

Perspective

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David Porter, Jennie Porter,
Mike Carroll, Bill Englehardt

— Email: publisher@tuscolareview.com

Good and Evil

I thought I'd start today's column with a quote from Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, the Pulitzer-winning author from the old Soviet Union who wrote about his incarceration in a Soviet Concentration Camp. Solzhenitsyn wrote:

"(T)he line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years.... If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

I thought about this quote after hearing about the murder of Bradley Police Officer Marlene Rittmanic and the wounding of her partner, Officer Tyler Bailey. During the bond hearing for Darius Sullivan, Kankakee County State's Attorney, Jim Rowe, provided the following information:

On Wednesday, Dec. 29, at about 9:56 p.m., Rittmanic and her partner, Officer Tyler Bailey, responded to a noise complaint regarding dogs barking in a parked car outside the Comfort Inn in Bradley. Investigation led the officers to room 308, where police wanted the occupant, Xandria Harris, to address the complaint about the noisy dogs. Harris answered the knocks by saying she would be coming to the door, but the officers had to wait several more minutes while continuing to knock on the door before Harris opened the door, slid into the hallway and attempted to close the door to prevent the officers from arresting Sullivan on a warrant for failure to appear in court.

Eventually, Sullivan came around the corner in the hotel room armed with a 9mm handgun. As Harris struggled with the officers, Sullivan shot Bailey in the head. He then allegedly turned the gun to Rittmanic and shot at her as she tried to run away. Sullivan allegedly chased Rittmanic down the hallway before pin-

ning her against a door. Sullivan struggled to unjam his gun using his right hand and mouth while also trying to disarm Rittmanic with his left hand. As the scuffle ensued, Sullivan called out to Harris, telling her to "cock the gun, cock the gun," prosecutors said. Harris joined Sullivan, helping him successfully disarm Rittmanic.

The two then stood over Rittmanic pointing guns at her as she laid on the floor, already shot once. She begged Sullivan not to shoot her. "Sgt. Rittmanic was pleading with them to, 'Just leave, you don't have to do this, please just go, please don't, please don't,'" Rowe said. "She was desperately pleading for her life." With Harris holding Sullivan's gun, Sullivan allegedly fired two shots from what prosecutors believe to be Rittmanic's gun, striking the sergeant in the neck area. Rittmanic died shortly thereafter and Bailey remains hospitalized in critical condition.

The year 2021 has been open season on law enforcement officers. According to preliminary year-end FBI re-

So there I was

By Pete Buckley
pete.buckley@tuscolareview.com



ports, 73 officers died in felonious killings in the line of duty in 2021. The National Fraternal Order of Police noted that 346 officers were shot in the line-of-duty in 2021. This total marks the highest number of officers killed or wounded since 1995, excluding the 9/11/attacks.

On Jan. 11, FBI Director Chris Wray wrote an op-ed piece for the Wall Street Journal. A portion of his article is as follows:

Especially troubling is that a record number of officers killed—nearly half—had no engagement with their assailant before the attack. Each story is heart-breaking: A 30-year Florida

deputy murdered one shift shy of retirement; an officer ambushed on his first day on the job, leaving behind a wife and 6-month-old son; a combat veteran and his police dog killed while serving together.

When I started as FBI director, I made it a practice to call the chief or sheriff of every officer killed in the line-of-duty. I have now made more than 200 such calls. Each conversation reminds me that behind the uniform, the badge, and, yes, sometimes the flashing lights in your rearview mirror, there are real people. With each call, I think about the families and friends who lost someone they loved, the children who will

grow up without a parent, and the communities deprived of a public servant. We owe it to them to redouble our efforts to take the most violent offenders off the streets and to make sure officers have the resources, equipment and training they need to do their jobs safely. Even more, we need to ensure the brave men and women know that the communities they serve have their backs. Every day, officers willingly put themselves at risk not knowing what dangerous situation or traumatic event they might encounter. I won't pretend every person who carries a badge is beyond reproach, but the overwhelming majority do the job with the professionalism and commitment to equal justice citizens rightly expect.

I like what the Director had to say. As good citizens, we do need to let the brave men and women in law enforcement know that we have their backs. I also think that Solzhenitsyn may have been right, but that on Dec. 29, Darius Sullivan's heart never fluctuated between good and evil... it was all evil.

Bread, eggs, and milk

The day my children told me they practiced a lockdown drill at school was a sharp reminder of the state of our society. As a Navy veteran, I know the importance of practice makes perfect. Many days, floating in the middle of an ocean, running scenarios of potential shipboard casualties, many of which never happened in my time onboard. We practiced first responses, proper communications, and escalation; training to be prepared to handle the situation without hesitation or fear if/when we had to face it.

I asked my girls about the details of their drill. I wanted to know how much they had covered in the different situations they could be in throughout the school day. Overall, I was impressed with how much they remembered to do but one thing brought my mama bear out. They explained that if they were outside for recess or PE when a lockdown for an active shooter was called, they

Margie's Mess

By Margie Carter
margie@tuscolareview.com



were to run to the nearest house and ask for help. Then one said, "And if I see one of the slower kids falling behind, I'll stop to help them." Talk about my stomach dropping!

I immediately, and maybe more aggressively than I needed to, say, "No. I need to you to understand that if you're told to run from the school that you will not stop for anyone. I need you to run."

In this moment, guilt seeps in. The weight of what I'm telling my child to do if her life and her schoolmates' lives are threatened still makes me

want to vomit. But I can't apologize for it because I meant every bit of it. I pray my child never has to make these decisions. I pray no child ever does again. However, if it comes between your child and mine, I choose mine, every time.

Recently, I found out how my husband and I would react to a similar situation. While grocery shopping in Champaign last week an announcement was made that the store was closing. Most people, like us, were confused and when nothing seemed different about our safety, almost every-

one continued with their shopping. A short while later another announcement, made by a different voice, again said that the store was closing and asked everyone to make their way to the front to checkout.

My initial thoughts were a staffing issues, mainly because if there was a safety hazard, I didn't think customers would be allowed to checkout.

My husband and I decided to split up and grab the essentials. With a winter storm coming and our habit of only shopping for 2 weeks of meals at a time, there were things we absolutely needed. As I made my way down the cereal aisle an employee walked up to tell me that the store was closing and that "the store has been advised to evacuate." I asked if that was an order from authorities, to which she replied "Yes." Now I was a bit more concerned and instinct told me that it must be a bomb threat. I made my way to the front of the store where a massive line

to the only open registers was blocking the front doors.

Now common sense started to flood back in. If there was a bomb threat in the building, surely customers would not be allowed to continue to checkout, much less wait in a line. Looking around, there was no immediate danger inside the store that I could tell. No sounds out of the ordinary, no one running, and no authority presence indoors. There was a marked car with lights going just outside the front door, but I couldn't see any other sign that the situation was dangerous.

I spot my husband walking toward me down a nearby aisle with one of our children. When he reaches me, he quickly pulls me to the side, out of earshot of the children, and tells me that an employee told him that there had been a shooting outside of the store.

Again, common sense rushes back in; maybe it was more of second nature from

my upbringing in inner city Chicago. "Then why on Earth would we walk outside?!"

Word must have started to spread because more people were abandoning their full carts of food and heading for the doors. To be honest, my hesitation to leave was fueled more by deciding on if I was going to walk out with the groceries that I needed unpaid or leave them. To be fair, I would have come back and attempted to pay for what I had taken but with the storm coming, I needed this food. I chose to leave without the food; there was still time to go to another store, after all.

As we got to the doors an employee walks inside and announces that the police have given the all clear and the store would not be closing. And just like that, the situation was over.

It all made for a much less congested shopping trip and little wait to check out in the end.

You can't single out a sud

I'm intrigued by anomalies in the language. Since I make my living with words, I suppose it's well and proper that I study them.

Lately, I've been obsessed by the word "soapsuds." It's a plural word for which there is no singular. There is no such thing as a sud, at least not as it relates to soap. In Scotland, it's a variant spelling of the word "should," but that doesn't count.

Whether it's bubble bath or beer froth, a single bubble is not a sud. Only when two or more bubbles appear does it become suds.

When I got to thinking about it, there are lots of plural words that have no singular counterpart. Pants, for in-

stance. Sure "pant" is a word. It's what dogs do. But you can't wear a pant.

If you cut a pair of pants in half longways, you don't have a pair of pant. Each side is a pants leg.

Oddly enough, pantsuit uses the singular pant prefix, perhaps because the word suit begins with an S.

I've always thought it was odd that a singular garment for your legs is called a pair of pants. A pair of shirts would be two shirts but a pair of pants is one garment.

Similarly, jeans is singular. I had a singular Jean once, but she was my aunt.

Some plural words have singular versions related to the plural, such as scissors. You can

cut cloth and say you scissored it, but that's another weird thing. It's akin to saying "itch" when you mean "scratch." But you could do the scissor splits, which mimics the appearance of scissors but uses a singular form of the word. I say you could do the scissor splits; I can't. At least not without hurting myself.

Like scissors, pliers and forceps are plural words for singular items. It must be the leg-like handles that prompt the use of the plural form. Like jeans and pants, a pair of pliers is a single item.

Maybe it has to do with clothes, another plural that doesn't lend itself to a singular version. Clothe, of course, is a verb but not a noun. The noun

Ramblin' Man

By David Porter
porter@ramblinman.us



is clothes. But at least there, "clothes" implies more than one item. If you have just one item of clothing, you would call it by its specific name, such as shirt or hat or shoe.

As nouns, "remains" and "cremains" have no singular word. It's weird. If you autopsy a dead body, you're working on

the remains, not the remain. A singular cremains would be an ash.

Then there are words like horsefeathers as an expression of disbelief. I suppose if horses had feathers, each one would be a horsefeather, but they don't so it's not.

In a similar vein, bonkers

and butterfingers have no singular corollaries.

An interesting one is the word "corps" as in the Marines Corps or Peace Corps. A military formation having at least two divisions is a corps. But there is no corp, which, of course, is an abbreviation for corporation. With a corp., the P is pronounced, but add an S and both the S and the P go silent. Weird.

These are the kinds of things I think about, evidence that I need more to do.

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