldn't even make up their minds about what outfit to wear for a night out. How dare they, she demanded, presume that they were worthy of making reproductive choices?

Abortion wasn't even a focus of the alt-right, but I had a friend and former roommate who had made the exact same argument, verbatim, years before.

At the time he and I were both normal young conservatives who agreed on pretty much everything. We both got off on the sense of rebellious self-satisfaction that came with being right wing, within a social circle which was best described as a Generation X pseudo bohemia and which was overrun with leftists.

Who needed Howard Zinn's revisionist history, or the smug asceticism of Thoreau, when boozy, witty Buckley and Podhoretz spoke more to our tastes, and to our lifestyles? We never found common ground on abortion though. My pal was staunchly opposed to it. He respected my dissent, and never tried to paint me as conservative unperson or, worse still, as a liberal, but we did argue about it more than once. Raised a non-observant Jew, he was a recent Buddhist convert at the time. His spiritual trajectory was, ironically, Allen Ginsberg's own.

So my friend, like Hentoff, lacked the usual religious reasons for his stridency on the abortion issue.

What he had instead was a West Coast Straussian impulse towards misogyny, towards a belief in the supremacy of family formation in Western culture. Though I have always identified as a more socially liberal East Coast Straussian, I'll confess to finding his misogyny attractive back then. I had just left an emotionally abusive relationship, and had cultivated plenty of misogyny on my own.

Still, it's a weird position, the notion that indecisive female stereotypes justify the idea that women should not enjoy fourth amendment rights. It was something people don't say often, if ever, even on the anti-abortion wing of the right. How did they both arrive at the same exact quip, one that I had never seen published before and one that I couldn't even find with a Google search after the fact?

How dare they, she demanded, presume that they were worthy of making reproductive choices?

And, like Marciegurl, this same friend had recently become interested in the alt-right. He dug Trumpism, but Trumpism is just an outgrowth of West Coast Straussianism so that actually didn't surprise me. He had taken a deeper dive however, as had she.

On the alt-right there are a lot of competing and diverse ideas, and few of them are good. His appetizers of choice at the all-night, alt-right Dim Sum buffet were Gamergate and Men's Rights Activism. These causes were kind of alien to me, so I didn't know enough about either to form an opinion at the time.

She seemed to have been going in for what is known as the Dark Enlightenment, the stupid philosophy that holds the Enlightenment proper has been a miserable failure and that the utility of social democracies and constitutional republics must be reconsidered. The Dark Enlightenment argues that monarchy, and later European authoritarian forms of government, deserve a second look. By contrast, I'd formed an opinion about this appetizer right away: it was shit.

My friend couldn't have been more different from Marciegurl if he tried. He had no attraction to the feminine whatsoever. His life had been punctuated by manly pursuits, whether they were macho ones like mixed martial arts, nerdy ones like Dungeons and Dragons, or practical ones like academic and career achievements involving pure mathematics and molecular biology.

After he had a major health scare, I visited him at his home. We talked for a long time about Gamergate, which I had a hard time comprehending. Gamergate was a core alt-right cause, and what really struck me about it was the diversity of its partisans, which he described. He produced a series of "Not My Shield" videos via his smartphone. This alt-right featured people who were African-American, who were Jewish, who were Muslim, who were gay, and who were disabled.

In opposing the "political correctness" affecting the video gaming industry, they were neither reactionaries nor bigots, this collection of YouTube testimonies seemed to suggest.

Though they were not represented in any of the videos I saw that day, my friend did speak of transgendered persons he had encountered who were both Gamergate adherents and proud members of the larger alt-right. I forget now whether he had reported meeting them in Western Massachusetts or in Illinois but I'm quite certain he didn't meet them in Arizona.

Marciegurl was nationwide.

I composed myself. As I had decided before the digression, what Marciegurl needed was one of my condensed, twenty-minute lectures on conservatism, on its canon and its history.

I would start with Edmund Burke, and end with the neoconservative patriarchs of NYC from the 1960s. Along the way I would touch upon Kirk, Strauss, Buckley, etc. Marciegurl was having none of it. She rejected this entire canon as fodder for RINOs and "cucks".

Oh well. It was during my heated remarks on the Straussian schism that Marciegurl finally tapped out.

She just plain didn't want to hear it. The alt-right that she had embraced was suiting her fine; she was happy with it. All I was doing was messing with her equilibrium.

During the same Straussian schism portion of my lecture, during my pathetic turn as Henry Higgins, I gave up too. As I said before I must work on my brevity.

Finally, I decided to offer a parting gift.

Though he had not yet made an appearance in my remarks, as they had been cut short, the neoconservative patriarch Norman Podhoretz once wrote a mighty strong memoir called *Making It*. Next year, both this book and I would be celebrating our fiftieth birthdays.

Making It was a work that described a transition, in some ways not unlike the one she was going through. I told Marciegurl she should read it.

“He’s John Podhoretz’s father, isn’t he? Israel first guy? Fuck those *cucks!*”

This revealed to me that, unimpressed as she may have been with it, Marciegurl had done some conservative reading beyond *Breitbart*.

I then tried to explain that, while Podhoretz had extraordinary relevance to the conservative movement, his memoir was mostly apolitical and that I was recommending it to be nice. Recommending books and music is how I offer olive branches to people. I freely admit that this is an eccentric habit on my part.

“Fuck you too, you neoliberal!”

She stormed out and slammed the door behind her. Twice.

“Oh well,” I thought to myself.

I then ruminated on all of the various terms of abuse that have been used against me during, or following, political arguments over the years.

Communist. Fascist. Nazi. Bleeding-heart liberal. Neoconservative. Now, apparently, I was a neoliberal as well.

The terms don’t mean much in these contexts, and honestly I’ve always held, more or less, the same beliefs over the years.

As much as I enjoy political discourse, a lot of other people who share this hobby are so invested in a fixed set of ideas that any dissent, any heterodoxy at all, is met with hostility on their part. It quickly becomes time to burn the heretic. This is true of people on the right and the left, of the mainstream and of the fringe, and it is most especially true of single-issue political activists and enthusiasts. This is why I prefaced everything with discussing Hentoff. It clearly hadn't worked.

The two Boston colleagues who had flown into this cacti-laden Hades with me wanted to go out to dinner that night, sparing me from “room service in the meeting room” at least once during the trip. I was expecting them at any minute.

When the knock on the door came about twenty minutes later I was expecting to see a pair of haggard event production guys as hungry as I, not a tearful barmaid with ruined makeup. Yet, life is full of surprises.

“I’m sorry, Silly.”

Marciegurl was so distressed that she had left the door ajar, even though speaker-ready was now closed. I closed it and told her to have a seat at the large conference round in the center of the room. Still bawling, she obliged and put her head down on the table.

I returned to my desk at the rear of the room, and noticed via my remote viewing system that the local labor had either closed or shut down the computers in the breakout rooms. I excused myself and raced out of speaker-ready so I could turn them back on manually. Luckily, all but one of the breakouts were nearby and on the same floor, but I was still annoyed. Mark, the breakout room manager from Boston, and I had explicitly told the locals that the machines were to remain on, so that I could extract any updated presentations at end-of-day via the network.

My errand took about twenty minutes, including the quick break I took outdoors to vape. As I made my way back to speaker-ready, Ned, who was the project manager of the show overall, called me to explain that he and Mark would be delayed by about 45 minutes for our dinner plans as they too were cleaning up messes made by these atrocious local techs we had been saddled with.

Marciegurl was sitting up and no longer bawling as I returned, but she was still distressed.

“I’m sorry again. I’m...I’m hormonal,” she whispered as she gave me an intense, strange gaze. I had a feeling that this was going to be a very long 45 minutes.

Plausible as it seemed I didn't have the training to determine whether her self-assessment was correct or not, but I did have to make up for lost time with the updated presentations. This took me about 15 minutes, and when I was done she was once again head-down on the conference round.

I had come here to set up a VLAN network and wrangle PowerPoint presentations, not to console members of the alternative right.

"Someone's gotta go over there and that someone isn't me!" I sang out as I drummed my fingers on my desk. It was from an old 1960s Phil Ochs song called "Draft Dodger Rag". It seemed appropriate for, as surrealistic as she was to begin with, Marciegurl also seemed a gatekeeper to a closed loop of mid-twentieth century ideas and culture. I had, after all, just attempted to complete an elevator pitch for conservatism, which necessarily focused on that era. It wasn't just that. Even on the first night I met her it was notables of the previous century who had framed our discussion. Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Augusto Pinochet, Francisco Franco.

I may have sung the Ochs line, but I didn't mean it. As militant as I was in my opposition to the dumb movement she represented, the person I saw before me was just a kid, and she was in pain. I walked over to the round and took a seat beside her.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Your worker," she replied, still choked-up.

I was confused. "They're not really *my* workers, but they do suck and they're ruining my evening as we speak. What does that have to do with you, though?"

"I'm worried I'm attracted to him," she blurted out.

"You have bad taste," I quipped. "These people are the worst local labor I've had since I started doing road shows again, and it's been several years now."

I was happy when she laughed briefly, before explaining that she had never looked at a male that way before.

"I don't have expertise in the field, but I have read that this sort of thing sometimes happens. Do you have a gender therapist?"

She answered in the affirmative and I told her to call them right away. She thanked me, but when she reached out her arm and pointed to a rainbow bracelet, which seemed to be made of rubber or plastic and read "Forever", she began crying again.

"Karen gave this to me, Silly!" Karen was her girlfriend.

"Forever changes," I replied. I was acknowledging, perhaps even saluting, that closed loop of the last century we had found ourselves in.

"What does that mean, Silly?"

I explained, and then rambled about the nearly fifty year old acid rock album of the same name, about how strange it was that it still perfectly described Los Angeles all of these years later, and about the miniature, bungalow canyons in parts of residential Provincetown, MA which mirrored the Hollywood landscape.

She stopped me there. She had never been to Provincetown but was hoping to visit the ocean side LGBTQ-friendly town, which was 110 miles from Boston on the northernmost tip of Cape Cod, at some point soon.

My relatively boring travel advice seemed to bring Marciegurl out of her own head. Mundane things can do this for many people, myself included. Sometimes it can help you get back up on your feet.

In her case, getting back up on her feet meant re-emerging as the alt-right firebrand I had met the night before, and who had more recently been present in speaker-ready, just prior to her outburst.

She talked about how proud she was of picking out the Sunday Group's collective homecoming gift for Katiegurl, a purple Derringer, and about the big event she would be attending with her cadres after the party on Saturday night. She couldn't wait until they departed the onsite restaurant so that they could help deliver the Heckler's Veto to the featured, Mexican-American speaker at a nearby immigrant's rights rally, one that they had deemed hostile to Trump.

Signaling that she had composed herself, she was now talkative and exhausting once again. I had ten minutes until Ned and Mark were supposed to arrive and decided to change the subject, for my own sake.

I asked her what other interests she had, outside of politics.

"Shoes!" was her enthusiastic reply. She was as strident and opinionated on that subject as on any other, I soon learned.

Marciegurl was livid that her girlfriend had worn flats rather than heels to a recent party they'd attended together. This teed up a series of rants about the genetic girls, about how the were, as she put it, "losing sight of their femininity".

She spoke of non-trans tomboys as if they were barbarians at the gate. As she saw it, it was her duty as a trans woman to retrain the genetic girls regarding feminine mores. Trans women, after all, were students of femininity and had developed expertise regarding it. She even used the word "expertise" when defending her point.

"I thought you Trumpists hated expertise," was my reply. She wasn't amused this time. She started to raise her voice and express her displeasure with TERFs, and about their ingratitude to trans women like her. She saw herself and trans women generally as natural leaders, as teachers of a lost art. Using common alt-right parlance she referred to herself an "alpha", who should be shown deference by "beta" genetic girls.

I was getting too hungry to argue, but I did note that she seemed to be forming a coherent, if very misguided, philosophy of sorts, and I also attempted a halfhearted defense of her girlfriend Karen. That went nowhere. "You don't understand," Marciegurl said as she gestured intensely. "Karen is losing her way. She was hardly wearing lipstick anymore before I straightened her out."

She then returned to the subject of TERFs, and their transgressions. I knew next to nothing about TERFs, but I wondered if there were even enough of them in the US to fill the ballroom at the resort. They were in her crosshairs, though, and those of her comrades. She spoke of a road trip to California later in the year, and another Heckler's

Veto they had planned for some feminist conference where there were real or perceived TERFs on the speaking program.

In some ways, it was even stranger than the previous night's cavalcade of dictators past. She soon excused herself. It turned out that she and Karen had dinner plans too. I once again implored her to call the therapist. She nodded.

"Good luck, " I shouted after her as she left the speaker-ready room and walked towards the elevators.

About ten minutes after she left, my colleagues from Boston arrived in speaker-ready, eager to head out for dinner. Ned was barely thirty and had movie star good looks. Mark was my age. He was a big, muscular black guy who enjoyed fast living but never looked any the worse for wear. I envied him because of this.

They were both terrific people, full of fun and down to earth. Just what the doctor ordered after my recent exchange, one that had visibly affected me.

"You look like you've just seen a ghost," offered Mark.

"Try arguing about William F. Buckley and ballet flats with a crypto-fascist sometime, Mark. See how you do," I snapped back.

We all laughed, even though they had no idea what I was talking about. Fortunately all of us were too hungry to want to discuss it further and we headed out.

Dinner itself was uneventful. Mark had probably traveled more than Ned and I combined, which was saying a lot. He had multiple friends in every major US city and on that night a pleasant Phoenix couple he knew joined us at the restaurant, which seemed to be going for a roadhouse concept. The food was decent, better than the resort's at least. The couple was initially less boisterous than Ned, Mark, and I. That changed after we ordered shots.

In spite of the shots, they elected not to join us for after dinner drinks elsewhere.. They probably knew that we were in for a Phoenix kind of stupid.

Our first stop was a loud establishment that had similar roadhouse decor to the restaurant. The clientele was young and racially diverse, but this was definitely a hip-hop destination. About a dozen patrons were accompanied by their pit bulls, many of which sported spiked collars.

Unnerved, Ned and Mark suggested leaving after the first drink. I was content to stay because dogs like me and I appreciated the establishment's lax vaping policy, but majority rule soon won out and saw me in an Uber with the guys, headed to the next venue.

The more upscale lounge we soon found ourselves at had a better-than-average cover band playing, which delighted Mark and Ned, and it seemed to require corsets as part of the dress code for its female bartenders. Perhaps Marciegurl was a silent partner, I thought.

The clientele there was also diverse, but much older than the clientele at the last place. It wasn't yet 10:00pm on a weeknight and most of them were already in the bag. This is where I ended my evening, though I suspected that Ned and Mark had just begun theirs.

Strange things can happen when you travel, and you get numb to strangeness after a while, so as surprising as it sounds I didn't think much about Marciegurl for the rest of the week. Aside from my own travails on the IT side of the conference, the horrible AV labor company had sent us several technicians who were making Ned and Mark's lives very unpleasant. Two of the "specialists" that they had paid top-dollar for didn't even possess the basic competencies to do their jobs.

For example, on one night, after already working for eleven hours, I had to go down to the ballroom to help Ned review and correct the bungled settings, which the audio engineer had dialed into the digital mixing console he did not know how to operate.

There were also logistical problems resulting from poor communication between the company that Ned worked for (and that had contracted me), its client, and the venue. On another night Ned and I were quietly enjoying dinner and drinks when he was summoned back to the resort to remove equipment from three breakout rooms, which he was under the impression were to remain set-up until the end of the conference. I felt obliged to assist him and did so.

Back in Boston my wife was as beleaguered by her work as I was by mine, and the time zones had conspired with her early bedtime to make our contact less frequent than it usually was when I was on the road. My homesickness was worse than usual as a result.

Then there were the little things, such as the mechanics of receiving a replacement cellphone at the property and the barista.

While presumably cisgender and non-extremist, the barista at the on-site Starbucks was nevertheless as sassy and inappropriate in her behavior as Marciegurl had been, and she was just as curious about who I was and what I did. What kind of a resort was this?

So I could have been forgiven for forgetting my social obligation to attend the Katiegurl homecoming soiree, but Marciegurl made sure that this would not be the case on the day the conference ended.

“We’re meeting at the Polynesian restaurant onsite at 7:00pm, Silly,” the hand written sticky note read as I returned to my room and found it on the door.

I must have looked somewhat Nixonian in my swim trunks, Cape Cod t-shirt, and polished Dr. Marten’s brogues as I turned up at the outdoor seating section of Aloha, but I really didn’t care at this point. Though the guest of honor had yet to arrive Marciegurl and her girlfriend Karen were there to greet me.

“I’ve heard so much about you!” Karen chirped. I wondered why. Karen was petite and pretty and she seemed to be as bubbly as Marciegurl herself.

They escorted me to a table where three of Katiegurl’s other disciples, the cisgender men from her pro-gun activist past, were also awaiting her return. They left me there, as they exited to wait for Katiegurl’s livery.

These gentlemen were a bit younger than I, but not by much. All of them were dressed in “Western casual” attire. Two of them had cowboy hats and all three carried side arms. One was fat and two weren’t, but they were all big, imposing guys.

Ted, one of the non-fat guys, was the only one who talked much. He lived in nearby Scottsdale and was an electrical engineer by trade, as my uncle and my late father-in-law had been. We talked about work for a while, Ted having been very interested in my own trade and its technical dimensions.

Eventually talk turned to politics, and Ted started asking about when I was going to return to “elitist Boston”. He too had clearly heard a lot about me, and he too sang Trump’s praises. Once again I wondered why. The other two men snickered.

Having to comp a failed show and having to bail a video engineer out of jail had previously been the worst ways that conferences had ended for me. Now I wondered if this armed, playfully confrontational Troika, who had been drinking, were about to change that.

Instead, Katiegurl’s delay was brought up. The men still referred to her as “Kev”. Ted explained that her surgery had been delayed by a couple of hours and that she had to postpone her chartered flight from Boston.

“It’s still too early for her to be travelling at all!” I exclaimed, certain that an engineer would understand the complications that can befall recent postoperative patients in transit.

He seemed to be agreeing with me when Marciegurl, returning without her girlfriend, interrupted.

“I told you how brave she was, Silly. This Gutierrez fuckface is trashing our nominee tonight, and preaching open-borders at a college! This is an emergency! Anyway, she’s here.”

Katiegurl emerged from the SUV livery ramp in a wheelchair, attended by a non-uniformed woman who would soon be introduced to me as her private nurse. Katiegurl was not wearing the MAGA hat I had seen in the picture. With her boyish close-cropped black hair, coupled with a blazer and feminine, incongruous heavy makeup, she resembled the left-wing broadcast journalist Rachel Maddow.

After being introduced to the nurse I was introduced to the guest of honor herself. Katiegurl was visibly doped-up due to her pain medication and who knows what else, but she acknowledged me. “You really with her, man? McCain in 2000, too? That’s so sad.” She spoke in a dismissive, Southwestern drawl. She also had the vague bearing of a cult leader.

How on Earth did a person who had just undergone sexual reassignment surgery on the other side of the country, and her pistol-packing followers, find the time to care about my relatively vanilla political opinions, about the minutiae of my political past? It was as ludicrous as it was unnerving.

Ultimately, we sat at our table. Katiegurl and her nurse, Marciegurl and Karen, the three gun activists, and I. Missing were the other two gurls. Dressed in modest swimwear, they were quite taken with the gentle water-mist that was sprayed upon the resort guests at the pool entrance just outside of Aloha. They kept running and jumping in and outside of it with childlike delight.

Katiegurl eventually spread her lips wide with her two index fingers and delivered an old-school whistle, calling them to the table.

The two gurls seemed to view me, and I suspect even the other men in their own group, as boring old squares. One was very passable and the other less so. We never interacted much the once they seated themselves and I don’t remember their names. I do remember their drink orders, though.

Having worked in bars and clubs for about ten years when I was younger, I tend to pay close attention to drink orders. Early on, as soon as I was reminded of the gathering by Marciegurl’s note, I had decided to abstain from alcohol during it. I had a long night ahead of me, and I really wanted to minimize the amount of hospitality I would accept from people who held such a worldview, so I ordered a club soda with a lemon. Katiegurl also ordered a club soda, but with a lime. Marciegurl and Karen ordered cosmopolitans, and the three other men various beers and shots.

The younger gurls, however, ordered Diet Cokes.

“Look,” I said as I gestured to them, trying to make conversation. “Katiegurl just got out of the hospital and I have to catch a red eye, but what’s your excuse?” They seemed embarrassed.

Marciegurl answered for them.

“They’re not old enough to drink yet, Silly.”

My God. They were just kids. No wonder it had only taken Katiegurl a few hours to indoctrinate them.

Marciegurl got up and headed for the bar, without excusing herself. Within a few minutes “Live and Let Die” by Paul McCartney and Wings was playing over the PA, and Ted knew every word as he sang along.

“I always liked Lennon more,” I offered. “This is a great song though. It’s nice to hear after all that pop crap. Kind of surprised they’re playing it.”

Ted quickly corrected me. “WE’RE playing it. It’s on all our devices. It’s like Kev’s theme song. Gets us pumped up!”

I chuckled out loud, wondering if Katiegurl was single. What a personal ad she could place, if so, I thought to myself.

Single, MTF transgender, 35, Phoenix area. I like long walks on the beach, Wings, and writing books about Augusto Pinochet.

Between frequent toasts to Katiegurl, during the fleeting moments in which she was coherent, the guest of honor talked of her current writing project. She was engaged in composing a work of historical fiction, a portrait of Benito Mussolini as a young military man.

Katiegurl, when mentally present, dominated the conversation. She talked of Trump, of TERFs, of how the Mussolini legacy was misunderstood. She was also an admirer of the more recent Italian authoritarian leader Silvio Berlusconi, and she bragged about regularly corresponding with him.

Though ready to leave I didn’t want to be discourteous. That rare moment when Katiegurl was neither fading into an opiate-induced Yen Sleep nor pontificating finally came, and I asked her how she liked Boston.

“Great place to get slitted,” she replied as she grinned. She was displaying the sort of Southwestern vulgarity I had become accustomed to hearing in the past, albeit in more conventional settings.

The vulgarity continued when Katiegurl began waking from the Yen Sleep for real, when the target of the disruption they had planned for later in the evening came up.

The lot of them really hated this Gutierrez character, and they were but one of several Trumpist, anti-immigration activist groups planning on disrupting his speech at the college.

The frequent slurs (they referred to Gutierrez as “that wetback”) and talk of throwing overripe fruit at the speaker were making me queasy as “Live and Let Die” played for the fourth time. I saw a perfect opportunity to exit when they ordered appetizers. I shook hands with all nine of them, thanked Katiegurl for the soda, and left.

The underage gurls followed me out, eager to resume their mist-hopping game until the appetizers arrived, and then I continued to the pools alone.

What a strange scene. I had been blessed (or cursed) with epic exits in the past. Seven years prior I had washed my hands of Boston’s music community following the crash of a Cape Cod rock festival which I had worked on as the Technical Director and which had gone down in a tire fire of waived payments and empty threats of violence and litigation.

That summer I had seen so many people, most 35 years of age and older, act like petulant children that I have never been able to bring myself back to the nightclubs and DIY spaces of my native place in the years since. I still remember the relief I felt when the ferry finally delivered me from that debacle, to Rowe’s Wharf, as if the voyage occurred hours ago. I was so embarrassed by, and for, so many people I had once considered pleasant acquaintances that I couldn’t bear the thought of running into them. This didn’t apply to everyone of course, but there were literally dozens of Boston music people that I never wanted to see again after that festival.

I had a feeling that my exit from conservatism had already topped that festival in its drama, and I wasn’t even at the Goldwater Terminal yet.

There were many pools at the resort, but I was feeling edgy and disregulated after the party, so I decided to start by letting off some steam and swimming against the artificial current in the lazy river.

After that half an hour work out I walked to the still pool with a cabana bar, ordered a Baker’s Manhattan, and called my wife as I lounged on a poolside beach chair. She was half asleep so we didn’t talk for long. Man, I couldn’t wait to go home.

The heat was still severe as dusk began, and I soon found myself swimming laps in the cabana bar pool, remaining to sit neck deep in the water for about fifteen minutes after I finished them. There was, after all, a lot to process.

For a nightcap I had decided to use the lazy river as intended, and after proceeding back to it I grabbed an inner tube and rode the artificial current face down on top of it, closing my eyes.

As I was about to decamp to leave the resort, I felt water being sprayed on my back and heard giggling.

Rolling off the inner tube and opening my eyes, I had expected to see a pair of under-attended children.

What I saw instead was different.

Standing at the edge of the lazy river, Karen and Marciegurl were decked out in miniskirts, fishnets, and cowboy boots and brandishing “Super Soaker” water guns. They both looked good, but more to the point Marciegurl already looked more passable than she had even days ago. I’d noticed this at the party as well, when she had been wearing sneakers and jeans. “Life comes at you fast,” I thought.

“Aren’t you gals a little over-dressed for a riot?” I asked this in reference to the Gutierrez event.

Marciegurl, clearly the alpha in the relationship per her budding philosophical principles, was the one to reply. “We’re not going, Silly. We need to spend some time together.”

“Good,” I said.

There was an awkward pause.

Karen waved goodbye.

“I’m going to miss you, silly,” Marciegurl said.

“You make a hell of an old fashioned. Take care of yourself, kid. You too, Karen,” was the best I could muster. I waved and they turned away, joining hands as they literally galloped into the desert night.

As I got out of the water and dried myself off I couldn’t help but wonder if they had left the Sunday Group. Two hours ago Gutierrez was all they could talk about, and their mentor felt his speaking engagement so important that she traveled across the country, against medical advice, to help disrupt it.

Had Marciegurl listened to my abbreviated talk on conservatism more intently than I had given her credit for? Had she checked *Making It* out of the Doc Holliday Memorial Library or whatever they called it? Perhaps she borrowed some back issues of the *National Review* and the *Weekly Standard* from one of her many Mormon co-workers.

Maybe I'd acted as what twelve steppers call a "power of example" when I consoled her, and that gave my ideas and those of my intellectual heroes more weight in her mind than she had initially found them worthy of.

I hoped it was the case, but not really for egotistical reasons. If this good outcome had in fact taken place I was hardly Henry Higgins in the events that preceded it; I was a mere librarian. The conservative canon, aside from the elegance of the writing it encompasses, is extremely persuasive. It is powerful stuff. I knew two socialists when I was in high school who were converted after encountering it, and much later one of them became a Mitt Romney delegate. On top of that conservatism's best thinkers to date, with the single exception of Pat Buchanan, were staunch and convincing opponents of populism and all of its empty promises.

As I put on my shoes and Cape Cod shirt I wondered also how exactly Marciegurl saw me.

Though she was over-familiar and somewhat flirty, I doubted she had a crush on me. Whatever new feelings she may have been experiencing, she had already confessed that they involved men much closer to her own age.

While I know first-hand how isolating it can be to be a bookish person in the food and beverage industry, where such things are practically frowned upon, she already had in Katiegurl someone to turn to when she wanted to discuss anything beyond workplace politics and the antics at table seven that happened the previous evening.

No, I feared it was something darker. I don't have children but I think she saw me as a sort of father figure. In the speaker-ready room a few days back she had described her parents as liberals who were nonetheless unable to accept her being trans. She mentioned that they were my age, on the wrong side of forty. That's probably why she knew about Big Black's music.

But after this weird week the last thing I needed to do was to enter a new closed loop, one built around armchair psychology. I walked through the mist at the pool exit/entrance one last time and headed to the main building to collect my things and leave Phoenix.

Normalcy and the mundane returned with all of the jarring abruptness of a stimulant crash, as my exacting travel habits started dictating my exit from the property.

The swim trunks were dried. They were packed, along with the other remaining things that needed to be. These included my laptop, hard drives, portable speakers, and the vape and cell phone chargers. A generous tip and a kindly note were left for the maid. I reviewed the room charges-there were many-and then called up my boarding pass on the

phone and reviewed that too. I donned travel clothes and performed what we in our industry call an “idiot check” to make sure I hadn’t forgotten anything, and finally grabbed the laptop bag and carry-on and left, propping the door open using the side bolt on my way out.

It was about 9:30pm when I arrived in the lobby and 9:45 when I hailed the Uber to PHX. At that hour on a Saturday night I was expecting the draconian surge in pricing, but I remember being annoyed that the vehicle’s ETA was fifteen minutes instead of the usual five.

I decided to wait outside so I could vape, despite the punishing 105° heat. The likable Mormon kid who had driven the shuttle to the “lifestyle center” was on break and we engaged in pleasant small talk until the Uber arrived to whisk me away to the airport.

And then, as if nothing had ever happened, I arrived at PHX’s Goldwater Terminal, to depart conservatism and embrace candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, herself a former Goldwater Girl.

On the plane, while it was still on the tarmac, I began doing the internal post-mortem regarding the dental conference, something I do even after more ordinary shows end.

After a day of quality time with my wife, the first thing I needed to do was talk to the AV company’s Boston branch manager about those un-imaged ThinkPads. It’s not that I wanted to go over Ned’s head; I just didn’t want the severity of the Western branch’s negligence to get lost in the translation. One un-imaged computer would have been an honest mistake, but six represented dereliction of duty on someone’s part. Not only had I been stressed beyond belief; the show damn near burned as a result. Accountability was necessary, as was disciplinary action.

Who was the authoritarian now?

The labor company had been monstrous and they needed to be blacklisted for future events in Arizona and everywhere else in the country but Ned, not me, was the one to facilitate that.

Another one was in the books.

As to Marciegurl herself it was her choice whether she would continue to traipse around the desert with her pack of alt-right trans girls and urban cowboy gun nuts, or whether she and her girlfriend would saddle up and ride away from such lunacy. I’d imagined that, given their location, the latter option might even be a literal one.

Either way I suspected she would be all right. “Youth is wasted on the young,” as George Bernard Shaw had once said.

And if she wouldn't be all right, so be it. If I worried about the futures of every wastrel and misfit I met on the road, and they were legion given my rock and roll past and fondness of bars, I'd have been committed to a lunatic asylum long ago.

After I enjoyed takeoff with the same juvenile excitement that no amount of flights had been able to quell, I pulled out my own ThinkPad and caught up with football and news and the RINO journals that the gurls so despised. Then, I shut my eyes until beverage service commenced.

When it did, I ordered a Woodford Reserve, a beer, a club soda, and peanuts. It was time to put away the ThinkPad due to space concerns.

As I waited for all of this to arrive, my thoughts turned to the election. I really wasn't worried about it at all. The way I saw it, Clinton/Kaine was a great ticket and Trump was a buffoon. I was also still confident in the integrity of the "Blue Wall", a thing I had dreaded not so long ago.

The alt-right did worry me though. Its adherents had effectively corrupted American conservatism and the GOP. Perhaps they had even destroyed one or both. Also, the alt-rightists had long arms. The fact that their sloppy ideas could capture everything from transgender support groups to the jejune American gamer culture to the hearts and minds of many highly intelligent and accomplished individuals was as extraordinary as it was alarming.

Still, as my peanuts and beer and Woodford and club soda arrived, I assured myself that its influence would be self-limiting. Trump and his core supporters represented my generation's dead-end George Wallace movement and nothing more.

We had an authoritarian problem in this country to be sure. It was Marciegurl's authoritarian problem. It was the problem of hundreds of thousands of her more pedestrian fellow travelers as well. Yet I did not, at the time, see authoritarianism as an immediate threat to the America that I had known my whole life.

I was innocent and naive on that night in 2016, as I finished my odd midnight snack and put back the seat so I could drift off to sleep until our descent into Boston five hours later.

I had no idea then that, in a matter of weeks, this authoritarian problem would become all of ours.