

2022 Posts

Like 2021, there were not a lot of posts in 2022, due in part to the Covid shadow and in part to a disenchantment with my blog service provider. No posts in the latter half resulted. Here are the seven survivors.

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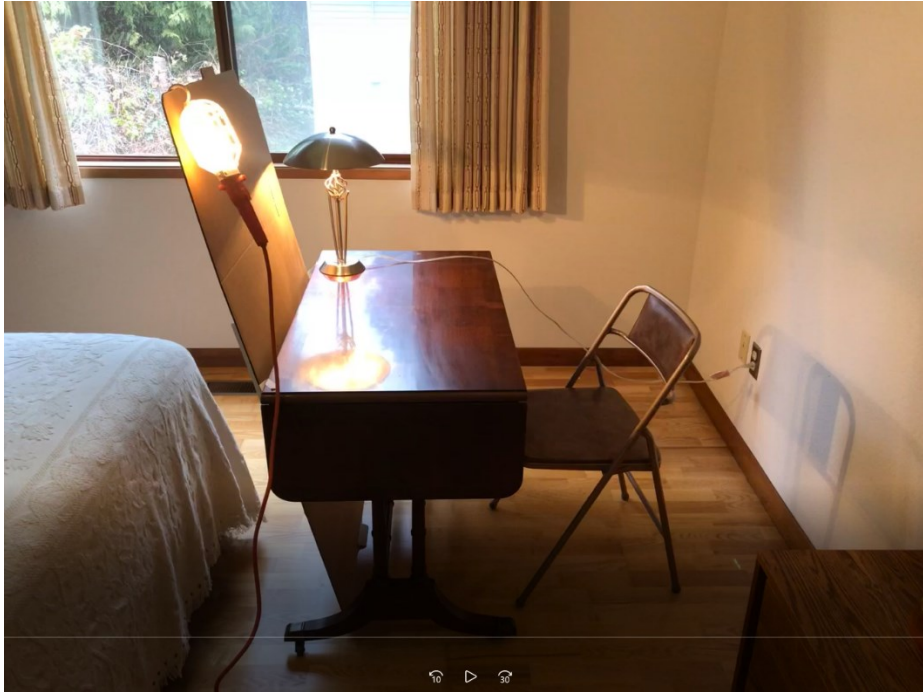
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Videos Now

January



Studio SG2022 (tongue in cheek)

This elaborately equipped home studio is the sight of a recent production of two videos now available on my website (www.SandysPen.com). In the first, on the main screen, I introduce myself and approach to books. The second is a trailer that can be tracked down from my 'You Speak for Me Now' page. Taping them was fun. Viewing them was humbling in the sense they too visibly reveal the ravages of time that our minds tend to deceptively hide.

In addition to a number of email interviews, I've now appeared on two live radio shows. Matching delivery with a professional host is an impossibility and I have yet to hear either broadcast. The second was taped and will soon be available for streaming, so hopefully I will be able to give you another laugh.

Autocracies

January

We all know a democracy involves a government responsive to the will of a majority of its citizenry. Autocracies are much more nebulous though they have a common characteristic. A small group of insiders rule the nation using a figurehead they select to issue their rules. Often the power goes to the "leader's" head, converting him to a dictator. I used the "him" advisedly since they seem always to be male.

Autocracies come in many forms:

Monarchs with their nobles (royalties before they were stripped of authority)

A military dictator with high-ranking generals (Genghis Kahn for example)

The Pope with Vatican officials

The Ayatollah with senior religious leaders

A political leader with supporting oligarchs (Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Putin, ad nauseum)

The leader of a revolution with his lieutenants (Castro)

An emperor with his palace entourage (Japan, Roman empire)

I'm sure you can think up more types and examples. These cliques almost always become very rich at the expense of their exploited population. Their form of government is efficient because things get done without lengthy arguing or dissenting voices. They could even be good for all if they didn't fall victim to greed or power. The general population suffers more with each passing year until the regime is finally overthrown.

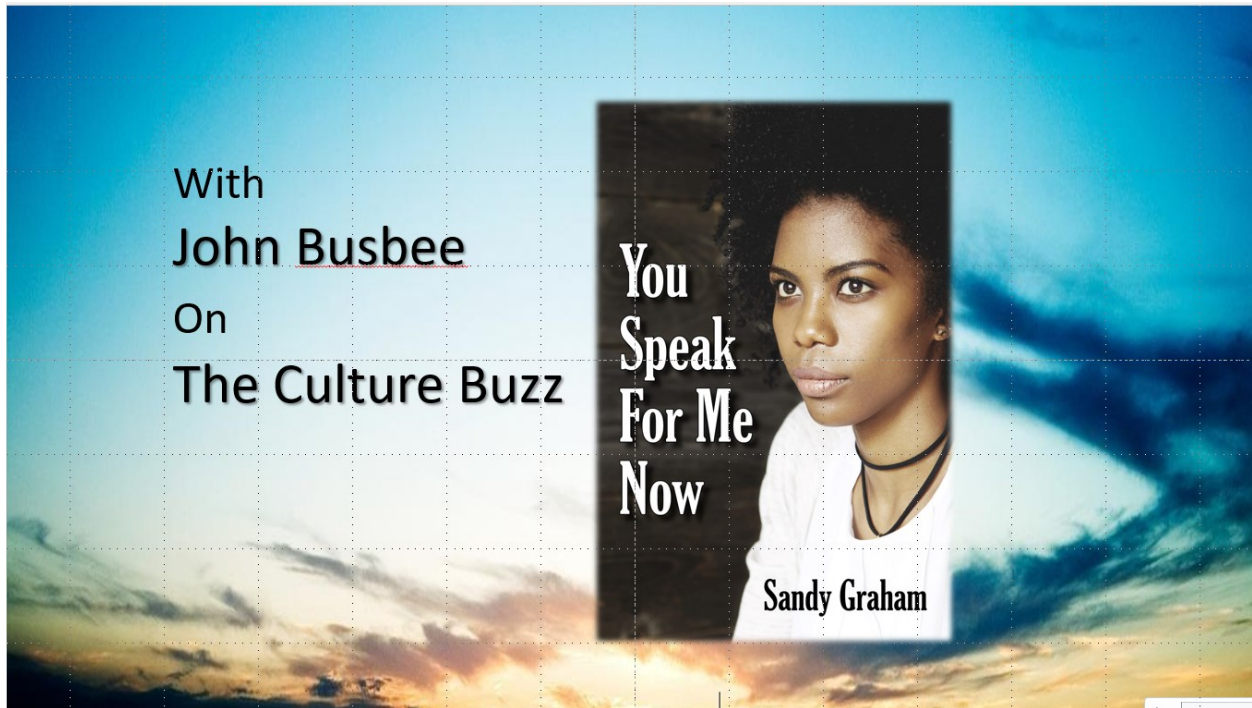
Overthrow can be by a bloody revolution as happened in France, Russia, and America). It can be via a World War involving many nations as in the case of Nazi Germany, Japan, and Italy. They can be almost bloodless as it was in England, Canada, and India. It may involve one autocracy taking over another, such as when the Ayatollah theocracy deposed the Shah of Iran. It may not even involve the government as when unions were created to end the industrial reign of railroad, mining, and manufacturing tycoons.

Democracy in the United States is facing its greatest threat since conception. Is it inevitable that our democracy will deteriorate into autocracy? 2,000 years ago, Plato said yes. He believed there is roughly a two-hundred-year cycle in which a democracy is overtaken by an autocracy that impoverishes the populace until the downtrodden revolt and re-establish a government of the people, for the people. He seems right in concept though far too restrictive in his time estimate.

How does all this relate to America today? Well, power is already in the hands of a relatively small group of corporate leaders and rich individuals. They own many media outlets, and a strong propaganda machine is in place. They have gained control of the Republican Party which now should be renamed the Autocratic Party. They have manipulated the presidential election system to enable a win with 47% or less of the popular vote. Their only large mistake to date was selecting a corrupt, unintelligent narcissist as their mouthpiece. They probably won't make that mistake in the 2024 Democratic/Autocratic election.

Sadly, the myth they have created is believed by a significant percentage of the people being exploited. Not just believed, fervently believed. Effective propaganda accomplishes two things; namely, make people believe its story and then close their mind to argument or even discussion. The human brain is wired for that form of exploitation. Over millions of years, human survival depended on uniting behind a strong leader. Worked fine when all the leader got was adulation, perhaps more than one partner, but not a palace, four mansions, private jets, and billions salted away in secret bank accounts.

Can the process be reversed or is it too late? In America, we still have a House of Representatives, and recently they have tried to protect voting rights and improve the general economy. But each measure is blocked by a Senate with a razor thin Democratic majority. The will of the people remains thwarted. Only with a solid majority of Democrats over Autocrats in both House and Senate can a reversal be successful. That's why 2024 is so pivotal to democracy in America.



In an effort to market a book for a change, I hired a publicity agent, Javier Perez. It cost quite a few sheckles but it has generated some good reviews, email interviews, and two radio interview. There's an art to participating in a radio interview, which I'm in the beginning stage of learning. With no advance knowledge of what will be asked, there's a lot of on-the-spot fumbling. However, a pattern is becoming apparent which should help in future.

The latest interview was with John Busbee, who hosts The Culture Buzz using a format of eight fifteen-minute interviews each week on all aspects of the arts. You can find it on www.SandysPen.com by clicking on the book image and selecting Videos & Reviews.

Reviewers are supporting my belief that this book has real merit. Nevertheless, like all new books not written by or for celebrities, it's very difficult to get it exposure even with those sheckles mentioned earlier. (Spell-checker wants to change "sheckles" to "shackles", which might not be too far off base when applied to my book.) In the past, I've broadcasted a book announcement to most friends in my address book. So far, not this time. Why? Well, even though it's a gripping read, it has political overtones which I'm reluctant to trust to the open-mindedness of my conservative friends. That's ironic since the main goal of the book is to get everyone thinking about the issues that are keeping us apart in our fragmented society.

Maybe I'll put my hands where my mouth is and rectify that.

Best Book List

March

Shepherd.com is a new rival to GoodReads that offers a novel approach for finding novels. It requires authors to create a list of five books which the author believes are the best dealing with the theme of the list, and then tell why they were chosen. The goal is to attract readers searching for books related to the list theme.

The focus is on helping authors reach an audience while giving readers an easier way to find books. It may be unfair, but my impression of GoodReads is that it has focused entirely on readers since acquired by Amazon. Happy to charge authors for giveaways but with no persuasion of winners to provide reviews or even ratings, unless the author pays an additional \$500. Sound like the Amazon culture?

Instead of mining for money, Shepherd puts authors to work coming up with a theme appropriate for their latest book, compiling a list of the best supporting books, and explaining why they belong on the list. To see my list, go to <https://shepherd.com/best-books/to-influence-human-society>



The screenshot shows the Shepherd.com website interface. At the top left is the Shepherd logo with the tagline "Discover the best books." and a search bar with the text "Browse by topic or book". The main heading is "The best books to influence human society" in a large, bold font. Below the heading is a profile picture of Sandy Graham and the text "By Sandy Graham" followed by social media icons for Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. A dark blue box contains the text "Who am I?" followed by a paragraph: "Over the past decade, I've become very concerned with the direction authoritarianism is taking human society. It's a global problem that now infects America, leaving us with a partisan divide we may not be able to bridge. My recommended books helped me understand the situation and how one might speak out against this negative force effectively. Convinced that bombarding readers with facts alone is useless, I chose to provide a novel that is interesting and captivates readers. My goal is to entice readers to press on to the end regardless of their..."

The \$6,000 Book

April

As you are probably aware by now, I decided to actively market my latest book, *You Speak for Me Now*. Hired a publicity agent and professional cover designer, ran two giveaway programs, made videos, etc. Obtained three very good reviews by industry leading reviewers (and one fairly good one). Did two radio interviews, one of which by John Busbee of The Culture Buzz, was extremely positive. The few ratings received to date on Goodreads average 4.3 out of 5 stars and the consensus of the reviewers seems to be that the book is both entertaining and informative – to a high degree. And I've made it available in paperback, hardcover and eBook formats.

Sounds wonderful, except that I haven't sold a print book in the last three months. In fact, Amazon reported only three paperbacks have been purchased so far, and I purchased one of them. Until recently, I told myself to relax. It takes a while for customers to materialize. Over a month ago, I sent out an email to many of my friends announcing its release. Not wanting anyone to feel an obligation, I informed them that I have no way of knowing who buys a book. All I get is a count of sales. It never dawned on me that perhaps none of them would buy it. Hopefully, at least one will part with fourteen dollars so I can assume whoever I'm talking to must certainly be the one.

Even an optimist suffers a twinge of doubt eventually. Still, one never knows when some small segment of humanity will find the book, recognize it predates Biden's concern regarding the battle between democracy and autocracy, buy it, and maybe even recommend it to their friends. Till then, it remains a \$6,000 book project.

Politic Or Not

May

While *You Speak for Me Now* has been praised as a story, some reviews have said its political message is too one-sided. My initial reaction was to suggest that the story can be read for its entertainment value disregarding the political mission. Upon more reflection, I think it important to explain why it is one-sided.

In America's highly charged political environment, there's a pronounced tendency to take offence the instant one detects a difference in political leaning. That's what creates the chasm in the land and prevents us from thinking objectively about issues most of us face in common. Apparently it also causes some readers to miss the predominant political theme woven into the story.

The days of a Democrat/Republican government shifting the country a little in the liberal or conservative direction, depending on the vote, disappeared in America over twenty years ago. Two parties working out compromises yet always moving the country forward. The political intent of *You Speak for Me Now* is to cause readers to pause, consider, and perhaps even conclude that the conflict is now between a rich minority trying to combine political control with their economic dominance and the rest of the population. In that context, I am unabashedly one-sided.

Over the past 3,000 years, hundreds of nations have gone down the path to autocracy, many in just my life-time. It's always the same; a small group getting excessively rich driving the rest into poverty and oppression until it leads to revolution. We tend to forget that the American Revolution was to overthrow the royal autocracy. We see it today in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Yet we condone the American oligarchs that make their Russian counterparts look like paupers. Too many communication channels are already in their hands and their propaganda machine has duped too many of us.

Describing the situation like this will have no real effect on people's thinking. Weaving it into a compelling story stands a little better chance. That's the goal in *You Speak for Me Now*. Yes, it's one-sided, not in a party sense but rather in a national one. This would be clearer if the authoritarian forces were not hiding their efforts behind a Republican Party smoke screen. Renaming it the Autocratic Party would reveal the truth.

Why Feed the Greed?

June

At Amazon's annual stockholders' meeting, they approve payment of 212 MILLION DOLLARS to their CEO. Even jewel thieves don't get that much and no human earns more than one percent of that amount. That, and the billions pocketed by owners and shareholders comes directly from our online purchases. It's obscene.

To illustrate how it works, consider a book that lists for \$14.00 on Amazon. On each sale, they take \$3.85 to cover printing costs, give the author a royalty of \$1.95, and pocket \$8.00 on the pretext that it goes to their marketing support. Very little of it does and they charge authors for marketing gambits or give away books with no royalty paid.

They need no book inventory since they use on-demand printing. Books are only one example. They take a cut on everything you buy. While they do inventory a number of products, they now make increasing use of direct shipment from the supplier, so again, no inventory.

Bottom line: we are making their executives and shareholders obscenely rich, contributing to the inflation problem, and widening the economic disparity in America today.

Solution: Stop feeding the greed. Reduce buying directly from them. One way is to search for a desired product on their website, note the manufacturer, and see if it can't be bought directly from that manufacturer's website.

Books are different since few authors sell directly, though it might be possible to buy from publishers when they are involved. My solution is to transition to Barnes & Noble Press. That \$14.00 book can be sold for \$9.90 and still provide a larger royalty, \$2.05. Before you say, "Why not lower the price so we're not feeding your greed?", please allow me to recover expenses first and maybe earn a couple of dollars an hour for the time taken to write the book.