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Editorial

Captain Sobel

You are about to read about Major Dick Winters, commanding officer of Easy Company in the European theatre during World War II. The apostle Paul tells us to “endure hardness as a good soldier.” Needless to say, Paul didn’t know Major Winters. But we believe that he was thinking about someone of his fiber.

Dick Winters was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, on January 21, 1918. At the time of his birth his parents, Richard and Edith Winters, lived in the little town of New Holland. When eight, the family moved to Ephrata. “I had a wonderful mother—,” he writes, “very conservative. She came from a Mennonite family, but never converted to that faith. Honesty and discipline were driven into my head from day one.”

With the looming prospect of war, Winters volunteered for military service and on August 25, 1941, entered the Army, choosing the infantry. In September he began his basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina. He did so well that in December, when his battalion was deployed to Panama, he was retained as an instructor for incoming draftees. Soon after came the attack on Pearl Harbor and the country—industry, and especially the military—geared up for war.

After ten months of training, Winters decided to join the paratroopers. This elite airborne force was made up entirely of carefully selected volunteers. Training was rigorous, torturous, to be more exact. Only those with almost inhuman stamina and determination finished the course and receive the coveted wings that set them aside as elite warriors—warriors who would silently drop down behind enemy lines during the darkest nights and converge for battle. During this eight-month period of training, such commonplace items as the position of shoes in the barracks and the fold of bedcovers (exactly seven inches) were checked by the cadre that carried rulers during inspection. Many washed out, but those who didn’t graduated with the commission of a second lieutenant.

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Toccoa, Georgia, was the birthplace of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), where Winters was officially activated on July 20, 1942. Upon reporting to duty, Colonel Sink made it clear that the 506th PIR was going to be the “best _____ unit” in the U.S. Army. By the war’s end, few would disagree with this prophecy.

Winters was assigned to Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th PIR, comprised of eight officers and 132 enlisted men. First Lieutenant (later promoted to captain) Herbert M. Sobel, of Chicago, Illinois, was E (Easy) Company’s commanding officer. Both Colonel Sink and Lieutenant Sobel left no doubt: There would be absolutely no breach of discipline in Easy Company.

And there wasn’t. The 506th PIR (remember that Easy Company was only one of the companies) was made up of 148 officers and 1,800 enlisted volunteers. During the 13 weeks of training, over 250 officers washed out, unable to take the strain, and over 3,500 enlisted men. Everyone was free to quit at anytime. All it took was to walk to headquarters and say, “I don’t want this.” Unquestioned transfer was immediate.

Those who remained is what this story is about.

A paratrooper must be in absolutely top physical and mental condition. Ten-mile daytime hikes were soon extended to 25 miles through the Georgia countryside. The first nighttime hike was 11 miles. Even though canteens filled with water were carried the entire time, Lieutenant Sobel insisted that no one drink a drop until the hike was concluded. Then came jumps from jump towers. Wearing parachute harnesses attached to a static line, which in turn was connected to a cable and pulley device that slowed the drop, but not enough to avoid a hard landing, which prepared the men for the real thing.

Training was incessant with no respect for weekends, holidays, day or night, rain, snow or freezing cold. But worse than all this was Lieutenant Sobel, whom historian Stephen Ambrose charitably calls “a petty tyrant who exudes arrogance.” During inspection, he could find every imaginable, and unimaginable, infraction of rules, including dirty ears, when all else failed. No matter how ridiculous his actions, his men had to stand at attention and accept whatever he dished out with a snappy “Yes, sir.” On one occasion he stood before an immaculately dressed soldier and finding no infringement, thrust his face within inches of the soldier’s and asked, “What size shirt do you wear?”

“Size 15, sir!”

With a deep scowl, he shouted, “_____, I can put two fingers between your neck and your shirt!”

“Yes, sir.”

As time went on, he became increasingly vicious with his men and his behavior more erratic. He was feared by all and respected by no one.

What bothered subordinate officers more than the beratings which they constantly suffered from their superior officer, was his method of leading through fear and not example. He didn’t speak with his men, but shouted. He loved to humiliate platoon leaders before the men whom they were to lead. Dislike for this officer progressed into downright hate. On at least one occasion plots were uncovered in which several soldiers planned to kill Captain Sobel.

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Training continued. The day came in which the officers of Easy Company made their first jumps from an airplane, actually, five during that day, which made them bona fide paratroopers.

More training. On Thanksgiving Day they went through what has since been called the “hog and innards problem.” Barbwire was nailed to the top of stakes some 18 inches high, forming a corridor approximately 25 feet wide and 50-60 feet long. The ground underneath this barbwire was covered with hog entrails. To simulate actual combat, machine guns were set up the length of the corridor and live bullets were sprayed over the area at barbwire height. The men then had to crawl through this gook, maintaining a low profile to avoid getting their heads or derriere filled with lead.

Then came the terrible march from Camp Toccoa to Atlanta, a distance of 118 miles, from December 1 to December 4, 1942. Colonel Sink read in a magazine that the Japanese had done a 100 mile march down the Malayan Peninsula in 72 hours. The Colonel was positive his own men could do better and wanted to prove this to the world. He did. Of the 586 men who started out on the march, only 12 fell by the wayside.

Seven miles out of Camp Toccoa, the rain in which they were walking turned to snow. The first day 44 miles were covered and 40 on the second. Major Winters will never forget the third day. After marching in a cold rain and mud that came to the top of their boots during the day, they made camp at night. As they slept, or attempted to sleep, the weather turned really nasty and dropped below freezing. The next morning sleeping bags were frozen solid. Boots were frozen in the congealed mud. It was not a happy bunch of soldiers that hit the trail that day. It must be remembered that these soldiers marched in combat conditions, carrying their weapons and other paraphernalia. The total elapsed time for the march was 75 hours and 15 minutes, which, when considering the additional miles, was better than what the Japanese did, and probably in considerably worse weather.

Upon reaching Atlanta, the men marched down Peach Street to Five Points, in the center of town, where they were greeted by the mayor and the press and given a hero's welcome.

Training continued and as time for deployment to Europe approached, Sobel's leadership became increasingly erratic. The men had trained under Sobel, but would they be willing to risk their lives to his leadership in combat? And yet, the results of his training were good. The War Department conducted extensive tests to determine the efficiency and readiness of battalions about to be sent to the war zone. Sobel's men came up with a score of 97 percent. It was believed a mistake was made, so a new battery of tests were administered. This time the score was 98 percent, the highest in the entire Army. Needless to say, not only were Colonel Sink and Captain Sobel pleased with these results. So were the men.

The men were transferred from one camp to another, and then finally, in early September of 1943, Easy Company boarded the S.S. Samaria in the New York Harbor and began the transatlantic voyage to Europe. On September 15, the ship docked in Liverpool, England. The troops were immediately scuttled to Aldbourne, in Wiltshire,

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approximately 80 miles west of London. This would be their home for the next nine months, where they would train for the invasion of fortress Europe. The enlisted men occupied Nissan huts, while officers were billeted in private homes. Winters lived with a family named Barnes, that had recently lost a son in the war. A very close friendship developed between Winters and what he soon came to feel were his second parents, a friendship that lasted for many years after the war, until the death of the elderly couple.

In England, training became more realistic in an attempt to duplicate the conditions that could be expected during the invasion of fortress Europe. One such operation involved 1,050 aircraft and 15,000 paratroopers. Even though no practice maneuver could prepare the men for the reality of the real thing, it did at least give a feeling of what was about to come.

The invasion was to take place on June 5, but because of weather conditions, General Eisenhower postponed it for 24 hours. Thus on the 5th, final preparations were underway for “the real thing” on June 6. The schedule for Winters’ company was simple: 10:15 p.m. in the plane; 11:10 p.m. takeoff; 1:20 a.m. jump.

After the aircraft door was removed in preparation for the jump, Winters stuck his head out and looked around. as far as his eyes could behold, there were V of V formations (nine planes in each V, which in turn formed larger V formations, each composed of 81 aircraft). As can easily be imagined, it was humanly impossible for all the paratroopers to be dropped on pre-established drop zones. In fact, few did. This was partially—possibly largely—due to intense anti-aircraft fire from the ground.

When Winters’ plane arrived at the drop-zone, the green light indicating the paratroopers should exit did not come on. A minute passed, another, and then the tail of the plane was hit. Immediately the green light came on and seconds later there were no more paratroopers in the plane (which returned to England without incident). In one of those quirks of war, it was exactly this two-minute delay that probably saved the lives of Winters and his men. As they were to find out later, there was a large concentration of enemy soldiers at the planned drop zone, prepared to annihilate all intruders.

When Winters exited the aircraft, flying low, at a mere 500 feet and a speed of 150 m.p.h., the shock of the prop blast ripped off most of his equipment. Thus, when his feet hit the ground, he found himself in enemy territory with no arms nor ammunition. That night was spent reuniting scattered paratroopers and moving toward their intended drop area, exactly where the Germans were concentrated. All this time Winters was rearming himself with a rifle, ammunition and grenades from dead soldiers.

Easy Company’s mission was to land behind Utah beach and then approach the guns and troops defending the beach from behind. As the bluffs overlooking the landing beach was approached, the sound of heavy gunfire was heard. A four-gun battery of “105s” (large bore stationary 105 mm guns) was firing on landing troops, taking a terrible toll. Winters immediately recognized this as his first task: to remove this gun battery. But how, with only light weapons and grenades?

It was here that Winters’ intense training, his supreme leadership, kicked in. Instead of regarding the gun battery as an insurmountable obstacle, he decided to take it one

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gun at a time. Crawling ahead under the protection of a hedgerow, Winters discovered that the gun battery, which faced toward sea, was being protected by heavy machine gun fire. They would have to silence the machine guns to be able to destroy the big gun. While this was being accomplished, one of Winters' men was hit by enemy fire. Instead of being worried about his wound, he apologized, "I'm sorry lieutenant, I goofed. I goofed. I'm sorry." With men like this, success was possible and the first large gun fell silent, saving lives on the beach. Six Germans surrendered, approaching with their hands up and shouting, "No make me dead!" Important documents and maps were captured, showing the position of other gun positions. Of interest to the men was a cache of ammunition with wooden bullets.

The second gun was taken in a similar way, then the third and finally the fourth. Utah beach was now a safer place for soldiers jumping into shallow water from their landing craft. The toll for Easy Company was four dead and six wounded.

After a beachhead had been secured in Normandy, troops, armaments and supplies kept flowing over the Channel in mindboggling volume. After days of intense fighting, Easy Company was recalled, the work now up to the infantry, the Air Force and armored units. The paratroopers were needed behind enemy lines in other fronts to prepare the way for the infantry.

Easy Company's next drop was in Eindhoven, a city of a hundred thousand inhabitants in the south of the Netherlands, occupied by Axis (Germany, Italy and allies) forces. As they approached their DZ (drop zone), the plane in which Coronel Sink was flying was hit by artillery fire and one of the wings hit. Looking out his window, seeing a large portion of the wing dangling, Coronel Sink remarked, "Well, there goes the wing." As Winters puts it, "No one seemed to think much of it." The men were able to exit the plane and land safely with no major problems. Probably the greatest problem occurred while the city was being liberated. The townsfolk were so thrilled to finally be rid of the detested Nazi rule that they crowded the streets to greet their liberators, offering food and drink, making it almost impossible for the troops to advance.

From here Easy Company advanced to nearby Uden. It soon became apparent the Germans still had enough strength left to stage a strong counteroffensive. Not only was Easy Company forced to retreat—for the first time in its history—but the Luftwaffe began dropping bombs on Eindhoven, setting many fires. Realizing that they could not prevail, the Germans retreated, peace was restored in Eindhoven and Uden was taken.

With Uden secure and still in Holland, the 101st Airborne Division was ordered to what was known as the "Island," a long, narrow area north of Nijmegen, between the Lower Rhine and the Wall Rivers. This was a lush farming area set among dikes, some 20 feet high. The German 363d Volksgrenadier Division, which included the dreaded, vicious SS German troops, was defending the area. To tell the story of the ensuing battle would take too much space. In a few words, Winters, with a small contingent of troops, left during the night to reconnoiter the area. They were drawn into battle, inflicting and taking casualties, when suddenly Winters and his men realized they were facing a far superior force and would shortly be outflanked with no possible escape, nor possibility of reinforcements reaching them.

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Once again Winters' ability to think and act under pressure and in the face of grave obstacles showed him up. Dawn was approaching and without the cover of night, he and his men would be shot down like so many sitting ducks. The enemy was entrenched behind a high roadway embankment. To reach them would require a dash over 200 yards of level field with no protection. Winters ordered the machine guns set up to give them cover fire as they sprinted over what could be termed suicide alley.

The night was freezing cold and when the roadway was reached, the German troops wrapped in long, heavy overcoats, only seemed able to move in slow motion. The battle was fast and violent. Even though the Germans outnumbered Winters' men ten-to-one, they soon turned tail and lumbered toward the river in their heavy overcoats. Reinforcements arrived and the enemy was routed. The 1st Platoon of Easy Company was cited for "their daring and aggressive spirit and sound tactical ability."

We now glide over numerous battles and drop in on the death throes of the Third Reich, that Hitler predicted would last a thousand years. Probably in recognition for outstanding performance during the war, the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment was dispatched to Berchtesgaden, a town high in the Alps. Nearby, at a place called Berghof, were the official residences of Hitler's top henchmen. Five miles from there was Hitler's private retreat, the Adlerhorst (Eagle's Nest).

Winters' men billeted themselves in the best hotels. Winters himself chose a beautiful private home as his living quarters and battalion command post. The residents were given 15 minutes to vacate the house. When they refused, Winters and his staff simply moved in. And the residents moved out.

Reflecting on this, Winters asks: "Did I feel guilty about this? Did my conscience bother me about taking over this beautiful home? No! We had been living in foxholes in Normandy; we had been in the mud in Holland; and we had suffered in the freezing cold in Bastogne. Just a few days earlier I had seen a concentration camp not a 100 miles from here. These people were the reason for all this suffering. I had no sympathy for their problems. I did not feel that I owed them an explanation..."

Winters could have mentioned the many close friends he lost in the war. He could have talked about the hundreds of thousands of dead, both friend and foe, that littered the battlefields. He could have talked about the millions of widows and orphans this needless war produced. Observed from the vantage point of the kingdom of this world, Winters was right. While the world suffered and died, families such as the one just evacuated enjoyed all the niceties of life—of a life of grandeur. Upon investigating the house, a wine cellar was found, 50 feet long, 30 feet wide and 10 feet high, in which were found nearly 10,000 bottles of the world's finest wine.

Officially, the mission of the 506th was to guard the homes of Hitler and henchmen from looters, for the loot stashed away went far beyond what most could possibly imagine. While nothing could possibly make up for friends lost and the suffering the soldiers underwent, the time spent in this mansion was a welcome respite from the rigors of war.

At 0241 hours, local time, May 7, 1945, General Eisenhower received the formal instrument of surrender signed by the German High Command.

The war was over.

Someone associated with Easy Company was asked if Easy Company rose to fame “because of” or “in spite of” Capitan Sobal. The answer was “Both!”

Possibly the most outstanding characteristic was the cohesion of both the officers and the men. According to Carwood Lipton, who was part of Easy Company, this was because “Easy coalesced to protect itself against Sobel.” He goes on to say, “No one envied us, but Sobel was producing a magnificent company.”

Winters tells us that “If a man was late in getting back to camp, instead of extra kitchen police (K.P.) duty, he had to dig a six-foot-by-six-foot pit with his entrenching tool at night after the day’s training. When the soldier was finished, Sobel would tell him ‘to fill it up.’”

The story of Easy Company is both interesting and inspiring. It is a story of brave men permitting a “petty tyrant” to mold them into top-notch warriors.

Less than inspiring is the amount of Soldiers of the Cross today, when encountering a spiritual Captain Sobel in their lives, simply say, “*I don’t want this.*”

Since no one is transferred in the Army of the Lord, they wash out. ▲

Readers Write

News from Darfur

by Natalie Jeffery

Dear Friends,

Home!! How are you? Hope this letter finds you well. I am doing fine and happy to be back home in the UK...even with the rain and cloudy skies.

I arrived home just under a week ago. My last weeks in Darfur were extremely busy ones so I am sorry for not replying to all your e-mails. In fact, for a while I didn’t have access to my e-mails and so my father was checking them for me.

The last weeks spent in Darfur I was covering for the health coordinator and so was attending all the coordination meetings with local government officials and other organisations. This, on top of supervising my clinic routes. One of my main objectives for my time there was to organise the rebuilding of several clinics in my routes that were looted and destroyed in attacks at the beginning of this year. So it felt like a lot to deal with as my time there was drawing to a close!

Whilst the health coordinator was away we were made aware of a very high rate of child deaths in one of the camps where Medair is responsible for health and runs a clinic. These camps are not small little gatherings of people. This particular camp has 35,000 internally displaced people (IDP’s) living in it, all having fled the conflict and attacks that are occurring in the villages of west Darfur.

This became a high profile problem with the government and other organisations and UN looking to see how we would handle the situation. I had an extremely busy, stressful and difficult week as I had to visit and interview the homes where these child deaths had occurred to ensure we didn’t have an outbreak of disease in the camp.

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Following the investigations there were countless meetings to decide what needed to be done. Thankfully it wasn't an outbreak of cholera which is what we all were dreading.

One case particularly has stayed in my mind. I went to the home where it had been reported that a small baby had died in the past week. As I entered the small compound, marked off by its grass walls, I was struck by the lack of hygiene to a degree which was unusual. The translators with me called out for the lady of the house and three small children appeared. We asked for their parents but they were too scared to do anything but stare at us. Eventually a young girl appeared from inside one of the huts and came out to greet us. We asked for her parents and she initially said they weren't at home. As we asked questions trying to find out about the baby that died, a tragic story unravelled. The father of these children had died shortly before the baby was born. Then tragically the mother died two weeks after delivery. The young girl, aged 12 years, was the eldest and she was left with the care of this two week old baby and three younger siblings. They had no relatives nearby, having fled their villages and she didn't know where any relatives were. Being so young and dealing with the death of her parents, she was unable to care adequately for the baby and not long after the mother died the baby also died. The young girl looked exhausted and overwhelmed as she looked at us. I myself could hardly imagine what this girl has gone through, losing her parents, feeling the loss of the baby she couldn't care for and no time to grieve, no time to be a child. She has three younger siblings to look after and bring up. Those with me clicked their tongues and nodded their heads in sympathy, one lady tried to explain to the girl about cleaning up the compound and washing the youngsters. The girl nodded resignedly as we left. We were able to inform an NGO that deals with such social problems but they are all too common in Darfur, families split apart, parents dead, and relatives scattered. It would have been so wonderful to be able to do something more for this girl. All we could do was express our sorrow at her loss.

My time in Darfur has been one of many challenges. Security is very precarious and in fact we would regularly have to go into our safe room at the house compound when shooting was heard in our neighbourhood. Some of you may have been aware that in July the ICC (International Criminal Court) put out an indictment for the President of Sudan for crimes against the people of Darfur. This was a time of high tension, when a backlash against international workers in Sudan, including Darfur was expected. In fact, on the day the indictment was released all the international staff in Geneina where I was stationed were prepared for evacuation. We were also prepared to hibernate in safe rooms with food and water to last several days in case an evacuation was impossible. We had heard rumours of thousands of armed arab militias gathering to protest and riot. In fact, we later found out that three thousand armed horsemen had gathered outside of Geneina, but following the President's talks with other African leaders who warned him not to react with heavy reprisals against Westerners, government officials were sent out to turn the militia away. So we spent several tense and exhausting days in our compounds, but thankfully with no problems.

Working and living in a Muslim country was a completely different experience for me than in any other country I have worked in. One of my project assistants is a lawyer

in Sharia Law and we had many interesting and very challenging (for me) discussions. It made me aware again of the need of knowing the Scriptures. Being able to give a good account of my faith when confronted by questioners. I realised how well my colleague knew the Koran and my need to study and prayerfully ask for insight into Gods word. It was not enough to say “ Oh that’s just the way I do it.” My colleague would have scorned such an answer. I have been so thankful to the Lord for the times when He has brought to memory a scripture related to what I have been questioned about. But I have also been reprovved and challenged to know Gods word more. I realise this is true not just for Darfur but for wherever I may live.

I am thankful to God for the opportunity to serve in Darfur, it felt like a real privilege. I always come back from these experiences with a greater awareness of the poverty and suffering that is in our world. It can be so easy, living in the west, to get caught up with an easier and materialistic life.

I am also thankful that I have returned with good health. This had been a major concern to my family and myself following my ill health on returning from Southern Sudan last year. I can say that I have been amazed at how well I have been.

I am currently in the UK and plan to stay a while. I would like to thank you for all your prayers and e-mails while I was away. They were very much appreciated.

May God Bless you and keep in touch. ▲

Readers Contribute

From the Lips of a Six-Year Old

Being a veterinarian, I had been called to examine a ten-year-old Irish Wolfhound named Belker. The dog’s owner, Ron, his wife, Linda and their little boy, Shane, were all very attached to Belker and they were hoping for a miracle.

I examined Belker and found he was dying. I told the family we couldn’t do anything for Belker and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the old dog in their home.

As we made arrangements, Ron and Linda told me they thought it would be good for six-year-old Shane to observe the procedure. They felt as though Shane might learn something form the experience.

The next day, I felt the familiar catch in my throat as Belker’s family surrounded him. Shane seemed so calm, petting the old dog for the last time, that I wondered if he understood what was going on. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away.

The little boy seemed to accept Belker’s transiton without any difficulty or confusion. We sat together for a while after Belker’s death, wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives. Shane, who had been listening quietly, piped up, “I know why.”

Startled, we all turned to him. What came out of his mouth next stunned me. I’d never heard a more comforting explanation.

He said, ‘People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life—like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right?’ The six-year-old continued, “Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don’t have to stay as long.” ▲

Broken Lawn Mower

Marriage is a relationship in which one person is always right, and the other is usually the husband.

When our lawn mower broke and wouldn’t run, my wife kept hinting to me that I should get it fixed. But, somehow I always had something else to take care of first: the truck, the car, e-mail, fishing, always something more important to me.

Finally she thought of a clever way to make her point. When I arrived home one day, I found her seated in the tall grass, busily snipping away with a tiny pair of sewing scissors. I watched silently for a short time and then went into the house. I was gone only a few minutes. When I came out again I handed her a toothbrush. “When you finish cutting the grass,” I said, “you might as well sweep the driveway.”

The doctors say I will walk again, but I will always have a limp. ▲

Depends...

A little girl asked her mother: ‘How did the human race appear?’

Her mother answered, “God made Adam and Eve; they had children; and so was all mankind made.”

Two days later the girl asked her father the same question.

Her father answered, “Many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved.”

The confused girl returned to her mother and said, “Mum, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad said they developed from monkeys?”

Her mother answered, “Well, Dear, it is very simple... I told you about my side of the family, and your father told you about his.” ▲

The Building Committee

Oh give me your pity, I’m on a committee
Which means that from morning to night
We attend and amend
And contend and defend
Without a conclusion in sight.

We confer and concur
We defer and demur
And reiterate all of our thoughts
We revise the agenda
With frequent amenda
And consider a load of reports

We compose and propose
We suppose and oppose
And the points of procedure are fun.
But though various notions
Are brought up as motions
There's terribly little gets done

We resolve and absolve
But we NEVER dissolve
Since it's out of the question for us
To bring our committee
To end like this ditty
Which stops without questions or fuss.

[If you think this is funny, you have probably never been on a committee.] ▲

The Mistake

A man was being tailgated by a stressed-out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. The tailgating woman was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection, dropping her cell phone and makeup.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. So naturally I assumed you had stolen the car." ▲

A Wish Is a Wish

A married couple in their early 60s was celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary in a quiet, romantic little restaurant.

Suddenly, a tiny yet beautiful fairy appeared on their table. She said, “For being such an exemplary married couple and for being loving to each other for all this time, I will grant you each a wish.”

The wife answered, “Oh, I want to travel around the world with my darling husband.”

The fairy waved her magic wand and—poof! Two tickets for the Queen Mary II appeared in her hands.

The husband thought for a moment: “Well, this is all very romantic, but an opportunity like this will never come again. I’m sorry my love, but my wish is to have a wife 30 years younger than me.”

The wife, and the fairy, were deeply disappointed, but a wish is a wish. So the fairy waved her magic wand and —poof! The husband became 92 years old.

The moral of this story: Men who are ungrateful should remember fairies are female... ▲

That Explains it

A teacher was giving a lesson on the circulation of the blood. Trying to make the matter clearer, she said, “Now, class, if I stood on my head, the blood, as you know, would run into it, and I would turn red in the face.”

“Yes,” the class said.

“Then why is it that while I am standing upright in the ordinary position, the blood doesn’t run into my feet?”

A little fellow shouted, “Cause your feet ain’t empty.” ▲

Pop tabs and Freezing Hot Water...

If you are like me and someone tells you that hot water freezes faster than cold water or that cold water boils faster than hot water, there is a little yellow caution light that comes on and from somewhere in the reasonable part of your mind comes floating a big question mark. If it doesn’t, one thing is certain. You will never need to bleach your hair because it is very blonde already!

Now, if you start with extremely hot water, and it is spread out so that there is plenty of surface area compared to the depth, a good bit of it will evaporate (and a smaller quantity of water will freeze faster than a larger quantity). So does that make it true? Not really, because you end up with less water to freeze, hence less ice, and

of course it takes less time to freeze a smaller quantity. What your common sense tells you is right and there is plenty of scientific proof to back up your sensibility. Your freezer will not have to work as hard if you start with cold water. I know from prior experience that what I just said is not going to convince some people, and that is okay. We end up at the same place anyway, because what I save on my electric bill they save on bleach! And tomorrow I will be blonde in some subject where they are not, so we are all even.

These kinds of notions are called “urban legends” and there are a couple of them about pop tabs that continue to make their rounds. The really sad one is that pop tabs are redeemable for time on dialysis machines for those suffering from kidney failure or for chemotherapy treatments. This one is nice enough that it should be true, but it’s not. There have been some large collection drives for this and then some huge disappointments when it was discovered that there is nothing to it.

What about saving them for the Ronald McDonald House? This one is a little better but still disappointing. The rumor is that the tab is especially valuable because it is “pure aluminum”. In truth, they are actually formed from an aluminum alloy just like the rest of the can, albeit a slightly different type. So what you are really doing is just recycling a tiny part of the pop can. Why not recycle the whole can? At 14 grams it weighs more than twenty times what the tab does at 0.6 grams. The answer I get to that is usually that they are too bulky to store and ship. So, just take them to the local recycling center and then mail Ronald McDonald a check.

Or just collect pennies instead. A million pop tabs (How long will that take to collect, anyway?) is worth between \$350 and \$400 dollars. It takes about 25 of them to make a cent. If you collected a million pennies you would have \$10,000 instead of \$400! Ronald McDonald House is a very worthy charity and deserves a better effort than our pop tabs at 4 hundredths of a cent apiece. ▲

Thinking Out Loud

Why I Don’t Vote

(One Reason, at Least)

It is fortunate that the Good Lord is smarter than I. Or than a lot of other people I know. It is good that he doesn’t answer all my prayers, no matter how fervent or well-intentioned.

Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva is the president of Brazil. The “Lula” is actually a moniker and not found on his original birth certificate. You see, Lula was born in the poorest part of Brazil to parents so poor they often had nothing, or almost nothing to eat. His education was rudimentary. Grade school. He did take some sort of a crash course, or maybe a test, to get a high school diploma. Never a day of college.

When Lula was a young boy, his parents decided to try for a new life in São Paulo. They had no money for a bus fare, so they, together with other likeminded families,

hired an open-bed truck with low sides. planks crossing from one side to another provided seating, while their earthly goods were stowed underneath.

Lula got a job. He was a good worker who showed leadership. He helped organize a union. And here we pause for a reflection.

We Mennonites relegate unions to an underworld, almost diabolic, status. We associate unions with the left, with communism and socialism. There is a lot of truth to this and in all fairness we recognize that unscrupulous union leaders have placed the American economy on an irrecoverable path (with China as the great winner).

Unions, however, did not come into existence because of unscrupulous union leaders. Unions were born because of a fatal flaw in capitalism: Greed. Unscrupulous industrialists, capitalists, offering harsh working conditions, long hours, no benefits, and shameful wages, caused men, exactly like Lula, to seek for a solution for a people crying under the injustice of greedy taskmasters. When democracy turned a deaf ear to these cries, communist rogues saw their chance. And took it.

This is what happened in Brazil. But, as it has turned out, for all the rhetoric, Brazil is not a fertile soil for communism. For communism or socialism to work, the proletariat must give far more than it receives, a proposition Brazilian culture rejects.

Lula's union soon gained national attention. As with all union leaders, he was loved by his men and detested by almost everyone else.

When Lula ran for president the first time, we all prayed. When he lost we felt the Lord answered our prayers. The next time he ran for president and lost, we again thanked the Lord. The third time he ran for president and polls gave him a good chance to win, we really prayed. When he won we were kind of shook up and didn't know what to make of it. The Lord surely wasn't going socialist.

It is said that leftist politicians in Brazil are like a fiddler. They hold the fiddle in the left hand, but play with the right. A very apt description. We have very few truly leftist politicians. They get elected on a leftist platform, which appeals to the masses. Then, once elected, they easily slip into rightist policy.

Lula's first term as president was good. Quite good. Now, in his second term, he is very good. Excellent. The standard of living for the poorer class has risen dramatically. A nice segment of lower class income homes have migrated to middle class. Increasingly, serious political commentators are listing China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Russia as players who will have a strong influence on the future world economic structure. Brazil is recognized by all commentators as the undisputed leader in South America.

And so, folks, I've sort of given up on telling the Lord who He should be president in Brazil. And since I don't vote, it makes His work easier. (I still am tempted to tell the Lord what would be best for the US.) ▲