Living History

By Mel Lavine

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In the waiting room at the doctor's the other day I struck up a conversation with a gentleman who took note of my sweat shirt which said Maine and wondered if I was from back there?

In some respects I said I was. I'd spent a lot of time there, relatives and friends still lived there, though I grew up near Boston. It turned out he was a retired professor of history, which was my favorite subject in school, as it is to this day. The doctor was behind schedule and we got to talk awhile. When we parted we exchanged e-mails and promised to stay in touch.

At supper that night I told the Lady Friend of meeting the professor and said, “I think I’ve found a friend, someone I can talk to.”

“Why was he so interested in your Maine jersey?” the Lady Friend asked.

“Every summer he and his wife fly out there and live on a small island, not far from Bar Harbor. They get around by boat, shop on the mainland for groceries. They love the peace and quiet.”

In a quiet voice, she asked, “Where do they live in the Bay Area?”

I dug out the professor’s card from my wallet and gave it to her.

She glanced at the card, then looked up. “But we know this man. We met him and his wife at a dinner party.”

“Is that possible?”

It’s better than possible. There can’t be two different couples living in the same town who spend summers on an island in Maine.” In fact, she said, we’d met the professor and his wife about two years ago at the home of one of the Lady Friend’s oldest friends. The evening was not memorable except for a brief clash between the Lady Fried and the professor. The subject was politics, a topic, like religion, usually avoided between strangers in such circumstances. The Lady Friend and the professor saw the world pretty much through the same liberal lens but when the focus shifted to the Tea Party it didn’t seem so.

They’re just plain stupid, declared the Lady Friend.

“No, they’re not,” the professor fired back. “They know exactly what they’re doing.”

An awkward moment passed before cheerful talk picked up again. But there was no further dialogue between those two the rest of the night.

Looking back, the Lady Friend said she was not saying Tea Party members didn't know what they were doing, but that they were working against their own self-interest.

Looking ahead, I was wondering if the professor and his wife were having the same conversation at their house, and wondering if I'll ever see my "new friend" again.

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