

Wielding the Mop and the Bucket

By Anna Von Reitz



Obviously, Granna and Mark Twain are of the same opinion; rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated.

I look worn out because at 68 I am working harder than most 30 year-olds ever will. That's all.

So let me give you some insight into the Federation. Most of the senior members are truly senior. Literally. At 68, I am among the youngest of the leadership cadre. Most are at least 80. Some are over 90. I'm just a kid to them. They kindly indulge me.

Over the last several years, we have developed a much younger Federation crew, who will replace us gradually and naturally. They are mostly young men between the ages of 30 and 50, and when I had a couple minutes to think about the group as a whole, I suddenly realized that they are mostly veterans, mostly a-political, well-educated, have I.Q.s above 180, cover a range of skills, but when you meet them, they present no conceivable group consciousness or appearance.

We've got black and we've got white, we've got Asian and Chinese and Hispanic --- and everything in between. We are the Melting Pot. When they are all milling around together, they look like an odd mix of college students, DEA agents, hobos, mad scientists, bikers, even a couple artists, which pleases Jim no end.

He has suffered his absence from the arts and crafts scene rather bitterly and enjoys talking shop when he can.

Still, having these young people involved is a happy kick in our pants and a breath of fresh air and a rush of testosterone for the Oldsters still charged with guiding the Ship of State and keeping it off any reef or shoal that appears in the shallow water we are treading through now.

As Bubba, one of our more senior Seniors said last week, "We avoid all the same mistakes, we just do it slower now." He winced.

The ice storms have left driveways and parking lots encased in thick glass-like ice. There are no supplies of ice melter sufficient to deal with this. Ironically, shipments are held up because the ice melter normally routes through Los Angeles, which is still burning.

Fire and ice, both, thousands of miles apart, but somehow still connected.

Picture a dozen very elderly chihuahuas on a smooth waxed floor.... very, very slowly and cautiously picking their way forward....

You can now picture the Ministers of your Federation going to work.

Now, picture me with a 25 pound bag of Kosher Salt, left over from pickling season, squinting into the dawnlight, tossing handfuls of the white crystals onto the gleaming sheet ice.

Sometimes knowing the truth is a very painful thing, without taking any spills on the ice. Several of us have endured both this week, but no broken bones, one sprain, and lots of wounded dignity.

Even the crime rate is down. The burglars are slipping and sliding like everyone else.

Bubba turned up his favorite song, "Pressure" on the stereo.... "It's the terror of knowing what this world is about..." We all faced that terror to get here. We all lost some good friends on the way.

Some candles are lit, we drink our morning coffee in silence before booting up for the day.

Each one in our own way thinks about why we are here, spending our last golden days like this. We don't think of ourselves as heroes, but there is something heroic about it all, to see these men and women, most of them from the Vietnam Era, still here for their country.

With our heating pads and our ice packs, our bruises, our might-have-beens, our moments of regret, and our moments just shaking our heads, but we are still here, nonetheless.

I walk from one room full of octogenarians into the next room full of forty-somethings and note how the atmosphere changes and how I, being somewhat in the middle of the pack, blend without blending with both groups. I wonder--- where's my peer group? Did we all drop out?

Seems like the 60-70 age group is Missing in Action, but then I realize how many of us have died early, how many inherited grandchildren to raise, and how many of my old friends still seem slightly stupefied, as if they just can't believe how bad the situation really is.

Our country, and most of the world, has been defrauded. We've been played by criminals. Big time. It's different for the Octogenarians; they saw enough graft and violence in their youth to piece it all together and face it. For them, once they saw the Great Fraud, they knew what to think, jaws set, chins out.

My own generation is the one suffering the most cognitive dissonance. Oh, no, this can't be true. Please, let me bury my head in the sand again. This is too awful! What about my 401K?

Then, strangely, as if they are the next harmonic link, there are the forty-somethings, who, like the Octogenarians, square up, look the Great Fraud in the eye, and spit. No need to tell them how corrupt the institutions are. No need to tell them about politicians. They all understand about Funny Money and the banking cartels.

It was the forty-somethings that came up with the word "de-banking" to describe the practice of denying individual people and competing businesses access to bank services as a punishment and as a means of crippling their ability to live and thrive apart from the criminal Colossus.

They understand that this is what happens when private money replaces public money.

No need to explain it to them, and no tips needed about navigating the ice, either.

One of them straps on ice cleats used for hiking on glaciers. The others sit down on my old toboggan sled and get pulled across the treacherous ice, slick as you please, right to the door.

The forty-somethings have a different way of solving problems: more communal, more creative, and more fun.

They may lack the wild and sturdy individualism of their grandparents' generation. One wonders if they will have the courage to "Go Full Chihuahua" and pick their own way across the ice when their time comes, but by then, they may have their own custom-made hoverboards.

The matrix does compensate for us, changing and adjusting as we go.

"It's minus 23 in Bismarck, North Dakota!"

"Not everything is relative," Bubba chuckles, "but that sounds about average for Bismarck in January."

Some of us watch "My Lunch Break" over lunch. Others are busy with their personal business, making appointments and phone calls. Some wander into the Open Room, where they can smell fresh flowers and enjoy the green growing plants that oxygenate and clean the air in the office spaces.

"I thought you were nuts," Bubba tells me confidentially.

Devote a whole room to plants and candles and water fountains and fish aquariums? A space devoid of books, papers, computers and file folders?

"I thought it was a waste of space," he says, as he settles deeper into a large and comfy overstuffed chair.

He will fall asleep there and someone will have to come rouse him up after lunch. It's not just the candles or the gas fireplace. It's the gentle breeze, the warm, humid atmosphere so different from the Arctic winds outside.

"Damned women," Bubba mumbles, half-asleep with a smile on his face. I shake my head. I envy his ability to fall asleep for a twenty minute "power nap".

These elderly men and women are all Aces. They deserve all the pampering and good food and care we can give. They'd deserve that even if they didn't work an average of sixty hours a week.

I stop a moment, looking at Bubba, stretched out like a cat in a warm room, softly snoring. I think about his Distinguished Flying Crosses, his herd of rescued horses and his Black Labrador, Snuffy, who will greet him when he gets home. I think about his wife, Maureen, the daughter of Irish immigrants, who died of stomach cancer four years ago. His daughter, Tura, will come pick him up at the end of the day, and take him out to dinner, then take him home up a dark and winding mountain road.

Yes, I love them all, both kith and kin, but it wasn't always that way.

Bubba and I don't always see eye to eye. He fought me tooth and claw on the "wasted space" of the Open Room, and that's just one example. His rough-riding go-for-broke attitude was just so uncompromising and tough, there wasn't any room for him as a man, not the least little bit of care for Bubba.

One day I snuck up from the side and grabbed his elbow, pulling him into the Open Room. He looked startled and followed along, not wanting to make a scene. I asked him to sit down in what he has since dubbed, "The Chair of Seduction", and I said, "There--- is that so bad?"

He's a big man, and it's a big overstuffed comfy chair in front of a fireplace, a far cry from all the office chairs we are forever sitting on and the blue light computer screens we are staring at all day long. He blinked.

"You work all day long, Bubba. If everyone else didn't stop, you wouldn't even stop for lunch. When do you do anything --- I mean, anything --- to take care of you?" He blinked again.

"Do me a favor," I said. "Just sit there and do nothing for five minutes."

So I walked away and he planted his butt for five minutes.

The next day, I asked him for ten minutes. Within a week, he was going to the Open Room all by himself, taking deep drinks from the water fountain, watching the fish, catching a few winks.

It wasn't silly after all. It was a little something for Bubba, the man, in the midst of all the work and "pile up".

I never thought he'd take a foot bath. Not in a hundred years. I would have bet on it, but one day, there he was, with one of the people he hardly ever spoke to, a Japanese doctor, deep in conversation.

And the Doc was expertly, gently, carefully, soaking and massaging Bubba's feet. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, so I just looked away.

Another step toward caring for Bubba, the man.

Lately, Bubba is learning how to massage his dog, learning about Acupressure, and taking more time for himself in the Open Room. Some days, he stays late and his daughter meets him there and they just rest and relax and talk about life in the indoor garden atmosphere.

Wasted space?

Little by little, everyone has learned the gentle, simple restorative power of the Open Room. The smell of flowers. The deliciousness of pure water. The sound of fountains. The life of the ever-changing aquariums. The warmth of the fireplace on a cold day. The comforting embrace of an overstuffed chair.

We have to find the ways and make the spaces to take care of ourselves and each other. Sometimes Bubba just kicks back and stares into space and I wonder if he is thinking deep thoughts or thinking nothing at all.

Not that it matters to me, either way. It's his time for himself.

"So what else can I do for you?" he quips. "I can plant my butt for twenty minutes, if you want."

"Just don't sprout any flowers," I tell him.

He'll be ninety years old this summer.