

As much as my friend lives to explore the natural world—indeed, because of this love—his feelings towards the human race are mixed. This makes for some very funny commentary. Every once in a while the spirit of charity toward his fellow human creatures catches up with him. It is fitting that, about a month before his 70th birthday, this occurred.

Nothing Lasts Forever

My friend Page lives in a tiny house with ancient plumbing. He has no washing machine. Once a month, he drives an hour and a half to the nearest town with a laundromat. He does not mind the inconvenience. Part of living the dream means accepting a little bother.

In town, he looks for decent coffee, fills his prescriptions, goes in search of fresh fruit, stops at a garage—simple things that the most of us take for granted. And he spends time at the laundromat—in his opinion, laundromats rival bus stations and airports as the most boring places on earth.

He shared this opinion recently with a fellow-laundromatter. The man was folding his sheets at the next dryer. He replied, “Well, I really like what Donald Trump is doing.” Unable to resist the non-sequitur, Page said he wished Trump would stop grabbing women by the pussy and bragging about it. “Don’t worry,” replied the man. “God is taking care of everything.”

“Well, I don’t know about everything,” said Page. “He may have overlooked the Environment.”

“Yes!” The man swung his full attention to him. Page noticed his glasses were a little askew. “We have to stop being so destructive,” the man sputtered.

“So greedy,” Page added.

He wondered if he should let it go at that.

A middle-aged couple, eavesdropping from their washing-machine, chimed in about the Environment. When they learned Page was a wildlife photographer they began to tell him of their recent trip to Wyoming. They complained about state of the highway to the Grasslands National Park—a disaster. Page said the road was rebuilt. It was pot-hole free and smooth as a baby’s bottom. Conversation faltered.

Page searched for a meaningful conclusion. Was not the laundromat remarkably clean? Yes it was. He went over to the owner, who was tinkering with the overhead lights, and commended him on the cleanliness of the place. The owner beamed proudly. Minutes later, the retired couple followed suit, praising the owner for the cleanliness.

Buoyed by his ability to inspire positivity, Page finished his chores and went off to the Pharmasave. He sat down outside the dispensary to wait for his prescriptions. Two old men sat beside him, discussing farm machinery. Their conversation was Greek to him, but he was impressed by their sincerity. Their intensity, their passion for how things worked—this was something Page could relate to. He was sitting idly, contemplating the unquenchable thirst *to know*, when the pharmacist came out from behind her

barricade of pharmaceuticals and asked each of them for their names. Their prescriptions were ready. He realized, with mortification, that all three of them were mostly deaf, and hadn't heard their names called. The pharmacist knew this. It probably happened all the time. He was one of "three old farts" sitting at the Pharmasave dispensary.

In that instant, he filled with humility, and love for humanity. Many things were in his heart: his fear of ignorance, contempt for mediocrity, joy at sunlit coulees, contentment with a glass of water. A litany of images flashed by—a coyote's grin, the owl's majesty. It was over in a blink of an eye.

He continued on his errands with a feeling of affirmation.

His mood did not change when the clerk at the Wholesale Club was surly to him. She sighed as he dug for his change. The grocery line-up grew, and soon snaked past the Star Bucks. She clearly did not find him amusing, even when he thanked her for taking his money. Nor did she thank *him* for bagging his own groceries. He wondered if he should get down on his knees and pray for her, but he didn't want to make a scene.

Gassing up at the Petro-Can a few minutes later, he felt disappointed to have no further opportunity for human interaction. He was standing at the pump when a pickup truck bombed in the station and screeched to a halt, four inches of his shins. Windshield wipers thumping, bright lights blazing, cab thrumming with aggressive hip-hop music.

He felt himself go into ultra-slow motion. He folded his receipt, fumbled with his seat belt.

"I wanted to allow the driver time to reflect," he told me, later, "while I projected my love for humanity backwards over my shoulder." Somehow, he suspected, it dissipated before reaching the driver. "I felt the love waning as I drove home," he admitted. "Nothing lasts forever."

End

James R Page is a photographer. See his images here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pageworld/>

*Disclaimer. This story is shamelessly plagiarized from an email from Page. Certain fictional details have been added. Happy 70th my friend.