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Vive le crayon!

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“Papa, do you remember when I was a kid I used to watch Dorothee’s program? There used to be an artist painter called Cabu. They killed him.” I got this text message from my son, born and raised in France. I called him, he could barely talk in his grief. Watch Channel 2’s animated children’s program clip by Dorothee called *Vive les vacances* (Long live the holidays) of 30 years ago https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJhetHo_zfo. Cabu’s live drawings had kept a whole generation spellbound. It’s incredible how my generation, my son’s generation, younger French generations I’ve seen in solidarity gatherings condemning the horrible shootout at *Charlie Hebdo* premises, were all so heavily influenced by intellectual satirical poetic cartoonists.

Gerrard, Jose and I were colleagues working in a design firm at Nation, Paris East, late 1970s. We’d lunch at La Grignoterie on Boulevard De Picpus, good meat with salad or French fries cooked by the husband of the woman who ran the small restaurant. The dessert was always delicious caramel custard or profiterolles. Particularly on Wednesdays we’d delay the owner because that’s the day *Charlie Hebdo* was published, and we’d get engrossed arguing over its contents.

This satirical paper challenged us with intellectual entertainment. What auto-censored traditional media could not say, *Charlie Hebdo* ripped apart without any frontier. Their lampooning spared no one, from politics and presidents to religious symbols like popes and

prophets, to high-profile celebrities and extreme right culture. They rebelliously took on subjects they disapproved of. Without sugarcoating, they often appeared crude, but with simple pencil strokes they aroused both great laughter and intense anger. The three of us could never agree on any Wednesday topic. We’d always have triangular fights or two-against-one fight. Lunchtime was just an hour, but hot Wednesday debates made us rush through the last 10 minutes. The best part after a big fight was that Jose and I would face each other across a worktable, where immediately we’d become friendly colleagues again. Gerrard sat separately in the architectural design department. Often on Wednesdays he’d arrive at 4 o’clock at the coffee shop behind our office to restart our *Charlie Hebdo* subject fight for 5 minutes, then return to work.

On 8 January 2015, Jose and I nostalgically spoke on Skype, watching TV in shock, he in France, I in India. We mused over how *Charlie Hebdo*’s non-conformist illustrators had engaged us on terrific debates every Wednesday. Provocative cartoons of Jean Cabu, Georges Wolinski and Philippe Honoré could express satire with a few lines within a few seconds, something that would take a thousand words to write or half an hour to film. Having seen their live graphical palette as they drew cartoons in reply to different questions in television programs was unforgettable. I was asking Jose why we are feeling we’ve lost our friends, because we’d never met them. Jose figured it was the power of their pencils, their humour and extreme modesty that endeared them so. As fellow artists we connected easily to their simplicity and artistic, expressive minds that showed a tangential perspective. They were not

known outside France as they communicated in French, but just look at how the whole world is mourning their death. This shows how creative ideology and liberty of expression can never die.

The power of crayons led people of all ages to 26 Rue Serpollet, Paris 75020. They put boxes of colourful pencils as memorial remembrances for those the terrorists gunned down at *Charlie Hebdo* office on 7 January, four of whom were considered among France's most ingenious cartoonists of all time. "I would rather die standing than live on my knees," is what Editor Stephane Charbonnier had earlier said. Watching a TV interview of his companion, Jeannette Bougrab really moved me. She served as French Secretary for Youth and Community Life in Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP Government. Remembering Stephane, with tears, but elegantly, she said she's from the Right wing while he was totally Leftist, but their love was above politics. She was dreading the next few days because two tough jobs awaited her; she had to see her companion's bullet-ridden body after the autopsy, and see him get into the grave. I will never forget her expression of the pain she is going through.

Satirical caricature has been a revered tradition in French journalism since before the 1789 Revolution.

In this world's first revolution where French motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" emerged, radical and liberal publications played a decisive role in replacing France's absolute monarchy. Subsequently, there arose modern political ideologies globally and democratic republics. Satire's core aim is to make people laugh. The printed press spread cartoons and liberty of artists across Europe. But censorship was not unknown to France in recent times. When satirical magazine *Hara-kiri* published some mockery after President Charles de Gaulle's death in 1970, it was banned. Most of *Hara-kiri*'s illustrators then started an alternative, irreverently calling it *Charlie Hebdo*. Aside from barbing de Gaulle, *Charlie* also references Charlie Brown who's lovable but a never-give-up loser created by American Charles Shultz in comic strip *Peanuts*. *Hebdo* is abbreviated

hebdomadaire, meaning "weekly."

Charlie Hebdo was the heart of French culture, admired for super-stroke creativity inspite of the contradictions they provoked. Other French publications are contributing to keep *Charlie Hebdo* alive, a million copies will be printed of its next Wednesday's edition. Although barely known outside France, young cartoonists worldwide want to join it today. France is hosting an international rally against terrorism on 11 January 2015. All this demonstrates that artist intellectuals have to the power break all political divisions to unite for a cause. Voltaire, 18th century French satirical polemicist and philosopher had criticized intolerance, religious dogma, and French institutions during his time. What he said sums up the solidarity people feel today: "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

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