

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

May 2, 2011

Each time I sit down to write an entry I am sorely tempted to engage in DOC-bashing, criticizing the way Wisconsin prisons are run and exposing all their problems and shortcomings. Perhaps I should focus on what it does well for a change.

For instance, this is probably the safest prison system in the country. The DOC has total control at all times. Gangs do not run the prisons, men do not have to fear sexual assault, strongarming or unprovoked beatings by other prisoners. There are isolated incidents, of course, but in general Wisconsin prisons are as safe or safer than the streets of Wisconsin's biggest cities.

Obama got Osama! That's good news for the U.S. and Obama. He did what George Bush refused to do. Cynically, I believe Bush turned over the task of capturing bin Laden to the war lords knowing they would let him go. That gave Bush a bogey man he could use to scare the public every time his ratings dropped. Now it's time to get out of Afghanistan and finish pulling out of Iraq. Hundreds of billions of dollars squandered in those wars which could have been used to rebuild our infrastructure. Money spent on weapons and soldiers' wages and benefits are a drain on our economy and do nothing productive. We would not be trillions of dollars in debt if we did not have ten times more military than we need.

We could easily cut our military budget in half without jeopardizing our national security. We should also require any country that wants our troops guarding them to pay us for the cost of keeping them there. We no longer need fear Russia of China. The Cold War is over.

It is time we put an end to those post-World War II conflicts we have been nursing along for decades. It's time for Taiwan to negotiate a deal with Mainland China - which they would do the minute we told them we won't continue to protect and arm them. It is also time to negotiate an agreement between North and South Korea and pull our troops out. If Bush can invade Iraq for no reason and spread turmoil throughout the Middle East, then Obama ought to be able to direct our resources from places they don't need to be (Afghanistan and Iraq) to put an end to the Korean conflict. Let's have a 4-way peace agreement between China, North and South Korea and the U.S.

Next, we can normalize relations with Cuba. Capitalism and a consumer society are the greatest tools we have to convert any nation to our way of thinking. Once we get in there with our consumer goods and technology, Cuba will change on its own. That's what we did wrong in Afghanistan. Instead of pouring hundreds of billions of dollars in weapons and manpower into an unwinnable war, we could have flooded the country with cheap consumer goods, televisions, cable TV and internet connections and bought off the entire citizenry. They would be going to nightclubs, malls, beauty salons and fitness centers instead of enslaving their own women and plotting ways to destroy the U.S.

Simplistic ideas? Yes, but the outcome wouldn't be any worse than the mess we have now.

Now for a poem . . .

Prey

The predator comes stalking, unbidden,
Into the fold, guised as one of us.
Prey can tell when danger lurks,
But can't always ward the evil.
Helpless eyes watch the drama unfold,
Wondering whether serpent's venom
Will poison generous heart.
Turbulence roils thoughts, feelings, atmosphere,
Creating dissension, distrust, destruction.
Life's challenges often creep quietly
Into the soft, safe places, where
Mettle is tested, resolve questioned,
And the answer lies unread between the lines.

Harlan Richards

In His Head

The world is in his head,
Where rivers, mountains, seas,
Flow together in a melting pot of visions.

Faces fly through countless remembered
Cities in a kaleidoscope of
Noses, mouths, eyes.

So full to overflowing, with Noah's
Creatures, two-by-two, gliding
Through his dreams and into
His waking, walking, working hours.

There is no rest or respite
To collect the simple, loving
Memories of mate or lover.
Sons and daughters vaguely recalled
Amidst the clamor of songs, speeches,
Lectures ringing in his ears.

The world is in his head,
Leaving no room for the man
He once was, nor the memories
Which defined him.

Harlan Richards