By the same author

Dr. Sheehan on Running

Running & Being
THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE

Dr. George Sheehan

Drawings by Nora Sheehan

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rest of us. But what he does in the common situation, how he sees it and himself, sets him apart.

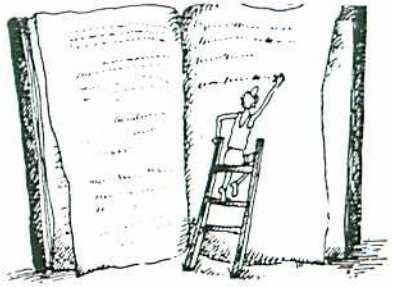
Sheehan writes, "Fitness is my life; it is indispensable. I have no alternative, no choice, but to act out this inner drive that seems entirely right for me."

Running is euphoria for Sheehan. "But then comes the Hill," he writes,

> and I know I am made for more. And by becoming more, I am challenged to choose suffering, to endure pain, to bear hardship. . . .
>
> At first the gentle swell carries me. . . . But gradually the Hill demands more and more. I have reached the end of my physiology. The end of what is possible. And now it is beyond what I can stand. The temptation is to say, "Enough." This much is enough. But I will not give in.
>
> I am fighting God. Fighting the limitations He gave me. Fighting the pain. Fighting the unfairness. Fighting all the evil in me and the world. And I will not give in. I will conquer this hill, and I will conquer it alone.

And George Sheehan will be himself. And, in writing about it, a gift to us all.

St. Louis Globe Democrat RICH KOSTER



Prologue

THERE ARE TIMES when I am not sure whether I am a runner who writes or a writer who runs. Mostly it appears that the two are inseparable. I cannot write without running, and I am not sure I would run if I could not write. They are two different expressions of my person. As difficult to divide as my body and mind.

Writing is the final form of the truth that comes from my running. For when I run, I am a hunter and the prey is my self, my own truth. Not only my own truth felt and my own truth known, but my own truth written. Good writing is true writing. A thing written as true as it can be done. And that truth must be sought deep inside of me. "Look into your heart," said the poet, "and write." The hunt, then, is in my heart, my inner universe, my inner landscape, my deepest inner forest.

To reach these recesses, these hiding places below the conscious, I must first create a solitude. I must achieve the aloneness that is necessary for the creative act whether one is a master or a common man like myself. Because nothing creative, great or small, has been done by committee. And having reached this solitude, this privacy, this detachment, I must await the coming of truth and know how I am to write it.

But all of this, of course, begins much earlier. First an idea

interests me. Then I put it in my head and allow it to germinate for a while. Each day I take it out and inspect it for substance. If it stands up I go to the typewriter for a day or two and accumulate pages of copy. Thurber referred to this effort as "mud" and saw it as the necessary first step to the finished product.

Next, I try to organize this raw material. Attempt to discover its essence, its true meaning, what it is all about. This is almost always a failure. What I have written until then is only information. It can make me neither laugh nor cry. It has yet to be transformed into something true, something alive. That must wait until I am on the roads. Only when I am on the run does this happen.

What running does is allow it to happen. Creativity must be spontaneous. It cannot be forced. Cannot be produced on demand. Running frees me from that urgency, that ambition, those goals. There I can escape from time and passively await the revelation of the way things are.

There, in a lightning flash, I can see truth apprehended whole without thought or reason. There I experience the sudden understanding that comes unmasked, unbidden. I simply rest, rest within myself, rest within the pure rhythm of my running, rest like a hunter in a blind. And wait.

Sometimes it is all fruitless. I lack the patience, the submission, the letting go. There are, after all, things to be done. People waiting. Projects uncompleted. Letters to be answered. Paperwork to do. Planes to be caught. A man can waste just so much time and no more waiting for inspiration.

But I must wait. Wait and listen. That inner stillness is the only way to reach these inner marvels, these inner miracles all of us possess. And when truth strikes, that brief, blinding illumination tells me what every writer comes to know. If you would write the truth, you must first become the truth.

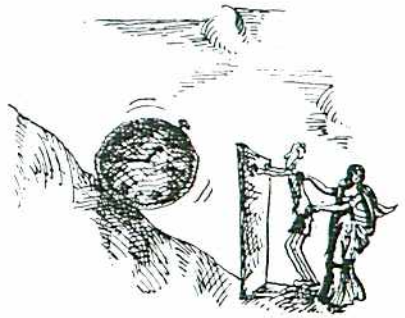
The mystery of all this is that I must let it come to me. If I seek it, it will not be found. If I grasp it, it will escape. Only in not caring and in complete nonattachment, only by existing

purely in the present, will I find truth. And where truth is will also be the sublime and the beautiful, laughter and tears, joy and happiness. All there waiting also.

All this, of course, defies logic. But so does life. We live, then explain things after the fact, and imperfectly. Somehow, perhaps not the way I have said, running gives me the word, the phrase, the sentence that is just right. And there are times when I take a column on the road and it is like pulling the handle of a slot machine. Bang comes down the first sentence. Bang comes down the second, and the paragraphs unfold. And then Bang, jackpot, the piece is finished, whole and true and good.

But writing is never easy. And no matter how well done, never to one's satisfaction. Writing, someone said, is turning blood into ink. Whatever, the idea of suffering is so natural to both writers and runners it seems to be a common bond.

And therefore no surprise when one turns out to be both.



1. Living

No athlete every lived, or saint or poet for that matter, who was content with what he did yesterday, or would even bother thinking about it. Their pure concern is the present. Why should we common folk be different?

YOU WIN, the experts agree, if the game is played in your rhythm. You lose if it isn't. Every basketball fan knows that. "We put on the press," a coach once told me, "not so much to create turnovers, but to upset our opponent's rhythm. To get them moving and not thinking." Most basketball fans know that, too.

But how many of us know that the same thing is happening in our lives every day? How many of us see that we are letting someone else set the rhythm of our lives, or that we face the equivalent of the Boston Celtic full-court press when we get out of bed each morning?

The clock is where it all starts. This mechanical divider of time controls our action, imposes our work day, and tells us when to eat and sleep. The clock makes every hour just an hour. It makes no distinctions between morning and afternoon. Aided by electric daylight, it doles out apparently equal minutes and seconds until *The Late Show*. And then, Good night.

The artist, especially the poet, has always known this to be wrong. He knows that time shortens and lengthens, without regard to the minute hand. Knows that we have a beat foreign to

this Greenwich metronome. Knows also there is an ebb and flow to the day that escapes the clock, but not us. And realizes that this rhythm, this tempo, is something peculiar to each individual, as personal and unchanging as his fingerprints.

The artists know this. The scientists have proved it. In *Biological Rhythms of Psychiatry and Medicine*, Bertram S. Brown writes, "Rhythm is as much a part of our structure as our flesh and bones. Most of us are dimly aware that we fluctuate in energy, mood, well being and performance each day, and that there are longer, more subtle variations each week, each month, each season, each year."

There was a time when we could sit and listen to these rhythms, but now they can hardly be heard over the din of the mechanical clocks set up by school and business and society. Now we have commuting and TV, three-day weekends and twelve-hour workdays, March migraines and April ulcers, twenty-one-year-old addicts and forty-five-year-old heart attacks.

Is anyone listening to his innards? But then, who listened to Socrates: "Know thyself"; or to Norbert Weiner: "To live effectively is to live with adequate information"; or to the Japanese philosopher Suzuki: "I am an artist at living, and my work of art is my life."

But that's what we must do to face that Celtic press every morning. Listen to what our body is trying to tell us. Know ourselves. Get adequate information. Become artists. Otherwise, someone else will control the pace, the game, and the score.

The Celtics are there and the press is on. They make us fit the job. Make us fit the hours. Make us fit the demands. Make us change to their tempo. March to their drummer. All the while, destroying our game plan. Our way of becoming all we are. Choking off what we do best.

They have made us prisoners of their artificial time, their mechanical clock. And all the while, they are planning the final irony. When we retire, they will give us a watch.

"Living the good life," wrote Nikolai Berdyaev, "is frequently dull and flat and commonplace." Our greatest problem, he claimed, is to make it fiery and creative and capable of spiritual struggle.

I agree. Life, except for a favored few, like poets and children and athletes and saints, is pretty much of a bore. Given the choice, most of us would give up the reality of today for the memory of yesterday or the fantasy of tomorrow. We desire to live anywhere but in the present.

I see that in myself. I start the day with an agenda of things to be done that makes me completely oblivious of what I'm doing. I arrive at work with no memory of breakfast and no idea of what kind of day it is. I am in perpetual concern or rumination about the future.

Numbers of people do the same thing in reverse. They avoid reality by living in the past. Nostalgia is their way of life. For them the good old days will never be equaled. Or emulated, for that matter, since these people rarely bestir themselves to any activity.

But for those active in mind and heart and body, the child and the poet, the saint and the athlete, the time is always now. They are eternally present. And present with intensity and participation and commitment. They have to be. When the athlete, for instance, turns his attention from the decision to be made this second and every second, he invites disaster. Should his concentration falter, should his mind wander to the next hole, the next set, the next inning, he will be undone. Only the now exists for him.

And the saint, for all his talk of heaven and the hereafter, knows that everywhere is right here, that all of time is right now, and that every man exists in the person in front of him. He knows that every instant he must choose and continue to choose among the infinite possibilities of acting—and being. He has no time to think on the future.

Nor has the poet. He must live on the alert. Always aware.

Always observant. When he does this well, he teaches us how to live more fully. "The feeling of life is in every line of the poem," writes James Dickey of the *Odyssey* by Kazantzakis, "so that the reader realizes time after time how little he himself has been willing to settle for in living; how much there is on earth, how inexplicable, marvelous and endless creation is."

For such a man, Perfection Past is no temptation. Nor is it for the saint or the athlete. Their characteristic fall from grace is in the contemplation of future triumphs. Heaven, perhaps, or a masterpiece, or a world's record. No athlete ever lived, or saint or poet for that matter, who was content with what he did yesterday, or would even bother thinking about it. Their pure concern is the present.

Why should we common folk be different? Are we not all poets and saints and athletes to some degree? Yet we refuse to make the commitment. Refuse to accept our own reality and work with it. So we live in the might-have-been world of the past and the never-will-be world of the future.

What we need is an element of present danger, an intimation of tragedy, some feeling of powerful implacable forces at our doorstep. We need a threat to the commonplace which will suddenly and for all time intensify its value.

Some years ago, that happened to me. I had run a personal best marathon in Oregon, and came home full of what I would accomplish at the Boston Marathon. Five days later, I came down with the flu, and everything of importance fell into place. I no longer cared what I ran at Boston, or indeed if I ran at Boston at all. What I cared about first was health, and then being able to run again. Just to run and feel the sweat and the breathing and the power in my legs. To feel again what it was like to toil up hills and to push through pain. Just that and perhaps that good tired feeling after a race. No past runs or future triumphs would comfort me. I was ready to repent and hear the Good News.

I knew then what every poet and child, every athlete and saint knows. The reason they say this is for all the marbles is because it is always for all the marbles. And the reason they say there is no tomorrow is because there is never, at this very moment, a tomorrow. We are always at risk, always at hazard.

"The trouble with this country," the late John Berryman once told fellow poet James Dickey, "is that a man can live his entire life without knowing whether or not he is a coward." For the burly Berryman and ex-fighter-pilot Dickey, ordinary day-to-day living did not provide the arena for the ultimate test, the moment of truth. For at least Dickey, war is the Big Game.

"Nothing," he writes, "gives you such a feeling of consequence and performing a dangerous and essential action in a great cause."

Where, indeed, can we find those qualities in our nine-to-five existence? "There were a lot of people in the service," says Dickey, "who cried when they were discharged because they knew they would have to go back to driving taxicabs and working in insurance offices." This perception of the heightened life of the soldier is expressed even by the late James Agee. Greatness, said Agee, emerges only under difficult circumstances, and it is war that produces these circumstances.

"The fact is," writes Agee, "that in war, many men go well beyond anything that any sort of peace makes possible for them."

But peace is where courage is. It lies somewhere between the wartime obliviousness to danger and the prudence of intellect that helps us preserve the race. Courage, if we go back to its Latin root, means that the seat of the intelligence is in the heart. That the heart determines a man's action, rather than his reason or his instincts. And if the heart has its reasons the mind does not know, it also has reasons the body does not know.

Our day-to-day living may seem mindless to the mind and of no consequence to the body, but the heart tells us different. The heart is where faith lies. Where we find the supreme act of cour-

age, the courage to be. To take arms against oneself and become one's own perfection.

"Courage," according to Paul Tillich, "is the universal and essential self-affirmation of one's being." It therefore includes the unavoidable sacrifice of elements which are part of us, but prevent us from reaching our actual fulfillment.

In everyday language, this means that if the most essential part of our being is to prevail against the less essential, we may have to give up pleasure, happiness and even life itself. Courage, then, has nothing to do with a single act of bravery. Courage is how one lives, not one specific incident. Just as mortal sin is a life style, not one startling transgression.

Some, like Berryman and Dickey's men in *Deliverance*, still ask for that one supreme test. They go from peak experience to peak experience. Shooting rapids, making parachute jumps, climbing mountains. Looking for fear that can be met and overcome fairly. Looking for something of consequence done for a great and essential cause.

Can day-to-day living provide that? Can day-to-day living become the Big Game? It can if you increase the stakes. Take Pascal's wager that God exists. Even if men had no reason for believing in God, said William James, they would postulate one as a pretext for living hard and getting out of the game of existence the keenest possibilities of zest.

"Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life's evils," claimed James, "is set free in those who have religious faith." Religion, he concluded, will always drive irreligion to the wall.

It will because suddenly we are doing something for a great and essential cause. And everything we do is of consequence and demands our perfection, physically and intellectually and psychologically. But always keeping sight of the truth that each of us is unique, each affirming his own self. Therefore we are not submissive. We are not concerned with right and wrong but with verities like good and evil.

So you see it is not as Berryman said. We are, in fact, always being called upon to be whoever we are, hero or coward. The challenge is always there. But it is not the reckless pursuit of catastrophe, it is the acceptance and perfection of the persons we are meant to be. In that perennial process so frequently fatiguing, often depressing and occasionally painful, courage is the bridge between our minds and our bodies.

"There are days when you can't get the ball in the basket, no matter how hard you try," a basketball coach once told me. "But there is no excuse for not playing good defense."

I've known those days. Days when every shot is forced. Every idea manufactured. Days when invention and wit and originality disappear. When nothing is new or bright or wonderful. The air is the same. The people are the same. The problems are the same. And on those days I start to press and everything gets that much more difficult. The feel is gone. And with it the touch, the ease, the brilliance that play brings.

The offense, you see, is play. The defense is work. When I am on offense, I create my own world. I act out the drama I have written. I dance the dance I have choreographed. I sing the song I have composed. Offense is unrehearsed, exuberant, freewheeling. Offense is an excitement which provides its own incitement. Its own compulsion. Its own driving force. It generates its own energy.

Offense, then, is an art. It cannot be forced. It is a spontaneous, joyful unification of the body and the mind. Therefore there are days it won't happen. The circuits of the brain will not open. The playful right hemisphere remains inaccessible.

Defense needs none of this. Defense is dull, boring, commonplace. It is the unimaginative plodding attention to duty. It is grit and determination and perseverance. It requires—can I use that word?—simply an act of the will. There is never a day you can't play defense. All you need is the decision to put out. To give one hundred percent.

On defense I am another person, the real person. Offense is a showplace for talent and even genius. What defense discloses is character. There effort and energy are a matter of the will. There I am asked, "Will I or won't I have it so?"

So defense is a matter of pride. The determination to be the person I am. The decision to give my word of honor, to take an oath that what has to be done will be done.

I try not to be proud of my offense. My play, my creativity, is a gift freely given and perhaps just as readily taken away. How many poets have turned to drink in an effort to restore that childlike way of looking at things? One has to be superstitious of such feats. The mystic never presses his luck. He accepts the vision, tells few if any, and does not expect to see it again.

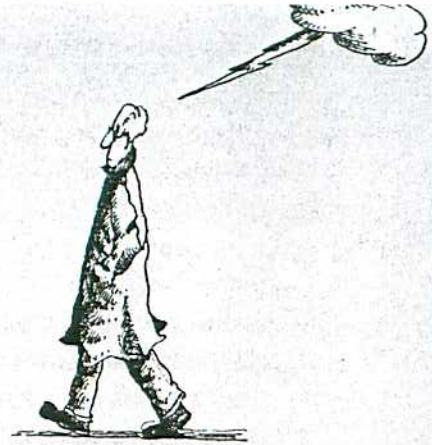
I enjoy my play. Enjoy having the ball. But I know that my talent is something I carry. The real test comes when that is absent. When I am filled with fatigue and boredom and the desire to be off on a vacation or a short drunk. We all know this and react differently. In an army survey, sixty-four males averaging twenty-two years of age rode exercise bicycles at fifty-five percent of their maximum oxygen capacity. They were told to ride until it became so discomforting that they felt it necessary to stop. They stopped at times varying from one and a half to ninety-eight minutes.

Defense therefore narrows down to character, the ability to persist in the direction of the greatest resistance. There are teams, and successful ones, that no longer look solely to talent. They recruit on character. It is a long season. There are days on end of giving of yourself, and talent is not enough. Only character can fix my will to the idea that anything less than my best is unworthy of me and the game and the people I play it with. Only character can take defense and make it worth every iota of my mental and physical energy. Only character can make me function when my existence seems to be, as Emerson said, a defensive war.

I know all that, as I suspect you do. But I still play defense

like almost everyone else. Knowing that eventually there will be a turnover and I will get the ball. And I dream of suddenly seeing that new idea plain like a man coming open. And I hit him and then see his shot, that long perfect parabola. Knowing that when the ball leaves his hand, like the idea not yet written, it will hit nothing but cords.

But dreams are not the stuff defense is made of. Nor are men, for that matter.



4. Beginning

If you think that life has passed you by, or, even worse, that you are living someone else's life, you can still prove the experts wrong.

THE PEOPLE WHO THINK they know say that given a second chance a man will make the same mess of his life he did the first time. Playwrights and novelists over the years have never given us any hope that reliving our lives would have any different result the second time around. Our scientists and psychologists seem to agree. Even such disparate thinkers as Bucky Fuller and B. F. Skinner are together on this. "We shouldn't try to change people," writes Skinner. "We should change the world in which people live." It is a thought Fuller has often expressed.

Some, of course, take an opposing view. The people who deal in Faith, Hope and Charity seem to think that one day is as good as another for changing your personal history. Philosophers since recorded time have recommended it. From Pindar to Emerson they have told us to become the thing we are; to fulfill our design; to choose our own reality, our own way of being a person. What they didn't tell us was how to do it; or how difficult it would be. When Paul said to put on the New Man, he reminded us of the unlimited potential of man; but the lives we lead constantly remind us of the obvious limits to this potential.

Clearly the Good Life is not as accessible as the books say. And yet it is not from want of trying that we have failed. We

start our new lives with almost as much frequency as Mark Twain gave up smoking (thousands of times) and with about the same success.

Can tomorrow be the first day of the rest of our life? And can that life be completely different from the mess it is today? The answer, of course, has to be yes, or all those great men wouldn't have said so. But how do you go about it?

The first thing to do, it seems to me, is to retrace your steps. To go back to that period of your life when you were operating as a successful human being (although you most likely weren't aware of it). To go back to those times when your soul, your self, was not what you possessed or your social standing or other people's opinion but a totality of body, mind and spirit. And that totality interacting freely with your total environment.

Somewhere past childhood that integration of self and that response to the universe began to dissolve. We came more and more to associate who we were with what we owned; to judge ourselves by other people's opinions; to make our decisions by other people's rules; to live by other people's values. Coincidentally, or maybe not so coincidentally, our physical condition began to decline. We had reached the fork in the road. We took the well-traveled path.

One who took the path overgrown with weeds and rarely used was Henry David Thoreau. The world knows Thoreau as a man of intellect, a shrewd observer, a rebel against conventional values. What has not been emphasized was that he was an athlete, and a fine one. He was, of course, a great walker. This kept him in prime physical condition. "I inhabit my body," he wrote, "with inexpressible satisfaction: both its weariness and its refreshments." It would not be too much to say that Thoreau's other activities derived their vitality from the vitality of his body. That the self that was Thoreau depended on being as physical as he could be. And that no life can be completely lived without being lived completely on a physical level.

If Thoreau was right, the way to find who we are is through our bodies. The way to relive our life is to go back to the physical self we were before we lost our way. That tuned-in self that could listen with the third ear was aware of the fourth dimension and had a sixth sense about the forces around it. That tuned-in self that was sensitive and intuitive, and perceived what is no longer evident to our degenerating bodies.

This may come as a surprise even to physical-fitness leaders. Physical-fitness programs have long been based on the desire to lead a long life, to forestall heart attacks, to feel better generally or to improve your figure. No one ever told us that the body determined our mental and spiritual energies. That with the new body we can put on the new person and build a new life, the life we were always designed to lead but lost with the body we enjoyed in our youth.

Now, common sense will tell you that you'll never see twenty-eight again, but the facts on fitness show that almost anyone can reach levels of vigor and strength and endurance equal to most of the twenty-eight-year-olds in this country. Given the good fortune to find an athletic activity that fits him, a man can recapture his youth and a second chance to listen to what his total self held important at that time.

If you think that life has passed you by, or, even worse, that you are living someone else's life, you still can prove the experts wrong. Tomorrow can be the first day of the rest of your life. All you have to do is to follow Thoreau. Inhabit your body with delight, with inexpressible satisfaction; both its weariness and its refreshments.

And you can do it if you'll just go back to that fork in the road.

If you are seeking the solutions for the Great Whys of your creation, you will have to start with the Little Hows of your day-to-day living. If you are looking for the answers to the Big Questions about your soul, you'd best begin with the Little Answers about your body. If you would become either saint or metaphysician, you must first become an athlete.

Study the lives of those who sought their own meaning and

the meaning of the cosmos. Or read the works of the saints who lived the questions and waited for the answers in the hereafter. The common denominator of these people is asceticism, which comes from the Greek *ascesis,* meaning rigorous training, self-discipline and self-restraint.

The ascetic is no oddball recluse; he is someone seeking his optimum, his law, the life he is to lead. And asceticism is practiced by weight lifters, football players and distance runners as well as by saints and philosophers.

"First be an ascetic, which means gymnastics," wrote Kierkegaard. "Then bear witness to the truth." And he took his own asceticism into walking and there he thought out and composed his philosophy. Kant was another great walker. His neighbors could set their clocks by his passage through town.

For Thoreau, the length of his walk made the length of his writing; if shut up in the house, he did not write at all. The mind and the body, wrote Huxley, another advocate of fitness, are organically one. Motion and meditation are apparently a unity. "Sit as little as possible," wrote Nietzsche. "Give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors, while one moved about freely—in which the muscles are not celebrating a feast, too."

But for your muscles to celebrate, and you to move about freely, you have to pay attention to details like diet and climate and training. How can one play and think and find truth when stuffed with jelly doughnuts? Nutrition is still a very controversial subject, but few will argue that we get into more difficulty eating than fasting, and that our intake of salt and refined sugar is unnatural.

Climate is something about which we don't have too many options. Some are luckier than others. When Green Bay trained in Santa Barbara for the first Super Bowl, one of the Packers asked a reporter, "What have these people done to deserve to live here?" Others have to live in their own equivalents of Leipzig, Venice and Basel, which Nietzsche found disastrous to his physiology.

Still, exercise covers a multitude of dietary and meteorological sins. The acclimatized athlete adjusts to his environment and begins to use altitude or heat or humidity to make him stronger. And his diet, through some inherent body wisdom now being allowed to operate, begins to conform with his needs, his nature.

Attend, then, to the little things, to the commonplace of diet and climate and your own form of play and sport. "I myself am my only obstacle to perfection," wrote Kierkegaard. The athlete has always known that. The athlete and the child at play have that same perception. That all things are possible and that I alone am master of my fate.

True, we must render unto Caesar. There are the forty hours we must contribute to the common good and the preservation of ourselves and our families. But beyond this door is freedom. The effort to make work more than the key to this door may not succeed in our lifetime or, indeed, in future lifetimes. But that should not bother us.

Even now work seems to distress psychologists and psychiatrists and sociologists more than the workers themselves. They have found the wisdom to accommodate to it. And they have not allowed its obvious physical, spiritual and psychological inadequacies to affect them.

Today's work does not make us the persons we can be. Work is simply the price to be paid. Having earned our daily bread, we can turn to our daily play. Having paid our dues for survival, we can pay attention to the more serious business of living. Having taken care of our bank accounts, we are now ready to take care of our bodies and the minds that go with them.

Wisdom, it says here, begins at 5 P.M.

"Is there a doctor who has the time," wrote a seventeen-year-old West German to the medical ministry, "to tell me how to live healthily?"

I'm not sure there is a doctor who would touch that question even if he had the time. Living healthily is a question few physicians seem ready to tackle. Living healthily is nothing less than

arriving at old age and, in Erikson's words, "accepting one's one and only life cycle as that something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitution."

To live healthily, therefore, is to become what one truly is and to work at it. To become in fact, as Ortega said, what you are in design. This may be a routine or rare accomplishment depending on how you view it. For myself now wandering around in my middle years seeking answers, it is like waiting for what happened to Saul on the way to Damascus.

The young, however, may get the same revelation through sport. That is one area of human activity in which they can taste of perfection. And even should they fail in that there is no better way to self-knowledge.

The athlete cannot fake it. He is a highly visible example of man maximizing himself. Or failing in the attempt. In this age of the phony and the upward failure, the athlete remains an example of excellence, grace and purity. Or at the least an honest effort to achieve those attributes.

But succeed or fail, the true athlete makes no excuses. He recognizes himself without pride or prejudice. He knows what he can or cannot do. He has found what he does best and is happy with it regardless of where he is listed in the standings. He has discovered himself, understood his strengths and weaknesses, and accepted them.

"To change the fundamental patterns of constitution and temperament is beyond our powers," wrote Aldous Huxley; "with all the best will in the world all that anyone can hope to do is to make the best of his congenital psycho-physical makeup [the particular personality associated with a given body build]."

The athlete already knows that. So he makes the best of it. Seeks fitness through positive goals rather than negative restrictions. The athlete doesn't stop smoking and start training. He starts training and finds he has stopped smoking. The athlete doesn't go on a diet and start training. He starts training and finds he is eating the right things at the right time. In just such a way other things fall into place. His sleep habits adjust. He automatically rests after eating and practices on an empty stomach. He warms up thoroughly and is satisfied with progress however slow.

He has discovered fitness and the fine line between peak performance and disaster. He becomes alert to his body signals. Palpitation, a sore throat, lightheadedness on arising, some minor joint pains, or awakening in the middle of the night—all these have meaning and alert him as a breaking twig would alert a deer in the forest. They tell him he has gone as far as he can go.

Where fitness ends, self-discovery starts. The athlete who is in complete command of the skills of his sport comes to understand the person he is through his attachment to his particular sport and his response to the stresses and strains that arise within it. He finds out what he is made of. What his true personality is.

Charles Morris in his *Varieties of Human Values* suggests there are three basic components to the human personality: Dionysian, the tendency to release and indulge existing desires; Promethean, the tendency to manipulate and remake the world; and Buddhistic, the tendency in the self to regulate itself by holding in check its desires. In psychological shorthand these components come out as dependence, dominance and detachment.

It shouldn't take all that long for a physically fit seventeen-year-old to find his or her sport and the appropriate life style to go with it. Detached, dominant, or dependent; Buddhistic, Promethean, or Dionysian.

It might even work for us aging worriers who are not at all sure that we are living, as Erikson said we must, our appropriate and only possible life cycle.

The formula for greatness, wrote Nietzsche, is *amor fati,* the love of fate, the desire that nothing be different, not forward,

not backward, not for all eternity. And not merely to bear what is necessary, but to love it as well.

Offhand the statement would seem to have little application to the ordinary person, to you and me. Greatness and necessity and fate and eternity are words that thinkers tend to use, ideas that have little relation to our realities.

But when we read Keats and the poet's view, we move another step into this necessity and into our own reality. Keats saw the world as a "Vale of Soulmaking," but said we humans are not souls until we acquire identities; till each is personally himself.

The only man who truly lives, Ortega stated, is the one who follows his inner voice which says, "You are able to be whatever you want; but only if you choose this or that specific pattern will you be what you have to be."

The question, then, is not the presence of this necessity nor even its acceptance. We will certainly do that when faced with such a truth. The question is how to discover it, how to hear this voice, how to find our pattern, how to know the identity of our soul.

Our problem, then, is not the possibility of this necessity but the probability that we may never know it. That we may finish our lives without actually having lived it. That we may come to the end never having experienced it; never having heard the call. Our tragedy may be an unused soul, an unfulfilled design.

Fortunately, Nietzsche had some suggestions on what we should do to avert such a catastrophe. Attend, he said, to the little things. Take care with your nutrition. Watch your diet. Be careful about where you live and the air you breathe. Do not commit a blunder at any price in the choice of your recreation. Develop an instinct for self-defense. Make your life a matter of play.

Know that these small things are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far. Great tasks, he concluded, depend upon small things, things which are generally considered to be matters of complete indifference.

Our salvation, then, is in the day-to-day living of what is surely the athletic life, the life committed to fitness, the life of one who knows the importance of attention to the little things, to the supposedly minor details of everyday living. The athlete is aware of all the points Nietzsche makes. Knows the response to training and diet and relaxation. The effect of tension and other people, of energy wasted on situations and relationships which make him merely a reactor. And the athlete knows more than most how one can find himself in play; and can accept himself who he was, is and will be.

Those who have found this play and with it their bodies know that life comes down to the usual matters of tasting, touching, hearing, seeing, breathing. "Our bodies are us, us," writes John Updike in discussing immortality, another grand idea. And then goes on to suggest that the only Paradise we can imagine is this Earth; the only life we desire is this one.

Fitness, then, is an imperative. How it is to be done is an individual matter, a matter, I might say, of necessity. But whether it is jogging or scuba diving, tennis or mountain climbing, its performance will involve attention to the details Nietzsche outlines. And in following this prescription we will begin to uncover the person inside, to burnish and polish and scrape away and let ourselves take shape.

Surely this is the way we must go if we are to find ourselves, know self-respect, accept our fate. Fitness can be our formula, if not for greatness, at least for the self-knowledge necessary to live a full life. Which is the most all of us, great or small, can expect.

The weakest among us can become some kind of athlete, but only the strongest can survive as spectators. Only the hardiest can withstand the perils of inertia, inactivity and immobility. Only the most resilient can cope with the squandering of time, the deterioration of fitness, the loss of creativity, the frustration of the emotions, and the dulling of the moral sense that can afflict the dedicated spectator.

Physiologists have suggested that only those who can pass the most rigorous physical examination can safely follow the sedentary life. Man was not made to remain at rest. Inactivity is completely unnatural to the body. What follows is a breakdown of the equilibrium. When the beneficial effects of activity on the heart and circulation and indeed on all the body's systems are absent, everything measurable begins to go awry.

Up go the girth of the waist and the body weight. Up go the blood pressure and the heart rate. Up go the cholesterol and the triglycerides. Up goes everything you would like to go down, and down goes everything you would like to go up. Down go the vital capacity and oxygen consumption. Down go flexibility and efficiency, stamina and strength. Fitness fast becomes a memory.

And if the body goes, can the mind be far behind? The intellect must surely harden as fast as the arteries. Creativity depends on action. Trust no thought arrived at sitting down.

The seated spectator is not a thinker; he is a knower. Unlike the athlete who is still seeking his experience, who leaves himself open to truth, the spectator has closed the ring. His thinking has become a rigid knowing. He has enclosed himself in bias and partisanship and prejudice.

He imagines himself self-sufficient and has ceased to grow. And it is growth he needs most to handle the emotions thrust upon him, emotions he cannot act out in any satisfactory way. Because he is, you see, too far from the athlete and participation in the effort that is the athlete's release, the athlete's catharsis.

He is watching people who have everything he wants and cannot get. They are having all the fun. 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, the exhaustion that permits you to be not only a good winner but a good loser.

Because he cannot experience what the athlete is experiencing, the fan is seldom a good loser. The emphasis on winning is

therefore much more of a problem for the spectator than for the athlete. And the fan, in losing and being filled with emotions that have no healthy outlets, is likely to take it out on his neighbor, the nearest inanimate object, the umpire, the stadium, or the game itself.

It is easier to dry out a drunk, take someone off hard drugs, or watch a three-pack-a-day smoker quit cold turkey than to live with a fan during a long losing streak.

And should a spectator pass all these physical and mental and emotional tests, he still has another supreme challenge to his integrity. He is part of a crowd, part of a mob. He is one of those the coach in *The Games* called "the nothingmen, those oafs in the stands filling their bellies." And when someone is in a crowd, out go his individual standards of conduct and morality. He acts in concert with his fellow spectators and descends two rungs on the evolutionary ladder. He slips backward down the development tree.

From the moment you become a spectator, everything is downhill. It is a life that ends before the cheering and the shouting die.