

We, the Haters

By: Greg Westfall

I have a friend who is a roofer. He has been blue collar his entire life. He also plays guitar and sings. That's how we know each other. He is also a Republican. Actually, that's not exactly accurate. He is a "Glenn Beck-912-Tea Party-protect our borders, we're about to be overrun!-all hail state's rights!" Republican. Here in Tarrant County, we have quite a few of them. They appear in our jury panels everyday.

I have always been very baffled by people like my friend - conservative, straight-ticket Republican voters with blue collar jobs. It's not like he sees eye to eye with the conservative social agenda. To the extent he does speak about politics (which, I guess, is pretty much all the time) he is talking about economics and ideology. He hates taxes. He hates illegal immigrants. He hates Obama. He hates Obamacare. He hates liberal activist judges (he really uses that term). He hates. He hates. He hates.

It's easy for someone like Ted Nugent (who my friend thinks an awful lot of) to have opinions like this. He's filthy rich and has figured out how to parlay his political views into dollars - kind of like Sean Hannity, but with long, scraggly hair, a machine gun and a barely-legal girlfriend. But my friend is a *roofer*. If he got hurt on his job, he would surely be victimized a second time by whatever insurance company covered his claim - an insurance company he has aided and abetted with his votes and views.

I really do like this guy. We have been friends for ten years. But he's a Hater.

Hating is really in fashion. And no wonder - there are so many ways to express it these days. Long gone is the time when we were admonished that if we didn't have something nice to say then we should say nothing at all. Don't worry about that. Today, if we feel like really going off on someone, we can log on to the internet and leave comments after stories or reply to blogs. And the greatest thing of all, it can all be done in exquisite anonymity. We can comment without using our name. We can even use an avatar! After all, hatred feels the best when done in secrecy with like-minded individuals.

All this gives hatred an outlet, the ability to exercise. Anything gets more powerful with use. Hatred is no exception. We have to be able to exercise our hatred to really keep it strong. And it seems we are more free to hate today than ever before.

Oh, don't get me wrong. I'm no Ghandi. I can hate alongside the best of them. Right now, though, most of the hatred out there is directed at the little guys - immigrants, poor people, religious minorities - the very people we most often represent. Oh, there's a little bit of righteous indignation being directed at Wall Street and the folks who brought you what promises to be the worst oil spill in our Country's history, but that's nothing compared to the hatred directed downhill. The recent law in Arizona is a fine example.

Lots of great comments on the internet about that one. But the "hatred of the little guy" thing has never really appealed to me. And that is what is mostly in fashion these days.

Alas, the fashion today is pretty much the same as it has been for most of our Country's history. Slavery and Segregation. Red Scares. What we did to the Native Americans. Persecution of immigrants and Jews in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Persecution of immigrants and Muslims in the 21st. The death penalty. There's always been plenty of hate to go around.

It's amazing that through all of this, somehow, we have managed to come up with one of the best judicial systems on the planet, given that so much of it relies on juries. In "To Kill a Mockingbird," Harper Lee wrote, "Our courts have their faults, as does any human institution, but in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal." That's true, of course, except when it isn't. Needless to say, there has been a lot of injustice that has happened in our courts as "To Kill a Mockingbird" goes on to demonstrate.

But it really does seem like in court everyone has at least a *shot* at equality and it's because of juries rather than despite them. The longer I practice, the more I have come to believe this is true. There are "not guilty" verdicts rendered in Tarrant County virtually every week by honest-to-God *juries*. How does that happen in a land so apparently drenched in hatred? Perhaps We the Haters are just on our best behavior in court. Somehow in the courtroom, a lot of times we do just seem to rise above it.

Ironically, my buddy the roofer will never be a part of the powerful interests he so ardently supports. Nor will I, but just for different reasons.

Ah, common ground.