Promotion at any price?

By Chaplain Norbert J. Karava

There is no lack of unhappy, anxious, compulsively worrying, aggrieved, yea, even angry souls to be found, wondering, waiting, scanning, scanning, scanning… Passed over? Select? It happens that with the words "passed over" comes an incurable bitterness of spirit, an unending interior and sometimes outwardly expressed diatribe against those whom the board has deemed worthy of the Lamb of Promotion, unabated remorse, and an inconsolable sense of failure. A case can be made that many of the happy "select" are, in the long run, even more unfortunate, that much the longer drinking the poison.

It all seemed to begin innocently enough: A healthy, normal desire to achieve, to succeed, to enjoy the natural rewards of negotiating the challenges that came with the profession. In other words, life, and the innate joy that came with it was the context of the profession. How has it happened that the profession has become the context of life, and that, with the loss of the profession, has come the loss of life, and therefore, the death of joy, to say nothing of love?

It has something, I think, to do with ambition, understood not as a species of courage and a driver of development and accomplishment, but as a vice and a moral illness of the soul. Ambition shares common features with all the other vices, and one of them is the loss of freedom in the shadow of obsession and compulsion.

Ancient authorities provide us with striking litanies of the outward manifestations of the soul sick with ambition. Lucretius: "For commonly, they, that like Sisyphus, roll this restless stone of ambition, are in a perpetual agony, still perplexed, doubtful, timorous, suspicious, loath to offend in word or deed, still cogging and colloguing, embracing, capping, cringing, applauding, flattering, fleering, visiting, waiting at men's doors, with all affability, counterfeit honesty and humility."

Thaschus Caecilius Cyprianus writing on the same, "From his hole he will climb to all honors and offices, if it be possible for him to get up, flattering one, bribing another, he will leave no means unessay'd to win all… what pains they will take, run, ride, cast, plot, countermine, protest and swear, vow, promise, what labors undergo, early up, down late, how obsequious and affable they are, how popular and courteous, how they grin and fleer upon every man they meet…"

Finally, as Cyneas the Orator declaimed to Pyrrhus, "With what waking nights, painful hours, anxious thoughts and bitterness of mind, vacillating between hope and fear, distracted and tired, they consume the interim of their time. If they do obtain their suit which with such cost and solicitude they have sought, they are not so freed; their anxiety is anew to begin, for they are never satisfied."

As we sit, regarding the full moon and listening to the contented cicada chirpings, enjoying a rare moment of interior vacancy, the words seem to hover on the warm night air, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but forfeit his very soul?" And, as we return to the index of endless worries, fears and cares, we might ask ourselves, when and how it happened that love stopped being enough?

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The Woods were forced to find another gym to practice in when the MWR gymnastics class was shut down. "The MWR gymnastics program was being dissolved because the coach had to return to the states," said Christie Wood, their mother. "So, I had to go looking and I ended up finding the same gym (as the Holloways) and the kids had to go there and try out because it's competitive gymnastics, which requires a certain level of skill and commitment. They had to go five days a week for three hours a day in the evening."

Despite the language barrier, the cramped facilities and older equipment than what they had been used to, the kids acclimated to the new, stricter and more challenging routines much more easily than the parents.

"I like them both the same (U.S. and Japanese styles of teaching) because back in the states they choose your routine for you and they work with you until you can do it or change any of your tricks, but they aren't as advanced," said Ryan. "Here the tricks are more advanced but they can still take them out if you can't land them."

For the parents, the stark contrast in the approach the Japanese take to teaching gymnastics to what they had experienced learning with Americans was disconcerting at first. In the states, the focus was on kids having fun and taking on small challenges little by little. In Japan, students are expected to be quiet, pay attention and execute each move perfectly.

"When we first came, it was the Japanese and Americans," said Holloway. "The Americans were a little unruly just because they're used to doing gymnastics for fun. In Japan they're here to work. They had to take their mentality from any sport that they had ever done in the United States and say forget about that. We're here in Japan now, and we have to either mesh with the Japanese culture or we can't do the sport that we love."

The kids all meshed together and Maeda took five American kids who didn't speak his language, four of whom had never even competed before, and got them ready to compete at a regional level. The coach communicated through body language and used a doll he had fashioned from foam blocks to show the kids proper form.

After a year of hard work by everyone involved, the kids were able to put what they learned to good use at the Tokyo Junior Gymnastics Competition Aug. 14. The kids helped Maeda take home more medals than any other team at the competition. Emily took two gold medals in the vault and floor. Ryan was awarded a team silver medal and a silver medal in the rings and a bronze in the vault. John won silver in the floor competition. Sara and Mackenzie were awarded the fighting spirit award for their progress over the year.

Although the medals and awards are a tangible memento the kids and parents will always have to help them remember an amazing year, the true prize of their experience will be the friends they made and the new outlook they will bring home with them.

"The other kids and moms are wonderful," said Wood. "They do everything they can to help us, they show us. They have become family."

Commissaries not affected by salmonella contaminated egg recall

By DeCA Public Affairs

As of Aug. 19, military commissaries are not affected by the massive Wright County Egg voluntary recall, according to Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) food safety officials.

Although the commissaries may carry some of the brands such as Hillandale and Sunshine that were mentioned in the Aug. 13 recall action, the cartons of eggs sold in military stores are not part of those linked to salmonella contamination, DeCA food safety officials said.

Commissary customers can check the status of their eggs at home by looking for the Julian date and plant code stamped on the end of each egg carton. The plant number begins with the letter "P" followed by its number. The Julian date follows the plant number. Example: P-1946 223.

The initial Wright County Egg recall announcement involved more than 228 million shell eggs. On Aug. 18, the recall expanded to more than 380 million eggs. The companies and Julian dates and plant codes listed in the Aug. 13 recall are:

• Lucerne, Albertson, Mountain Dairy, Ralph's, Boomsma's, Sunshine, Hillandale, Trafficanda, Farm Fresh, Shoreland, Lund, Dutch Farms and Kemps, varying sizes of cartons (six-egg cartons, dozen egg cartons, 18-egg cartons).

• Julian dates of the recalled eggs range from 136 to 225.

• Plant numbers of the recalled eggs are 1026, 1413 and 1946.

The companies and Julian dates and plant codes listed in the Aug. 18 recall are:

• Albertson's, Mountain Dairy, Glenview, Ralph's, Boomsma's, Sunshine, Pacific Coast, Farm Fresh, Lund and Kemps, varying sizes of cartons (six-egg cartons, dozen egg cartons, 18-egg cartons).

• Julian dates of the recalled eggs range from 136 to 229.

• Plant numbers of the recalled eggs are 1720 and 1942.

To date, the recalled product is known to have been distributed to stores nationwide, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recall alert sent Aug. 13. There have been confirmed illnesses relating to the shell eggs and traceback investigations are ongoing, the FDA statement said.

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Salmonella is an organism which can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Healthy persons infected with salmonella often experience fever, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. In rare circumstances, infection with salmonella can result in the organism getting into the bloodstream and producing more severe illnesses such as arterial infections, endocarditis or arthritis.

The FDA wants consumers to know that thorough cooking is perhaps the most important step in making sure eggs are safe.

Cook eggs until both the yolk and the white are firm. Scrambled eggs should not be runny.

Casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 160°F (72°C). Use a food thermometer to be sure.

For recipes that call for eggs that are raw or undercooked when the dish is served — Caesar salad dressing and homemade ice cream are two examples — use either shelled eggs that have been treated to destroy salmonella, by pasteurization or another approved method, or pasteurized egg products. Treated shelled eggs are available from a growing number of retailers and are clearly labeled, while pasteurized egg products are widely available.

Consumers with questions about egg safety should visit www.eggsafety.org or call Wright County's toll-free information number of 1-866-272-5582.

For more information about food safety alerts and product recalls affecting military commissaries, go to the Food Safety section of the DeCA website at http://www.commissaries.com/food_safety.cfm.