

Incivility for Breakfast

by Dom Macchiaroli

Had to go to work early this morning. Since it's now technically winter in the desert, the sun rises a little earlier than I am used to at that time of day. And so, with scalding, inevitably spillable coffee in hand, I backed out of the driveway, made my way down our little avenue and turned the corner, now heading south, using the street that we've grown accustomed to driving on for over twenty five years.

There I saw my neighbor standing in her front yard; a lady that we've gotten to know very well over time. I gently honked my horn and gave her the kind of friendly neighbor wave that only friendly neighbors with hands are licensed to give. But she didn't wave back. What the hell? Is she mad at me? What mighty transgression might I have executed to see her treat me so rudely? Am I now presently somehow beneath her elevated echelon on the Friendly Neighbor Good Morning List? Shit, man.

There's an epidemic of incivility in this country, apart from flying bird flu and political partisan hatreds. No one even waves in greeting anymore. People are more often apt just to stare at the ground in passing than to say hello. All you gotta do is pretend the other person giving the salute doesn't exist, continue with your fake weeding or whatever you're doing out front your domicile in jammies at seven in the manana. So why do we all live so bunched up together if we're gonna pretend the other person doesn't exist at the same time? We might as well move out into the wilderness and take our chances with wild flora and fauna if we're going to avoid noticing others. Somehow we've lost our neighborliness. Wasn't it Hermann Goering who said neighborliness is next to godliness? Or Ayn Rand? It's time we got it back. I say let's start with you.

As for the lady, I am kind of pissed at her now. How many times have we watched her dog, indeed, had the ancient animal over at our house while she was away on holiday(s)? How many times have I

cut her lawn without being asked, without expecting reciprocation? What precisely have I done to earn her ire and disrespect?

It would require most of the day for me to forgive the slight.

Later, on my way back home, the rage returned. Gripping the steering wheel, I considered all the ways I would get back at her. If she is going to be like that, I'll return the favor in kind. No more gifts of my time, no more happy morning greetings. And since the wholesale absence of couth is now prevalent in greater American society, I'll pay the general public back as well. I'll retreat a little bit more into myself, talk a little less when talked to, be less social in social settings that ask for more of me. I will do no less than completely alter my patterns of behavior and all because she couldn't give me a salute. That'll show her and the rest of you too, for that matter.

Just then I angrily turned the corner, carefully and painfully eyeing the spot where I thought Gini had been that morning, my anger twisted and all aflutter.

It hadn't been Gini at all. I had waved at a cactus.

