

EVEN WHEN THE TASK IS SIMPLE

... even when one is on the way to the mail box.

I had been inside the house all day. In fact, I had yet to shower, shave, or even taken off whatever I had worn to sleep the previous night. Granted that sometime during the day I had opened the garage door and, as was my custom, thrown out several servings of dry dog food with which a family of crows living on an elm tree on my front yard supplements whatever other meals it gathers throughout the neighborhood. Those birds are so accustomed to my gesture that sometimes when I go out before feeding them they come almost inside my garage when I return home looking for their treat.

Somehow I feel rather badly when my wife and I travel and I realize that there'll be no one around to feed "my birds". It's almost reason enough for me not to want to take vacations. On the other hand, just as I consider feeding the crows routine, it's also my habit to enjoy the day, usually perusing the Internet's resources, reading, writing, in short, doing nothing that would be considered useful by most rational people. I could, for example, notify several businesses that I am available as a translator and that my translations are generally more accurate than those presented to the public by American businesses. Even the ENCARTA 2000 ENCYCLOPEDIA has translation errors which in several instances make that work's information not only inaccurate but also ridiculous. I have written to Bill Gates about that fact. I have also mentioned it on a radio program in which I participate. I have even written a letter to an editor which he, or she, was kind enough to publish in its entirety. Thus far, however, the only comment I got was an e-mail from Microsoft indicating that if there is something wrong with my computer data, the great technical staff at that company will gladly fix it for free. Nothing, however, about the Encyclopedia's errors. The whole thing reminds me of the argument against the nun that was raped. Had she only worn a nun's vestment when she came across her attacker, my argument adversary insisted, the rapist possibly would not have bothered her. It was therefore her fault, and next time she shouldn't go out wearing any kind of tantalizing dress.

But that's another subject... Let us, therefore, return to my mail box.

It was sometime between five and six in the evening when my wife came home from whatever she had done that afternoon. "What?" Katherine asked. "You still undressed. We have to go out to dinner."

"Yes," I replied. "Guess, I'll go and clean up."

A shave and a shower followed. I then looked in the closet for a clean shirt and a pair of pants. We were not going anywhere fancy. For that reason, therefore, I was not too particular about what I put on as long as it was clean. As I finished tying my shoes I then inquired whether Katherine had picked up the mail while on the way from the street to the house. There's a distance of about 125 feet between the two points.

She hadn't, thereby giving me my first chance to get out of the house on February 4, 2000. I would pick up the mail myself.

Little did I know, however, that the minute snow storm we had had and which when we lived in New England we would not even consider as a storm had melted during the day and that part of its water had run from the lawn to the driveway. But, even so, what if it had? The day had been warm and the chill of the evening had not been around long enough for anything to freeze, so I thought.

Obviously I thought wrongly...

As I write this, it is now March 10, 2000. My right leg is encased in what the orthopedic surgeon and the physical therapist call a "walking boot".

Furthermore, although both say that I am making great progress, my leg hurts along the incisions where the surgery was performed. I am also told that I shall soon be moving all over the house off the wheelchair, although the therapist has clearly warned me not to do it unless my wife is home where she can attend to me should I mishandle the walker that the hospital loaned me to use while at home.

Thus far I have been a good and obedient patient. On the other hand, it's strange how I miss those things that I would normally do in the process of just plain living. For example, during all the time I have been laid up, I miss urinating while standing up. I am just sick and tired of the plastic urinals that, although clean, are all over the house, or at least where I am bound to be for some time. Or how I would normally put on my underwear and pants. Until yesterday I was under orders not to place any weight on the right side of my body. As luck would have it, that is supposedly my strong side in view of the damage that a stroke I had three and a half years ago had done to my left side. Simple things. Plain, simple things.

On the other hand, I don't miss going out at all. I do miss feeding the crows and the other birds that, now that Spring is near, can be seen through my house's picture windows. I wonder if they still remember me... In the meantime, even though everyone says that I shall soon be well, it's only been recently that I have decided to start writing once again.

Even when I came home from the Missouri Baptist Medical Center I had been dominated by a sense of depression that life, perhaps, is not as just as one feels it is. Could the planet have just kept on gyrating if I had not fallen, I would ask myself? Why do things happen? Ironically, in spite of my ability to find reasons, whether rightly, or wrongly, on most occasions, I couldn't come up with a logical reason of any sort. Even the fact that at the time I was totally dependent on the kindness of those who cared for me and, even though I should have felt thankful, I simultaneously encountered within me a sense of defeat and uselessness. I suppose that's something similar to what those who feel within themselves that they are bound to remain marginalized in society must feel and one of the reasons for their anger... Well, that's

another subject.

In any case, as I look out my window at this moment, I notice that night is coming and that soon it will be dark. Ironically, just as today's daylight did not last, the darkness of night won't last either.

Furthermore, soon the creatures of the night will avail themselves of the absence of light as they seek whatever they need for their survival. I am certain that within a few hours, there will be opossums, racoons, etc. possibly walking over the same spot where I fell over a month ago looking for whatever they can find. And, as night ends, there will be other creatures, other hopes - in short, life. Whether they'll find what they seek, only God knows. Perhaps as a bird digs for a worm buried in the ground, a cat will be on the prowl, etc.. In short, one never knows, even when the task is simple. Like going from the house to pick the mail at the end of the garden.

The task, somehow, is never simple....

Manuel L. Ponte

St. Louis, Missouri. March 10, 2000