

Guest Column: Life Its Own Self

The Great Chagrin Falls Dung Ball Championships: Part Two of Two

Michael Novak, Contributing Writer

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We adapted the rules from the dodge ball game that we learned in gym class. Two teams would form within the paddock, shaped by the affections, animosities and judgments of the week as well as by long standing alliances and grievances. Kinship loomed large: Gary and Dale Planicka with their cousin Andy Paluf; Oleh and Omelan Korenewycz and their positively deranged sister Slawka (a waifish sociopath feared by all); Matt, Mark, Luke and Gus Hriczo, 4 of the 12 offspring from an odd marriage between a Mormon and a Hungarian undertaker; the twins, Terry and Jerry Wolanski. Loners like myself, Dale Dranchak, Joll Dvorak and Al Zahuronak (later to play music with Joe Walsh) did our best to seem appealing to the pre-forming core groups.

The object was to drive the other team to ruin and surrender through inflicting a combination of insult and injury from behind the center line. No one could wear gloves or leave the paddock without being disqualified. All this made discernment in the choice of projectiles essential to success. A pie or a plop too recently deposited would insult the person who chose to grab it, being difficult to remove from the hand, let alone throw at the opposition. Too dry, and the object would throw well at no risk and could inflict injury but not additional insult. Ideal was the perfectly cured item: a hard enough shell to throw without risk but also thin enough to shatter on impact, leaving its rich interior all over the stricken enemy. Such a find was a rare treasure, usually hoarded for just the right moment.

A perfect cow pie offered many of the advantages of an off-center Frisbee (then called a Pluto Platter) or discus: it could be spun through the air sidearm with great angular momentum and would take an utterly unpredictable but sustained flight path away from the thrower, threatening almost everyone ahead of it. Throwing it up at a steep angle could make it come back almost like a boomerang. Sharp edges could act like the teeth on a good circular saw, while saucer-like shear tendencies often released the moist interior before or sometimes without actual impact. Even the members of the thrower's own team insisted that the warning shout "cow pie" precede each launch. Our version of the nuclear option. More popular were the horse plops because their shape and weight could approximate a baseball and offer a weapon more familiar to the hand and much more predictable in flight. Enlightened self interest led both teams, in moments of clarity, to favor these.

And so—armed, dangerous, motivated and loosely organized—we would engage in battle, hoping to disable all but one of the opposition, at which point the leading team could cross over the center line and move in for the kill. Tactics evolved to hasten this outcome. A high lob of a very large cow pie would force the other team to look upward in hopes of avoiding its descent, thus making them vulnerable to massed fire from the horse plop throwers.

Feigning serious injury could have the same result, momentarily freezing targets on the duped team for directed horse plop fire. An unconvinced enemy, however, would punish the flopper without mercy. A team truly desperate could often release one or more of the stallions into the field of play, hoping to exploit the chaos to their own end or at least to see all humans flee the field of play and accept the resulting draw.

But in fact most players and all spectators wanted the game to end conventionally. Sooner or later attrition would take a greater toll on one team than the other. Players would stop from exhaustion, from injury, or in sudden bursts of sheer disgust with the entire process. As soon as the active duty roster reached one, the endgame ensued. Freed from the restriction of the center line, the remaining few would drive their sole opponent backwards with barrages of all densities and shapes, hoping to force him or her into contact with the fence and, in particular, with the bovine voltage electrical wire.

It is necessary to appreciate the impact of an electrical charge designed to deter a beast of 1200-1500 pounds on a human 1/10 that weight. Most of us have felt the electrical shock of a house current or dog fence — an unpleasant buzz that we instinctively release. The shock of a bovine charger, however, is an assault upon being and consciousness, an inward explosion of energy that launches the poor recipient into the air while temporarily stopping thought and movement. The inevitable result is a dazed crash to the ground, followed, in our case, by a jubilant victory dance around the confused victim. This we all sought, a fitting and glorious end to the championships. Back we would drive the sole survivor, ever back, until either sheer transfer of momentum from assault dung to body would accomplish the task, or the quarry would simply take a step too far back in retreat, or make one false move of self defense with an arm or leg. Zap! The thrill of victory.

One mitigation of the agony of defeat would result on those occasions when Slawka Korenewycz found herself the isolated party. Some inner demon would make her fight like a Fury until defeat was certain even in her own addled mind. Determined to keep her destiny in her own hands, shrieking like a banshee, she would grab one very rich dung ball in each hand, hold both aloft and back herself so quickly into the fence that her assailants had no time to flee before her launch — a glassy-eyed human projectile with two very powerful warheads frozen in her grip by the tremendous electrical forces coursing through her body. She was quite often successful in transferring both the warheads and the electrical charge to her tormentors in her final, diabolical gesture of contempt, a testament to the deeper reaches of the human spirit.

Such is the true story of the Great Chagrin Falls Dung Ball Championships. Sport is in us all. But, as Dave Barry would also say: DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

Rebecca's Big Fat Vegetarian Rant

Rebecca Brodney, Staff Writer

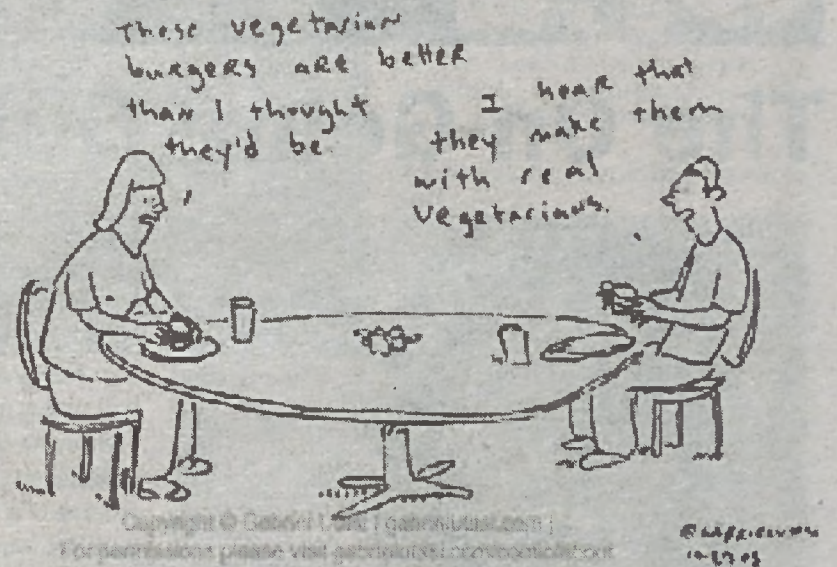


image via Gabriel Utasi

You are un-American if you don't ingest a dead animal at every meal, social gathering and holiday. After all, one day it's vegetables only and the next you'll be living on a commune with the other like-minded hippies singing Kumbaya around a campfire and donning earth shoes. This is the sort of reputation that vegetarians have. I know because I am one.

I grew up in a home with very health-conscious parents who were, and still are, living in fear that I do not have enough protein in my diet. I remember many arguments over holiday dinners because society has mandated that everyone must engage in a gluttonous frenzy and later pass out because of the tryptophan in their Thanksgiving turkey. At an early age I was repulsed by eating meat and by seeing others eating it as well. Did they not see the blood veins in the chicken breast that they sank their teeth into? As I aged and matured, I became aware of the abuse that these animals suffer. Further, I knew that if I were to continue eating the occasional piece of chicken I was perpetuating that abuse, which prompted my decision to stop eating meat entirely.

Frequently I am asked a series of asinine questions that go something like this:

(1) "Isn't that expensive?" Buying a slab of a "good quality" animal carcass/steak is expensive, unlike shopping like a vegetarian. I go to the grocery store more frequently because fruits and vegetables don't stay fresh for long, but I don't spend much money while I'm there.

(2) "What do I feed you?" Unless someone is preparing a smorgasbord of animal parts for dinner, I eat what everyone else does, minus the meat. For example, if someone made spaghetti and meatballs for dinner I wouldn't eat the meatballs.

(3) "I'm not becoming a vegetarian, okay?" Most vegetarians don't walk around wearing a button saying, "I'm a vegetarian; ask me how!" Admittedly, I have some idiosyncrasies about other people's using my pans to cook meat, but one's diet is a deeply personal decision, and most vegetarians wouldn't guilt trip someone into giving up a Big Mac.

So what would prompt someone to become a vegetarian? It's believed that vegetarians have an easier time managing their weight, avoiding food borne illness, living a long life and having more energy throughout the day. Clearly I am not the only person who finds these reasons appealing because celebrities like Pamela Anderson, Carrie Underwood, Chris Martin (lead singer of Coldplay), Ellen DeGeneres and even Brad Pitt have all taken up vegetarianism because of environmental and health concerns, as well as animal welfare. If you want to try and achieve these goals on a smaller scale look into the Meatless Monday Movement, which aims to decrease people's meat consumption by 15% while simultaneously improving their health and helping the environment. How do you get started? Simply switch out your carnivorous favorites for vegetarian friendly alternatives. Check out www.meatlessmonday.com to learn how.