
ROSEANNE ARCHY

Dispatches from the Nut Farm

Also by Roseanne Barr

MY LIVES

ROSEANNE: MY LIFE AS A WOMAN

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Roseanne Barr



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This book is dedicated to those I love and to those who love me. May we always think for ourselves and continue to rebel against the Confederacy of Dunces who now rule the earth.

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Acknowledgments

Foreword

by Bill Pentland

I had no idea, when I carefully pored through the shallow cardboard box of Roseanne's hand-scribbled ravings in 1973, I would one day be writing the foreword to her third book. This is somewhat of a literary hat trick for me: As a nine-year-old boy, I received my first rejection letter from Rod Serling; years later, as a young cub reporter, I witnessed the first burgeoning seeds of the Watergate scandal. But commenting on the inner workings of Roseanne's mind is something else entirely.

The scathing diatribes you'll find herein are very much like the tracts in that cardboard box that she hesitantly allowed me to view almost forty years ago. She was shy and protective of her writings, the a motley collection of handwritten essays, thoughts, poems, and rants scribbled on random scraps of napkins, notebook paper, and colored memo pads, and stashed under an unused bunk in our eight-by-forty-six-foot trailer. We had recently moved up in the world—a young hippie couple vacating the mountain cabin, pump, and outhouse for the relative luxury of a 1956 Alma trailer, complete with electricity, working lights, a refrigerator, and, wonder of wonders, indoor hot water on demand! No longer would we have to tramp into two feet of snow to fill a galvanized bucket with water from an old hand pump to heat on the stove. It was only natural, now being comfortably ensconced, that Roseanne could free up the time to pursue her passion of writing and telling the world specifically what was wrong with it.

Writing came naturally to this early Roseanne; punching a time clock did not. She found the restrictions of steady employment a drain on her muse. How else could one explain her predilection for wearing corporate baseball uniforms to her job as a fancy restaurant hostess or her insistence that she punch in on her time card to do her dishwashing shifts for her? How else to explain her excited watching, from behind a kitchen door, poet and singer Rod McKuen munching a biscuit at her very own hostess station? She later told the staff that he ordered “a glass of water, please. By the sea, by the sea, by the beautiful sea . . .” The staff cracked up and a monster was born; that day, she learned she could do better in life tossing off sarcastic one-liners than ever holding a steady job.

And she was in good company. Georgetown, Colorado, was nothing if not filled with the most eclectic ragtag band of Bohemian misfits and social renegades this side of Prague. Head chef Andy Ivory would often cook in the nude, reluctantly wearing an apron only to keep boiling grease from splattering his genitalia. Six-foot-eleven Stretch might tell us about the young ghost in his room the night before, and One-Armed Carlos would bus a table with his single appendage ten times faster than a busboy with twice the armage. Mad polka music would fill the bar on Sunday evenings and the sun would flow; with my frosty mug stashed in the ice-cream freezer, I washed the Texan-spattered dishes earmarked for Roseanne.

Georgetown was a little like Greenwich Village then, a little like Nome, and a little like Dodge City. Artists, writers, exiles, and hooligans of every conceivable stripe were drawn there, taking low-paying jobs to keep a roof over their heads and their hopes alive. I believe this milieu of total creative anarchy made a firm and lasting impression on Roseanne, who was all of nineteen years old. We fancied ourselves “Alpine Bohemians,” and not the white trash we would have appeared to most people. Then again, it's hard to avoid the “white trash” label when you live in a trailer and have to bring your sewer pipe inside at night to keep it from freezing, or steal change from a motel cigarette machine to buy hamburger meat.

But bit by bit, Rosie began to morph into a housewife, and we finally decided to tie the knot

1974—after seeing *The Exorcist*, we were convinced that Satan had possessed us. We came to the realization that although Alpine Bohemia was nice, eating was nicer. We got tired of scraping for pocket change and composting garbage and fixing our VW with chicken wire. We aspired to own a home without wheels one day; we wanted to have kids without having to borrow money from a paycheck-cashing service to cover the maternity bills; we wanted a TV with a picture you could actually see instead of the static that passed for entertainment at 9,000 feet above sea level. We even dreamed that someday we might own a Sony Trinitron!

Therein followed our next life course, which was to admit defeat as hippies and crawl to Colorado Springs, where I would finally pursue the civil service career my father had been pitching to me for years. We took out a loan, bought another trailer, and began what would become for Rosie five years of self-imposed agoraphobia and scattergun childbearing. We had three children in thirty-nine months (again with the “white trash” labels!), eventually moving to Denver and plunking down \$25,000 on our first real home. Thus began our inexorable descent into mainstream establishment Amerika. We traded in our patched blue jeans for new Levi’s, patchouli for Obsession, our Gremlin for a Ford Country Squire station wagon. I went to work for the U.S. Postal Service, while Roseanne stayed home with the kids and slowly went insane (or sane, depending on your frame of reference).

For five years, we played Ward and June Cleaver, and I foolishly believed we were just living life. But apparently Roseanne was recording every synapse, meltdown, revelation, and resurrection to create the persona that would become Roseanne Barr/Connor. Somewhere, around the time our youngest left diapers and I left the graveyard shift, Roseanne had what I viewed as a psychotic break. She began to explore radical feminism and Wicca, and went to work at a women’s collective bookstore, staffed by the angriest bunch of ball-bustin’ babes I had ever met in my sheltered white-bread Lutheran upbringing.

Frankly, I was threatened by her involvement in women’s studies; my only interest in the feminist movement at that time was seeing a picture of Gloria Steinem in that Playboy bunny outfit. Of course it didn’t help that Roseanne’s rad-lib sister, Geraldine, was living with us. Geraldine and I were in a constant battle for Roseanne’s soul then; I wanted Rosie in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant, and I suppose Geraldine had some silly idea about Rosie having an identity outside of our suburban Denver home. (Geraldine would provide the basis for the character of Jackie and her love/hate friction with Rosie’s husband, Dan Connor.)

Roseanne would eventually try stand-up and incorporate the people in our lives into her routine, eventually evolving the template that became one of the most accurate portrayals of a blue-collar family in history. Although our three kids were the primary models for Becky, Darlene, and D.J., Rosie would weave real details, peccadilloes, accents, clothing, etc., from actual people she knew. One of our hillbilly trailer park neighbors provided Roseanne with some great grist for the Connor mix with her backwoods Kentucky accent, lanky protofeminine swagger, and the chutzpah to praise her four-year-old daughter’s hot-dog-eating abilities. “You just keep on doing that, darlin’, and you’ll never have want of nothin’,” she would say. “Men just love that, I don’t know why.” You can’t write stuff like that, but you can sure as hell absorb it and splinter it off into another five or ten characters. Not to mention the subliminal feminist ramifications!

Roseanne continued with radical stand-up, alienating every white male within a 2,000-mile radius (a talent she maintains to this day, incidentally). As the threatened male-dominated Denver clubs began to close their doors to her, she instead branched out as a fledgling producer and integrated herself into the Denver art scene. But as her stand-up became more mainstream, more and more of our daily workaday lives melded themselves into the Becoming Roseanne Connor Family. By couching radical feminist doctrine in a safe, chubby housewife, she was able to go inside the stereotype and eventually, I truly believe, enact real, measurable change into the consciousness of the average

American woman.

While this has been a generally positive development, Roseanne's persona unfortunately spawned its own Moriarty. While it talks like Roseanne Connor, the leviathan Sarah Palin is busy going inside her own stereotype as well. I only hope that when they remake *The Dead Zone*, they cast Tina Fey in the role originally played by Martin Sheen. You really can't blame the Palin phenomenon on Roseanne, I guess, but I'll bet Ms. Palin would have presented herself differently had there never been a Rose-anne Connor.

Eventually, destiny came to Roseanne in the form of Johnny Carson. Her five-minute monologue on *The Tonight Show* fired the opening salvo in the real war of the sexes. A new sheriff was in town and, baby, she was loaded for bear. The Friday night her monologue aired, I was driving across the moonlit Wyoming tundra with our three kids asleep in the back in what was to become our last "normal" year of life in Denver. Things would change very soon, and they would change hard. Overnight success has its own agenda. There is no preparation for this, no support group, no legend, no diagrams; you simply hold on to the barrel as you cascade over the falls. In 1988, shit would come so fast and so hard that it is only now, twenty years after the fact, that I can even get my head around it.

When Roseanne first exploded across the national consciousness, the tabloids began their crazy dance. One has to live through shredding one's billing statements, peeling off prescription bottle labels, separating booze bottles from the regular trash, and erasing planted calls off answering machines to fully appreciate the horror of the microscope. But it can be fun, too. When NBC and Fox aired their competing (and unauthorized) "Roseanne" biopics, we gathered around the television, panning the actors who had been cast to play our extended family.

Roseanne has written of her creative struggles with ABC in prior works, but *I was there and I saw what she did*. She not only talked the talk, she walked the walk. Much of the Hollywood establishment simply viewed her as a spoiled brat, an 800-pound gorilla, a histrionic, salivating she-bitch. And she is. The reason Roseanne prevailed is because Roseanne Connor was Roseanne Barr, and no one understands that better than she. She knocked the network suits on their asses by the simple virtue of presenting the truth. I can only hope someday the rest of the world will catch up to what she was saying all along.

For nine years, Roseanne Connor held forth on her bully pulpit; Roseanne Barr has held forth a lot longer than that. Within these pages, she will once again regale you with her unique vision, her misanthropy, and her general intolerance of slack-jawed, drooling dunces. You will learn of her impending decline into her golden years and of smelling like pee, her obsessions with serial killers, conservatives, Satan, and blaming everything on everyone else. Pure vintage Rosie, and the final maturation of those scraps of Rocky Mountain paper. Read this book and enjoy once again that special descent into the catacombs of her mind. It's all here; you just have to look for it.

And don't be afraid.

ROSEANNE ARCHY

Dispatches from the Nut Farm

Introduction

The first thing I asked myself after making everyone I know check around to see if they could get me a book deal was, *Why the hell am I thinking about writing another book?* After all, everywhere you look, some pouty intellectual is whining about how we live in a postliterate age, which means that nobody reads anything longer than a text message, and even those are just a few dumb-ass abbreviations strung together—LOL (laugh out loud), LMFAO (laughing my fucking ass off), ROFLMAO (rolling on floor laughing my ass off), TTYL (talk to you later), or LOLSTC (laughed out loud scared the cat!).

Now here I am, almost fifty-eight years old, being completely honest with myself as I begin to approach middle age (LOL), full to the brim with wisdom, grandmotherly love, and the kind of gut that only a whole head of roasted garlic can generate, so you, dear reader, are in for a treat. I wanted to write the kind of book that I'd like to read, but my publishers, who just got bought again (this time by a Chinese hedge fund or something), told me that trashy crime novels full of lurid sex and gory details that forensics freaks love to revel in are just rotting on the racks. So I went straight to Plan B: a timely, eclectic book by a Baby Boomer that even younger people could take home and read, if they could in fact read after coming up through our skool system (ROFLMAO).

Speaking of younger people, my five kids (I used to be pro-life), who think of me as a Mominatrix who has somehow always managed to both cruelly neglect them and butt into their lives too much, are glad I'm writing it. In fact, my whole formerly estranged extended family is happy about it. I think it's because it'll give them a chance to really consider my words carefully, get to know me all over again, and then see if there's anything in here that would give them grounds to sue me. God love 'em!

I know damn well that there are a lot of people who *never* really got to know me and still don't like me, but this really isn't a book about ex-husbands. Some people are almost incurable hardcases, and despite the fact that legions of Roseannethropologists have determined that I've done our desperate, diverse, dynamically dysfunctional culture way more good than harm, some folks just won't let me live down that night all those years ago when I started the National Anthem too high, and ended up sounding like a screechy but brittle blend of battlefield surgery and a pterodactyl with its tit in my wringer. I've said I'm sorry a million times! I know this is a Christian nation and all that, but can they at least consider forgiving me after all these years? Talk about going the extra mile: I'm a Jew and I dressed up like Hitler and baked little burned people cookies to atone for my poor performance. What more can I do, for Christ's sake?

I know that there are a lot of books out there right now by well-known people in the comedy business, people who are utterly brilliant and have timely, relevant things to say—funny things and poignant things that go straight to the heart after tickling the funny bone. Some of these talented figures, many younger than I, have enjoyed big success on TV more recently than I have, and they're getting rave reviews. I'm not too proud to say that I hate those people. But I can't let the jealousy I feel for them and my inability to focus keep me from trying to show them up and get out there and have my say, too!

I just know this book will be wildly successful and well received because I'm someone who surrounds myself with positive energy and light, someone who doesn't let negative, demoralizing words like *failure* or *disappointment* or *exercise* even begin to creep into her life. I learned an important, valuable lesson years ago, when I used to smoke three or four packs of cigarettes a day: I am no quitter! I do whatever it takes to make things work—to make them fulfilling and joyous.

Hell, you want to see determination? I'll take my son's college money (I don't think he's college material anyway, but let's just keep that between us), give it to my personal assistant when she gets out of rehab, and have her buy thousands of these sons of bitches, ten at a time. I don't need Oprah Book Club; I'll spend myself into the goddamn poorhouse, buying my own books by the truckload and then get me one of them government bailouts! See what I'm saying? Those rookies at Goldman Sachs will come to *me* and ask how to work this free market ba-ziz-ness up in here!

I do hope you like it, though—yes, *you*, who are reading my words at this moment, this very moment, the only one we really have. Okay, there's this moment, too, but you know what I mean. Think of this book as a big, fun, shiny fridge that you can open at three in the morning when your pillow wears off and you realize your nightmare was more fun than your real life and you're looking for something tasty to read. Open this book and the light will come on, and you can just stare into it, like a clueless zombie who doesn't give a damn about low fat or fiber or cholesterol or corn syrup or blood pressure or any of that other crap the science nerds try to scare us into caring about—then you can just start grabbing at things, unwrapping them, smelling them, trying some of this or that. Don't think of the slabs and slices and chunks of words as chapters that unfold in a logical manner or reveal some artfully woven plotline or ironclad womanifesto. Logical shmogical! Think of it more like “Hey, this chocolate-covered strawberry really tastes good with a mouthful of bean-and-cheese burrito! Now where's the rest of that pumpkin pie?” (I just made myself hungry.)

Anyway, thanks for buying my book, my friend! Eat hearty, and we'll start our walking program next week—next week for sure. Till then: Bon appétit!



IRONY ALERT: Upon reading any and all parts of this book that deal in matters religious and political or any other areas that have traditionally caused humor-challenged people with arguable “traditional values” to burn bigmouthed women at the stake, please be aware that I reserve the right to be a comic, a satirist, and a citizen of the nation that proudly proclaims itself the freest on earth to say things that should probably not be taken literally enough to make a nut job like *you* (you know who you are) feel justified in attacking me. Just as I discourage you from menacing or inflicting bodily harm on your spouse, your kids, your pets, your neighbors, or complete strangers who don't look, act, think, dress, or believe exactly as you do, I urge you to keep an open mind and a sense of humor while reading this book.

I extend this invitation to the “journalists” and the “media,” too, as you guys always seem to take my jokes and report them as if they are serious news. Of course, I know that you cannot tell the difference, and I admit that I like to fuck with you all the time. But the last straw was when I was on tour with Michael Moore for his “Slacker Uprising” tour of colleges, and I used this joke onstage: “I voted for George Bush because he is way more ‘educationably orientated’ than that Kerry guy”—despite the fact that I got a huge laugh, the local Cleveland paper reported that I said: “George Bush is more education oriented than is John Kerry.” I fumed at this act of satanic brilliance and deceit—enough and enough. You can fuck with me, but don't fuck with my jokes, you bastards!

Yours, for a free and peaceful world for
all living things to keep living in,

Roseanne Cherrie Barr

What the Hell . . . Let's Go!

Writing another book is like having another baby, they told me, except with a baby you get screwed only at the *front end* of the deal. I wanted to write this book for a few reasons, and one is that I still have a story worth telling. Part of it has already been told, but the saga continues, as they like to say in comic books and zillion-dollar movies about adventurers and sorcerers and tales that challenge the imagination. The part that lots of folks who know me, or know of me, have probably heard starts with a fat, little Jewish girl growing up in Mormon Utah with chronically broke, disappointed parents who warned their daughter that if she didn't cut down on the calories and the wiseass comments, she would end up a poor, fat, lonely, bitter old spinster. Man, am I glad they were wrong about the *poor* part!

Anyway, long story short, I'm guessing that if you're reading this right now, it's probably because of *Roseanne*, the TV show about the fat, sassy little girl who had become a fat, sassy woman with a husband and kids, all of whom found themselves in a family that doesn't quite get how brilliant they are. It's like the horse that's pulled the cart of everything that's come after it. I shouldn't brag because it's been awhile since the show that made me famous aired on prime-time television; but it's funny how the more time passes, the more *Roseanne* is proving to have been ahead of its time. Whether addressing working-class issues, gender equality, or changing family models, we took a pretty hard look at an America that was in need of a pretty hard look. It's been more than a decade since we stopped making the show, which still airs all over the place in syndication, and we're still grappling with the same issues that were brought to light back then.

I often open my stand-up act by telling the audience that I know what they're thinking (because I'm psychic): "Roseanne, what has a *has-been* of *your magnitude* been up to recently?" Obviously, I'm not able to take a joke, but really, I'm grateful that there's always been a pretty steady stream of opportunities for me to dive into in showbiz. TV people, who figure lightning can strike again, still pitch me ideas; I've gone around the world with my stand-up act; the phone rings and the emails pile up—but something keeps me from jumping into any real big projects with both feet. And it's not just because I'm busy raising my awesome but (I hope, temporarily) surly teenage son.

I have found that after all is said and done, having my say and doing it for free is my therapy for poststardom soul retrieval. Losing your soul is the cost of fame and fortune, I found. It will become severely compromised when you realize that you must remain silent about the worst things on earth. You will need drugs, alcohol, sex scandal, and incessant shopping to help you stay "above the fray" so that your conscience doesn't bother you anymore. After buying everything on earth that one can buy—visiting exotic places, and meeting princes and idols, all I found myself wanting was to be able to say exactly what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it. There are, sadly, almost no women, famous or infamous, who can afford to do this, or who have the education, brains, or courage to do this, either—there never have been. Which brings me to my website, Roseanneworld.com, and the blogging habit that inspired me to write another book.

I was the very first celebrity blogger, and I remain the only one to this day who advocates the

return of the splendid guillotine for class criminals and pedophile priests. My blogging has gotten me into some uncomfortable positions on occasion, but it's the place where I go to unload, upload, and fire back at the shitstorm of absurdity and horror that the media unloads on me, and the rest of us every day. I shoot from the hip and bitch about people, places, and things; I pontificate and react in panic; I praise and criticize and encourage people, and sometimes fight with them; I turn them on to worthy organizations and causes, and talk about the things I think are the most important issues in our lives. Some days I go on at length about all kinds of strange, esoteric, metaphysical musings, and sometimes everything I write sounds like New Age jibber-jabber. I've expressed myself, reversed myself, defended myself, made people laugh, made people think, pissed people off, engaged in feuds, made new friends, made peace, given advice, asked for advice, and some of what I write is just pure Roseannarchy; channeled from Goddesses on High.

I've asked the world to cut the bullshit. The world can be a better place in a hurry. I don't have time forever, and sometimes it really pisses me off!

I have spent the majority of my life researching information about solutions to the world's problems. I got interested in doing this at a young age, when I first discovered that I had an Imaginary Friend with whom I could spend most of my time discussing how to fix such a cruel and crazy world as this one. My Imaginary Friend was "God." (Now I know that She was actually an Inner Self-Help—something all dissociatives possess.)

She was always available to discuss my thoughts and fears, and later, when I could finally read (about six years of age), She led me to find a lot of answers in old books found in my grandmother's bookcase, at school, and downtown at the Salt Lake City Public Library, which became my home away from home once I got a library card. I grew up in a city that actually prized knowledge and education and books, despite being so fundamentalist Mormon.

I sometimes wondered if I was from a special tribe, the Tribe of Librarians or Book Lovers. My passion for books and for reading took up the first twenty years of my life. I read an average of fifty books a week, and most of them were about what people wrote on the subject of God, which I would then discuss with my Imaginary Friend. Sometimes I would test Her, just to see if She actually existed or if She was merely a figment of my imagination. I would open my mind wide, and ask Her a question; and each and every time, without exception, I found that merely opening a book, *any book to any page*, would provide an answer of some kind to those questions I asked of Her.

Currently, I own my own library of sorts. I have collected more than twenty-five hundred books. They are mostly about God, written by people with varying points of view from every corner of the world. Most of the books call Her a He, but I am able to ascertain what is meant, despite that *semantic error*. God is a She, and here is my proof of that fact: I was made in Her image, which I found in the mirror where I went as a child to speak with Her. She was Me, and yet I was not Her—that blew my mind, and continues to do so. I'm a mystic, and find myself excited at the theory of physics that says the universe itself functions as a sort of mirror of consciousness. Of course, this does not surprise me at all, as I have always known that to be true.

If a Roseannethropologist comes along someday, and figures out how and where I was shaped by the odd world I found myself in, and how I did some shaping of that world myself, she'll have plenty of ground to uncover. Your Domestic Goddess grew up in Utah during the '50s and '60s. It was such a fun-house mirror of sorts, where I saw the "Truth" completely reversed by women. I heard them talk constantly about how weak men were, how disloyal, cruel, misogynistic, and devoid of empathy. Yet they also talked constantly about how, if the apelike human male were molded correctly by them, he could become more female, and therefore more human, then they, the women in my childhood sphere, could then rest well, assured that their Frankenstein monster would dutifully support them in the manner in which they wished to live.

As they attempted to remake all the males in the family, their oldest daughters were deemed to be their indentured servants and often the targets of their rage. They would never miss an opportunity to instruct me on how I needed to be groomed and dumbed down enough to get a husband of my own someday to mold into a guilt-controlled provider of my own. It was a perverted patriarchal world that I grew up in, and one that I wanted and *needed* to be free of.

How I did that—and keep doing it—is my story.

Right Is Wrong, and We Need to Straighten It Out

Does this sound familiar: “Where does some old show-business spoiled brat get off blabbing his opinions about politics and economics and religion and the way the world should work?” I’d like to telepathically air-smack people who say that, right in their cake hole! To anybody who asks me who I think I am to tell political bigwigs, captains of industry, and religious honchos where to get off, my answer: Who do I *have* to be? I am the Domestic Goddess, you impertinent creature, you!

Please listen to me, and listen to me good. I’m also your sister, your granny, your friend with the big mouth and the heart of gold; for some of you, I’m even your favorite TV mom. I’m someone who came out of nowhere, and had to cut through a jungle of old-growth bullshit, using nothing but my big mouth for a machete. How many Vegas oddsmakers would have given a fat girl from Utah with a child on her shoulder a chance of becoming one of the most famous women on the planet for a time? It happened because I was preaching a message that flew in the face of the proper, politically correct behavior that reigned before I flung the door open and came out swinging.

I dropped out of school, got a real education, took myself to the prom, peed in the punch bowl, and got rich doing it. And believe me, they don’t *give* big dough away—but they will pay if they’re sure you have something people want. And what did people want then that they still want now? They wanted a plainspoken message from somebody they figure is on their side, somebody who cuts people who think they’re better than the rest of us down to size.

The key phrase there is: “on their side.” There are more than a few blowhards raking in huge money, who are good at acting like they’re “one of you,” standing up to those in power. A recent example is the Sarah Palin phenomenon. Note to Sarah Palin: Telling a bunch of powerful men and their brainwashed lemming lackeys what they want to hear but doing it in a spunky, folksy manner does *not* make you a maverick! I got especially turned off when I saw some footage of Sarah P. at church, where along with some mundane, provincial happy talk about how super it was to be the congregation’s particular brand of Christian, she gave a rodeo-style shout-out to her son, who was shipping off to Iraq with his unit. It was so cheerleader! I mean, seriously, it was like he was going on the road to play the rival high school in football. And this was from the pulpit at church! It really demonstrates the truth that politics and religion in the United States work like the twin grips of a pair of pliers on a critical mass of the masses.

I have a feeling that before Dick Cheney and Cowboy George decided that the poor Iraqis hated our freedom so much that we had to go kill a bunch of them, Sarah P. couldn’t have found wherever her heavily armed son was headed on a map, even with both hands. But enough about Sarah, our geopolitically challenged, national pom-pom girl, who walked off the job she ran for and was elected to complete. I’m ticked off at Oprah for giving her so much attention as it is. Let’s move on to the bigmouthed men who are so good at spreading their fake populist BS that shouldn’t fool anybody, but they do.

Now, before any of you Rust Limburg or Sean Cassity disciples and dittoheads tune me out

accuse me of blasphemy, you really owe it to yourself to give it all another look. Everybody knows that we took a wrong turn in this country awhile back, and we can argue for another twenty years about who and what was behind it. But damned if most working people don't agree that *something* happened that didn't lead us in the right direction—it did, however, lead us in the *right* direction (in the political sense).

Regardless of your politics, if you're a fair-minded person, at least hear me out. If there's anybody who loves their country and the American people, it's me! Why wouldn't I? I was able to scrape my way up from *under* the bottom of the barrel to the top of the heap, and I was able to do it by speaking my mind. I got more attention, love, respect, and opportunities to *keep* speaking my mind than a broke-ass, little fat girl from Utah had a right to even dream of having—not to mention a boatload of money and the good things in life that all of that brings. *But* I'm still speaking out and I'm doing it for the same people I always did it for: the ones like me, who felt shut out or different or looked down on or ignored or all of the above.

For working people, average Americans, the hundreds of millions of people who feel like lots of things are passing them by, can we at least agree that life's getting harder instead of easier? People are getting screwed! There are places in this country where one family in three is "upside down" in their homes. They have to pay way more for things than they are worth, and the pile they owe isn't getting smaller, because they're mostly paying interest on their debt. That is damn near slavery!

There was a time when the expression "Home Sweet Home" embodied an ideal we could all aspire to and attain with hard work and careful planning. Owning your own home and the ground it sat on was a cornerstone of the American Dream. Home was where you put your feet up after a day's work, raised your kids, found comfort and safety. "There's no place like home" wasn't just a line from *The Wizard of Oz*; it was a mantra we believed in wholeheartedly. But when did a home become like a chameleon in a casino? Where did we make a wrong turn?

Remember the movie *Wall Street*? Michael Douglas played a lizard of a finance big shot named Gordon Gekko—pretty subtle, eh? He was one of the Wall Street elite, a tycoon who loved to say things like "Greed is good." Art imitates life, though, and all that stuff about "trickle-down economics" had been running through the national dialogue for a while (my friend Susan Bublitz, a funny comic, said it meant "the rich piss on the poor"), along with all the rest of that jazz that rich guys used to love Ronald Reagan for saying. They didn't call Reagan the "Great Communicator" for nothing. Personally, I think they called him that because the "Great Bullshitter" was probably rejected as a nickname by the Carlyle Group or at a meeting of the Bilderberg Group or one of those other cabals consisting of ten or so guys who have more wealth, power, and insider information than anyone else.

Granted, Reagan was a likable sort—relaxed and folksy while oozing a grandfatherly vitality, as he simultaneously helped to reverse and dismantle a half century of hard-won social progress. I won't bury you under page after page of bad-mouthing Reagan; the major point I'm trying to make here is the importance of distinguishing facts from opinions. (In that spirit, I offer the title of a book that's a treasury of facts about how Ronald Reagan seldom missed an opportunity to steer resources away from public services and into private pockets: *The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America*.) The middle class has been shrinking like the dollar, union membership, and our standing in the world (with a few brief spurts of growth) ever since the Reagan era. Given the facts, how can the windbags on the extreme right justify describing the president who slashed public services and even took the solar panels off the roof of the White House as the greatest president in recent history? They're as entitled to express their opinions as the rest of us—freedom of speech is, after all, one of America's founding principles. But it's up to the public to discern fact from opinion and make up its own mind.

Religion—yep, I’m going there—and allowing people of diverse faiths to practice their beliefs without fear of persecution is another defining quality dating back to the birth of our nation. I grew up with religion on steroids—two religions, in fact. Being a nominal Mormon among Mormons, but also inescapably, a Jew, really affected me. I was in a hyperspiritual environment, where people would regularly insert phrases like “The Lord” *this* and “God” *that* and “The Devil” *such and such*, in the most mundane, casual conversation. It still comes so naturally to me to think and talk in the manner of my childhood. That was some powerful indoctrination. A lot of my attitudes and actions have either been because of those conflicting influences or in rebellion against them. As I get older, I can see where there’s overlap in what used to seem like two totally different religious cultures. One thing I know: Patriarchy runs deep in both systems.

I’m loving the show *Big Love* right now. It’s almost spooky to watch so much of that “Utah thing” as I affectionately call it, play out on television. Watching it reminds me a lot of what it was like when I lived there—what with the rampant xenophobia and homophobia that led to my little brother’s nose being broken nine times by devout Mormon classmates by the time he was nine years old, either for looking Jewish or being effeminate. The Mormon influence is still out there, big-time.

Religion needs to be less about believing things and more about beholding things—sharing and healing and bringing people together, not separating them. When I hear people say they have a need to connect with something bigger than themselves, one of the voices in my head says, *How can you not be connected with something bigger than yourself? You’re part of everything!* I look at my young grandsons, for example, and just the pure physical fact that these little guys are in the world—living, growing, thinking, using language, and finding their way—is *profound!* They’re setting out on a life that’s as big and deep and wide as they can feel and experience, and *that* is amazing enough for me. I’m not so sure that they need a great big belief system injected into their mostly pliant minds right now, or ever. I’m breaking with tradition; I just tell them to be kind to one another and polite to other people, and they’ll turn out just fine. Mostly, I just like to have fun with them.

I look out at what’s left of the natural world, and it is as mystical and beautiful as it was when I ran around in the mountains of Colorado doing my 1970s Wiccan, natural-woman thing. When I remember how complex and awesome is nature’s machinery, the planet’s place in a vast solar system that contains such precision of motion, I still feel a huge sense of awe for it all. Just to be quiet and behold and respect its greatness seems so much more appropriate than to impose a big net of dogma that supposedly makes everything more meaningful.

Instead of knocking myself out trying to understand or rationalize a bunch of holidays (holy days with their symbolism and oh-so-deep, arcane significance, I’m a little less quick to chase that merry-go-round and more apt just to dig the seasons and the real turning points in the year, which are less about myth and interpretation and more about *real* signposts on our trip around the sun. Why believe a bunch of Bronze Age stuff we can’t prove when we have dependable occurrences to believe in, like the summer solstice—the day with the most light and the least dark? No believing required, nothing to argue about. Or the vernal (spring) and autumnal equinoxes—the balance of day and night—perfectly predictable, and plenty spiritual *and* scientific for me. I guess we were all pagans way back when—observing, accepting, and respecting the natural world—and that wasn’t such a bad thing.

In looking at the world in all its scary glory, people often see it as a backdrop on which to pin their religious beliefs, like a giant billboard, and then insist that other people accept those beliefs as fact. For example, the Creationist movement points to the universe, to life itself, as proof that there’s a creator, one that they just happen to know a whole lot about and want to “share” with you. Before you know it, you’re on an ideological conveyor belt. That mental assembly line has you going from “Wow, the vastness of space!” and having a sense of wonder about life on earth straight to talking about the blood of Christ, living in the Last Days, and taking dictionaries out of schools because they contain

words that are unacceptable to certain Christians. I'm not bitching about Christians; I'm righteous ~~bitching about fundamentalists of all stripes, anywhere, who insist that there's just one way to live~~ and that way is strictly in accordance with their ancient religious texts—as they interpret them, course.

Speaking of ancient religious texts and who does the interpreting, can you believe that there's a movement under way to write a revised Bible that's more about “free market principles”? There are people who think that there's way too much “help the poor” and “love thine enemy” talk, along with a whole lot of other stuff that they feel is way too “liberal” and “entitled” to be in a proper, what capitalist Bible? Yikes!

This all goes back to my premise: People are getting screwed—from both sides: politics and religion. Let's face it; religion *is* politics. Right-wing Christians, who deny the fact that Jesus was basically a Jewish liberal from way back east, have hijacked his teachings to suit their political beliefs. Jesus did an awful lot of talking about caring for the poor and sick, and he warned us about judging one another while not being perfect ourselves. But these facts are conveniently overlooked in service of a new interpretation of the Christian tradition that better suits the conservative agenda. We all know that the extreme religious right is losing a little of its clout, but changing the Bible to be more “conservative” is absurd.

I'm not letting Jews off the hook, either, when it comes to twisting and politicizing something that should bring peace and unity. For some, unquestioning support of the Israeli government serves as a litmus test for Jewish people. I ain't buying it! I'm militant in my support of peace and cooking down militarism. There's defense, and then there's the insane policy of beating your plowshares into swords and acting threatened and victimized when you've got the biggest life-threatening shithammer in the world on your side.

I'm for taking an Armageddon break. I have to; I have little grandsons whose future I need to consider. In fact, I'm taking a small step back from magical thinking of all kinds: religion, astrology, New Age pseudosciences—and let me tell you, it's not easy. Like I said, my spiritual “rearing” in Utah—Hillbilly Israel, a hybrid modern-pioneer theme park with cheerful hymns, a few pervs per block, and some polygamist families scattered around to keep us guessing—had a profound impact on me. (As I say in my act, my family really stuck out in Utah: We had only the *one mother*!) But seriously, folks, I have some crackpot religious, messianic, paranoid tendencies in my blood. Add to that my hippie, Wiccan, radical feminist, multiple personalities, and the Kaballah razzmatazz, and I'm a gushing fountain of symbology from Scientology to Roseannethropology. But I've been making a little more room for things that work whether you believe in them or not and using plain old common sense to identify those things that almost everybody can agree are stubbornly true.

We're here on earth for a finite amount of time. Life can be good when people are kind to one another and try to work things out when there's conflict. Except for the fundamental belief in kindness (the Golden Rule), religion gets pretty complicated and calcified and can really create more divisions between people than we need in a crowded world with real problems that probably won't be prayed away. I think we need to live and let live, get over ourselves, and do away with the thinking that life is not enough for us as it simply unfolds every day. Why fixate on the stuff we can't prove, like the existence of prophets or messiahs or angels or devils? I don't think any of it makes a gorgeous sunset any more gorgeous, or the wine any more delicious, or the kids any cuter. Why can't we love and cherish what we *can* see and know? Can't we just start with the basics—appreciating life and helping to make it better for everybody—without insisting on the existence of some elusive deeper meaning?

This fresh outlook is part of my brilliant, new program of trying to lead what great spiritual masters and adepts from all disciplines and sects call a less-dumb-ass life. I'd like to provide you, free of charge, with a coping tool, as they call such things in “workshops” and support groups and the like.

It's called Dynamic Laziness. And it's not easy for a recovering hyper-control freak with ADD and ~~tripolar disorder to practice; you have no idea what an incredible struggle it is for me to leave things~~ alone for a minute. Sometimes, for me, not throwing a tantrum is what running a marathon or swimming the English Channel must be like for others of a less-challenging emotional nature—descriptive term I like a lot better than “completely crazy,” which I've often been called. I've also been called a drama queen, an apt description for my behavior throughout much of my life—until I had an epiphany one day in the form of a simple, undramatic realization: Dynamic Laziness is my salvation.

Sure, panic and rage still felt natural and came in handy whenever I felt the need to generate a much larger reaction than was called for or would be helpful. But those emotions just weren't providing the warm, “fully engaged with life” kind of self-Taser experience I'd come to expect from expressing them. Like losing interest in sex, the ambivalent afterglow was almost gone. Sure, there was the revulsion and fatigue and remorse. But instead of that “roll over and have a cigarette” feeling of satisfaction, it was more like I wanted to be put on a respirator and covered gently with a plus-size morphine patch. Getting too mad or freaked out really feels like work now, and uses up more of what's left of me than I need to be burning up with useless wear and tear. Now that I have embraced Dynamic Laziness, if I desperately feel compelled to make bile and blood and adrenaline gush through my arteries like torrents of churning, pressurized BS spurts from Glenn Beck's blowhole, I'll simply go for a walk/blog.



I've gotten in touch with my inner tired old Jewish woman. Like me, she's in her late fifties, and she really feels it—as they say, “It ain't the year, it's the mileage.” Now, whenever smoldering anger or panic rises up inside me, the tired old Jewish woman within says, “For *this* you'll risk a heart attack!” In fact, the prospect of most any kind of physical or emotional exertion gets tossed on the cost-benefit scale these days. And usually, I think: *Anger, shmanger*—I'm getting too mature for that. And by *mature*, I mean tired and lazy.

I know I used to drive people around me a little crazy sometimes (which is like saying Stalin used to get grouchy and mess with people—an understatement, to say the least). In addition to tormenting my poor, witless husbands, I put a lot of unnecessary mileage on my ticker. Not good! And I know there were days when my children probably felt that living with the awful realization that I wasn't dead yet almost wasn't worth the effort they didn't put into looking for jobs. At times like that, I decided that I needed to focus on trying to like them more often, too.

These insights come to me during meditation, when I sit quietly and let my churning thoughts drain out of me, like old bong water on Willie Nelson's tour bus or the fat at a Beverly Hills liposuction clinic. It's not easy to let go of these thoughts; they are always there, pushing me to do and achieve, reminding me that life is short, like Tom Cruise, that these nails aren't going to chew themselves, that the new tabloids are out today, possibly with women fatter than I am on the cover. It's so hard to sit still and do nothing while a suffering world calls out for my help to heal it, and then eat crab legs and hear God Himself speak to me through cheese and fulfill what's left of my grand destiny, and then watch forensics shows until my son comes home from school and gives me that special look, that moment of contempt and condescension that only a mother can recognize and bask in. It's a rich, full life. And it's time to enjoy it.

So beware of the two-headed monster of politics and religion. Listen to your inner compass. We all have an inner compass. Mine's right there next to my inner pie detector and my dashboard full of panic buttons. Seriously, we have some kind of hardwired internal voice that says, *Don't be a dumb ass*, which I can often hear in there saying things like *Have another glass of wine!* and *I hate women*.

who lose weight for a living and are skinny and rub everybody's face in it. Heed that clarion call.
Don't be a dumb-ass!

Moving from prescribed dogma to a truth-based approach to life has been a work in progress for me. That extra layer of religion that was lacquered on me as a kid wasn't easy to slough off—being Jew *and* a Mormon was a full-time job. Navigating between those two monuments to rigid, patriarchal arm-twisting wasn't exactly like rowing my boat gently down the stream.

I used to think there was a world of difference between Jewish and Mormon belief systems, but the latter sure has done a lot of borrowing from its predecessor. In Judaism you're made to think you're betraying your people if you don't trudge dutifully along the road of persecution and guilt and suffering that's always in the rearview mirror and just around the bend for God's chosen people. Even the happy songs are in a minor key. Mormonism isn't much different. Both religions revere a prophet who trudged through the desert or the mountains with his people to some kind of promised land—it's Zion *this* and Hebron *that*, and a whole lot of energy goes into begetting. Let's face it: A lot of the heavy lifting involved in begetting is assigned to the women. The Hebrews were no strangers to polygamy, and there's an inordinate amount of emphasis on breeding in their faith—same with the Mormons, of course. In their case, it's extra strange because they believe God just had the one son, but the average old Mormon daddy can crank out as many as his wives can send down the chute.

Anyway, Judaism and Mormonism against the backdrop of 1950s and '60s Republican Utah was my crucible. With those two judgmental, busybody monoliths yelling in my face from down the centuries and up the street, I had to pull my head in like a turtle and strain to hear the inner voices that I figured were casually acquainted with "the real me." No wonder I needed a Greek chorus of multiple personalities to stand up to the legions of patriarchs, who, whether in sandals or cowboy boots, never tired of letting me know I needed to show plenty of respect for their odd doctrines, and that I definitely needed to know my place as a woman and stay in it. I guess they didn't know whom they were dealing with. I had three words for them and I shouted them over my shoulder as soon as I had a chance to get on up the road: "So long, suckers!"

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