

THE HURLER OF STARS TO SERVE AND TO REVERE

Elder Marion D. Hanks

What I intend to do this evening is to offer a small slice of the core of my experiences and observations over the past several years, involving family, schools, missions, wars, work, civic involvements, reading, Church service touching all the continents, and the privilege of being a blessed and grateful, though too frequently absentee, husband and father. If this modest expression

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of some of my clearest convictions engages your thoughts and your gears, I will be content

Three matters of pressing concern have occupied my attention this past week: (1) my return from a visit in the Philippines for a private foundation which serves to train, prepare, and place people in employment or in small business; (2) the moving memorial service this week after the passing of Obert C Tanner; and (3) preparations for a

One week ago on my birthday we made a safari into the hilly areas of Cebu, 65 kilometers outside the city, past the rice paddies and up the rough stone-cut steps of a primitive area to find the tiny wooden shack of Judith Naneo. Judith Naneo is a little lady about the size of a large pencil, dressed in a ragged but clean T-shirt and long skirt and cloth slippers, shepherding eight shoeless and in some cases bare-bottomed little children while she

1,000 pesos each Monday morning from a benevolent local loan shark to buy materials, and returning to him each Saturday evening the sum of 1,300 pesos. When Enterprise Mentors learned of her circumstance, this group, led by local volunteer citizens, Mormon and non-Mormon, arranged to help her, including obtaining financing from a bank at a sensible interest rate. (At current rates 1,000 pesos is about \$35; 300 pesos about \$12.)

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would be. "But," said he, "this one thing I know:
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Sunday departure with my son and six local citizens in a different humanitarian project in Quelessebougou, Mali, West Africa

You can fully believe me when I tell you that I am pleased to be here tonight; actually, I am pleased to be anywhere near home after spending the last two near sleepless weeks in some of my old territory in southeast Asia. I survived a few days of driving the streets and byways of metro Manila, the city and outlands of Cebu, and the always fascinating politically complex territory of Mindanao, where rest geographically the cities of Davao and Zamboanga

operates in her tiny dirt-floored shack the shoe and slipper-making business, which feeds the family and provides footwear for sale to the less financially blessed people on Negros and other islands. She gets there by carrying packs of her product on her back through the jungle to the road where she climbs aboard a crowded jeepney for transport to the bay four kilometers away, across which she takes the ferry to sell her goods to the poor people who live on Negros. She has been doing this for nearly 20 years.

Until last year Sister Naneo has financed her business by borrowing

We visited many other individuals now in their own small businesses or otherwise earning a paycheck to care for their families. The foundation has favorably affected several thousand individuals in the last two-and-a-half years.

And after flying Philippine Airlines from place to place those many days, I understand why the little Asian lady sitting next to me one day was fingering her prayer beads and fervently praying, head bowed, as we took off!

I was more responsive to the personal application of a note I read in the Salt Lake morning paper "Orbiting

Paragraphs" column the morning I arrived home: "Prayer has been eliminated from many graduation ceremonies but remains an important part of final exam week."

Sunday my son and I will depart for our second annual October excursion to the villages of Quelessebouyou, Mali, West Africa, where we will help them prepare the ground and plant seeds. We will check the 66 wells they have dug with the support of the Quelessebouyou-Utah Alliance (a different private humanitarian effort involving some of our local citizens); will sit in on some of the 46 classes where 1,000 of the villagers are being taught to read and write in their own Bambara language, being instructed by some 200 or so fellow villagers who have previously qualified themselves as teachers; and will help in the construction of the first of 10 schools now authorized by the government for children of the villages. We are scheduled to visit the president of Mali, who a year ago said to us that the real future of Mali is closely related to the work being done in the villages in helping to provide clean water, gardens, health care, and literacy training. "You are like a rope lowered from heaven to bring us what we desperately need," he said.

Two medical expeditions will follow this year, one for eye surgery, primarily implanting lenses, and to provide eye glasses. The second health mission involves Utah gynecologists who will help to correct very serious disfigurements imposed by tribal custom upon some young girls in the villages. A fourth building expedition will occur the first of the new year. It will be devoted chiefly to completing the school buildings.

Having spoken now of some concrete, ongoing examples of useful service, for the next few minutes I have in mind two ideas and some suggestions.

Let me keynote the ideas by reference to statements by special men, rabbis of uncommon wisdom, and by Albert Schweitzer, great compassionate "Physician of the Jungle." Without elaborate expostulation, they will establish the substance of my remarks.

First, from Rabbi Susya: "God will not ask me, 'Why were you not Moses?' He will ask me, 'Why were you not Rabbi Susya?'"

From Rabbi Herzog:

A prominent visitor stopped by the home of the revered rabbi. In his room was a table, a chair, a cot, a washbasin, and many books.

"Why, Rabbi," said the visitor, "Where is your furniture?"

"Where is yours?" said the Rabbi.

"But I am only passing through," the visitor said.

"So am I," replied the Rabbi.

From Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, teacher:

Two things a man needs—information and appreciation. When I look at our educational system and many other institutions for civilization, I see a tremendous emphasis upon information but hardly any cultivation of the sense of appreciation. Mankind will not die for lack of information. It will perish for lack of appreciation. Unless there is appreciation there is no mankind. The great marvel of being alive is the ability to discover the mystery and wonder of everything. The real dignity of anything that is, is in its relationship to God who created it. Unless we learn how to revere, we will not know how to exist as human beings.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer told a group of people that he did not know what their future would be. "But," said he, "this one thing I know: The only ones among you who will really be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

The quotes from Rabbi Herzog, Rabbi Heschel, and Dr. Schweitzer seem simple and understandable, though each has a connotation of immense meaning and importance. We are all "just passing through," and we will leave all of our furniture when the time comes. The Bible teaches us that we are on earth to work hard, live simply, learn to love, and discover soon or late that we are not here to serve our own interests exclusively, or chiefly. Happiness is a choice, and we make

that choice when we appreciate our blessings and develop and unselfishly express the habit of helpfulness, serving others who need.

But what of the intriguing statement from Rabbi Susya? "God will not ask me, 'Why were you not Moses?' He will ask me, 'Why were you not Rabbi Susya?'"

The Obert Tanner memorial services brought me to again examine that question for myself. The incredible breadth and balance of this public benefactor's life was astonishing. He deliberately built his life on the values Plato made famous: the good, the true, and the beautiful. Some of his own writings reflect Plato's values:

God is the author of beauty, as He is of truth and goodness. Beauty is a revelation of Him. Beauty is one of the confirmations a reflective person will add for his belief in God.

Obert and Grace had their share of difficulties. He grew up in poverty, a tenth child, battled for his education, started his business in the basement of his mother's home, lost three sons, and went on to become a teacher, philosopher, and a wealthy businessman. "We determined that we would not let grief define our lives," he said after the loss of their third son.

He spoke of the blessing of affluence ("it is a blessing to give") and of its dangers:

Of the many hazards in the possession of wealth, one is the loss of sympathy for the poor. People with means find it hard to know where the shoe pinches the less fortunate. They may analyze it, but they do not feel the pinch. It is a terrible risk to rise above the poor and the needy; terrible because we may not feel their wrongs and cruel inequities. And failing to feel them, we do nothing to correct them, thereby losing our own souls—lacking in sympathy and humility our willingness to sacrifice. . . .

We all marvel at handicapped men who rise above great adversities. But should we not marvel even more at fortunate men who rise above prosperity? Christ apparently thought so. He pointed

out that it was nearly a superhuman task for the rich man to gain spiritual mastery over the success he has won [Obert C. Tanner, *Christ's Ideals for Living* (Deseret Sunday School Union Board, c. 1955)]

Perhaps most of us here are not overburdened with wealth, yet we may struggle still with the burden of sharing what we have—money, patience, concern, kindness, time, knowledge, faith, warmth, compassion, encouragement, a listening ear—a few dollars sent halfway across the earth to help dig a well, a few minutes to comfort the ill or the frightened or the bereaved. Pro bono publico remains a constant principle for a lawyer, as visiting a friend in a hospital does in his avocational life.

Once in another part of the country, I accompanied some local leaders to visit one of their members who was slipping away. The elderly man was pleased that the visitor from Salt Lake had come to the hospital to comfort him, but his tears of gratitude were directed chiefly to his own associates and leaders: "You came!" he said, "You came!"

On that same weekend I heard the tender story of an older man who had taken his 1974-model automobile to a garage for repairs. The projected work was more costly than he or the conscientious mechanic had contemplated, and the garage owner wondered if the man really wanted to spend that sum on an older car.

Said the car owner, "Could you take a credit card that isn't mine?"

"Whose is it?" asked the garage man.

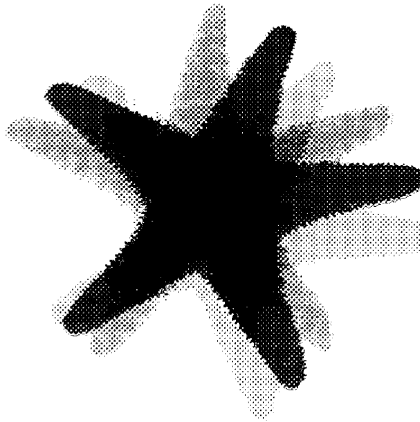
"It is my daughter's," the man said. "She wants me to have my automobile in good, safe condition. It is the only thing I have."

As the son of a father of whom I have no conscious memory, and as a father of loving children, I weep over that. There is no neighbor, after all, closer than the ones in our own families. And in this incident, knowing no more details, one does not get the impression of a casual check written on

ample funds, but of a loving daughter, very possibly sacrificing to preserve the self-esteem and precarious independence of a cherished father.

We are speaking, of course, of that second commandment, linked inseparably by Christ with the "first and great commandment," both centering in love of God and neighbor, the two together declared to be the heart principle upon which depends the validity of all other of our convictions and commitments—"all the law and the prophets."

Rabbi Susya's sobering thought came with special impact to me when I first read it. It emboldens me to sug-



gest to you, substantial and successful and able as you may be and will be, that all of us can profit from periodic consideration. An ancient sage left us a helpful standard: *To be, and not to seem*. If our purpose is being and not seeming, and if any course correction is suggested, then a thought from Samuel Johnson might be useful:

The fountain of content must spring up in the mind, and he who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the griefs which he purposes to remove.

The reality is that none of us is at any point in this mortal experience a finished product; all of us are still and always will be in the process of creation. If disposition is the key, then it is well to

remember that *happiness is a choice*. None will escape pain, but we can choose not to be miserable. Botanist Julius von Sachs gives a key if we are ready to open our minds and hearts to a broader, more balanced base: "All originality comes from reading," he said.

Alfred North Whitehead has given us the thought that "Effective knowledge is professional knowledge, supported by a restricted acquaintance with useful subjects subservient to it." He observed that the rate of progress in fields of knowledge is so accelerated that the individual human being living an ordinary span of life must face what he calls "novel situations which find no parallel in his past. The fixed person for the fixed duties, who in older societies was such a godsend, in the future will be a public danger." In his book *Science and the Modern World* he offers us this observation:

The modern chemist is likely to be weak in zoology, weaker still in his knowledge of the Elizabethan drama, and completely ignorant of the principles of rhythm in English versification. It is probably safe to ignore his knowledge of ancient history. Of course I am speaking of general tendencies, for chemists are no worse than engineers or mathematicians or classical scholars.

He then speaks of the pitfalls of such a situation, which he said, "produces minds in a groove," and inevitably restrains serious thought beyond the groove. "The remainder of life is treated superficially, with the imperfect categories of thought derived from one profession."

"The leading intellects lack balance," he concludes.

The suggestion seems obviously to encourage all of us to broaden our capacity to appreciate, to read, and to learn and be glad in God's beautiful world, to work to acquire what is sufficient for our needs, and to share time, talents, and means with those who need them most. As we respond to the needs of others, we open doors to incredible blessings. Let me share one example.

I had a dear friend who has been gone for some years now, one whom I look forward to visiting should I ever qualify to be where I am sure she is. In her active, energetic, participating, young-mother years she was stricken with polio and spent the next 40 years in a wheelchair. She struggled valiantly, was honored as the Handicapped Person of the Year in the United States and traveled around the world seeking to help other people with special problems. Over the years the body grew more ungainly and difficult to manage. Yet she lived alone largely, managing I don't know how, but maintaining a sweetness of spirit that lifted a multitude of other lives, including those who were invited to bless her. After one such blessing she wrote something in her journal that she invited me to read at a subsequent visit on a similar errand. As I read, her purpose in having me read became obvious. She wanted me to speak for her to the Lord, thanking him for this imperfect body which was part of her eternal soul. This is a brief extract from what she had written:

I have been commanding this inconvenient, twisted body for years to function, not appreciating its struggling efforts to perform and its great worth to me. I have realized what the past performance of this incapacitated body has really meant to me. It has been magnificent, and I say that humbly. My prayers for bodily strength to meet the days' activities have been gloriously answered. It has in excellence carried me as I have traveled in the service of my fellow men. Oh, I know we can progress with the aid of a healthy tabernacle, but in physical misery and discomfort the spirit can be refined to spiritual heights more rapidly and thus permit one to rise to greater calls in the service of the Master.

Overnight, as it were, I have come to respect and cherish this body. More than ever I desire to increase a gift of faith that I may, as soon as I grow worthy, experience the reuniting of my spirit and my renewed flesh and bones. I want no other body—just this one, cleansed and strengthened, and spiritually refined. It is part of me.

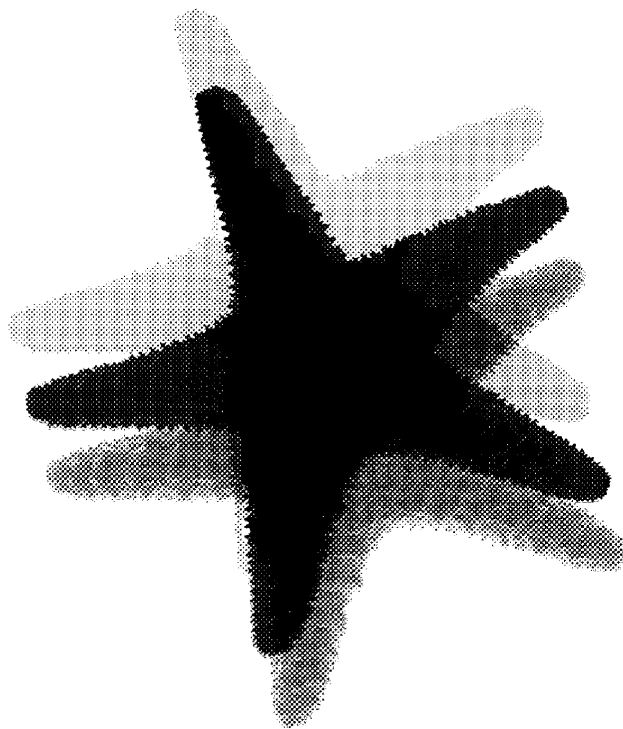
This school of law bears the name of President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., a man of great intellect and passion and legal and diplomatic skills. If you are acquainted with a statement he made in a general conference about 56 years ago, you may well find in it whatever encouragement you need in your Christian commitments and more particularly your pro bono work and your consistent service in behalf of those with special needs:

When the Savior came upon the earth he had two great missions: one was to work out the Messiahship, the atonement for the fall, and the fulfillment of the law; the other was the work which he did among his brethren and sisters in the flesh by way of relieving their sufferings. He left as a heritage to those who should come after him in his church

In this great commission, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are bound with all other true Christians to reach out to those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, and in prison, and to seek to supply comfort and encouragement and hope and vision to those who may suffer for want of these things. For those who may not bear allegiance to Christ, there is that tie to other humankind that is expressed by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius who said:

We ought to do good to others as simply and as naturally as a horse runs, or a bee makes honey, or a vine bears grapes season after season without thinking of the grapes it has born.

For years I have nurtured a story I have wanted to share. I will do that



the carrying on of those two great things—work for the relief of the ills and the sufferings of humanity, and the teaching of the spiritual truths which should bring us back into the presence of our Heavenly Father [President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., Conference Report, April 1937, p. 22.]

tonight, referring to part of a chapter about a star thrower from the book *The Star Thrower* by the late Loren Eiseley, eminent anthropologist. The story is of a man who has a reverence for life, all life, but it is a testimony also of Eiseley's own dilemma when he thinks with his heart rather than only with his

professionally trained, scientifically oriented mind. Ultimately, it is a testimony of the vitality of acting to serve life, all life.

Eiseley leaves his seaside hotel and observes the sea creatures littering the sands. Thrown from mother ocean to shore, the sea life struggles to return through the surf.

As he walks before dawn along the beach the author observes with disgust collectors carrying their sacks of shells with life still in them to the outdoor

man that he does not "collect," neither the living nor the dead. "Death is the only successful collector," he says and walks away.

From a distance he sees the thrower skillfully sailing the starfish into the ocean. "For a moment, in the changing light, the sower appeared magnified, as though casting larger stars upon some greater sea. He had, at any rate, the posture of a god."

But he roughly reminds himself that the star thrower is only a man

ventured out at dawn resented others in the greediness of their compulsive collecting. I had also been abrupt because I had, in the terms of my profession and experience, nothing to say. The star thrower was mad, and his particular acts were a folly with which I had not chosen to associate myself. I was an observer and a scientist. Nevertheless, I had seen the rainbow attempting to attach itself to earth.

Eiseley finds the star thrower and joins him in spinning still-living

"I set my shoulders and cast, as the thrower
in the rainbow cast, slowly, deliberately, and well.
The task was not to be assumed lightly, for it was
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For a moment, we cast on an infinite beach to-
gether beside an unknown hurler of suns."

kettles "provided by the resort hotels for the cleaning of the specimens."

Distressed, Eiseley picks his way through the remains of life toward a distant rainbow where he sees, near its foot, a figure picking up something from the sand and throwing it vigorously back into the ocean. Eiseley reaches him as he lifts another dying starfish and spins it far out into the sea.

"It may live," he said, "if the offshore pull is strong enough."

Eiseley asks him if he "collects," and the man answers, "Only like this, and only for the living." "The stars throw well. One can help them."

Eiseley, uncomfortable, tells the

engaged in a fruitless task, and cynically returns through the collectors and the steaming kettles to his room where he struggles through the night, battling the shadows "which might be said to have been released by Darwin, Einstein, and Freud," these shadows of famine, war and death, of opposition, of the dark side of nature.

But the scientist had seen the star thrower and now at next dawn sets out again to find him.

Somewhere far up the coast wandered the star thrower beneath his rainbow. Our exchange had been brief because upon that coast I had learned that men who

starfish far out into the water. "I spoke once briefly. 'I understand,' I said. 'Call me another thrower.'"

I flung another star. Perhaps far outward on the rim of space a genuine star was similarly seized and flung. It was like a sowing—the sowing of life on an infinitely gigantic scale. Small and dark against the receding rainbow, the star thrower stopped and flung once more. I never looked again. The task we had assumed was too immense for gazing. I flung and flung again while all about us roared the insatiable waters of death.

But we, pale and alone and small in that immensity, hurled back the living

stars Somewhere far off, across bottomless abysses, I felt as though another world was flung more joyfully. I set my shoulders and cast, as the thrower in the rainbow cast, slowly, deliberately, and well The task was not to be assumed lightly, for it was men as well as starfish that we sought to save. For a moment, we cast on an infinite beach together beside an unknown hurler of suns

I went my lone way up the beaches Somewhere, I felt in a great atavistic surge of feeling, somewhere the Thrower knew. Perhaps he smiled and cast once more into the boundless pit of darkness. Perhaps he, too, was lonely, and the end toward which he labored remains hidden—even as with ourselves

From Darwin's tangled bank of unceasing struggle, selfishness, and death, had arisen, incomprehensibly, the thrower who loved not man, but life. It was the subtle cleft in nature before which biological thinking had faltered We had reached the last shore of an invisible island—yet, strangely, also a shore that the primitives had always known. They had sensed intuitively that man cannot exist spiritually without life, his brother Somewhere, my thought persisted, there is a hurler of stars, and he walks, because he chooses, always in desolation, but not in defeat

In the night the gas flames under the shelling kettles would continue to glow. I set my clock accordingly. Tomorrow I would walk in the storm I would walk against the shell collectors and the flames I would walk remembering Bacon's forgotten words "for the uses of life." I would walk with the knowledge of the discontinuities of the unexpected universe. I would walk knowing of the rift revealed by the thrower, a hint that there looms, inexplicably, in nature something above the role men give her. I knew it from the man at the foot of the rainbow, the starfish thrower on the beaches of Costabel [Excerpts from Loren Eiseley, *The Star Thrower*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978)]

The Almighty has put before us perfection as the ultimate goal and laid out the path of eternal progression that leads to it. It doesn't seem necessary to remind anyone here that none of us is a finished product yet, but that we still

are in the process of creation, a process involving our free agency and the opposition that makes it so meaningful, and the principles and ordinances which can take us up that path toward the maturity enjoyed in fullness by God and his Holy Son Jesus Christ. They

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are full of light and love, have no malice, are free from selfishness and resentments and ego One of my greatest comforts came early with learning what the Almighty has taught us—that he is a God of "loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth," that he waits to be gracious unto us, and that he delights in his own exaltation because it permits him to be merciful

And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him [Isaiah 30:18]

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord [Jeremiah 9:23–24]

God loves being God because it permits him to be merciful, and he waits for us to open the door to his graciousness!

It is perhaps the general assumption that all of us are so keenly conscious of our limitations and shortcomings that we look with sorrow and regret upon our own record and stage of development. Yet we understand enough about the Savior and his mission and the principles of faith and repentance and obedience, and the supreme importance of forgiveness, that we are trying honestly to move forward on the path toward that ultimate maturity of which I spoke

The great duke of Wellington was one of a group of famous personalities who was asked near the conclusion of his life what he had learned from his years of superior, successful leadership His answer was: Had I to do it again, I would give more praise and credit to my associates and my subordinates"

It is reported that Aldous Huxley, asked the same question, replied that what he had learned was that the chief need of the world is more kindness.

And Karl Barth, theologian, made his reply by singing the first words of a well-known Christian hymn: "Jesus loves me, this I know, For the Bible tells me so"

I believe these things. I also believe that you who are associated with the law are in a critical and honorable profession I pray for you that you will honor it and bring honor to it by truly serving God through serving his children.