

“Monday Morning Melancholy”  
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The opposite of a fence is open range, acres and acres of unimpeded land where wildlife live free and roam, where the sky is so vast and blue the lakes reflect it's glory, where the land remains untainted by human touch. In Wyoming, where there are miles and miles of nothing but miles and miles, the 82 miles of road between Medicine Bow and the outskirts of Casper used to boast 31 cattleguards and the occasional “open range” sign to remind foreigners that cattle roam free in these vast acres of hilly grassland. When we first started making the trip from Laramie to Sheridan, we used to count the cattleguards, noting over the years that the number grew smaller and smaller, sometimes as the metal-covered culverts were filled in and painted with white lines to fool the cattle into being afraid to cross.

There is little open range left in modern America. The greed of the few has turned the land into a wasteland of organized agriculture. Where do the wild horses roam? Where do the buffalo go when they are too cumbersome to leap the wires separating production from profit. Is there a distinction between the left and right sides of these fields? Is something being fenced in or fenced out? Indeed, what is the purpose of a fence?

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If a fence represents greed, the opposite of a fence sharing.

“Yes, I own this land, but you may walk through it. Please try not to trample the wild flowers.”

“Why yes, it's perfectly all right for you to pitch your tent in my field. Just use the outhouse, please, and don't knock over the corn.”

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A fence is a judgment on society. It says that we are a selfish culture, that it's everyone for themselves. It's tribal in the most basic of ways.

“Don't cross this line.”

“It's my way or the highway.”

“I don't trust you.”

“I'm just sure if you cross my boundary, you will trample my flowers / steal my yard decorations / let your dog poop in my grass / take things off my porch / break into my car / vandalize my house.”

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Does it get any worse than this? We don't trust each other, to the point that when the neighbor's wife dies, the neighbor tells his only friend not to tell anyone. How paranoid do you have to be to not want your neighbors to know that someone living right there next door is gone and isn't coming back? How paranoid are the rest of us going to becoming, knowing you don't trust us?

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The opposite of a fence is trust. I trust you not to steal or damage anything that belongs to me. I trust to you pitch in and help out with the chores because I was kind enough to let you share my abode. And if I share everything I have with you, I trust you not to ask me for more.

It seems that our society has fallen off the rails and is careening toward a canyon where it will plunge to its demise. We have become so very tribal in our pettiness that we have lost sight of the very thing that makes us human — not our opposable thumbs and our self-awareness, but our compassion for others. Why is it that for every person who is willing to give you the shirt off their back, there are a dozen more who will fight over the shirt and rip both it and its owner to shreds?