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General Meeting

The January General Meeting of the Hamilton Harriers is scheduled for 7 pm, Wednesday, January 14, 2009 at the Hamilton Downtown YMCA.

Awards Night

The annual Awards Dinner has been set for Saturday, February 7, 2009. We are using the same location as last year, namely, the Piazza Banquet Centre at 230 Anchor Road in Hamilton i.e. across from Carmens. The price is \$25.00 and there is a cash bar from 6:30 to 7:00 with dinner at 7:00. We hope to see you there.

Michael Lamont Boxing Day Race

Because of the age of your editor, you may have noted Footnotes is liberally spliced with stories from our sport's history. On the topic of the staging of road races, the Club has quite a history of its own. In the days of our former President, Ed Hicken, we were quite green to the business of putting on a road race. Ed was as committed a race director as you could find and was surrounded by a group of volunteers who were equally as eager for success. Unfortunately, desire, commitment and the best of causes are no guarantors of success. We made our fair share of mistakes. On more than one occasion, Eddy had the unenviable task of informing runners who had waited for several hours that there were problems with the results and they wouldn't be available this day. In our eyes, the little man stood tall on those occasions. A poet, whose name escapes me suggested if you want to know the meaning of victory don't ask the winner, ask the fellow lying beaten in the dust. It was during those days, a wise man recognized that success in any undertaking was directly related to your standards. As some may recall that wise man was Art Mitchell and the standard became, "The race was a success, no one died."

This year's Boxing Day Race met that standard and much more. Our attendance numbers were good with nearly eight hundred finishers and registrations higher still. All aspects of the staging went well. On the basis of comments received on the pre-registrations and on race day, the new apparel was appreciated by the runners. Since we offer articles that will last more than one season i.e. t-shirts, we have to change it each year. Our President is out in front on this challenge and invariably delivers merchandise of such style and quality that people are proud to wear them. The Club Executive were in management positions over the various departments of the event i.e. registration, start/finish lines, water, course, food and awards and performed well. And it cannot be said too often, this event would not happen if it wasn't for the volunteers, many of whom are club members. I will presume to speak

for the rest of the Executive and say thank you for coming out. This support means more to the organizers as it comes on a day in the calendar where you could be readily excused for staying at home with family.

In this issue, I have included some of my own ruminations on George Sheehan. Those who know of George will recall that one of his favourite writers was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson was one of humanity's more perceptive beings. He made the observation that behind every successful venture, there was always just one person with the vision and energy to bring it into being. For the Boxing Day Race, that person is our President.

Phoenix Place

A Club member, who sits on the Executive, Dave Harrison, lends his support to Phoenix Place through their association with the Halloween Race (Dave is the Race Director) and through assisting them in staging their annual Try-a-Tri event in the summer. Phoenix Place is the Starting Over House for women and children affected by domestic abuse. Their mandate is to "empower, counsel, educate and house women and their children who are affected by domestic abuse."

On Monday, January 19, 2009, between 7:00 and 10:00 pm, at the Football Hall of Fame, 58 Jackson Street West, Hamilton (next to City Hall), Phoenix Place will be holding a fund raiser and kick off event for this year's triathlon. Attending the event will be Colin Jenkins, Paula Schnurr (Olympic runner) and Sue Palmer (Olympic cyclist).

There will be a raffle and silent auction for among other things:

- Canadian Olympic athlete shirt autographed by Simon Whifield and Colin Jenkins
- Condo in Florida for one week
- Condo in Collingwood for one week
- Autographed TiCat football
- And many more

Word Plays

Anagrams are words or phrases made by rearranging the letters of another word or phrase. The following are anagrams with an added twist i.e. they approximate their parents' meaning.

Eleven plus two *becomes* twelve plus one

Evangelist *becomes* evil's agent

The Morse Code *becomes* here come dots

The Hilton *becomes* hint:hotel

David Letterman *becomes* nerd amid late TV

Tom Cruise *becomes* so I'm cuter

The Detectives *becomes* detect thieves

Originals

George Sheehan

At the end of the 19th Century, Nietzsche had announced that God is dead and forecast moral

catastrophe for mankind as a result.

“If the doctrines of sovereign Becoming, of the fluidity of all ... species, of the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal ... are hurled into the people for another generation ... then nobody should be surprised when ... brotherhoods with the aim of robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers ... will appear on the arena of the future.”

If you allow for a few extra decades, Nietzsche's prophecy came true with the stock market crash in 1929. The “brotherhoods” at that time were referred to as “manipulators”. These were wealthy individuals who knew how to move share prices to heights that were not supported by their underlying value. The “non-brothers” were the average citizens of the day who were led to believe anyone prepared to take a risk could get rich on the stock market. After hyping the shares to an unrealistically high price and drawing in the non-brothers' money, the brotherhoods would sell, take their profits and leave the remaining investors with a collapsing share price.

Although the names and techniques have changed, something like this same story seems to be unfolding today. Allan Greenspan, the former US Federal Reserve Chairman, was called before Congress to explain how the 2008 financial meltdown could have occurred. His response could have been an addendum to Nietzsche's forecast. Greenspan indicated that the de-regulated financial environment over which he presided required integrity on the part of the players and this was not forthcoming. Following Nietzsche's reasoning must we resurrect God in order to rein in the scheming brotherhoods?

British thinkers over the years were more pragmatic and not generally given to the leaps in logic one sometimes finds in Nietzsche. Men like David Hume and John Stuart Mill saw that moral behaviour should not require a religious foundation. You did the right thing because it was right, not because God would punish you for misbehaving. On their reasoning, the moral world - the world of “should” and “ought”, “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “bad” - would continue to function whether you had a God or not. Logic may be on the side of the British, but history is on the side of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche was one of the first to appreciate that there are no such things as “objective” facts. The facts are to varying degrees all a reflection of our values. How the world relates to our well being determines our approach to both Nature and our fellow man. If we grant that our well being is always and in all things the end we seek, the significance of that scheming brotherhood in our lives might be reduced. Their elimination is too much to hope for. As long as our well being is centred on the accumulation of wealth, the scheming brotherhood will continue to have their way with us. But what if the wealth the brotherhood would tantalize us with is a mere side show, a necessary but only tolerated reality and not the *sine non qua* of our every act? We might adopt the position that yes, we need money, but no, it can never be our overriding focus. If we take this position, it behoves us to identify what should be our main focus.

In the late 1970's, a cardiologist named George Sheehan started publishing his thoughts on running and fitness. One of Dr. Sheehan's earlier works, “Running and Being” was a book on running like none other. It contained no workout schedules, no drills, no advanced training techniques. There were no recommendations on the clothes to wear, the shoes to buy, the performance enhancing diet to follow. Bereft of all the advice one would normally expect to find in a book on running, it nonetheless found a home in the running community and beyond. It soon became a New York Times Bestseller. In retrospect, one can see that Dr. Sheehan's success came from his willingness to talk about one of the slipperiest topics around – values. There is a lot of talk today about codes of conduct in business, about an organization's core values. I suspect if the Doctor were alive today he would not have anything negative to say, but his bemused smile would speak volumes. Dr. Sheehan spent the latter part of his life on an odyssey and a mission. His odyssey was to find what was important in life; his mission was

to communicate it to anyone who would listen. In this, the Doctor might be considered somewhat of a modern day saint, although I am sure he would wince at the label.

Saints to my mind do something the rest of us do not do. They focus their lives on finding and doing what is important in life. Not important in the sense of what you need to do to get along, like making a buck. Rather, important in the sense that these engagements give worth to your existence; that with them you enjoy the fact of your life, while without them, it is a matter of indifference to both yourself and others whether you are here or not.

If an experience is to rise to this level of importance, it has to be one that will engage you completely. It will also have to be one that you freely choose and choose at your leisure not at another's beckoning. In "Running and Being", the good doctor makes the case that he found just such engagements in the realm of sports. This is, in a way, an extraordinary position to take. We normally view sports as an entertaining diversion from life's more serious moments. For Sheehan, most of life's more serious moments are a bore (or worse) by comparison to the thrill we get from sports. This point is perhaps better left to the words of a former major league pitcher, one Tug McGraw:

"I think the reason I like baseball so much is because when I come into a game in the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, none out and a one run lead, it takes my mind off all us screwed-up people."

Dr. Sheehan believed he was merely articulating what was happening around him. People were being drawn to sports and to his sport in particular, distance running, in numbers that during the 1970's were expanding exponentially. As he notes, "This quiet revolution is spreading over the land." The Doctor was keenly aware of the values that dominate American society: "It is a world primarily of money." He directed himself otherwise: "What I have learned is to get outside this world. To need less. To reduce my wants. To be satisfied with essentials."

The Doctor was a religious man, a good Catholic, the firstborn in a family of fourteen and the father of twelve. He states our reason, our purpose in life is, "to give glory to God and rejoice in our own and God's existence. And we do this in play."

I have never found anyone who wrote with such eloquence and power on a subject matter that many might consider trivial. In his own words,

"You can have peace without the world, if you opt for death. Or the world without peace, if you decide for doing and having and achieving. Only in play can you have both. In play, you realize the supreme importance and utter insignificance of what you are doing. And accept the paradox of pursuing what at once is essential and inconsequential. Play than is the answer to the puzzle of existence."

"Play is where life lives...At its borders we slip into heresy. Become serious. Lose our sense of humour. Fail to see the incongruities of everything we hold important. Right and wrong become problematical. Money, power, position become ends."

Dr. Sheehan talks about values in a way few have done before or since. He warns us to the extent we leave playing to children, to the extent we do not make time for it, to that extent we lose the best parts that life has to offer. For all of the talk of the loneliness of the long distance runner, Dr. Sheehan saw more. Our games, even the seemingly lonely one of distance running, bind us together and make us all equal. In his own words,

"The fun of playing, the fun of winning, even the fun of losing, they are experiencing the exhaustion that is the quickest way to fraternity and equality."

To the more critically minded some of Dr. Sheehan's positions are open to exception.

- He describes the runner as follows:

“For the runner, less is better. The life that is his work of art is understated. His needs and wants are few, he can be captured in a few strokes. One friend, a few clothes, a meal now and then, some change in his pocket, and, for enjoyment, his thoughts and the elements.”

The class of runners is a wide one; some can be truly described as above, but not all.

- On the importance of runners:

“And while a world composed solely of runners would be unworkable, a world without them would be unliveable.”

It is only in the latter part of the twentieth century that running has become popular amongst the masses.

- On the delight in running:

“What happens in those moments, I am not sure...whatever it is, it starts with the body. By first reaching a fitness which reveals the real person inside my body. And then through this body ... I see myself as I really am.”

The eventual findings on the body's release of endorphins when under stress, might have led Dr. Sheehan to temper these words.

It is difficult to categorize Dr. Sheehan's writing. In one sense, his writings would seem to fit under the definition of a sermon. Funk and Wagnall's definition is, “any speech of a serious or solemn kind, as a formal reproof or exhortation.” From start to finish, we are exhorted in beautiful flowing language to embrace the athletic life style. The Doctor's wide readings allow him to support his case with numerous quotes from respected personages, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Ortega, Marianne Moore and other “yea sayers” to the wonder of life. He filters their words and distils them down to what they have to say about the body, its movement and its sports. With this cast, and with their carefully chosen exhortations along with those of the good Doctor, it is hard not to become a convert.

However, there is a problem with becoming a convert and it comes in reconciling the good states induced by running (and sports more generally) with the rest of our lives. By the rest of our lives, I do not mean those vast chunks of our best hours spent earning a living. Those hours are the price we must pay for the freedom to live our off-hours in the best way we know how. There may be a tendency, when under the Doctor's good influence, to constrict your expectations for the better things in life to the times spent in athletics. The athletic hours are joyful ones and we are indebted to Dr. Sheehan for finding the words to fit their worth. But the athletic hours do not exhaust the values we find in life. The problem is that these other values are not nearly as accessible as a pair of runners and the open road.

The other values I refer to come under the headings of justice, affection and aesthetics. What they share in common with athletics is that they all have an inherent worth. It can be argued that these experiences, along with sports, exhaust the range of inherent worth. Where they differ from sport is the degree of challenge in bringing them into being. A moment's reflection may make this point. For most of recorded history, slavery was a fact of human existence. For the ancient Romans the great appeal of being a Roman meant you were the master race. The peoples Rome ruled appreciated the security that came with being a part of the Empire, but knew that to stand for their own and fail would turn the survivors into slaves. It was a long and bloody struggle to stamp out slavery from the face of the earth. This slavery took a more subtle form in the relationship between the sexes. The difference here though is that the inequity still exists in certain cultures. The struggle for what the civilized world has come to recognize as just treatment for all the people in the world is far from easy or over.

In the case of affection, the quest for it meets with as many failures as successes. In its natural home,

in the relations between a husband and wife, current statistics indicate one half of marriages will end in divorce. For the more altruistic amongst us, their intentions are not always easy to realize. It starts with the fact that no one is content with being a charity case and we are correct to be suspicious of those who are. With regard to aesthetics, great artists are a rarity in any age. This is why I suppose we keep going back to the classics; to having our hearts wrung out in plays like Shakespeare's Othello or soar when listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony or warm with Jane Austin's "Pride and Prejudice".

Dr. Sheehan pointed to athletics as an experience with inherent value. To apply some perspective, there are other such experiences, those in the areas of justice, affection and aesthetics. These engagements, along with sports, can rightly be called absolute goods. They are immediately and inherently rewarding and make the rest of our lives more than bearable for their sakes. If we focus our efforts here we will escape from those "brotherhoods with the aim of robbery and exploitation of the non-brothers."

From the Oval Office

Here it is into the New Year and it seems that so much has gone by between me writing anything. Much has happened since I last sat down to write. Dave Harrison did an excellent job of keeping our former presidents memory alive by continuing the Ed Hicken memorial Halloween Run, now based out of the Corktown tavern. I am told that a good time was had by the runners and volunteers. I was in Niagara Falls that

weekend promoting the Boxing Day Run at the Niagara Marathon. Then it was off to New York City to watch Linda run the marathon. New York comes alive for the marathon; there really are people five deep as the runners cross the bridge onto Manhattan Island. Linda decided to stay upscale at the Benjamin Hotel which is half way between Times Square and the marathon finish. One of the perks was a choice of pillows from the pillow menu, a choice of 13 different pillows. New York takes everything in stride except for the marathon where it seems to really raise the bar

on the event. As an example there was an escort of eight police motorcycles for the lead male runners. At intersections in Manhattan there were fire trucks staffed and ready to go. As Linda was exiting the finish chute there were 30 ambulances waiting for finisher problems. Linda of course finished under 4 hours, looked tired but great. The next day it was easy to see the marathoners walking gingerly around looking sore. For Linda as usual it was just another day. We enjoyed a New York bagel then a walk to Times Square before our flight back to Buffalo. Linda said that of all of the marathons including Boston that the energy of the runners, and the crowd was by far the best of any marathon that she has done.

Then there were the usual preparations for the Boxing Day Run. The sudden downturn in our economy did hurt our numbers as we were just below 900 runners instead of the 920 in 2007. The runners and the volunteers both liked the race wear this year. Art Mitchell would say the race was a success as all our entrants lived through the event. The City of Hamilton Parks department did an excellent job of clearing the waterfront and rail trail portion of the course both on Christmas Eve, then again on race morning. To the many volunteers who helped in the event, thank

you for your continuing work. We do have some jackets and tights that will be for sale at Around the Bay Expo. New in 2008 were our title sponsor Michael Lamont Personal injury law, a tote bag for all entrants donated by G.T. French, a current issue of I run magazine, new age group and overall standing snowman medals. Increase in prize money to \$2,500

from \$1,500 thanks to a donation from one of our volunteers who wanted to make running attractive to Canadian athletes. There was a \$150 bonus to first Canadian male and female finishers, both male and female winners were Canadian runners. Then Slainte Irish Pub hosted our post race party, live music and a great atmosphere was enjoyed by both the runners and the volunteers. There was coverage by CHCH television on the news and a picture the next day in the Spectator.

I am already talking to Niko about the 2009 Boxing Day race wear and to the YMCA about a way for the race to increase its support to the Strong Kids Campaign.

On a personal note the racing season starts for me in the sold out Robbie Burns Run, and I have already signed up for the 25km Run for the Toad.

On January 14th Bryan Webber will be making a presentation to the club on his 2008 trip to Israel.

Footnotes

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