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Exercising the Heart Part V

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Your Life Your Health

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This is the last article in a five-part series on the exercising of the heart. It is the third article on the heart as a symbol of emotion and caring rather than as the cardiovascular pump. The balance between having only two articles on how to exercise the physical heart and three on exercising the “heart” emotionally and spiritually is intentional, as it must never be forgotten that to be healthy, it is not only important to be physically well but it is important to be emotionally, mentally and spiritually healthy. Also, we must never allow ourselves to reduce humans to a biological organism as their person is not defined by their organs, healthy or not.

Few things mark emotional health as the memories of our childhood, especially the memories of the “songs of comfort” which our mothers sang to us. Recently, as I watched the 1944 movie, “Going my Way,” I was reminded of my mother’s singing of the yodeling melody from the song “Cattle Call” to my brother and me, and of my wife’s singing of “Toora Looa Looal” to our children.

As I watched the conclusion of this wonderful movie, I enjoyed Father O’Mally’s surprising his superior, Father Fitzgibbon, with a visit from Ireland of Fitzgibbon’s elderly mother. The haunting melody of this Irish tune was poignant as the elderly mother of the old priest shuffled across the room to embrace her son, who was speechless. As Bing Crosby sang “Toora Looa Looa” in the background, Father Fitzgibbon simply buried his head in his mother’s embrace. I feel certain that he was weeping softly but it was hard to tell through the blurred vision of my own tears. Listen to the words of “Toora Looa Looa”:

“Over in Killarney
Many years ago,
Me Mither (mother) sang a song to me
In tones so sweet and low. Just a simple little ditty,
In her good ould Irish way,
And I'd give the world if she could sing
That song to me this day.

"Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, hush now, don't you cry!
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, that's an Irish lullaby."

“Oft in dreams I wander
To that cot again,
I feel her arms a-huggin' me
As when she held me then.
And I hear her voice a -hummin'
To me as in days of yore,
When she used to rock me fast asleep
Outside the cabin door.

"Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, hush now, don't you cry!
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, Too-ra-loo-ra-li,
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, that's an Irish lullaby."

Sometimes, it feels that our hearts will burst from the feelings brought back by these memories. But, just as physical exercise keeps our hearts soft and pliable through the rapid heart beat of stress, so our emotional heart remains tender and compassionate as it is exercised with these memories. And, it is a reality of being human that regardless of the character of our mother's they remain the dearest person in our lives. In the heart-wrenching movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, we were reminded that when men were dying, they cried for their mothers.

Yet, it is not only the words and songs of our mothers which enrich our “December years,” it is also the memories of past years. One of the frames of the 1928 silent film *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg* reads, “Let us sing ‘*Gaudeamus Igitur*.’” In 1954, a talking – and indeed, singing -- *Student Prince* shows the Prince, now the King of Karlsburg, riding in his carriage away from the University of Heidelberg to assume his new responsibilities as king. As he is carried away, the students of Heidelberg sing *Gaudeamus Igitur* in the background. In two other movies, both of which celebrate the triumph of the human spirit over ignorance and prejudice, *Gaudeamus Igitur* is featured. In 1951, *People Will Talk* is concluded with the student orchestra of a university medical school performing *Gaudeamus Igitur*. And, in the 1963 movie, *Spencer's Mountain*, the music of *Gaudeamus Igitur* celebrates a father's dream of his son going to college.

While he did not play the role, Mario Lanza sang the title role in the 1954 *Student Prince*. Song after song echoes through the mind from this production. Sigmund Romberg composed most of the music for the *Student Prince* between 1920 and 1924, while Dorothy Donnelly wrote the lyrics. Even those of us who cannot carry a tune with our voice can play the music flawlessly in our mind. The lyrics and melody of “Golden Days” celebrates the wonder of life with the words:

“Golden days in the sunshine of our happy youth
Golden days full of innocence and full of truth.
In our hearts, we remember them all else above,
Golden days full of youth and love.”

As Lanza's magnificent tenor voice reaches the height of a "high C", the lyric and melody celebrates what is best in human experience. The story is a classic. The King of Karlsburg sends his rigid and arrogant grandson – a Prussian Pickle, he is called -- to the University of Heidelberg to learn the graces of life, where the young Prince also learns deep and profound lessons. In his first class, the Professor of Ancient History asks the Prince to name a figure of great significance in the pre-Christian era. The Prince named Alexander the Great. to which, the Professor replied, "Ah, but Aristotle was opening the minds of men." The Prince retorted, "Can you name anyone more powerful than Alexander?" And, the Professor, to the discomfiture of the Prince, responded, "The Gorilla!" The education of this aristocratic young man had begun.

In turn, the Prince learns about loyalty, love and life. He learns that the quality of a man comes from within, not without. He learns that the measure of a man is his character, not his title or position. In his learning, there is echoed the lament of Dr. Martin Luther King who looked forward to the day when his son "would be judged by his character rather than by the color of his skin."

At one point, the Student Prince is tempted to abandon his responsibilities and to do what he thinks will make him happy. Fortunately, he learns the lesson that happiness can only be found in fulfilling one's responsibilities. As the Prince, now the King, visits Heidelberg for the last time, he speaks with Kathy – his one true love. On his way to be married as an affair of state, the young King assures Kathy that she is his only love. She wisely corrects him and tells him that she is his "first love." Kathy smiles as she sends him away, but tears flow down her cheeks as he turns away for the last time. The King joins his mentor in his carriage. And, as they ride away, the refrain *Gaudeamus Igitur* is heard in the background.

*Gaudeamus igitur
Iuvenes dum sumus;
Post iucundam iuventutem
Post molestam senectutem
Nos habit humus...*

The words mean:

Let us live, then, and be glad
While young life's before us!
'After youthful pastime had,
After old age hard and sad,
Earth will slumber o'er us...

Brief is life, and
Briefly shall be ended..."

Wise words. Multiple other stanza's celebrate the university life of young students, but all reflect the wisdom of Solomon who wrote in Ecclesiastes: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Perhaps we can teach another generation to seek happiness within the constraints of duty, honor, responsibility and decency. Perhaps we can all remember our Creator in the days of our youth, and when

the days of our youth are gone, we can remember those Golden Days, which will then warm our hearts and lives always. I can hear the words now in my mind, *Gaudeamus igitur....*

Exercise your heart when you are young with experiences of worth and of eternal value. Then when you are old that exercise can be repeated again and again. It is in this way that the exercise of the physical heart has ultimate value for you are then whole with a strong, healthy heart that loves greatly.

Remember, it is your life and it is your health.