

Talking about a Friend Over a Cup or Two of Coffee

by Nonnie Augustine

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“Their first fight was over school lunches. Free school lunches. She taught Kindergarten in a public special ed center for emotionally disturbed children. The school had about 100 students, roughly evenly mixed, black and white, but almost every one of them poor enough that they qualified for free breakfast and lunch. He astonished her with a blunt pronouncement that they shouldn't be giving out free food. And, you know, she explained why the meal programs were so important, but failed to sway him in the least during the next hour or so of their drive to a fish camp. (She'd never been to a fish camp before and didn't want to go to one ever and yet, there she was.)

So, seven months into her marriage she finally noticed that she'd hooked herself up with a Republican. Somehow her life had only grazed the surface of relationships with those people. Never had she been in a long discussion, confined in a car for hours, with someone who opposed feeding children who otherwise would not get enough to eat. His arguments made no sense to her, whatsoever, and he was her husband!

Of course, they'd only dated for six weeks or so before she got pregnant and the wedding was three weeks after that. Life was a delirious blur for sixteen weeks, then she lost the baby. And then, well, she was too depressed to take in much of anything for a while.

He thought the weekend with friends at a fish camp in the Dead Lakes region would cheer her up. Ironic, eh? But... she'd never been there, knew the area was famous for its mystery, and besides, she really, really wanted to have her first and only marriage (she was 41) work. This big fight over free school lunches and all that, however, was a humdinger. They almost never discussed politics after that weekend.

Oh, yeah, somehow they stayed married for 15 years. She told me just the other day that she doesn't think anyone can top her when it comes to arranging reality in neat compartments. Her husband's Republicanism stayed locked away, way in the back of her mind for as long as she loved him. Amazing, isn't it? I mean, one of her heroes has always been Noam Chomsky."

