

## KAREN'S KORNER

BY KAREN DUMS | DUMSKAREN57@YAHOO.COM

### Picture this

I truly enjoy looking through old photographs. However, it makes me sad when I pull a really interesting one out of an old album and there's no information written on the back, or even a date of when it was taken.

We have to guess by situation, clothing or hairstyle what the date might be and then wonder: Is it some relative we've never met shown there in those sepia tones? Or is a good friend of one of our ancestors. I laugh at the ones that have something unintelligible (to me at least) scribbled on the back. Did a cousin Cora even exist? Or does that say

Carol? What I find most interesting is the resemblances between people from one generation to another.

It follows of course, since we are bits and pieces of multiple generations. Generations can not only define our look, but also our gestures. It must be carried in our genetic code because oftentimes we'll have the head tilt or the talking with our hands habit passed down from those we've never even met.

My dear old dad talked with his hands.

Same here. My brothers and I tend to take after mom's side of the family in looks and coloring. My sisters bear more resemblance to dad's. In my grandpa and grandma Seifert's wedding photo my younger sister could be a stand-in for Grandma Lilly. They were nearly identical looking at age 19. My sisters are (or were in the case of my older sister who is now gray) blonde, with the paler skin tones and



lighter eyes of dad's side. These tidbits of heredity interest me, and yet I have no desire to obtain a DNA kit. As if. Most recently I was sorting through a tote of my mother-in-law's photos that had somehow not been put back

where I thought and thus it was overlooked. The younger generation in the pics were all familiar, but there were some golden oldies mixed in that neither Rick nor I could identify.

Rick never knew his grandparents as they passed on before he was born. So he'd love to know if any of these folks are from his maternal side. Unfortunately, no hints are given. But they're still fun to look at — and we can't help but wonder what folks 100 years or so down the road will make of OUR clothing trends and hairstyles. But the way 'everything old becomes new again,' maybe the styles will have come back around and be much the same in fashion as the present day.

There is one thing I've noticed with Rick's family that is very cool and much appreciated.

His dad's side of the family had many professional photos taken and in these photos the folks are identified. Yay. Family pictures with his great-grandparents and their children; his grandmother with his mom and dad and his older siblings. Fine wedding portraits and first communion portraits and confirmation portraits.

In my family the professional photos were taken when my sibs and I were infants and again when we graduated high school. In between are amateur snaps with a little Brownie camera, then a Kodak or maybe a Polaroid. Simple slices of life.

Yes, I do enjoy looking backward sometimes. Recalling where we came from can often help us get where we're supposed to be going. Huh. Picture that.



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## Conspiracies or disinformation plots?

BY ARNOLD OLIVER

Some time ago, several millennia in fact, a wise man known as Confucius admonished the Chinese people to "call things by their proper names" in order to better perceive and grapple with reality, and to avoid disorder. It is said that he was among the first to understand the importance of language in politics.

If he were still around he might well have plenty to say about the English language in general, and our political lexicon in particular. A number of the terms commonly used in American politics conceal more than they reveal and seem almost designed to confuse. One of the more confusing political terms out there is "conspiracy theory."

Why this matters: Many people are confused about what "conspiracy theories" are, how they originate, and how they are spread. Partly as a result, millions of Americans live in a dark fantasy world as a result of their misunderstanding of the nature of the information that they receive. Consequently, our tired old democracy is in peril.

Let us deconstruct the term "conspiracy theory," explain why it is confusing, suggest a common sense alternative, and outline the information crisis that we face.

Oxford provides us with a standard definition of conspiracy theory, which is, "a belief that some covert but influen-

tial organization is responsible for a circumstance or event."

That is fine as far as it goes, but it does not help us to understand where those beliefs originate. It is as if conspiracy theories spring from out in the ether somewhere, and there are no human agents responsible for them. But that is not the case: Nearly all conspiracy theories are the deliberate creations of individuals, groups, and sometimes governments seeking to confuse, stoke fear and obscure the truth.

The use of the word "theory" in the phrase is similarly problematic. A theory is a proposition that can be tested against reality, or by experiment. The great majority of theories are developed in good faith with no intent to mislead. It is rare to encounter a theory that is almost entirely devoid of testable propositions, and blatantly false, unlike most of what are called conspiracy theories.

Further, the word "conspiracy" generally connotes an activity by at least several people to secretly commit an illegal act. But most of the vile rumors advanced by right-wing influencers and Q-Anon types, as vicious as they are, are not against the law.

Therefore, in the Confucian spirit, allow me to offer an alternative phrase that represents a deliberate effort to disseminate untruthful information aimed to instill hatred, fear and divisiveness.

I suggest that we go with

"disinformation plot" as a preferred alternative to conspiracy theory.

Disinformation is created purposefully. Its origins are not mysterious and can be understood. It is false information created deliberately in order to mislead. (This is not the same as "misinformation," which is incorrect information believed or spread without necessarily malicious intent.)

Disinformation plots would not matter very much were they not believed by millions of people, including Americans, with dire consequences. The claim that there is a secret Democratic party pedophile cabal that murders and eats children has been promoted by Q-Anon and others who know quite well that it is a monstrous lie. But it is nonetheless apparently accepted as truth by millions. This and other false beliefs have already led to violence, with more sure to follow.

While there are many sensible conservatives out there, the facts are that conservatives are more likely to believe disinformation, create it, and pass it onward. There is very little on the left side of the political spectrum resembling Alex Jones, Donald Trump or Q-Anon for sheer disregard for truth and evidence. The left side of the political spectrum is also vulnerable to disinformation, but not to the same degree.

Many disinformation plots originate and are boosted by

foreign governments, among the most pernicious of which are those aimed at weakening Americans' faith in their electoral system or sowing skepticism about the Covid pandemic and science's response to it. It has been established that the government of Russia has employed such disinformation plots against the United States.

The US government has also launched disinformation campaigns against other countries for many years. As long as our own government engages in those sorts of practices we hardly have standing to complain when other nations do it to us as well. Covert info wars that are aimed at weakening a country's independence and institutions are wrong whoever makes use of them.

Speaking of InfoWars, it now seems likely that Alex Jones will pay a heavy price for his vicious lies about the Sandy Hook massacre families, as will some of those who have defamed voting machine manufacturers. Let us cheer when disinformation plots are prosecuted in courts of law, and penalties imposed. Other malicious disinformation plotters also need to be brought to justice.

If Confucius were still around, I am pretty sure he would approve.

Dr. Arnold Oliver, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Emeritus Professor of Political Science, Heidelberg University, Ohio.

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