

## Tom Greco's Letter from California

Today is St. Patrick's Day. After driving more than 600 miles yesterday from Tucson, I spent a restful night at the Motel 6 in Buttonwillow, choosing it as the much more frugal option over the other lodging possibilities closer to Los Angeles. At a shade under \$33, it's probably the best bargain in the state of California.

The morning TV programs from New York City show, as they always do, enthusiastic crowds eager to be seen by the folks back home. This time they are gathered for those special events that happen every year on March 17, the day when everyone is Irish. Bundled up against the thirty degree chill, they remind me of that time more than a half-century ago when a few of my college buddies and I drove up from Philly to watch the Saint Paddy's day parade and join in the revelry. How many bars could we manage to hit in two days? How many girls could we meet?

Those were the days when a family could live pretty well on one income. The ten dollar allowance that my dad sent faithfully every week was enough to take care of my incidental expenses and pay for an occasional lark, like a weekend in New York or Atlantic City. Strange as it might sound today, many of my schoolmates would regularly pack up their dirty laundry in aluminum cases and mail it home for their moms to wash and send back. Postage was cheap. As I recall, a first class letter back then could be sent for three cents. Have costs gone up, or has the value of our money gone down?

Before leaving Buttonwood I fuel up at the *Arco* station. The regular grade gasoline-ethanol blend is priced at \$3.39. Regular gasoline at the other nearby stations is advertised for \$3.51. That's forty five cents more than I paid when I filled up yesterday in Tucson.

The morning air is crisp and fresh, but tainted by the odor of cattle from the nearby ranches and feedlots. I've seen many of those feedlots, both here and in Texas, where hundreds or thousands of cattle dot the landscape with nary a blade of grass in between them, just the dark brown muck of their excrement. Feed is brought to them for the final stage of fattening before they become steaks and hamburger.

Under bright sunshine I head northward on *Interstate 5* through California's central valley, a broad expanse several hundred miles long nestled between the Sierra Nevada mountains to the east and the Coast Range toward the west that protects it from the Pacific winds. I've been this way many times before, and I'm always amazed at the mile after mile of cultivated lands that stretch out towards the mountains - orchards, vineyards, fields of vegetable crops, alfalfa, cotton, and even flowers. There are, of course, irrigation canals, and every so often there's a big sign along the highway that reminds, 'Food grows where water flows'. That water comes mainly from the melting snow that accumulates each winter in the mountains, and the food that grows is shipped to every corner of North America and beyond. I've heard some numbers but don't recall them, only the impression of how dependent we Americans are upon that snow pack and upon this valley for so much of our food.

I'm excited to be headed for my new home in a town opposite the northeast corner of San Francisco Bay. My good friends Sergio and Gaye Lub have graciously offered me the use of an apartment in the building where they have their business. I've known them for more than ten years, have seen their children grow up, and have been taken into their extended family. Such blessings as these are never deserved, they can only be appreciated.

I've come to write and be in a place where different opportunities seem likely to present themselves. California is fast and intense. It seems to vibrate with a different energy. As a young man starting out on my engineering career, I lived for two years in the LA beach area. I worked for *Douglas*, which was then one of the biggest, most successful aircraft companies. Many years later, when I organized the *Fourth World Assembly and New Economics Symposium*, I spent several months near Santa Cruz, and Oakland. Since then, I've been back many times, staying for brief periods. I wonder how it will feel this time around.

Still a nomad after spending more than half of last year traveling through Asia and spanning the globe, I hadn't planned to stay in Tucson quite as long as I did. After seeing my friends and taking care of some business, what kept me there was the need to rest up and find a way to feel better. I've had to resolve some medical issues, mostly some discomfort in my gut. Doctors will give you plenty to worry about - your cholesterol is too high; your *PSA* is elevated and rising, so you'd better have a prostate biopsy; you have a family history so you ought to have a colonoscopy; you may not have fully recovered from the Lyme disease you think you had years ago or the typhoid you caught last year in India, so you should have some more tests. What's a person to do?

I'm someone who takes responsibility for my own health. I won't abuse myself and then expect someone else to "fix" me. I think I know my body pretty well and I pay attention to what it tells me, but I'm not inclined to be panicked into invasive procedures when I'm feeling relatively well. Modern western medicine can perform some astounding feats, but I think there may be something wrong about its basic assumptions and attitudes. That has been partly addressed by what has come to be called 'integrative medicine' by Dr. Andrew Weil and others who have looked beyond the orthodoxy that pervades our medical schools and clinics.

The 'slash and burn' treatments of surgery and chemotherapy, for instance, seem to be based upon fear and a war mentality, rather than an understanding of the root causes of illness, most of which may be psycho-spiritual. By that I don't mean they are psychosomatic, but rather a departure from right living, or an inability to let go of negative emotions, or repression of that 'small still voice' that comes from within.

The conventional medical attitude about cancer is one of constant vigilance and 'zero tolerance'. Find a few cancer cells? They must be rooted out. Never mind that the 'best' available treatments often kill the patient in the process. Is there such a thing as peaceful coexistence or reformation of errant cells?

I once met Ivan Illich. It was 1989, I think, during the time when I was *President of the School of Living* and one of my colleagues had organized a *Fourth World Assembly* in Toronto. That was a historic event with Illich, Leopold Kohr and John Papworth all on the same program, each of them thinkers 'outside the box'. Illich was an iconoclast of the first order. Among his major works were *Deschooling Society* (1972) and *Medical Nemesis: The Exploration of Health* (1977). When I met Illich he had a large cancerous growth on his face. He had already had it for several years, and lived with it until he died in 2002. I'm not sure I'd be willing to do that. Was it mere stubbornness on his part? Here's what *Wikipedia* has to say about that ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan\\_Illich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Illich)): "At an early stage he consulted a doctor about having the tumor removed but was told that there was too great a chance of losing his ability to speak and so he lived with the tumor as best he could. He called it 'my mortality'."

For most of my time in Tucson, I took a room in the house of a long-time friend, Marie, who happens to be a nurse practitioner. Besides access to her extensive library I had the advantage of her considerable knowledge and experience with the kinds of health concerns I had to deal with. I was particularly taken with one particular book she passed along for me to read. It was *Stomach Ailments and Digestive Disturbances* by Michael T. Murray, ND. That book describes all kinds of gastro-intestinal disorders, their symptoms, possible causes, and natural as well as conventional treatments.

One situation that Dr. Murray highlights is conventional medicine's "obsession with the infectious agent rather than host defense factors." He describes the origins of the germ theory following the discoveries of the nineteenth-century French physician and researcher, Louis Pasteur. But he also tells of another French scientist of that time, Claude Bernard, who argued that the pathogen was less important than the person's internal state or milieu in determining disease, and how Pasteur on his deathbed acknowledged that "Bernard was right. The pathogen is nothing. The terrain is everything." So, should we be compulsive about avoiding germs, or should we put the emphasis on healthful habits and building up our natural defenses?

I delayed my departure from Tucson one more day so that I might get to see another good friend, Spencer MacCallum on Saturday, March 15. Spencer, accompanied by two artists from Mata Ortiz, had come up to Tucson from his home in Chihuahua, Mexico, to put on an exhibition and sale of Mata Ortiz pottery and handcrafts, and to give presentations of his Mata Ortiz story. Reports in both the *Arizona Daily Star* and the *Tucson Weekly* provided the bare facts but could hardly begin to convey the richness of this amazing story of genius, discovery, devotion, and success, which Spencer managed admirably with wit, humor and his characteristic thoroughness. He had told me before about how he had discovered some of Juan Quezada's early work in a Deming, New Mexico junk shop, then went to find him, help him develop his art, and sell his work in the United States. But that was a mere preview that gave hardly a hint of the remarkable sequence of events and circumstances that over the past 30 years have led to the transformation of the village and its people from poverty and obscurity to artistic mastery, fame, and widespread acclaim.

But it was another of Spencer's remarkable achievements that led me to contact him almost thirty years ago. I think it was in the *School of Living* library on one of my early visits that I first came across a copy of E. C. Riegel's book, *Flight From Inflation*. That book had been compiled and published long after Riegel's death by, you guessed it, Spencer MacCallum. What shines the brightest in Spencer's character is his knack for recognizing true genius and his willingness to dedicate his prodigious talents and skills to making sure it gets the attention it deserves. So it was with both Riegel and Quesada.

I have learned more about money from Riegel than from any other source. It was Spencer who rescued Riegel's legacy from oblivion. Spencer, during his student days at Princeton, had met Riegel through his grandfather. Recognizing the importance of Riegel's work with regard to money, banking, and democratic government, Spencer kept tabs on him. When Riegel died in 1954, he left his literary estate to a couple who had been close friends and supporters for many years. About ten years later, only the elderly widow remained, so Spencer negotiated with her to acquire all of Riegel's books and papers. He eventually went meticulously through all of it, cataloging and transcribing, publishing and republishing, making it available to others like me who might be able to build upon the conceptual foundation that Riegel had so elegantly laid. You can read Spencer's own account of his discovery of the Riegel legacy, his exploration of Riegel's writings, his publication and propagation of Riegel's message, and the text of the book itself at <http://www.reinventingmoney.com/documents/Flight.pdf>.

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