

## Never News the Ending

There's always something! Things keep happening!

**G.I. Joe bravado.** Long ago, in combat--not World War I, you guys (as our kids always claim, trying to paint this young-looking veteran old and decrepit)--I decided that, faced with death, sure, I would be scared, but I would not run. (Of course, if the brass ordered a strategic re-adjustment, as happened in the Little Battle of the Bulge, I would with unreluctant alacrity comply.) "Wise as serpents, harmless as doves," Jesus said (Matt. 10:16). In Spanish, the word is "prudent". Sometimes people around here are excessively prudent, I think. Chile celebrated its national holiday Sept. 18-19, and on such days the terrorists creep out from under their slimy stones. On the 18th, the new temple president was scheduled to give the MTC temple preparation lesson in my stead--a great thing for the missionaries, I thought--but he prudently stayed home. He shouldn't be criticized but, well, I'm often grateful for my experiences in the war. I'm certainly not impervious to fear but I can face it and go forward. (Said humbly, as I flick my fingers across my shoulder in the Spanish gesture for "Hey, look at me! Not bad, eh?")

**Sure, Sherlene...** She writes in her 39-page **Notes on the Halls (Tracy Line), August 1989**, "this is all too long and no-one will read it..." I was first amazed by the epical length of her letters when she was a missionary in Germany. No wonder she is such a wonderful writer. Few people in the world have had so much practice. We must get this into all of our Halls' hands as soon as possible. It is **so** good! Sample excerpt, with reference to a Nantucket poem that mentions our ancestors the Coffins:

The Coffins noisy, boisterous, loud,  
The silent Gardners plodding,  
The Mitchells good, the Barkers proud,  
The Macys eat the pudding.

"Noisy, boisterous, loud"--does that sound like the Halls? I don't know how in that combination with the Langfords, I turned out to be so reticent and demure.

Her quotes about the Shakers and the Quakers made me laugh till tears came. Wow, I didn't know we had some of them among our forebears! It takes nothing away from the splendor of Jessamyn West's writing (The Gentle Persuasion) to point out that she was exploiting her family heritage, but Quaker lore is just a gol dang gold mine for literary inspiration. Sherlene, kindly do not stop at 39 pages. Just keep going on and on, like our ancestors Thomas Carter's and Howard Hall's prayers. What a treasure, that record of the Reverend Carter's supplication, and how proud I am that my very own dad was every whit his equal!

**Uncertain sounds.** Group 199... My heart was so pierced in the interviews by their faithfulness, in the face of all kinds of opposition, that I nicknamed them "Los fieles" (The faithful ones). Surprising, how many are the only member in their family and disowned by parents, brothers and sisters and friends, or the only active member in their family, or the first one to go on a mission from their ward or branch or family. One was a nun for six years and is creating a new life against the disapproval or hostility of all who once were close to her. And economic obstacles haven't held them back. One dear elder, from a tiny town down south, is wearing a "3-mission" suit. Yes, his suit is going on its third mission, passed on from two older elders. It's threadbare, but for what it represents, it looks more beautiful to me than royal robes, and my eyes get wet every time I look his way. So I want to be especially appreciative,

kind, and understanding toward them. In priesthood meeting this morning, to my surprise, only two of the eight elders assigned came prepared to give their talks. "¿Los fieles?", I momentarily asked myself. But there was no way I could be hard on them, so I placed the blame on myself: "Well, I guess the trumpet gave an uncertain sound." (1 Corinthians 14:8) We all looked up the scripture and then looked out the window toward the angel with his trumpet on the spire of the temple. "In the future I'll be careful to sound loud, clear notes like Moroni and not like this," I said, tubing my hands in front of my lips like a bugle. You're not going to believe this. My intent was to trumpet out mixed-up, off-key notes but the sounds came out harmonious and pure. Believe it! The elders enjoyed this bit of theatricality, but they wouldn't let me take the blame. "We heard you well enough," they confessed. I didn't want to go into the reasons why they hadn't prepared and merely asked them to step up and give extemporaneous talks, bear their testimony, read a scripture, or whatever. Rather hesitantly and awkwardly, all six came up, one after another, and spoke just beautiful words. As they were speaking, my mother's voice kept coming back to me: "What did I tell you, Wendell?" I almost bawled. Oh, my blessed Mom, whose words were never uncertain and who had the wisdom to always back them up and get them through my head. I resolved to do the same. "Now, what are you supposed to do, elders, sisters? Is there any way I can help you? Perhaps if that's too hard right now, maybe you could just...."

**So special.** In spite of their pitifully limited means, each group insists on giving us a farewell gift, which at the same time grieves us (They shouldn't, they can't afford it) and completes our love and joy. Group 198 gave us the most inexpensive but one of the best recuerdos (souvenirs) yet as a sign of their affection: Name tags similar to what we have but with the date and the inscription "El grupo de los gososos" (the joyful ones)--misspelled, but therefore all the better, so typical and so natural. Until Group 199 arrived, we wore them with unaffected pleasure, and they will remain one of our most treasured mementos ever.

**What joy!** Two Santiago South elders always help out with charla practice on Monday morning. The mission has had some transfers and the elder in last week's letter who wanted to go home to Uruguay is now one of those who come to help us. (This is the third time that a missionary has no sooner left the CEM than he/she has returned to assist us with the discussions--from a nearby area in either the Santiago North or Santiago South Mission.) Elder Fleitas has a super companion and when they arrived at the CEM his face was radiant with happiness.

**Waiting for shoe #2.** On Sept. 8, four weeks after I dispatched my letter to Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Pres. Waldo P. Call, member of the Second Quorum of Seventy and area president (headquarters at Bonpland, Buenos Aires), stopped by church offices here in Santiago to interview me. We were mission presidents together (Montevideo and Buenos Aires) and had an amicable conversation. Two members of the Quorum of the Twelve in addition to Elder Oaks have read the letter. It was made clear that my communication revealed a lack of faith and was out of order. Certain doubts, reservations, and objections are not to be raised, because there are no answers at this time. But if contradictions and improprieties exist and no one understands (Pres. David O. McKay himself admitted as much), and nothing can be said, and something is so sacred that no one can touch it with a ten-foot pole, and the proselyting effort is hurt, and members become inactive, drop out, or forget what constitutes God's glory and put blinders on their intelligence with regard to certain things, preferring partial, unseeing blindness to the unobstructed radiance of the gospel's revealing light, then isn't the moment long overdue for straight-forward answers? And if this too difficult or embarrassing, then shouldn't changes be effected, now? Others may continue to wait, but as for myself I no longer can go on performing acts that are contrary to a command which is self-evidently true and right, whatever its source, but which in fact comes from Jesus, the Messiah, whose name I have taken upon myself, covenanting to always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given us. Actually, I expressed myself somewhat more mildly and tactfully than this, but as a result, two restrictions have been placed on me, which are not hard to bear and only marginally hamper my efforts to be the very best MTC president I can. Now I am waiting for the other shoe to fall. Maybe it will be a boot. My peaceableness and equanimity remain intact. ●●● Ever-loving Mom and Dad / Merrill and W.