

A Wonderful World Endures

By Maurice Carter in *The Covington News* – June 17, 2012

My sweet father's life ended just seven days short of this Fathers Day. I'll have many opportunities to remember the goodness of his life, and even his passing. But, first I must share an unpublished piece I wrote four years ago. With apologies for drawing political boundaries, as cynicism robs us all...

Last night, I found the America of Carl Rove, Rupert Murdoch, and Rush Limbaugh in the least likely of places... in a dimly lit nursing home, at the foot of my father's bed. Spinal surgery gone badly this year robbed him of bodily functions below his waist. Aging has taken his stamina and now his mental sharpness. Bad business decisions and a failing economy stole the financial security he might have enjoyed in these later years. But, sitting with him last night, I realized so much more has been taken from him.

Like many their age, my parents are losing life-long friends to the passage of time. Yet, they remain surrounded by good people who love them. Though his business limps along without him, my father helped many in his lifetime and did right by everyone, as far as I know. He's been a faithful husband for 50 years and a loving father for over 49. Dad has always been a man of few words, but seldom are those words harsh. And, yet, I could hardly recognize the man speaking to me from that bed last night.

If he's angry about the paralysis, he's not saying. If he's scared of dying, he's not letting on. What he spoke to me about, in that nursing home, was not his own demise – but rather the end of the world as we know it. He's worried about terrorists roaming inside our borders, and he's certain they will soon destroy us. He's frightened and confused by “all of them” coming into our country by the “planeload and busload,” though he's never quite clear about who “they” are. He frets for the children next door and the world they are doomed to inherit. At a time a man should look with pride at the life he's lived and marvel at how the world changed with him, my father has been cheated into seeing the world as a dangerous, deteriorating place.

I shouldn't be surprised; not when men who should lead with inspiration and hopeful energy, instead relentlessly urge Americans to fear and distrust the rest of the world and even one another. Men who offer no positive vision have sought to isolate and imprison trusting followers in fear and paranoia.

Real leaders bridge divides. They do all within their human power to bring healing and comfort to the scared and the hurting. Real leaders find hope within and spread it infectiously to others. Petty men and pretenders to their post seek pain for profit and wedge small divides into chasms to gain advantage. They fear hope and hope for fear. Such men have no conscience for the harm they bring

to men like my father and families like ours. They take from my father -- and millions more like him -- the most essential element of the American dream: to pass into the great beyond knowing you left this world a better place than when you arrived.

Listening sadly to my father's painful resignation, I imagined I heard Louis Armstrong...

*I see skies of blue... clouds of white
Bright blessed days... dark sacred nights
And I think to myself ... what a wonderful world.*

In confusion and anxiety, compounded by physical and emotional trauma, my father is yielding to manipulative cynics spouting fear and loathing from the TV set as he lies bed-ridden. But above that din, I hear...

*The colors of a rainbow... so pretty in the sky
Are there on the faces... of people going by.
I see friends shaking hands... sayin' "how do you do?"
They're really sayin'... "I love you!"*

I wanted to sing last night. I wanted to shout: "Can't you hear it, Dad?"

When "What a Wonderful World" was released on January 1, 1968, I was an eight-year-old boy; my brother and sister were six and four.

*I hear babies cry... I watch them grow.
They'll learn much more... than I'll ever know.
And I think to myself ... what a wonderful world.*

Dad was 30 then, a young man finding his way in the world, working hard with mom to care for us and give us a chance for a better life.

It saddens me to realize you may never know... But you did, Dad. You did.

Postscript: As he left us last Sunday, I realized... He knows.