

On Reading

By Carl Nelson

“If you don’t read, you’ll always be doing what somebody tells you.”

This past evening I was dining out with relations when the struggle to lose weight became the topic of conversation. I sympathized with my in law. After working out my own diet regimen over two years and writing a book about it: “The Poet’s (40 pound) Weight Loss Plan”, I had found that I could, indeed, lose at least 45 pounds. However, I also discovered that to maintain that lower weight was just too much trouble – and that I’d rather appear just a little chunky.

Lately, however, after reading the book, “Ultra Processed People” by Van Tulleken, I have sought to eliminate ultra processed foods from my diet. I feel better, and I believe some pounds are slowly sliding off. “According to this fellow,” I told my brother-in-law and others at the table, “diets simply don’t work. Willpower won’t work, as weight has been shown to be more a product of your environmental exposure to ultra processed foods. And being active won’t make you thinner either. It simply changes where the calories are burned in your body.” My enthusiasm rose with some of the points I was recalling. “They actually did an interesting experiment which provided these findings that involved using heavy water and hood devices placed on hunter-gatherers in Tanzania.”

This got no response.

“You (all) should really read the book! It is a fascinating look not only at what is driving our obesity epidemics, but other health failures as well.”

My brother in law listened with his usual wry smile.

My niece (his daughter) said, "I don't read."

They say these things back here with the same matter-of-fact flat affect that you might say, "I didn't kill your dog." or, "Those drugs are not mine."

This isn't unusual, as people back here generally don't read. They work, hunt and fish, follow sports, build and repair all sorts of stuff and watch TV – but they very rarely read. This suits me, as it leaves me free to write near the truth as I can manage about my surroundings, without any hostile pushback. Even if I wrote something, which they were told directly addressed them, I doubt they would bother to look the piece up, and then suffer the reading of it. Most likely they would rely on the gossip of one who (said they) had. The general feeling back here about people who read books is that they are "eggheads", and not really in play.

This passage from Andrew Tate, posted on 'X', fairly well encapsulates the stance:

"Reading books is for losers who are afraid to learn from life. So they try and learn from the life OTHERS have lived. But you never REALLY learn unless you lived it. You must feel it to believe it. Books are a total waste of time. Education for cowards." [11:28 AM · Dec 13, 2022](#)

I recall my nephew, relating to me (with a friend), how they had nailed some required reading in high school (I think it was Dickens) to a post and used it for target practice.

But, we're on good terms, and while no one hereabouts, excepting a rare few I come across, read what I've published – neither have they nailed any copies to posts for target practice. And they stopped bothering to call me an "egghead" years ago. So, I suppose, for lack of a better word, I've "settled in". They might even come to me for advice, the knowledge of which might only arrive from books.

And if the roles were reversed, and I was put through twelve years of mandatory schoolwork in subjects I had no interest in, and was continually prodded to do what did not come natural to me, and was continually put down (for over twelve years) for my low achievement in such matters... I might well want to shoot a few holes through Dickens, myself.

And I know many successful people who don't like to read. Stanford graduates, businessmen... Presidents of the United States! (I had to laugh reading Peter Navarro's substack, to find that he'd found the only way this cabinet level officer had to get his ideas before the President on one critical issue – was to make his case on TV.) And I have a lot of relatively unsuccessful friends who just LOVE to read! (You can also waste an awful lot of time here.) How many unsuccessful salespeople did I see filter through our company who spent their time searching for deals inside of their computers, rather than burning through some shoe leather and grabbing some customer by the lapels? And do I really like to read so much, or is it just the words and ideas which enthrall me? (Do I really like women that much, or is it just the sex which has me spellbound?) I would like to think it's both.

A point I would make for reading though is that it is the cheapest way I know of to get the best thought out there on virtually any topic. Or just for scintillating thought, the offerings greatly exceed the abilities of my neighbors. (Who might very well take umbrage at this.) But for enlightening talk, my neighbors simply don't hold a candle to say Chesterton or Scruton. ("And who the hell are they?" Might be the aggrieved, unspoken, retort.) So, a person has to ask, why would you not seek out not only what the very best minds of our time, but also what all of history has to say, after these minds have tried their very hardest to condense it in a palatable offering as is possible – and have all this for pennies? Why would a person not jump at the chance? (Or rather, sit real still – in order to focus?)

Indeed.

Well, there a few practical reasons.

The first of which is that, thorough reading is a study, which is an effort. So you must want what is there. (Do you want to know more, or just enjoy immediately what is given?) And you must read enough to have a sense of what might be there. You must have an innate sense of possibilities... be a bit of a dreamer, really. And you must also desire the silence and then employ the discipline to focus on what is there. Which brings me to the second reason.



It's been my impression that many people much rather have the immediate fun of the social group, than the possible and future benefits of finding out something. And one of the social hazards of solitary reading is that it excludes that person from being with the group. And third, groups don't like that.

My wife, as a child, had to climb a tree in order to obtain enough solitude to read uninterrupted. It was also nearly impossible in my home. Every time we sat, mom was on us. How

could we relax while she was so busy with every sort of task, she argued? But she was always busy! She wouldn't sit. One of the defining reasons for crafting the Constitution and the Bill of Rights would be for the right, as one Supreme Court Justice phrased it, ... "to be left alone". But this seems lost on many people.

One of those 'the glass is half-full' truths about people who don't read is that they tend to denigrate those who do as "losers" and "weirdoes". It takes some years and self-confidence to realize that being marginalized and disliked can be of benefit. In sales, I noticed, that being suddenly disliked could very well be due to the fact that you were doing well! In fact, outselling others. In regular society it can mean that the very people you want little to do with – want little to do with you! It's a marriage... of convenience.

One of the reasons I've suspected that many people like getting their information from the TV rather than reading is that those who read are outliers – whereas those who watch are part of a group. No matter what they learn off the tube, they can incorporate it and talk of it freely, as there are no outliers on TV. Whatever is said there is heard by thousands. Talk about being safe. You wouldn't spout weird, strange ideas if you culled them from off your TV. They've all been focus group tested! At best, if you should be first to echo what you've seen to your friends, you'll be first to spread the (plague) 'news' ... a trend-setter!

Which is why, I believe, my niece was so forceful in her statement that, "I don't read."

My niece and brother-in-law are smart, capable people, and suffer no hesitance in voicing their opinions. And why should they?

The downside to this however, as I see it, is that **if you don't read, you'll always be doing what someone else tells**

you. You will go on to do what the crowd approves. And this has perilous consequences, especially in this day and age of instant communication and social media, where people not only are fed and believe the same narratives, but rush to do so! And crowd the online sites to be most ardent to agree. You read something unusual, it'll seep into your speech, bleed into an opinion here or there, and you're a marked man... a red flag situation.

Nevertheless, isn't it wonderful to ferret things out and to further understand, to have nudged and clawed yourself a little closer to the truth, through some exploratory reading?

No opprobrium will ever halt this.