

The Never-Ending News

There's always something! Things keep happening!

Warm-up. In Chile, November's like May, with summer still a month away, but with elections on the way, the heat's on night and day, beyond all rhyme and reason. Saturday night there was an area-wide "apagón"—no lights. Extremists blew up a couple of high-voltage transmission towers and in the resulting darkness shot it out with armed guards around NTV (National Television). They were repulsed. The insane criminality of these extremists blasts a hole in the boundary of beyond belief. Two days before, a 16-year-old high school student recruited to do their vicious, lethal work was blown up in front of our chapel in Conchalí, across the Mapocho River in the northern part of the city. A pre-set time bomb went off while still in his hands. Parts of his body splattered the front of the chapel and littered the ground, with horrible fragments hanging from overhead power and telephone lines. Another 16-year-old casualty to the terrorists' cowardly victimization of young kids, at first thought to be an innocent bystander, was blown apart by his own bomb on Sunday near a monument erected to honor bodyguards killed while thwarting an attempt to assassinate Pres. Augusto Pinochet. Later, Radio Minería, one of Chile's most important stations, was heavily damaged by a bomb. Broadcasting resumed after an hour and a half.

Feet, seats, vodka, heads. Elsewhere, in an exciting, spectacular, incredible way, people have voted with their feet and a wall has been breached. Others have voted with their seats, passively sitting, going through the motions, doing the minimum to get by. Some have chosen to vote with vodka, a vacuous method of escape from vapid lives. The moral is pervasive: People will vote. Their franchise is from God: their free agency. If not allowed due exercise of it, through open, unhardened arteries of communication, able to feel the heartbeat of a system and feeling that they are part of it, there will be dysfunctions, inferentially evidenced by murmurs. Murmurs—rightfully right bothersome—are perilous to ignore. The dogmatic abhor auscultation of the heart. Murmurs are an offense to their preset minds and the merest suggestion of remedial action is perceived as heretical by them. All has to be well. When murmurs reach a level where no stethoscope is required, minds will be reset or else set aside. For as anaerobes and aerobes will have oxygen, bound or free, so the people will have their say and they will have their franchise, exercising it with their feet, their seats, or a vodka-ish evasion if other ways are blocked. Courageous ones will speak and act at the cost of their heads, paying whatever price: death, imprisonment, concentration camps, the Gulag, torture, trumped-up internment in mental hospitals, privation, deprivation, dispossession, defamation, blackmail, threats against loved ones, banishment, exile. What a debt the world owes them! All of us can emulate these great ones in some way.

Adiós a los valientes. Tuesday we said goodbye to Group 202, "the valiant ones." Little is said about bombings and violence in the CEM but our missionaries are quite aware of potential dangers to them. In family home evening, when each has the opportunity to read a favorite scripture and make a comment, tears may come when someone chooses Psalm 23 ("Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me..."), Matthew 5:10-12 ("Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."), etc. These young women and men are the choicest, willing to give their all. "And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 10:38-39) Don't misunderstand. As a rule, Chileans are among the most friendly, cordial, loving people on earth. Only a small, deranged minority are responsible for this vile virus of violence.

The education of an innocent. I owe to Robert Gudmanson the first lappings of a tidal change in my life well expressed by Robert Burns' famous verse in obverse, changing "A man's a man for a' that!" to "A man's not a man for a' that!" In Spanish, this is humorously put: "Mono vestido de

seda mono queda." (A monkey dressed in silk is a monkey still.) More commonly known as Goodie, Bob was mentioned in my letter of Nov. 11 as a friend who died in World War II. Early autumn, 1939, Ogden Senior High School... Hitler had invaded Poland, but the war in Europe seemed remote. With no thought at all of preparing for war, I signed up for ROTC instead of gym for two reasons: a) Too poor to buy clothes, I could get a couple of ROTC uniforms free (worn all day at school); b) I was too embarrassed by my "98-lb.-weakling" physique to be seen in a gym suit (though I loved all kinds of sports and did the best I could) and oh, horror, a girl might see me.

Our first day of ROTC... everyone still dressed in regular clothes. "Fall in! 'Tench hut!" A guy in an officer's uniform—I take him for an instructor—struts up and picks me as a natural to pick on: "Suck in that gut, pull in that butt, straighten those shoulders, stick out that miserable excuse for a chest, uncross those crooked eyes...." / "Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Yes sir, sir!" His sadism for the moment satisfied, he moves a few paces away. Goodie, happening by, comes up to me as I stand red and rigid at awkward attention. "Relax, Puff," he says. [Harvey Neuteboom gave me that nickname. Wendell > Wind >> Puff. Get it?] "You don't have to take that guff." [Maybe what he said was "crap."] "He's a senior, but nothing more than a student, just like you." Do I hear the whole social order crashing down around me? What's Goodie doing here? Goodie's got nothing to do with this class. My required role here is to grovel, right? Besides, the guy in the uniform's got dark facial hair. Looks like he shaves. Goodie is fair-haired, smooth-cheeked, friendly, mild, and if the pecking order's based on stark animality, the going for Goodie's going to be neither smooth nor fair. But the senior, in easy earshot, says not a word and something no doubt very important catches his attention across the way. Goodie wears no uniform so I must suppose he has some discernible kind of moral authority on. (What a concept!) The hirsute jerk turns out to be a crude-mouthed nobody. Goodie becomes cadet colonel and president of the student body.

Later my education continued. (I could write a book.) Let me mention Captain Leonhardt, though, Company Commander, Anti-Tank Company, 411th Regiment, 103rd Division, U. S. Army. We called him Sunbake. It was alleged that his brains had been fried on a tour of duty in Panama as a buck private in the Regular Army. When I arrived at Camp Howze, Texas, still a pasty-faced kid but up to 118 lbs., Sunbake took me for a cupcake. We were headed out on maneuvers. He appointed me his personal aide to ride in the back seat of his Jeep behind his driver. Was there such a thing in the Army? I felt overflowing superfluous. How were the dogfaces we were passing looking at this? Not with envy! No way. Leers... That may have registered on my subconscious. I was such a naive, green, callow youth, quite sheltered from the world up till then. In the dark, at the end of the day, when I was ready to roll into my bedroll, Sunbake had me come into his tent and in the light of a lantern started showing me feelthy peectures. Such were so many early influences in my life, my poverty, my poor build, my missing upper-front teeth, I still wasn't overmuch weaned from an overweening conformity with authority. But thanks to so many solid teachings and examples in my life and thanks to Goodie, oh, Goodie, my friend fallen in combat, my friend with the golden aura, I saw the monkey through the silk and bumblingly, stumblingly got out of there. I had the sense to go immediately to First Lieutenant "Abby" Abendroth, a former school teacher from Wisconsin. Abby was sturdy, stocky, and tough, and took no guff. With what admiration and respect I remember him! He said, "Don't worry, Hall, I'll take care of this." As Abby headed for the commanding officer's tent I went to my pup tent. A few minutes later I think that Sunbake, may our Just Judge judge him with mercy, got his overheated, perverted brains shaken.

After we landed at Marseilles and headed for combat near Dijon, I saw Sunbake only twice. He took care to stay to the rear, but one day, when the colonel wanted to personally inspect our positions, Leonhardt obligatorily had to check things out ahead of him. We were moving along a narrow road when two planes, Messerschmidts, I suppose, came out of the overcast and started strafing us. We hit the dirt and after the planes zoomed past and started to turn for another pass, we saw the captain in his Jeep tearing like a bat out of heck for the rear. "Got to report to the colonel, got to report to the colonel!" the coward squawked. "USE YOUR RADIO!" Harold Howell or somebody hol-lered. Words wasted on the wind. Along with Abby, we had Second Lieutenant "Schoolboy," directly in charge of our platoon. Since we never called him anything else, I can't remember his name to save me. Schoolboy was smart enough to realize he knew nothing practical and in any and every crunch would ask Sandy Coulter, our sergeant, "What'll we do now, Sarge?" I have no doubt that I'm living and breathing today because of Sandy. I had no idea I was going to write any of the above. What got me started on it? Memories of a wonderful friend. ● Loving you all always, Merrill & W

Dear Mom and Dad:

Carolyn's influence

I am sorry not to have written sooner. Emmers is sleeping most of the night now so I feel a little more human, I enjoyed your last letter, especially the part about purple me. We hope you are both well. Aunt Madeline said she called you and assured us of your well being. We were glad they came to the blessing, it was a wonderful experience. I wish I could write as well as you do Dad* so I could give you some idea of our precious Emita. You would think she was the first baby ever born, the way we eight people adore her. During family prayer she started crying in the bedroom, after amen eight people dash down the hall. Dan and Cheryl come home from school at the same time and fight over who holds her first everyday. Charlotte dresses her in doll clothes and ribbons. John says she is his property, I have to limit Paul to giving her one hundred kisses a day. David gives her tours of pictures on the wall. Seeing her smile is the highlight of our day.

With all this adoration you probably think she never cries, wrong, she can really scream. But she is mostly pretty good. Even with all the good help I feel busier than with the other babies because the older kids are involved in more activities. Dan and Charlotte have both made basketball teams in their schools. Charlotte, Cheryl and Dan play ward volleyball. Charlotte is on a coed team that is going to region. Richard is still working extra hours. Add homework, babysitting, and piano and I need a chart to keep track of where everyone is and when they will be home.

Last week I wrote 30 thank you cards! Mary Cannon in the ward gave a shower for Emma and a baby boy born three days earlier. I was reluctant-not liking others to buy presents but the sisters involved were excited to plan it and I couldn't graciously decline. I have already sent many thank yous to ward members for meals and gifts. At the shower we were given so many lovely clothes, mostly dresses. To give you an example Sister Penrod gave her a cute dress, Sister Engle a blanket, I better just show you when you come home.

We had Paul fitted for glasses last week. His right eye is weak and the Dr. thinks we can correct it.

We are looking forward to Thanksgiving. We are going to Grandma Nielsen's.

I made your last ZCMI payment yesterday. We will pay your property taxes this month. No problem Mom.

Dad, some of the best advice you ever gave me was to remember that people are human and I hope this will help you as you deal with us very human people. You and Mom have less of the human element than any one I know and I admire and love you more than I can say.

Love,

Jeannie

*This is nonsense, Jeannie! (Forgive the word.) Your writing is far superior to mine--so spontaneous, sparkling, and natural. Mine spouts out almost automatically but then I recycle it and filter it and add a few drops of Crystal Clear®. Could it be otherwise, after so many years as a professor, correcting hundreds of papers per semester? I spent plenty of time untangling each student's syntax and learned a lot while meddling with their unorthodox usage. Almost 100% of that was in Spanish, though, so not to expect much from me in English, please.

Now Jeannie is saying that I'm inhuman, deficient in the element. Yes, I used to insist that everybody's human, but more frequently I would jest about eradicating that tendency. The touching concern of Jeannie and most of you for me infuses my subcutaneous tissues with gushes of gratitude, the warmth and confusion of blushing. Ask yourselves, though: If the authorities deemed me to be a menace to the missionaries, wouldn't they have jerked me out of here so fast that it would have made your heads swim and mine rattle?

A high official I talked to, requesting anonymity, stated that some of our leaders have long contemplated effecting some of the changes that I suggest. Another, with no knowledge at all of what I've written and in an entirely different context, asserted that with respect to effecting changes at the top, quote: "A little nudging here, a little coaxing there, can accomplish great things." So don't despair altogether at this point and remember **Ruk No. 1: Be calm.**