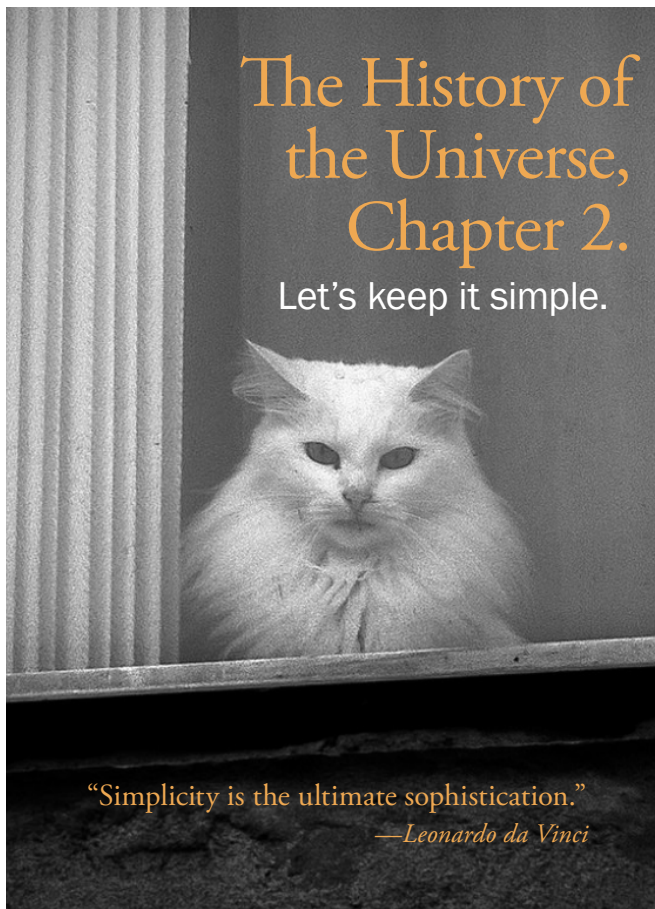




ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 8, Issue 5



What if the answers to everything are simple? And what if, as Leonardo da Vinci famously said, simplicity is the ultimate sophistication? Some people who pride themselves on what they imagine to be a superior intellect will inherently choke, not only upon their caviar hors d'oeuvres, but on my assertion that the explanation of such a grandiosity as the universe could be straightforward, smooth, plain, elementary, satisfying, and graspable by the kinds of people (and *only* the kinds of people) who wear flannel shirts.

Those who would never deign to wear any fabric suit-

able to the felling of trees may be illustrated using the American phenomenon of the “coastal elites.”

COASTAL, COMPLICATED “ELITES”

The coastal elites live in cities such as Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, and I suppose one might include Philadelphia in that mix, but certainly not San Diego. One would think that the proximity and curative properties of such large bodies of salt water—namely, the respective oceans—would alleviate the afflictions of the elites (pride and indigestion), but it rather seems to exacerbate them. This tribe is also known as the “intellectual elites”; “social elites”; “cultured class”; “high society”; “the upper crust”; “*beau monde*”; “beautiful people” and “complicated sons of bitches.” One might easily identify them by the way they start their sentences with, “I say, old chap...” and “Where the hell are Martin Zender’s credentials?”

“Elite,” it must be said, is how this posse thinks of itself. It is not how we “commoners” think of it. We think of it and of them as out-of-touch snobs whose lives are so complicated that they must hire small armies to manage them. They despise anyone living in the middle of the country. (Even some suburbs of New Jersey are “the middle of the country” to the self-appointed mental giants sipping lattes in the shadow of the Empire State building.) People in the middle of the United States tend to drive pick-up trucks, shop at Wal-Mart, eat Kentucky Fried chicken for dinner and Dunkin’ Donut bagels for breakfast—and believe in God.

A coastal elite once told me: “God is Santa Claus for adults.” I asked her who created the universe. She said, “The Big Bang.” I said, “The Big Bang is Santa Claus for atheists.” She said, “How can you believe in something like the virgin birth?” I said, “How can you believe in something like a penis that hardens at the scent of the opposing gender and that fires millions of sperm into a woman’s fallopian tube via the vagina, a process



wherein each sperm knows how to swim—*swim*, mind you—toward the action and sniff out an ova that the woman has disbursed unconsciously from an ovary so as to penetrate it and begin multiplying into something that eventually knows to suck a breast and starts high school at age fifteen?”

At the time of this conversation, I was on a date at a fancy restaurant with this coastal elite femme. (Notice the word “was.”)

STARFUCKS

People like me retire before 10:00 p.m. after reading bedtime stories to their kids. For this, we are thought by the elites to be simpletons. (A representative of our breed might be Homer Simpson; note the verbal proximity of “Simpson” to “simpleton.” On second thought, I may be giving Homer too much credit.)

This coastal mentality is arrogance on steroids—or arrogance on three cups of Starbucks coffee, Starbucks being “the iconic, Seattle-based coffeehouse chain” favored by elites everywhere. Who but Starbucks would sell “tall, grande and venti” sizes of their product, rather than “small, medium and large”? What unmitigated pretension does such a thing? Why doesn’t Starbucks just go all the way and print their prices in Roman numerals? That would put the cherry on top of the baloney. If Starbucks is “the iconic, Seattle-based coffeehouse chain” then what is Dunkin’ Donuts? Oh, I don’t know. Maybe

“the moronic, Canton, Massachusetts-based hangout where *real* people consume the product of roasted and brewed coffee beans.”

A MATTER OF DEGREES

I should tell you that, while I do believe in Jesus Christ and that He is not only my personal Savior but the Savior of the world, I do not label myself a Christian. Neither does Jesus for that matter. I therefore consider myself to be in good company. My prayer before bed each night is, “Lord, save me from your fan club.” I am a Scripture pumper, not a Bible thumper. (More on this in the next chapter.) There is a big difference. I study God’s revelation as unfolded from the inspired languages, namely Hebrew and Greek. This, I have been doing for thirty-five years. It’s amazing what truths emerge from an accurate translation. (Imagine my shock when, in 1979, I realized that Jesus never spoke English.)

For a moron, I’m pretty smart.

As previously discussed, I have no formal education in the things of God and this has saved me from the uniform deceptions therein. What some think as my weakness is in fact my strength. It is now the first entry on my résumé: 1) I have never attained any degree whatsoever from any theological seminary, either at home or abroad. Baptist seminaries produce Baptists, Catholic seminaries produce Catholics (this is still part of my résumé entry—*Ed.*), and I dare you to guess what Methodist seminaries produce.

I have thankfully (and studiously) dodged these bullets/theological boxes and am thus able to imbibe directly of the source of all wisdom (the Word of God) and believe what I read there without the obscuring denominational filters. Religious systems consider rogue Scripture pumpers like myself to be clear and present dangers, especially if one such as myself can write and owns a publishing company. (This ends the résumé entry—*Ed.*)

APP CRAP

I talked to a friend last night who works for a company that has developed an app that can keep track of all your passwords on all other apps. Imagine that. A complexity invented to cover another complexity. How in the world are we supposed to remember all of our passwords? Precisely. We all want Internet security. The sites holding your banking information, your social media profiles, your ordering history on Amazon, or the dating site where your future husband or wife may lurk (and that’s exactly what they do here)—these all insist that you choose a password so that only you can access your electronic life-line. This is essential, of course, as a considerable criminal element wants to steal your identity, spend all your money, infringe upon your potential sex partners, and “borrow” your healthcare benefits. Most of these sites insist that your passwords be at least eight characters, with at least one capital letter (three is better), one yellow emoji and the name of your childhood pet. Who can remember any of this? Precisely. So an app has been invented where you can list your passwords to every other app. The problem, said my friend, is that many people forget the password to the app that stores their hundreds of other passwords. In other words, they misplace the key to the kingdom. “What happens when *this* happens?” I asked my friend. My friend said, “These people are then basically screwed.”

Are we screwed because the universe is too complicated? Or are we screwed because we inherently complicate things that are simple, simply because we don’t trust simplicity?

SEE DICK RUN

Another warning at the outset: beware the kinds of people who refuse to believe (it has been trained into them at the aforementioned schools) that child-like facts stated in a child-like manner must necessarily be wrong. Along this line, I give you Exhibit A—

The people brought children to Jesus, hoping he might

touch them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus was irate and let them know it: “Don’t push these children away. Don’t ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom.

—*Mark 10:13-14, The Message*

Just watch children run. I’m serious. Watch a bare-footed kid run across his yard in the summertime. His/her running form is perfect. The only other place you will see such locomotive perfection is among the elite Kenyan and Ethiopian long and middle distance runners, who lived most of their lives without shoes and thus obeyed the manner in which their feet and bodies dealt with the ground. Padded, beefed-up shoes put the affluent foot to sleep. The leg responds by doing stupid things that it ought not do, to make up for the foot being sent off to beddy-bye. The leg must compensate for the hibernating foot that, as soon as its owner surrounded it with layers of padding and foam, basically said, “Screw it. The knee can figure this out, starting now. I’ve lost all contact with anything that matters.” The podiatry industry has thrived commensurately with the advent of bigger, “better,” cushier footwear. Our feet have forgotten what the Earth feels like. If left alone, our feet know what to



do; every part of the body adjusts to the dictates of the feet. But who leaves feet alone these days? Who wants to appear so hickish as to air their bare soles in public?

THE BRAZILIAN REVELATION

Me, that's who. I ran barefoot through downtown São Paulo, Brazil on the regular for about a year. One would chiefly find me on Paulista Avenue, Av. Brigadeiro Luís Antônio, Rua da Consolação, and Rua Estados Unidos. Three, four, five miles at a time, without shoes I would go. Here, I discovered the miraculous intelligence of the foot. "Let it be" was my mantra whenever I traveled shoeless. I never felt better. I upped my pace with less effort. I never got more funny looks, true. I like to think that the looks were admiring. I was a throwback



from another era. I felt positively primitive, and became somewhat of a celebrity because of it. An old knee injury disappeared. My friends back in the States would ask me, "What about glass and things on the sidewalks?" "I've got two ways of dealing with such hazards," I said, and I would tell them about my two eyes. I like to think that some of the Paulistas still talk about me, especially the kids.

Knowledge of God must also be barefoot.

One ought to rely on his or her naked intellect whenever approaching the Deity and His revelations. One has two eyes; both of these ought to be utilized wide open without tinted, seminary-assisted lenses. Trust what God gave you. Truth is free. True theological degrees come from bare feet, two naked eyes and heaven. If you want truth, seek out the kid sitting with Jesus in the dirt. This is where it's happening. Look for the tax collector, the fishermen and the prostitute—all sitting at the feet of Jesus, Who is not wearing arch supports. Here is true spiritual genius, far from the temple. Eschew the doctors of theology who boast more degrees than

Nebuchadnezzar's oven. Do not expect such formally-trained professionals to recognize spiritual ground should they even happen upon it, which they rarely do. To find truth, seekers must surrender institutional padding—the so-called "protection" of the system—and the numerous rubber springs and arch supports that dampen one's inherent spiritual sense, anesthetizing it. These professionals don't even remember what God feels like.

Don't ask elites to run barefoot—or run at all—unless you need a laugh. The padded and proud despise the very possibility that a barefoot contingent could apprehend and effectively communicate something that, for them, must never depart the mystifying fog of theory: the universe. The very idea of simple people with simple thoughts apprehending truths that they—in all their formal education—cannot grasp, enrages them. It makes them mad enough to kill the holders of truth.

SETTLE DOWN

One of the qualifications of elitehood is to avoid ever becoming settled or happy. Contentment is for morons. As the saying goes, "If you can stay calm in days such as these, perhaps you just don't understand the situation." Anything said to be settled becomes, for elites, an object of ridicule. If nothing is settled, then nothing can be right and nothing can be wrong. This leaves nothing but moral relativity and theorizing, which of course can never settle anywhere upon anything. It has no perch. But this is what this crowd wants: relativity. Truth is *their* truth. Thus, they can make truth whatever they want it to be. It's a convenient excuse for never truly understanding—or trying to understand—anything of consequence. For surely the consequential must always be settled. And thus it is. Yes, and this is one of my major contentions.

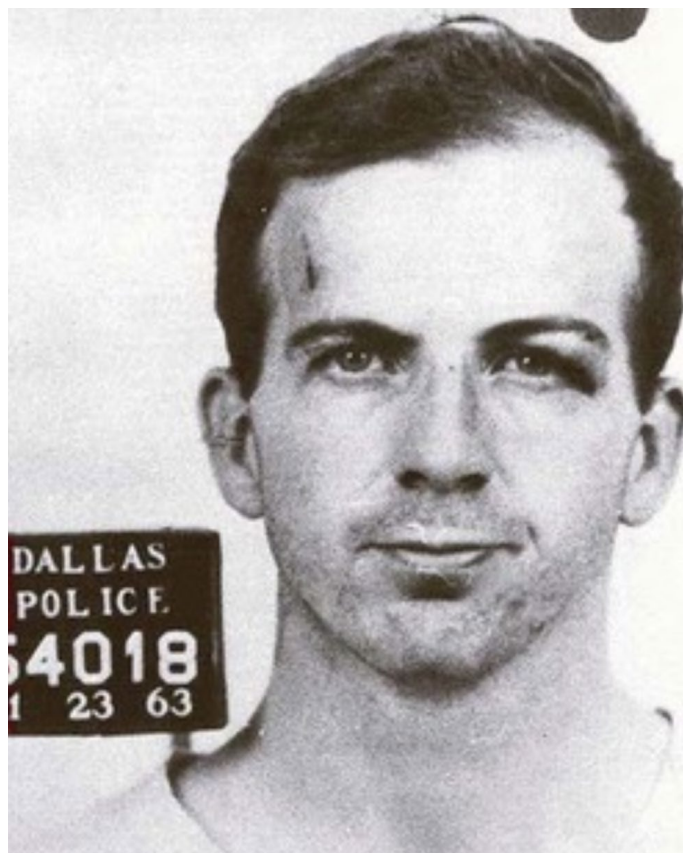


Spiritual elites—ditto. God is whatever they *think* God is. It becomes easy, thereafter, to put down those setting out (barefoot, of course) to actually study God and discover the One Who welcomes the microscope as well as the telescope. His front door is always ajar. If people can find God by studying God—opening His refrigerator, looking into all His cupboards, ruffling His covers and napping upon His bed—then suddenly the spiritual elites occupy the unenviable position of ignorance. They could never have *that* (horrors!), and thus they arrange it so that their understanding of God is as viable as anyone else's, never mind that any such “understanding” comes not via studious application but rather vivid imaginations and/or excessive caffeine.

THE DISGRUNTLED BOX-STACKER

Many people reject simplicity simply because it's too simple. This is how conspiracy theories are born. Over-thinkers thrive on complications. It is highly disquieting to think that a beautiful, young, tanned and optimistic president like JFK could have been snuffed out by a disgruntled school-book salesman/Communist sympathizer from New Orleans who wanted to be famous and to impress his girlfriend/fellow Communist sympathizer Marina. No one wants to think that one bullet from a Commie numbnuts (okay, two) could kill a great man like John F. Kennedy. How could a narcissistic numbskull stacking boxes for a living kill the leader of the free world? And yet he did. Yet there exists a segment of society that even today, fifty-six years later, will do anything to complicate the murder of the president. Is theory more emotionally satisfying than truth? Is the concept that simplicity regularly dismantles complexity too troubling a thought? A Dallas friend of mine, ridiculing the JFK assassination conspiracy-theory crowd, said, “Officer Tippit shot Kennedy from a manhole cover on Elm Street.” I at first thought he was serious. Why not? The rabbit holes of conspiracy are bottomless.

The easy answer to anything is probably the right answer to everything, but too many restless minds want tangles. It satisfies the odd (to me) human lust for vagueness and webs of mystery. If there is anything that humanity hates more than conclusions it's that someone could be right and others wrong. Oh, wait. That's the same thing. Nothing is more politically incorrect than to insist on absolute truth. Or simple answers. Relativity is worshipped for its comforting nothingness, complication for its inability to be grasped. But how can inconclusivity comfort anyone? I don't get it—unless ignorance is bliss, and perhaps it is.



Humanity's corporate head-scratching probably explains the never-ending demand of adult beverages and the preference for anti-depressants over megavitamins.

WRONGLY IMPLIED STUPIDITY

But this is why simple explanations are often overlooked. Simple explanations can be and are believed by simple people, but those who write *New York Times* best-sellers generally despise the Homer Simpson types and reject their answers. Simplicity is a distasteful notion to those who have spent scads of money ensuring that everything remains so convoluted that only *they* can “grasp” it and multisyllabically “explain” it. But of course their “grasping it” turns out to be an unending series of hypotheses that breed riddles. Thus, the conversation never stops. So maybe *this* is what humans hate more than settled conclusions: the end of chattering. (Might this help explain social media?)

Simplicity does not imply stupidity. The opposite is true. As Leonardo da Vinci said, “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”

He must have been considering the smile of his friend Lisa Gherardini, the subject of his most famous painting.

ALLOW ME TO WINE

If you can stand it, take the time to study wine bottle labels. Even the cheapest wines are said to be “complex.” It’s the same with coffee. Any coffee enterprise other than working-class companies such as Folgers, Maxwell House and Dunkin’ Donuts are loathe to call their product “coffee.” They prefer to say that the particular blend you’re now holding is but one of their many



Something tells me it's "complex."

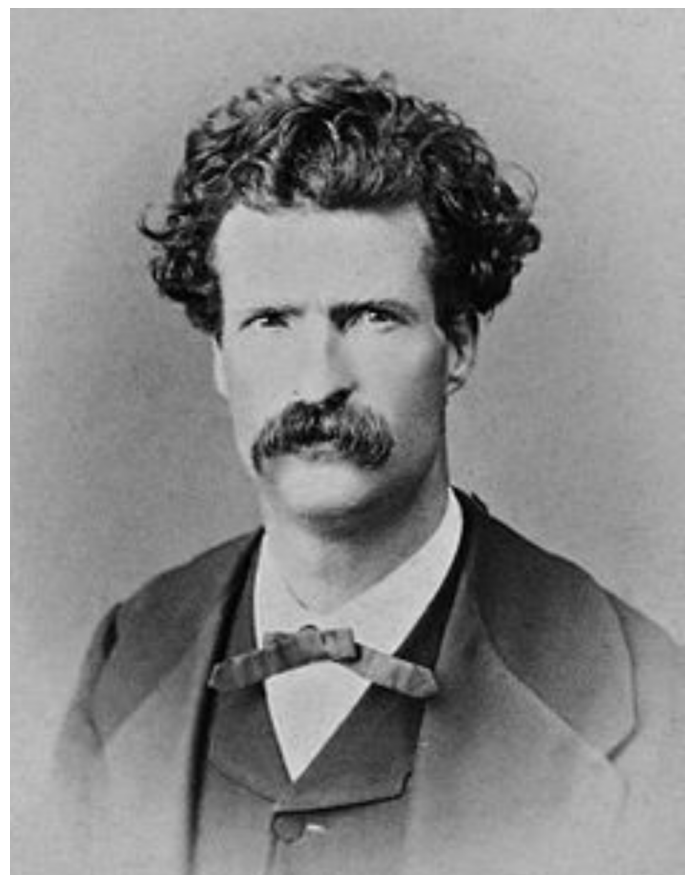
“coffees.” Instead of “check out our coffee,” these grinders and brewers say, “explore our many coffees.” Yes, but what if the product is simply *coffee*? And what if, in fact, there is no wine on the planet that is “complex,” but that it is all simply the product of fermented grape juice? Does any wine have a note? I read of many different “notes” on wine bottle labels: blueberry notes, vanilla notes, cranberry notes, smoky notes, Post-it notes, quarter notes. Is this a symphony or a glass of fermented grape juice? One has to wonder. Can one simply drink the wine and dispense with the notes and the so-called complexities? Apparently not.

Some literary critics of Mark Twain’s time dismissed him because of his simplistic writing style; witness *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain wrote to everyman, making himself

the bestselling author of his time. His famous travel book, *The Innocents Abroad*, became the literary hit of its day, breaking the mold of the stuffy travel guide and speaking to the unpretentious in a common vernacular. Twain saw things as they were, and not as the travel elites *said* they were. Edward P. Hingston, writing the introduction to *Innocents Abroad*, wrote—

A most aptly chosen title is that of “The Innocents Abroad,” so far as Mark Twain is concerned. He visited Europe and Asia without any of the preparations for travel which most travellers undertake. His object was to see things as they are, and record the impressions they produced on a man of humorous perception, who paid his first visit to Europe without a travelling-tutor, a university education, or a stock of conventional sentimentality packed in his carpet-bag. Throughout the trip he looked at all objects as an untravelled American might be expected to look, and measured men and manners by the gauge he had set up for himself among the gold-hills of California and the silver-mines of half-civilized Nevada.

Mark Twain answered his critics by commenting, “High and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water.”



QUOTES ON SIMPLICITY

- “Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.” —*Confucius*
- “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” —*Leonardo da Vinci*
- “Don’t use a lot when a little will do.” —*Proverb*
- “The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.” —*William James*
- “Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification.” —*Martin H. Fischer*
- “The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” —*Hans Hofmann*
- “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.” —*William Morris*
- “Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it’s worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.” —*Steve Jobs*
- “There is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness, and truth.” —*Leo Tolstoy*
- “Voluntary simplicity means going fewer places in one day rather than more, seeing less so I can see more, doing less so I can do more, acquiring less so I can have more.” —*Jon Kabat-Zinn*
- “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.” —*Albert Einstein*
- “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! We are happy in proportion to the things we can do without.” —*Henry David Thoreau*
- “Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.” —*Lao Tzu*

HERE COME THE GODMEN

The Catholic church used to hate the idea of ordinary people finding out about God. (They’re still not crazy about it.) They lusted to hold power over the unwashed, and so they strained to make God’s word unobtainable; foggy; esoteric; secret; buried. Anything to keep the citizenry from clasping God to their own bosoms. Clergymen forever want their followers in fogs because then the followers (feeble and frustrated) must look to the clergy for clarity. Were the people to obtain this clarity on their own apart from the professional godmen—oh what a disaster this would be for the godmen. The realization would then have dawned that no longer does any man or woman need a go-between separating them from God;

one only needs God, and God—like certain modern presidents—skips the mainstream media and Tweets directly to the people via Scripture. So the godmen live to obfuscate God’s direct, Tweet-like revelations. They must do this to preserve their power, position and pay.

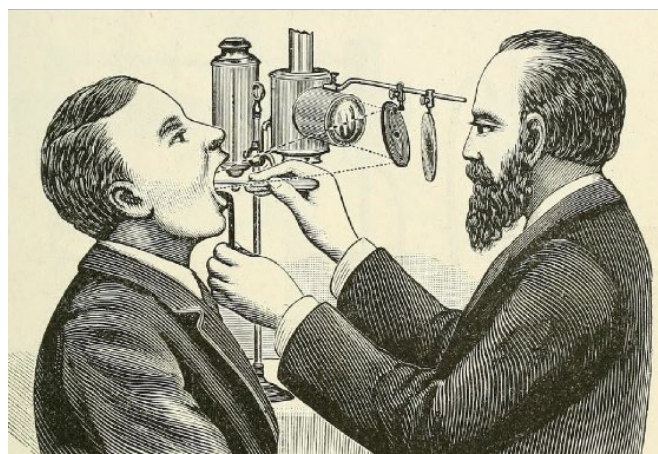
Some of these same jackasses probably write wine labels in their spare time.

JESUS AND MEDICAL JERKS

Jesus loved simple people. Only these kinds of people “got Him.” They hated pretension. They had no reputations to fan or water. They drank simple wine with no notes of anything, just grapes. Jesus said, “Matthew, please bring me a goblet of wine.” The Son of God is not anywhere on record as saying, “Por favor, fetch me something with an incredibly sexy nose of smoke, black fruits, cappuccino, and toasty wood. Have you an ‘03 Magdalan blend, which I would call an expansive, terrifically concentrated wine with a sumptuous texture, no hard edges, beautifully integrated acidity and tannin, and a long, 35-second finish? Many have called the ‘03 Magdalan ‘a stunningly aromatic, multi-dimensional wine that must be tasted to be believed.’ Peter, what do *you* think?”

No. Jesus would simply have said, “Peter, pour me some wine, for God’s sake.”

Don’t get me started on doctors. They want you to remove your pants and sit on an elevated table covered in stiff paper and wait for them. But why? Why can’t I just sit in this relatively comfortable chair with my pants on, wait the requisite ninety minutes until someone makes the bogeyman finally aware of “the victim in Examination Room 6-F waiting to have his tongue depressed and his pockets picked,” and only *then* take off my pants and sit on the crinkly deli paper so that the medical school graduate/business operator can rape me with a Q-Tip?



Wouldn't this be simpler? Of course it would. And this is why it never happens.

TWEED AND SMOKE

I almost became an elite, effete, leftist-type in Chicago in 1981.

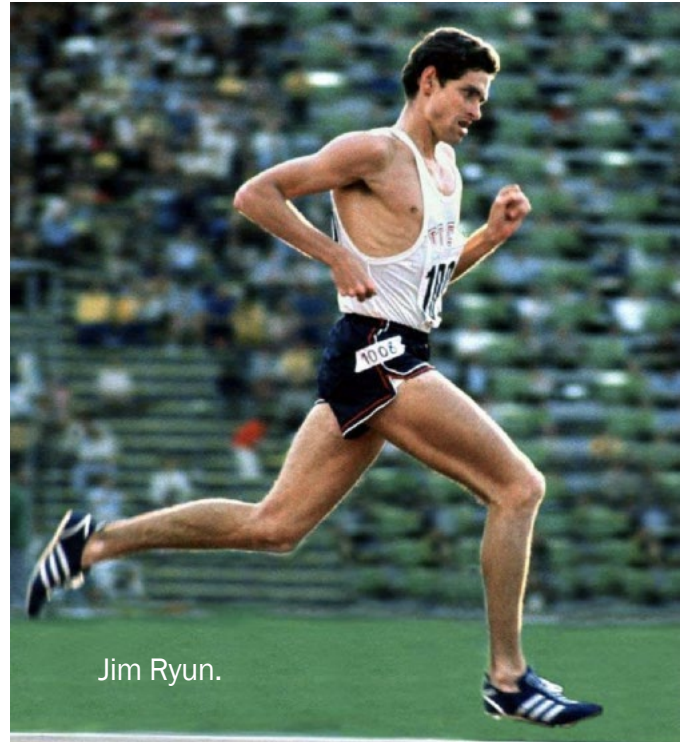
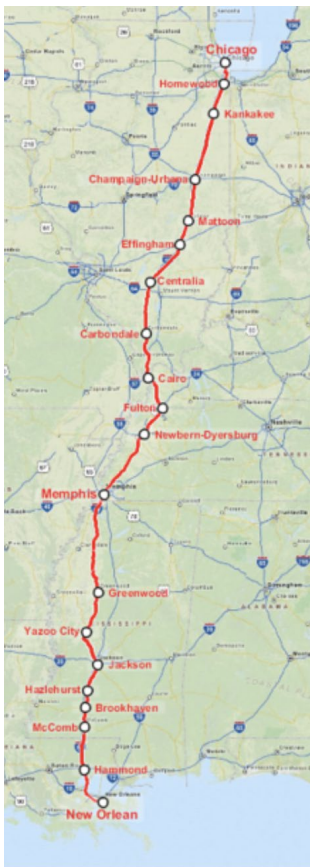
"Oh my God, Harold, he's bashing leftists. I was hoping he wouldn't get political."

"Maybe he's building to a point, Maude. You never know about these things. I think we should hear him out."

"You're gravitating now toward the kid?"

"I like what he said about doctors. He got me with that one. I don't know how many times that has happened to me. Why do doctors always want your pants off no matter what? You could have an elbow problem, and they insist that you remove your pants. They tap your elbow with that rubber hammer and then tell you you can put your pants back on. I hate that crinkly table paper, too. The kid was right to call it 'crinkly.' You see that stuff only at delis and doctor's offices."

I felt it coming on near McCormick Square off Indiana Avenue. I had taken a train to Chicago from Canton, Ohio to begin a one-thousand mile, solo run to New Orleans. I was a distance runner then, and marathons weren't enough for me. I'd already run two of them. I wanted a running route that paralleled the Mississippi River. I wanted to be able to see my route on satellite photos of the United States. In this, I was a misfit. Still, people could not look away. Something about the ground moving beneath me under my own power fascinated me (and others) ever since I was fourteen years old and first saw the tortured face of miler Jim Ryun taking the silver in the 1500 meters in Mexico City at the '68 Games. Only the extremes



Jim Ryun.

were good enough for me. Ryun hadn't run far enough.

I began my trip at Union Station, Chicago. I had time to kill on the afternoon I arrived, so I slung on my flimsy, breadbox-sized backpack and headed out to the street.

The attractions of the street worked on me. I passed haberdasheries. I became afraid of the run, then, partly because of the allure of the haberdasheries. The time and distance of the Chicago-New Orleans run intimidated me. *Why now? Wasn't it a little late?* Maybe Jim Ryun was right. What was I doing? Why wasn't I normal? Why did I think it necessary to suffer so much? Why multiply miles to such extremes? Or would I transcend suffering in order to accomplish what few people could? *Look at all the people out here walking and not thinking about running to New Orleans, I thought. They are beautiful people. They are city-dwellers. They live to attain things that could land them in a Michigan Avenue penthouse, and probably have. Running to New Orleans has never occurred to them. They seem quite happy without it.*

THE WRITER

What about *me*? I would run to New Orleans in the rain, the snow and the mud. The month was February—don't ask me why. I would stay in Motel 6s and Super 8s and mom-and-pop lodges all the way down. When I got to New Orleans I would have a Coca-Cola on Bourbon Street. (I was not a drinker then, but was this day con-



Union Station; Chicago.

sidering becoming one; I would be a man of whiskey and scotch; the distilled beverages would accessorize my new lifestyle.) I would suffer with great purpose as I paralleled the Great American Waterway. I would witness much road-kill at the same time that it witnessed me.

I was also a writer. The gravity of this pre-run walk downtown hit me when I concentrated on the fact that I was a writer, and rare. It's when I noticed the gentleman in the tweed jacket in combination with my being a writer that it all ramrodded me right out there in public into a new series of thoughts. Only in hindsight did I realize what was happening and why God brought to me the tweed-jacketed man.

I would be a professional writer. I could dispense with this ridiculous adventure and buy a tweed jacket like the man God had paraded before me. I had never smoked before, but I pictured myself with a pipe. It would be a pleasant transformation, and monumental—my jacket and my pipe. These would be only two accoutrements of many (remember the scotch) that would illustrate and demonstrate to the common world my personal revolution. I would live in Chicago. I would try to sell my essays to *The Atlantic*. I'd read some of the stuff there from the likes of Cullen Murphy

and knew that I could do it. I could best them, or at least attain to what they'd done. That, and a byline in *The New Yorker* would raise me into a penthouse suite or at least into a townhouse in this great city.

My imagination was so rich that I could already feel how it would feel to attain these monstrosities. I immediately understood how the monstrosities would distinguish me from others, at least in my mind. But wasn't the mind the best place to be distinguished? Wasn't it the best place to entertain monstrosities? It was safest, most impenetrable place for certain. I would be known as "an intellectual." The regular people would feast their eyes upon me in my tweed jacket and my pipe and realize that they could never attain my eminence. In the summertime, I would sit on a park bench



on West Madison Street near Millennium Park and read the *Tribune*. The smoke from my pipe would curl off toward Lake Michigan. In that smoke I would compose my next essay on the latest bank fraud or foreign war. Or why Americana was moronic and old. Oh, what a vast difference between Chicago and rural Illinois. I already felt myself disdaining it. How dare the small people imagine that they knew what was best for themselves and their families. I would become an intellectual participant of the Central Planning committee. I would draft its *Magna Carta*—the reverse of it of course, for only my rights needed considered, for with my rights secured I could then secure the “rights” of others.

These thoughts electrified me. Yes, even the haughtiness. I felt then as though I were floating ten inches off Indiana Avenue. *Floating ten inches off Indiana Avenue in Chicago*, I thought, *is better than running from Chicago to New Orleans on U.S. 41, with feet never leaving the pavement.*

I was ready to quit the run before I’d even begun. I could be back in Ohio and sitting at my word processor by noon tomorrow, planning my ascent from there, the keynote of which would be my eventual and permanent departure from there.

THE KING OF THE HOBOS

The wind off the lake was cold, so I went back into Union Station. I spent the night on a hardwood bench rubbed smooth over the decades from the likes of gypsies like myself.

A policemen rudely awakened me the next morning with a tap of his nightstick to the bottoms of my New Balance running shoes. It was six o’clock a.m. I would begin running at nine—or would I?

At seven o’clock, as the bell tolls, I met the King of the Hobos of Chicago. He said that he was the King of the Hobos, which is how I knew. He did not have many teeth, and the ones he did have were far in back, out of the way. But he spoke in a wet lisp as if the teeth in back were not even there. He wore a wool sports jacket, unbuttoned, and a “white” shirt underneath. His pants were gray, followed by brown loafers. He had not shaved since perhaps his last cup of coffee.

“Do you drink coffee?” I asked him.

“Sure!”

I got coffee for us and we sat at a small table. He began to tell me of his life as a hobo. This led to stories about his life before he had become King of the Hobos of Chicago.

I listened politely. He was so convincing that I began wondering if he believed these stories himself. But when he talked about stealing grapefruit all summer from a vendor in the south-side suburb of Dolton, I wondered with deeper amazement if his stories were actually true. I thought then about asking his name. I didn’t have to.

“Jerry. C’mon, Jerry. Let’s move it, now. Out you go.”

A policeman broke up our coffee. But at least I finally knew and can report to you today that the name of the King of the Hobos of Chicago is Jerry.

I was once again electrified.

I needed to watch him go, and I did. I didn’t expect him to look back at me, but here it came. Oh my God, he looked back at me. I have never seen him again, but Jerry turned back toward me as they took him away and, with a single glance, communicated to me my marching orders.



You can be someone in this world as long as it is what God wants you to be. You can rise to the top of anything, but only after considering the worthiness of the height. You can change your mind, or you can mind your change. You can always *be* someone, but the ground seems a reliable indicator of the measure of nobility in your breast.

You can then leave Union Station, Chicago, out the south door onto W. Jackson Boulevard as you sling your dilapidated, breadbox-sized backpack over your already weary shoulders. And then you can dream of a nobler, Jesus-type future as you trot toward Kankakee in the howling wind. —MZ

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