

Hi. It's Ira Glass recording this in 1996. And the show that you're about to listen to, the fifth episode of our show, we actually can not find a master copy of, and so what you're going to hear is a copy off of somebody's old cassette of this show. And we apologize for the sound quality.

We all know what liberalism looked like back in its heyday, back during the Kennedy administration and the Great Society. We all can see it. There is President Kennedy on the White House lawn in a sweatshirt playing touch football or taking a pause while playing touch football. He's turning toward the camera. This little film of sweat on his forehead, and he's smiling. And looking, just radiating sexual charisma.

The heyday of liberalism meant a nation increasingly open about sexuality. It was a time of rising sex on ads and sex on television and increasing sexual frankness in society in general. Now, in our current moment of the Republican revolution, we're a nation that is increasingly getting in touch with our anger. Anger sells. Anger motivates voters. Anger is the engine behind 1,000 talk radio programs. 2,000, 3,000. But not this one, because from WBEZ in Chicago, it's Your Radio Playhouse. I'm Ira Glass.

Wasn't that very Saturday Night Live? I got so excited when I did it, you could barely understand the call letters, I bet. Just in case you missed, they were from WBEZ. That's so management doesn't call me up. It's important to them.

Anyway, tonight on our little radio show, civilization and its discontents, and the people who are discontent with the discontents. And if that doesn't make any sense, just stay with us. Just stay with us. Coming up in our program, stories from Larry Steeger, Iris Moore, Cheryl Trykv, and more, more, more.

So anger, anger is an inherent part of the current conservative revolution. It is built into it from the start. It is front-loaded. It's in the hard drive, hard-wire mechanism of the thing. In the 1980s, when Newt Gingrich was making videotapes and audiotapes for Republican candidates who were trying to win office, and Newt was trying to convince them to win office in the way that he had-- and was very successful in building the Republican majority, as you know, this way-- one of the things that he told them was to consciously use words and phrases that would polarize the political debate, and that would get people angry.

This past October, there was this huge profile of his political strategy in The New Yorker. And as it pointed out, the recommended words from these tapes, the recommended words that candidates were supposed to use as often as possible in referring to Democrats, included these words, sick, traitors, corrupt, bizarre, cheat, steal, devour, self-serving-- I'm just trying to get the music ready for this dramatic moment here, I'm setting up-- self-serving, and criminal rights.

See, wasn't that worth it, when the music came in right there? Sick, traitors, corrupt, bizarre, cheat, steal, devour, self-serving, and criminal rights. I wonder if it's possible to use all those in one sentence? I'm just looking at the words here. Sick traitors-- I guess I've got to use Democrat. Sick Democratic traitors, with their corrupt and bizarre ways, not only cheat and steal and devour-- It's not a very interesting sentence.

All right, I'll tell you what. We are a radio program. And we have the power to do the following thing. And I'm just going to stop the music. Yeah, there we go. Because this is such a dramatic moment here.

Here's what we're going to do. Get a piece of paper and a pencil. I'm going to read you these words. And we'll give you the address of the radio show at the end the program. And whoever can come up with an interesting, grammatically correct sentence using these words, will win a valuable prize. All right, here are the words, sick, traitors, corrupt, bizarre, cheat-- people all over the city are just like cursing me out now. Go slower-- steal, devour, self-serving, and criminal rights. And the winner will get-- I don't know-- a coffee mug, or-- I don't know-- a seat in some congressional district yet to be named.

Let's just be fair here for a second, just a moment of fairness. Cultivating anger amongst the voters is not just a tactic used by conservatives. I would say pretty much the last, oh, you know, 100 years-- let's call it an even 100-- that's been pretty much a mainstay strategy of the left too, to cultivate outrage. Except when the left does it, it is to cultivate outrage at the rich, at business. Which, as we know, is very different from our current political moment. That same New Yorker profile, basically, outlines this whole political strategy to cultivate anger of middle class people against the poor. Not against the rich, but against the poor, and against social programs for the poor.

At one point in this article, one of the consultants who holds seminars for House Republicans at the invitation of Speaker Gingrich, this consultant tells the reporter-- All right, I'm going to read from the article.

"Spitting his words and gesturing angrily at his chin, the consultant says, the middle class has had it up to here with the arrogance of the poor and the disenfranchised."

Act One: Act One

Ira Glass

And one thing that is particular about the current moment in our political life as a nation is that people are angry, but they're not angry at things that are happening to them. What they're getting paid, work conditions down at the factory, the garbage pickup on the street, this isn't what this particular political revolution is trying to instill. This particular revolution is trying to instill anger at welfare moms. People are angry at the O.J. Verdict. They are angry at people who they never met.

Which brings us to the Susan Smith trial. I know that's kind of a non sequitur. Just ride with me here for a minute. I know a lot of you are working on your words. So this would be a time to really pay attention. The Susan Smith trial is this grisly, grisly, grisly case. And to review briefly, in the small town of Union, South Carolina, Susan Smith locked her two children-- very, very, young children-- into her car and then sank the car in a lake, supposedly, to help her keep this rich boyfriend, who, supposedly, didn't want any children, didn't want her to have kids. And really horrifying story.

And one of the contributing editors to this radio show, Jack Hitt, he's from South Carolina. And he's a journalist. He's an editor. He's been an editor, anyway, at Harper's Magazine. He's a frequent contributor to the The New York Times, and Esquire, and other places. And over the course of the Susan Smith trial, he traveled home to South Carolina a number of times. And watching the coverage on South Carolina television, he said that what struck him was the pure rage that people had toward Susan Smith. Here he is talking about it.

Jack Hitt

What this town wanted to do was rip her apart. Baby killing bitch, I remember hearing a woman on TV shouting this at the top of her lungs. People were sending in their milk money to help defray the cost of

electrocuting her. Perhaps the most horrific image was to see this town of good Christians sort of gathering at the police station door when she was first brought out for a hearing.

And the crowd actually rushed the deputies to try to get to her. The deputies had to lock arms to stop the crowd from ripping her apart.

Ira Glass

He said that this reaction is understandable at the beginning. He said that when he first heard about this case, I mean, his blood ran cold. But he said the thing about this anger was that it never let up. He said that weeks went by, week after week, and it just stayed at fever pitch. And Jack Hitt said that, at that point, he realized that this is typical of a certain kind of conservative today. This is a political style, for good or bad, that we're seeing a lot of in our country right now.

Jack Hitt

Every time you tune them in-- whether it's the McLaughlin Group on Sunday morning, or whatever-- they're still furious. They're just angry, angry, angry, angry, angry. And once the Susan Smith trial drops off the radar, they go pick up something else that will inflame their anger. So they can move on, and hate something else, and be angry, angry, angry at somebody else.

Ira Glass

So Jack Hitt wrote an article for The Washington Post. This was an op-ed piece. And in this piece he argued for a different kind of response to the Susan Smith trial. What he said was, sure, she should be punished. He said, we all can agree that she should be punished and severely punished. But he said, even in this case, even in a case so horrible that no one could possibly sympathize with the criminal-- what could be worse than a mother killing her two young children? He said, even in this case, we have to have empathy. The anger has to turn to an attempt to understand why she did what she did and to forgive her.

He wrote in his piece, "If there's one aspect of the old liberalism that should be preserved during its excommunication, it's the willingness to contemplate even the most horrific and to seek to understand why things happen."

Jack Hitt

What we understand as we come to know Susan Smith more, and more, and more, is that rather than it being the story of a sort of libertine, promiscuous woman who wanted to have her way and wanted to have her rich husband and, therefore, killed her children so she could have this husband who didn't want to have any children. It became a much more complicated story, less of a cartoon story, more of a sort of human story. And let me just give you that very briefly.

Her mother, Linda, was married to a fireman, and eventually divorced him, and married a sort of richer man, Beverly Russell. And after a few years, when Susan's 13, she tries to kill herself. That happens, it passes. When she's 16, she goes to a high school guidance counselor to say that her stepfather, Mr. Russell, a member of the Christian Coalition and a Republican county chairman, is abusing her.

Russell comes in. He basically admits to this. Mom says, I'll handle this. We don't need to go public. We don't need to bring any charges. I'll handle this at home. Nothing happened. And everybody went back home and went back to what they were doing. We now know that Mr. Russell went back to abusing his stepdaughter. A year after that, Susan tried to kill herself again, was institutionalized. After that, she

graduates from high school. She gets pregnant by this young man, has the first of the two boys. And finally, at age ۲۳, she commits this unspeakable act.

Ira Glass

So this op-ed piece is published, in which Jack Hitt urges that we try to understand and forgive Susan Smith. And you know, a writer wants to have an effect on the public. And after this op-ed piece came out, Jack Hitt did notice one significant change in the general mood of public anger. What he noticed was now some it was directed at him.

His op-ed piece generated this huge response. He got lots of furious letters. He was used as a punching bag on talk radio, all just ripping into him. Now people who write letters to the editor about a piece like Jack Hitt's, they usually do not get much satisfaction. You're lucky if you get published at all when you write a letter to the editor. And if you are published, you're usually edited. And who knows what will happen to your words. But because so many people disagreed with Jack Hitt, we thought that we would give one of them a chance, here, to discuss it with him directly.

And so we invited one of the letter writers to come on the show with him. We think this is a radio first. At least we're going to say that. We have never heard of anybody doing it. And so from now on, we are just going to repeat that for the rest of the show. This is a radio first that we're doing this. OK, good. I'm glad we have that settled.

The person that we chose, the letter writer that we chose, is named Gregory Baruch, and he's an attorney in Washington, DC. And what he said in his letter, he said, basically, that Jack Hitt overstated the need for forgiveness in this case and understated the need for punishment.

Gregory Baruch

First of all, it may be that forgiveness is a pretty low priority here. That what we have is a situation where somebody, to some degree, has placed themselves beyond the realm in which we really should be worrying too much about that. Of course, it's a horrible story, Susan Smith's life. But there has got to be a limit to where you forgive. What if her stepfather came in and said, well, I was abused as a kid too, and that's why I had to pass on the cycle of abuse to Susan. Would we then have to hold out forgiveness to him as well?

Jack Hitt

Can I say something here, Ira?

Ira Glass

Yeah, sure. Jack Hitt.

Jack Hitt

Yes, Mr. Baruch, I would say you should. In fact, you know there's an entire religion founded on this concept called Christianity. And yes, Mr. Baruch, I would say that one way perhaps to break the cycle is to speak of forgiveness. Now, I say that all in the context of, this is not the equivalent of clemency. Forgiveness and clemency are two different concepts. Forgiveness does not mean we let Susan Smith go, or that we eliminate the need for punishment.

It goes without saying that she deserves, at very least, a lifetime in prison, at the very least. And I say that as a liberal. People who do bad things need punishment, and we need to punish them.

Ira Glass

Gregory Baruch?

Gregory Baruch

I think what a lot of people are reacting to here is that the liberal view that was most popular in the '60's, it's not inherently necessary for a liberal to take, is sort of a denial that there is evil in the world. And with Beverly Russell, I think what people see is, they see that that's evil, and also with Susan Smith. Now, one thing to keep in mind with Susan Smith is the country saw her over several days on television, tearfully talking about her babies, and how they had been taken away by a black man. And I think that that stuck with people. That what they realized was this was somebody who not only was able to do it, but who was able to do it and then try to get away with it. And that that does not indicate a person who really is deserving of a lot of sympathy.

Ira Glass

Jack Hitt?

Jack Hitt

Really, my article is not about Susan Smith. It's about you and me. The punishment issue, you're right, it's about Susan Smith. She deserves to be punished. My point is that the whole idea of forgiveness is about getting beyond this crime. Otherwise, we all are forced, as I think many conservatives would like us to be, stoking our anger for the rest of all time, so that we can hate this woman forever. And really, my piece is, finally, a kind of secular statement of what Christianity is. That's why I was sort of alarmed that most of the people who reacted with such fury at my piece were themselves alleged Christians.

Ira Glass

Let me ask Mr. Baruch. Do you find persuasive anything in what Jack Hitt says about this notion that, yes, of course, this woman should be punished. But in the case of her, in the case her stepfather, the point of Christianity is that there needs to be empathy and forgiveness.

Gregory Baruch

Well, obviously, I don't want to be in a theological dispute. But at the same time, there's nothing necessarily bad about people's outrage. That Jesus also said, what you do to the least of my creatures, you do to me. And it's not true that everybody who has a bad home life or who comes from a situation where they were abused has to turn around and do the same thing.

And in fact, what a lot of people, I think, recognize is that the forgiveness culture does not encourage people to choose the right path. It doesn't encourage people to act well. That we may be better off in a culture that asks more of people.

Ira Glass

Part of what you're saying in your letter, if I understand it right, is you're impatient with the notion of, we should try to understand people like Susan Smith, and we should try to be empathetic with them. I get the sense that you feel like we've had enough of that.

Gregory Baruch

Well, there is something like that. Because the thing is that there is a history here. There's a history in which crime has not been taken as seriously, as it should have been, for many years by a lot of people who place themselves on the left of the political spectrum. And that really, I think, is what people were reacting to so strongly when Michael Dukakis had that famous line. When he was asked what would happen if his wife were raped and murdered, he essentially responded that he would increase drug education in the schools. That people realized that there is a history here where people do see that that may well be where this leads.

Ira Glass

Jack Hitt, Gregory Baruch is arguing, essentially, that too much forgiveness, a notion of too much forgiveness, is dangerous for a society. That is, that people cease to take responsibility for their own actions, in a way that even you would want them to.

Jack Hitt

I would agree with him on that. I agree that I don't want the idea of forgiveness to mean that we let people go. My argument is that the pendulum has swung so far in the direction of punishment that that's all we care about. Jails, jails, jails, that's the solution to everything. There's a local statute that was just passed that anybody under 18 who gets in trouble, their parents now go to jail. It's the remedy for everything.

But it seems to me, for us to be able to contemplate the bad things that people do, and the horrible things that happen in our culture, and then to be able to move beyond that requires that we find some way to comprehend and understand these terrible things that happen. And I think that the idea of forgiveness is the right way to go.

Ira Glass

Let me turn to Gregory Baruch.

Gregory Baruch

Well, Mr. Glass, what Mr. Hitt says, is well we shouldn't keep being angry at this. But I don't know that it's a bad thing, when something terrible has been done, to stay angry at it, not to let it fade in our mind. And I don't think it's selfish to do that when it's a bad thing that has been done to somebody else. I like to think that I wouldn't be jaded, that when I hear something terrible, that I will continue thinking it's terrible, and, frankly, that I'll continue being angry about it.

Jack Hitt

I can't disagree with you more. I mean, the people who were angry at that courthouse, and who are still angry-- and that's my point-- they sort of dig themselves into this rut of anger and never get out of it. They just stay there in a constant rage. There is no other choice. Like I say, Susan Smith drops off the radar this week, don't worry.

Ira Glass

Jack Hitt is a writer, now living in Connecticut. Gregory Baruch is an attorney in Washington, DC.

As for another model for how to consider this question of punishment and forgiveness, you could also consider the testimony of Susan Smith's stepfather, Beverly Russell. And in this culture of forgiveness, where people go onto talk shows all the time and say, well, sure I did whatever, that bad whatever that I did. Sure I did that. I had a reason, though. People are constantly saying, I had a reason. It was my parents. It was my upbringing. Beverly Russell said, no, no, no. The buck stops here. He said that by sexually

abusing his stepdaughter for all those years, by doing that, he said, he was guilty, not just for what he did to her, but for what she did to her two sons.

In his testimony he said, "You don't have all the guilt in this tragedy." At that point he cried, apparently, on the stand. He said, "Had I been true to you and my responsibilities, you would have been stronger in yourself, not needing to be constantly supported and reassured emotionally. My heart breaks for what I've done to you, for your pain and loss. Had I known at the time the result of my sin, I could have mustered enough strength to assume my responsibilities."

Polls show that in the little town of Union, South Carolina, where Susan Smith and Beverly Russell live-- or where Susan Smith lived before she was put in prison-- in that town, 90% of the residents have agreed with the jury's decision against the death penalty in her case. They decided for the more lenient penalty of life in prison. In the country as a whole, further away from the human reality of these people's lives, 90% of the population believes that she should get the death penalty.

Act Two: Act Two

Larry Steeger

I'm sorry for what I've done. I realize that it is premature and also at a very late stage in the game for me to be coming forth. But to come forth is an action, which should take place. I apologize for being taller than the person sitting behind me. I apologize for being smaller than the person sitting in front of me.

I relinquish nothing and everything in order to stand here before you. And this I apologize for. I do not believe that this will allow me to enter into any new situation without the remembrance of what I've done. I only wish for you to hear me. I apologize for this also. I'm sorry.

I have brought shame on my family. I've caused anguish, hurt, pain, and suffering in other families. I've done things which should not have been done. Without naming names, I have provoked, qualified, justified, revoked, interred, summoned, questioned, realized, created, allowed, returned, configured, situated, and muted things I should not have.

I will allow for a return of the things that I have taken. They are not mine. They have never belonged to me. And if they could all be restored with no knowledge of me ever possessing or adjusting them, I could regain footing and a holding in this world that I do not or should not belong to.

If I am misunderstood, you have only me to blame. I do not warrant this voice. I give this back. I do not hold this ground. It is not mine to stand on. Your hearing is the only thing I have left. And I apologize for this. It is not mine to possess.

Iris Moore

Every time you say my name, my body's resistance breaks in a column from the surface of my skin to the bone. But I forgive you. I forgive myself. I forgive my past. I forgive my name. I forgive my family. I forgive my anatomy. I forgive everything until I am totally blank. I have no memory at all. All my questions have been answered. The missing link has been found. All is forgiven. Come home.

Ira Glass

Performance artists Iris Moore and Larry Steeger. Larry's piece was based on the testimony of serial murderer Jeffrey Dahmer. This is Your Radio Playhouse from WBEZ Chicago. Now this artifact of the forgiveness culture.

[MUSIC - "I BLAME GOD"]

Act Three: Act Three

Ira Glass

Well the views expressed in the music on this program are not those of WBEZ management or the program's funders. So whatever you think of this notion that our society needs to be less forgiving, that we need to be harsher with people, so they do what's right and not what's wrong. But if you think about this philosophically, you have to acknowledge that it has practical consequences as social policy.

These kinds of ideas have, basically, led to a dramatic toughening of many criminal statutes in many states across the country. We've seen a spate, over the last year, over the last few years, of increases in mandatory sentences, accountability laws, lots of laws, trying juveniles as adults when they commit certain crimes.

And in a certain sense, these laws are working. The murder rate is down in many big cities, including Chicago and New York. The prison population has skyrocketed, people are being taken off the street, more men are being locked up for more years. But to give a sense of some of the human consequences of this, here's Darrin Bowden, a supervising attorney with the public defenders office in Cook County.

Darrin Bowden

A young man I was seeing, for the record, his name is J.B., a 13 year old who was a ward of the court, because his mother was a substance abuser. His father was nowhere to be found. The only one who embraced this young man was the gang, the dope pusher. 13 years old, began selling narcotics. And--

Ira Glass

Hi, Ira Glass here, talking to you again. Remember, about 30 minutes ago, I said that this is an old cassette copy of one of our programs? Well, this is actually the point in the program where the person needed to flip over the cassette. And what's about to happen is that in going to the other side, apparently, a word or two got cut off. And we think the word that got cut off is the word, someone. So I'm just going to say it for you now. Someone--

Darrin Bowden

Stole his narcotics. His life was on the line. And he was threatened that if you do not either get the money, the drugs, or get the individual who stole the drugs, not only will your life be in jeopardy, but your sister's life will be in jeopardy. And, basically surviving, J.B. pulls a trigger, takes a human life. And yes, he should be held responsible for that.

But where we erred, we were not concerned and compassionate enough to understand why it took place. In doing that, we sent a 13 year old boy to the adult system, where he was sentenced by a judge, who is an elected official, to 30 years. Treated as an adult, and being treated as an adult, receiving adult time.

J.B. is now 10 years of age. J.B. will be in his late thirties or early forties, I believe, when he's released, with no hope of receiving a job, because he's a convicted felon, convicted of murder. That record will follow him forever.

And if we had moved in the true spirit of the Juvenile Court Act, we would have decided that, hey, this is a young man who never had an opportunity, let's provide him with an opportunity. And that opportunity might have been, yes, we're going to send him to the juvenile Department of Corrections.

But unlike the adult Department of Corrections, there are services, schools, counselors, the ratio between students and teachers. And try to help this individual, upon his release-- at the age of 17, 19 years of age-- provide that individual with an opportunity to make something of himself, to reintroduce him into society, to understand that he is a child. And that's all he was. He is a child. You may say that he performed an adult act. But when you're a child, you speak and act as a child.

Ira Glass

Darrin Bowden, from the public defenders office here in Cook County. This next song is from Johnny Cash's album recorded at Folsom Prison and San Quentin.

[MUSIC - "THE WALL," JOHNNY CASH]

Act Four: Act Four

Ira Glass

Johnny Cash, Your Radio Playhouse. Glen Fitzgerald sees all this from another angle.

By the way, if you are trying to think about doing those words that we said earlier in the show, that is, create one sentence. Our very first radio contest here. Create one sentence, grammatical sentence, an interesting sentence we hope, using these words. The words are sick-- got a pencil, got a pencil-- sick, traitors, corrupt, bizarre, cheat, steal, devour, self-serving, and criminal rights. And get the word Democrat in there too, just for good measure. And if you didn't hear the beginning of the show, we're not even going to explain it. It's too complicated.

So Glen Fitzgerald sees all this from a different angle, these questions of forgiveness. He's a missionary with Youth for Christ, Chicago Metro Youth for Christ. And he works with gang members. And for a lot of his job-- for all of his job, actually-- he tries to bring gang members over to the Lord. And spends a lot of time in the prisons, in the jails, and a lot of time on the streets. But as part of his job, he goes out to suburban churches and does public speaking, partly to tell people about what the ministry is able to do, in terms of turning boys around, and partly to raise money sometimes. And occasionally he takes some boys with him. But he says that when he goes out and talks to these suburbanites, these mostly white suburbanites, about what goes on in the city, he says the reaction is usually the same.

Glen Fitzgerald

You have people being comfortable saying, even in a church setting, these kids really do need to be locked up. These kids, we need to throw away the key on this. Something bad should happen to them. We should punish all this wrongdoing. And yet they never feel that way about the kids that we bring to them. And I'm talking about guys who are really-- these aren't wannabes. These are the real thing, dope dealing, gang violence between the two, what they would call, missions.

So those are the guys I bring in to the meetings. And they will say to the kid, this is great what you're doing. The same people who, five minutes ago, were line them up and shoot them. I don't care. Lock them up, throw away the key. The same people can instantaneously turn themselves around, when they actually can

see this kid. This is great. This we like. Him, we like. This is good. We can do this. But these other kids on the street, that's different. What I was just saying now, forget that. With them, that goes back to what I was saying before about lining them up, and shooting them, and everything.

I think we have to look at what's going on there. We have one consideration for these people who are on the evening news, and another one for the people who are in our lives, in that inner circle of our lives. And it, for whatever reason, is easy to take those people on the evening news and pronounce something ugly should happen to them. But that should never happen to these people in our own inner circle. Well, and I'm there to explain, wait a second, it's really the same thing.

I think there's an unfortunate syndrome that many Christians fall prey to, and I'm speaking about my own brothers and sisters. One way or another, I'm still on their side. I still love them. But I got to be honest about what I'm seeing out there. And I think there's an unfortunate tendency to see ourselves, since we've been forgiven, and since we've made some improvements, that we then, therefore, ascended to some lofty position from where we can look down on the rest of humanity and society.

But of all the people who shouldn't be thinking that way, it's got to be us. What I'm saying is grace is the substance of my relationship with God. It's not a cute idea that's thrown in there. It's not just a really nice aspect. It's the stuff of which it's all about.

Ira Glass

Glen Fitzgerald, a missionary with Youth for Christ here in Chicago.

Glen Fitzgerald

A conservative will tell you if this guy did a crime, he's lousy, and something bad should happen to him. A liberal will tell you, this person did a really bad thing, because of their parents mistreating them, and something really bad should happen to their parents. Well, eventually, don't you get tired of being mad?

[MUSIC - "GREYSTONE CHAPEL," JOHNNY CASH]

Act Five: Act Five

Ira Glass

Well, Your Radio Playhouse. Ira Glass here. One sign, perhaps the best sign, of just how widespread in our culture is this idea that we [INTERPOSING MUSIC] When Colin Powell, General Colin Powell, dropped out of the presidential race, on that day in that press conference, he was asked by a reporter, what would you have done if you had become president? And recall, this is a candidate who even was criticized for having views that were so mainstream, so middle of the road, that he alienated no one. So let's listen to what he said.

Colin Powell

Show leadership. Be a conciliator. Move the country forward toward lower government, less government.

Ira Glass

OK, so far we're in pretty standard territory for politicians in this country.

Colin Powell

Put us in a more fiscally responsible platform basis.

Ira Glass

OK, so far absolutely everything is just things you've heard before, very common things in our political culture.

Colin Powell

And try to inspire people. And try to restore a sense of family, restore a sense of shame in our society.

Ira Glass

That's the one that-- when I read in the paper, restore a sense of shame. Clearly, this is at a point where now everyone-- this is widespread enough that he would just say that in an offhand way. And he didn't even have to explain it or bother. Here's what he said next.

Colin Powell

Help bring more civility into our society.

Ira Glass

That's it. Well, at this point in our program, in the interest of equal time, we thought that we would have a story of people who do not have much of a sense of shame in their society, and in fact, are not looking for forgiveness. And in fact, I do not believe would meet the approval of pretty much everybody who we've heard of and heard from so far in the show.

We're talking about sinners, basically. Basically, we've had the good people up until this part. And now, we have the part of the show, in the interest of equal time, where we're going to hear about sinners. And one of the things about sin, besides the fact that many sinners are not seeking forgiveness, one of the things that is often underestimated, is that sin is not easy. Sin is not just all fun and games. And this next little story from Cheryl Trykv is pretty much a vivid illustration of what that means, and what it means when you don't seek any kind of forgiveness.

Cheryl Trykv

Sally calls and says, Pat has just come home with a big bag of P-O-T, and that maybe I should come over for dinner. Yes, I say, maybe I should. What a friendly gesture, I think to myself, as I dash across the park on my way over. I just met Sally and Pat two nights before at an amiable little tavern up the street on Damon. What a night that was, laughing and joking, crazy photo booth sessions, \$<sup>0,00</sup> shots of Jagermeister, and a very generous barkeep Sally seemed to know rather well.

I don't recall much of any conversation that took place that night, just that, well, Sally kept taking off her top, and that everyone was having lots of fun. I cross Damon and turn up Evergreen, where a group of boys wearing Laker jackets man the corner. One of them spits and calls me a yuppie. I'm sure he means this as a joke, so I take no offense. Oh no, I'm quite flattered. He thinks I have insurance, and credit cards, and that I make more than \$<sup>4,000</sup> a year. Still, I wonder if we don't attach different meanings to the word yuppie. Clearly he means one thing. I mean another. The way bitch, to some, does not mean nasty slut, but rather, hello woman.

I'd like to illustrate to the young man that he's made a mistake, that I'm not what he thinks I am. And as a matter of fact, I'm on my way to get high, and quite possibly, we share something of a bond. I turn to him

and say, all bugs are not cockroaches. Stunned by the relative ease my quick wit shows itself, I continue walking and, in the background behind me, hear someone hocking a loogie.

Sally is glad to see me, very glad. For dinner she's made her favorite, noodles with pepper and garlic, lots of pepper, lots of garlic. Pat is glad to see me also but is much less physical about it. No juicy lip kisses from Pat. Just a bare chest with two self-piercing nipple rings, a shaved head, and a downward glance that says, hello woman.

Sally sets the dinner table, while Pat puts on some music, a deep, trans-techno, acid, house, hot mix of apocalyptic wonder with 1^∞ beats per minute. Perfect with dinner. Pat seems like he's glad to see me, but I wonder if his selection in music isn't a thinly veiled attack, manifesting his resentment of my coming over to smoke his dope. Still I present myself as the perfect guest.

Pat, I say, at the dinner, this is a stunning tune. Who is this? Oh, do you like it, he says and turns it up, as if it could go any louder. It's Idiot Bliss. Idiot Bliss, oh. They're knew aren't they? No, Pat says. Well, I've got to stop living with my head in a hole, haven't I?

Sally eats her dinner like a little cat-rabbit, nibbling and licking away. I watch her lick her fingers. She licks her knife, and, after that, she licks the serving spoon. I watch her eat and talk at the same time. I got a letter in the mail today from my friend, Miao, in Seattle, she says. She drinks her wine with little laps of the tongue. And how is Meow, I ask? Not Meow, Pat says. Miao, like ciao. Miao. I beg your pardon, Pat.

From the looks of the apartment, I wouldn't have guessed Pat was such a stickler for detail. Sally says, Miao says that if a spaceship comes down for us, we should get on it, because it will be God come to save us. She says, everyone in Seattle is talking about it. Pat's face will not let up that I've offended his sense of aesthetic. Mistaking Miao for Meow, how could I have been so careless?

I use the notion of God's Holy Spaceship to lure Pat back into the confines of deference and civility. Pat, I say, will you get on God's Holy Spaceship when it comes? Get on it, he says, no. I might get in it, but I'm not riding on top. Sally asks if I will get on God's Holy Spaceship. I tell it depends on who else is getting on. What do you mean, she asks? Well, I'm not going to board willy-nilly, I say. What if my upstairs neighbor gets on? That man raises pit bulls. I'm not getting on with that. I tell her that if I see, say, Oprah Winfrey getting on, I might have a change of heart. Pat says, he would rather get on the superhighway and meet God there on own, rather than get on the spaceship, which like the bus, will only be a breeding ground for TB.

He says, the spaceship will be for people who don't have computers, and that he will have his by the time God comes. He says, definitely, he will not get on God's Holy Spaceship if Rush Limbaugh is on. On the spaceship or on TV, I ask? Pat looks at me as though there were a horrible smell coming from my direction. Sally says, she will not get on God's Holy Spaceship if there is anything on TV, because that would mean that someone would still be left on Earth, and that she, Sally, would want to be the very last, last person to board God's Holy Spaceship.

She asks, what if I can't see that Oprah already has her seat? This little game of, what if, is starting to depress me, and I announce to the table that I will not be boarding God's Holy Spaceship at all. Pat passes from behind me on his way into the kitchen and detectably mutters, as if anyone cares.

What do you mean, you won't be getting on God's Spaceship, Sally asks. There is an element of fear in her concern for my salvation. I tell her, I mean that if Wicker Park gets on God's Holy Spaceship, I won't be. But nobody else would be here, Sally deduces. You'd have to get high all by yourself. Yes. But if nobody were left in Wicker Park, you'd have to go all the way to Humboldt Park to get your dope.

I tell her if there were no one in Wicker Park, then I'd be high on life, and I wouldn't need a bag of dope. Sally is offended by this somehow. And I spend after dinner time in the kitchen helping with dishes as a gesture of goodwill and gratitude for the future bowl of hooch we will share in the living room, after I have persuaded Pat to change the music.

I ask Sally probing questions about her childhood and family. I feign interest in her affairs, her many, many affairs, one right after another. An endless stream of half-night romances with this bartender, that bartender, this cab driver, that cab driver, this paramedic, that paramedic. I imagine Sally's service is readily available to any adventurous commuter on God's Holy Spaceship who would offer her a smile.

You're crazy about God's Spaceship Cheryl, she says. You better get on with God. I imagine Sally getting on with God. I follow her into the living room where Pat hangs like a bat from a bar on the rack off the ceiling. I wonder why he's doing this just after eating. Sally and I sit on the couch. She picks up the classified section of the Reader and scans the personals leisurely but with intent.

I wonder why she's invited me over. Where was this alleged bag of P-O-T? I light cigarettes to drop the hint that something needed to get burning. I dropped the hint that I had very bad, bad cramps. Sally asks Pat to get me some Advil from the bathroom. You get it, he says, I'm hanging. You get it, Pat, Sally says, I'm reading.

Pat crunches himself up quickly 〇• times before disengaging himself from the rack. He executes a midair flip to get down and tells me I wouldn't have such bad cramps if I got more exercise. I follow him to the bathroom, which has no door on it. A beach towel drapes the entrance. He pops the top off the Advil container and asks how many, one or two? ʘ.

In the living room, Pat changes the music to something a little more subtle, ambient industry noise. Cheryl darling, will you get me Pat's jacket from the coat tree in the hall? Yes, pet, of course. A shift is taking place, we are rounding the bend. I pretend I don't know or care that Sally must be sending me to retrieve something very special from Pat's jacket. I pretend it's the farthest thing from my mind that I am about to get very, very high. Pat's jacket, in the hall? I don't see it. Oh, this jacket?

Sally takes the jacket and pulls out what I have been waiting for. Oh, yes. She tells me it's hydroponic and that a little goes a long way. I understand. She pinches off a bit of it for the bong, a four foot water pipe the landlord, Sally tells me, left over during one of his last project days a month ago.

Cheryl darling, she says again, as if the use of darling could make any more attractive what she was about to offer me. Yes, pet? Did you know a dog will lick for hours anything spread with peanut butter? Her pretty little pixie face stuns me. Really? Peanut butter, fascinating. Oh yes, she says. Bundy, she calls. And from the other room jogs in a black dog, with a mix of doberman and rottweiler.

I watch Sally light and suck up the bong. She holds it in and blows it out all over Bundy's face. Hello boy, she says, and lets him wash her face with dog kisses. Cheryl darling, she says again. Yes, pet. I'm not going to get you high until you promise to get on with me and God in the spaceship.

I should have seen it coming. Oh, pet. Are we still on that tired routine? Pat sits in an armchair, reading with focus and vigor the pages of an Interview magazine. With his fixed gaze, he strikes an uncanny resemblance to Captain Picard deep in thought. I try not to look at him or the beautiful bud Sally has placed in a Ricola tin on the coffee table. I try not to think of myself on God's Holy Spaceship with Sally as my bunk mate, the endless nights up talking, giggling, Sally recounting the many stewards she had screwed that day. How could it get any worse? I wonder if sometimes I am too much of a snob. Well, why wouldn't Sally make a wonderful bunk mate? All bugs are not cockroaches, all bugs are not cockroaches, I think to myself. Oh, pet, really. Well, if it'll make you happy. Good, Sally says. Pat will you bring me the jar of Skippy from the kitchen? I want to show Cheryl something.

Ira Glass

Cheryl Trykv performing at the Hothouse, back in the day.

Credits

Ira Glass

Our show is produced by Peter Clowney, Delores Wilber, Nancy Updike, Alix Spiegel, and myself. And contributing editors are Jack Hitt, Margy Rochlin, and Paul Tough. We broadcast from WBEZ in Chicago.

Hey, you know, let's get some music up here. Hold on. Let's hear you little music. There we go.

We broadcast from WBEZ Chicago. Now to review our little contest that we announced at the beginning of the show. You are to use all of the words that are seen as desirable words in referring to Democrats. You are to use them all in one sentence, those words. If you have pencil and paper they are, sick, traitors, corrupt, bizarre, cheat, steal, devour, self-serving, and criminal rights. And also get the word Democrat in there, will you please?

And the address to send that to, Your Radio Playhouse WBEZ, ^ε^ East Grand Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 7.777. Our email address for this very contest, or anything else you want to say, radio@well.com.

[ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS]