

LITERARY
PATCHWORK

JOHN D. BOENKE

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John D. Boenke was born in 1926 in Rossford, Ohio and grew up during the Great Depression. He served in the U. S. Army in 1946 - 47 in the Medical Corps. In 1951 he received a degree of Bachelor of Science in Physics from the University of Michigan. After college, Mr. Boenke worked in research and engineering for the General Electric Company. Later he was the Manager of an engineering test laboratory for Lau Blower Company, then Chief Engineer for Halsey Taylor Water Cooler Corp. and Senior Design Engineer for The Werner Ladder Company. Before retiring in 1989, Mr. Boenke also owned and operated a small motel in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Since retiring, Mr. Boenke has been interested in reading and studying in the areas of Cosmology, Theoretical Physics and Philosophy. In addition, he has an interest in the origins of religions. He has privately published several short stories and some poetry.

Introduction:

This book consists of a variety of short stories written at various times over the years for a variety of reasons.

Jocko Runs A Race
or
One Should Always Look Ones Best
by
John D. Boenke

Jocko awoke suddenly; it was already light. He sat up in bed and exclaimed, "I'm late." He dressed quickly, took a slice of bread and buttered it. Hurrying out the door as he ate, he left the house. Jocko was going to run in the race this day at the town square, but it was almost starting time already.

As he walked swiftly along the street, he passed the Manicure Shop. The Manicurist was standing in the front doorway and greeted him, "Good morning, Jocko. Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I am going to run in the race to day, but I am late."

"Ah, that will be fun, but your hands and nails are a sight. You should have a manicure. One must always look ones best."

"I have no time for that now. Perhaps after the race I can see you. I cannot stop, or I will completely miss the race."

"That is no problem," she offered, "I can do it as we walk along. Here give me your hand."

Jocko did not have any reason to refuse, so the two of them continued toward the square. In the next block they passed the Barber Shop. The Barber was just opening and called to them, "Where are you two off to this beautiful morning?"

Jocko called back, "I am going to run in the race today."

"But your hair is a mess. You need a haircut. Let me do it for you now. One must always look ones best."

"I will come back after the race for a haircut. I cannot take the time now, as I am late."

"That is no problem," replied the barber, "I can do it as we go." So he grabbed his scissors and fell in behind Jocko snipping at his hair as they proceeded.

Farther on they passed the Tailor Shop, and the Tailor shouted, "Hello, my friends. What is the occasion for you to be scurrying along the sidewalk as you are?"

Jocko shouted back, "I am going to be running in the race today, and I am hurrying to the square as I am late."

"But why all the entourage you have with you?"

“Well, I have no time to wait, but the manicurist must do my nails and the barber must do my hair. So they work as we go.”

“But stop,” insisted the Tailor, “your shirt is frayed and needs sewing. I will do it for you now as One must always look ones best.

“No, I have not time now. Perhaps after the race.”

“Oh it needs doing now,” answered the Tailor, “But that is all right. I will come along with you and sew as we hurry along.”

The group of four continued down the street and had almost reached the square when the Cobbler came out of his shop. He looked startled and confronted them, “My goodness, what a strange group you make. What is the reason for running along the sidewalk like this?”

Jocko again explained, “I am running in the race today, and I am having my nails done, my hair cut and my shirt sewed, since One should always look ones best, but I am late and must hurry to the square.”

“Ah,” replied the Cobbler. “You are right, but your shoes need shining. Just a moment and I will shine them for you.”

“No, I cannot stop now. I see them collecting at the starting line now. I must hurry on.”

“Very well, said the Cobbler. “But I will come with you and shine them on the way.”

So the five persons scrambled along together and arrived at the starting line just in time for the official to say, “Line up.” Jocko stood at the staring line and the others hovered around him doing their best to hurry and finish their jobs.

“Are you ready, Jocko?” asked the Official.

“Yes,” Jocko assured the Official.

“No, no,” cried the Manicurist, the Barber, the Tailor and the Cobbler. “We are not ready. We have not finished our jobs.”

“I am sorry,” continued the Official, “It is time to start. I must be on time and start the race.” With that, he fired his little gun in the air and everyone started off. The other racers had looked amused as Jocko had arrived with his four friends, but they started running. Jocko ran as best he could with the four others around him, but the appearance of the group was very strange. They looked like a giant crab scuttling along down the race track.

The onlookers saw this and began to laugh. The farther Jocko and his friends went, the more they laughed. The other runners heard all this and turned to look also. They too, were overcome by the strange appearance of the group struggling and scuffling to keep moving. The other runners could not resist and doubled up with laughter, also. Even as Jocko passed them by they could not recover enough to run. Jocko however, kept moving along. He almost reached the end when the best runner forced himself to get back into the race and came charging after Jocko and his team. But it was not enough. Jocko crossed the finish line first and turned to face

the crowd which was now roaring with laughter.

As the Official approached, the Manicurist, the Barber, the Tailor and the Cobbler all finished their obligations for Jocko's appearance and stepped away.

"Well," began the Official, "That was most unusual, Jocko. But you are undoubtedly the winner as you did cross the finish line ahead of all the others. I declare you the winner, and I am pleased to award you this ribbon. I must say it certainly looks good on your neat shirt, and you make an excellent impression as a champion. Congratulations."

"Thank you," replied Jocko modestly, "But I am always careful about my appearance. One must always look ones best."

John D. Boenke
March 1994

GONDO

Once upon a time there was an average man named Gondo. Gondo lived an average life, and had an average family, and an average job. He was neither very good nor was he very bad. But he did not go to church, and he did not proclaim how good he was or how bad everyone else was. He helped others when he could, but mostly he tended to his own business and let others know they should treat him the same way.

When Gondo was through living, he left the physical world to make his way into the situations which follow. He presented himself to Saint Peter at the Pearly Gates, but Saint Peter rebuked him, "Gondo, you are only an average man. You never did any great deeds. You never made great sacrifices, but most important, you didn't go to church and bow down to God. Therefore you may not enter here. You must go to--to--- "

"I understand," replied Gondo. "Don't distress yourself, and don't bother with me. I will find the way."

Gondo set off in the opposite direction, and after a short while came to the GATES OF HELL. He rang the bell, and the devil came out smiling.

"Ah! Gondo! I've been expecting you. I know you are one of mine. Welcome to HELL".

"Thank you, devil, but now that I am here, what must I do?"

"There is only one thing I really need to know," answered the devil. "What is the thing you dislike the most. Tell me what it is, if you please."

"Well, if you really need to know, the thing I dislike most is being too hot. Anything else is all right."

"Good! Then come along," and the devil showed Gondo the way to a large fiery furnace. "In here is where I will put you." Thereupon the devil pushed Gondo into the fiery furnace, and shut the door.

Gondo looked around at all the other poor souls in the furnace. He looked at the glowing walls of the furnace, and the red embers rolling around beneath his feet which were now very much too hot.

"Well," thought Gondo to himself, "If this is it, this is it." He turned to a neighboring person and said, "Aren't we lucky. Think of all those poor people battling the wind and cold in Cleveland. At least we don't have to shiver and shovel snow all day."

His neighbor's faced brightened, and he replied, "You're right. I remember all those cold days and bitter winds. How much better it is to be warm."

"Right," added Gondo, "and we are free to dance and run and have fun. There are no restrictions on the things we may do." So saying he engaged several others standing nearby, and they started a game of tag. Others noticed the activity, and in their own group began a game of hide-and-go-seek. Soon everyone was playing some game or sport and enjoying a great time.

Suddenly, the furnace door opened and the devil stepped in with a very serious look on his face. "Gondo," he rasped, "Come with me." Gondo followed the devil out of the fiery furnace, but as he left, he turned to wave and smile to everyone who was running and playing.

Outside, the devil turned to him and in a firm voice confronted his guest, "Gondo, I do not think you have been fair with me. Now tell me again. What is the thing you dislike the most?"

With an expansive smile Gondo admitted, "What I really don't like is being cold. Coldness is the worst of all."

"Fine," said the devil, "Follow me." Again Gondo followed along until they came to a door in the hallway. The devil opened it and quickly pushed Gondo through it, closing it firmly behind him. Gondo found himself in an immense space, deep in snow, and with a cold, biting wind. (Cold? In HELL? Yes indeed! I hear the weather compared to it every year!)

Gondo walked up to another soul and began a conversation, "Aren't we lucky to be here? No messy sweating here, and we certainly won't be burned. Look at all the snow. Let's make a snowman." He started rolling a ball of snow, and others followed along to help him. Soon everyone was working on snowmen in groups, trying to make the biggest or most unusual one. Then Gondo began a game of fox-and-geese and a large crowd joined in. Just when the laughter and noise was at its height, the devil appeared.

"Gondo!! I must see you back in the hallway." Gondo followed the devil back to where they had come from, but Gondo waved to all the persons building snowmen, and gave them a "thumbs up" as he left.

"Now Gondo this has gone far enough. I am through playing with you. Tell me once more. What do you dislike most?"

"All my life I have disliked being hungry. Nothing is worse than having a gnawing pain in my stomach and no food."

"At last," cried the devil. "I have just the place for you." and he led Gondo down another hallway to a door at the far end.

Again, he opened the door and forced Gondo into the space. Gondo found himself in a large room where everyone sat at dinner tables, which were completely bare. There was a great moaning and groaning rising from the crowd. Gondo took a seat and began talking to those around him, "Aren't we the luckiest of all? We do not have worry about being overweight, or heart attacks, or too much cholesterol. What could be nicer than not having to be concerned about choking on a fish bone or devouring bad chemicals in our food. Tell me," he asked those around him, "What are the worst things about eating you can think of?" Soon the table was buzzing with conversation. Each tried to outdo the other in enumerating all the bad food they had ever eaten, and how glad they were not to have to do it anymore.

Other tables heard the claims and chimed in with their own thoughts. Soon all were busy talking and had forgotten the pains in their stomachs. As the joyous sound of conversation waxed louder, the devil suddenly appeared. He was extremely agitated, and as he glared at Gondo, he pointed and shouted, "YOU! OUT!"

Gondo obediently got up and headed out with the devil, but turned and waved goodbye to his new friends as he retreated.

In the hallway, the devil stormed at Gondo, "I will give you just one more chance. You are not following the rules. You must be punished. Now tell me, WHAT DO YOU LIKE THE LEAST?"

Gondo stopped to think, for several minutes he mused, then finally stated, "The situation I like least of all is having to eat, when I am not hungry."

"ALL RIGHT," raged the devil, "COME!"

Gondo complied. Down two hallways and around a corner they arrived at another large door. The devil, very unceremoniously, jerked open the door and prodded Gondo in. The devil was feeling very unhappy and not his usual suave self.

This time Gondo found another large room with persons sitting at dinner tables, but the tables were loaded down with a feast comprised of many succulent and tasty foods. No one appeared happy. Everyone was complaining of being full, not having an appetite, and not being able to eat another bite. Gondo sat and looked at the food. He

took a healthy portion, and turned to his tablemates, explaining, "I am not hungry either, but I will eat what I can. Why don't we sing a song while we are eating, or does anyone know a story? I heard one the other day. It goes like this."

Gondo proceeded to tell stories, encourage singing, and showed such interest in the others, they were soon all eating and drinking, laughing, singing and telling such great stories. The mood was infectious, and the rest of the tables started doing the same thing. In no time at all, the hall echoed with sounds of joy replacing the somber laments prior to Gondo's arrival.

In the midst of all the hilarity, a sudden burst of light produced the devil, who was bouncing up and down and beside himself with rage. Grasping Gondo by the arm, he dragged him from the hall, into the passageways, and to the main office. (Where hardly ever, anyone gets to go.)

The devil sat Gondo down in a chair, then sat himself behind his impressive big desk and glowered, as only the devil can glower. "You, Gondo, are more trouble than you are worth to me." he raged. "You are upsetting everything. I must find a way to make you suffer. Why are you doing this? You are making a HEAVEN out of my HELL. Why don't you follow the rules?"

Gondo answered slowly and calmly, "I make my own rules, and whether it is HEAVEN or HELL, is all in one's own perception."

John D. Boenke

MR. CROCKET BUILDS

A ROCKET

For all future Astronauts

By John D. Boenke
March 1995

Henry was as bored as a boy could be. He had played in his sand box, and played in his tree. But now he was done and just sat and stared. What new thing could happen, what fun could be shared? Something as happy as climbing his tree, but he just didn't know what that thing might be.

His dad and mom were out in the yard. If he went out to see them and cried real hard, perhaps they would tell him what new thing to do. Or maybe they wouldn't. That could happen, too.

He re-tied his sneakers (they were always undone), and taking his ball, went looking for fun. He first saw his dad working by the back fence. He was cutting the weeds. They looked very dense. Henry watched for a minute, then decided it best not to bother his dad. He looked quite a mess. Next he looked at his mom, who was raking some leaves. That wasn't fun either. They should stay on the trees.

Henry noticed a noise from the neighbor next door. It started out little, but then it grew more. It sounded unusual like a grunch and a scree-e-e. He went to his fence and crawled up to see what was making the grunch and high pitched screeee - eeee.

Mr. Crocket, an inventor, was working alone. He had some plastic and metal and stone. There were pieces of junk and a desk and a tire. Some nails, nuts and bolts, and even some wire. When he hammered the metal to form it and shape it, the grunch of a noise was glad to escape it. His motorized cutter did much of the work, but it screeeed as it spun, it was a strange quirk.

Henry watched for a minute then called to the man, "Hey Mr. Crocket, what'cha doin'? I'll help if I can."

Mr. Crocket looked up; took a wrench from his pocket. "Hi there Henry! Come on over. I'm building a rocket."

Henry was over the fence in half of a flash, and landed on the metal with a resounding crash. He picked himself up, (he was purty durned tough), and started in looking at all the good stuff. "Hey Mr. Crocket, this is neat and exciting. What's next to be done? And what's all that writing?"

"Those are the plans, and here's what we're doing. That wood over there needs some cutting and gluing." The two set in working on metal and wood. By the end of the day it began to look good. The rocket took shape and stood firm and strong. The work went quite quickly. It didn't take long.

"That's enough for today, we'll finish tomorrow. I've got enough stuff, I won't have to borrow. Tomorrow after breakfast, you come on outside, we'll finish her up and go for a ride." That evening tired Henry went right straight to sleep, he slept long, and quiet, and certainly deep.

The next day was sunny and just nice for soaring. Henry knew right away, it wouldn't be boring. Mr. Crocket was working when Henry got there. His whistling and singing were filling the air. "Well Henry, are you ready? Let's go while it's cool. I just need to finish putting in all the fuel."

They climbed in the rocket, and fastened the snaps, on their seats, and their goggles, and even their caps. And then they were off in a swoosh and a glide, and Henry looked out and could see far and wide. He could see his own house, but not many people, though right straight ahead was the downtown church steeple. "Look out! Mr. Crocket. Turn right or turn left!" But the rocket went straight and the steeple was cleft. They went out of control and tumbled around, and next they were bumping along on the ground.

"Wow," said Henry, "What happened up there? We gave the church pigeons a truly great scare."

Mr. Crocket replied, "The turn-thing came out. We can't fly without it, of that there's no doubt, but don't worry or fret," assured Mr. Crocket, "I've got the rocket socket right here in my pocket." With a few quick twists, he knew what to do, and shortly the rocket was as good as brand new, so then they went off, and again rose to the sky, but they didn't go far nor yet go too high.

They had a nice ride and zoomed over town. By now a crowd watched as they zipped up and down. They flew up the river and circled the park and had a great time till it began to get dark. Then they finally went back to land their great rocket, but midst the junk in the yard, it was not easy to dock it.

So Henry went home to eat and to sleep. He slept all the night not making a peep. The following day Mr. Crocket and he were as good as could be. They went to the church, and climbed to the steeple. They fixed it just right, and did it so well, they pleased the church people. Afterward, Henry remembered the rocket and Crocket, whenever he flew or used a large socket.

A CONFEDERATE FUNERAL

Today, I went to a Confederate funeral. That is, it was a graveside service with full Confederate military honors. It impressed me enough that I decided to write about it to share some of the experience with others. Several years ago, in the course of various committee activities, I met a gentleman, Charles by name, who was always a gentle and considerate person. Over the few years that I knew him, I learned a little about his background and interests. He was semi-retired, had lived in Brazil for quite a while, was married but separated, had grown up locally (Southwest Virginia), and was interested in Civil War lore.

A major activity for him was the searching out and documenting of Civil War graveyards. (Here they say "The War Between The States", which even I, as a transplanted Northerner, prefer.) This interest had grown out of his personal interest in his genealogy, and the efforts he made to trace his own roots. I did not realize the extent of his efforts in this respect until today, although he often talked about his work.

Several months ago my friend died rather unexpectedly. There was a memorial service later, and we, his friends, commiserated in losing him. Life went on, and there were only occasional thoughts of Charles until yesterday, six months later, I accidentally noticed a brief article in the obituaries (which I seldom read) that the Fincastle Rifles were going to have a graveside service for Charles with Full Confederate Military Honors. This intrigued me; so my wife and I decided to go, not only to honor and remember Charles, but to experience the Military funeral as well.

Another friend traveled with us and showed us the way to the little community where Charles had grown up and to the small cemetery where he was buried. The site is a drive of approximately an hour. When we got there our friend directed us around the community and pointed out several landmarks which had been important to Charles. I was amazed at the small old houses back in lovely old hills and woods. Some of the buildings had fallen into disuse and were in general disrepair. But many, though in poor shape, were still serving their occupants nobly and well. As we proceeded away from the main road, which was itself a narrow two-lane blacktopped thoroughfare, and up the country roads into the hills; the byways became ever narrower and less well paved. As we came almost to the end of the road (single lane - two ruts) a small, well weather cabin was pointed out to us. "There, that is where Charles lived until he was eight and his father died. Then the family was split up and Charles with two or three others went to the county orphanage." I marveled at the spot. This was true Appalachia in it's rawest beauty and weariness. The little houses were barely big enough for two, much less than for a family of a dozen or more. This is where this gentle person came from. It was still populated by his kin near and distant, and close friends.

We traveled back to the cemetery which was entered through a farm gate and over another two rut mud road to a spot where we found a place to park in a pasture. Walking from the car to the little fenced-in two or three acre graveyard was hazardous. The space was usually occupied by cows which were careless in their personal habits and left their calling cards randomly distributed.

A fairly large size group of people had accumulated, talking, milling around, getting acquainted and re-acquainted with others, some of whom had come great distances for the event. We talked with acquaintances also, until promptly on the hour, The Fincastle Rifles formed up in ranks two by two and came quietly marching into the cemetery and proceeded to a low knoll overlooking the entire space. There they formed two ranks and stood at attention with their rifles. A minister entered reading scriptures and took a position by the grave marker. Another contingent of the Fincastle Rifles serving as pall bearers entered, led by their officers and carrying a simulated coffin formed by an army cot draped with flags and wreaths. (Remember, Charles had died six months previously, had been cremated, and the urn was already interred in the gravesite.) They proceeded to the grave and placed the cot in front of the headstone. and also stood at attention. They had been followed by several ladies and a gentleman dressed in WBTS era clothing who took positions by the grave next to the fence.

The minister continued reading scriptures and appropriate other readings, offering prayers and generally doing the ritual required by his particular religion. When he was finished, the bagpiper of the Confederate troops played "Amazing Grace". A poem Charles had written about the sleeping confederate soldiers was read by one of the costumed ladies. Friends and family were invited by the General (he was wearing a single gold star, so that is my assumption), to say a few words if they wished. Only one person took the opportunity, and spoke very highly of Charles and what he had meant to him and his family. No one else felt comfortable offering to say anything, and the General went on to command the Rifles to load, aim and fire three volleys. These were black powder rifles and required half a minute or so between firings to reload. This was followed by the flag folding ceremony by the pall bearers. First the USA flag, then the Confederate flag were carefully and respectfully folded in the prescribed fashion. The bagpiper played "Shenandoah" and "Dixie" for these proceedings.

As the bagpiper played another number, the flags were carried by the General and his Aide to the main surviving relative. They delivered the flags to her, saluted her and returned to the gravesite. A young but earnest trooper played taps on the trumpet, and the General dismissed the soldiers in military style to complete the ceremony. I believe I have the details in order, but if not, at least you get the flavor of the proceedings.

There were many notable parts to this whole procedure. The troops were probably very typical of the soldiers of the time. They were all descendants of WBTS military men. Some of their uniforms were not completely consistent, and they did not show the keen edge of thoroughly trained infantrymen. But what they lacked in polish, they made up in pride, spirit and intensity. The ladies and gentlemen in WBTS era costumes added to the realism and conveyed a feeling for the southern pride displayed there. Even their silence when given an opportunity to extol Charles, added to the sense of southern manners and the propriety of public actions. The onlookers were of all types from the sophisticated to the neighboring small (and probably impoverished) farmer.

As I looked over the group of a hundred and fifty or so persons who had come to witness and participate in the event, I began wondering what each of them got out of it. I had come out of respect for Charles and to see his community and his resting place. The religious parts of the service held no meaning for me. They were intended to aid those who believed in them by furthering their process of accepting and coping with the loss of their friend and relative. Many joined in the prayers and paid attention to the readings in silent contemplation. Their mute participation was the acceptable part of the ritual for them. The military proceedings also aided the military contingent by recognizing their fallen fellow soldier, and resolving their duty towards him. By being there and conducting the prescribed rituals they could feel a sense of oneness with him and the collective military establishment.

It feels to me a main reason most people had for coming to the funeral, was to continue and enhance their sense of "belonging" to some group. That may have been the family group, the friends group, the military group, the religious group, or any other of many unnamed or unknowable groups. Being part of and identifying with various sectors of the human race gives us all a feeling of support and reassurance. This funeral, like any other funeral, did nothing for the dead person. The only benefits were for the survivors who could feel a little better about themselves for having been respectful and caring for a short while.

Reading more about Charles from the literature available at the reception following the funeral, I learned much more about him than he ever volunteered about himself. It turns out he, with a few helpers, was a major factor in finding hundreds of WBTS cemeteries, finding thousands of graves many of which were military men, documenting their names and locations, and searching out and informing relatives of the sites. He was instrumental in using a government program in assisting relatives to receive from the government a veterans headstone and getting them properly placed after such a long time of disregard. He helped re-instate such rituals as "washing the stone" before it was placed on the gravesite. The local sons of WBTS veterans organizations respected and honored Charles for doing all of this to help them. Much of what he found was turned over to libraries and genealogic associations. A treasure of knowledge was found and preserved by his efforts. His community was truly grateful to him and sorrowed by his loss.

My thoughts turned to what Charles might have thought about all of this "to do". I can not help but believe that even as he labored in collecting this soon to be lost WBTS information, that he may have fantasized about being recognized some day for finding it. I hope his fantasies were as good as the real thing. He would have been very pleased, I think. Still, he most likely would have said in his modest way, "It was not work, it was a pleasure to do."

This has been my tribute and my way of coping with the loss of Charles.

John D. Boenke

Sylvie Renee and the Canoe Ride

One day Sylvie Renee was busy in the back yard making mud pies. She made nice thick pies that stuck together very well. It took a lot of work, but she enjoyed it. Suddenly, she heard her mother calling, "Sylvie Renee, come here and see who has come to visit you." Sylvie Renee was a respectful girl, and always came when her mother called her, so she came running into the house.

In the kitchen she found her mother and Oma, too. Oma was Sylvie Renee's grandmother who was always doing nice things for Sylvie Renee. "Sylvie Renee," said her mother, "Oma has come to take you on an outing. She wants to take you for a canoe ride, if you want to go."

"Oh yes!" said Sylvie Renee, although she didn't quite know what a canoe ride was. "May I go Mommy?" asked Sylvie Renee.

"Yes," said her mother, "But only if you promise to do everything Oma tells you to do, and you obey her all the time."

"I promise", said Sylvie Renee, although she wasn't sure what that meant. Quickly she washed her hands and face, and changed into a clean dress. Then she kissed her mother goodbye and went with Oma to the car.

Sylvie Renee got into the front seat of Oma's car. She fastened her seat belt and off they went. Soon they came to the lake. After they parked the car, Sylvie Renee held Oma's hand, and they walked through the parking lot down to the beach. There Sylvie Renee saw a beautiful silver boat. It was long and skinny. "This is the canoe, Sylvie Renee", said Oma. "Come on. Lets get some paddles and life jackets. They found a big paddle and life jacket for Oma, and a little paddle and life jacket for Sylvie Renee.

I don't want to put on that jacket." said Sylvie Renee, "It looks scratchy, and it will get in my way."

"Oh, but that is one of the rules", answered Oma. "We always wear life jackets when we are out in a boat. It is the safe thing to do" She added. "Here let me help you."

Soon they were ready to start. "Now we always walk right in the middle of the bottom of the canoe so it doesn't tip," instructed Oma. The end of the canoe was on the beach, and it was easy for Sylvie Renee to step into it. It was more difficult to step over the seats and bars in the canoe, and still stay in the middle of it. Oma held the canoe steady while Sylvie Renee walked to the front, and sat down in her seat. She held on to the sides of the canoe for support as she stepped along. Then Oma got in, and they were ready to go.

Oma pushed the canoe away from the beach and they floated along on the lake. The canoe moved very quietly and smoothly across the water. Sylvie Renee tried paddling too. Sometimes she paddled on the right side, sometimes she paddled on the left side. It didn't seem to matter much where she paddled, Oma seemed to be able to make the canoe go along very well anyway.

Then she tried waving the paddle straight up in the air. That didn't do any good either, and Oma spoke to her right away, "Sylvie, that is not the way to paddle. The flat part has to go down into the water to push against it and make the canoe go." "Besides," she added, "putting the paddle up in the air makes the canoe more tippy, and that is not the way we should do it."

Sylvie Renee put the paddle down into the water again, because she wanted to do it right. Also, she did it because Oma wanted her to. Maybe that was what Mommy meant when she made Sylvie Renee promise to do everything Oma said to do. After a while Sylvie Renee got tired of paddling, and just sat and watched the water go by.

As she looked into the water, she saw little fish swimming along. Once she saw a great big one, also. When they were going through some lily pads, she saw a big frog

jump off a lily pad and dive into the water. Sylvie Renee laughed as the frog swam away.

They floated along near the shore, and waved to people standing there. They passed a boy sitting by the side of the water with a fishing pole. He did not seem to be catching anything, and was leaning back almost asleep.

Suddenly a fish jumped right out of the water just in front of the canoe. It startled Sylvie Renee, but then she laughed. Oma laughed too. It seemed such a short time until they were paddling back to the beach, and the end of the ride.

As they headed into the shore, there was a duck sitting at the edge of the water busy preening its feathers. It didn't see them coming, and only at the last moment it jumped up and ran away squawking. That made Sylvie Renee laugh again

When they landed the canoe, Sylvie Renee carefully got out of the shiny boat remembering to step in the middle of the bottom as Oma had told her before. Sylvie Renee helped put away the paddles and life jackets, then took Oma's hand and walked to the car with her so they could go home.

They went to Oma's house first, and Opa waved to them as they drove in. "Opa," called Sylvie Renee, "We had a canoe ride, and saw fish, and a frog and we landed the canoe at the duck."

Opa smiled and said, "Don't you mean you landed at the dock?"

"No," answered Sylvie Renee, "I mean the duck. There was a duck on the beach, and we almost hit it when we came to shore." Opa laughed and laughed at that. Then they sat down and had some cookies that Oma just happened to have. They drank some milk, and talked about canoes. Soon it was time for Sylvie Renee to go home. As she got into Oma's car, she thought to herself, "I have lots of things to tell Mommy and Daddy at dinner this evening." She smiled because it had been such a lovely day.

March 1995
John D. Boenke

IRRELEVANT MATERIAL

God was upset. There was trouble in paradise. Everything had been going so nicely and now this. It had planned this little experiment so well, too. The plan was to have been a glorious display of the evolution of one massive structure starting with just a little handful of energy. Does nothing work right anymore?

Of course, the condition was probably Its own fault. God had not paid a lot of attention to the progress of the experiment for quite a while. The beginning had started well enough. When the energy first started to expand and condense, the vision was quite spectacular. The basic matter particles had formed rather quickly. Then more slowly the more complex particles formed and even simple atoms. God had turned away at that time, since there were many other things to tend to, and It knew there would be a long period of chaotic interaction before anything interesting happened.

Now God had returned to the universe. It let its awareness scan all the far reaches of space. For the most part the experiment was progressing well. The galaxies with billions of stars were in various stages of growth and decay. The black holes were beginning to form nicely, although the universe was still in the expanding phase. Heavier elements were gradually building up by means of fusion in the large stars, but the heaviest ones were still under 150 atomic weight and many of them were unstable in the environment in which they were located.

During this scanning of the universe It discovered the malfunction in one of the lesser elements. Carbon! God suddenly realized It should have put more restrictions on carbon, seeing as that element fell into a transition area of the simple atoms. This advanced state was too late to do anything about the situation. As God looked, It detected multitudinous sites of some infection located on the surface of small planets which had a surplus of water in their constituents. There were huge greenish spots to be found on many of them, and there was evidence of massive amounts of crazy complex molecules growing and reproducing there.

Quickly, God visited the green spots. They were all basically similar variations on the carbon theme, while some were very simple, others became quite complex. God finally chose one of the more advanced colonies, and settled down to watch it. The development was fascinating. The green spots evidently spawned other kinds of growths which were mobile, and not necessarily green.

These growths were all associated with the carbon atom. The structure was a mess, but that was not the worst part, some of these carbon compound structures had developed rudimentary awareness and were actually trying to control their environment. What a ridiculous thing to have happen. This was too much. What did those particles aim to do anyway? They had no knowledge of the workings of things. They were certain to mess up the whole experiment and make it useless, unless God did something about them. But what to do? That was the central problem. These Carbonisms lived on the green growing material and each other. Those Carbonisms which were the most advanced were the formations presenting the greatest problem.

As God watched the advanced Carbonisms, they spread out and took over the planet. In turn they tried to destroy each other with varying degrees of success. The viciousness of the Carbonisms increased in proportion to their awareness and knowledge. The confrontations became more and more devastating. Suddenly in a great battle, an explosion took place which was much greater than all the explosions which had preceded it. God realized the little Carbonisms had learned to release some of the energy contained in the larger atoms. This explosion was followed by many more, The later ones were even greater and more devastating than the first ones.

At seeing this development, God felt a great sense of relief. It knew the Carbonisms would soon succeed in destroying themselves and the rest of the aberrations. This would eliminate the green growth problem. That would undoubtedly be the result of all such green growth situations everywhere in the universe. With passing amusement, God turned away to more important tasks knowing that the difficulty would cure itself.

June 15,1996 John D. Boenke

The Philosopher and the Scientist

By John D. Boenke

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Once upon a time there were two brothers. The older one, Phil, was an easy going person who seemed always to know what he was about. Phil appeared to understand people and animals, and have a very accepting attitude to all of life's problems. He could be calm in the midst of crises and always keep his wits about him. His younger brother, Sy (actually Sygmond, but he preferred to be called Sy) was the equal of Phil intellectually, but he took more interest in the why and how of the operation of the farm and of the world in general. Sy was the more active of the two, and was busy all the time with the tasks around their farm which they ran as partners.

Their farm might actually be called a ranch, in spite of the fact it was located in Vermont and the animals they raised were sheep. They had a good many acres, but it was not anything like the mental picture of miles and miles of open land which the term "ranch" evokes in the West. They were in the animal husbandry business just as much as the typical large ranches of Texas though. They raised food crops also, but only for their own use. The main activity of their establishment was raising and harvesting wool from their sheep. They were modern day shepherds.

There was a very good market for their wool since these were Merino sheep which produce some of the finest wool in the world. The two brothers had been in the business together several years. Phil started the business after he graduated from college (Oh yes! They were well trained. Remember I said modern Shepherds) and Sy joined him a couple of years later. They had worked out most of the problems with operating their ranch, but there were some which persisted.

One of the continuing problems was an unacceptably low survival rate among the new born lambs. Let me describe the problem a little. There was a very large barn into which the sheep could come and go as they pleased. This opened onto a lot of about 100 acres which provided grazing, exercise area, and living area for the sheep. The feeding area was next to the barn as was the watering area, although there were also a couple of springs located out on the acreage.

When a ewe was ready to give birth it was often out somewhere in the 100 acres. When it was missed, a search might find it in an awkward situation for tending to its needs and the needs of the lamb. This contributed to the loss of many lambs due to inadequate care in the first moments of life. It was most desirable to have the ewes in the barn at lambing time. It was also inappropriate to keep them all penned up while waiting for the events, because of space requirements and due to the adverse effects resulting from restricting the sheep's movements. The problem then, was to be sure the ewes were in or near the barn at the proper time.

The brothers discussed this problem often, but did not resolve it. It was Phil's contention that the ewes knew what they needed. For them it was a priori information. They were born with instincts, and when they were ready to give birth they did what was natural. The brothers then had to accommodate to the ewes needs and keep intense enough track of them to know exactly when the birth would take place. Phil felt the sheep had to be left to their own ways. He and Sy should only accommodate to what the sheep did to assure they sheep had the best the brothers could manage to provide.

Sy disagreed. He felt the ewes were also affected by a posteriori knowledge in that they had learned their way around the grounds and knew they were safe anywhere therein. They were thus comfortable having the lambs wherever they happened to be. It was then up to Phil and himself to somehow use the current actions of the sheep to cause them to reach the best outcome. This was a problem of making appropriate observations and applying the knowledge gained correctly.

The sheep had no control over their environment, but it can certainly be argued they did not realize it. The two men had provided the fields and barn, the food and water, and all the other needed care of the animals. In the brother's discussions, they were continually concerned with what more they might do to change the sheep's surroundings and thus attain a higher level of survival rate among the newborns. Phil remained of the opinion that they were doing all they could. But no matter how the brothers tried to keep up with them, there were always those ewes which produced their lambs far from the convenience of the barn. Lacking the best care, lambs were lost.

As Sy considered the problem one day, it occurred to him that after a sheep was shorn of its wool, it tended to stay in the barn for greater periods of time to benefit from the warmth the enclosure provided. He decided to try an experiment to assure the ewes would be in the barn at lambing time. Knowing which ewes were pregnant and having a rough estimate of when they would be birthing the young, Sy started a program of shearing the pregnant ewes. Immediately the ewes near lambing time spent more time in the barn and more of their lambs were appearing in, or close to, the barn. The survival rate of lambs climbed and their ranch attained the highest among their counterparts throughout the industry. The experiment was a success. Applying a little reasoning to the facts had produced a course of action which enhanced the success of their operation.

As Sy and Phil discussed the results of the shearing timing, they reached agreement that a priori information is important, but a posteriori information is perhaps even more important. They then realized we are all caught in the situation of not being able to completely control our environment whether we are sheep or people. However, applied knowledge can solve problems, and using the knowledge we glean from our senses is the most practical thing to do. We should also recognize the role of all sources of information whether given or learned and attempt to use them to our best advantage.

Author's footnote: This is mostly a true story. I visited such a "ranch" and even assisted with feeding time. It is fascinating to feed sheep when the temperature is minus 6 Fahrenheit. One quickly pours the food pellets into feeding troughs then moves out of the way with celerity as sheep do not understand the concept "wait". The philosophical aspect of the story is that even sheep have a priori knowledge. They come into the world with a certain set of instincts and behavioral patterns. Left alone without human intervention, they would still survive in the natural world, using whatever knowledge of their environment they accumulated. Because of human intervention, the new knowledge they gain (a posteriori) is different than they would have alone in nature. This affects their behavior perhaps to their detriment. If their experience is changed further, their behavior can also be changed to be more advantageous.

John D. Boenke
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WAFFNORG

By John D. Boenke

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Waffnorg sat quietly in his six dimensional space enjoying the sensations his 100 senses afforded him. He was done with his immediate tasks and had the freedom to be idle, if it pleased him. It pleased him, so Waffnorg sat and did nothing.

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Duane and Helen had walked steadily all afternoon, climbing up a small, gradually sloping mountain into the hinterland. Duane stayed in front while Helen did her best to keep up. This was the third day of their annual vacation climb and they were feeling the stress of three days of rather high energy output. They crested a small rock ledge and reached a spot which seemed pristine. There were no indications anyone else had ever been there. Far in the back country, there had never been much exploration as it appeared not much of value was there. Even the forest was scrubby and consisted of small tough trees. No one had ever found a use for the trees or anything else in the region. This lack of value though made it ideal as a place to come and escape the confusion of modern life. Duane and Helen loved it and the isolation it provided.

"Let's stop here." offered Duane, "It is higher and farther than we have ever gone before. It should be a very peaceful place to spend the night."

"I'm ready whenever you are." Helen managed to say between deep breaths."

They set about making camp and putting up the tent. The cook stove gave a welcome smell of heat and savory food as Helen made the evening meal. Preparations for the night completed, and a meal consumed, found them sitting on a rock watching the sun go down. As it grew darker, there was nothing else to do but to go to bed.

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Waffnorg sat quietly a long time. As he sat, he became aware of a small hole into which his toe (we would call such an appendage a toe) had fallen. He considered the hole with curiosity and realized it was a small imperfection in the fifth dimension, and part of himself was extending into another space. Waffnorg was amused by the aberration, but let it be.

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Duane was the first to rise. Quietly he dressed and went out into the new day. At first he merely enjoyed the clear cool atmosphere of the mountains. Then he suddenly noticed a large formation on the nearby rock wall. It had a very strange shape, dark brown in color and quite hard. Excitedly he called, "Helen, come here and look at this. It wasn't here yesterday, was it?"

In a few minutes Helen appeared from the tent looking rather bleary eyed. "What in the world is that?" she exclaimed. "No, it certainly was not there last night. That is right below where we sat. We surely would have noticed it. Did it grow overnight?"

"I don't know, but we must investigate it. Where is the ax? I want to break off a little piece to take home." Duane went scurrying to find the ax while Helen looked more intently at the object.

She murmured softly to herself as she examined it, "Hmm. Round and smooth, sort of dome shaped, a little shiny, almost like metal, and hard as any rock." She used her hand span to crudely determine the size of the item. Counting hand spans and drawing a little sketch, she recorded the measurements as Duane returned with the ax.

Duane began hacking away, but with no luck. "It is hard and yet a little rubbery at the same time. It is as though it is protected by some invisible sheath. I can't get any of it to come off." he complained. At a loss at what to do next, they sat down and contemplated the formation. They discussed the various possibilities. They reviewed the dimensions and characteristics which Helen had written down, but they could make no sense of the strange object. "We must at least get a picture of it," Helen decided.

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As he contemplated the aberration, Waffnorg felt strange sensations on the toe and was aware of two little three dimensional objects moving around his toe. He sat and watched in amazement. He was able to follow them as they shifted position relative to the toe. The visual sensation came to him in all ranges (which we would call, infrared, visible and ultraviolet) and was similar for him as it would be for us if we looked at a flat sheet of paper, or as it appears when we look at a projected two dimensional picture.

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As Duane began hammering away again, Helen returned to their duffel to get the camera. After she returned and was getting ready to take a picture, the object suddenly disappeared. It didn't just fade, or melt, or show motion of any kind. It just "poof" disappeared, and all that was left was the rock which gave no indication such an object had ever been there.

Helen and Duane looked at each other, nonplused and disturbed. "What happened?" they asked each other. In amazement they examined where the object had been, looking very closely at the rock structure, but nothing indicated the rock was any different than it had been for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years.

"We can't have just imagined it. Can we?" asked Duane, stupefied.

"No, it was really there. We touched it and I have measurements, but no one will believe this. I never got a picture." Helen spoke with remorse in her voice.

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As Waffnorg watched, the little three dimensional objects stopped moving. The Sixth Dimension Person got the impression that the three dimensioners had exhausted their interest in his toe. He felt amusement since the primitive efforts of the three dimensioners had given them less than a thousandth of what he, Waffnorg knew of his toe. He mused to himself, "If they realized what was really happening in the sixth dimension, wouldn't they be surprised?"

Waffnorg lost interest in the situation and decided to withdraw his toe. Actually, he knew it was against the Established Way to interfere in another dimension, but perhaps no one had noticed. Anyway he didn't do it on purpose, the dimensional aberration had been there and he accidentally dropped into it. Besides, as he withdrew his toe (our term) the flaw had healed. It was now impossible to push into it again. He arose slowly and went about his business.

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Helen and Duane were left confounded. Their experience had been real for them, but it was impossible to prove. Being practical people they decided it was either an act

of God or something far beyond anything they could know. In either case, they resolved never to tell anyone about it. They would only make themselves appear as insane or as liars. Neither possibility appealed to them.

Commentary:

Kant said human beings experience reality as three dimensional space and time because that is the way we are constructed. Our perception may not have anything to do with the “real” reality, but it is what our senses tell us. What we bring to the sensing experience determines what we will learn of the reality. Kant maintains that phenomena of the natural world must meet the requirements of the human mind in order to be possible objects of human experience and knowledge. This is in contradistinction to the widely held view that our minds must conform to the laws already extant in the natural world. Helen and Duane could know only the three dimensional aspects of the sixth dimension. It was impossible for the entire sixth dimension to be part of their experience.

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