

Brazil News



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Editorializing

Life's Lessons

Life is a teacher we don't have to hire. But yes, it is a teacher we can ignore. Some of the lessons are instructive, they teach us how to avoid the hard knocks of life. Others come in the form of hard knocks, with the implicit message: "That's what you get for not following my instructions." In a word, life's lessons have the potential to make or break us.

Rather than philosophize, we want to adjust our rearview mirror to analyze the consequences of how we have dealt with life's lessons.

Our Schools

I began my schooling in the late 1940's. It was back in the days when, at least in Kansas, country schools peppered the countryside. My entire 12 years of education were in public schools. Church schools were still in the prenatal stage. I cannot speak for these schools statewide, but if nationwide they would have upheld the principles found in the McPherson County, Kansas schools, I sort of doubt if the need would have been felt for our private schools.

It is taken for granted today that a school with eight grades needs a minimum of eight teachers, plus some assistants, directed by an overworked school board of at least five members.

My first four educational years were in a one-teacher school. There was an "outhouse" for non-curricular necessities, a bucket with water from a hand-pumped well, with a dipper to fill a basin for symbolic hand washing, and one soil-colored towel for drying purposes. By the time I started school there was electric lighting.

Needless to say, the teachers were not Mennonites. Yet they espoused many Biblical principles, creating a wholesome atmosphere, both in the classroom and during recess. In the morning we would all stand, place our right hand over our heart and salute the flag. While this was not a religious practice, it helped create a civic appreciation. Before

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beginning our lunch we would all bow our heads and each day a student would take his/her turn saying grace. (I still remember mine, recited at supersonic speed, “For all we eat, for all we wear, we thank Thee, Father. Amen”). We ate.

We sang religious songs, had thematic Christmas programs that depicted the Shepherds, the Wise Men, the Manger, the Angelic hosts...

Then consolidations became the new reality, which spelled the demise of the old country schools.

About this time “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not the Holdemans.” He believed that a TV in each classroom would enhance learning. He also believed that children should at an early age learn the positive function of sex. Discipline became lax and sports a must. Religiosity was virtually banned from many classrooms.

Like Israel, we found that Egypt had slipped in on us. It not hyperbolic to say we were in a life or death situation. The Promised Land would not be reached by crossing the Red Sea. Then, after much prayer and supplication, our “Moses” showed up and said he would not deliver us to the Promised Land, but rather bring the Promised Land to us. Which he did.

The waters of the Red Sea didn’t part, like they did for the Israelites. As our men reached the shores, Pharaoh’s soldiers were on their heels. My memory is blurred at this point. I don’t recall if any of our directors spent a night in jail, but I do know there was a lot of opposition.

We know the outcome of the story. Today, in North America we have our own schools – basically unopposed, I believe. Pages could be filled on the benefits we are reaping. Number one, of course, is the Christian atmosphere with Christian teachers and board members. Amazing is the amount of the older students who get converted while in school.

(Some of you were acquainted with Leola Willard who was a missionary in Mexico for a good part of her life. She began her teaching career in the Liberty School, where I studied, got converted and became a member of the church. She spent decades in Mexico as a missionary.)

The wisdom of establishing our own schools stands out today as a tribute to the men and women with long-range vision. They saw a dark cloud in the near distance, without knowing that prayer and Bible reading would be outlawed in public schools, the inclusion of the theory of evolution in the curriculum, and worst of all, a breakdown of the ancient landmarks of morality and civility. The cloud they saw was not the cloud that hovered over the Israelite camp in the desert.

More could be said on this, but we want to zero in on one of the miraculous fringe benefits of fleeing Egypt.

The gift of song.

We Mennonites are a singing people. We sing in church, we sing at home, we sing in gatherings. We sing when alone. In a word, singing is an integral part of our life, and has possibly always been. Thus, the singing we are able to enjoy by tuning in on the CloudVeil Messenger stream has featured youth and adult groups.

Then something interesting occurred. Grades 8-10 at the Livingston School was scheduled to sing. Julius Caesar described his victory strategy in a particular battle by saying, “I came, I saw, I conquered. We paraphrase the Caesar singing by saying: At Livingston “We tuned in, we listened, we were conquered.”

Such singing from school children! I contacted the Livingston music instructor and understood. He is enthusiastic. He has his heart in what he is doing.

Then other similar groups were listed. And we were reconquered. We understood that what we heard in California was not an aberration. It is something that is occurring in our parochial schools. Singing is not an afterthought; it is an essential part of the curriculum.

If there are still little question marks dancing before your eyes as I attempt to make my point. Am I being overly enthusiastic?

Please read on.

Without finger-pointing or an attempt to use high heels, permit your brain to take a backward look with mental binoculars.

While in our schools boys and girls are being led to the “still waters” where David praised the Lord in song, what are the children of those who chose a different way learning (and not learning)?

(We recognize there are exceptions and not all fall under the negative influence.)

They have developed an appreciation for blaring music that stimulates the body and not the soul. They sway, they are in constant movement, they laugh and possibly shout, they play instruments. While this may occur in an alleged religious settings, the name of the Lord is abstract.

And that isn't all. In public schools there are some – a few – who can read musical notes, not for vocal singing, but for instrumental music. Our young children – some very young – can look at a new song and begin to hum the tune. In group singing, someone who is unfamiliar with the song being sung can step in, and in moments be singing along. It is the musical version of the “loaves and fishes.”

Songs sung to the glory of God bring inspiration and conviction. I find this element to be present in the songs sung by our school children. (Unfortunately, not all our adult groups meet this criteria.)

I tip my spiritual hat to the music teachers and board members who carry this torch. I sincerely believe there will be souls who spend eternity singing with the celestial host because of what our children are learning in our schools.

Loose Pages From My Scratch Pad

Haiti in Brazil

With the crisis in Haiti, Brazil has opened its doors to Haitians looking for a better life abroad. We now have a small congregation in Toledo, a city in the state of Paraná. Interestingly, a number of them are working in the BRF (Brazil Foods) chicken processing plant, smaller than the one in Rio Verde, to which some of us sell our birds.

The missionary couple stationed there are Bicler & Charlotte Fils-Aime. Some of them were out to spend the holidays here in the Colony. I had the privilege of updating their Creole song book. More on this little fledging congregation in Toledo, Paraná in another issue.

Fascism

When asked how fascism starts, Bertrand Russell once said: “First, they fascinate the fools. Then they muzzle the intelligent.

The brain

The smaller the brain the bigger the mouth.

Guys & gals

When we moved to Brazil in 1969, the term “guys” was used for men – especially younger men or boys – as a generic identification. But now, for a number of years, as we listen to programs in the congregations in the US, “guys” is used from young men. No problem. I don’t see it as a form of liberalism. But, I can’t bring myself to use the word as now being used, as I have never referred to children as “kids.” Again, I see absolutely nothing wrong with calling children kids, but, well, I guess these are terms to which I am allergic. Call my children and grandchildren and great grandchildren kids and I won’t be offended, or think maybe you are a bit off the track. Just an allergy.

Oh, will girls be called “gals” one of these days – in church?

The credit

It is said that men who don’t care who gets the credit for what they do can get a lot done.

Travel

The dollar/real exchange rate has done an Elon Musk, SpaceX feat. It has been successfully launched into monetary space and now takes over six reals to buy one US dollar. That means that the folks who travel to the US are going to find it rather expensive. But for North-Americans coming to Brazil it will be cheaper than six months ago.

Feliz Natal

Faith and I wish a wonderful Christmas to all of you readers and a 2025 with God in your lives.

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