

Where Will This Lead?

by Alan Sorenson

I remember a time when my daughter, Pandora, asked me why most people are concerned only with the present. I told her, they have this idea: spend it today, enjoy it today, and take no thought of the future.

She is truly her mother's daughter. At her age I would have never given it a thought how we would be so much happier if we were only conscious of the future. As I now think about it, perhaps all of us should be asking, "Where will this lead?"

Some decisions are choices between doing something and doing nothing.

Not having a formal education beyond the third grade until I took my GED at 47, I remember taking my daughter to a beautiful college campus in Coldwell, Idaho. The setting sun was as new to me as Pandora. We sat with a crowd of young students, all seated on the grass as speaker after speaker described great ideas about the future to guide our actions today.

As we all listened, there was a beautiful tree squirrel with a large, bushy tail playing around the base of a huge hardwood tree. Sometimes it was on the ground, sometimes up and down and around the trunk chittering playfully. But why would such a familiar sight in farm country attract the full attention of a crowd of students, teachers, and parents?

Stretched out prone on the grass nearby was a speckled blue heeler, a handsome dog. He was the object of everyone's interest, and the squirrel was the object of his. Each time the squirrel was momentarily out of sight, circling the tree, the heeler would quietly creep forward a few inches, and then resume his apparently indifferent posture. I remember thinking, "This is what's holding everyone's profound interest." Silent and immobile, everyone's eyes were riveted on an event whose outcome was increasingly obvious.

Finally, the blue heeler was close enough to bound at the poor innocent squirrel and catch it in his mouth. A gasp of horror arose. Pandora cried out and pushed her face against my chest as a crowd of people ran forward to try and wrestle the little animal away from the dog, but it was already far too late. The little bushy tailed squirrel was dead.

Anyone in that crowd, myself as well, could have warned the squirrel at any time by simply crying out or running the animal off from around the tree so the dog would have never had the chance to catch it, but no one did. All of us just watched while the inevitable outcome got closer and closer. No one asked, "Where will this lead?" When the predictable occurred, all rushed to prevent the outcome, but it was too late. Our tearful regret was all we could offer.

This true story is a parable of sorts. It applies to things we see in our own lives and in the lives and circumstances of those around us. As we see threats creeping up on persons or things we love, we have a choice of speaking, acting or remaining silent. It is well to ask, "Where will this lead?"

I tell you, my brothers and sisters in prison, advocates, and legislators, the consequences of doing nothing are immediate and serious. We must sound appropriate warnings and prevent other lives from being lost in these prisons. If you want dignity and human rights then things must change. We must change as a people inside these walls and out, or we will become the squirrel.

For Dianne, my friend and teacher...