

Hot new trend: Home-Made Straitjackets

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 13 November 2013 17:52 - Last Updated Wednesday, 13 November 2013 23:34

A clear theme has emerged in news magazines during the last few years and keeps getting stronger all the time, especially in the last few weeks: The country is conducting its business on the basis of how much Crazy we can scrape together at any given time.

This is very bad news for the country but somewhat more acceptable news for me personally because, for a second there, I thought it was just me.

See, some time ago my own life slipped on a Canvas Camisole it has still not figured out how to shed. It will take some time to undo this thing. I am no Houdini. Even a right-off-the-rack straitjacket offers me a tight fit -- and tight fits.

(Sidebar: Perhaps this is where the expression, "dire straits" comes from. I mean, I can see where dire situations might drive people into dire-straitjackets. In any case, whether steely-eyed and sober, or barking-mad Looney Tunes, high as a weather balloon, I highly recommend the music of Mark Knopfler and Dire Straits, jacket or no.)

For examples, you needn't look any further than the ongoing budget madness in the seat of our national government -- a seat I would relish paddling and/or kicking in a burst of absent self-restraint.

I defy anyone to use the words "sane" and "rational" to accurately describe the proceedings on Capitol Hill, a site that could really use a vast influx of canvas camisoles. First, there was the slack-jawed disconnect of repeated attempts by our representatives to kill off a plan that only wanted to bring a scant, introductory level of medical wellness to their constituents.

A certain political party (one rhyming, ironically enough -- given its lack of anything close to an easy-going, Happy Hour nature or a desire to associate themselves with the notion of collecting taxes -- with "Free Publicans") tried drowning that simple wish in the bathtub 32, 33 times. This was an all-time record for crazed, obstinate grandstanding, and was done at a cost of just under 50 million dollars.

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Adding a few carloads of salt to those open fiscal wounds, these *Brie Pelicans* did so during a time of concern of the nation spending way too much money, and doing so on trivial, frivolous, unnecessary things, like the needs of its regular people, versus the needs of its corporations and the rich.

(For the moment, we'll let a few pet lap dogs of these *Glee Pemmicans* wander off the leash hereabouts, and not peer too closely at the deep, troubling stains made on the carpets of our thoughts -- the ones in which corporations are somehow persons... that wealthy businesses and individuals desperately require permanent public welfare payments.... and that these representatives are the exact same people who ran up psychotic levels of spending in the first place. Thank goodness I just got my Rubber Bungalow Suit back from the dry-cleaners yesterday.)

I imagine we should also just let other sleeping dogs lie, such as our representatives -- the half with the pin-wheeling eyes and attention spans measuring in the single digits of standard clock seconds -- deciding that ruining the civilizations of innocent people, abroad, through war, was far more important than ruining the civilization of innocent people, here at home, through neglect.

We can be grateful for small favors, I suppose. I mean, if being second on a Hit List offers any consolation at all.

And if all that's not enough to drag your questioning psyche to the edge of Squinting Unfathomability, you must also remember these same representatives have one of the best, finest, medical care plans to accompany their equally impressive, and equally costly, comfy li'l perk packages bulging with eye-popping favors and gifts from a, uh, grateful nation.

To really look over the edge at *Gee HatchetMan* Heights (aka Rightwingnut Leap), and give serious consideration to taking that parachute-free leap to terra firma far, far below, one must first make peace with this notion: The recent breakout budget nightmare, Part 34 or so, was mostly over whether or not *to honor the checks they'd already decided to approve and write.*

[*sound of chiming bells, ah-ooogah horns, and submarine diving klaxons -- and of me rubbing*

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my eyes and cleaning out my ears with very long lengths of mental floss]

Replaced most of your fried fuses and reset your circuit breakers at this point? Yes, well -- don't wander too far from the wall panel, and realize that you should order a significant back-stock of fuses and keep those replacements handy: None of this is anywhere near done yet.

The *Me-Sure-I-Cans* are far from finished on demonstrating the extent of their brain injuries and showing us how we may best serve them by acting out various symptoms of their mostly invisible and usually contrary concerns with our own very real flesh-and-blood pains.

The Gallup pollsters, meanwhile, are keen to point out to us one dimension that Crazy has now seized: the *Glib Flublicans*, at 28 percent, now own the lowest favorability rating ever recorded for either political party. *Ever.*

And, by a 22-point margin, that same group earns the public's blame for the recent shutdown.

But, you should not get too excited about the public waking up after their long coma-trance begun under Reagan and enhanced under Rush. Another organization, the Pew Research Center, says that this very same public says they think those same *Crashed Minivans* are better able to manage national government (42 to 39 percent) and better able to deal with the economy (44 to 37 percent).

So much for a determined, energized public awakening from the cruel hoax of propaganda, hypnosis, and disbelief. We are, apparently, and very basically, asking for more of the same. And you know how the *more of the same game* argument goes: Doing the same thing, over and over, and expecting a different result, is one very apt definition of insanity.

Or, if you are a *Fat-Cat-I-Can*, it is the very cornerstone of persistent, insistent optimism -- the kind of nightmare that no alarm clock can interrupt and no jackhammer can crack.

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I don't know how to fit an entire country with a straitjacket, especially one with such a vast geographic area, such pockets of bulging tea-baggery, and so many wellsprings of determined ignorance. I'm having trouble enough getting my own Garments of Enforced Passivity arranged for the Fall and Winter.

On a personal level, life has been feeling like the organized, tranquilized calm of a whole lot of fast-moving, bullet-style commuter trains plowing into slow-moving freight behemoths.

This most recent 10- or 12-month long period eased itself off the smooth, main line of Life, and onto a siding called Medical Mayhem, after a decade of pretty much trouble-free service. Sundry genetic alarm clocks went off and Life's timetables and rail lines were re-routed -- and about as easily as one plays catch with locomotives.

I mean, in a very narrow run of time, we lost a favorite dog to bone cancer. Then, my genes decided to hold an uncontrolled, cellular population explosion in my body, too, giving cancer the run of the place. Then, a very special person in my life needed to have extensive surgery for a few different life ills and ailments, along with some precautionary tissue removals at the same time, so we could check and see if The Big C had her name on a dance card, too.

While it is true that this country's notion of health care, and delivery method, is itself insane, there's just so many lines on the patient chart page on which we might write our complaints.

I mean, where would you like to start? Cost per individual compared with equally civilized countries around the world? Levels of health and wellness received for spending performed? Ease of accessing services -- or accessing them at all? Cost of administering those services? Focus of services, whether it is profit- or person-centric? And on and on.

Forget for the moment another major chunk of that game, too, in which fighting the disease is only one small part of working toward wellness -- operating in a DIY environment, and coordinating and organizing your own care during a time of decreased energy and ability, is also

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part of the game. Just like it is part of the game to both figure out how to pay for those needed services, and then doing it -- or figuring out the process for medical bankruptcy, and then doing it.

And on and on.

The reason I bring up my recent, deep, 8-hour-long familiarity with an outpatient surgery center's waiting room is for one small glimpse into the national psyche. This peek behind the scenes of the country's hot button issues came courtesy of a family troupe of one patient's entourage who had noisily trooped into earshot.

These good people remind me of one of my neighbors, the one who runs the leaf-blower at the drop of a leaf, using it even in the rain -- I kid you not -- who entertained one another by reading aloud, simultaneously, from newspapers and magazines discovered in their wake.

One man, the apparent father of the other four present, and husband of the woman who was called up for her turn in the surgical theater, landed on the account of the FDA's notion to ban trans-fats in food.

He became visibly agitated, rattling and crashing his now-balled-up newspaper onto a nearby chair, muttering this in a perturbed, angry voice: "Well, there goes the taste of my french fries."

It may help fill in the picture at this point if I tell you that the man was about, *oh*, a hundred or more pounds overweight and very clearly obese.

He did not say, "Oh, good -- the government is trying to help keep poisons out of the food supply," or even, "well, maybe that'll help me lose some weight," or even, "Good for them, trying to help people not eat dangerous or questionable items."

No, it was all about *My Loss of French Fry Taste*.

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The four kids he had in tow in the waiting room were aged anywhere from their late 20s to their late 30s. They all echoed dad's sad discovery with plaintive mini-wails of their own. All four -- two men, two women -- were also very obviously obese.

Forget that french fries are being made, and have been made for some time, without the use of trans-fats. Forget that keeping up with the facts is just too much to ask.

It remains clear that stupidity is alive and well on the Big Things as well as the Little Things, from honoring a nation's legally-incurred debt to the even holier sanctity of french fry taste.

It is also clear that insanity, and inanity, once fostered and festered into consciousness, have strong desires to spread their contagion outward, doing so via family, and proudly hand down their genetically-leaning ignorance, jumping from one generation to the next, just like any other form of cancer.

News reports say our political lives, and the rest of our lives, too, now appear to be driven by a New Crazyness, and that Continual Crisis is the new norm -- that Unblinking Madness now drives the bus across the boards, across all strata, and across all spectrums. Reports suggest that this growling, foaming-at-the-mouth, hand-biting crazyness is simply a reflection of People themselves -- that, having been driven to a crazed, unthinking, mad, reflexive state, we have ourselves been made Really Good Candidates for Restraint Wear, and so, we elect representatives *just like us*.

I have my own theories for what has been driving the country nuts, to use an imprecise term of measurement, and it focuses almost entirely on a decade and more of the fact-free drum-beating and psychotic pandering of the *Blight Wingers*, whipping the easily led and craftily bled into a frothy fever pitch of unmatched idiocy, harmful nonsense, and crazed actions taken by people in their own worst interests.

They're probably right, we're stuck with it. What would help? Well, let's see now: Nothing easy or fast -- two basic requirements for immediate adoption and action in today's consumer society of Instant Gratification, On-Demand-Happiness-Or-Else.

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General education would help, as would instruction for people in basic civics, civility, compromise, and critical thinking. Then, there's the energized, and energetic, Paying Attention component, along with the desire to be Informed and Aware, and demanding it from a Watchdog Press -- which was last seen in widespread numbers pre-JFK, with a slight resurgence around the time of Nixon, himself a cesspool of troubling psychoses, but barely enough to provide him a low-bar qualification for entrance into his former party today.

What else? *Hmmmm*. Then, we'd have to ensure the Supreme Court would re-institute Democracy, after having ended it on December 12, 2000. There'd also be the need to re-institute a previously unspoken agreement by media to report using real and actual facts, and to return to that old-fashioned notion, agreeing to tell the truth in newscasts. I'd also like to see a return to segregating news from opinion, and labelling opinion as such, rather than letting editorial opinion slip through as news -- but that's about as likely as a return to the Fairness Doctrine, another item on the wish list.

Then, there's the whole accountability angle -- being aware and alert to the activities of your representatives, and being willing to bring heat as well as praise to their doorsteps, based on their activities. Plus, we'd all have to....

Nah. The New Sanity sounds like too much work. The New Crazy is way easier, for sure. And far more entertaining, if you can commit to grounds for not taking anything seriously ever again, lest you need to commit yourself to institutional grounds instead.

Besides, *like*, we all have to go get fresh batteries for our big screen's 3D glasses, and pick up that new release today -- we've really been looking forward to *Fast and Furious 19: Nothing Left to Steal*.

Either that, or *Gone in Sixty Seconds 23: Your Last Functioning Brain Cell*.

It all seems so real, in 3D, you know.