

## Shop till you drop....NOT!

by Glen Birbeck

I like the logical construct, "the gun is always loaded." I like it because it forces logic where emotion might lead to bad outcomes. If you treat it as always loaded you've reduced the possibility of inadvertent injury or death enormously. Not eliminated totally, but reduced by orders of magnitude, hundreds or thousands of times. Life is statistical. Its odds for and against things good and bad. Improving your chance of avoiding the bad is a good idea.

"What's all this about guns?", you inquire, "I thought you were talking about shopping!" Yes, I am, risky shopping, shopping with other people. "Oh, more Corona stuff", you say, rolling your eyes. Sorry, yes Covid, Corona... I'm tired of it too. I'm weary of dealing with it, of thinking about it, of cartooning about it. But just as being tired while driving increases your odds of becoming a statistic, being tired of Corona (to the point of ignoring safeguards) could land you among Maine CDC's Covid stats. The loaded gun in this analogy would be the the asymptomatic spreader. Its that shopper next to you who feels fine, never felt better, but who is shedding virus like a nine alarm fire. It's the person who just tested negative. True, the test gives 30% false negatives. Wana play Russian roulette with a revolver that's empty 70% of the time? To me, Russian roulette looks pretty good, compared to catching Pneumonia and coughing to death. I had pneumonia once, I recall not enjoying it at all. I thought, this is how I'm going to die.

So I've decided to suppress my (physical) shopping instinct. Hard to do. Step one, I signed up with Instacart. Two hours later two sacks of realized virtual vittles landed in my garage. I waved at Dave, the delivery guy, from a safe social distance. For \$80 in groceries, \$8 went to Dave including tip. Instacart got \$4. I saved an hour of my time, wear and tear on the vehicle, gas, risk on the road and risk in the store. It gives Dave a job too. Oh you can tip more than the 5% I gave Dave. Instacart conveniently held \$110 on the card for a \$92 total. This so I could bump Dave's tip. Well, Dave might have driven through a snow storm to reach me. Am I so callus that I'd tip just 5% for Dave's risking his life for my wheel of brie? With just a mouse click I can tip a more noble 25%.

It is truly a new world anymore, isn't it?

## Paul Chartrand reports from Paris

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## Down Main Street with Phil Groce Wider Vision

Because of Covid, you can't just walk into Sidecountry Sports and look for boots, or skis, or bikes, but you can make an appointment; and you can order at the table set up outside. Andrew Dailey, co-owner along with Brian Kelly, says that all the stores and restaurants downtown along Main need to girdle themselves for the winter, or else there will be massive permanent closures. "It's going to take some 'outside the box' thinking to save the businesses," Andrew declares.

Andrew and Brian started what is now Sidecountry Sports nine years ago after BikesenJava went out of business. Andrew had gone through school in the area and graduated from Camden-Rockport high school. His career there emphasized outdoor sports—golfing, biking, skiing. Thereafter, he graduated from Lyndon State College in Vermont with two majors: business and ski resort management.

After college, he took off for the West and ended up teaching skiing in Colorado. He later joined a firm in Scottsdale, AZ as Director of Corporate Communications for an association of large hotels, many international. He traveled on business to Europe frequently, and particularly to Budapest, Hungary.

"It had been quite a learning curve for me," he said, "but my boss was patient, really intelligent, and he taught me so much. I was lucky. After 5 years, with the business running well, the 911 attack caused a downturn in the hotel industry, and we sold the business to the Radisson Hotel group."

Andrew, freed of a job, kicked around AZ for a while before he decided to return home. He worked for BikesenJava as a mechanic and also served as the Snow Bowl's director for marketing and ran the ski school. He married, and they now have two children in school and his wife, Nell, teaches at the high school.

How did you become a bike mechanic? "I picked up a lot along the way, but both Brain and I attended UBI [United Bike Institute] in Oregon. Brian had been living in New Mexico, and he had worked in ski retail. When he returned to Maine he started and owned a ski shop in sublated space in Bikesenjava. We worked in the same businesses when the opportunity to open Sidecountry Sports came along."

I wanted to know what might be special about the business he and Brian run. "We want to give back as much as we can to the community with trail development and access to outdoor spaces for skiing and biking. We also want to provide stable full-time employment to our great staff. Even during the pandemic, we continue to provide full-time work for our shop employees.

"We are lucky to have such fine professional workers. We now have nine full-time employees—2 to 3 each day in sales, and 2 to 3 a day working as mechanics or ski technicians. A lot of the staff are interchangeable and can-do multiple jobs. In the Spring, Summer and Fall we deal with all kinds of bikes from your family bikes to high-end full suspension mountain bikes. In winter we specialize in boot fitting and a wide variety of skis and snowboards. It's fun, and everyone works together. Brian and I feel humbled by the good work of our employees.

"The business has grown, and we have capable staff to run the retail side of the business. We now can work to develop bike trails. At the Snow Bowl we run the ski shop during the winter and the trail bike store in the summer. The trails around the Snow Bowl tend to be more technical, but we are interested in developing bike trails for families. We have teamed with the Georges River Land Trust and developed trails in the Thomaston Town Forest. That's going through the roof in popularity. Our business has donated \$10,000 a year for the last two years to the effort. People can access the trails at the end of Booker Street from a parking lot there. The bike trail starts just off the hiking trail."

I said to him that Maine looks really good right now. "People are moving to the area," he replied. "Real estate prices are going up, and houses are selling quickly. Getting access for recreation is the key, and that's why we are working with the Land Trust.

"Speaking of roads," he said, "Main Street, right here, is so busy, and as you can see, the two lanes of north-bound Route 1 have morphed into one lane with barriers so the restaurants can have outside dining because of Covid. I think the one lane is good, and the traffic is slower. It has been scary in the North End with two lanes. I've seen so many accidents. If they want to continue with one lane, they should put in diagonal parking to increase capacity."

What about deliveries? "I know that's a problem, but there could be delivery zones, but even more parking areas have to be added. Just slow the traffic—that's the big deal—and allow the sidewalks to be vibrant.

"The gigantic tax increases this year doubled our taxes—not incremental—all at once. It's tough, and we own our building. Come next spring, we are definitely going to see many empty business spaces—like so many downtowns throughout the country. Even in Portland, I've heard that one third of the restaurants are going to close. That's a big deal for Portland.

"One of the reasons we are stressing outdoor recreation development is that not only do we want to see it, but it is essential when people start moving here from away. People with families are now able to work from their homes. Outdoor recreation needs development, and I think that will help all of us. But RIGHT NOW, downtown, as well as the rest of Rockland, need innovative help. Innovative, not return to 'normal.'"



## European Confinement, Phase 2

by Paul Chartrand

"There you go again....," as Ronald Reagan said to Jimmy Carter in their famous 1980 debate. And here we go again, into uncharted territory with Covid 19 on the edge of winter. Cases in Europe have been rising quickly since August, but with fewer hospitalizations and deaths than in the spring. These last grim statistics are now catching up with cases; governments can no longer ignore them. Most European countries have launched new efforts to restrict movement and gatherings.

Over the summer and early fall in France, large events like the Tour de France, Le Mans Grand Prix and the French Open were allowed with some restrictions, as well as many smaller controlled events. Limited tourism came and went quickly, with hardly any crowding. A Paris open for business but without lines this summer had advantages for some of us, but many also became more relaxed about social distance and protection.

Pres. Macron spoke about Covid to France on TV last week for the first time since May or June. He did all he could to ignore it for the summer, concentrating on other matters and leaving health announcements to his new Prime Minister Jean Castex. In June Macron fired Edouard Philippe, who had perhaps become too popular and trusted after leading us through the spring covid crisis. Too bad, I kind of liked Philippe's odd looking beard and his abrupt manner.

Last Thursday night it was le President himself who acknowledged that Covid was "everywhere" and growing again. With well over 20,000 new cases per day nationwide lately, hospital staff and intensive care units are again under pressure. He believes 3-5,000 new cases daily is "sustainable," but changes must be made to get there again. "We cannot be inactive, nor must we panic," he said. I wish he had been more active and sooner. Delays to get tested and get results here can still be incredibly long, and N95 type masks are nowhere to be found. This is over six months into the Covid experience and many are disappointed in this lack of progress on certain fronts.

All citizens pretty much everywhere here are required and wear masks when outside the home, unless exercising or walking in rural areas. Large events over 1000 persons and small events of over 10 persons have been shut down for a few weeks, as have bars in many cities. Thus beginning last Saturday, on only two days notice, Paris and eight other urban areas have had a 9pm curfew or "couvre-feu" for 6 weeks. This WW2 term for a blackout expresses the gravity of such a measure for french cities and continues Macron's language of a "war on Covid".

There are few exceptions permitted and police controls will administer \$150 fines to anyone caught breaking curfew without written authorization, as they did during the spring lockdown. Most restaurants do not even open here until 7:30pm, so a 9pm curfew will effectively shut down many unless they do mostly takeout. "A shutdown disguised as a curfew" is how the hospitality trade views this. "He is paralyzing the country due to lack of space in hospitals!" said another group, clearly reminding us of last year's heated opposition from hospital staff to health budget cuts. Opposition leftist Jean-Luc Melancon said "Welcome to Absurdity!" after hearing the speech last week.

The next day, even some of the Macron team backed off a little, and final rules were tweaked a little. When asked last week if folks would be allowed to return home from an engagement that ends at 9pm, Macron said "Sure, if they live next door to the cinema or restaurant! If not, they better consider leaving at 8:30." City mayors and business owners convinced the government to accept a cinema or theater ticket with an event time before 9pm as enough justification to get home soon afterwards.

On Friday last week, without any coordination with other government actions or decisions, officers from an independent review board used warrants to enter the homes and offices of past and present health ministers and directors, as well as the past Prime Minister. An investigation is underway to determine if anyone involved in past government virus decisions avoided using information they had for the public good. Certainly this is partly a political effort, but it also reflects the general distrust and disappointment with Macron's past decisions and results on Covid 19. The President cannot be accused of such errors in judgement, but his ministers may be.

Macron appealed last week to the French sense of unity in crisis that was evident this spring. The curfew was implemented and accepted with some minor adjustments, in hopes of a virus slowdown. No one wants to see health care system under the pressure we saw earlier this year, with an additional winter flu threat ahead. On the first night of this curfew, last Saturday I returned home on foot slightly after 9pm, after enjoying what may have been a last evening concert and meal for a few mos. The streets and the bridge from Paris were extremely quiet for Saturday night; there were very few folks out. Restaurants and trains had begun emptying at 8:30 without any visible enforcement. It looks quietly successful, this "couvre-feu." The French love to argue and complain about the government, but they have learned the value of sacrifice for the general good over many generations of war and disorder.

Also on Friday after Macron's curfew announcement last week, junior high social studies teacher Samuel Paty was brutally murdered on a street near his school outside Paris, on the way home for the two week fall vacation. He had previously shown cartoon caricatures of the prophet Muhammed to his class on freedom of expression, after inviting students to look away if they preferred. A student and her parents objected publicly on social media, quickly gathering attention. The result was this murder by an 18yr old man who had had no previous contact with the student's family, the teacher or the school before complaints were posted on line. A horrible reminder of how quickly emotions spread online, and that freedom of expression is not shared by all citizens of the Fifth French Republic. A government crackdown is under way on groups or individuals that fomented hatred of the teacher online,

## WEEK THIRTY-TWO

COVID-19 RANDOM NOTES WHILE SHELTERING IN PLACE  
by Phyllis Merriam

Broken Wing and her just grown crow brood can teach us all how to handle bullies.

Courage is the operative word. This is true as well for humans experiencing bullying. At first, the young crows were very intimidated by a seagull. They backed off and discovered the gull was eating most of their breakfast I provide. But they just accepted the bullying. Gradually the crows followed their mother's courageous example and have successfully fended off gull bullying by standing their ground from the especially aggressive seagull. I haven't seen any gulls here for two weeks.

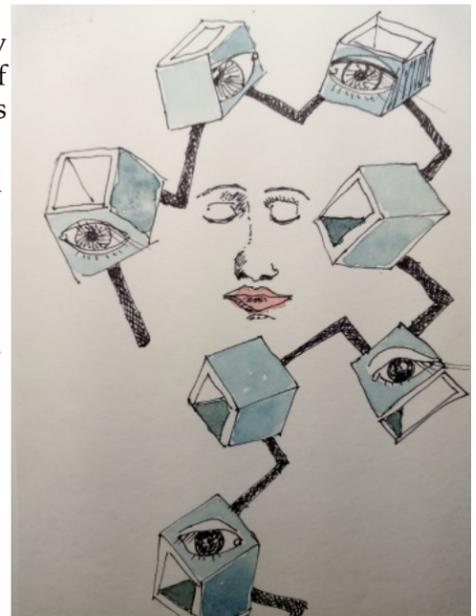
Five O'clock Shadows: No matter their height or heft, people walking around five in the evening create very thin and very elongated shadows they can't catch up with.

I've been thinking a lot about all the national and worldwide chaos during this very peculiar time in history: the mutating pandemic; cases rising here, in the south, northeast and especially the mid-west, and Europe; social unrest; right wing fanatics planning to kidnap the Michigan and Virginia governors; the president on dexta's; climate change sparking western wildfires displacing thousands; the rise in white supremacy groups; the general election; the president flogging election fraud conspiracy theories; no corona stimulus package to help the neediest; dire financial predictions; huge rise in gun purchases; 8 months on there are still mask-resisters.

I like to think I'm coping pretty well with covid until I notice I'm unconsciously clenching my teeth and there are furrows between my eyes. Instead of anxiety, I think I'm feeling angry and defiant at an impending covid winter. I do eat healthy food, get outside into nature and find anything funny helpful, especially that which is politically incorrect. (My new fav video is the clip from Borat's October 23rd film where he's wearing a Trump fat suit and prosthetic mask, carrying a female mannequin and calling out to VP Pence who is speaking at a conservative convention.) But I dismiss meditation and yoga. Generally, I've fallen asleep during meditation. Or contrary to the practice, I cannot wait to get up to do something, anything. I'm just contrary. Mostly I hate yoga. However, of all the Asana, I do like the Tree Pose (Vrksasana) for my balance, which, so far, is great.

Most fall leaves this year are dull and scrunched up before the wind carries them away into dry piles along the streets. The few local exceptions are fiery Red Maples that leave me breathless with their bold beauty. In my childhood I loved the smoky perfume of burning leaves. (Local safety ordinances don't permit leaf pile burnings.)

A peregrine falcon has been observed at the top of the Mechanic Street cement towers. They like high places like cliffs, tall buildings and bridges from which to hunt prey such as our local pigeons. They are the fastest birds with diving speeds up to 200 m.p.h. This falcon may be the American peregrine or a transient, migratory Tundra peregrine. I have no birding expertise but to me the falcon has such mesmerizing mystery, wildness and power.



assisted the assassin or otherwise recently spread messages encouraging punishment for "blasphemy."

As I wrote this Weds evening the 21st, a national non-religious funeral service with high honors was under way for Samuel Paty at the Sorbonne, for centuries the French center of learning and humanism. He is also being awarded the National Legion of Honor Medal. The service is being led by the President and attended by past President Hollande, as well as hundreds of invited teachers, students, friends and family. The safety and value of learning and freedom of expression are strong currents in french history and social life.

A final update on Thursday the 22nd: the Prime Minister added most of France to the high risk zone so now about 70% of the population is under curfew, set for 9pm-6am each night. There is some talk of extending the curfew to 7pm but so far it remains at 9pm. A 7pm curfew would really crimp whatever is left of life after work, and work itself for many in the hospitality or entertainment worlds.

President Macron will have a lot on his agenda this winter, including a future decision on whether to postpone next March's regional elections to avoid crowds. But this Fall, the only election being watched is the one in which Buzz readers will soon participate. Vote as though your life depends on it.

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