

Random Notes

*From the desk of Michael Willard, chairman of Willard.
Random Notes are written for a few special friends of Willard
(the agency and the guy).*



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A Nuclear Childhood



When I was seven, I vividly remember the evacuation of the entire Whitehaven Elementary School in Memphis, Tn. because Soviet nuclear missiles were headed our way.

It was a test, of course, but the school principal announced afterward a majority of us would have died. It was pretty heavy stuff for a kid.

Looking back more *than 60 years*, it all seems rather silly. Why Memphis? Why did we pile into the cars of parents when it was estimated we had, maybe, 15 minutes until we were so much molten ash.

The “duck and cover” school drills in case of a commie attack took much less energy and time, and you didn’t have to miss school recess.

It wasn’t too much later that salesmen who previously had sold aluminum siding for houses found a profitable business in selling family bomb shelters. My father went for a new 1954 Oldsmobile instead.

It turned out it was a wise decision.

For much of his life, my father worked in SAC, the Strategic Air Command. He was a controller and was among those whose job it was to make sure the B-52 bombers with *nuclear warheads* flying exercises toward the USSR came back before they crossed Soviet airspace.

He felt he was doing something terribly significant, and he was. However, it was a reminder that we lived in a fragile world where one pissed off Soviet leader could destroy the planet.

Many years later—with my boss the Senate Majority Leader—I sat across from Soviet Foreign Minister *Andrey Gromyko* in the Kremlin, and observed a fascinating discussion between the two men on what was called SALT II, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.

The treaty was designed to lessen the prospects of nuclear war, though for the life of me I have never understood that merely limiting nuclear weapons without getting rid of all of them made sense.

When you have sufficient kill power to destroy a country, why do you need it to the 10th power? It was called the MAD theory, or a hope that Mutually Assured Destruction would keep all fingers off the trigger.

A few months later, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and my boss, Sen. Robert Byrd, said the treaty would not be considered. Always suspicious of the USSR, it was an easy decision for him.

I don’t know about you, but I for one don’t want to go back to those days. It leads to a collective nervousness that can become pervasive and generational. It means we have to suck back in that great sigh of relief the world felt when the USSR crumbled.

However, I do believe the challenge of today vis-à-vis Russia is the greatest one in my lifetime, which includes the Cuban missile crisis. The reason for this is the Western world is more complacent today about Vladimir Putin’s intentions. Some Western nations are beholden to him.

Putin’s ambition—western leaders should write on the blackboard 50 times—goes way beyond a frozen zone in east Ukraine and the stealing of the Crimean peninsula. This is a morsel. He wants the whole enchilada.

Though I almost choke when I admit it, Mitt Romney was spot on when he said the greatest world threat today comes from a Putin led Russia. President Obama needs to wake up to this.

Putin is not a Nikita Khrushchev. Nikita was one of Joe Stalin’s boys which might have actually helped keep his ego in check. He squished the Stalin cult at the 20th Party Congress in 1956.

No, I think an FBI profiler would say Putin’s psychological make-up—ambition without conscience—is more in line with Stalin, Hitler, and Mao. In other words, illusions of grandeur without concern for consequences.

The sand of time is quickly running through the hour glass. There is only one way to deal with the *Lizard* of Odd in the Kremlin, and that is to challenge him at every turn, and do so from strength, not ambivalence.

The quicker the American president realizes this, the sooner our kids and grandkids can stop worrying about a sky filled with nuclear tipped rockets.

The Legacy of Moon Pie Jefferson

There once was a show in the U.S. called “*This is Your Life*”. In it, a guest’s life was paraded before him, folks that had been instrumental in his or her personal history.

That’s a little the way I feel with a reception for my new novel, “*The Legacy of Moon Pie Jefferson*” coming up this month in Washington, D.C. at the home of my good friend and former colleague, Kyra Cheremeteff.

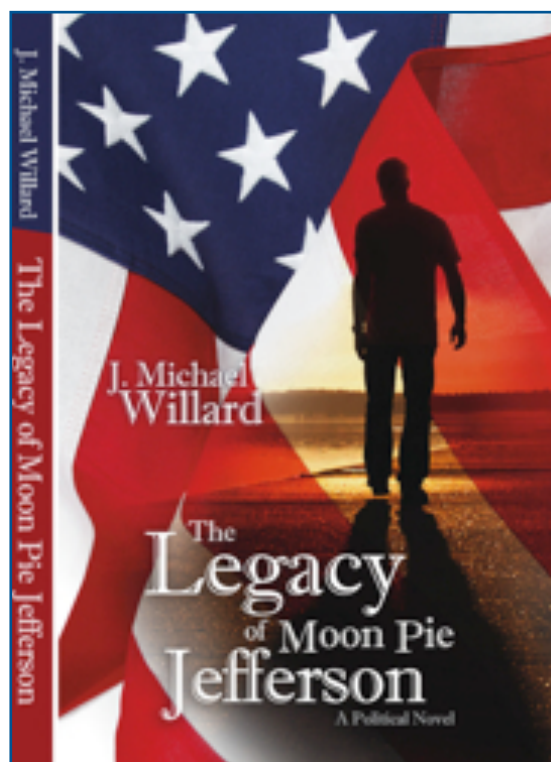
Among the confirmed guests are people I have not seen in a long while, such as Lewis Lord, the former US News & World Report editor who hired me for United Press International when I was a mere 23.

Also confirmed is Tom Raum, veteran Associated Press White House reporter who worked with me on the Tampa Times, my first newspaper job out of university.

Glad also to have Joe Galloway coming. Joe is a UPI legend and the author of a book on the battle of Ia Drang, “*We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*” which was made into a movie starring Mel Gibson.

Others include several good friends from my days at Burson-Marsteller, and Lane Bailey, with whom I worked on the John D. Rockefeller for Senate campaign back in 1983. Several people will be present from the staff of the late Senate Leader Robert Byrd where I worked for seven years.

By the way, *the book is available* at <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00NKJZD6O>



The Message is the Message

The field of advertising continues to be in a state of denial, worshipping at the altar of what was once considered creative and cool but today is simply clutter and cacophony.

What's more, advertising on television as we know it is dying.

This has confused an entire tribe of East European creative directors. They had grown up thinking advertising was about making 30-second movies.



Whether intentional or not, they let the medium swamp the message. They introduced cute or even shocking video bites, and the visual blast overpowered a message that called for simplicity and emotional connection.

Without a doubt, the *communications challenge* of today hinges on how best to reach stratified audiences.

Demographics are becoming less homogenized. No longer is the family clan sitting down in the evening together to watch a favorite program. They scatter in multiple directions, each availing his self of the media platform that suits a current purpose.

Often I have written that the advertiser or the PR marketer has to tap the consumer on the shoulder, turn him around, and metaphorically shake his hand. But more than that, a friendly hug is needed.

This challenge doesn't call for traditional advertising or traditional public relations. It does call for a married and genetically modified version of both. It calls for a *personal brand of communication* that moves to action rather than annoys or even entertains.

So, how do you reach the consumer in the 21st century?

First, shred yourself of that which worked well up until the 1990s, even beyond in some countries, those little 30- or even 60-second spots that advertising agencies so like to make and show off at award ceremonies.

Secondly, think locally. The late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, said that all politics are local. But don't think in terms of widely segmented groups, but more in terms of attitudes and emotional buttons.

Thirdly, throw out the old axiom that there is nothing new under the sun. There is, or else inventors wouldn't invent and in a computer world books wouldn't be having an all-time resurgence. But keep it simple.

Marshall McLuhan, the oft-referenced communications expert, has as his epitaph writ large: "The medium is the message." It was his most famous pronouncement, or at least the most quoted.

Today *the message is the message*, and the quicker advertisers and marketers realize this, the sooner our profession will become more relevant to the consumer.



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