

Waiting for the American Dream

By [Edward Curtin](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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“All good things arrive for them that wait – and don’t die in the meantime.” – Mark Twain

It is damp, drizzly November once again, the grim grey in-between month, a time for dying and a time, above all, for waiting. Waiting for the fallen dead foliage to be buried in snow, waiting for the shortest day to come and go, waiting for the New Year to usher in great changes.

Waiting – so what’s new?

Some sullen sage once said that life is what we do while we wait for death. It’s not the kind of wise-guy wisdom I would try to refute, since I was one of the precocious kids who saw the skull at his first pabulum banquet. He seemed to be waiting for me even then, and I can only assume he is waiting still, though, like the dead writer William Saroyan, I can enjoy thinking an exception will be made in my case. But wishful thinking aside, there’s no question that Mr. Death knocks at everyone’s door sooner or later, preferably later, better never than late, to coin a phrase in reverse and revert to wishful thinking. Nevertheless, it’s hard to deny he’s coming and everybody is waiting for his knock.

Of course, rather than knock, he just might blow the house down. Though it’s a little impersonal, a lot of people are waiting for that. Like the early Christians who were eagerly awaiting the imminent end of the world, most people today are waiting for a nuclear holocaust – on the evening news, of course. The general consensus seems to be that it will solve all problems; and anyway, what’s there to do goes the refrain. Keep waiting, that’s all, seems to be the popular approach. If I didn’t know better, I’d think people were looking forward to meeting Mr. Death. For why else are they waiting?

That’s the big picture, so to speak, the big waiting game. Waiting in the smaller sense can also kill you, or keep you going (but don’t ask where), depending on your point of view. There are endless variations to this waiting game.

Every day at my local post office I see the anxiously expectant faces of people eagerly awaiting their mail, as if that special, life-transforming letter will be arriving. Then, when they pull the latest sales circular from their magic boxes, you can see their faces momentarily drop, but just as quickly do they revive, for now they can still have something to wait for – tomorrow’s mail. But tomorrow is such a long time away, so most quickly check their phones to see if God has called, or at least sent a text. Hope springs eternal in the banal post office.

Then there are those other desperate waiters, those who regularly play the lottery. They are the truly faithful ones who haven’t lost their faith, or who’ve found a parallel one – true believers in the money god waiting to surprise, the deus ex machina of the American

happiness machine. For no matter what the odds, they regularly plunk down their bucks and intone the magic numbers that will change their lives forever. Then they wait. "You never know; someone's got to win, so why not me" is their refrain. Sure. And everyone has got to die. But to hell with the odds. Ever hopeful, like Gatsby cataleptically gazing across the water at the green light on Daisy's dock, they wait for their numbers to be up - up above the conjuring computers that raise their tickets to happiness - so that they too, like John Smith, who won 400 million last year and said, "Of course I'm not going to let this change my life. I'm not going to quit my job in the dog food factory. I'm going to be the same regular guy I've always been" - so that they too can give up waiting for the gravy train and find something else to wait for.

It's easy. They can always join the millions who are always waiting for the interminable weather reports or those who, as soon as one season has barely begun, are anxiously awaiting the next. Spring is a favorite season to wait for, eternal green spring, the time of year when most suicides can't take waiting any longer since the weather's nice but nothing else has changed, so they rush to Mr. Death who solves all their anxious waiting.

We all know those who are always waiting for Fridays and the great relief from their weekday horrors that the weekends bring. If that's your game, and you're far from retirement age, don't worry, you can look forward to years and years of waiting for Fridays. Thank God. And then you can wait in dread for Mondays. Damn the devil. Wasn't it Studs Terkel who said that most jobs in America are hellish? You wait to get one and then you wait until you can afford to get rid of it. It's a lot of waiting.

Waiting is endless, and endless is the waiting.

As for me, I've been waiting to tell you the truth. Not too long ago I lost all hope. After decades of secretly waiting for a knock at my door, I now know it will never come. It's over, this waiting of a true believer in the American Dream. I guess I've been exactly where George Carlin meant when he said to believe in the American Dream you have to be asleep. I was shocked to recently learn that Michael Anthony is dead, or to be more precise, Marvin Miller, the actor who played Michael Anthony is dead. Even as the years have tumbled out the backdoor of my life - 32 to be exact - I thought Marvin/Michael was waiting in the wings to surprise me. But I have just learned he died in 1985. My heart dropped. My waiting all these years, my secret hope of hopes, my train that would one day come in and rescue me - gone. No more. The door will not be knocked. My waiting days are over.

Who, you ask, was Michael Anthony, this character...in a movie, a play, or on television? In reality? A dream? A hallucination? He was my hope and salvation coming from the private sector, of course. He was the emissary from the invisible god, the billionaire John Beresford Tipton. And every week he would knock on someone's door and hand him or her a check for one million dollars. "The Millionaire" was more than a television show; it was a waiter's dream. It was why I thought of myself as "a temporarily embarrassed millionaire," as John Steinbeck said most of us poor slobs do. And though I haven't been waiting for reruns, I have thought a knock was imminent, that I would be a chosen one. Now my hope is gone, my capitalist dream in shatters. I am Zero Mostel without a song.

The odd thing is, it's a great relief. Hope, after all, is the fuel that drives all this waiting. Without waiting, everything changes. That's often the message waiting in an obituary; you see the name, realize it's not yours, and perhaps give up waiting for the day your waiting ends.

It's living, I think they call it, something you can't wait for forever, no matter what the month. Take a tip from me: being a waiter is not that rewarding. You can get by doing it, but you'll miss the meal.

Edward Curtin is a writer whose work has appeared widely. He teaches sociology at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. His website is <http://edwardcurtin.com/>

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