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*Playing To Win*

My last article: *Erik's Betting Line On Human Extinction* drew feedback, with a few cancelled subscriptions and some new readers. At times, when I know what I write is going to make some uncomfortable, I wonder if it's my readership that will become extinct? But, curiously, when made uncomfortable with the facts—readers tend to stay with me.

My article began: *Before the rains come, I'm climbing steep metal roofs to clean 7 stovepipes on rentals. The sweeps want \$1500, so I have 2 cups of coffee and write first. No energy later.* The replies that came showed concern for my health. 1 in particular from my economic mentor and friend, Bill Holter: *Are you an idiot? You are 80 years old, and yes capable of cleaning chimneys, but what if you fall, is \$1500 worth your life?* That's Bill, a no-nonsense, heartfelt admonition for well-being/avoidance of death.

Am I an idiot? Guilty your honor—with an explanation. In my late 20's, I was doing what I'd been doing for years, riding up through Big Sur in a 1959 VW bus, when it slowly dawned on me that my life was moving along a path towards a dead-end future.

My father (who I had a love/hate relationship with), with only a 5th grade education, became a Royal Canadian naval officer, then a lead engineer for the 2nd stage of Saturn—the moon rocket. There were things he would say to me. About Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, he said: *only 2 two kinds of people travel—the rich and the poor.* And that the rich had discovered how to make the *relative maximum* from *relative minimum*. I was a traveller, living in a bus. I had the necessities. But, by default, I was of the poor.

I needed a different vision for my future, and because I carried psychological baggage from childhood—I couldn't use the usual paths. I'd been to graduate school (literature/philosophy), where, being outspoken, I saw I wouldn't survive a teaching career.

Whatever I did, I had to do it on my own—and I had to start now. A huge optimist, distrustful of most everything—I had an advantage. I could connect with people while remaining skeptical of whatever they said/did. One thing was for certain, I was going to everything possible to win. Leaving the question—did that involve winning at all costs?

My dad's principle—making the *relative maximum out of the relative minimum*, is what saved me. First I applied it economically—then fortunately, over time, to my life.

Economically, it involved saving and investing. Being distrustful, it was obvious that making the wrong investments would render it all for nothing. And psychologically, if I failed to apply the same principle to my life—everything that I did could be for nought.

So, how was I to go about making the relative maximum *me*, out of the relative minimum? In those days, I aligned with blue-collar democrats—politically liberal/financially conservative. But, taking a closer look I opted to pick and choose rather than join-up.

Another choice was libertarian-ism, but scrutinizing that group, (though I partially agreed with their principles), I did not belong there either. What I was, (though I didn't understand the terminology until I later heard it from Doug Casey), was an anarcho-capitalist—distrustful of government (except for US Constitutional necessity), admixed with a capitalist who was playing to win—investing in what were the dominant trends.

My decisions left much undefined. For example, an anarchist playing by self-made rules—involved no requirement for an ethical code. Obviously I needed an ethical code, but with my *baggage from growing up*, that code came slowly—with great pain.

Because I do best with simple terms, I *panned for gold*, down to basic elements. I would keep my word, without transgressing on another person or another person's property (also did not come easy), eventually arriving where I operate from these days.

My preferred choice was an income from housing rentals. This I did on a heavily forested piece of land in Southern Oregon where I milled lumber while negotiating timber contracts for a telephone pole logging outfit—where I got a bonus: free, peeled poles from the reject pile—far stronger joists/beams for my rental construction projects.

The economic aspect of relative/max/min was investing. Beginning in 1971, with the closing of the gold window, history told me, given that event, over time, the dollar was on its way out. These days, when someone lays-out a non precious metal portfolio to me, I point out how each investment is dollar dependent—a dollar—that's at great peril.

Most Americans don't operate from a position of distrust for the dollar/economy, they (except for those who heed reality and buy precious metals), laugh it off and continue on their way. My skepticism disallows that—instead I keep watch on the dollar horizon.

I no longer fear for the future of the economy—collapse is virtual certainty. With that surmise I've listened to Bill Holter: when credit goes bust, what will matter is what you have (food, ammo, no mortgage, gold), and a barter element to survive—silver dimes.

For a long time I considered silver dimes *a bridge too far*, but soon, as recognized *coin of the realm*, and without settlement currency, silver dimes will be *the* barter item.

This gets us back to an 80 year-old climbing steep roofs, working out, and riding motorcycles. I promise my family, at times, I will pull back, but I *go back on my word*. My spirit is that of a 17 year-old and my body is 20 years behind my age. Riding a bike on backroads only makes life better. As for hard work, and somewhat precarious roofs...

The town where I live is its own *blue state, boutique center*, where, when needed, contractors are doing you a favor at twice the going rate. So I go on, as long as I can, doing everything. What I saved just this year is enough to pay for a \$1000 face bag of dimes. That's 10,000 dimes—translating to a lot of bread and eggs—maybe houses?

I live on a well-to-do alley of Berkeley emigrants, realtors, and doctors. To a person, they upbraid me for not hiring the work out. I listen, smile, agree with them, then clean my stovepipes, confident in knowing that, with what is coming, they will each need to become anarcho-capitalists—to have any chance for survival. I ride away—and climb.

Am I an idiot? I don't dismiss it, but I go my own way. Maybe I'll ride across Russia one more time? And, if I don't, at least come with the attitude I could—taking comfort in the knowledge that in Siberia, I would be at less risk of arrest than Canada or Europe.

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