

THE NEVER - AN - END - TO - NEWS NEWS
975 E. Main Canyon Rd., Hallsburg, UT 84082, 6 de enero 1994

News, like memory and history, is mostly miss and hit if we're any good at it. At Clovis, where Merrill and I just spent a few days with wonderfully beautiful and entertaining children who never dulled our moments while Marvin and Anna were at the Holiday Bowl, I read Jim Herriot's latest: Every Living Thing. A great thing about Jim is that he includes very awkward and embarrassing moments in his memoirs, sparing not. Notice, however, that his perceptions of what goes awry with himself and people and four-appendaged animals and fowls are so wry that we are captivated and enchanted. A right rum chap, this Herriot, making a great hit out of himself when he misses. With muck knee-high with pigs in a sty.

You who can read me like a book think I'm going to vainly attempt to make myself look good reading while little children cried. Well, I'm sensitive about my looks and (as a rule) hide them behind whatever books are at hand. This is understandable. Actually, at the Ashcroft house I mostly read abed. Kids, like wives, are frightfully adept at noticing when one is not rewarding them with one's full attention. In this context reward may be viewed as nothing less than simple regard and as such is its own reward. Without fear of being misunderstood I hope all concerned (for this is life, our life) may be all that deserving. As for me, any regard of mine coming my way, wending itself back from them to me, was rewarded many times over.

Snatch repartee from the jaws of defeat. As I reflect on it, the Herriot technique has long served me well. Asked about my exploits as an infantryman in World War II, I may tell how I discovered the combat-corroborated meaning of the basic training expression "dry run" or How private first class Hall, 19153139 Sir!, experienced a "wet" run--shivering from the onset of the coldest winter of the century under all available layers of clothing, including olive drab G.I. long handles and--I'll say the word, now--from fear. We blamed initially frequent attacks of diarrhea on our Government Issue K-rations. No other explanation occurred to us. Truly. I realized the truth much later. So there's PFC 19153139 Sir! in an Alsatian stable (mucky as any of yours, Herriot), pants down, twisted around, trying to cut away with his trench knife a critical piece of undergarment. A Herriot, a Hall with more time, could do more with this. Wet also referred to blood.

Merrill just looked over my shoulder to regard this unsympathetically. In a family letter? Long ago I jokingly told her I knew war was hell on noting the absence of plumbing. Love me, love my war! Let your hearts bleed as you laugh. A naked, bloody corpse in the manure. Under attack, shells exploding all around, how undress and naked face the foe? Making it unthinkable: the image of my mother's son like that. Change clothes: Into what? First shower: months later, a Mannheim factory, after crossing the Rhine. A huge room, no separate compartments, with many shower heads. Female attendants, customary at the time and place, supplied soap and towels. Not squeamish they. Second shower: a portable open-air one not far from the front. Allowed about three minutes each, one at a time. Pump failed when all soaped up. Got the soap off the best I could with snow. Third and last ablutions at war's end: a sybaritic delight, a public bath the Romans could envy, pools large and small of varied temperatures, Innsbruck, Austria.

Why go into the heroics when there are vignettes like this to tell? I will utter a wry truth. Wish I'd somehow saved my holey undergarments as a souvenir to display as an objet de contemplation--despite my well-known abhorrence of "biology"--as an unwonted (with o) symbol of the inconveniences we suffered. When (a minor in German) I read Im Westen Nichts Neues (All Quiet

on the Western Front), I thought what a great book, despite the horror depicted, if it would help mankind learn never to go to war. "Each according to his ability..." In lieu of a novel, I offer some tragicomic images of war that may be deplored. Deplore war. You do, for sure. Deplore it more.

Who knows what suscitates (and resuscitates) memories. I disremember now how it was as Merrill and I were traveling along that I started reminiscing about Grandpa Henry C. Hall. Helon Henry Tracy has got remembrance and admiration much more than H.C.H. Hey, I could have been named W. Henry Hall instead of Herbert. I signed my poem Wendell Herbert Hall, by the way, because of Joey Larsen (Joey boey, our pride and joey), who gets a kick out of calling me Herby and Herbert. Well--I got to thinking--the other Henry had to be admirable too. I remembered his Ogden Transfer and Storage and how I liked to climb up into the storage area over the cab of his moving van when Pa would drive it home to Marriott. My grandpa Hall was the only grandpa I knew. Grandpa Tracy died in 1893. That's before I was even born, Carolyn. (So how could my war have been the Civil one?)

A remarkable coincidence occurred. We get back to Wallsburg and there's a letter awaiting us from Tracy (copy enclosed). I had told Merrill, I wish I could remember better and more; I'll have to check with Trace and Gene, who no doubt can provide more information, elderly brethren that they are. And lo! Thanks very much H. Tracy. Tell us more. U 2, Gene. Turning to her family, Merrill imparted some information on her dad, Cyrus, that I hadn't heard before. Put that down in writing, Merrill. I always wanted to call him "Cy," holding him in great esteem and affection but, uncertain how it would be received, put it off too long and he became "Grandpa." See, I wasn't as cheeky by half as Joey boey.

Unwittingly... Forget it! Wittingly. He's a scientist. In full knowledge of what he was doing, Tracy revealed the hitherto unknown origins of the miniskirt, more remote than I had imagined. The horses couldn't be potty trained like mules and the stuff heaped up and up and the ladies had to hem their skirts higher and higher. And from those days on, even though the horse power was no longer provided by horses, the ladies obviously liked seeing the men see what they saw and... This is no "biology" binge, Merrill. Was Ida Rose looking over Tracy's shoulder as he reported his rigorously determined data? We pray that she will be on her feet soon, able to fully attend again to wifely prerogatives and duties.

Just space for one recollection of Henry Charles Hall. We were walking with Grandpa along Washington Avenue (now a boulevard!), near the corner of 25th St. and the Broom Hotel, where our angel mother Florence worked as a maid during the depression to help Dad enhance our precarious life expectancy. A short man, his eyes nonetheless higher above the concrete than Delbert's, Donald's, mine, Eugene's and Tracy's, in ascending order (at that time), Grandpa suddenly bent down and picked up a dime that we had failed to see. He put it in his pocket. We walked along. We passed Kress's. We passed Newberry's. "Five and Dimes." A dime could have bought a lot back then.

No one can pretend to know what Grandpa was thinking, or whether he was, but this incident continues to remind me that kids have expectations and, rightly or wrongly, take kindly to you as you act accordingly. They should not be spoiled. Dumbpaw is the spoiled one, when he gets to take darling, adorable grandkids to the Round Valley Store, known to them as The Candy Store, and share their anticipation, excitement and fun. But I am very strict and stern. One dollar. No more. The rough equivalent of one red cent at Bingham's grocery store, Marriott, Utah, 1927. It doesn't seem like yesterday. Feel free to color the butterfly of love.

Merrill
Wendell