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Editorial

The Golden Rule

A hundred years from now, the year 2111 (None of us will be alive—maybe no one), in institutions of learning all over the world, students of economic sciences will know who Sam Walton was. He will be more than a legend. Sam Walton will be to modern commerce what Marco Polo was to ancient commerce. We hear professors intoning, “Before Sam Walton...” and “After Sam Walton...” The lecture is ended with, “After Walmart, business was never the same again.”

The daughter of one of Sam Walton’s housekeepers probably comes as close as anyone to putting in a nutshell who Sam Walton was: “Sam was no genius. Sam was a workaholic. He wanted to be the best at whatever he did. He was not driven by money, but by competition. Sam was one of the most competitive tennis players I’ve ever met. He could be playing a one-legged man in a wheelchair, and he would show no mercy.”

Most of Sam Walton’s revolutionary approaches to business were so simple that they were overlooked by greater brains. In fact, one of his great strokes of genius was a step backward. As modern commerce became a science, it was believed that deodorants (among thousands of other products) had to be sold in attractive cardboard boxes. Sam’s logical brain told him that these boxes take up more shelf space, cost money to be designed and produced, required salaried workers to place the product in the box, and finally, because of extra weight and bulk, added to the price of transportation. The clincher was that—and it certainly doesn’t take a genius to figure this out—after the product was purchased and taken home, the cardboard box was discarded, thus making trash collecting a bit more expensive. For today’s ecological mentality, the crowning glory is that over decades tens of thousands of acres of forest have not been cut down to make cardboard boxes that would have ended up in landfills. Savings over the past 30 or 40 years? Probably well in excess of a billion dollars. And so deodorants, among thousands of other

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products, are no longer sold in little boxes. That's typical Sam Walton, the man from Arkansas.

Sam Walton's daily supplication was: Give us this day our daily numbers. Sam woke up with numbers in his head, he spent the day reading and listening to numbers, he digested numbers, he talked numbers, he went to bed with more numbers in his head. Decisions were based on numbers. Indeed, numbers were Sam Walton's daily bread. Numbers told the story.

Walmart headquarters knows in real time exactly how many items each clerk in every store over the nation scans per hour (typically four to five hundred) and what the items are. Of the more than 60 thousand items in each store, it is known how much a square foot of shelf space of each item yields in profits. Thus, as you walk down the long aisles in a Walmart and gaze at the merchandise, be assured that nothing you see has been placed as an afterthought. The location of each product and the amount of shelf space occupied is the result of a lot of number crunching.

Absolutely nothing is overlooked at Walmart. Some stores are neat and clean; others are...well, not neat and clean. This is no coincidence or oversight. If the store is in a part of the country in which cleanliness is not next to Godliness, why spend money keeping the place spotless if it won't impress customers and bring in additional sales?

To climb the corporate ladder in Walmart, the foremost qualification is strong toes. When Sam Walton would call a store manager early Saturday morning, he had better be on his toes and have his day-by-day sales results for that week on the tip of his tongue. He was also expected to be able to give instant account for his payroll expenses for that week, plus other pertinent data.

One store manager relates that he was allowed a payroll budget of 8 percent in his store. Being overworked (as all Walmart managers are), an assistant manager was hired. In the next telephone call from upstairs, requesting his payroll expenditure, the manager told him he had spent 8.1 percent.

"What did I tell you your budget was? Eight percent?"

"That's right."

"Since you can't control your payroll, I'll control it for you. Send that new assistant on to Popular Bluff, Missouri."

What was at issue? Over a period of a year, this one tenth of one percent would have amounted to an additional three dollars a day on the payroll. Unacceptable.

Sam Walton's method of making a dollar profit was a simple question: "How many dollars of merchandise do you have to sell to make that dollar?" Everything revolved—and revolves—around that simple question. For years the answer was 35 dollars. To make a million dollars profit, 35 million had to be sold. And it is exactly here that Walmart gets its cutting edge. To make an identical profit at Target on a hundred dollars of sales, Walmart spends \$3.10 less. This means that an item selling for a hundred dollars at Target can be sold for \$96.97 at Walmart. Apply this same arithmetic to the 60 thousand plus items stocked and it begins to make sense why Walmart always runs at the head of the pack.

If Sam Walton would have created the earth, there would have been no mountains.

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He would have cut them all down and filled the valleys to save on freight. His corner-cutting policies permeate the company from east to west and from north to south. In his executive offices (if there really is such a thing at Walmart) the furnishings are often mismatched pieces of furniture that have been damaged or didn't sell. For decades a concerted effort has been made to force suppliers to pay for phone calls to Walmart. They are expected to accept charges on collect calls from Arkansas.

Sam's fortune didn't change his personal values. He had a 1975 Chevy vehicle that he used to haul his hunting dogs around. The car was dirty, had no hubcaps and the steering wheel showed his dogs' teeth marks. Simplicity was a way of life, not an artifice to impress others. Thus, he had no qualms in imposing on others his no-frills approach to store management.

Sam Walton considered himself to be a happy man and wanted his managers to have happy lives. Yet, his concept of happiness was inexorably drawn to numbers. He believed that store #330, located in Victoria, Texas, had been a mistake; it should never have been built. Flying to the opening of store #385, at Cuero, Texas, on impulse Sam suggested to an accompanying general manager that they borrow a car and make a quick trip to Victoria, which was only a short distance from Cuero. When they got there, they found the store prospering with good morale among the workers, who hugged him as they told him goodbye at the end of the visit.

After returning to Cuero and boarding their plane for the return trip to headquarters, Sam asked the manager, "Lowell, tell me something. What do you do in your spare time?"

"Sam, who do you know at Walmart that has got any spare time?" He then added, "I do fish a little."

"And what's your goal with that, Lowell?"

After thinking a minute, Lowell answered, "Well, I'd like to catch a ten-pound bass someday."

Sam answered, "You know, Lowell... That's a good store in Victoria. And when we were fixing to leave, and all those people were waving and hugging me—I caught my ten-pound bass right there."

Money did not change Sam Walton's basic principles and approach to life. It was his second nature to constantly scan his surroundings for anything useful. It was his 360 degree optical radar, plus—and I know this sounds strange—an humble nature, that helped make him what he was. The old saying, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit" fits Sam Walton like a glove. If he saw the lowest pay grade worker—"associate", that is—in one of his stores doing something he considered useful, he would stop, whip out his omnipresent tape recorder, and discuss the procedure. Upon returning to Benton, he would send out a memo to store managers requiring that the practice be implemented in all his stores. He shamelessly visited his competitor's store to get new ideas.

When Sam Walton decided to try something new in his stores, he was prepared to invest millions—and to lose millions if it didn't pan out. Since his store managers were handpicked by severe criteria, he had at his fingertips a wealth of talent and good ideas,

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not to mention total dedication. Since Sam had the humility, or at least common sense, to see the value of a good idea, no matter where it came from, business flourished, to put it mildly.

In December of 2008...

Americans spent an average of 36 million dollars every hour of every day at Walmart.

That comes out to approximately 21 thousand dollars profit per minute.

M-I-N-U-T-E.

Divide the total sales for the year by the total amount of households in the USA and that comes to more than 2,000 dollars per household. Since not everyone buys at Walmart, that means that the average amount for those actually buying is considerably higher.

Walmart was bigger than Home Depot, Kroger, Target, Sears, Costco and K-Mart combined.

Walmart employed 1.6 million people (the majority of which don't speak English), making it the largest private employer on earth and the largest company in history. (Because of the hike in petroleum prices, ExxonMobile may today be larger.)

In the USA, approximately 3 million people have jobs directly dependent on purchases from Walmart.

Walmart had nearly 4,000 stores in the USA.

Sam Walton is a man to be admired. He was able to take three words, "Always Low Prices" and build an empire on them. This empire is more powerful, more structurally sound and infinitely more efficient than many federal, state and local governments. And contrary to almost all governments, it does not have debts that are listed in millions, billions or trillions of dollars. In fact, Walmart has no debts. Love Walmart, hate Walmart, say what you like about Walmart, sounds like Walmart might make a pretty good deacon.

But wait...

What is the price of Walmart's success? What is the tradeoff for "Always Low Prices"?

Partnerships. Walmart regards its relationship with suppliers (over 60 thousand) as a "partnership." Interestingly, this concept of partnership appears to be unilateral. True, initially to have Walmart as a customer seems like a dream come true. It's like hooking Sam Walton's ten-pound bass. The problem is that once the bass is hooked, instead of reeling it in, the bass reels the supplier (partner) in.

How does this work? The same as Walmart sells for the lowest price, it also buys for the lowest price. Since most orders are quite substantial, suppliers go along with this believing volume will make up for the price reduction. At the end of a year, when the contract expires, Walmart shows interest in renewal, BUT, for 5 percent less than before. This is a real problem. Because of the substantial orders from Walmart, the supplier has probably hired additional workers, increased installations and purchased more machinery. Reluctantly a new contract is signed. The following year another 5 percent is demanded. When the supplier protests, explaining that raw materials have

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gone up, Walmart suggests operations be moved overseas to China, or wherever, where production costs are much lower. The “partner” is unemotionally informed that either their price will be accepted or there will be no new contract. After being “reeled in” by Walmart, thousands of businesses have ended up closing their doors. Others have moved overseas and their American workers have found themselves jobless.

There is another option Walmart proposes to its suppliers. Reduce the price of their product by reducing production costs, which in most cases means using inferior raw materials and downgrading quality. Companies that pride themselves for their quality products find themselves at a crossroads. Often at this point ditching Walmart, who now represents a large slice of their sales, means bankruptcy. Not to worry. Soon a similar, if inferior, product is on the shelves. Instead of Made in USA, it is now Made in China.

Jim Wier, former CEO of Snapper Inc. (that managed to ditch Walmart and survive) puts it in a nutshell: “Once you get hooked on volume, it’s like getting hooked on cocaine. You’ve created a monster for yourself.”

World War II would never have been won by Allied forces without the industrial force of the United States. Prowling German submarine “wolf packs” roaming the Atlantic shipping lanes systematically attacked merchant ships transporting war materials, medical supplies, food and clothing to England to sustain the war effort. Loaded ships were torpedoed and sunk sending hundreds of thousands of tons of urgently needed supplies to the bottom of the sea. So great was the tonnage sunk that by all logic the war should have ended with the hoisting of the white flag by the Allies. America rolled up its sleeves and for every ship lost, shipyards were able to turn out new ships faster than they were sunk, and industry to manufacture tanks, airplanes, munitions, and everything needed for the war effort, to replace that which was lost to the sea. To say that without American industry the war would have been lost is no overstatement.

If the war were today, the Allies would probably lose. In 2003, for the first time, the number of Americans working in retailing (14.9 million) exceeded those in manufacturing (14.5 million). This means America is now a consumer society. Today consumer spending accounts for two thirds of the US economy. To lay all the blame on Walmart would be unjust, yet facts cannot be ignored. During a period in which manufacturing jobs in the US decreased by almost 20 percent, Walmart’s imports from China alone increased by 200 percent. In plain English this means that the more than 3,000 Walmarts (including Sam’s Clubs), plus tens of thousands of other stores in the US loaded with customers spending money they don’t have, represent the largest commercial house of cards of all times—a house of cards that can come crashing down at any time.

It has been said that “We are shopping ourselves out of jobs.” This causes us to ask several questions:

Is a shopping mall with 60,000 items (50,000 of which we don’t need) more important than jobs for our own citizens?

Are cheap consumer products so important that we are willing to convert

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non-Christian China into a world power? (And yes, “peaceful” China is now investing heavily in armaments, high tech aviation, which includes the fearful stealth bomber, as well as the production and launching of satellites indispensable for modern warfare.)

Walmart is an extremely secretive organization seldom cooperating with researchers wanting to assemble data on their operations. Suppliers receive implicit instructions to not reveal details of their dealings with Walmart. (Virtually all information comes from suppliers who have been ditched or broken off commercial relations with the behemoth.)

Studies show that when a new Walmart moves into an area, within two years three local retailers close their doors for good. Four close within five years. While Walmart employs an average of 300 workers in their stores, 250 workers from local business lose their jobs. Oh! that is a net gain of 50 jobs! It is, but what about the hardware store that has been handed down from grandpa to son to grandson and instead of having a smiley face pasted on the walls, greets you with a sincere, friendly human smile? Is capitalism really so cold, so savage, that we can shrug our shoulders and mutter that even in commerce the law of the jungle prevails?

“Always Low Prices” Are we happy with the tradeoff?

If by now you have concluded that this article will end with a suggestion to quit buying at Walmart, please read on.

On our next visit to the US, I plan on buying at Walmart. True, I will drive main street and look for small businesses that sell the products I hope to buy, but there will be no Walmart boycott. Nor am I suggesting that anyone change his buying habits. That isn’t what this article is about.

It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried. —Winston Churchill

The same could probably be said for capitalism.

We devoutly believe that capitalism is the most Biblical form of government. Actually, capitalism is the best form of government because it prospers in spite of a host of inherent defects and imperfect men. Socialism is more Biblical, but to function men must be perfect. And since they aren’t, it becomes one of the worst forms of government, almost always implanted by force while rejected by free-thinking men.

Walmart by no means has a snow white record. In fact, the largest class suit in American judicial history in which Walmart is the defendant should soon be heard by the Supreme Court. Yet its basic operating principles are very much within the bounds of capitalism. So what is the problem?

In a game of tennis, Sam Walton would give no quarter to a one-legged opponent in a wheelchair. Similarly, his “Always Low Prices” left no room for the Golden Rule. His competitive nature became ruthless to the point that when a “mom-pop” store that had been in business for three or four generations was forced to close its doors because he moved into town, he saw this as a natural consequence of economic survival of the fittest.

Sam Walton was a friendly, likeable human being, but he was driven by a force commonly known as “savage capitalism,” which is, as we have said, capitalism without the Golden Rule.

Forget about Sam Walton.

The Golden Rule has no teeth in it, obligates no one, makes no threats, makes no effort to explain itself, except to say that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. That's all. And so we often ignore it.

Not all men are born with the gift of sound financial judgment. They make mistakes. Dumb mistakes. In similar circumstances, we would have walked a straight line. And so we shut up our "bowels of compassion"—never mind that the brother tried valiantly to make a good decision. But failed.

There are those who get into a financial tight and decide to sell something to raise some cash. They come and tell us their situation and ask if we are interested in buying whatever they are selling. They give us a price—a very reasonable price, let's just say 900 dollars. The truth is that we could use whatever it is, but since it isn't on our "need-badly" list, we inform our brother that we aren't interested. Seeing his look of disappointment, we say, "I really don't need that piece of equipment, but I'll tell you what. I'll give you 500 dollars. That should help." That is capitalism. We could have said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you a thousand dollars. I could use that piece of equipment and it is worth it." That is the Golden Rule.

Merchants are human beings. (I'm talking especially about the "mom-pop" operations.) They have feelings just like we do. They get into binds just like we do. They enjoy making money just like we do. They enjoy having someone do them a favor just like we do. So when making a purchase, why do we find it so easy to ask for a discount? Insist on a discount? How about, "Keep the change!"?

Not everyone is prepared for financial setbacks. Sometimes someone in such a situation asks us for a small loan to get through a tight situation. Our sense of justice tells us that we should set a repayment date so as to not turn our brother into a beggar. Jesus said, *And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for [capitalists] also lend [...] to receive as much again.* Why not say, "It's yours. I'm glad to help."? (Needless to say, often a repayable loan is appropriate. But there are those times...)

We can be totally honest in our dealings with our fellowmen, with our brethren, and be out of sync with the spirit of the Golden Rule. Forget about Sam Walton, but remember this.



Walmart in Brazil

Walmart opened its first store in Brazil in 1995. Today it has 450 stores in 18 states with annual sales of over 10 billion US dollars.

Since Walmart has bought out a number of large chains, it today operates under nine different names. These stores, plus those with the Walmart logo, have almost no resemblance to stores in N America. They are not standardized and each store has its own characteristics.

Because of Brazilian culture, Walmart will probably never be able to implement its "bulldozer" effect of ruthlessly entering a new area disrupting or destroying established

businesses. Most neighborhoods have their own supermarkets with their own personality. Customers shop there not only because of prices, but because of proximity and often friendship with the owner.

The French chain, Carrefour, has been in Brazil since 1975 and has 190 stores in 13 states with annual sales of nearly 14 billion US dollars. In our local town of Rio Verde we have a large Atacadão supermarket, that is owned by Carrefour. So far as I know, it has had little effect on other businesses and I doubt that any has been driven out of business.

McDonalds and Burger King are both in Brazil. Neither is coming even close to replicating what they have done in N America. Again, there may be a simple explanation. Most Brazilian restaurants have open fronts toward the street and the smell of grilled meat (churrasco) definitely attracts more people than the smell of McDonalds or Burger King. Plus, the food is cheaper and much better and much, much healthier. So, if you have a real restaurant two or three blocks from your job or home, why travel half way across town for food not nearly as good as what you can get next door? ▲

Brazilians Write

The Gift of Helps

Following is a loose translation of an article written by Max Gebringer, a corporative consultant and author of various books. The title is not his.

During my professional life I have met some people whose success has really surprised me. One of these is a man named Raul.

I have known Raul since we were in college together. We had a classmate called Pena who was a true genius. Whenever we were assigned a class project, we all wanted Pena to be on our team because he simply took over and we didn't have to do anything. He would choose the topic, do all the research, write up the report in his elegant style and even make the cover.

Raul wouldn't make a peep while Pena was at work. Saying his job was to give Pena moral support. If Pena needed anything, Raul was getting it for him, even before his friend finished talking.

As can be imagined, Pena graduated at the head of our class. The rest of us hitched a ride on his success, as he had no objections if we copied some of his answers during tests. During the graduation ceremony, Pena was praised to high Heaven as the kind to bring honor to the world of education.

During all this, Raul was seated on the third row applauding at the appropriate moments.

Ten years later Pena was the star in the planning department of a multinational corporation. Brilliant as always, he made projections on what the market would do in five or ten years.

And who was his superior?

Raul.

How did Raul manage to get to that position? When I interviewed his co-workers, no one seemed to know for sure. Raul himself modestly explained his success by saying his subordinates knew more than he did, something no one contradicted.

I found out that like in school, Raul was known for his willingness to help out anyone who had a problem. All it took was a word with Raul and he would go to work.

My last contact with him was a year ago. He had been transferred to Miami, the headquarters of the multinational corporation for which he worked. Raul told me that he himself was surprised because he now found himself surrounded by absolute brains, the dumbest of which, as he put it, was an ex-astronaut.

I asked Raul what his job was. His laconic answer was that he was helping others with their work. I knew better. A Brazilian wouldn't be transferred to Miami just to help others.

Later, at a conference in São Paulo, I learned to know the vice-president of human resources of the company Raul worked for. He told me the secret of Raul's success: "He understands people, which today is a qualification of inestimable value. He has no qualms about letting his subordinates take the lead and staying in their shadow, letting them feel they are responsible for a successful project."

He then went on to quote Samuel Butler: "Any fool can paint a picture, but it takes a genius to sell it."

Raul's success came from his ability to cultivate good relations. He made everyone feel he was an expert at what he was doing. He made a painter feel he was a genius.

"There are great men who make others feel small. There are truly great men who make others feel great."

Again we quote: "It is amazing what a person can do if he doesn't care who gets the credit." ▲

The Cab Ride

I arrived at the address and honked the horn. After waiting a few minutes, I walked to the door and knocked. "Just a minute," called a frail, elderly voice from inside. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.

After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 90's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase.

The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets. There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware. "Would you carry my bag out to the car?" she said.

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I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness. “It’s nothing,” I told her. “I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother treated.”

“Oh! you’re such a good boy,” she said.

When we got in the cab, she gave me an address and then asked, “Could you drive through downtown?”

“It’s not the shortest way,” I answered quickly.

“Oh, I don’t mind,” she said. “I’m in no hurry. I’m on my way to a hospice,”

I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. “I don’t have any family left,” she continued in a soft voice. “The doctor says I don’t have very long.”

I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. “What route would you like me to take?” I asked.

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. Sometimes she’d ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, “I’m tired. Let’s go now.”

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico. Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. They were solicitous and intent, watching her every move. They must have been expecting her. I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

“How much do I owe you?” she asked, reaching into her purse.

“Nothing,” I said.

“You have to make a living,” she answered.

“There are other passengers,” I responded. Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly. “You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,” she said. “Thank you.”

I squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light. Behind me a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life.

I didn’t pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away?

On a quick review, I don’t think that I have done anything more important in my life. We’re conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unaware—beautifully wrapped in what others may consider a small one. People may not remember exactly what you did, or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel. ▲

I'm Just Fine

[A few explanations. The name, Zé Mineirinho, comes from José (Joseph) and Mineiro, someone from the state of Minas Gerais. Mineirinho is the diminutive of Mineiro, which makes him Little José from Minas Gerais. Zé is uneducated and totally hillbilly in his speech, which we have tried to transmit through the translation.]

Zé Mineirinho thought about it and decided that his injuries from the accident were bad enough to where it warranted taking the driver of the other car to law.

The trial began and when Zé Mineirinho was called to the stand, the defendant's lawyer began his questioning.

Lawyer: After the accident you were heard to say, "I'm just fine!" Is that correct?

Zé: Well now, I'm gonna tell you exactly what happened. I'd just finished gettin' my favrite mule into the back of my pickup...

Lawyer: Hold it! I'm not interested in details. Just answer my question, which I repeat: At the scene of the accident did you say, "I'm just fine."?

Zé: Well, as I said, I had just got my favrite mule on the back of my pickup and was headin' down the road...

Lawyer: Objection, your honor. I'm trying to get the facts of this case. The plaintiff told the highway patrol he was just fine. And now, a number of weeks after the accident he is suing my client. Obviously, this is a fraudulent claim. Please, your honor, ask the plaintiff to simply answer my question and not go into a lot of details about his mule.

By now the judge was curious and wanted to hear what Zé Mineirinho had to say.

Judge: Objection overruled. I too want to hear what the witness has to say.

Zé Mineirinho: Thanks, your honesty. Like I was sayin', I put my mule in the back of the pickup and was drivin' down the highway when another pickup runs a red light and plows into the side of my pickup. I flew out of the pickup one way and my mule the other. I was so hurt I couldn't hardly move. But I could hear my poor mule a groanin' and a brayin' away. By the sound of things I could tell things was really bad. Then the highway patrol showed up. The mule was still carryin' on and I dragged myself to the other side of the pickup to see what was going on. That highway patrolman took one look at the mule and pulled out his revolver and shot him three times right between the eyes. Then he come to where I was, still with his revolver in his hand. He looks at me and says, "Your mule was in tough shape and I had to shoot him." Then he says to me, "And you, how are you feeling?" Your honesty, I looked at that cop and that big revolver in his hand and yelled as loud as I could, "**I'm just fine!**" ▲

Readers Write

A Little Lesson in Math

[A reader, Ryan Koehn sent me this, explaining he was snowed in for three days at Christmas and came up with these figures. This bit of research consists of taking two sheets of paper and putting one on top of the other, then doubling that amount, which bring the total to four, then doubling again, and again. . . He has figured this out to 110 times, giving the results for each doubling. For reasons of space, I will select only a few of the results.

1. 2
2. 4
3. 8 ...
8. 256 (The stack is not even an inch tall yet)
13. 8,192 (Nearly 2 **feet** tall)
27. 134,217,728 (5.9 **Miles** tall)
35. 34,359,738,368 (1,506 **miles** tall)
50. 1,125,899,906,842,624 ...
56. 72,057,594,037,927,936
(Could reach to the sun 67 times)
57. 144,115,188,075,855,872
(6,319,934,943 **miles** tall)
100. 1,267,650,600,228,229,401,496,703,205,376...
110. 1,298,074,214,633,706,907,132,624,082,3
5,000 (**miles** high)

Now to put step 110 into perspective: the speed of light is 186,282 miles per second. One light year is 5,874,589,152,000 miles or the distance light travels in one year. A jetliner traveling at 500 miles per hour would need to fly 1.34 Million years to travel one light year! The last number on this page is sheets of paper stacked 360 to an inch. It would take a jetliner 12,981,029,984,067,137,280 years to travel the height of the stack of papers. ▲

Book Review

Decision Points

By George W. Bush, *Decision Points* gives a candid view of what it means to be President of the United States. His honest appraisal of his mistakes has gained him the grudging acclaim of even those who do not agree with his policies.

Decision Points makes it clear why the Oval Office can be the loneliest place on the planet. Seldom do the men surrounding the president have a unanimous view of what course should be taken. The decisions which must be made often affect the destiny of thousands, or even millions, of human beings.

I wrote some time ago about how the media is able to project a false image of public figures. Reading President Bush's book, I realized how much he had been victimized by the press. He was portrayed as an arrogant, insensitive, shoot-from-the-hip president. *Decision Points* shows us that George W. Bush was actually a very religious man who places great value on prayer. Many, if not all, of his important decisions were only made after seeking divine direction.

Bush shows great respect for his parents, George and Barbara Bush, and especially for his wife, Laura. He gives her much of the credit for what he achieved in life. It was Laura who helped him overcome his heavy drinking habits. He is very close to his twin daughters, in spite of the embarrassment they sometimes caused him—and continue to cause on occasion.

Possibly the quality I admire most in George W. Bush is his ability to stand up under severe and largely unwarranted criticism, to not turn bitter. Had President Richard Nixon possessed this quality, he would have gone down in history as one of the great presidents of the United States.

If *Decision Points* does nothing else, it will help the reader to see how much our presidents, as well as other public figures responsible for the well-being of our nations, need our prayers. ▲

This & That

First woman president. Brazil's first woman president, Dilma Rousseff, took office on January 1, 2011, elected by a comfortable margin. Like her predecessor, she is a leftist. I have mentioned before that here in Brazil we have a saying that politicians are like a fiddler. They hold the instrument with their left hand, but play with the right. Actually, it makes sense. A leftist platform is good for getting into office, but once there, rightist policies must be followed if the country is to prosper. Our president knows this and her first acts in office have been encouraging.

BR060 is the highway from Brasília to Cuiabá, capitol of the state of Mato Grosso, that runs through our local town of Rio Verde. The stretch from Brasília to Goiânia, capitol of the state of Goiás, some 180 km., is 4-lane. The remainder of the road, from Goiânia to Cuiabá, is scheduled to become 4-lane. The intense traffic and frequent accidents certainly justify doubling the capacity of our present road. The big question is: Will it actually happen?

Farmers are harvesting—and happy. Yields are good and the price of soybeans is really good. We are in the middle of our rainy season and we can figure on getting four or five rains a week. Farmers are becoming quite adroit at making good use of time when the sun is shining. The big problem when it rains a lot during harvest are the roads.

The TECNO-SHOW is an annual farm show staged at Rio Verde. This year it will be from April 12-16. It is expected there will be...

- 400 stands

Brazil ¹⁴ News

- 65,000 visitors
- Sales of \$125,000,000 USD
- 80 talks and courses
- Investments of \$800,000 USD by the sponsors

This farm show draws visitors from all of Brazil and a number of foreign countries. Very well organized, it gives a bird's eye view of what is happening in Brazilian agriculture. The livestock show attracts a lot of visitors. It is expected that 15,000 people will visit the "jungle," a half-acre walk-through of native trees and plants with a different theme each year. One full day is enough only to get a general idea of what is on display.

Magic Jack looks like an oversized pen drive that can be plugged into the USB port of a computer with an Internet connection. For a \$15 USD annual fee, unlimited calls can be made to selected foreign countries. By using an assigned US number, we here in Brazil are able to call N America for free. The nice thing is that anyone traveling with a notebook can continue making free calls from a hotel room, or wherever there is a broadband signal. Magic Jacks are sold in large retail stores for less than \$50 USD.

The Wall Street Journal reports that Walmart sales in the US experienced an unprecedented 1.8% slump during the last 13 weeks, which includes the Christmas period. No comments.

The Monte Alegre Congregation has increased its staff with a new minister. Edinei & Janete Alves, with their three children, have spent five years in the mission in Mozambique and are now members at the Monte Alegre Congregation. The church in Brazil is in desperate need of more ordained workers. Outlying congregations and mission posts aren't getting the attention they need, not for lack of God-power, but for simple lack of manpower.

A new phone list is available that includes the Colony, outlying congregations, missions and others with ties to our group. Send me an e-mail requesting a phone list and I'll send you one. Remember that your international code to call this way is 011-55, followed by the 10-digit number in the list (without spaces or dashes, naturally).