

## The Passing Parade:

March seventeenth has come and gone. It is with bittersweet feelings that I recall the holiday. St. Patrick's Day was important, really important. The St. Patrick's Day parade was a big one in my home town. The Irish population of New York was as large as the Irish population of Dublin. The lane divider down the middle of Fifth Avenue was painted green and it seemed that everyone, Irish and others, took part in the day. For music and marching it was unbeatable. Bag pipes, are you kidding me? We had pipes!

Unfortunately it was also a particularly important showcase for a motley and endless collection of Irish firebrands who were constantly haranguing the crowds to send money and best wishes back home, to the old sod. Sometime in high school I found out that many of the millions they raised helped to murder mothers and children and anyone else who was inconveniently in the way of their political goals.

Funny thing about thugs; they find a place to ply their trade. Some become leg-breakers for the mob and some become knee cappers for the IRA or Sharia enforcers for the Taliban. Far too many take the easiest path. They hit women and they hit children. It's the same personality type: angry, alienated, socially inadequate young men who want to hurt someone. Don't kid yourself, the politics, the religion, the business, whatever the front for their violence, it's only an excuse. A thug will find a venue to be a thug.

Where was I? Oh yeah, parades. I love 'em. Memorial Day was a great day for marching through my neighborhood in Queens, NY. The Boys Brigade of Woodside replete with uniforms, wooden rifles and a snappy cadence stepped off at 9:00 AM. A smattering of grownups and little kids stood on the curb waving small flags and sharing the pride we all felt. I achieved the rank of Corporal in the Brigade. It was only later that I realized there were no Privates in our corps.

My sister and I, in our teens, formed a bond that continues to this day. We were kindred spirits and occasionally marched to the beat of that different drummer you've heard tell of. We had a phase in the late sixties where we would rise very early on a Saturday morning and go to the financial district. Early on weekend mornings the place is lunar, empty and eerily quiet, the antithesis of its weekday identity.

Kathy and I would march down the middle of Wall Street, in perfect step, to the cheers of absolutely no one, completely happy in the absurdity of our celebration. A parade for two.

This parade discussion leads inevitably to the granddaddy of them all. It's the Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York. Growing up there I actually attended one or two as a child. More than that, it was a TV experience for me and my family. I fondly remember all of us watching the show. Mom, of course, was mostly in the kitchen preparing the feast of the day with the help of her sister in law, tiny Terry. Dear Aunt Terry was in charge of the pearl onions, yams and a ham. She weighed about the same as a large ham and spoke with the unmistakable accent of working class Manhattan. On a rough day she would say, "I shoulda' stood in bed." She meant slept in, of course, but I liked the way she said it.

Anyway, back to the Parade. In those days before it was a three hour promo for the network's other programs, it was a more or less innocent show about bands and balloons and politicians kissing babies. It's one of the few shows I remember watching on Aunt Terry's big white Philco. Of course what people still recognize the most about the parade are the balloons, those magnificent, oversized, helium filled creations memorializing all manner of cartoon character from Mighty Mouse to Tweety Bird. It's amazing how much of an impression a big bag of air can make on folks.

Which reminds me, I have an idea for this year's big new balloon. The character is immediately recognizable to fan and foe alike. His identification with hot air and pompous presence is second to none. He's been entertaining us for so long that he almost seems real. I can just see this larger than life, self-invented king of conspicuous consumption being held down by twenty strong men. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the biggest thing in airbags today, the newest balloon in the passing parade, Rush Limbaugh.