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Clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst

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[Dinner at Tara](#)

We dined on Aug. 11 at the Governor's Mansion in Baton Rouge and were hosted by the Lieutenant Governor of the state of Louisiana, Scott Angelle, who was elegant, gracious, charming, and informative. He was a Democrat, he was quick to tell us, and with self-deprecating reassurance, about the most "underwhelming" person in a high place we would ever meet. We should not be even the tiniest bit intimidated by him, (now I must admit, until he reassured us, being intimidated had not occurred to me). He was no big deal, he insisted, but in his understated Southern way, we saw a man who is strong, self-assured, and every inch a representative of the people of Louisiana. And, one got the sense, no pushover. Angelle could easily become the next governor; I would not be surprised.

The dining room was large and ornate, and we, our group of GIC members (www.interdependence.org) sat, four to six at a table, an enormous thick oriental rug under us, a Blue Dog staring at us from the wall, a glittering crystal chandelier above. The linens were exquisite, the china formal, glassware sparkling. The menu, written in ornate script on heavy vellum, one on every gold rimmed plate, boasted -- who'd a thunk it -- had Louisiana Seafood Gumbo as a first course. Dum-da-dum-dum.

"Are they kidding?" I asked my table mates, *sotto voce*, as I did not want to be thought rude.

"Why? It looks fine," said someone, gazing into his bowl.

"Yup, it does look fine," said I, thinking of my taxi driver, who had told me on the way to the hotel from the airport that the oil was "gone."

But how does seafood look if it's got a little crude inside it? Sliding around, say, somewhere in its digestive system? And how does one know if there's a little dispersant scratching away in there at the invisible blob of crude? (You can tell I'm not a scientist.)

And serving us seafood right after about five million barrels of oil had just gushed into the gulf barely an inch, on the map anyway, south of Baton Rouge, did seem a little in-your-face. But then, I appeared to be -- compared to those around me at my table, or for that matter everyone else in the room according to what I witnessed in a furtive survey of the other guests -- slightly hypochondriacal about the idea of ingesting industrial strength soap and what looks, on TV anyway, like thick black tar.

Of course, people in Louisiana have a stake in buying the spin (or what seemed to me on Day One to be spin) offered by both the oil companies and the media, that most of the oil is "gone": cleaned up, sucked up, burned, dispersed, eaten by "nature," evaporated.

What does Corexit look like, I wondered. And how do you know what it looks like inside a fish? Or what it tastes like. Does it have a taste? Maybe a lot of it has a taste, and only a little has none but will give me brain cancer that will show up five years from now, when I've forgotten I was ever in Louisiana. Or fifteen years from now. I recalled one of Dr. Oz's rules of thumb: if you can't pronounce it, don't eat it. Let's see: propylene glycol, 2-Butoxyethanol, and dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate.

My dinner companions ate theirs.

I tasted the broth and some of the rice.

I read somewhere that a fellow kayaking in or near the polluted waters passed some 60 dolphins, and they were spouting OIL. And maybe in the same article, or in some other one, that they would die, as would the dolphin fetuses they were carrying. The death of dolphins seems to me sadder than the death of oysters, dolphins being so much more like us. Communicative and smiling. The oyster beds down here are wiped out, but that's a subject for another article.

Back to dinner with Scott: "Tell your friends and neighbors," he said, emphatically, "it's all right to eat Louisiana seafood." So, here I am, following instructions. The lieutenant governor, who is not only smart but also well-informed about the environmental situation in his state, says don't worry about the seafood from the Gulf. And he wasn't the only one to reassure. Ed Overton -- who is a Ph.D, a professor emeritus at LSU, and who unlike yours truly *is* a scientist (in analytical environmental chemistry) -- spoke to us the next day and told us that the kind of dispersant used was not only not poisonous, but also that the amount, though it sounded immense, was minuscule, given the volume of water in the Gulf of Mexico.

We cannot ignore the fact that both of these men have a stake in Louisiana's well-being and prosperity, but that fact does not necessarily compromise the absolute veracity of their statements.

But dispersants, along with the above mentioned oysters, is too a subject for another article. Not to mention truth and the bending of it.

Angelle went on to tell us that Louisiana was responsible for a fifth of the nation's fisheries; he said that 11,000 wells had been drilled in shallow water off the gulf in the last fifteen years with spills so minimal as to be negligible; and he voiced emphatic objection to the Obama administration's declaring a moratorium on drilling, a moratorium on which our EPA insisted despite an intervening judge's ruling it "arbitrary and capricious." He believes that the White House has an agenda, the the aim of which is to reduce hydrocarbons. But we can't get the energy, right now, from the birds and the bees, said he. And until we actually have clean, renewable energy, we need oil. He warned of the consequences of ending deep-water drilling in the Gulf: Ships will go to Brazil and West Africa, as well as the consequences of halting work on the jack-up drills -- local companies will not survive, and the state will lose 10 to 20,000 jobs.

What seemed tragic, cruel, and dreadfully unfair (to my ears, by the time he was finished speaking) was the likelihood that the large oil companies, whose coffers seem almost infinite, could and would ultimately survive spills, moratoria, lawsuits of almost any amount and duration, while the little guys, the independents, will have no way of surviving a six month moratorium (for that is the length of time of inactivity as the government ruling stands now) and they, their employees, their families, the restaurants they supply, and their employees, and -- well, you can imagine the ripple effect -- will find their livelihood and therefore their lives pretty much destroyed.

As we were leaving the mansion, I asked our host if he thought that there was any possibility at all that the purpose of the moratorium was purely and simply to avoid further catastrophe, and without so much as a pause, he said, "no."

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