



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #78 — FEB. 21, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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### **Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 21, 2012)

**"I sing the Body electric."** (Walt Whitman) — Three Day Celebration of the Flesh in the Streets



#### New Introduction

Today is Fat Tuesday in New Orleans and the last day of our *Carnaval* here in Santa Cruz. If you are in the U.S., I hope y'all are way down south in one of my very favorite cities for the celebration—N'awlin's, darlin'! In case you aren't, let me tell you just a little about all the strange and wonderful goings-on here in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

I guess you know that Carnival means "Celebration of the Flesh"? I surmise that must an idea too raw and powerful for the entire U.S., or Mardi Gras would have spread. It's lots of fun. Really! Good Christians, especially, spend the year supposedly denying the flesh. What a force if all that repression exploded all at once. Yet Mardi Gras, Carnival, and *Carnaval* are semi-religious events, triggered into existence by Lent, but almost certainly the continuation (though seasonally displaced) of Pagan fertility festivals much, much older than Christianity.

We seem to be enduring a rebirth of the “culture wars” in America. Even after Rick Santorum goes down...it seems like the pot has been stirred a lot. Unfortunate, but there we are. Actually, it may not be so unfortunate after all, because it plays right into President Obama’s and the Democrats’ hands. A big majority of people support the current status quo, at least, on the so-called “moral” issues. What are the Republicans going to do against the tide of history and the awakening of women and minorities, except destroy themselves? Do they think they are going to change our minds with their lies? Not likely. They and their philosophy of exclusion and inequality failed miserably in the battles of the last 100 years. They will fail again. We are not going to go backwards.

I have no problem with Jesus or any religion or religious figure or their beliefs or their morality or whatever, save one—the belief that our focus in this life should be on some afterlife (sounds like the Egyptians, huh?). I believe this particular element of religion is responsible for much evil in the world, including the condemnation of the flesh which we celebrate with *Carnaval*.

I won’t go into all the details now, because my primary focus today is on the fun, but suffice it to say that if, for instance, a suicide bomber blows himself and 100 innocent people to eternity because he believes his final act is the road to heaven, then we have a problem. If there is a heaven and a belief, the end will always justify the means, will it not? Any means! That is the problem in a nutshell.

Here’s my two cents worth. **No one knows what comes next.** Face it. Belief and faith and hope (I’m a big believer in hope!) have their place, but they are not knowledge. But “I think, therefore, I am.” I know that I exist in what is ostensibly, for all practical purposes, this flesh, however that may actually be manifested in the physical universe. It don’t matter one whit to me. I don’t give a damn. I have somehow been given this incredible gift of life. I like to say that the biggest miracle is to be in here looking out. You know what I mean?

And this life is damned short. You, my dear friends, all know that by now, if we have not always known that. Don Juan says to treat your death as an advisor. What do you think your death would tell you? Think of heaven? Not to me. Death tells me that life is short and eternity is long. If you are Christian, don’t you think that even God might have wanted to taste the flesh and, in Christianity, appears to have been changed by the experience? Jesus enjoyed life in the flesh (until the very end, I guess). I believe he intended to tell us to do the same. We should love this short life in the flesh. Eternity will wait.

There is an incredible *Star Trek* episode where very advanced aliens have shed their flesh and become pure, eternal mind, immortal spirit. They can read minds and enter minds. When the *Enterprise* arrives, the aliens do everything they can to keep the crew there so that they can experience life in the flesh again, even if it is vicarious. Without the flesh, there is no emotion. Imagine! Is that life, or just being a robot or a computer or Mr. Spock? Perhaps we live life in the flesh so God can experience it too? Who knows? If Muslims can imagine virgins and streets of gold (who would need them as a spirit?), then I can imagine a Heaven where the angels sit around reminiscing and dreaming about their lives in the flesh and wishing they could do it again. Thinking that the one lesson they should have learned while on Earth was to love life more and live it to the fullest. *Vive la carne!*

Now, I’m not saying there’s any *carte blanche* on morality, if we don’t concern ourselves so much with “Heaven”. On the contrary, without Heaven, we also give up the most extreme cases of ends justifying the means, so a higher morality, one truer to human nature, could evolve. Do you know what else Walt Whitman said?

The man’s body is sacred, and the woman’s body is sacred;  
No matter who it is, it is sacred;  
Is it a slave? Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?  
Each belongs here or anywhere, just as much as the well-off—just as much as you;  
Each has his or her place in the procession.  
--Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

### Carnaval 2012 Almost Live (written Sun., Feb. 19)

I’m just back from a segment of 2012 *Carnaval* in Santa Cruz, as it exists only Santa Cruz. I’ve been to *Mardi Gras* and Carnival in four Caribbean and two South American counties and I’ve never seen anything like this. *Mardi Gras* at its peak on Fat Tuesday is probably the closest to this of all the pre-Lent events I’ve ever attended, but it’s still a

little tame compared to here. In the eastern part of Bolivia, bordering Brazil, every little town has *Carnaval*. They have a queen, floats, parades, and the celebration must go on for three days. But the granddaddy of all *Carnavals* is left to the capital, Santa Cruz. In the mountainous west, the people from cities and towns all over the *altiplano* gather in Oruro for another huge celebration, much more formal and religious than here in Santa Cruz, though still as drunken and almost as chaotic.

I'm a little drunk, I will admit, but I will do my best to try to describe today's action as close to live as possible.

As I mentioned, there are different what I call segments of *Carnaval*. The big family event is a huge parade with dancing and the crowning of the queen on Saturday night. There are more parades before and after that biggest one, starting two or three weeks before and extending to the end of *Carnaval* on Tuesday night (actually Wednesday morning when the sun comes up). Tonight and for the next two nights there will be a lot of live music, loud music, drink, and dancing. Those three nights are the "adult" segments".

For all of the celebrating, the whole inner city is closed to vehicles. In Santa Cruz, this is a circle one kilometer in diameter, a very big playpen (see map below, we live in the heart of the city just three blocks south of the central plaza). The public part of the entire area, minus certain small "protected" places, is open for just about anything people want to do. The afternoons are the segments sort of for teenagers, though everybody is there, from little kids to little old ladies. Beer and food are sold everywhere, along with certain, shall I say, *Carnaval* equipment. Some streets have a lot more people than others, but most are very crowded. Bands walk around the streets playing, and people dance along behind. Many folks open their houses for parties. Restaurants host parties. The street is the biggest party.



But, as far as I know, only here, the streets also become a battlefield, literally. In the midst of the celebrating and dancing, chaos stalks the innocent and danger lurks around every corner and within almost every doorway. Almost everyone in the city these afternoons is armed and dangerous. Some of the little kids are the worst, some like SWAT team members. I don't think there are any rules, but certain weaponry is sold well in advance of the start of *Carnival* and in the streets during:

1. Big cans of intense white spray foam. It comes out almost like from a foam fire extinguisher. I've invented a little gadget that lets you fire four of these a once, using both hands. Maximum fire power.
2. All manner of squirt guns.
3. Water balloons.
4. All colors of washable (or not) ink, in squirt bottles, and to fill squirt guns.
5. Baby oil and mild grease to cover exposed skin to keep ink, etc. from penetrating.
6. Hats, goggles, and plastic protective clothes, in case you're fussy.
7. The people who live in town have the huge advantage of garden hoses, brought out their front doors.

### Retribution

So, every afternoon, a few hundred thousand people are walking around the city trying to defend themselves, get where they're going, have fun, dance, be seen and see people they know, while nailing anyone who seems like they might deserve it. When we got back home, a while ago, I was totally colored red, purple, green, blue, pink, black, etc. I was soaking wet. A shower took off most of the ink, but I will wear the rest like war wounds all week.

I wish I had known about this when I was a teenager, because, obviously, that's who these segments seem to be designed for. I would have loved it. My favorite part is the chance to employ a little strategy and tactics. Anyone with a fair knowledge of these subjects has a big advantage during *Carnaval*. It's very good to have a "squad" of three to five people, and you see many of such groups walking around, looking for trouble. Today it was just Marci and me, but we were still able to raise a little hell. Marci says I act like I'm 12-years-old, but gets a kick out of me, I guess. She even follows orders, somewhat, when we're "deployed".

Most celebrants just direct their fire sort of randomly. Remember, most streets are packed with people. Any passerby is fair game, except babies (usually) and the folks who are working, selling beer, mixed drinks, food, playing in bands, etc. A lot of teenage boys like to squirt the teenage girls, of course. Before we head down each block, I hesitate at the corner, assessing the situation ahead. There will be ambushes from several doorways, families with hoses. Teenagers covered in ink can be dangerous adversaries, though fun. Most people walking around can't be very heavily armed, though there are always surprises. You see many pairs of people lugging around big bags of water balloons. The "battles" have all the strategy of laser tag or, better, paint ball, with the chaos of real warfare.

My goal is to get down each block getting soaked and inked as little as possible, while dishing out as much retribution as I and my squad can. Let me explain what I mean by retribution. Invariably, there is a 12-year-old with a hose near his front door. His family surrounds him, sitting in lawn chairs, drinking and laughing. Everyone in the street gets squirted by the hose. The juvenile delinquent's cousins hurl an occasional water balloon. When I go by, if I'm left alone or the kid is taking fire himself, I'll walk on. But if he's just squiring away and no one is firing back because they're so outgunned, then it's time for a little tactics. I head to the wall on the same side of the street and look back. For some reason, they rarely expect attack except from in front of them, from the street. They don't expect flanking maneuvers. I hug the wall, hide behind pillars and other people, working my way back through the crowd, but just the fewer people on the sidewalk. Then I come out of nowhere, running in from the side or even from behind, maybe with my entire squad from both directions and let them have it in the faces at close range with our foam cans, hoping the shock and awe will allow us to run for cover before getting drenched. Devastating and lots of fun. Retribution. Next year, I'm going to have a special T-shirt made that just says, RETRIBUTION!

### Other Fun

Maybe you know that Latin women tend to wear tight, sexy clothes. Cleavages are common with any kind of dress, even the most casual. Let me also mention that the foam cans they sell for *Carnaval* really have a great output. They're from Brazil and cost \$1 each and contain quite a lot of high-volume foam. As you know from your physics, the foam gets very cold when it comes out.

So another of my favorite "strategies" is to completely fill available cleavages at close range with cold foam as the "exposed" ladies walk by. Much fun! Amazingly, I haven't been slapped yet. Quick on mi feet, Mon!

In the mornings, peace, but not normalcy, returns to the city for a while. Workers come out to clean up the mess from the night before. Some people get a little sleep, though loud music can still be heard coming from many places all over town. For three days, people sleep in the mornings, engage in drunken chaos in the afternoon (all good, clean fun), and dance all night. There are many parades and may very big parties.

It gets a little more brutal each day. I really think one day would be enough, but there are three! It's funny, we British tend to under-do things. Think of an Eric Clapton solo. Latins tend to overdo things. Think of Brazilian thong bikinis.

Well, it will soon be time to dance again!







And, of course, the Queen!

## FotM NEWSLETTER #78 (Feb. 21, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<a href="#">20120221-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
<a href="#">20120220-03</a>	19:39	Art	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120220-04</a>	20:24	Cândida	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120220-05</a>	21:46	Bill	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120220-06</a>	22:30	Ben	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120220-07</a>	23:08	Larry	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120220-01</a>	14:02	BrentR	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120220-02</a>	17:35	SteveB	"Inside Rick Santorum's Head"
<a href="#">20120220-08</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Carnaval 2012

<a href="#">20120220-03</a>	19:39	Art	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
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Holy cow!!! I am probably a bit old for that these days but your description makes it sound fun. As a good Protestant Midwest farm boy, I knew nothing about any of this until my senior year in college, when the Citadel Summerall Guards marched in the New Orleans Mardi Gras Parade. The Parade was something, but the night life was something yet again. We used to say "Meet you in the gutter in front of Pat O'Brien's at 2300". Later as young 2nd LT in Germany I went to my first Fasching party in Bavaria. Let's just say the costumes again shocked my young sensitive Midwest soul. Being a Catholic ain't so bad after all.

You are a devil. Have fun!!!

[Bavarians are wilder than Bolivians by far! I love `em! –SteveB]

<a href="#">20120220-04</a>	20:24	Cândida	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
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:D. It seems amazing!!! I wish I were there! eheheh

Big hugs!! And a great *Carnava*!!!

<a href="#">20120220-05</a>	21:46	Bill	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
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*Viva la Retribucion!*

<a href="#">20120220-06</a>	22:30	Ben	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
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This is like most awesome. I bet you get worn out after a few hours of this, drunk, or not. I know my few experiences with laser tag left me limp, and very, very sore for almost a week. This sounds like laser tag without the timeouts between games...

<a href="#">20120220-07</a>	23:08	Larry	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
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That's great Steve Baker Hemingway. Very colorful etc. [My cousin exaggerates, but I love him. I don't drink nearly as much as Papa Hemingway! –SteveB]

Be careful.

20120220-01 14:02 BrentR Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

**From Brent (Feb. 19, 2012, 2:02 pm)—reply to SteveB, above, ref: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra**

Glad to hear you are in Bolivia!! How long are you there for? We are in Southern Chile until probably May.

Hope you have fun..... My trick was to load the back of my pickup full of barrels full of water with paint and perfume and what ever else makes for fun gooey messy(usually a little poly plus(drilling additive that makes water like snot!) too, just for extra gooey fun) .... and a 5 hp Honda pump with a 1 inch hose for distance!!!

20120220-02 17:35 SteveB "Inside Rick Santorum's Head"

"Inside Rick Santorum's Head" by Jim Hightower, Nation of Change

Feb. 20, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/inside-rick-santorum-s-head-1329747965>)

Rick Santorum is the latest darling of the most extreme of the GOP's extremist voters. Here's just an earful of this guy's moral piety.

Let's start where it all starts for us humans: conception. Not only does Santorum insist that life begins at the instant that a sperm contacts an egg, he also wants to preserve the sanctity of sperm itself by outlawing birth control. Yes, every sperm counts. Last October, he warned about "the dangers of contraception in this country...It's not OK. It's a license to do things in a sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be."

Indeed, Ayatollah Rick is a bit obsessed with what you might be doing in your bedroom. The Supreme Court, he asserts, was wrong to rule that we have a right to consensual sex in our homes. "Then you have the right to bigamy," he wails, "the right to polygamy...to incest...adultery...the right to anything." Then comes his punch line: "This right to privacy doesn't exist in my opinion in the United States Constitution."

In a January interview on CNN, the sanctimonious Santorum offered another startling insight into his moral code. When asked what he'd say to his daughter if she had been raped, was pregnant, and was crying for an abortion, he actually said, "the right approach is to accept this horribly created, in the sense of rape...gift of life and accept what God is giving you." He added that his daughter — and presumably yours, too — ought to "make the best out of a bad situation."

So much Rick, so little time. I haven't even gotten to global warming ("no such thing," he says), or his endorsement of the Crusades as being about "core American values," or his comparison of homosexuality to "man-on-dog" sex. But, with the national spotlight now on Santorum, we can count on many more Rickisms to enlighten us.

<http://www.eldeber.com.bo/nota.php?id=120219012239>

Davinia Fernández, 2012 Queen of Carnaval, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia



—Friends of the Middle,  
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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