

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Miranda's theory about technology

“WE’RE entering an age of autism,” said Miranda. “Look at all these people sitting around the coffee shop hypnotized by their phones.”

Miranda was sitting on the patio of Coupa Cafe with her niece Christi, trying to persuade Christi not to marry a young autistic tech billionaire whom she did not love.

“These devices are just the way we younger people communicate, Aunt Miranda,” said Christi. “You old people are out of touch.”

“Perhaps,” said Miranda. “But I think autism has grown epidemically in recent years; and that electronic devices are part of it; and that Palo Alto is one of its centers.”

“But people are like this everywhere,” replied Christi. “Young people, that is.”

This is part 8 of a 24-part fictionalized serial appearing in the Daily Post, written by John Angell Grant. To read previous chapters, go to www.johngangellgrant.com.

“This new epidemic of autism,” said Miranda, “emerged because children now learn how to speak by watching television screens instead of interacting with other humans.”

“If that’s true,” said Christi, “what do you want to do about it? Your generation built the machines.”

“I don’t have an answer,” said Miranda. “I appreciate the usefulness of the technology, but it has facilitated this epidemic in my view. I hear it in the speaking patterns. Like that cashier at the counter who says ‘perfect’ to everyone. Things aren’t

perfect. She’s just hanging on to a lifeboat emotionally, trying to stabilize her reality.”

“That’s a stretch,” said Christi.

“I’m just theorizing,” said Miranda.

“So you’ve got your theory,” said Christi. “Now you need your data.”

“I like my intuition in this area,” Miranda continued. “Empathy skill sets are not well learned by children who grow up nurtured by television, rather than by other people. Having been away from Palo Alto for so long, but having grown up here years ago, I can feel it in the air.”

“Well we have you to blame for it,” said her niece Christi. “Your generation was the first to come of age in front of a television set. You could have warned us,” she teased.

“Apologies,” said Miranda.

“Now that you’ve retired, you have more time on your hands to reflect,” said Christi.

“That is true,” said Miranda. “Life has stopped being a rush of deadlines.”

“Maybe that’s not a good thing,” said Christi.

“How is more time to reflect not a good thing?” asked Miranda.

“Maybe we’re all better off working hard, so we don’t notice what’s going on around us,” said Christi.

“Perfect,” said Miranda, with a smile, imitating the intonation of the coffee shop clerk.

More tomorrow.