

# A Grumpy Old Imagination

By Dennis Knight

The hostess paused at his table of women and men, all senior citizens. "Is everything GREAT for YOU GUYS this morning?" A testy retort caught in his wheezy old breath, and she was out of sight before he could reach his cane. Curtis realized he would soon qualify for the badge of a Curmudgeon. He would pin it to his suspenders.

If the badge is a license to be a grumpy old man, he could do it with alacrity, and you'd better watch out, but he would resist any expectation to wind down. He was already working on another badge, the lofty rank of Imagineer.

He thought of the role of imagination and remembered when Lewis Carroll took him through the looking glass to see Wonderland. Theodor Seuss Geisel feted him with green eggs and ham, and Frank Baum delivered him to Oz via the tornado express.

Even as a first grader, Curtis would get so deeply and quietly lost in his imagination that his first grade teacher would have to touch his shoulder gently to draw him back. Adults called it daydreaming, which he learned when his parents came back from parent-teacher conferences. It is a trait that has possessed him for a lifetime.

Curtis can be happy reading clouds in the sky or dreaming of rainbow trout in deep pools at the edge of a swift mountain stream. But this morning he reflected on the optimism of that great imagineer, Martin Luther King, Jr. and how his dreams sprouted and grew over decades to see the election of the first black president of the United States. Great things can come from great imaginations. His reverie deepened and continued.

Imagine a climate healthy enough to grow in. The rule has always been so obvious. Use but don't abuse. But mankind has abused, and now it falls to us to manage and nurture what is left. Imagine the possibilities if we don't.

Imagine a society safe enough to walk in. Gunpowder should be for fireworks in the sky, ammunition for sport, weapons for police, national defense, and that's about it. Does the concealment of guns in the purses and pockets of anonymous people, ostensibly for self protection, give us comfort or discomfort?

Imagine a world without want. Couldn't the very rich realize even higher success by empowering those who struggle? And do it freely and without judgment, for the rightness of it and not just for the tax deductions?

And imagine a world without war. Would it happen if ideological, religious and nationalist zealots who monger war for profit and power could imagine what they might gain from waging peace?

Curtis reached for his coffee. It was cold. His companions had left the café, and the waitress was nowhere in sight. Where had the time gone? The skeptical old agnostic realized he had spent the morning in his imagination, and reflecting on that absorbed him in yet another question. Had he been praying?