

Tri As I Might...

I'm a little tired this morning after the Triathlon this past weekend. No, I didn't compete in it but I did drive through Houston on Saturday morning and seeing all those exhausted participants near the finish line really wore me out. Paddling, pedaling and running all on the same morning was inspiring. It inspired me to count my lucky stars for that old shrapnel wound. I've been using it as an excuse for years whenever I've needed to fend off the inclination, however slight, to enter anything with the prefix "tri" in it.

It's a good rule of thumb to follow. Events with "tri" in the title are best left to others with more expertise, better bodies and less sense than I have. Here's a short list of venues to be avoided.

Trials: These affairs are most certainly included among the least desirable of all human pursuits, especially if you're the one being tried. They are generally tedious things where you are expected to sit still, pay attention and look serious. The best that can happen is that you get acquitted which means you've spent a lot of time and a ton of money just to get back to where you started. At worst you will end up on the wrong side of seriously thick glass, holding a telephone, visiting with your friends and family in fifteen minute segments.

Tribunals: Even worse than trials. A tribunal is convened when the offense is of such enormity that a simple trial won't do. War crimes, crimes against humanity, treasonous acts and acts of terrorism all get adjudicated before tribunals. Tribunals generally have several judges and dozens of lawyers. Tribunals are for guys like Saddam Hussein, Herman Goering, and the commandants of POW camps. You don't want to be the guest of honor at a tribunal. There is no up side and the down side is permanent.

Triumvirates: In ancient times and in certain backward contemporary regimes you'll find three people in charge of what one guy originally thought would be his job alone. In old Rome this happened every generation or so and it never worked out very well. First of all when three people are in charge they usually spend all their time trying to line up one of the other two to side with them on important issues. As you can imagine this can lead to an uneasy partnership, to say the least. The old "dagger between the shoulder blades" was not an uncommon outcome.

Secondly triumvirates are hard to explain to your mom. It is so much easier to say "That's right mom, I run the whole show." It's tough for the moms of rulers to share their baby with anyone let alone two anyones. So the next time you are offered a place in a triumvirate run, don't walk, in the other direction.

Triglycerides: Your doctor is always telling you to get your triglycerides down, right? They have a lot to do with liver problems and diabetes and heart disease and all that bad stuff. I know that when I get the results of my annual physical I go right to the "tri" part to see if they are in retreat. I've actually tried being a better person the week before a physical exam in order to fool the blood tests into yielding better readings. You know, less starch, less sugar, less alcohol, less of everything I like. It's foolish of course but I like to think it gets me a point or two lower and reduces the severity of my doctor's lecture.

Trifectas: Betting on the ponies is a chancy proposition at best. Betting on three horses is even more so. Think of it this way. If you buy one Lottery ticket you are throwing x dollars away. If you buy three Lottery tickets you are throwing three times as many dollars away. You haven't appreciably increased your odds of winning; you're just being three times as chuckleheaded. Horses resent the fact the people bet on them. They like to race but they resent the betting as it leads directly to doping and fixing and stable fires. It's tough enough to get one horse to go along with the deal. Three horses? Fawgettaboutit.

Trigonometry: This is my final word on the subject of "tri". In high school I was a very bright lad, sailed through in most of my subjects. I took advanced classes in everything from Literature to History. But there were certain disciplines, certain ways of thinking that I never could get the hang of. The demon Algebra began a very difficult string of classes for me which ended in an awful bought with Trig. When it came time for my senior year and choosing a curriculum I sat with my guidance counselor, Brother Francis, to go over the possibilities. When I saw Chemistry on the list I liked it. Who doesn't like making explosives and smoke bombs and potions? Brother Francis, who was a kind, brilliant and generous man looked at me and said, "But Ed, Chemistry has a lot of math in it." And then he started laughing. My own guidance counselor! I was humiliated by Trigonometry and its demon sisters.

I'm glad we had this chance to talk about "tri" words. It's important, when you think you have discovered a truth, to share it with people. In today's instance it's entirely possible that I have saved one of you

from a calamitous courtroom experience or a foolish wager or a tongue lashing from your doctor. As for next year's Triathlon, I'll let you decide. Me? I'm sticking with ski jumping.