

# FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS 2008

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### THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER -- JANUARY 2008

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### THIS MONTH'S QUOTE -- ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature"...

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### 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS

Well, Happy New Year!

Since I'm wishing you Happy New Year on January 7, you can probably guess Old Father William has been slowed down a bit. That's because we're in the process of moving to a new mailing list manager. In the next week you'll get an email asking you to confirm your subscription. Please do so if you want to continue receiving this newsletter. If you have any problems, please email me at

[fatherwilliam@thirdagecenter.com](mailto:fatherwilliam@thirdagecenter.com).

Thanks to the delay, even in New Zealand I experienced what I hope is a re-opening of America's heart. I am not advocating for any political candidate, and I want to be very clear about that -- this newsletter must never be turned to politics. But I was inspired by the Iowa results that may indicate America is renewing its commitment to the values I and Mr. Lincoln cherish so deeply.

Here's what follows...

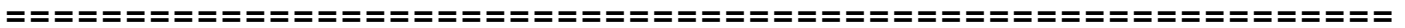
If you're around my age, Bob Herbert's brilliant column (#2) will take you back to another era when we lost our sense of ourselves as a people and a country (and it wasn't just in the US this happened). For me, his column is a brilliant, humbling reminder of America's aberrations as a culture. I've lived through three in this lifetime of mine, and I do wish we could all get together and love our neighbors more consistently.

After Abe's plea and Bob's '68 reminder, I moved away from the serious stuff, at least the patriotic and political serious stuff. The next piece, by Jay Dixit (#3) presents a whole new perspective on what dreaming is about and why it's important. I don't think it's the full picture, but he connects enough with my own dreaming experience so I feel he's worth paying attention to here.

Finally "The Wisdom of Grandfathers & Other Elders" (#4) lightens things up with a profound example to help us remember how fortunate we are to be in this Third Age of ours. (A dear friend and colleague, Ronn Williamson, recognized my advanced development with "And you probably think you'd be the old gray haired grandfather, right?!! Now this is my idea of what it takes to be a sage or elder!")

I do hope you had a wonderful holiday season, and I will get back to more personal musing next month. Elder Ed and I are back talking again on the blog (see link below) - if you want to join in feel free, and until we meet again, as Louis Armstrong sang, "Have a Wonderful Life"...

<http://blogs.salon.com/0004489/>



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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – BOB SEGER, "AGAINST THE WIND"**

"I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then..."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

In "Changing Course: Navigating Life After 50"\*, Bill Sadler and James Krefft describe five major tasks required to make the transformation from Second Age (The Age of Achievement, approx. 20-50) to Third Age (The Age of Fulfillment, approx. 50-85). These are:

- 1. Do Your Third Age Homework;**
- 2. Change Negative Images of Aging;**
- 3. Redefine Success from Achievement to Fulfillment;**
- 4. Build Your Third Age Identity on Paradox;**
- 5. Create a Third Age Infrastructure.**

This month's Musings focus on the fourth task and specifically on its primary paradox – the paradox of being BOTH Idealistic AND Realistic. I thought I'd been doing well with this one, but recent events have made me re-evaluate my progress.

Those recent events are happening in the U.S. Democratic Primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. To me, this race has now manifested clearly as a forced choice between EITHER the Idealism of Obama OR the Realism of Hillary, and, as a maturing Third Ager (I hope), I want a





Those exchanges are not very hopeful. But they are a part of Jim's and my Realism because we were there in 63 and 68 - as were most of you.

Given our shared history, can we reopen to embrace the poles of Idealism and Realism in ways that will be good for us all? I'm certainly having my difficulties doing so...

May Third Age bring us all many BOTH/AND's, Father William

[\\*http://www.amazon.com/Changing-Course-Navigating-after-Fifty/dp/0979351057/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_sr\\_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1202260617&sr=83](http://www.amazon.com/Changing-Course-Navigating-after-Fifty/dp/0979351057/ref=pd_bbs_sr_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1202260617&sr=83)

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### **THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – CALVIN & HOBBS**

"From now on, I'll connect the dots my own way."

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### **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Two of the Third Age paradoxes old Father William wrestles with are "Self & Others" and "Freedom & Intimacy." These balancing acts are themes in this month's newsletter, and both bring us face to face with the work of "individuation" that's so central to Third Age Transformation.

Jung popularized the concept of "individuation", and, simply put, it means moving toward psychological wholeness as we mature. The primary dimensions Jung used were:

1. E-I: Extroversion-Introversion (focusing on the external world vs. the internal world);
2. N-S: Intuition-Sensing (taking in our data from either world through intuition vs. sensory inputs);
3. T-F: Thinking-Feeling (making decisions about our data by rational vs. "gut feeling" processes);
4. P-J: Perceiving-Judging (a way to note whether our taking-in or decision-making processes are primary). This was added to Jung's original three by Meyers and Briggs when they developed their Type Inventory.

While Jung believed we had natural tendencies on each of these dimensions, he also believed later life required that we also develop in the opposite directions of those tendencies to reach our full wholeness as human beings.

For my first 50+ years I was extremely extroverted and intuitive, but in Third Age I've become much more introverted and sensing; I now absolutely delight in my solitude as I putter in the yard and write these Musings. More and more I like less and less being engaged with others for very long. It's not that I don't love and enjoy many people, but I want them in shorter and shorter doses at times and places of my choosing.

And what resistance I have to feeling caught or coerced by anyone or any structure in any way! My greatest happiness is to be on my little mountain top in New Zealand or Vermont and have my beautiful family and friends drop in for short spurts of high intensity connection (especially during cocktail hour). Then I like them to leave before or shortly after dinner so I can get back to my puttering and writing.

This is a very different Father William than the Second Age "Zoomer" who couldn't get enough of people, engagement and action. (Just ask anyone who knew me in those earlier years!) That I am not alone in these changes of personal balance is evident from the rest of this month's newsletter. I hope you find yourself in these stories, too...

"ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE BY A MELLOWING THIRD AGER" is a good friend's response to last month's "The Singers" poem. His reaction illustrates the uniqueness of his path through Third Age Transformation to personal wholeness - which you may find to be the opposite of your own.

"DIRECTION OF ERROR" came to me from a brilliant psychologist and mentor, Wilson Van Dusen, whose interests were phenomenally wide and insights profoundly deep. In a conversation way back in 1972 he opened me to this concept, and I've found it to be very helpful in my own process of maturing.

"WHEN IS A GIG NOT A GIG?" is a story of personal transformation from another good friend, "The

Music Man". How many of us have made significant changes in our spiritual path as we matured? And, having made such changes, how difficult have we found it to remain engaged with some of the activities and people that were so easy for us before? "The Music Man" is in this position and shares his confusion and questions. He's reached no clear answers yet, but that's not the point for me; I find great value in his honesty and openness.

Have a great March and keep your stories coming...

For more on Jung and Individuation:

[http://www.schuelers.com/ChaosPsyche/part 1 27. htm](http://www.schuelers.com/ChaosPsyche/part%201%2027.htm)

For more on Wilson Van Dusen:

<http://www.rendingtheveil.com/article.php?article=62>

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – JOSEPH CAMPBELL**

"We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it's all about."

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## 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

Well, happy day after April Fools' Day, my friends, and welcome to spring in the Northern Hemisphere. In the US, this means Opening Day of the 2008 Major League Baseball Season is occurring for the next several days. Yes, I know that sounds absurd, but that's how American baseball does it, and none of the games' results will mean much of anything. The whole thing is a religious ritual for some, and they will go through a pilgrim's tribulations and pay enormous sums to attend. Others, like me, could not care less.

However you feel about such things, I'm going to use David Brooks' most recent column in The New York Times as the starting point for April's Musings. Brooks is a bit conservative and logical for me, and still I learn from him every week. To honor America's Opening Day pilgrimage, he uses H.A. Dorfman's "The Mental ABC's of Pitching" to make a point I do and don't agree with:

"A baseball game is a spectacle, with a thousand points of interest. But Dorfman reduces it all to a series of simple tasks. The pitcher's personality isn't at the center. His talent isn't at the center. The task is at the center.

"By putting the task at the center, Dorfman illuminates the way the body and the mind communicate with each other. Once there were intellectuals who thought the mind existed above the body, but that's been blown away by evidence. In fact, it's easiest to change the mind by changing behavior, and that's probably as true in the office as on the mound.

"And by putting the task at the center, Dorfman helps the pitcher quiet the self. He pushes the pitcher's thoughts away from his own qualities — his expectations, his nerve, his ego — and helps the pitcher lose himself in the job.

"Not long ago, Americans saw the rise of a therapeutic culture that placed great emphasis on self-discovery, self-awareness and self-expression. But somehow the tide seems to have turned from the worship of self, and today's message is: transcend yourself in your job — or get shelled.

"A fitting reminder from opening day."

That's Brooks' view, and it has merit. We can change our minds by changing our behavior. Over my quarter-century of helping leaders with organizational change, I would show managers and executives how to prove the difficulty of such change to themselves. "Please fold your arms," I would say. "Look down and notice which arm is on top. Now, to prove to how open you are to change, fold your arms again putting the other arm on top.

If you've tried that before or just tried it now, you will know how difficult it is for the body and the mind to take on a new way of being. But if you persist in folding your arms the opposite way for about three weeks, you'll find it will become just as comfortable as the old way.

This is what Brooks means when he says "putting the task at the center, Dorfman helps the pitcher quiet the self. He pushes the pitcher's thoughts away from his own qualities — his expectations, his nerve, his ego — and helps the pitcher lose himself in the job."

I agree repetitions of a physical behavior can create new pathways in the brain that make that behavior more natural and consistent. But repetitions of physical behavior are not more useful for change than similar repetition of our intellectual, emotional and spiritual faculties. They all produce change, and this is what Brooks misrepresents.

He seems to clearly imply physical reality (the body) is more significant than other dimensions of the self. While he relegates only our minds to secondary status, the overpowering suggestion is that neither our emotional nor spiritual assets have much to offer, either. To me, this is a disturbing narrowing of our human possibilities.

Yes, I know I can change my brain's pathways by changing my body's habits, and that's very useful. But, I also know I can change my body with my mental, emotional and spiritual potentials, and these are also useful. (HeartMath's research\* has shown intentionally shifting to a positive emotion immediately changes heart rhythms.) The point is all are useful - and important. This is what Joseph Campbell meant by...

"We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it's all about."

Of course this can sound a little flaky in comparison to Brook's logical argument, and especially so to those in Second Age (roughly 25-55) when we're caught up in the outer world. But Campbell makes great sense when we remember our First age and how we loved playing with life. And he makes even greater sense in Third Age when learn to play with life again.

Unfortunately and inevitably, both First and Third Age perspectives can irritate us in our serious Second Ages, and our irritation ridicules them. They certainly irritated me, and I certainly ridiculed their importance. But no longer.

I thank the Universe for bringing me home again to "the rapture that is associated with being alive" - and I thank Joseph Campbell and so many others for helping me return to so much I lost in my "achievement years". Now I know the point of life is to be "the rapture that is associated with being

alive," and this is what my simple, solitary existence is allowing me to do. I hope you're finding your version as well...

Much Love, Father William

For more on Joseph Campbell:

[http://www.jcf.org/about\\_jc.php](http://www.jcf.org/about_jc.php)

For Brooks' Column:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/01/opinion/01brooks.html?>

\*For more on HeartMath's research:

<http://www.heartmath.org/>

For more of Father William:

[www.fatherwilliam.org](http://www.fatherwilliam.org)

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**THIS MONTH'S FIRST QUOTE – FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

"And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music."

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- 1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

This looks like a skimpy newsletter. It isn't. It's actually rather long. But 80% of it is in these Musings instead of other short pieces. I think it's worth it, but then I would. See what you think...

I received an enormous gift in the form of a talk given by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor at the 2008 TED (Technology-Entertainment-Design) Conference. Hopefully, you've been able to watch her presentation because these Musings will make more sense that way. If not, you can see it here:

<http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/229>

TED's challenge to the speakers is to "give the talk of your life in 18 minutes", and Jill does. She describes a period of four hours on December 10, 1996, when a stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain progressively took away her abilities to process information. The only consciousness remaining was her right hemisphere ability to be fully in the present moment. She expected to die, but she survived with the memory of her experience intact. After regaining her left hemisphere abilities (it took her eight years to fully recover), she's sharing her experience and what she learned from it with the rest of us. I find this to be an especially great gift to us in our Third Age.

Here's the leap Jill helped me make. Most developed cultures overdevelop (interesting insight into "development", isn't it?) the brain's left hemisphere during First Age believing this will guarantee the success of achievement in Second Age, and it often does. But this lack of balance has its costs, especially as we mature into Third Age burdened with a culturally skewed brain imbalance. Here's Jill in an interview with "The Bleeping Herald"...

"Recently [TED.com](http://www.ted.com) [1] featured an 18 minute clip about a brain researcher who had suffered a stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain. One morning Jill Bolte Taylor, PH.D, a brain scientist at Harvard, found herself in the midst of having a stroke. Being the curious neuroanatomist that she is, she proceeded to keep track of what was going on during the 4 hour deterioration of her left brain, which rendered her unable to walk, talk, read, write, or recall her old life.

"In her book , 'My Stoke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey [2],' Dr. Jill takes us through the process of her left brain injury, the discovery of what it was like to live almost entirely through her right brain, and the 8 years after the stroke that it took her to completely recover. With a golf ball sized clot rendering the full function of her left hemisphere non-existent, Dr. Jill recreates for us what it was like to exist and function from the perspective of her right hemisphere where time doesn't exist. This is the center for bliss and joy, the ability to think outside the box, intuition, empathy. Another fascinating aspect, this is where we live without the ego: no individuality or feelings of separateness.

"BH: Since you were able to experience first hand, living in your right brain, is it a lot easier for you to

get back there now?

"Dr. Jill: Oh yes, you know, it's not that I'm separate from it. It's kind of like the story of how the blue sky is always there and so I see the blue sky as the right hemisphere. It's always there, it's always doing what it does, it's a constant entity. The left hemisphere is the clouds and the clouds represent brain chatter. The clouds come in, and the thoughts come in, and they block the view of being able to see the blue sky even though the blue sky is always there.

"The brain chatter comes on line and then it's organizing and categorizing and dramatizing all of our lives in the external world. But you can quiet that when you get rid of the clouds, when you allow the mind to focus away from those thoughts, then you unveil what's always been there – which is the existence of the right hemisphere and that peacefulness and that awareness that everything is one and everything is connected. That experience of euphoria, if you're willing to let go of the left hemisphere clouds.

"BH: And the more you practice at that, the better you get.

"Dr. Jill: Well you know, I'm coming from the other direction. So for me, when I had the hemorrhage and I lost the left hemisphere, I lost all the clouds. I was open to this incredible experience, and then for me to actually be functional in the external world, I had to consciously choose to bring the clouds back so that I could function like a normal human being.

"My primary place is the state of being in the blue skies, and the clouds I can then just blow away. It's a tool; I'm so clear that my brain chatter is a tiny group of cells that perform a magnificent function and I have a say in whether or not that circuitry runs. So all I have to do is make the decision that in this moment, I'm not going to think those thoughts. I'm not going to run that particular circuitry, and I'm going to focus my mind on the bigger picture and think about other things and block those clouds from being there.

"BH: It seems a lot of people don't have the understanding that they are in control of their emotions, or the brain chatter, or what goes on in their brain. Do you think if people had a little bit more knowledge about the workings of their brain that it would be easier to understand we are in control?

"Dr. Jill: You know, no society that I'm aware of, at least certainly not in our society, have we been brought up having any real relationship with our brain. We get disciplined on our behavior, which is our output and we create relationships with other people, which is our socialization, but we are not trained as children that we have some say over what's going on inside of ourselves.

"We haven't had the biological knowledge, the scientific support for it as well, which leaves us very

vulnerable to what's going on outside of ourselves because we are not trained to develop ourselves internally.”

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**THIS MONTH’S SECOND QUOTE – T.S. ELIOT**

“What is this self inside us, this silent observer,  
Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorize us,  
And urge us on to futile activity,  
And in the end, judge us still more severely,  
For the errors into which his own reproaches drove us?”

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“BH: At times it seems like we live in a left hemisphere dominated society. Is the left hemisphere naturally dominating?

“Dr. Jill: No. Not necessarily. Look at children. Children are born, they have two hemispheres, the right hemisphere actually develops before the left hemisphere anatomically, it's just a stage ahead. But both of the instruments are blended together.

“Then we put our children in school and we are now teaching them details. Learn the alphabet earlier. As soon as we start teaching these abstract details to our children, the left hemisphere turns itself on and starts becoming a functional machine. Depending on how much structure the brain gets at an early age, then the brain becomes more structured.

“You're going to have children who, by the time they're five, they're little geniuses at school kinds of work because they've really turned on and mastered their left hemisphere structure. So then what do we honor in our society? We honor academic achievement, and academic achievement means thinking, reading, writing, math and all of these wonderful skills that are skills of the left hemisphere. So we praise our children, we reward our children, we give them higher paying jobs when they have really done a great job with their left hemisphere.

“The right hemisphere on the other hand is kind of peaceful, kind of filled with bliss, kind of happy at being. Well nobody is going to give me a job to exist as just being, so I have to do, do, do. So, it's the structure of our society that I believe has shifted the development of the brain and how we reward people in our society. When you look at a typical school in America, they are trying to get rid of the music program, or P.E., or they're trying to get rid of art. These are the only courses that actually really actively engage, train, and develop the continuation of the right hemisphere. The brain is responsive to its external environment and if all I'm doing is feeding my left hemisphere, then my left hemisphere is going to over-develop as opposed to my right hemisphere skills.

“BH: Are people who take the time to cultivate their right hemisphere better at finding peace?

“Dr. Jill: A highly dominated left hemisphere extremist generally has a lot of stress in their lives. The difference, the advantage of living more in the right is that first of all, there is no measurement of time. If you are in your space creating something and the day goes by and you are not in a state of urgency, you're creating. You're being, you're evolving something, you're using the essence of what you are to create something new and there is a joy and a satisfaction in that.

“That lack of urgency, that's very different from sitting in an office being on the phone, being on the e-mail, text messaging every moment, never really connecting to the essence of what you are. You're just acting like a machine that's in process. That doesn't mean that you're not being creative in what you're processing, but you have to have the pause. During the pause, it's an opportunity for healing, it's kind of like sleeping and waking. In so many of our jobs that are left hemisphere dominant, we're just output, output, output, there is not pause, there is no refueling, no regeneration.

“Overall, if you're going to look at the health of the organism, our traditional society is very unhealthy. If you look at the mental health of our society, it's very poor and we don't even have a handle on how to create a mental health system that can help us. Most of us are not really tending to our own mental health, so how can we expect to have good overall mental health of our society?

“BH: You talk a little bit in your book about studies that have been done with Tibetan meditators and Franciscan nuns that showed when a meditative climax was reached, certain areas of the left hemisphere had decreased activity.

“Dr. Jill: The beauty of this is there are scientists who are open to recognizing these are realities. Just because we may not understand them is no reason to say they don't exist or they're not real. Now we have enough modern technology, and really open-minded scientists saying, "Let's explore this." So, it's a very exciting time because the two worlds are facing one another with curiosity instead of resentment. And boy what a difference that is!”

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### **THIS MONTH'S THIRD QUOTE – ALBERT EINSTEIN**

The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant.

We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.

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Okay. Using Jill's science and personal experience, old Father William is going to try to make the case that:

1. While Second Age is about more left than right hemisphere, Third Age is about more right than left (we're talking brain hemispheres, not politics here);
2. This shift toward more right than left would occur naturally and not require our attention if First Age's indoctrination had not overdeveloped the left at the expense of the right;
3. So, to truly mature and enjoy our Third Age means ensuring our right hemisphere is fully available to us (this does not imply giving up use of the left).

I laid these out 1-2-3 so they'll be clear for our left hemispheres, but the more right-leaning me wants to ramble on a bit about what I'm learning as I evolve further into my Third Age.

I'm now in the process of recovering a sense of vision for myself, and it is quite unlike any I held earlier. Most simply put, it is truly to rejoice in being absolutely ordinary – to relax into my participation in The Larger as one of the infinitely tiny bits of energy I might (or might not) be. When Jill described her right hemisphere consciousness, I immediately identified with it as a state I occasionally experience and delight in. My visits there are still infrequent but increasing.

What's clear now is I've been so separately left hemisphere for so long that the notion of surrendering my separate (ego) identity consciousness is a huge stretch. With my culture's help, I unbalanced myself to become very good at playing in fast-moving, intellectual ball parks. What I didn't develop nearly so well was my "smell the roses" and "love thy neighbor" capabilities. The image of long term, professional Jai-Alai players comes to mind; the arm they play with is usually freakishly more developed than the other. Of course, this imbalance does not seem abnormal in the Jai-Alai culture.

Similarly, I've thought my looking after my "separate" interests was perfectly normal for all these decades, and my culture continually confirmed this imbalance. Only after the Second Age achievements of the world lost their over-attraction (as in Peggy Lee's "Is this all there is?") did I start to question my long-established patterns. It's taken me years and years to recognize how self-centered I've been and am, and will likely take years more to release that perspective.

What's different now is feeling however long it takes is just fine. Before, as soon as I would get a new vision, my goal-oriented left hemisphere would want to have achieved it, and that ego stance kept me from seeing who and where I really was. Son Matt tried to help me by regularly saying, "Dad, it's not all about you", but I wasn't paying much attention.

Strangely enough, what has helped me change my mind (as Jill says, "take a step to the right"), is experiencing my body reducing its effectiveness over the last year (nothing serious by any means). As a person blessed with near perfect health for 69 years, my small physical problems caused a significant psychological shift. I found myself giving up the perspective that most events in my life "mat-

ter". It's not that I don't care; I am more captivated by the beauty of reality than I ever was. But I'm not worried about what might or might not happen very often, and that's a big shift for this obsessive neatnik. Much of the time I can just relax into and enjoy the reality that's unfolding whatever direction it takes. This is not the Father William of old.

I thank Jill Bolte Taylor for her "Stoke of Insight" and hope sharing her experience opens new Third Age possibilities for you, too...

Love, Father William

TAYLOR'S TED TALK:

<http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/229>

TAYLOR'S HOME PAGE:

<http://www.drjilltaylor.com>

THE BLEEPING HERALD INTERVIEW:

<http://www.bleepingherald.com/apr2008/taylor>

FOR MORE OF FATHER WILLIAM:

[www.fatherwilliam.com](http://www.fatherwilliam.com)

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## **THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – WILLIAM JAMES**

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes."

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### **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

It is that time of year when Father William goes from his New Zealand home back to his Vermont home for four months of reconnection with my US family and friends. That's because I'm married to a delightful Kiwi, Donna, who has a full time job managing the Mana Retreat Centre on the Coromandel Peninsula, NZ. Our accommodation to our NZ-US existence includes her coming to America for six weeks during my four months.

In the past I've gotten depressed when it's time to go from one family to the other, but this year I'm feeling very different. That's because I changed my mind.

I used to believe my life was fragmented between two homes and it meant giving up one to go to the other. It was as though I could never have all I loved, and this felt unfair and wrong. For reasons I don't fully understand, I recently realized and accepted my "home" is now in New Zealand. No longer am I split in an EITHER/OR. I BOTH have my "home" here AND visit my American family and friends each year for four months. Absolutely nothing has changed in the external reality of how much time I'll spend in either place, but something huge has shifted internally with my change of mental frame.

A small combination of actions has helped. I've put my small (600 square foot) condo on the market and begun dividing the few furnishings up among the kids. I bought half of a camper hooked up to water, electric and septic on the family homestead. It's mine to use for my visits, but I have no ownership responsibility for it whatsoever. I feel light and free - and I'm now viewing my biannual 10,000 mile journeys with equanimity and even positive anticipation!

Why should a simple mental shift make such a huge emotional difference for me?

As I asked that question, the answer leapt out at me. I feel so much better because I exchanged the "I can't have it all" mentality of EITHER/OR for the "I do have it all" perspective of BOTH/AND. How simple! How easy! How absolutely A-5!\*

It is so much more intelligent to work with what's true rather than drain myself by fighting it. Donna and I do live on one continent, and my five children, their partners, my grandchildren, extended family

and friends live on another. I know I am not going to change that in the foreseeable future. How silly it would be not to love the life I choose to live!

So how might these Musings be of use to you?

First, try on the framework of EITHER/OR and BOTH/AND as a way to compare and contrast the stressful and delightful situations in your life. EITHER/OR means we want two things and believe having one means not being able to have the other. BOTH/AND means we believe we can have and enjoy both. "Believe" is the key word here. Sometimes just using this simple way of categorizing brings you options invisible before.

Second, once you identify an important EITHER/OR (like "I can EITHER tell my friend the truth OR continue our relationship"), rephrase it as an energizing BOTH/AND wish ("I wish I could BOTH tell my friend the truth AND make our relationship even better!") When you make this transformation in words that inspire you, you're well on your way to creating a BOTH/AND that will work for you. It might not work for anyone else, but it doesn't need to. It's your life you're living.

FW NOTE: What follows came from my good friend, Ronn, who proof-read this newsletter and asked some questions probably many share:

"Your Musings clearly showed you feel better now about your two homes and that appears good; but they also had me wondering about getting depressed and how that is part of the EITHER/OR question, too. Are we striving too hard in Third Age to eliminate getting depressed when it is really part of who we are sometimes? Is life about being EITHER happy OR depressed, EITHER content OR discontent? How do we accept and embrace these together and believe its okay?"

"With your change in thinking, it sounds like you will be at peace more with the back and forth, but it's okay if you still feel a little depressed when the day to move finally comes, right?"

Thanks for raising this issue, Ronn. What you write makes perfect sense to me. If BOTH/AND is such a good idea, surely it would apply to BOTH happiness AND depression, too.

I'm sure I will feel sad and a bit disoriented this week and each time I make the journey. But, strange as this sounds, I think I'll actually find value in those difficult feelings while having them. How? By using them to help me experience how blessed I am to have BOTH my home with Donna AND so much time to be with and appreciate the rest of my family. (I got some help with this from #3. SOMETIMES FEEL YOU'RE NOT BLESSED?)

I know this can sound like playing word games, but I don't believe it is. While I may still feel the

sadness and stress of the long trip and being away from loved ones, MY EXPERIENCE of these feelings has changed dramatically with my change of mind. Now the sadness has a tinge of the sweetness that comes with a powerful increase in appreciation of how much I have, not how much I don't.

Of course I didn't discover this wisdom. In the second century Marcus Aurelius put it more simply and clearly than I have...

"If you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgment of them. And it is in your power to wipe out that judgment now."

Happy June, Father William

\*For more on A-5 go to:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/FW-GL%20Perf%20Appraisal%201.htm>

For more of Father William:

[www.fatherwilliam.org](http://www.fatherwilliam.org)

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – RICHARD BACH**

"You don't want a million answers as much as you want a few forever questions."

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## **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Welcome to July, good friends! Yesterday my home town of Warren, Vermont, held its 60th Fourth of July Parade which is an annual event attracting thousands of visitors. It is a spectacle and day-long party well worth the time, especially the parade with its provocative, home-made floats.\*

I got to thinking about our emphasis on "Independence" and some "forever" questions crossed my mind. Is "Independence" an unmitigated blessing in the 21st century? Is it the epitome of freedom that was celebrated so widely across America yesterday?

Not if nations evolve the way we humans are capable of – and sometimes actually do.

### **FOUR STAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH**

As we grow in years, hopefully we also grow in maturity. The progression of this psychological growth underlies our movement from childhood to mature adult:

AS A CHILD my vulnerability makes me dependent on my parents, teachers and other adults. In this early DEPENDENCE I rely on the authority and care-taking of others. It is not adult behavior.

AS AN ADOLESCENT my need to grow creates a counter-dependence toward those I must now break away from. COUNTER-DEPENDENCE means resisting all authority no matter how appropriate or helpful the authority might be. It is also immature behavior although as teen-agers we didn't see it that way.

AS A YOUNG ADULT my accumulated power and intelligence open up new possibilities for independent thought and action. This INDEPENDENCE initiates my capacity for mature self-direction and is part of everyone's movement out of adolescence.

AS A MATURE ADULT my experience, maturity and wisdom guide my power and allow an Inter-Dependence that can truly build peace and harmony in the world. INTER-DEPENDENCE combines self-direction with cooperation, and results in the ability to work mutually with others to achieve common goals. It is the psychological foundation for "[Complementary Wholeness](#)".

Each of the four variations (Dependence, Counter-Dependence, Independence and Inter-Dependence)

is natural to our development, and across our nearly 7 billion siblings, all are continuously in play.

What if this diversity of psychological maturity is true for nations as well? We've spoken of "developed" and "undeveloped" countries for decades. What if we talked as realistically of Dependent, Counter-Dependent, Independent and Inter-Dependent cultures and countries? Could this help us better understand and resolve conflicts across national maturities in the same way understanding the differences between children, teen-agers, adults and elders does? I think so.

But how to go about it? Like "To be or not to be", that is the question. What if we in America could recognize all four stages are valid – and "Independence" is only one? That would be a major stretch, I think. As would not expecting a "Counter-Dependent" culture to behave like its "Independent" or "Inter-Dependent" cousin. Asking these "forever" questions might help us all enjoy our diversity of development more.

Of course the major responsibility for making adjustments falls to those with greater maturity. I remember in 1984 when Matt was in his "Terrible Two's", and I regularly tried my macho approach of, "YOU WILL DO AS YOU ARE TOLD!" This always ended up in some form of mutual screaming disaster. One day Mother Nancy said, "Bill, you're 46 and Matthew's 2 – which of you has the maturity to make the adjustment to the other?" Another "forever" question that has been with me ever since.

There is another complexity in this Dependence-Independence stuff that intrigues old FW. My experience is that we generally think we are a stage ahead of ourselves. Children think they're ready for Counter-Dependence and separation from the parent before they are. Teen-agers believe they're behaving Independently when they're still stuck in the rebellion of Counter-Dependence. Most mature adults remain committed to self-centered Independence even while they proselytize for the Inter-Dependence of genuinely sharing the planet's resources and creating sustainable relationships with others.

If this is true for nations as well, then perhaps developed countries are not as psychologically mature as they think. Perhaps the U.S. is more Counter-Dependent than we want to believe. This would certainly explain our frequent over-reaction to being challenged by others. Suppose we were truly relaxed in our Independence and worked to understand and meet our challengers' needs? This could be most important for those young nations in the "Terrible Two's" and might bring about some WIN-WIN solutions we don't even glimpse now.

On a personal level, I'm finding my Third Age is about maturing into true Independence so I can understand and help those with less flexibility of response. If I make some real progress here, who knows - I might even venture into Inter-Dependence on occasion!

Hope you've all had a great Independence Day and enjoy the questions that follow below...

For more of Father William: [www.fatherwilliam.com](http://www.fatherwilliam.com)

See pix of the Warren Parade after 7/10 at: <http://www.valleyreporter.com/>

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTES – JOHN 8:32 & STEPHEN STILLS**

“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

“Love the one you're with...”

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Welcome to August, Good Friends! On Saturday we completed our annual Family Week vacation together. It was truly a wonderful time, so this month I'm going to share some of my experiences with family. Not all of them have been so positive.

At 70, I feel fortunate to have lived across the great family divide that began around 1960 and

continues to this day. I was born in 1938, played GI Joe in our suburban St. Louis backyard during The Great War. What a time of being at one with family and country! We ate from Victory Gardens, conserved our rationed gasoline and took tin (not aluminum) foil balls and quarters for Savings Bonds to school. In those years I knew I was part of the perfect family (one father, one mother, one sister, one dog - just like "Dick and Jane" in my school book). I also knew I was part of the perfect country that was saving the world.

My mother had been raised as the daughter of a Federal Judge in Birmingham, Alabama, so our family was always very, very proper. Mom could experience survival level anxiety over table settings and any possibility we might be "creating a scene." I thought this was normal for everyone.

Time passed and while there were bumps along the way, I somehow managed to sustain this weird belief system through college and into my first marriage (which, true to the model of Rock Hudson and Doris Day, was incredibly romantic and consummated in eloping after only knowing each other for six weeks). My "Dick and the Jane" view of family shook.

In 1968 I finally joined the 60's and ran smack into both diversity and feeling at the same time. I realized our family's "affection" (love would be much too strong a word) was a charade we propped up with repeated rituals around holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. Less conscious but more devastating was my realization my parents were trapped in mind-sets that could not understand the values I was growing and the choices I was making. We actually didn't communicate with each other between 1972 and 1976. Then we re-created our past rituals because I had to adjust to them. Even though my dad lived with me the last four years of his life, we were never able to connect with each other. When he died, I sat by his bed and cried, not for his death, but for what we'd never been able to create together.

The primary dysfunction in my family of origin was lack of truthfulness. Whenever I'd had real problems, the last people I'd let know were my parents; in fact, I'd do my best to hide my pain from them. As far as I could tell, Mom and Dad did the same to my sister and me.

Over time I evolved a vision of the family I hoped to have someday. I wanted to be part of a family that shared all their truths with each other, and began working on this in 1974 with Nancy, Susan and Scott. In 78 I reconnected with my eldest daughter, Laura (who I'd not seen in 17 years), and in 80 and 82 Kate and Matt came along to make us complete.

In 2008 our family includes the five children, their five partners, four grandchildren, Mama Nancy and I with our partners, Don and Donna, cousins, in-laws and others. We call this beautifully messy organism "The Family Bush", and we love hanging out together. My vision of family now exists, and I am so grateful for it.

I'm sure it's our habit of truthfulness, cultivated for 30 years, that has, as Robert Frost put it, "made all the difference." Not that this openness hasn't been very uncomfortable and painful at times. When Kate was 16 she sat down, looked me in the eye and said, "Dad, I've had sex." My first reaction was, "Who is the son of a bitch!" But I took a breath and didn't say it. In the space of that moment I thought, "This is exactly the truthfulness I've always hoped for", and I was able to be glad for my daughter – and for me.

I certainly don't mean to suggest our family is in any way superior. I could go on for pages about the mistakes we've made and the pain we've experienced and caused. Being truthful surfaces rather than avoids pain. It makes all the difference if we tell our (not THE) truth with love and caring. Still, when we can't, I'd rather you gave me your truth even with the pain it might bring.

The simplest way I can put the difference between my family of origin and our Family Bush is: Tell your truth and love each other...

With Much love (and hopefully some truth), FW

For more of Father William: [www.fatherwilliam.com](http://www.fatherwilliam.com)

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2008**

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTES – ARISTOTLE**

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.

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## **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Happy September, Good Friends!

I hope my Southern Hemisphere mates are rejoicing in spring coming on and those up North are enjoying a lovely end of summer.

This month's Musings are sparked by this question:

"Dear Father William,

"I enjoyed last month's "Geezers Doing Good" article, and it's one of many that talk about the potential of us boomers to be of service to the world. But usually the examples are, as in this piece, Bill and Melinda Gates, and not the average non-millionaire boomers like me. How do we balance our Third Age need for personal transformation into elderhood and simultaneously increase our "social responsibility" activities?

"Certainly, this is not an EITHER/OR proposition, but after many, many volunteer experiences myself, it's hard to avoid that Second Age achievement mentality, and the accompanying burnout, when more is always asked of us.

"Regards, Ronn"

Dear Ronn:

My simple response is to do what you love and only as much as makes you joyous. Easy to say, but very hard to do if we feel what we do or don't do "matters." It's much easier to do in Third Age when we've accepted that whatever is going on is infinitely larger than us and any actions we might take. Needing achievements to "matter" is a function of ego, and properly belongs to Second Age (The Age of Achievement) when our egos are still maturing. As we move fully into Third Age (The Age of Fulfillment), we find it much easier to know what and how much we want to offer the world.

This "mattering" thing is not easily understood before Third Age. It raises the question, "Why do anything if 'needing to matter' is just ego?"

Why indeed?

There's a great difference between "needing to matter" and freely giving our value to others. Joni Mitchell captured this difference in her song "For Free":

Now me I play for fortunes  
And those velvet curtain calls  
I've got a black limousine  
And two gentlemen  
Escorting me to the halls  
And I play if you have the money  
Or if you're a friend to me  
But the one man band  
By the quick lunch stand  
He was playing real good, for free

It seems almost impossible to "give yourself away" when we're carrying the responsibilities of Second Age and striving for security and status. And there's nothing wrong with this just as there was nothing wrong with being childish as children. It is who we are and what we do in the different phases of our lives.

But Third Age offers something new, something beyond the constraining limitations of Second Age ego. With enough life experience and mature reflection, we now know "it's not about us." No matter what or how much we contribute, it will just be another drop in the infinite ocean of existence. Knowing this, we don't deceive ourselves into believing we "should" do more than flows freely and joyously from us. It's not what or how much we do that matters, but whether we're "playing real good, for free."

Let me use myself and this newsletter as an example how easy it is for me to get caught up in thinking what I do "matters".

This month's Musings have been harder to finish than most. Part of the reason is I've been traveling a bit, but mostly it's because I've allowed myself to get caught up in America's "Theater of the Absurd" (also known as a Presidential election year). I realized I've been spending a ridiculous amount of energy on political theater, and allowing myself to be both disturbed and depressed by it. How silly! Now I'm finding my way back to sanity as you'll see in these recent exchanges with a brilliant friend I call "The Young Man" (TYM) who's been encouraging me to engage in and enjoy the process as theater. He sent me a number of e-mails making the point that Sarah Palin could turn into a surprisingly valuable asset for the GOP, and he may be right. We enter the dialogue with my response to those emails:

FW: "I care less and less about any of it – and I grant you Sarah had a great night at the convention."

TYM: "In all honesty, you might wish to ponder why it is you are caring less and less."

FW: "I do ponder all this, and where I come out is that the levels we've been focusing on are meaningless. They're like watching the spectacle of the leaves as fall begins up here. Their colors are brilliant and they swirl magnificently in the wind. People travel for hundreds of miles to 'peep' at them and put lots of money in Vermont's coffers. But foliage season doesn't last very long, and it will come again next year and the year after that and the year after that ad infinitum. Most importantly, the dance of the leaves is not a cause, but only an effect of much larger forces. The power of these larger forces is inversely related to our little abilities to perceive them. The wind is most visible and much less potent than the more difficult to see shortening of the daylight forces. And I believe there are unperceived forces way beyond those our science can recognize at this point. So thanks for your push. I am returning to my mystical roots which means caring less and less about 'bonfires of the vanities'..."

TYM: "But you do care, you always have and always will. Don't you need to embrace this and find a BOTH/AND solution? What happens if you start to, in part, experience this as theater. A way of looking at, and accepting, the nature of America as a whole. No, it is not to our liking. But just like the leaves on the trees, it is what it is."

FW: "You're right, I do care, but not about this kind of theater. I am becoming very choosy about how I will expend my energy, so my caring has become more and more focused. Primary are family, a few friends, personal comfort and sharing my understandings of how the larger levels and systems seem to work. If the theater makes me feel good (like watching the leaves), I'll pay attention, but if it makes me feel sad (like the partisan politics), I'm going to do my best to let it go right on by. Theater is theater, and that's all it is. I used to let it disturb my life because I thought it was 'important and significant,' and that was useful then. Not any more. The point of Third Age to me is to include in my life what helps me feel fulfilled, and theater, especially political theater, no longer does that. I'm on to greener and more nourishing pastures. I'll send postcards from time to time."

TYM: "I think there is going to be plenty of rain for those pastures in the days to come based on the current path of the hurricane."

FW: "You're probably right about the rain, and I'm going to stay out of it as much as possible..."

I shared this exchange with my daughter, Kate, who's getting her Masters at Lesley College in "Expressive Therapies" (which means helping people make sense of their lives using all different forms of the arts). She took exception to my use of the term "theater," and I think she was right. We ended up agreeing that theater has two dimensions. The first is the excellence of execution or artistry. The second is the excellence of purpose or intent – and seeking to discover and reveal bits of truth is part

of any valid purpose.

We also believe great theater is excellent in both the power of its artistry and the depth of its truths, but most of our recent political spectacles, while perhaps excellent in parts of the execution, have been terribly inaccurate on the purpose dimension. We rarely get theater in our politics. But since 2000 we have gotten a horrendous amount of blatant and deceitful propaganda. How terribly, terribly sad for us and the world.

So how do we elders offer our value to a troubled world? I certainly have no answers for anyone else. What works for me is to share my current experience of reality's truths in this newsletter and on my weekly radio show. And I try to not get sucked into conflicts that have too often led me to recreate reality and truth to suit my emotional needs. What might be fulfilling for you? You'll know when you find yourself "playing real good for free"...

With Much love (and hopefully some truth), FW

For more of Father William: <http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – SUSAN ARIEL RAINBOW KENNEDY**

"Dogs are miracles with paws."

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## **1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

It's has been a bit of a rough summer for Father William. In this Third Age of mine, I aspire to be more loving and less combative in responding to situations that upset me, and I often fail. There are three that have been ongoing in the last few months. One is the US election campaign, the second is a family matter and the third is a neighborhood conflict.

It is only in the second, the family matter which is also the most important, that I've been able to be the person I hope to be. I'm very thankful I've been consistently able to support all involved with genuine love.

But when it has come to the campaign and neighborhood conflict, I've failed abysmally. I am caught up in anger at what I consider to be the pettiness, deceit and betrayal involved in both. My response has been to flip into my masculine "Fight or Flight" mode, and I usually fight. I'm good at fighting, but it's not who I want to be unless the circumstances will allow nothing else.

What makes much more sense to me now is to access more of my feminine "Tend and Befriend" mode that opens possibilities to resolve problems rather than exacerbate them.

The maturity to "resolve rather than exacerbate" seems to me to be what later life is meant for. But even at 70, this maturity is often incredibly difficult for me, and I imagine for some of you.

I think we make most progress toward our best selves when we recognize the differences between who we are and who we'd like to be - and accept them with humility and hope. What follows was emailed me just this morning and helped me know who I want to be and what I want to share in this month's Musings...

"Being a veterinarian, I had been called to examine a ten-year-old Irish Wolfhound named Belker. The dog's owners, Ron, his wife Lisa, and their little boy Shane, were all very attached to Belker, and they were hoping for a miracle.

"I examined Belker and found he was dying of cancer. I told the family we couldn't do anything for Belker, and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the old dog in their home.

"As we made arrangements, Ron and Lisa told me they thought it would be good for six-year-old Shane to observe the procedure. They felt as though Shane might learn something from the experience.

"The next day, I felt the familiar catch in my throat as Belker's family surrounded him. Shane seemed so calm, petting the old dog for the last time, that I wondered if he understood what was going on. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away.

"The little boy seemed to accept Belker's transition without any difficulty or confusion. We sat together for a while after Belker's Death, wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives. Shane, who had been listening quietly, piped up, 'I know why.'

"Startled, we all turned to him. What came out of his mouth next stunned me. I'd never heard a more comforting explanation.

"He said, 'People are born so that they can learn how to live a good Life - like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right?' The Six-year-old continued, 'Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay as long.'

"Remember, if a dog was the teacher you would learn things like:

"When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.

"Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure Ecstasy.

"Take naps.

"Stretch before rising.

"Run, romp, and play daily.

"Thrive on attention and let people touch you.

"Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.

"On warm days, stop to lie on your back on the grass.

"On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.

"When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.

"Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

"Be loyal.

"Never pretend to be something you're not.

"If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.

"When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by, and nuzzle them gently."

This Old Father William is still trying to learn what dogs seem to be born with. My guess is some of you might be, too. Have a great October...

For more of Father William: <http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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**THIS MONTH'S QUOTE – SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL**

"Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

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**1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Happy Halloween, [Guy Fawkes Day](#) and Welcome to November...

It seems appropriate this year that the US Presidential election occurs between two scary holidays, both of which involve large elements of horror, deceit and violence. Much of the long campaign's rhetoric has encouraged personal and political variations of these terrible elements.

Over the last 45 years old FW has continuously straddled the paradox of his disillusionment with, and hope for, the country he loves. By "country" I do not mean its political, business or religious leaders. My disillusionment and hope are, at their best, a function of how I've perceived the mentality and maturity of my fellow citizens evolving over the last six decades.

On the one hand, I've abhorred our uncountable examples of racial cruelty and murder, our endless lies about why we've entered and continued misguided wars, and our consistent unfairness in the disparity of opportunities we offer all our children for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

On the other hand, I've rejoiced in the gains we've made for our people of all races, creeds, genders and lifestyle choices. I'm proud of all our patriots who've stood up for what they believed was fair and right, often at enormous personal costs to themselves, their families and their friends. I'm very grateful to the emerging cadre of religious leaders who are courageously advocating tolerance and respect for beliefs that differ from their own.

So my personal experience of American democracy is a paradox of cycling disillusionment and hope. To repeat Churchill: "...democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." While the liability of the "other forms" is that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," democracy's liability is that it will pander to the majority rather than seek the guidance of the wise.

In "The Meaning of the 20th Century," Kenneth Boulding wrote, "Five percent of the world's population lives in the ice age, five percent in the space age, and the rest are strung out in between." While we may not have a great many ice-agers left in the US and other developed countries, we obviously still have an huge range of mentality and maturity, especially in our unconscious selves that create our perceptions and drive our behaviors.

Given this mass reality, how can I hope such a majority could (especially manipulated by the high tech [Mad Men](#) of today) elect leadership that might actually govern wisely in this time of multiple crises?

One way I answer this question is with what [Campbell Brown](#) said on her [CNN newscast October 30](#) in response to a political ad designed to appeal to the majority's basest instincts:

"Is this really what it has come down to? We are fighting two wars, our economy is a disaster, and Senator Dole's message to voters is to falsely accuse her opponent of not believing in God? Again – a false accusation! Elizabeth Dole is hardly alone here. Her ad is just one of the most egregious.

"So to all you politicians desperately trying to hold on to your jobs, wallowing in the mud right now, willing to stoop to any level, just say "No" to your own craven ambition. Just cut it out! Reclaim your dignity! And with only a few days to go, please, please tell us what you think you can do to help get this country back on track. That is really all we want to hear..."

I find hope in the courage of Campbell and others in our media who seem to be practicing, rather than corrupting, their profession – thank you, Campbell!

But for democracy to survive and flourish, we will all need a personal navigation system, an internal sense of fair play that guides us at the unconscious levels that determine our choices no matter what we may believe in our conscious, rational minds. The following articles also boost my hope in democracy's future:

2. A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEBT offers evidence we are unconsciously equipped with a sense of fair play that can compete with other unconsciously instantaneous, and less admirable, motivations;

3. WELL, EXCUUUUUUSE MEEE! suggests we also have an unconscious instinct to enforce that sense of fairness by rewarding those who play fair and punishing those who do not;

4. THE BEHAVIORAL REVOLUTION opens up a new field of understanding – our mechanisms of perception – that may take our decision-making to a whole new level.

Happy Haunting and Bonfires, FW

For more of Father William: <http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

PS: I did this week's radio show to musically communicate my feelings of disillusionment and hope. You can hear it at:

<http://www.audioacrobat.com/play/WFNbh1cQ>

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**THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2008**

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**THIS SEASONS’S QUOTE:**

“PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO – AND FROM - US ALL...”

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**FATHER WILLIAM’S MONTHLY MUSINGS**

Happy Holiday Season, Dear Friends!

Old Father William is finding it delightful to turn his attention away from our earthly conflicts (especially partisan political differences) to the hopeful spirit of the holidays. With this lighter tone in mind, I’ve selected a gentle assortment of readings for you this month, and I hope you enjoy them as much as I have.

“NURTURING A GRATEFUL HEART”, “SOME THOUGHTS ON HOPE” and “THE FOREST-DWELLER STAGE OF LIFE” offer quiet ways to enjoy yourself and your loved ones during a season that is meant to be renewing but often turns out to be stressful. “BIRTHING OF A ‘CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS’” is a bit of humorous history that helps us remember there’s often more room for new possibilities than we think.

There is one more piece I’m going to include in these Musings because it was a gift that lifted me out of the partisan quagmire of America’s interminable Presidential campaign. As the weeks and months passed, I found myself at e-mail odds with very good friends - moral, intelligent and committed friends – on both my left and right. One of these I hadn’t encountered until the exchange below. His name is Gary, and he and I have obvious differences in our thinking. Here’s what he sent that so aided me in

"stepping back" into a perspective I truly want to take:

"Thanks for keeping me in the loop on this dialog... it's very thought provoking... sorry in advance for the long winded message... it helped me to write it..."

"What I'm beginning to see is that on the outer edges of all the issues are people who are indoctrinated in beliefs. Their beliefs are so concrete and real to them that they are not able to see anything other than their own point of view. People with a different set of beliefs see them as having selfish interests at best, and terrorist intentions at the worst. In that sense we are all the same... the entitled, the enablers, the terrorist, the greedy, the list goes on..."

"Most of the dialogs, including those I participate in, are more about presenting a case and getting the others to see our point of view. I mean, isn't [this particular conservative story] strong enough that any liberal should now be enlightened? If only we say it loud enough and often enough because if they don't get it, they must not be paying attention! Are they blind? Are they wrong? Or are they just stupid?"

"We can rally around [this] story, and believe me I did. It absolutely reinforces to me that my position is right. It shows me that you and I are aligned. So now I'm stronger in my resolve. I send the story to people with an alternative position. Do I really expect it to change their position? Not really... I expect it to create a debate, which quite frankly I enjoy... call it "intellectual masturbation" cause it feels good, but doesn't accomplish much..."

"I realize that each of us have spent our lifetimes creating and investing in the identities that we operate from.. liberal, conservative, black, white, rich, poor, laborer, Christian, Jew, social worker, CEO... We take actions to reinforce our beliefs and identities. To seriously consider, much less adopt, the position of another is to lose the investment in our hard earned identities... it would require people to admit that they are "wrong" and would require a level of vulnerability, honesty and bravery that may be more than we can expect to ask from most."

"As for my contributions, I've created the identity of being a conservative white small business owner who sees that there are a few greedy, unscrupulous corporate leaders who need to be strung up. I also see that most business people are not in that group and that a lot of the potential liberal regulation is an overreaction to the actions of a few. I see the entitled as more of a homogeneous group all of whom are lazy victims. The truth is probably that there are about as many extreme entitled in that set as there are the greedy corporate wrong doers in the more conservative set. Even if that's not true, it's probably a useful and helpful belief."

"So we're trapped in a circular series of "partisan" dialogs that only serve to deepen the chasms and

harden our opposing positions. These dialogs also act like the tide and pull the non committed lemming middle one way or the other with the popular culture that surrounds them.

"So while there are a LOT of issues in the world, I believe the biggest is our increasing separation. I think the biggest problem in Washington is partisanship. The lack of compassion and understanding and commitment to do what is right. The seeming desire of our two parties to take opposite positions on EVERYTHING because surely they can't agree... heavens no... if we are to win, the other party must lose...

"Sorry for the diatribe, my thoughts are still forming... for my part, my next step is to take a step back and "seek first to understand" because I clearly don't understand the liberal point of view. I'm clearly and strongly biased. I will better be able to affect positive change if I can take on a position of increased understanding and compassion."

Thank you, Gary, for your thought-full-ness; it is a beautifully appropriate gift for this season. May we all find our own ways "to take a step back and `seek first to understand'" as we move through our holidays and into a new year of possibilities...

Much love, Father William

For more of Father William: <http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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