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about 900 words

Make Love, Not Pickleball

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It's been a few years since the country was turned over to a sociopathic dictator. The dystopian nightmare has been realized. Currency has been replaced by a crypto card, doubling as a personal ID. People are allotted monetary value based on their political servitude to the leader. Each citizen must wear a ring that transmits data to a governmental department. It also tracks women's ovulation status and if they become pregnant. That status is forwarded to a local police station for interrogations.

Most Latinos have been deported or put into camps. African Americans have also been downgraded to second-class status. Only Caucasian people are free to travel, purchase luxury items, or have children. The dictator has recruited people from Nordic countries to live here, giving them tax breaks and homes once owned by the liberal elite. So, places like Palo Alto, Beverly Hills and La Jolla have been repopulated.

The government control is overwhelming. Women are prohibited from sex outside of marriage and abortion is illegal unless of course, the woman is part of the second-class population; then abortion is enforced in a designated medical camp.

Since the inauguration, the leader withdrew our membership in NATO, leaving the European countries to defend themselves from Russian aggression and Iranian cyberattacks. Attacks on Poland and Moldova are in progress. Millions of people in Europe are emigrating to countries like Switzerland, Norway and Sweden. Germany is fighting to stop a right-wing candidate from staging a coup. Thousands of Americans are moving to Canada daily, eating Tim Horton's donuts and watching hockey 24/7.

Pickleball has become a national sport. Each adult must play daily. The ring transmits scores to a government database. Each time you win, your currency allotment is increased. So, it has turned from a friendly exercise pastime for seniors into a blood sport that rewards aggression and bullying.

However, one resistance movement was led by a group of seniors from the 1960s hippy subculture. Their headquarters is in Berkeley, where so many liberal protests began. They fashion their rebellion after the Star Wars characters. They even celebrate May 4th in costume.

Many of the old crew were there: Jimi, Janice, Tim, and Carole. They met at Alice's diner because it was fully stocked. The jukebox was filled with classic rock hits,

the themes from the Superman and Mission Impossible movies, Dream is Collapsing by Hans Zimmer, and Discombobulate from Sherlock Holmes. Finally, they have repurposed The Imperial March from Star Wars because they have become the resistance.

Fortunately, the resistance had thousands of tech-savvy professionals. Their goal was to disrupt that evil government's goals while staying under the radar. They stayed in touch with Alice's diner through a sophisticated, stealth server, *deus ex machina*. They hacked the government servers, sent self-destructive communications among the rulers and created chaos everywhere. They even created an online television channel, *Woodstock*, that refuted propaganda and exposed the lies. The access for this channel was highly secured and only given to people loyal to the resistance. The government couldn't find it or shut it down. So, it was the one tool the resistance had to fight back.

Janice called a meeting.

"We must find a way to overthrow this evil. Defending ourselves is not enough."

Jimi agreed.

"We need a new anthem, something to rally the resistance. I've been working on it."

Tim nodded.

"Yes, an anthem is a universal statement, something we can hum to ourselves even if we are in custody."

Carole spoke next.

"It's not too late. We mustn't give up hope."

Alice overheard the conversation.

“Could we get help from England or Australia? They are strong democracies, at least for now.”

“The government tracks all communications to democracies. They would discover our movement.”

Tim had a thought.

“Maybe we could spike the drinks of government officials with LSD or another mind-altering substance. That would at least cloud their brains.”

Alice chimed in.

“A tablet, like a fizzy, colorless and odorless, dropped into their alcohol and soft drinks. We can call it an energy booster.”

Carole smiled.

“Our ex-pats in Canada can manufacture it and deliver it through an underground railroad. And we’ll need a marketing plan to advertise the benefits of, hmm. What should we call it?”

Jimi had it.

“How about Tang, the old astronaut drink? That should obscure the nefarious intent.”

Everyone nodded and smiled.

“What about a side effect, something that would upset them even more?”

“If Tang also caused impotence, along with the acid trip. They wouldn’t realize they had been drugged and we can go on peacefully living our best 60s lives.”

So the Canadian ex-pats created Tang, sent it to the states and distributed it in places the evil officials visited: bars, strip clubs, and Republican functions. Soon, their reign of terror began to crumble.

Woodstock programming was also working. People realized the evil the country was in and began resisting, even in minor ways, giving tips to waiters or being kind to service workers. That helped the second-class citizens to unite.

The government leaders began to fall. They stayed home drinking whiskey with a Tang booster and gave up their plans for world domination.

And they couldn't make love or play Pickleball anymore!

Bio and picture for publication:

Jerry Guarino's short stories have been published by dozens of magazines in the United States, Canada, Australia and Great Britain. His latest book, "Café Stories: west coast stories", is available on Amazon.com and as a Kindle eBook. Please visit his website at <http://cafestories.net>

