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Editorial

You Feelin' Me?

Doktè Paul

Day is breaking in Cange, Haiti. Above a gate in a concrete wall there is a sign that reads: ZAMNI LASANTE (Partners in Health). Just inside the gate there is a large courtyard where a hundred Haitians have spent the night, awaiting medical help. As the day lightens, another hundred patients show up.

Zamni Lasante is the creation of Doktè Paul. And quite a creation it is. In the compound, lush with flowers and towering trees there is an ambulatory clinic, a general hospital, two well-equipped laboratories, an Anglican church, a school, a kitchen that prepares meals for two thousand mouths daily. The floors are tiled, the walls and ceilings flamboyantly decorated by Haitian painters. There is running water and a large generator that provides electricity for the entire compound.

When Doktè Paul walks through the front gate at daybreak he is greeted like an old friend. He greets old women as Mami Mwen (my mother) and bends down, practically kneeling, for them to kiss him on the cheek. He says, "A son always cares for his mother." He addresses old men as "my father."

It takes Doktè Paul approximately an hour to make his way through the crowded courtyard chatting with young and old in an area where the per capita daily income is less than one US dollar. There is a rigid rule: Everyone must pay the equivalent of 80 US cents to receive medical attention. No exceptions. Except for those who don't have the 80 cents—which is almost everyone. They needn't pay.

More patients arrive: on foot, by donkey, and even on a narrow bed carried by four men. It is estimated that up to a million peasant farmers are aware of Zamni Lasante. In a more immediate area that is home to more than a hundred thousand souls, some 70 trained health workers traverse the countryside offering relief and hope to the sick and suffering.

Within this region, known as a catchment area, schools have been built, all the children vaccinated, water systems installed in villages, epidemics brought under control and tuberculosis, a national scourge, inhibited to where there have been no related deaths since 1988.

Doktè Paul sleeps four hours a night. He explains: "I can't sleep. There is always somebody not getting treatment. I can't stand that." He is no saint and is not motivated by religious fervor. Rather he sees religion as a useful tool in the art of healing. He graciously receives patients from voodoo healers when they realize their enchantments can hardly stand up to modern medical science. Speaking to close friends, he at times ends a sentence with "comma," which they understand to mask an expletive.

Doktè Paul is dearly loved by these people, some of the poorest on the globe. Many bring him presents. One brings him milk in a green bottle with a corncob stopper. Delighted he tells the giver, "Oh, Cheri! Mesi anpil, anpil!"— Thank you, thank you! He turns to a friend and remarks, "Unpasteurized milk in a dirty bottle. I can't wait to drink it. It is so awful you might as well be cheerful."

Doktè Paul takes his patients seriously. He sits close to them as he discusses not only their ailments, but their many problems. Sometimes he pauses and asks, "You feelin' me?" Depending on this "feel" is possibly one of his great secrets to success. He tells his medical students they should never let the patient feel they are in a hurry. And so, he arrives at work at daybreak and rarely leaves before dark.

Doktè Paul knows that at times all he has to do is listen… "Just talking to you makes me feel better. My situation is so bad. I keep hurting my head because I live in such a crowded house. We have only one bed, and I let my children sleep on it, so I have to sleep under the bed, and I forget, and I hit my head when I sit up. I don't forget what you did for me, Doktè Paul. When I was sick and no one would touch me, you would sit on my bed with your hand on my head. They had to tie up the dogs in the village, you walked around so late to see sick people. I would like to give you a chicken or a pig."

Research is an important part of Doktè Paul's work in Haiti. One of his projects was to prove that merely dispensing medications is not enough. He divided some TB patients into two groups. One group was given the proper medications and sent home. The second also received the proper medications, in addition to regular visits to their huts. Paul himself took part in this project and spent weeks trekking the mountains making visits. The results were astonishing. In the group receiving medications without visits, 48 percent were cured. In the second group that received visits, the cure rate was one hundred percent.

From then on all of Doktè Paul's patients got what he called a full package of services, which included the visits as well as the equivalent of five American dollars to buy extra food. After twelve years without the loss of a single patient, Doktè Paul isn't about to change the rules.

Since it would be impossible to visit all the patients every month, they were expected to report to the clinic every 30 days. When this didn't occur, Doktè Paul would send someone after them. Or go himself. Some years ago a patient from the village of Kay Epin didn't show up for his appointment, so the doctor himself went after him. He

located his man in a cane field and called for him until he came out for treatment.

Doktè Paul has a simple theory for his success. He says that most philanthropists "…think that all of the world's problems can be fixed without any cost to themselves. We don't believe that. There is a lot to be said for sacrifice, remorse, even pity. It's what separated us from the roaches."

To get material for a book he was writing about Doktè Paul, the author decided to follow in his footsteps for a number of weeks. This meant following him deeper and deeper into the mountains. On foot. The trip to Morne Michel should have taken two hours, but the author, drenched in sweat, turned it into nearly a three-hour ordeal. Doktè would climb the steep inclines like a mountain goat and then wait for his guest to huff and puff to catch up. All the while Doktè was waving to and greeting the locals.

Almost three hours after they began their trek, Doktè and the author arrived at a hut made of rough-sawn palm wood with a roof of banana fronds. The patient was found, looking good. Yes, he was taking his medication. That is what the Doktè wanted to know. He was ready to return.

Heading down the mountain, Dokté looked over his shoulder at the weary author and said, "Some people would argue that this wasn't worth a five-hour walk. But you never can invest too much making sure the stuff works.

When Doktè Paul arrived in Haiti in May of 1983, he felt he was seeing real poverty. As he rode out into the countryside and got to Mirebalais to visit a missionary one-doctor clinic, he had to redefine his definition of poverty. He traveled on to Cange and their he found his previous definitions no longer held. He says that "most of the dwellings were crude lean-tos with dirt floors…the roofs of these tiny hovels [were] made of banana-bark thatch, patched with rags, clearly leaky." Almost everyone was ill and there was no medicine available for anyone. This all permeated Doktè Paul, right down to his very bones. It was a scene that would shape his future. And the future of countless others.

Doktè Paul learned to know a young American doctor. "He loved the Haitians. He was a very thoughtful guy." The doctor had worked in Haiti for nearly a year and was slated for his return to America. The following words of the Doktè are revealing. "I realized, hearing him talk, that something had happened to me already… Haiti was something that he was seeing that he could leave and erase from his mind, and I was thinking, Could I do that? He was leaving Haiti, really leaving in body and mind, and I realized I was going to have trouble with that."

He asked the young doctor, "Isn't it going to be hard to leave?"

"Are you kidding? I can't wait. There's no electricity here. It is just brutal here."

"But aren't you worried about not being able to forget all this? There is so much disease here."

The doctor replied, "No, I'm an American, and I'm going home."

Dokté asked himself, "What does that mean, 'I'm an American…' "

Dr. Paul Farmer

The Brigham's and Woman's Hospital in Boston is hardly a run-of-the mill health

center. It is surrounded by what has been called a "Wall Street of medicine": the campus of Harvard Medical School, the Countway Medical Library, Children's Hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, the Brigham. It is said that all this is so imposing that even the Boston drivers, famously deranged, don't honk while passing through the neighborhood.

Brigham's is a medical Mecca. The entrance is a towering atrium with marble floors. An endless hall is flanked by banks of elevators that whisk the medical staff and patients to clinical departments, to over 40 operating rooms (not counting those found in the obstetric ward), to dozens of laboratories, and of course, to hundreds of patient rooms. In just a word, it is the facility to which other hospitals send their most difficult cases.

This is where Dr. Paul Farmer works as an attending specialist on the Brigham's senior staff during approximately four months of the year. A graduate of Harvard Medical School with a medical degree and a PhD in medical anthropology, he also lectures at his alma mater during these four months. Oh yes, and he dresses very properly in suit and tie.

One would expect that Dr. Farmer's patients would be upper class. Doubtlessly he has such patients, not because of their bank accounts or social standing, but because they are sick…

Dr. Farmer is asked to give his opinion on an HIV positive, 35-year old male patient who smoked a pack a day, drank half a gallon of vodka, used cocaine both intravenously and by inhalation, and recently overdosed on heroin. Over the last several months he has lost 26 pounds, developed a suspicious cough and his attending physicians, after studying his chest X ray, believe he has a right lower lobe infiltrate. Tuberculosis is their tentative diagnosis.

This is a strange diagnosis for a patient in a modern Western country, where tuberculosis is a rarity. But then Joe's—we'll call him Joe—medical history seems sort of strange in a place like Boston. Joe has lived in homeless shelters, on the streets, under bridges and in jails. His teeth are falling out, but as one resident commented to Dr. Farmer, "He's a nice guy."

After taking a look at Joe's X ray, Dr. Farmer and the infectious disease team headed up to the patient's room.

Joe, a small man with scarred arms, is lying on his bed. He has unkempt hair and a shaggy beard. Dr. Farmer goes directly to his patient and sits down on the head of his bed. He looks intently into his face and strokes his shoulder. He asks some questions and tells the patient what he believes his problem is. At this point he should stand up and leave the room. He doesn't.

The conversation now becomes informal. Joe senses that Dr. Farmer is in no hurry and soon begins discussing his situation with greater candor than with his other physicians. In spite of this being their first encounter, they seem to be old friends, laughing together. After talking for some time, Joe confides, "I feel kinda lonesome in this room!" He then tells the doctor he would like to live in a home for HIV patients where "I could sleep and eat, watch television, watch games. I'd like somewhere I can drink a six-pack."

"I know," Dr. Farmer replies. "I can see your point. So I'll tell you what. I'll look around and you'll probably be here a couple of days, and you know, I don't think it is that crazy of an idea at all, what you said. It is better than being out on the streets…"

"Freezing to death," Joe interrupts.

"Freezing to death," Dr. Farmer agrees.

Boston, Massachusetts and Cange, Haiti probably have very little in common, except for Dr. Paul Farmer, who becomes Doktè Paul when on the tropical island.

Doctor Farmer/Doktè Paul has—well, let's just say—an anthropological faith. When religion, any religion, including witchcraft, make a contribution to the healing arts, he is a staunch supporter.

We can't get real bubbly about Dr. Paul's religious convictions. This, however, shouldn't blind our eyes to his qualities. In fact, it might be good for us to take a good look at them. A glass of cold water given by an atheist to a thirsty traveler in the desert assuages just as surely as a glass given with religious fervor.

We focus Doctor Farmer, or Doktè Paul, take your pick, under our microscope. And here is what we see:

Dr. Farmer/Doktè Paul is no re specter of persons. He gives his time and talents just as freely and cheerfully to the sick man lying in a banana thatch hut up in the mountains of Haiti that has cost him a three-hour hike as he does to the millionaire who sees him at Brigham's in climate controlled comfort.

It is said that people who do things that count don't stop to count them. Dr. Farmer/Doktè Paul does not need recognition to feel useful. What he wants is results. These he publishes in medical journals for the sole purpose of showing the way for other health officials.

Dr. Farmer/Doktè Paul has what we call an encapsulated relationship with patients. He sees his patients in a capsule where time and others cease to exist. He, the healer, becomes the property of the sick, and remains so until he has done his very best to give him hope.

Over 40 years ago, while living in the States, I had a doctor who had his nurse place patients in three or four examination rooms. He would poke his head in and say, "Good morning. What's the matter with you today?" I would begin to explain, "Well Doc, I have this cough…" My good Doc was now half way to the next examination room. Ten or 15 minutes later he would walk in again. "OK, you say you have a cough…" "That's right Doc. It started a couple of week ago and I…" Gone again. On the third try he would hear me out.

We have had the same family doctor in Brazil for the last 40 years. He has occupied the same examination room, with his desk at exactly the same place, during the entire time. When I walk in he greets me effusively—we are close friends—and closes the door. We chat. Maybe for 15 minutes. Maybe for half an hour or more. Then he looks me in the eye and asks, "What brings you here?" He never takes his eyes off of me as I describe my symptoms. He and I are in a capsule, in a world of our own. (Nurses know it better be mighty important to knock on his door when it is closed.)

Dr. Farmer/Doktè Paul asks his patients, "You feelin' me?" When I lived in Mexico some 45 years ago, a government doctor was sent to our village to man a small clinic. He was just out of medical school and very clearly felt this work was way below his dignity. I can still see and hear him clearly as a poor mother would walk into his Spartan examination room carrying a very sick child. With no greeting or smile, he would bark, "¿Qué le pasa?" The poor woman, trembling in fear, would tell him what she knew. Another bark, "¿Qué más?" This he would repeat until the mother had nothing more to say. That would be the only dialog between doctor and patient. He would write a prescription, shove it to the standing woman (yes, she had to stand through it all) and the next patient could come in. "¿Qué le pasa?" He never even came close to feeling anything (or probably to healing very many).

Dr. Farmer/Doktè Paul is concerned. "You feelin' me?" In other words, "Do you feel that I care?" That was very important to this healer. He must be in the same capsule with his patient for healing to take place.

To feel, to truly feel, doesn't come natural. To be able to feel we must first recognize and overcome some prejudices that not only come natural, but that we defend with a high sense of moralism.

Untouchables. Answer: Would you find it difficult or very distasteful to shake hands with a leper? With a beggar? With a hobo (the kind that hasn't bathed for six months)? With a skinhead (the kind that looks like he survived a trip through a meat grinder)? With someone dying of AIDS? With a homosexual?

If you have answered "yes" to all of these questions, consider yourself normal.

Racism. Answer: When boarding an airplane, if you catch a glimpse of the pilot, do you feel more at ease if his skin is the same color as yours? Do you associate slums and poverty with the color of the skin? Does a mixed marriage cause you to inwardly frown? Do you use the term "we whites" quite freely to distinguish yourself from foreigners who have even a slightly different skin hue from yours?

If you have answered "yes" to all these questions, consider yourself normal.

Culture. Answer: Do you consider the American culture to be more Christian than most, if not all, others? Immigration is a warm issue in the US. Do you feel it would be beneficial if all immigration could be put on hold—maybe permanently? Do you look apprehensively at immigrant neighbors who don't seem to be assimilating the American culture? Do you feel that accusations of an American superiority complex are unjust? Or at least overrated?

If you have answered "yes" to all these questions, consider yourself normal.

Language. English is the universal language. Does that also mean it is the most expressive and beautiful? If you meet a foreigner who speaks fluent English, do you chalk that up to a higher cultural or intellectual level? Do you look unfavorably at someone who has lived in the US for possibly 20 years and still has difficulty with the English language? Are you satisfied knowing only English?

If you have answered "yes" to all these questions, consider yourself normal.

If you have come through this little quiz as completely normal, you have placed the Apostle Paul in a rather delicate position. He says:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you

Let's face it. The Apostle Paul would have gotten a lower score on that little quiz than you did. He would have ended up as less than normal. Come to think about it, if Doktè Paul would have lived in the time of the Apostle Paul, and gotten converted, he would have been one fabulous helper. There might even be a brief reference to him in the Bible.

For an American it is normal to be normal. Interestingly, the people who made America a great nation, the most powerful nation the world has ever seen, were not normal people. True missionaries are not normal people. (Recently we had a N American tract board member here in Brazil. He gave us a report on a trip to Africa and enthusiastically announced, "How I wished I could have been black!" If he ever goes to Haiti, I hope he looks up Doktè Paul in Cange.) The brethren who make things happen in the church aren't normal.

Normal people have a routine. They are perfectly happy to be monoglots, to steer clear of the foreign section of town, to ignore what the capital of Paris is (don't bother to write), to spend more money flying to weddings and funerals than on donations to charity, to believe that all men are created equal—except that some aren't as equal as others.

The church is in desperate need of men and women who aren't normal. The church needs youth with binocular vision, undistorted by the windshield of a late model pickup or car. The church needs workers who aren't afraid to grip the hands of a leper, who are able to graciously receive a tiny bottle of milk with a corncob stopper, who, when in Africa, wish they could be black, and who see foreign languages and dialects, not as nuisances, but as instruments of communication that must be acquired at all cost.

The church needs brothers and sisters who aren't normal, who can see the soul in the illegal immigrant, who understand that skinheads and homosexuals who die without a Savior will spend eternity in hell where everyone will be equal, who believe that if he could chat with a street urchin or a hobo he could learn something interesting that would enrich his own life.

If you are normal—at least by the little quiz—you will continue to be normal for the rest of your life. UNLESS you understand that to be useful in the work of the Kingdom, normalcy will greatly reduce your effectiveness. Doktè Paul, a man without a religious backbone, is able to be all things to all men. Can you think of one single reason why you, a Christian, can't be all things to all men? If he was concerned that others were "feelin," shouldn't you be too?

Doktè Paul gives us one reason why you may find this difficult, if not impossible. We repeat his conversation with the young American doctor in Haiti:

"Isn't it going to be hard to leave?"

"Are you kidding? I can't wait. There's no electricity here. It is just brutal here."

"But aren't you worried about not being able to forget all this? There is so much disease here."

The doctor replied, "No, I'm an American, and I'm going home."

Dokté asked himself, "What does that mean, 'I'm an American…' " ▲

[If you would like to know more about Dr. Farmer/Doktè Paul, read *Mountains Beyond Mountains* by Tracy Kidder. Oh yes, you present and past Haitian missionaries, could any of you tell me anything about Doktè Paul? Have you heard about him? Do you know him? Drop me a line.]

Economy

The Crisis

There are times when being a developing nation isn't all that bad. The severity of the seismic tremors being felt as a result of the current monetary crisis seems to be in direct proportion to the prosperity of the nations. Industrialized nations are a lot harder hit than say, Haiti, that is probably quite immune to even the worst shocks. Such nations, after all, are constantly in the path of the tornado.

VEJA Magazine gives 10 reasons why Brazil is managing to weather this crisis much better than could really be expected. Let's notice:

1. **Monetary reserves**. Brazil has monetary reserves of 200 billion US dollars. Through all this these reserves have been virtually untouched. The weakened dollar has caused the dollar/real exchange rate to rise from approximately 1.50 to 2.30. Because of this, the public debt has been reduced significantly.

2. **An efficient and very cautious banking system**. Between the years of 1995 to 2000, Brazil's banking system was completely overhauled. It can safely be said that it is probably one of the most efficient in the world. A rule of thumb in international banking is that for every dollar held in deposit, no more than 12 should be loaned out. Merrill Lynch has stretched that to 31 dollars, Goldman Sachs to 25 dollars, Citigroup to 18 dollars. The Itaú Bank, in Brazil—the largest in Latin America—loans only 9 dollars, and the Bradesco Bank, the next in ranking, 10 dollars. Loans made are very well secured. Very few risks are taken. Because of this, year-end profits are unbelievably high. Lamentably, so is interest paid on loans.

3. **Very few junk bonds, high-risk loans and mortgages**. Loans made by Brazilian financial institutions are very well secured. Eventual losses are covered by high interest rates. Housing loans are very short-term compared to common 40-years loans made in the US. There is almost no risk to the financial institutions as the

housing financed is secure because of its intrinsic value. In other words, if the owner can't make the payments, the property is simply repossessed and then resold without a loss.

4. **A vigorous internal market**. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected president of Brazil as a socialist. Needless to say, we were apprehensive. Not only we. The international financial community feared the worst. Today heads are turning in disbelief everywhere. It appears that when President Lula, as he is know, finishes his second mandate he will go down in history as one of Brazil's best presidents. When he assumed the presidency in 2002, Brazil's class E—earners of up to 350USD—stood at 30%. Today it is down to 18%. Class D earners—350USD to 475USD—dropped from 15% to 13%. The upstart is that Class C earners—450USD to 2,100USD has risen from 43% to 54%. This additional earning power has given the economy a very positive boost. Even in the midst of the current crisis, this tendency continues. Thus, in many parts of Brazil people are feeling virtually no effects of the economic crisis.

5. **The "greenest" energy profile in the world**. Over half of Brazil's energy consumption is non-pollutant, or renewable, because of an extensive network of hydroelectric dams and ethanol production. Brazil no longer depends on petroleum imports. Enormous reserves discovered off the coast of the states of Espírito Santo and Rio de Janeiro guarantee that once these fields are in production, Brazil will be a major league exporter.

6. **Political stability**. When we moved to Brazil in 69, all political and economic crises were accompanied by saber rattling in the Armed Forces. There was even a brief military intervention when Congress was recessed and a new Constitution drawn up. When civilian power was restored—peaceably—democracy began to take root. Today democracy is taken for granted. Yes, there is still corruption in high places, but increasingly it is being exposed. And so, in spite of corruption, Brazil continues to boom.

7. **Economic predictability**. That means that investors no longer fear a moratorium or an abrupt change of legislation controlling economic activities. In the US the humble penny continues to circulate 216 years after it was first coined in 1793. Brazil is thrilled that the one-cent piece coined in 1994 is still circulating, now in its 15th year. I remember when inflation was at its worst and hit 2 percent per day for approximately a month. During our 40 years here, in four different occasions three zeros were lopped of our currency. (Unless you have lived through this, or are a mathematician, you can't appreciate the true effects of these monetary surgeries.) Today inflation is running under seven percent per year, a bit high for an industrialized nation, but truly a miracle for us. After years of unpredictability, to say that the economy today is predictable says a lot.

8. **Foremost exporter of food products**. In economic crises, almost all sectors of industrial production suffer. But people must continue to eat. Brazil has approximately 880,000,000 acres of arable land, of which only 20 percent is presently in production. Needless to say, the remaining 80 percent will be the target of litigation and harassment by ecological groups.

9. **A vigorous export market.** Brazilian exporters sell their products worldwide. Mexico sells 80 percent of its products to the US, tying its fate uncomfortably to that of its northern neighbor. Brazil, on the other hand, sells less than 15 percent of its export products to the US, which is only 2 percent of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product), as opposed to 20 percent of Mexico's. It doesn't take a lot of explanations to see that diversification, putting the eggs into as many baskets as possible, is a definite trade plus.

10. **Projections for 2009**. The Euro Market is expected to have a 2 percent decline in its GDP for 2009, the US a 1.6 percent decline, Russia a 0.7 percent decline. Worldwide there should be 0.5 percent growth, Brazil 1.5 percent growth, India 5.1 percent growth and China 6.7 percent growth. In Latin America, Chile and Brazil are expected to weather the storm with less turbulence than most countries. ▲

Readers Contribute

I Took Your Place

One day, a man went to visit a church. He got there early, parked his car and got out. Another car pulled up near the driver got out and said, 'I always park there! You took my place!'

The visitor went inside for Sunday school, found an empty seat and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, "That's my seat! You took my place!" The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing.

After Sunday school, the visitor went into the sanctuary and sat down. Another member walked up to him and said, "That's where I always sit! You took my place!"

The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment, but still He said nothing. Later as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood up, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet. Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out, 'What happened to you?' The visitor replied, as his hat became a crown of thorns, and a tear fell from his eye,

"I took your place." ▲

Clean Wash

A young couple moves into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside. "That laundry is not very clean," she said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent.

Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to

wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?" The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

And so it is with life. What we see when watching others depends on the purity of the window through which we look. ▲

Rain

We have had 4 inches at my house in Western Kansas. Did you ever stop to think how much water that is? On the average small city lot it comes to about 28,000 gallons. On a quarter section of land, it is about 17 million gallons! Or 72,500 tons! Start thinking of that over a large area like SW Kansas and the figures are too big for your calculator. And it all came on the wings of the wind! We think of air as not weighing anything, but it sure can carry a lot of water with it. We get tired of the wind, but it is a necessary inconvenience to bring the rain. I'm still trying to get my mind around the story that I heard of someone complaining about this rain because it interrupted their plans. That, I think, would be whining at its absolute best! Or worst, whichever you want to call it. I was glad I never heard a name attached to the story.

(And there are folks who believe all this came about because of a BIG BANG billions of years ago. One of these days they are going to hear a sure enough big bang and wish they would have prepared for this one instead of imagining one that never took place.) ▲

A Girl with an Apple

August 1942. Piotrkow, Poland

The sky was gloomy that morning as we waited anxiously. All the men, women and children of Piotrkow's Jewish ghetto had been herded into a square. Word had gotten around that we were being moved. My father had only recently died from typhus, which had run rampant through the crowded ghetto. My greatest fear was that our family would be separated.

"Whatever you do," Isidore, my eldest brother, whispered to me, "don't tell them your age. Say you're sixteen." I was tall for a boy of 11, so I could pull it off . That way I might be deemed valuable as a worker.

An SS man approached me, boots clicking against the cobblestones. He looked me up and down, then asked my age. "Sixteen," I said. He directed me to the left , where my three brothers and other healthy young men already stood.

My mother was motioned to the right with the other women, children,sick and elderly people. I whispered to Isidore, "Why?" He didn't answer. I ran to Mama's side and said I wanted to stay with her. "No," she said sternly. "Get away. Don't be a nuisance. Go with your brothers."

She had never spoken so harshly before. But I understood: She was protecting me.

She loved me so much that, just this once, she pretended not to. It was the last I ever saw of her.

My brothers and I were transported in a cattle car to Germany . We arrived at the Buchenwald concentration camp one night weeks later and were led into a crowded barrack. The next day, we were issued uniforms and identification numbers."Don't call me Herman anymore." I said to my brothers. "Call me 94983."

I was put to work in the camp's crematorium, loading the dead into a hand-cranked elevator. I, too, felt dead. Hardened, I had become a number.

Soon, my brothers and I were sent to Schlieben, one of Buchenwald's sub-camps near Berlin. One morning I thought I heard my mother's voice, "Son," she said softly but clearly, I am going to send you an angel." Then I woke up. Just a dream. A beautiful dream. But in this place there could be no angels. There was only work. And hunger. And fear.

A couple of days later, I was walking around the camp, around the barracks, near the barbed-wire fence where the guards could not easily see. I was alone. On the other side of the fence, I spotted someone: a little girl with light, almost luminous curls. She was half hidden behind a birch tree. I glanced around to make sure no one saw me. I called to her softly in German. "Do you have something to eat?" She didn't understand. I inched closer to the fence and repeated the question in Polish. She stepped forward. I was thin and gaunt, with rags wrapped around my feet, but the girl looked unafraid. In her eyes, I saw life.

She pulled an apple from her woolen jacket and threw it over the fence. I grabbed the fruit and, as I started to run away, I heard her say faintly, "I'll see you tomorrow." I returned to the same spot by the fence at the same time every day. She was always there with something for me to eat–a hunk of bread or, better yet, an apple. We didn't dare speak or linger. To be caught would mean death for us both. I didn't know anything about her, just a kind farm girl, except that she understood Polish. What was her name? Why was she risking her life for me? Hope was in such short supply, and this girl on the other side of the fence gave me some, as nourishing in its way as the bread and apples.

Nearly seven months later, my brothers and I were crammed into a coal car and shipped to Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia . "Don't return," I told the girl that day. "We're leaving." I turned toward the barracks and didn't look back, didn't even say good-bye to the little girl whose name I'd never learned, the girl with the apples.

We were in Theresienstadt for three months. The war was winding down and Allied forces were closing in, yet my fate seemed sealed. On May 10, 1945, I was scheduled to die in the gas chamber at 10:00 AM. In the quiet of dawn, I tried to prepare myself. So many times death seemed ready to claim me, but somehow I'd survived. Now, it was over. I thought of my parents. At least, I thought, we will be reunited.

But at 8 A.M. there was a commotion. I heard shouts, and saw people running every which way through camp. I caught up with my brothers. Russian troops had liberated the camp! The gates swung open. Everyone was running, so I did too. Amazingly, all of my brothers had survived; I'm not sure how. But I knew that the girl with the apples

had been the key to my survival. In a place where evil seemed triumphant, one person's goodness had saved my life, had given me hope in a place where there was none. My mother had promised to send me an angel, and the angel had come.

Eventually I made my way to England where I was sponsored by a Jewish charity, put up in a hostel with other boys who had survived the Holocaust and trained in electronics. Then I came to America, where my brother Sam had already moved. I served in the U. S. Army during the Korean War, and returned to New York City after two years. By August 1957 I'd opened my own electronics repair shop. I was starting to settle in.

One day, my friend Sid who I knew from England called me. "I've got a date. She's got a Polish friend. Let's double date." A blind date? Nah, that wasn't for me. But Sid kept pestering me, and a few days later we headed up to the Bronx to pick up his date and her friend Roma. I had to admit, for a blind date this wasn't so bad. Roma was a nurse at a Bronx hospital. She was kind and smart. Beautiful, too, with swirling brown curls and green, almond-shaped eyes that sparkled with life.

The four of us drove out to Coney Island. Roma was easy to talk to,easy to be with. Turned out she was wary of blind dates too! We were both just doing our friends a favor. We took a stroll on the boardwalk, enjoying the salty Atlantic breeze, and then had dinner by the shore. I couldn't remember having a better time.

We piled back into Sid's car, Roma and I sharing the backseat. As European Jews who had survived the war, we were aware that much had been left unsaid between us. She broached the subject, "Where were you," she asked softly, "during the war?" "The camps," I said, the terrible memories still vivid, the irreparable loss. I had tried to forget. But you can never forget. She nodded. "My family was hiding on a farm in Germany , not far from Berlin ," she told me. "My father knew a priest, and he got us Aryan papers." I imagined how she must have suffered too, fear, a constant companion. And yet here we were, both survivors, in a new world. "There was a camp next to the farm." Roma continued. "I saw a boy there and I would throw him apples every day."

What an amazing coincidence that she had helped some other boy. "What did he look like? I asked. "He was tall, skinny, and hungry. I must have seen him every day for six months." My heart was racing. I couldn't believe it. This couldn't be. "Did he tell you one day not to come back because he was leaving Schlieben?" Roma looked at me in amazement. "Yes!" "That was me! " I was ready to burst with joy and awe, flooded with emotions. I couldn't believe it! My angel.

"I'm not letting you go." I said to Roma. And in the back of the car on that blind date, I proposed to her. I didn't want to wait. "You're crazy!" she said. But she invited me to meet her parents for Shabbat dinner the following week. There was so much I looked forward to learning about Roma, but the most important things I always knew: her steadfastness, her goodness. For many months, in the worst of circumstances, she had come to the fence and given me hope. Now that I'd found her again, I could never let her go.

That day, she said yes. And I kept my word. After nearly 50 years of marriage, two

children and three grandchildren, I have never let her go.

—Herman Rosenblat, Miami Beach, Florida ▲

Easier Said Than Done

The true secret of giving advice is, after you have honestly given it, to be perfectly indifferent whether it is taken or not, and never persist in trying to set people right.

—Hannah Whitall Smith

This & That

A month ago, several large buildings, which included their cold storage, caught fire at the Perdigão facilities where nearly 500,000 chickens and 5,000 hogs are slaughtered daily. Miraculously, there were no serious injuries and no one was killed. Some of the other 42 Perdigão plants scattered over Brazil are being used, both to aid in the slaughter of chick ens and the processing of the meat.

As Brazil becomes more ecologically friendly, so are the mountain lions, now on the increase locally. They have found that Frank Burns' sheep and lambs are exactly what he says they are: Good to eat.

Min. Dale Becker and a deacon were here on Gospel Tract business. We had some inspiring meetings.

On February 2, we began our 2009 school year. This synchronizes our school system with the Brazil school year. This means there will be a six-week mid-term vacation beginning in June. December and January make up the end-of-the-year-vacation.

Marco Silva has returned from Moçambique after spending two years in CSI work.

The Rio Verdinho Cong. hosted the preparatory class for girls in January. Min. Dean Mininger was the instructor. Twenty girls attended the classes.

There has been a changing of the guard on two of our mission posts. In the Acaraú mission Flávio & Flávia 16 Brazil News Oliveira took Sérgio & Katrina Alves' place. In the Pato mission, Daniel & Anna Kramer are the short-term replacement for Kevin & Elizabeth Warkentin. In the Goiânia mission, Duane & Luciene Miller are replacing themselves.

The Monte Alegre Cong. is finally building a much needed social hall. A number of years were spent in the labor room before the delivery. And by the looks of things, more time will be spent in an incubator before the project is finished.