

The Last Leaf

Number 7, May 2004 Published for AAPA by
Hugh Singleton at 6003 Melbourne Ave.,
Orlando, FL 32835
This is an e-journal

The eye of the beholder may govern what is seen.

James MacGregor Burns

WHAT WE SEE

IN HIS ARTICLE *On Seeing*, my good friend J. Hill Hamon points out that our eyes do not see as the camera does. He goes on to explain that only a part of our visual field is sharp at any given moment. I want to dwell on the ramifications of “what we see” and the perceptions we derive from images our brain creates.

I accept as truth that no two fingerprints are exactly the same. It also seems logical to me that no two people will see exactly the same image; nor will they interpret what they see exactly the same. Taking this idea a step further, isn't it reasonable to assume that none of us are exactly the same in any aspect of our being?

How then do we ever agree on anything? There must be a range of values, a scale of compatibility where perceptions are so similar that we are unconsciously willing to accept them as being the same. As an example, three men, Arthur, James and Tim who are traveling afoot come to a wide river. Arthur has not eaten all day, so his first thought is that here is a source of food. James has an injured foot, so he sees the river as an easier way to travel. Tim recently had an unpleasant encounter with a large alligator and to him the river is a place of terror. Do all three agree on *anything* about the river? Yes. All three know that thirst need not concern them here; that in order to continue their journey they must cross the river; and that the crossing is likely to be dangerous. We have agreement! Where do individual differences come into play? Arthur knows that he can slack his thirst quickly by lowering his mouth to the water; James by using his hands to scoop water into his mouth, and Tim by using a reed to siphon water while staying on the bank. To Arthur, crossing the river is an opportunity to look for something to eat. James sees the crossing as a chance to rest his sore foot, and Tim, while fearful of the crossing, sees safety on the other side.

All three recognize that rivers are always dangerous to cross—but again they assign varying degrees of risk to it. Arthur feels less threatened by the crossing; indeed, he is willing to dawdle while looking for something edible. James is concerned that his injured foot will hinder him in getting safely to the other side, while Tim is counting on his friends to rescue him if he is attacked. Granted that these examples are perhaps overly simplistic, they do illustrate how each of us is motivated differently even though we are in general agreement and therefore can

work toward a common goal. This ability of reaching a common goal despite the differences in how or why one goes about it is perhaps not entirely unique to man but he certainly has benefited most from it. Furthermore, by being able to operate within a range of compatibility, man has advanced steadily while somehow preserving those attributes which make us different—which make us individuals.

I salute the differences in people, but appreciate their capacity to function in pursuit of common aims without losing each person's unique make-up. And furthermore, these unique qualities add immeasurably to our fun and enjoyment in the world of amateur journalism. #



WHAT WE TELL

MOST OF US seem to have a reluctance to discuss with others those things that would reveal the kind of person we are. The same reluctance prevents most of us from discussing our family connections. Is this a part of human nature? Is it a need for secrecy—a fear of losing the privacy so precious to us? Or do we simply not want to come across as a compulsive talker—one who rattles on like a phonograph—and as mindlessly?

As a child, I loved to listen to conversations between my parents and their friends and kinfolk. The adults seemed to enjoy talking to each other so much, and there was always a lot of laughter and an atmosphere of peace. Even in unhappy circumstances such as a death in the family, those who met to honor the deceased shared such an obvious bond that the loss seemed more bearable.

Since my graduation from high school those many years ago, I have met former classmates at reunions and I am ashamed to say that I have learned more about them in just a few hours than I had learned in years of sharing a classroom. I have discovered family connections and shared history that would have engendered close and continuing friendships through the years that are now lost and gone forever. How sad it is to realize that people who suddenly mean something special to you could have been wonderful friends for sixty years or more.

The blame for missing such rewarding friendships is to be shared among several human traits. Shyness plays its part, as does fear of rejection—a major deterrent to a kid. In addition, as the teen years surround us with an endless pursuit of maturity, we put matters of ego before more commonplace aspects of life. One of the important duties of parenthood, that of teaching our youngsters how to be more open and friendly, is too often overlooked. A teen who has developed social skills in grade school will have no problem in knowing his high school classmates. #