

# Summer Gets Spicy

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## Monday

Well, I didn't meet my usual self-imposed deadline and get a newsletter out on Sunday, but last week's newsletter was a couple of days late, so everything feels a bit off-schedule. I'll write briefly now and try to get back on schedule next week. I'll either succeed, or won't succeed, but the world will keep turning in any case.

The political situation is very bad, and very fraught.

## Jacob Blake

Last night there police shot another black man in Wisconsin. CNN today has an [article] with a headline that reads "Wisconsin police shoot Black man as children watch from a car, attorney says." I'm glad it doesn't say "Wisconsin suspect shot in officer-involved shooting" — I guess that's an improvement. But what does the headline mention the attorney? There is live video of the shooting all over the Internet; we don't need to take the attorney's word for it. And although the article says that the children are the man's three sons, the headline doesn't.

Say his name: Jacob Blake.

Even after the article identifies Blake, it continues to refer to him as "the Black man," and keeps slipping into passive voice:

As the Black man enters the driver side door of his car, the nearest officer grabs the tail of his tank top and seven shots are heard.

That's an odd wording, don't you think? "Are heard." Not even "are fired." How about "As Blake tried to get into his car, one or more officers fired seven shots at his back, at close range."

How about this for a headline: "Wisconsin police officers shoot Black man, Jacob Blake, in the back seven times, while his children watch?"

What, too inflammatory? Let's wait until all the facts are in?

Last night on Twitter some initial reports said that Blake had died, but as I write this, the news is that he survived and received care and is currently in a hospital I.C.U. The comments were filled with law-and-order liberals blaming Blake for “resisting arrest” or “not coöperating” with the officers; some even claimed (without any evidence) that he was climbing into his car in order to retrieve a gun.

These folks are cop-suckers, reasoning backwards from “a cop did something bad to a Black man” right into “the Black man must have done something to deserve it” because their pro-police bias doesn’t allow them to see what is right in front of their faces, which is that there is *no* justification possible for this use of violent force. I’m not going to contort myself to try to be fair to “both sides” here or even pretend that I’m still willing to give police officers some kind of “benefit of the doubt.”

I can’t see into the officer or officers’ heads to know whether it was bigotry that resulted in this outcome, or fear, or fear created by bigotry combined with dangerously poor training, although I think this trifecta is the most likely scenario. Because we can’t know what is in their heads, it is best to look at their actions and take appropriate actions to reduce this kind of violently failed policing and end “qualified immunity.”

I am deliberately not using the phrase “unarmed Black man.” Here’s why. We shouldn’t have to know that the Black man didn’t have a gun in order to feel outrage. If he had *drawn* a gun or *aimed* a gun at an officer, there could be a self-defense justification — although it’s remarkable just how many white men seem to get away with waving guns around, in the presence of police officers, or even pointing guns at police officers without ever getting shot.

Wisconsin is an “open carry” state. Blake could have been visibly armed, and it would be completely legal. No license is required. “Concealed carry” requires a license in Wisconsin, but I’ve seen nothing to suggest that Blake either was or wasn’t carrying a concealed weapon or that he did or didn’t have such a permit.

I saw the video, but I didn’t share the video. I would urge you to share your outrage without sharing the video. I get it; people want to spread the video because it is shocking and they hope it will outrage complacent people. But many, many people, especially Black folks, have had their fill of the spectacle of violence against Black folks looping endlessly on their computer screens and don’t want or need to be re-traumatized by the images.

Reading headlines this morning, I mis-read one of them and thought the governor of Wisconsin had been shot during overnight protests, and was briefly filled with joy, but it turned out I had just mis-read the headline. That’s where my head’s at right now.

## California On Fire

Last year I antagonized some “names” on Twitter by suggesting that, long-term, some parts of California must simply be declared uninhabitable and many residents must consider relocation. The whole rural pattern, in many areas, of private homes interspersed deeply in wooded areas, gives people lovely homes in the woods but is unsustainably dangerous as the state dries out. I argued with “@drvox” and “@daveanthony.” The Twitter thread is preserved here, although *both* “@drvox” (David Roberts of Vox, psuedo-environmentalist and neoliberal shill for Elon Musk) and “@daveanthony” (Dave Anthony, comic, podcaster, and professional plagiarist) have deleted all of their tweets from the conversation.

That means I won, right?

## Hurricane Season

I’ve been watching the weather forecasts that were predicting the possibility that two hurricanes might strike America’s gulf coast simultaneously. Fortunately it seems like one of them is losing steam, so we may see only a single hurricane make landfall.

“Only.”

Oh, and apparently Zoom is down today.

## “It’s a *Good* Life”

I’ve seen a meme going around about the Republican National Convention and how the party has apparently decided to simply adopt the Trump campaign’s talking points as its platform wholesale. The meme was a clip from the old black-and-white *Twilight Zone* episode, called “It’s a Good Life”. The episode is from 1961 and I’ve never actually seen it, but I’m very familiar with the short story it is based on, from 1953, by Jerome Bixby; it’s been widely anthologized. It shows the dangerous child in the foreground, with a room of adults nervously clapping behind him.

The implication is that the Republicans are being held hostage by the dangerous child, Trump, and so will nervously approve everything he does — “it’s *good* that he’s dismantling the Postal Service,” “It’s *good* that he’s politicizing COVID-19 treatments,” “It’s *good* that his family is violating the Hatch Act,” or whatever.

This morning while I was getting ready for the day I realized that this isn’t quite right, though.

In the original story,

Anthony Fremont is a three-year-old boy with near-godlike powers: he can transform other people or objects into anything he wishes, think new things into being, teleport himself and others where he

wishes, read the minds of people and animals and even revive the dead.

It's a horrific and unsettling story — a three-year-old boy has the power of life and death over the residents of an entire small town, and there is nowhere else to go because:

Anthony's powers were present at birth, as he was able to kill the obstetrician and then, instinctively, separate his birthplace, the town of Peaksville, Ohio, from the rest of Earth moments after he was born. Nobody knows whether Anthony transported Peaksville somewhere or whether the rest of the world (or for that matter, the universe) was destroyed and only the town remains.

But it's the wrong metaphor. There are doors out of the Republican party and doors out of the convention. There's a whole world out here.

The professional asshole Andrew Sullivan once wrote about how people were "ethnically" Republican. It was a lie then and it's a lie now. There's the door. They can just take off the hat.

Unless, of course, they either have started believing their own propaganda, or they want to continue their various gifts.

Oh, and the same goes for the Democrats.

Kamala Harris is a woman of color, of Jamaican and Indian (class-wise, Brahmin) descent. Her mother had a ground-breaking career. But Harris's elevation onto the Biden ticket, to me, mainly just illustrates that Democrats either aren't ready themselves, or don't think their voters are ready, to put an actual African-American woman on the ticket — that is, a descendant of American slaves — and the real barrier is class, which in America is nearly a perfect proxy for race.

This is a great year, because of what it is revealing; so many quiet parts are being said out loud. So many people are showing us who they are. We need to believe them, and remember.

## Gardening News

The peak of summer has passed, and I have seen one — but so far just one — leaf changing color. August is usually cooler than July in Michigan, although the past few days have been quite hot and humid, and we haven't had any rain in a while. This may not change for several days — possibly not until the remains of Hurricane Laura blow over Michigan later in the week (if in fact they do).

I harvested a dozen paprika peppers this past weekend, took out the stems, seeds, and some of the stringy "pith," sliced them up, and dried them in the oven at 170 degrees overnight. Well, I dried eleven of them. Sam ate one fresh, much to my chagrin, since I wanted to dry all of them. (They taste like sweet peppers with just a bit of heat, but don't have a lot of flavor when fresh).

They were orange-red, but not bright paprika red per the picture on the tag, but it wasn't clear if they were going to get to bright red before deteriorating, as some were starting to shrivel a bit, or show some spots. Some of them had some small dark spots in their interior flesh. I'm not exactly sure what that was — mold? In any case, I cut out those bits. The strips of pepper shrank down to tiny brittle shreds. These stiff little shreds were easy to pulverize in a small blender made for making baby food. Now we have a small jar, about half-filled, of homemade paprika powder. It tastes delicious and we are now very excited about making chicken paprikash with our own paprika.

Grace and I are wondering what it would take to grow enough paprika for a whole year. "Enough paprika" is a slippery concept because if we have fresh home-ground paprika on hand, we're likely to want to use more than we normally would. I'm guessing we would want to process at least four dozen ripe peppers. So that might mean growing a dozen pepper plants.

We might get another six to twelve usable peppers off of these plants before either the plants give out, or the weather ruins the peppers. They aren't all coming ripe at the same time. The pepper plants are still producing brand-new pale yellow-green peppers, and those can't possibly grow to full size and ripen in the summer we have left. We'll harvest them early and do what we can, although because these are thick-walled peppers, they are more likely to develop mold than the thin-walled peppers like our cayennes. I think the climate in our yard is hot enough for these plants, but also too humid for them.

Speaking of cayennes, we also ground up a couple of handfuls of lovely dried cayenne peppers, which produces a cough- and tear-inducing dust.

We're not going to try that with the Scotch Bonnet peppers — we'll roast those, or eat them fresh, or cook with them, but they aren't going to go into the blender, because that concentration of capsaicin really would create a potent chemical weapon.

We're continuing to harvest wonderful Black Crim and Black Beauty tomatoes. Fortunately they aren't all ripening at once, so we don't have a huge glut, although I did take five to work to give away. I've also been harvesting and freezing more chives and rosemary, and sprigs from one of our oregano plants, the "hot and spicy" variety that Grace likes. I cut back a lot of the flat-leaf parsley in the kids' garden bed and stuffed those sprigs into a bag and froze those, too. I wanted to label the bags and had left a Sharpie in a magnetic cup on the refrigerator specifically for this purpose, but it had gone missing. The babies didn't get the Sharpie, but one of the members of our older three kids, the Varsity team, who shall remain nameless apparently took it, drew all over himself, then passed it on to a member of the Junior Varsity team, who did the same thing, and then lost the pen. No one can tell us where it is.

We can only hope it doesn't fall into the hands of one of the two members of Team Tiny, but we have to assume that it will, and we'll find something covered

with permanent marker ink that we really didn't want covered in permanent marker ink.

Cue yet another round of lecturing the kids about how “this is why we can't have nice things where *any* of you can reach them, not just the babies.” Which makes it very, very hard to get anything done. But we're managing.

I've been cutting back the mint plants and drying and bagging up big piles of spearmint, peppermint, orange mint, chocolate mint, and lime mint. Last night we made a syrup of the lime mint — the first time I've tried making anything with it. It has a very nice subtle citrus aroma, less noticeable than the orange mint, but it makes a delicious syrup. It was good mixed with peach-flavored fizzy water, and also very tasty simply mixed with a shot of bourbon.

Have a great week!

## About This Newsletter

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