Fall 1981

Message From the Dean

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Recommended Citation
Marshak, Robert R. (1981) "Message From the Dean," Bellwether Magazine: Vol. 1 : No. 1 , Article 4. Available at: https://repository.upenn.edu/bellwether/vol1/iss1/4

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The eternal protein shortage and the other got rid of a lot of undesirables. All of that has gone by the way, however, the companion animal idea has not only lingered on, but has become a very important part of our way of life. Psychological benefits were acknowledged long ago, of course. As a result of studies at this University, as well as at others, it now seems certain that there are profound physical effects as well—things like longevity, our own longevity.

Not long ago I was in Amsterdam with my wife, my daughter, and some friends. I was moved to give them all a brief history quiz. "Who," I asked, "was the prime minister of the Netherlands when the Nazis invaded Europe?" Puzzled looks. "When he was unseated? Who did the Nazis put in his place as the Dutch quisling?" More puzzled looks. ""All right," said I with mock disgust, "who was the German general who conquered this part of Europe?" No one knew. "Just two more questions," I promised. "Who was the head of the Gestapo in the Netherlands?" When no one seemed to know, I protested again with mock disgust, "But these were men who had the power of life and death over millions of people—and wielded it without mercy. These were the movers and shakers of their time and they wore shiny belt buckles and daggers. O.K., one last question, who was the twelve-year-old girl who remained hidden in a small room here in Amsterdam for two years, kept a diary, and then died in a concentration camp?" The chorus, of course, was immediate. "Anne Frank.

Does that tell us something about power—dark, corrupting, unlimited, and evil? I think it reflects directly on what we were just talking about. It suggests that quiet, benevolent, positive human acts and actions, people with ideas, goals, and thoughts are the high places in our past, present, and future. All the rest of it happens down in the valleys, in the cuts, hollows and draws, the dank places and the dark, the places that real history forgets once you add time. As might be expected of a race, a species coming from the primitive time of skull bashing and cannibalism and overall brutish behavior toward a mandated, no-alternative place of gentle care and benevolence, we peak at the good and suffer briefly, and mercifully forget the bad. Nature has been kind. Men and women cannot remember pain.

To tie up the loose ends, to package it, as they say in my world of show and tell, I think our purpose in being here today has a great deal to do with everything I have been talking (continued on page 4)