

**RUSSELL'S RUMINATIONS**  
**A LETTER OF ANALYSIS AND COMMENT ON MANY, BUT SELECTED,**  
**CURRENT ISSUES AND EVENTS**

**Cobden, Illinois 62920**  
**May, 1978**

Dear Friends:

Here it is, three months further into 1978 and time for another letter of Ruminations, which I shall hopefully label VOL. 1, No. 2. I enjoyed doing the first one, during the cold of winter, and comments received were generally favorable. (Of course, most of the recipients were relatives or old friends, so I did not seek harsh criticism, obviously. And I didn't really consider what simple silence could mean.)

I was the pleased recipient of a note from our busy, ubiquitous Congressman, Paul Simon, who said a few encouraging things. I put the letter away carefully (so I could quote it here), but did it so carefully that I cannot now find it. (Have you ever done that?)

The best full letter, however, was from Mabel Hefty, a friend from our first years at Punahou School, 1948-52, with whom Lenore and I renewed relationships last summer in Hawaii. Her response to my comments on death and dying was:

*From the time of my childhood I have thought of death as going on a journey to a farm away place. At 63, I still feel the same way... with another word added – adventurous. Every part of my life has been an adventure of one kind or another. The important work given to me to do was to rear two children to become self-sufficient, productive persons who have established families of their own. When this was done, I considered every day a bonus to be lived fully and joyfully. Even the difficult days and the painful experiences brought growth, which added to the richness of the next adventure. I've always loved life and adventure, and when the greatest adventure of all – death – comes, I expect to start out with as much excitement and anticipation as any I have had. Thanks be to God!*

It was interesting to me that she used the word "bonus," for that's one of my favorite concepts of life, day-by-day. No one has any guaranteed length of life, but as a young man I had the feeling that there were some experiences to which I was "entitled". Somewhere in my late 30's, however, I lost the sense of "entitlement", no longer felt that there was anything I deserved, so each new day of life is a "bonus"... like unto Mabel. And that definitely affects the way I consider death. Yes, I'd say OK to the concept of "adventure".

At 63 she, Mabel, gives evidence of being one of those hardy human beings who has growth with the adversities and weathered, thus far, the threats of life. She goes, in mid-July, back to Kenya where she lived and worked for two years, some ten years ago. Each geographical place and each culture has its dangers and its threats to which those in it must adapt. In Kenya it can be micro-organisms, insects, wild animals, and/or wild, terroristic humans. Here, in this civilization, one of the threats is beverage alcohol.

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I was in California in February and brought back a tale from the San Francisco Examiner of February 17, one of unlikely maladaptation. David Johnson, pictured as a long-haired 16 year old (not unlike the way most of our boys have looked at about sixteen) came from a large Mormon family, but exhibited a drinking problem from about age thirteen. His mother said:

***“I won’t deny it. He’s had some bad bouts with alcohol, but he’s been good this year... He knew alcohol makes you drunk, but he was naïve...”***

His sixteen year old friends said:

***“I’ve known him for a long time. He drank a lot, but he wasn’t no alcoholic... He was just a normal kid. He just rolled with the punches.”***

Not too bizarre... except that the report told of David’s death... not from an automobile crash, as might be expected, but from a stomach that bled too much and a liver that failed. He had drunk heavily for two years, apparently, but certain bars and alleyways throughout America will yield men who have drunk heavily for 30... 40 years. David was a “normal kid”, but he couldn’t adapt to alcohol. And most young people in the U.S.A. today have to be able to. It’s one of our threats.

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Now relatively few will hear of David Johnson (fascinatingly, the same name as my cousin who was killed in a plane crash at 17 two years ago), and the fact that a large amount of something, even in a short time, can be harmful. But many have heard of Linus Pauling and his controversial assertions that a large amount of something will do much good.

***“Orthomolecular” is a concept of the right molecules in the right amounts... in practice, it means altering the amounts of the naturally occurring substances – vitamin, amino acids, and so on – in the human body until you find what corresponds to the concentrations necessary for the best of health....”***

His application is to Vitamin C, of course, and in the Plowboy Interview in the January/February 1978 issue of Mother Earth News he tells of the development of his

personal and scientific interest in this nutrient. The thing that was most intriguing to me was his descriptions of opposition to his suggestion that large amounts of Vitamin C can prevent colds and flu, opposition by medical scientists who apparently had not read thoroughly the literature on this phenomenon... and his assertion that even some researchers who found positive results reported that these were “unimportant” – (apparently because this wasn’t what they were “supposed to find”.) I am not anti-science, but I sometimes do get disturbed/amused by the arrogance that some scientists exhibit... not really founded in their own work or on a thorough, honest study of the literature. More than any other area of human endeavor, science should be open to new findings, refutations of the true and accepted, and a constant restructuring of truth. I suppose not enough of those who become scientists also have the adequate sense of self and the security to be able to see science this way.

There is, then, in some scientists (as in some religionists, including some Christians) the conviction that, in order to keep one’s own position strong one must criticize, berate, and even destroy competing forces. I prefer a stance of “do what you do as well as you can”... as the solidest approach to building strength. Out of honest competition will come strength, excellence, and, even, appreciation for other ways of knowing, acting, and reacting.

\* \* \*

Now I think this relates to a thought I had last week as I was walking across the campus (really ruminating). It concerned a statement that had come up recently in a Consumer Health Course – that many patients do not take all of the medication prescribed by a physician; as soon as the symptoms subside they stop medicating, which, according to medical thinking, is a dangerous consumer practice. Now, being one who believes in having as strong an immune system as possible (and in the basic principle, “If you don’t use it, you lose it”) I think that the body’s combined immune system should be given the fullest opportunity to combat disease or infection with its own resources. If the system can’t do the job, then an antibiotic may help, but should only be used as a help, not a substitute. When symptoms diminish, that’s generally a sign that the Help Wanted period is over.

The medical approach seems to be, “OK, immune system... you’re not really capable of dealing with this, so just relax and let the antibiotics do it for you.” (I realize this is an oversimplification, but I won’t retract it.) So each time the immune system gets to “relax” and not have to struggle for victory, it becomes just a little less able for the next attack.

As I said, out of competition will come strength and excellence... in science and in healing.

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Of course, competition in all realms always carries the possibility of “defeat,” so there are strong urges to “win at any cost”. Scientists can become fearful that other modes of inquiry may come into vogue... and, in parallel, the lingering sore throat may portend the inability of the body’s defense system. From my personal and professional perspective a very legitimate query is, “What, really, produces health?”

One of our criteria for healthiness is longevity, and most folks who deal with this in academic terms know that there are three “pockets” of obvious longevity in the world – Indians high in the Ecuadorian Andes, Russians in certain portion so the Caucasus Mountains, and inhabitants of the valley of Hunza, high in the Himalyas in what is now Pakistan. (Interestingly, these cultures, even though widely removed from each other, have many similarities to one another, but none has any major likenesses to the “approved” life in the U.S. of A.)

While At Purdue University this past semester as a Visiting Professor I made a Seminar presentation on Health in Multicultural Perspective and made a passing reference to reported changes in life in Hunza (the geographical and cultural inspiration for James Hilton’s Shangri-La). The next day a student gave me a small, tattered paperback book to read, called Hunza Health Secrets. I read it overnight, and it was a fascinating account of a young woman’s perilous trip into the Valley, probably around 1963. The people were portrayed as a healthy, simple people, who worked hard physically, ate sparingly (even fasted in the Spring when stored food was gone and new crops were not yet harvestable), and seemed happy and content with life in the beautiful but isolated valley. They were hospitable to strangers, generous, and fun-loving. Men 125 years old played volleyball.

This formed the sad backdrop for the clipping I have, a special report by a National Enquirer reporter, Leo Clancy, in 1975 on what had happened to Hunza. The Mir (ruler) had authorized the building of a road, so that his people would no longer be isolated. With the road had come people, and with them came tuberculosis and whooping cough... also sugar and a great increase in tooth decay, practically unknown before. To get money to buy things now potentially available, Hunzakites were now charging visitors to talk with and photograph them. It seemed likely that a tourist hotel would be built, and that rich visitors would become an industry. Young men were leaving the valley for more exciting life elsewhere, and therefore trees were not being planted... and wood was the only natural fuel and source of heat.

All in all it showed, again, that however some of us may extol the virtues of a simpler life... a “more healthy life”... the one we are creating in the U.S. today is clearly the more seductive and seems to win out in competition every time. But it is equally plain that the civilized life has its prices – in physical adaptations, in the stress of redeveloping a personal orientation as a “consumer,” and in the rearrangement of social relations. “How ya gonna keep ‘em happy in Shangri-La, after they’ve seen the Hilton?”

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And yet the world is not just a matter of extremes. As extremes come together, syntheses may develop. I commented in the First issue on the folly of simply defining problems “our way” and then solving them “our way”... and mentioned hunger and population as an example. Mable Hefty commented on this, too, and she observed:

*How can a well-fed people who are surrounded by quantities of food appreciate what it is like to live in the midst of*

*drought-ridden fields and subsist on a ration of a half cup of cornmeal every two days. This ration was distributed either by the local administrative officer or the mission church minister. At least this was as it was in Kenya when I was there during such a period. Many a day I hauled the cornmeal from Fort Hall to the distributing point in my Land Rover.*

*All subsistence agriculture in Kenya depends on seasonal rains, and when they fail, the people starve. This is the kind of problem we must confront and understand if we are to help with a solution. We must understand the culture, the people's values, their limitations, and their strengths before we can be of any permanent help. A well, built in the traditional manner which the people will know how to use, will prove to be of greater help than the most sophisticated technically perfect one. We can only help if we find and send well-trained people who will go to an area, listen to the elders with understanding and compassion, and be able to work within the limitations of the environment, not as a "keeper" but as a companion.*

It bothers me that she still is talking about this as a "problem", which, presumably, has a "solution". Yet I can presume that those are just "acculturisms," because she really focuses on "help." And "help" is what we can do, even though this may not lead to any "solutions".

Mabel's observations emanate from years of maturity, years with their combinations of joy and pain. It is fascinating, then, to find such similarity of these thoughts with those of Ardy Bryce, a former student of mine, a bright, brassy, chubby young woman, the daughter of a physician, who is spending her first post B.A. year in the Peace Corps in Niger, West Africa. She writes:

*... April 1<sup>st</sup> I will be starting my 10<sup>th</sup> month in Africa... Life has its ups and downs, but when I add everything up I made the bet decision in coming to Africa. Each day I become more involved with the health problems here, comparing them with the rest of the world. Everyday is a learning experience and that's one of the good things about being here. I am working in a well-baby clinic; however, there are more sick ones than well ones... Right now we are in the middle of two epidemics... measles and meningitis... the hot season is in full swing... average temperature for siesta (12:30-4:30) is 120\*-130\* F. I am really enjoying working in health. Although it can be depressing it is also very rewarding, for everytime one woman doesn't listen, there are three that do...*

*Here we have the Moslem religion; death and Allah are one and the same here. Knowing my own feelings on death and studying the feelings of others has really helped me when the mother of a sick child says, "It is Allah's will" and just gives up. I can understand that her beliefs are stronger than my education. I am here to help and volunteers have to accept the fact that Allah has been around longer than the Peace Corps in giving out answers...*

OK, how do I get from two perceptive multicultural comments on black Africa to the SSPS? I think I'll go back to Mabel's statement, "A well, built in the traditional manner which the people will know how to use, will prove to be of greater help than the most sophisticated technically perfect one." This is a very honest, straightforward statement, but it could be taken as an up-date of the "white man's burden"... "those poor savages aren't really able to deal with the technology with which we in civilization are comfortable." For we, in this culture, must continually deal with the overpowering ethic, "If science and technology can do it, then we should do it." It's actually the same challenge/dilemma at different levels: how useful will advanced technology be, considering everything. The difference is that a technically perfect water system probably isn't potentially dangerous, while some of the new technology for power generation certainly is.

SSPS are the initials of a Satellite Solar Power Station, and these are described in generally unloving detail in an article titled "Shuttling Manhattans to the Sky" in the May, 1978 issue of Mother Jones, a Magazine for the Rest of Us. Concisely, an SSPS is envisioned by the folks at Boeing, Grumman, Rockwell, and Raytheon as about 72 square miles of solar energy collecting panels and mirrors, functioning over 22,000 miles above the earth, converting solar energy into microwaves and beaming them back to earth into great five mile wide antennas.

This is a way of creating many jobs and utilizing much of our already developed space technology in making solar energy more utilizable. A Boeing official put it this way, "The response from people when you talk about solar power is excellent. They like it. They have that inherent feeling of the warmth of the sun."

Cost is a crazy phenomenon these days, because "costing too much" is judged both by "do we have it to spend? and "how badly do we need it?", and "... compared to what?" Most of the "cost" of these "stations the size of Manhattan Island" would be wages and salaries for individual people who are having a hard time keeping up with inflation. We know we need electricity, and every other means to generate it will cost more... so what is "too much" to the taxpayer, who is also the electricity-demander-user?

The cost of development of SSPS's would run \$40 to \$80 billion, and building and installation of projected "needs" would take around \$1 trillion. Also it is estimated that each would have to supply energy for 7-8 years before it was "even" for what it took in energy to manufacture and shoot out of the earth's atmosphere. It seems incredible to my basically conservative nature, but perhaps we could afford these, given whatever the alternatives were.

But, somewhat like unto nuclear fission and the breeder reactor, these big rascals send forth an intermediate product – microwaves – that do bad things to human protoplasm. So there could be “stray” microwaves, just as another form of pollution, increasing the possibilities of cancer, cataracts, and Downes syndrome (Mongolism). Also there would always be that possibility of the satellite changing position slightly from the antenna and quietly cooking some portion of a population.

Now it would seem that dangers such as these would doom a project, but the future of the aerospace industry may be at stake. “They think SSPS is the best thing since candied apples” was one scientist’s comment. So be prepared for more complicated decision-making as we try to utilize science for our betterment, while avoiding its destructive potentials.

Has this been a negative, disaster-predicting experience? I hope not, for the essence of life, say I, is balancing the yin and the yang and melding the ups and the downs (without creating some sterile, flat plain). Father Joseph Martin offered this at the end of one of his films on alcoholism, and it says a lot of what I want to:

*I do not wish you joy without a sorrow  
Nor endless day without the healing dark  
Nor brilliant sun without the restful shadow  
Nor tides that never turn against your bark  
I wish you faith, and strength, and love, and wisdom  
Goods... gold enough to help a needy one  
I wish you songs, but also blessed silence  
And God’s sweet peace, when every day is done.*

As I tiptoe back through these ruminations I see that I began with death and dying, but dealt with it mostly in a secular way. Then I described a particular death and pondered beverage alcohol as a threat requiring adaptation. Next came Linus Pauling who affirms, as a scientist, that the normal body needs much more Vitamin C than it can get naturally; still my comment was on the potential dogmatism of science. That raised the issue of competition, a tentative speculation about the immune system, and the triumph of some deteriorative forces in Hunzaland, until people can “adapt” to civilization. We must work internationally on the terms of others... but then must be wary of technology making us buy its terms... case in point, the SSPS.

There was nothing very theological... except Ardy’s concern when the Moslem mother accepted misfortune as “Allah’s will”, and her sage comment that “Allah has been around longer than the Peace Corps...” But this points to one of the prime theological issues, “What is God’s will and what is our ‘free will’” Applied to all of these issues – from alcohol to SSPS’s – how much control do we really have? And that leads to an even deeper issue, which I’ll phrase in what should be a characteristically Presbyterian way – “Which of us chose God, and which were chosen by Him?” In 1965 I did some regular daily meditative writing, and the following “Parable of Predestination” was “given to me” one May morning.

*Once there lived (and still lives!) a father and a son and their faithful servant in a house. The father was wise, powerful,*

*loving, benevolent, demanding; the son reflected the traits of his father; the servant interpreted the spirit and teachings of both to all who would listen. Some said that they lived together in such perfect harmony that it was difficult to say whether they were really three or really only one.*

*Father and son were not content to live alone. They loved the world around them and the people in it, and would have some come and live with them – to share the joy and affluence of their dwelling place. So father and son called some individuals – for different reasons and different purposes. Some they called young, that their lives might be lived long with the father and son; others they called when they were older, that their experiences living elsewhere might enrich their household. Each who was called obviously had to leave his former home, but the invitation was either so compelling or so insistent that all did (though some tried to live in two places for some time).*

*There was joy, there was love, there was both stimulation and peace in that house. Others, who had not been called and selected for some task, came because of what they had heard or seen or had some to know about this family and asked if they might join, too. Some had great talents, some small, but the father accepted them all and welcomed them. No distinction was made – in the great love of the father and son – between those who were called and came and those who came on their own. In one sense they loved those who were chosen, because they, father and son, had selected and invited them – in their great wisdom – for purposes of their own. In another, they loved those who presented themselves willingly and they were able – in their great wisdom – to use the talents so freely presented.*

*At any one time it was impossible for anyone looking in to tell who in the family had been chosen and who had come of their own initiative. This also became an unimportant distinction for those in the family.*

*Yet the life of the family went on, and father and son continued to invite new sons and daughters to live with them, and the nature of the home attracted others.*

*And it continues to this day, and shows no signs of diminishing life and vigor.*



So, you may feel “chosen” to share your reactions with me (and blessed if you just do it on your own)... that we might all ponder more together... as well as singly.

Happy Summer,

Bob Russell