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Sixty-Five and Counting

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Your Life Your Health

The Examiner

November 4, 2008

Sixty five and counting! November 4th has come and gone and Mrs. Holly and I have returned from our trip to England. I am now 65 – going on 66! The origin of that concept was a history and physical examination I read once in which the healthcare provider indicated that the patient was “98 going on 99.” I thought it was so helpful to know that the patient was “going on 99 rather than 97.” In preparation for my birthday, I fulfilled my first promise to my patients. Throughout my life I have noticed that politicians extol the virtues of public education and support its universal use, EXCEPT generally for their own children. Because I have encouraged my patients to participate in a Medicare Advantage plan, and particularly in Select Care of Texas’ Texan Plus, I promised that when I was of an age that I became eligible I would join the same plan. My wife and I are now Texan Plus members and are experiencing all of the benefits of that plan. “Yes,” is the answer to your question, but I was not going to mention it; Mrs. Holly did become eligible before me. Also, on November 1st, I began a four-week sabbatical which I discussed last week.

In the past two weeks, Mrs. Holly and I have put an exclamation point upon the first 43 years of our life together. In our visit to England, we have toured all of the sites connected with Sir Winston Churchill, who is my secular hero. Churchill exemplified the “bulldogged” tenacity which is required of a man who is going to affect events around him, rather than a man who is going to be the victim of the circumstances of his life. Paul’s admonition was that we not be the victim of circumstances; he said: “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the Plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.” (Romans 12:1-2, Letters To Young Churches, J.B. Phillips)

As we visited Churchill’s gravesite, his birth place at Blenheim Palace, his home (Chartwell) and the Churchill Museum and World War II war rooms in London, I was taken again by the life of this great man. As we approached his gravesite, I remembered how desperately he plead with his mother for her nurture and with his father for his approval. Largely, he never received either. Yet, to my knowledge there is not one word of complaint in the tens of thousands of pages he wrote. Unlike many, he did not allow past disappointments to dictate his future. He refused to live life as a victim.



Yet, as I approached his gravesite, I knew that he had been offered a place to be buried at Westminster Abbey and also at St. Paul's Cathedral. Having spent his life earning and receiving great honors, in death, he asked to be buried with his father and mother at a little country church in Bladon, England at St. Martin's Church, Oxfordshire. In July 1895 Winston wrote to his mother: "I went this morning to Bladon to look at Papa's grave . . . I was so struck by the sense of quietness and peace, as well as by the old-world air of the place that my sadness was not unmixed with solace . . ." As I stood before his grave – Lady Churchill and Sir Winston occupy the same burial plot as the grounds are so small – tears came to my eyes and I quietly wept. I was overcome with the realization that in death he had still sought what he had been denied in life: nearness to his mother and father. For a moment, I shared his grief and then it was over. I realized that in this simple act, the character of this great man was demonstrated once again. "Don't be a

victim and never give up!” He was never a victim and he NEVER gave up; in the end, he obtained what he had desired.

As our election takes place on my 65th birthday, I realize that Sir Winston was 65 when he became prime minister of England the first time. He was 76 when he resumed the same office in October 1951. One is never too old to serve in a great cause and when you refuse to be a victim and when you never give up, all of life prepares you to serve your country. Youth is attractive but it is often not the source of the strength of character which is worthy of being trusted with great responsibility.

In *The Duel: 10 May -31 July 1940: The Eighty-Day Struggle Between Churchill and Hitler*, Dr. John Lukacs (Ticknor and Fields, New York, 1991) states:

“...One of the essential differences between Hitler and Churchill was this: the former was a nationalist, the latter a patriot. (During the last one hundred years these words have become regrettably confused, perhaps especially in American usage, where we speak of a superpatriot when what we mean is a supernationalist.)...We may perhaps go even further. We may recognize that while Hitler was a man of ideas, Churchill was, rather, a man of principles. (‘A categorical idea,’ the old Metternich once wrote in a letter, ‘is like a fixed gun...It is dangerous for those who stand or move along the line of its trajectory. Principles, on the other hand, may be compared to a gun that can turn around and fire at untruth in every direction.’” (p. 50)

In a footnote, Dr. Lukacs stated:

“When Dr. Johnson said that ‘patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel,’ he meant nationalism, a word that did not appear in the English language until more than sixty years after his departure from the world...patriotism is essential defensive, while nationalism is aggressive, and that the former is deeper rooted than the latter. Patriotism is not a substitute for a religious faith, whereas nationalism often is. It often fills the spiritual and even emotional needs of uprooted men. It is often the result of hatred; and as Chesterton wisely said, it is not love (which is personal and particular) but hatred that unties men -- something that Hitler instinctively understood. ‘The jingo nationalist,’ as Churchill’s faithful supporter Alfred Duff Cooper once wrote, ‘is always the first to denounce his fellow countrymen as traitors’ -- a truth very applicable to how Hitler and his party saw and dealt with their domestic opponents.” (footnote, p. 50)

While Churchill was a politician, he acted more like a prophet. The July 16, 1995, *New York Times Book Review*’s cover page is entitled “Rethinking Churchill.” Two new books on Churchill and/or his family are reviewed. In his review of Norman Rose’s *Churchill*, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger contrasted the hero with the superstar, sadly much of what he said applies to politicians today. He said:

“Our age finds it difficult to come to grips with figures like Winston Churchill. The political leaders with whom we are familiar generally aspire to be superstars rather than heroes. The distinction is crucial. Superstars strive for approbation; heroes walk alone. Superstars crave consensus; heroes define themselves by the judgment of a future they see it as their task to bring about. Superstars seek success in a technique for eliciting support; heroes pursue success as the outgrowth of inner values.

“The modern political leader rarely ventures to comment in public without having tested his views on focus groups, if indeed he does not derive them from a focus group. To a man like Churchill, the very concept of focus groups would have been unimaginable.

“Thus in the space of a generation, Churchill, the quintessential hero, has been transformed from the mythic to the nearly incomprehensible. Twice in his career he crossed to the other side in the House of Commons, in effect joining the opponents of his previous associates. Such an act is generally considered political suicide if undertaken even once. Out of office for nearly a decade, he returned as the embodiment of British determination during his country’s ultimate crisis. How is one to explain such a career? Deep conviction or unbridled ambition? Principle or opportunism? Our time leans to the second interpretation, all the more so as it has little understanding for the certitudes of the generation whose formative experience took place before World War I...

“The ultimate test of statesmanship -- and Churchill was the dominant British statesman of his period -- is a combination of insight and courage. Insight leads to assessments that define a society’s freedom of action, while courage enables the statesman to act on his convictions before they are generally understood. Great statesman operate on the outer margin of their society’s capabilities; weak statesman tend to be overwhelmed by events.” (“With Faint Praise”, Henry A Kissinger, *The New York Times Book Review*, July 16, 1995, p. 7)

America is in desperate need of heroes and mostly she is offered “superstars”. Politicians often fall victim to the judgment that they promote superstars, who “seek success in a technique for eliciting support”, rather than providing heroes, who “pursue success as the outgrowth of inner values”. The Kingdom of God is built by prophets, not by politicians. The essential difference between the prophet and the politician is: The politician tells the people what they want to hear and takes them where they want to go; the prophet tells the people what they need to hear and takes them where they ought to go.

In *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years*, Gilbert Martin reports:

“His dynamic personality and outspokenness had gained him many enemies...Each (Prime Minister) had turned to him, and given him high office. But each had also expressed qualms about him, for they feared his courage, decisiveness and

honesty...They loved listening to him in the House, look on him as a star turned, and settle down in the stalls with anticipatory grins. But for leadership, they would turn him down every time.”

I am grateful for having stood in places where Sir Winston stood; it is my hope that should I live another 25 years beyond my 65th birthday as he did, while I will not lead a country that I will lead a life which will be exemplified by “never being a victim and never giving up” Next week, the American Cemetery at Normandy France.