

THE ESCAPIST

by Steve Ramirez

I read once, that there are three kinds of people: conformist, activist, and escapist. I will never be a conformist; the very word is offensive to my ears. I have always been an activist, and someday; a day that seems very close, I will be an escapist.

In all honesty, I guess I have spent a great deal of my life betraying myself. The mere mention of conformity can send me into night sweats and dry heaves. I often envision the mass of humanity as one endless herd of lemmings marching mindlessly toward a cliff and into the sea. If I could stop one of the lemmings in their tracks and ask them, "Hey, why are you marching toward that cliff?" I know that it would give me an angry herrumph, and say, "Because, that's what we do, and why aren't you?" But, I don't try to stop the lemmings anymore. Instead, I sit on my rock and watch them pass me by on the way toward oblivion.

Oblivion- that is a great word. It sounds like what it means. So if the lemmings, which include many of my dear readers, are marching toward oblivion, toward what is it that they are marching? In fact, I do not think that the cliff or the sea are the oblivion. It is the mindless journey; their very lives or lack there of that constitutes the oblivion. It is moments in time, wasted, lost, and missed, never to return. It is a walk in the forest looking only at their feet. It is the illusion of self-importance and eternal life. The oblivion lies deep inside each of us.

The Buddhist teach that we live in an illusion created by our mind. We are never in the moment; the here and now. We spend what passes for our lives planning to live sometime in the future. Then, the future becomes the present, if only for a moment, and we again plan to live, "someday." "Someday, I'd love to travel." "Someday, I'd love to be happy."

"Someday, I'd love to love." "Someday, but not this day; because on this day, I'm too busy, marching." The Buddhist are right.

I once saw a British comedy where a husband and wife were lying in bed, the husband on his back, wide eyed, staring at the ceiling; the wife turned on her side attempting to get to sleep. The husband says to his drowsy wife, "I just realized that nothing is real!" She half-heartedly asked him what he means to say. He says, "If the past doesn't exist because it is over, and the future doesn't exist because it hasn't come yet, and if the moment you are in the moment it becomes the past, nothing really exists!" She gives him an angry herumph, and tells him to go to sleep. She did not understand that he was trying to be, very much awake. The Buddhist are right.

I guess I have dodged the earlier comment that I have spent a great deal of my life betraying myself. I guess it is time for me to face the music. The truth is, even though the very idea of the lemmings and their ill fated run makes me want to retch, I have sometimes found myself in the crowd moving in the general direction of the cliff. Sometimes, I can almost hear the cold dark sea just beyond the edge. This lunacy has taken many forms, some excusable, some, not so much. I have held down a "steady job." You know, the kind where people

pretend kindness while working to undercut each other, fighting like cowardly dogs over scraps of foul meat. The kind of job where you find yourself Zombie like in traffic, hating "life," knowing that it is the wrong thing to do, but you do it any way because it is expected, and because it is, "what we do." Then, other times it is like trying to wake from a bad dream. I toss and turn, screaming silently inside, "Wake up! For Gods' sake, no for your own sake, wake up!"

When I do wake up, I am faced with a dilemma. I sit on my rock watching the rest of humanity go by, and it is nice not to be running toward the cliff and oblivion, but I am left with the question, "What now?" From my rock, I get closer to myself. My true self can never be a conformist. At least up until this moment, I have always been an activist. I am always the one who stands when others stay seated. I cannot help myself. I have to speak up or step forward when I see an "injustice." At times, lemmings have asked me to step forward on their behalf, and I have only to look back into the silent, lonely, darkness when the bad times come; and they do come, because you must pay a price for being an activist.

This brings me back to my old friend the Buddhist Monk. When I was a child, the Vietnam War was in our face, as it should have been. Our collective faces did not handle it well; we ate our own young rather than putting the blame squarely where it belonged. ...on the "adults," lemmings, one and all. I remember seeing a Buddhist Monk as he sat serenely in some distant city square, poured gasoline on himself, and burned himself to death in protest. At that moment in time I wonder, which role did he play? Was he a conformist that followed the thoughts taught to him by others? Was he an activist, choosing to forfeit biological life for his beliefs? As he spent most of that biological life seeking self-enlightenment by excluding all of the outside worlds illusions from that entity that we call a mind, was he an escapist? Like urine in the Mekong River, did the three beings within him mix and mingle? I was seven years old when I watched him burn on a black and white television. Even then, I wondered, what does this mean, to me? Perhaps, as much as he wanted to be an escapist, he just could not help himself.

I am left with this. After many battles, over many long forgotten battlefields, I find myself feeling like the Roman General, who just wants to stay in his tent. I wonder why I would continue to fight for the empire that often does not seem worthy of my life. I wonder why I would spend more energy to protect the troops who call my name in time of hardship, and speak it crudely, when I am alone. Make no mistake, as the activist; as the leader, when you stay standing while all others are seated, you are always alone. In that moment, all I want to do is be an escapist. I want to sail away to some distant island. I want to tell the world of lemmings to pass me by. In the end, I put on my tunic, sheath my sword, walk to my tents' door, and step forward. I just cannot help myself. X

Readers Choice Award Winner



\$2 Longnecks • 7 - 11pm

Live Music

Saturday, May 2nd • Step Aside Band

Wednesday, May 6th • Someone Like You Band

Saturday, May 9th • Band (to be announced)

Saturday, May 16th • Loyd Bonham
Kenny and Aimee Anniversary Party
10 Years with My Love

Karaoke Every Friday Night beginning at 9 pm

Open Mike, Every Sunday beginning at 4 pm

31133 I-10 W • Boerne, TX (across from Toyota)

Open NOON Every Day!

830-755-5313

Lucky Bat Contemporary Art



INCENSE, SMUDGE & SWEETGRASS
HANDMADE GIFTS, TIBETAN PRAYER
FLAGS, JEWELRY AND MORE.

Th/Fr 10 - 5

Sat/Sun 12 - 4

Hwy 27 in Cypress Creek Landing
Behind "Downright Texas"

Comfort, Texas

830-431-0769 BY APPOINTMENT
WWW.NANCYMCGALLIARD.COM