

THE CHEATING HEART

My confrontations with learning were always disastrous. Three divided by one always propelled itself into some kind of insane fraction and my principles were constantly dangling. But I loved to read.

I just can't tell you how influenced I was, during my youth, by history books. And reading these books built within me a great and proud patriotism. The stories I chose were always historical studies of America's bloody path to freedom. My pulses tingled when those Minutemen stood firm against the dastardly Redcoats.

My heart filled when I opened a book dealing with the War between the States. I knew the rolling hills of Gettysburg, the bitterness of Cold Harbor, and the tangled desolation of Chancellorsville.

World War One introduced my youthful heart to more valor and a deeper respect and love for my country.

Sergeant York, General Pershing, dog fights amongst the clouds over France, and that final grand march down the Champs Elysees after the American soldier had once again saved the world from Tyranny.

These lessons in history, these struggles and victories, instilled within me a dedication, responsibility, and sense of patriotism that was as strong as structural steel.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that history books made me perfect in every way. I certainly have my limitations and my failures. Sometimes, while sitting in the gutter, I realize that I drink too much. Women can't keep their hands off me, and weakling that I am, I sometimes allow them to lead me onto the path of sin and debauchery. (My phone number is 475-9232).

BUT I AM PATRIOTIC. And that is why I am so damn mad at what happened at my house several weeks ago. There are many situations where ethics

and moral standards are weakened due to human frailty...but brother...when someone accuses me of being anything less than perfect in my dealings with America...well...it gets my dander up. Let me tell you about my ordeal.

Two gentlemen knocked at my door. They introduced themselves as special agents for the Internal Revenue Service and asked if they might talk to me. One of the men was about 30-years old, ruggedly handsome, and had a smile that could have melted iron. The other fellow was about 50-years old, very distinguished looking, and had a Tiny Tim kind of pleasantness about him.

"What can I do for you gentlemen?" I inquired.

"Mr. Holmes, in 1975 you contributed ten dollars to the Salvation Army. You listed that donation as a charitable contribution."

"That's right" I said, "Is there anything wrong in that?"

"No, of course not" replied the elderly gentlemen, "That's perfectly

all right. Then in 1976 and 1977 you did the same thing. You contributed ten dollars to the Salvation Army and claimed your gift as a deduction on your tax form."

I was becoming a little irritated. What in the hell were these guys insinuating?

"Now, Mr. Holmes, this past year, 1978, you have stated on your form that you contributed one thousand dollars to the Salvation Army. We find that a trifle strange and perhaps you can explain it to us."

How could I explain something I didn't understand? I didn't know anything about their stupid \$1,000. But the hair on my neck was beginning to stand on end and I was becoming incensed because these two men were pointing the finger of accusation. What was worse...those suckers were accusing me of cheating my beloved country.

"Look" I thundered, "I have no idea what in the hell you're talking

about...but I don't like your damn insinuations. Now I suggest you two get the hell out of my house before I start knocking heads together."

The two agents got up, and as they left my house, the younger dude turned, and said, "You will appear at a hearing in Washington, D.C....You will be advised, by mail, as to time and place."

I stewed and fretted and worried all day until my wife got home from work. Imagine! Accusing me of cheating! I just felt weak and washed out with the injustice of the entire episode.

When my wife walked in the door, I screamed, "JoLoyce, do you know anything about us contributing \$1,000 to the Salvation Army?"

"Certainly," she replied, "That's the amount I told the Internal Revenue Service we had given this year."

"But baby" I bellowed, "We didn't give any \$1000 to the Salvation Army."

"Of course not, silly, I just needed another deduction and the Salvation Army seemed like a pretty good idea."

"JoLoyce" I cried, "They have ways

of checking these things. They have receipts...cancelled checks...and anyway...IT'S DISHONEST."

My wife sneered, "Look, George Washington, relax. Everybody cheats on their income tax. They will never be able to prove I didn't give that money. I'll just say I put the money in those kettles and tambourines at Christmas time."

Of course we're going to get caught. I'm just sitting here waiting for those agents to come and get me.

In the meantime...one million dead patriots are pointing bony fingers at me...and in ghost-like anguished tones are whispering...traitor...traitor...traitor...