

Inquiring Minds: Remembering a Lesson Learned

#45 October, 2017 “Choosing to learn from one’s mistakes makes them valuable assets.” -moi

[Intent](#) [Issues: 1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#), [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#) [23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [26](#) [27](#) [28](#) [29](#) [30](#) [31](#) [32](#) [33](#) [34](#) [35](#) [36](#) [37](#) [38](#) [39](#) [40](#) [41](#) [42](#) [43](#) [44](#)

HOW I CAUSED A GOOD PRIEST TO HIT ME

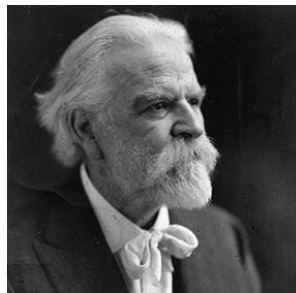
In 1963 I was a fifteen year old high school sophomore, which from the Greek means “wise fool”. For some unknown reason I had just hoisted a younger, smaller freshman into a portable laundry bin. Out of nowhere came the hardest blow to my right shoulder I have ever felt, almost knocking me off my feet. I turned around and to my shock, surprise and embarrassment, I found myself looking into the stern face of Father Terry L., the least likely of anyone to throw a blow. Without a word about my action, he said, “Meet me in my office after room inspection.”



TL (as we nicknamed him) was a quiet man, a teacher of English literature and the school infirmarian who drove many a sick boy into town to see a doctor. He, Pierre Calegari, Dick Mayo, and Bruce Atkinson were classmates at St. Joe’s in 1952, and were ordained in 1958 from St.

Patrick’s. Three would later be released by Bishop Mitty to teach at St. Joseph’s College (seminary) in Mountain View. I learned later that Bruce Atkinson and Terry were light weight Golden Glove boxers, maybe during their summers, which explains how such a small man could pack such a wallop. I did not know what consequence was in store for my hazing incident, but I knew one thing for sure: it was no fun being overpowered by a stronger person, such as I had done to the younger student.

Once in his office, I apologized for my behavior. Not saying a word he reached over to the book shelf and pulled out our literature text. He turned a few pages and told me, by the following week, to memorize 20 lines of Edwin Markham's poem, “The Man with the Hoe.” I was terrified by the thought of trying to memorize anything since I found memorization very difficult. In eighth grade it took me a full week to memorize Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, which I promptly forgot a week later. It would take me an hour to memorize or translate my Latin lesson where other classmates



Edwin Markham

could do it in half the time. Maybe it was from several concussions I had in my younger days of street football. It never occurred to me to refuse the punishment I so rightfully deserved. As I read and re-read the poem it

became even more obvious to me how my behavior somewhat resembled that of the ignorant serf tilling the fields oblivious to the world around him. That may not have been the point, but it was still a very powerful poem.

I did in fact memorize, understand, and enjoy that poem. That was my only encounter with the good Father, but his impact on me, literally and figuratively, was one of those key interactions which helped shape my values. Every so often I would think about this embarrassing incident, both the hazing and the punishment. I did so again when I read of the recent passing of his wife after he, along with many of my teachers, had left the priesthood and married.



Below is the poem inspired by the Millet painting above. [Edwin Markham](#) grew up in Santa Rosa, taught in Oakland, and was made famous in 1898 by this poem.

The Man with the Hoe

by Edwin Markham

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes.
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?
Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave
To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the Dream He dreamed who shaped the suns
And marked their ways upon the ancient deep?
Down all the stretch of Hell to its last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this —
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed —
More filled with signs and portents for the soul —
More fraught with menace to the universe. ([et cetera](#))

“Attitude is a choice. Happiness is a choice. Optimism is a choice. Kindness is a choice. Giving is a choice. Respect is a choice. Whatever choice you make makes you. Choose wisely.”
—Roy T. Bennet, *The Light in the Heart*. **Best to you. —Joe**

