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“Immigration Front Lines”
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The day I arrived at my uncle’s trailer park near San Diego two things became immediately obvious: my Unk called me ‘Bobby;’ second, Arizona’s newly enacted Immigration Law dominated the news. The pundits opined. CNN interviewed the ‘Trail of Dreams’ hikers who marched from Florida to Washington DC demanding a meeting with President Obama. The news was filled with the clucking of Chicken Littles on one side busily shrieking and pointing upward in alarm: “the sky is falling – we must keep them out!” The Chicken Littles on the other side were shrieking just as brashly and thrusting fingers in chests: “the sky is falling – this is blatant profiling!” Fox and MSNBC gave voice to the bluster of dozens of Foghorn Leghorns. But this is no joke, son.

Whenever has the law saved us? But where would we be without the law as a higher authority? It’s rarely simple. What is simple?

I don’t know. I just don’t know. A long time ago, I gave up trying to be right all the time. All I know is that when I mentioned to my uncle that I’m surprised at all the tension, he replied that that’s because I don’t have to live with it. He was right. Mine is the comfortable judgmentalism of the sidelines.

My uncle and cousins feel as if they are bunkered down on the front lines of an escalating war. They live on the border. Life for many has become unbearable. The competition for jobs. The competition for resources. The fear of drug gangs. The missing or killed youths – bodies of young adults discovered -- the body count numbering almost one a week either from abduction, rape, or the lure of easy drugs. The desperation of the Mexican peasant. Many want out of where they are. Life there is even more unbearable. My yearly trips to Honduras have taught me how toilsome, back-breaking, and prohibitively expensive it is to obtain visas. Only the privileged manage. How can an impoverished, illiterate campesino navigate his way through the consulate paperwork? He never will get the chance to cross legally.

It all boils down to the harsh reality that has defined the history of our world from our world’s first fist-fight: the competition for limited resources, especially as resources become scarcer and scarcer.

What my cousins face is a tax base that simply cannot support being generous. They’re struggling to make it, fighting tooth and nail to keep their business afloat. Liberalism is easy when liberalism is affordable. The increasing demand on social services is sucking dry the tax base, stretching nerves, emptying pockets. Theirs is the frustration of escalating taxes, increasing violence, diminishing water supplies, fewer jobs, less money banked to send their children to college.

Some mistakenly assume that you first have to get to know someone before you can love them. The opposite is true. Only when you love them do you get to know them.

A long time ago, while busily engaged in all the right causes and crusades as befits a liberal arts college student, I met one of my wife's South Africa relations. Mr. Beal-Preston, taking time to spend the night at my wife's home for family visit, was on his yearly excursion to Canada to stock bulls for his ranch. His ranch was the size of Rhode Island. This was before Mandela, before the collapse of apartheid. I enjoy a certain devious delight in telling people how my wife's family comes from Africa. It confuses them. My wife's grandmother was indeed South African, on the English colonist side. Her ancestors, the Kemsley's, settled Capetown, founding the Capetown Times. They were residents there long before the Zulu's began invading from the north. The only rightful inhabitants to South Africa were the Xhosa, but they got killed by everyone -- English, Boer, and Zulu.

I expected to confront a monster. Instead, I shared a drink with an interesting man who patiently explained the complexities of his land and culture. Is anything really black and white? As with most of the English South Africans he found apartheid distasteful, but he also feared what could happen with the collapse of the rule of law -- as eventually did happen very bloodily and violently in Rhodesia. I found him a gentle man, who, in his own way, cared about the black Africans who worked for him. He wanted to protect them, give them opportunity.

It is so very easy to be doctrinaire when you don't have to deal with people.