

SPARTACUS

no. 45.

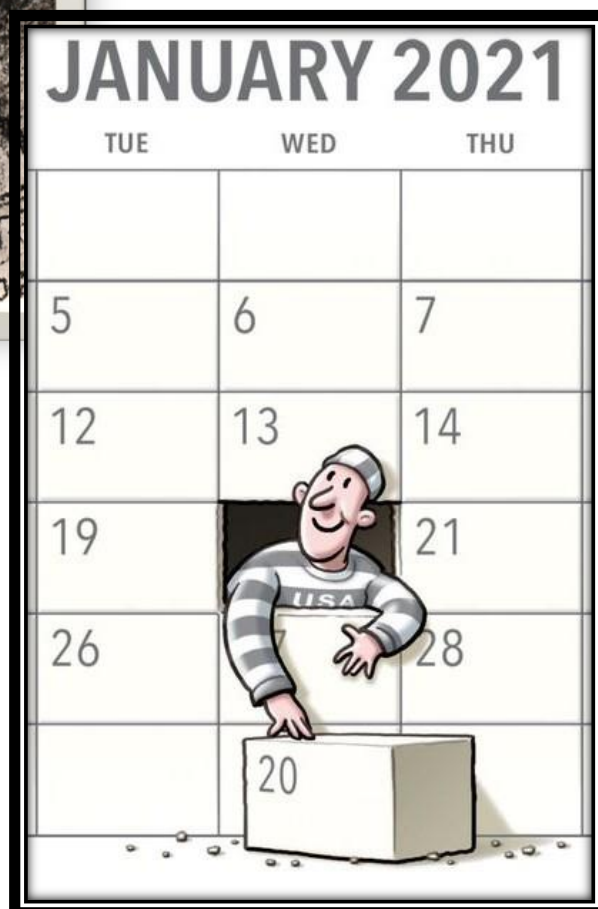
A zine of opinion by
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We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Joe Biden's inaugural address had no great such language as Lincoln's first, and Heaven knows the early weeks of January inspired few such feelings. I can't help but remember that the flowery paragraph above comes from Lincoln's *first* inaugural – when Fort Sumter still sat untouched on its artificial island in Charleston Harbor, and that Lincoln's plea went unheeded. But damned-and-be-diddled if on January 20, 2021, I didn't feel that those better angels had won out.

It was and remains a relief to think the word "President" and not have to append "Trump." More than that, the plain, sincere emotion and passion of Biden's address have made the obscene spasms of the last few weeks distant memories, the sins of a fading adolescence. Thoughts have turned forward, to the cleansing Joe Biden says is possible – to the vaccine more than the disease, to the reconciliation rather than the divide, to the hope instead of the disgust. I'm going to erase much of what I've already coimposed for this *Spartacus*, because now, post January 20, I can't think of Trump's clumsy coup of January 6th as I used to. It is no longer the first shot of a new Civil War, a dire portent of what might be coming. On January 20, the attack on the Capitol of a fortnight past became a crime as ancient in mind as Herod. A foolish optimism, I know, but the optimism is there, unexpected and for the moment, unarguable.

On January 20, America brought forth its decency, and put it on display. *This is our choice.*

Let's put the day in context with a look back in anguish. January 6th dawned. We were celebrating the Georgia election which threw two Republican hacks out of the Senate and gave its control to the Democratic Party. For the next two years, anyway, Joe Biden's appointments and policies would have an easy trek through the country's legislative bodies. But then, on January 6, as the Congress was counting the electoral college votes that would secure the election, *they* came.

I thought I'd never see America more divided, but at the height – or depth – of the counterculture wars of fifty years ago, I never saw anything like this. The mob was egged on by Rudy Giuliani and Trump himself – thugs waving Trump banners, a weirdo in *faux* Indian garb (I was reminded of Red Stick, the Indian villain in an early Davy Crockett episode), a grinning dope with the speaker's podium (Pelosi made a point of using it later), a bozo with his Confederate flag (its display protected by the First Amendment, his presence a clear case of trespassing), bedecked in "Camp Auschwitz" tees and riot gear surged upon the majestic Capitol, attacking cops, threatening Congressmen – more than one toting zip-ties to handcuff hostages, smearing shit on the walls – thousands of berserkers, including one woman whose attempt to climb into the House chambers through a broken window earned her a fatal bullet to her neck. The invaders trashed offices, stole papers (and a laptop, which could qualify as espionage), battled cops – braining one fatally with a fire extinguisher – and then split. The coup fizzled. Guided by the Speaker and by the Vice President, acting at last like one suited to the office, the Congressional ritual went on. Biden and Harris received due credit for their electoral victory.

Each new video that emerged revealed a greater depth of violence and every day of the following ha'month seemed to bring new evidence of a deep criminality and conspiracy. We gave vent to a national revulsion, a rejection of Donald Trump, through a second impeachment, more visceral, immediate, anger-driven than the first. Its point was to keep Trump from ever running for federal office again. At last, at long, long last, America had had enough. As January 20 and the end of Trump's term approached, Washington became an armed camp. Blocked bridges, barbed wire. More soldiers and National Guardsmen gathered there than were serving in Afghanistan. And then came Inauguration Day, and peace reigned.

Will peace continue? Could well be. There were no “insurrectionist” disturbances of any significance after January 6th – could be the reaction was too strong and too negative to inspire repetition. Much will depend on the influence Trump maintains, which we don’t know. All interest rests on Biden, as Joe promises immediate executive orders to rejoin Paris climate accord and restore Iran deal, free refugee kids from cages and restore them to their parents, initiate a humane immigration policy and fight the twin scourges ripping at America’s belly, COVID and racism.

Hopefully, speaking personally, sometime soon, two things will happen. First, the COVID vaccines will truly become universally available. (The local attempts to offer reservations to people our age filled after ten minutes.) Jobs and Travel will open up and I’ll be able to take Rosy to London and Paris this fall .. and incidentally, people will stop dying by the thousands of this disease.

Secondly, people will stop lecturing and start listening. Nothing offends people more than being talked down to. The culture wars are a reaction to the condescension and contempt of others who think their better fortune makes them superior creatures. The calls for “unity” after the Capitol invasion were mocked, as they seemed like no more than desperate P.R. by embarrassed Republicans, humiliated and frightened by the assumed ties they share with the thugs, but as Biden expressed in taking his oath, unity is what America is all about. His is a unity born of empathy, not the brute force of the right or the arrogance of the left. We achieve that, the maniacs will be emasculated. They will have nothing left to say.

(Speaking of leftist arrogance, I fervently hope that **the “cancel” culture** dries up and blows away. Talk about “lecturing.” Last year a Catholic college removed Flannery O’Connor’s name from a residence hall because of her alleged racism, showing not only a misunderstanding of the great author’s work – *heavy* with Catholicism – but a *tragic* misunderstanding of liberal academic values. Jeanette Ng’s surly 2-minute rant against John W. Campbell was awarded a Hugo in 2020 over several substantial works of SF criticism: an insult not only to Campbell’s memory but to the generations of SF authors he mentored and the authors in the competition. Hugo rules should be amended to prevent such nonsense.)

I want these things to happen for the greater good, of course. But I also have selfish reasons. I’m tired of politics. I want to write about SF and fandom again, about movies, books, football ...

Yes, **football**, even after the disappointing playoffs for my beloved New Orleans Saints. **Drew Brees**, like all Orleanians I hold you in esteem higher than anyone else in sports, now that Connors has retired. But time is showing on you, and it’s time to retire.

No one who isn’t an Orleanian – either a native or a longtime citizen, like me – can understand what the Saints mean to the city – especially after Katrina. I urge all to check out *Challenger* #23, my Katrina issue, on eFanzines.com. The hurricane mauled New Orleans. The city was covered in mud and stink. The population was scattered. The economy was gone. The Saints’ home, the Louisiana Superdome, lost part of its roof and became a cesspool of death and neglect. New Orleans itself became emblematic of political incompetence and uncaring. The state repaired the Dome and the next fall, the Saints played their first game after Katrina there against their great rival, the Atlanta Falcons.

Just a football game, right? Nothing *really* to lift the spirit. Not for us *smart* people. Guess Orleanians are as dumb as they, we, look. After Brees and co. waxed the Falcons, you could *feel* the energy rise throughout the city.

That was a warm-up. Then there was Superbowl 44 ... The Saints were underdogs to the Indy Colts, a superb team led by Peyton Manning, who had the team behind at halftime. But then ... *Tou jours, l’audace*.

An onside kick to begin the second half. (I predicted it! Din;t know why or how, but s’t true!) Drew’s throws as accurate as a plumbline. Inventive, chess-like defense – or did you think Tracy porter got in the way of Peyton’s



pass by accident? Great coaching, great understanding of the game, great talent ...and a great moment for a city recovering from a natural obscenity and the governmental incompetence that exacerbated it. ("Brownie, you're doing a heckuva job.") When Rosy and I left NOLA that night, every police siren in town was wailing. Gunshots and fireworks split the air. *New Orleans won* – and it wasn't Indianapolis the Saints had beaten, in their city's name; it was the whole sense of Being Wronged. "Heart and Soul," read the title of the *Sports Illustrated* story naming Brees as its Sportsman of the Year.

Drew and the Saints would have made the Super Bowl again if not for an incompetent official in an NFC championship. In the Tampa Bay game of 2021, after funny give&take with his fellow geriatric, Tom Brady, the Prince of Darkness, Drew wasn't sharp. He could not loft the ball downfield. He threw INTs. It came out later that he had played with a torn rotator cuff.

Drew pitched his stubbornness against his age, and age won. When Brady visited Brees and his family on the field after the game, chatting, communing -- Brady even threw Drew's oldest boy a touchdown pass – my estimation of Brady rose 200%. My opinion of Brees could not be higher, but my conviction *did* grow. Time to let it go, Drew. With thanks. *You are Spartacus*.

I'll also want to return to yap about **movies**, always a jolly subject as **Oscar season** rolls around – even an extended one, like this year's. The awards won't be presented till April 25: *Nomadland* is almost inevitably Best Picture, its star Frances McDormand almost as clear a shoo-in for her *third* Oscar as Best Actress. (That'll be a record, by the way – Meryl Streep and Ingrid Bergman have three Oscars, but one for each was for a Supporting role.) The flick debuts on Hulu on February 15. It feels like a long time since I staggered ecstatic out of Frances' breakthrough flick, *Blood Simple*, muttering "Fuckin' A" under my breath. If the current press is righteous, I expect the same response to *Nomadland*.

Lots of change in the movie bizness. Films debuting on streaming TV have a different look than widescreen theatrical releases: more emphasis on close-ups, less on *Lawrence of Arabia* grandeur. (Thanks to movie nut John Guidry for pointing this out.) New faces will be recognized – Sidney Flanigan, Kingsley Ben-Adir, Riz Ahmed. Also, count on seeing lots of stage plays brought to the screen during the pandemic ... They're well suited to this practice.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is the first of two fine plays articulating black experience this season, and given that it's an August Wilson play with A+ actors (including the late Chadwick Boseman, who is stunning), power and quality shine through. Music was a liberation for black folk in the era when this flick is set – as much as anything could relieve the obscene stress they lived under.

One Night in Miami – Malcolm X, Cassius Clay, Sam Cooke and Jim Brown explore and debate their experiences and their perspectives as black men of accomplishment and their competing visions and ambitions for themselves and their people. Kingsley Ben-Adir, hitherto unknown, is brilliant as Malcolm X, but the whole cast is terrific. The guy playing Ali is spookily on point.

Shirley – This fanciful, deeply disturbing story of the creation of *Hangsamen*, Shirley's second novel and first masterpiece, involves a young academic couple and how they are subsumed into the lives of their demanding mentors. Elizabeth Moss deserves an Oscar nomination. Jackson deserved the Nobel Prize. Her lesson deserves thought: *art demands all*.

Never Rarely Sometimes Always is the terrifying story of a teenage girl visiting New York with her BFF – to get an abortion. They wander the streets in a neurasthenic haze, dealing with creeps and bureaucrats, but their danger in the Big City isn't the story. The true drama, the scope of the girl's sadness, is left for revelation for one quiet, exquisitely controlled scene. Sidney Flanigan, the young actress in the lead, is magnificent. There's no proselytizing in this little film, only quiet, subdued compassion for damaged souls striving to survive.

The Sound of Metal comes with a slew of critics' awards for its performers to its credit, and a compelling story: a musician learning to deal with his incoming deafness. Yet it disappoints. There are plot holes – mostly involving "Where'd he get the money for that?" – and character inconsistencies that overwhelm the good acting – some by amateurs! It boasts interesting sound (!) effects. I have a deaf sister-in-law and thought this film might be a worthy tribute to the fortitude of the hearing-impaired – but it falls short.

Des – A great performance by David Tennant as a real-life serial killer. He nails the Arctic lifelessness of a sociopath with all of the detachment and horror of the breed. The back story of the lead detective is less successful, but it's great to see the writer to whom Tennant's monster tells his story react to the inhumanity he faces. I had a similar experience with a serial offender I represented; I'll write about it in my memoir.

Your Honor – On the other hand ... here's one of my favorite actors, Brian Cranston, as a judge covering up his son's vehicular homicide of a mafiosi's kid. Not that good, and Cranston is hammy, over the top. Nevertheless, I watch the show faithfully for its New Orleans setting. Neat to recognize streets, buildings ... even if the idiots in charge do show Mardi Gras filling the streets in *October*.

I've also read a couple of **books** – Steve King's *The Girl who Loved Tom Gordon*, on Rosy's advice, Short, slight by some standards, but *very* well written – King seldom exercises his skills as a wordsmith, especially nowadays (when he writes not novels, but miniseries treatments); this story of a young girl lost in the forest is a welcome exception. Only a trace of supernatural horror, and it's not missed.

The Stranger Diaries is an Edgar-winning Brit mystery revolving around a teacher's obsession with a great short horror story, very well done. Held my interest even after I (correctly) guessed the villain 2/3 of the way through.

Awaiting more eyetracks, *Devil's Peak* by Deon Meyer, on the enthused suggestion of my father-in-law. Good commercial thriller, nicely designed, strong characters. And of course, a dozen dozen novels I've started and haven't finished.

On January 23, muttering *I never got polio* every inch of the way, I drove Rosy and self down to the county health department – and got our shots.

To obtain that first infusion of **the COVID vaccine** – Moderna, in our case – took the cooperation of our mutual employer, Eastern Florida State College. I needn't tell you the fiasco Florida's vaccine roll-out has been; after weeks of terrifying bafflement, I finally got an appointment for inoculation at a local Publix after rising at 5 and sitting at my computer from 5:45 to 6:45 – an appointment that did not include *la belle* or her dad. Fortunately, EFSC came through, carving out an hour-and-a-quarter on the 23rd for its employees over ... well, let's say *a certain age*. We enrolled and made the 15-minute trip to the health department an hour early. Without leaving the car, we were immediately ushered through.

Any geriatric of my era will remember the terrors of the Salk vaccine – the sudden appearance of the school nurse at your classroom door (we knew the jig was up) – the line of your fellow first-graders (I really did dream of us once as rolling on a conveyer belt) wailing in anticipation – the circle of hypodermics laid out, ready, gleaming needles the size of sewer pipes – the shrieks of those who went before – and then the pain, the *pain*, the **pain**. *Three times* you had to undergo this. (When I changed schools after my third dose, I gloated about it to my classmates when *their* third shot came around ... and one boob threw up on my shoes.) And then, a very few years later, the Sabin vaccine came out. A drop of fluid on a sugar cube. Thanks, f*ckers.

The PTSD has never left me. So when COVID came around, and the vaccines began to appear ... let's just say my joy was muted. I celebrated the possible end to the pandemic, but dreaded the moment of injection. But I would not show fear while Rosy watched! I drove us to the site, thirty-five minutes early, and yes, I kept muttering *I never got polio*. The lovely kid sister of our next door neighbor in Buffalo had had polio. Remember the clanking junk Forrest Gump had to carry around on his legs? That was accurate. *But I never got it*.

I was joking with one of the ladies about giving her an A in my basic composition class when a little black girl – in her 20's, probably – stepped up and took my arm. "Oh here we go!" I moaned ... and then it was over. The tech rounded the car and gave Rosy her shot. It was 11:35. The whole experience had taken ten minutes. Hooray for EFSC and Brevard County: this is how the war against COVID *should* be waged.

As of that morning, 414,000 Americans had died due to COVID. Pretty good chance now neither of us would join them. We go back February 20 for our booster shot, and I'll be trying to get my father-in-law inoaked—to coin a term – before then. And maybe this Fall I'll escort Rosy into the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and she'll walk with me through Stonehenge. On January 23rd, it seemed possible.

GIMME DEM LOCs

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I wasn't surprised about your mention of the post office discussion with the woman who didn't want Bill gates changing her DNA through vaccination. I knew a sensible woman, college educated, who was upset when I opened an umbrella indoors. She told me I shouldn't do that, acting as if bad luck would strike both of us down.

I agree the situation is greatly better with Biden winning the race. But with how insane Trump is acting, denying he lost while ignoring the pandemic, who knows what will happen before January 20th. I agree with the observation we're seeing what a Trump second term would be like. He could do something really nuts like throwing the nuclear football into play. I'm not worried but I am concerned.

Rich Lynch rw_lynch@yahoo.com

Like you, I was both thrilled and greatly relieved by Joe Biden's victory in the U.S. Presidential election. But I've already written extensively about that in the latest issue of my personal time capsule, *My Back Pages*. So instead I'll just give you a brief comment about your early November encounter in a post office with that Vaccine Karen. You write that: "The lady protested that she wasn't taking any vaccine. No way would she let Bill Gates change her DNA! An intelligent, decent woman, a home health worker, she was mouthing craziness straight out of QAnon." All I can say to that is I guess the COVID Kool-Aid must be very flavorful in your part of Florida.

The current word is that QAnon believers are very disappointed with Trump for not carrying through with the insurrection after the Capitol invasion fizzled. My thought and prayers, etc.

Anyway, I feel relieved to have survived 2020. Every year I always say, somewhat in jest, that my only New Year's goal is to make it to the next year. For this year it's no longer in jest. Stay safe, my friend.

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[On *Spar* no. 44:] Love the Lincoln. The style of art looks like it's from MAD Magazine, and that stovepipe hat is so tall, I expect to see a few puffs of smoke rising out of the top.

Your election...whew. It was close, not a landslide, but Trump is a single-term president. Still, the trouble he is causing is alarming, and I know he's petrified of what the FBI and other law organizations will do to him the second he is no longer president. The popcorn is ready for that show, and I will be cheering.

The vaccines are moving out, and people are getting their needles, and we are ready for ours once it is our turn. Yet, we all have the supposedly-intelligent people mouthing the most ridiculous stupidities about Bill Gates microchipping people through the needles, etc., etc. We have our own Proud Boys and QAnon up here, too...I think the guy who started QAnon is a Canadian, not sure. (Definitely not bragging about that one...)

I didn't watch the election debate; the less I see of Orange Monster, the better. I see he has fired his AG, as soon as Barr dropped his guard and reported that there was no election fraud. If there was any, it came from the Republicans. As always, blame others to cover for the terrible things you do yourself.

I think Joe Biden will be (is already!) a breath of fresh air. He seems friendly and willing to work hard, he knows that needs to be done, and his choice of VP is inspired. I hope that he will revive the tradition of many presidents in the past, and make his first foreign visit up to Ottawa. He and Justin are old friends, and our two nations will be as close as ever. Our politics are still fairly left, and with the pandemic, our deficits are

astronomical, but it is what needed to be done to save the lives and livelihoods of the public. We may yet have an election over the deficits, with our own right-wing parties screaming over ALL THAT MONEY!, but the ruling party in Ottawa has the support of a lot of people. Their own emergency relief programmes have certainly saved us.

Biden is 78 years old. By the end of his term, he will be 82. I looked up Kama Harris, and she is 56. I think Joe will not run for a second term, and Harris will take over. I read that she is a hard worker. I see elsewhere in the world about how effective female presidents and prime ministers are, so I think Harris will be the next best thing to happen to the US. She will beat the racist Rethugs down, I am sure.

The local...Yvonne has made about 120 masks, but is now concentrating on widening the selection of Hawaiian-style shirts she makes. My letter...At least the Rethuglican-based Supreme Court justices are not rubber-stamping Trump's agenda, but deciding that what Trump wants to do is just simply Against The Law. Good for everyone.

The RIP file...Alex Trebek's death was a done deal, but he fought to live as long as he could. He was a CBC mainstay for many years, as a host and a sports reporter before making his way southwards to see what he could do. I wish I'd had the chance to meet him...he was probably the most successful son of Sudbury, Ontario.

Trebek's last appearances on Jeopardy were models of professionalism and courage, and the show where a contestant credited him and the show with teaching him English ... epic. Vale.

To me 2020 is irredeemable. The best part of 2021 will be that it's not 2020. I doubt we will be at any future Worldcon, actual or virtual. Ten days left in the Ghod-forsaken year, and soon, I hope we can start fresh, get our vaccinations, and try to have a normal life again. We wish you both a wonderful Christmas and Happy New Year, and see you with the next issue of whatever you're publishing.

Bob Jennings <fabficbks@aol.com>

I am glad you had supreme confidence that the Biden-Harris ticket would get elected. I myself was far from sure. In fact it looked fairly close to me right thru Friday nite after the Tuesday election date, with five swing states still counting votes while the Trump assault team lobbed hundreds of lawsuits at the state and federal courts claiming massive voter fraud. Luckily all those cases were tossed out of court, and even when some states and districts did recounts, the results did not change much.

One thing this election clearly demonstrated was that the political polls were not just wrong, they were dead wrong. Perhaps you remember my comment a few mailings back about Trump supporters never answering surveys or political questionnaires, instead they just vote? Well, it certainly was the case this election. All The polls, not just a few, but all of them had Biden-Harris leading by 11 to 22 percentage points, yet when the election results came in the vote was very close.

Despite the Democrats winning the electoral college and four important swing states, most of the South, as well as most of the Mid- and far-West all went solidly for Caligula Trump. Over 71 million people voted for Donald Trump in this election, a shocking number consider the incredible level of incompetence, malicious mischief, and blatant lying he has brought to the job.

The reality is that vast numbers of people think the jerk is doing a great job and completely approve of the way he had handled the office. The *harsh* reality is that without the COVID-19 crisis and the major blunders Trump made in handling it, that he would very likely have been reelected by a frightening and very comfortable margin. Only the fact that his every pronouncement, and every effort he has made was a near complete mishandled of the federal response to the coronavirus saved this nation from another four years of his malicious leadership. The fact that a fair number of his supporters caught the crud, with some dying from it, helped turn enuf people away from the jerk to swing the election to Biden-Harris.

To me this is not so much a miracle, as it is a truly frightening picture of a deeply divided nation. There are at least 71 million qualified voters who are either too alienated, too stupid, or too brain-washed to see the harm Caligula Trump has done to this democracy. They were more than willing to vote for four more years of the same, and I think the next four years for the Democrats are going be very difficult indeed.

I only hope they can manage to not only right the massive numbers of wrongs Trump and his cronies has done to this nation, but that they can somehow convince the people who still think Trump is wonderful of all the harm he has done.

This may be impossible. The mind-set of the average Trump support almost defies definition, just as their beliefs clearly deny reality.

But the country has a new optimism after the inauguration – I can feel it. And I will give Biden and Harris a chance to work with it before I despair.

In regards to the **Worldcon** date, I've indicated a willingness, in the poll, to attend a December DisCon. In fact, I'd prefer it. By the way, I could use some **Hugo nomination advice**. Looming over the ballot are Stan Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* and the much-anticipated *Ready Player Two*. Any films to compete with *The Invisible Man*?



A moment here to hail my father-in-law: *happy 90th birthday* to **Joe Green** – who began his day of celebration by working on his writing, as he has almost daily for 60+ years. (He also noted the day with a ZOOM call with his daughters.)

A moment here to remember **Hank Aaron**, the great baseball player and home run champion. Show this gent of character a baseball and he'd hit it a hundred miles. He was a testament to the power of sports to enrich and enlighten lives. *Gawd!* He could tonk that thing ...

A moment here to mourn **Ben Bova**, victim of COVID, a gentleman, a fine writer, a terrific editor. Sat with him at an OASiS panel in 2019 and enjoyed the experience immensely. Superb champion of our field.

A moment here to remember **Chuck Yeager**, the *Right Stuff* pilot who broke the sound barrier in 1947, and who passed away near year's end. He said that test pilots always balance the risk against the reward. Pioneers always do. Funny thing, they always seem to reach for the stars, no matter what the risk.

And another moment to remember January 28, 1986 – how can it already be 35 years ago?

The 73-second flight of the Space Shuttle *Challenger*, and the seven superb men and women who composed her crew. I still remember the names: *Francis Scobee ... William Smith ... Ellison Onizuka ... Ron McNair ... Judy Resnik ... Greg Jarvis ... and Christa McAuliffe*, teacher and much-touted first civilian in space. I baffled and annoyed my shrink in 1986 by talking incessantly about Christa's sacrifice. Now she's being granted an all but unheard-of honor.

At the end of December, 2020, Christa's widower, now a Circuit Court judge, announced the release of a commemorative silver dollar bearing her likeness. Susan B. Anthony and Sacagawea are the only other private citizens I remember being so recognized in my lifetime. It's astonishing.

We've been to her grave, in Concord NH. The beautiful black monument was covered in pens, stones – traditional remembrances for teachers and honored dead. (We left slate from Prince Edward Island.) Someone said that the explosion had left nothing to bury, and that only an empty coffin rested beneath that marker. It didn't matter.

Though Christa insisted, always, that was just an ordinary person, her lesson was that there is excellence in ordinariness, that there is courage and hope, and that if she was ordinary, then ordinary can be magnificent. What McAuliffe left behind, what that monument and this coin memorialize and celebrate, is character, and commitment, and a simple and corny yet cosmic encouragement: *Reach for the stars. Per ardua ad astra. Requiesce in pace.*

