

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT

**W**e have had an awfully pleasant look at four early examples of American luminaries, boasting a great wealth of character attributes worthy of emulation. Let us now leap forward with gusto to a fifth, an American for whom I have a healthy sense of rippling admiration. Theodore Roosevelt, our twenty-sixth president, was an avid sportsman, naturalist, writer, explorer, soldier, and historian, known for his lively, masculine personality and fondness for pugilism, in both his backyard and in his politics. His interests were varied and rich, amply served by his voracious appetite for books, adventure, the society of people, wildlife, and the great outdoors. We largely have him to thank for our National Park System, as well as a great deal more preserved wilderness, not to mention the Panama Canal; but before we get to that, let's have a peek at his childhood.

Young Theodore was, for lack of a better term, a wuss. He was stricken with asthma, which left him debilitated, weak, and rather an easy target for the other boys to bully. "Having been a sickly boy, with no natural bodily prowess . . . I was at first quite unable to hold



my own when thrown into contact with other boys of rougher antecedents." Ineffectual as he may have been on the playground, his prodigious brain was already enjoying an inspired regimen of reading, a pastime of which he never seemed to tire. A favorite title in his early years was the magazine *Our Young Folks*, which our young Theodore described as containing "interesting [stories] in the first place, and in the next place teaching manliness, decency, and good conduct."

Despite his sickly state, he was as smart as a whip and keen on any topic having to do with nature. After scrutinizing a dead seal at a local market, compulsively measuring the creature's head again and again, Roosevelt was finally awarded the skull, which he employed as the tent-pole attraction in his first amateur museum of natural history at age seven, belying what would become a lifelong obsession with wildlife and its proper exhibition for public consumption. "That seal filled me with every possible feeling of romance and adventure." He was determined to pursue the career path of a naturalist, a notion he eventually gave up, although his instinct to catalogue wildlife would comprise a great deal of his life's writing.

While hiking with his family in the Alps, a still wimpy Theodore happily discovered that the beneficial effects of the exertion were suppressing his asthma and bolstering his timid spirit. His father encouraged him to begin a program of rigorous exercise, including boxing and weight training, and this discipline had a tremendous effect in fortifying Roosevelt's morale. For the first time in his life, but certainly not the last, he understood that with a properly applied dose of gumption, he could accomplish much more than the recently apprehensive version of himself could ever have envisioned. "I felt a great

admiration for men who were fearless and who could hold their own in the world, and I had a great desire to be like them."

Theodore quickly came to love boxing, an exercise that not only exponentially improved his physical health, stamina, and coordination but also fortified his self-confidence in physical confrontations. Reveling in his newfound strength, he set about to make of himself an ideal specimen of masculinity, in both body and spirit. He also found that he loved to row a boat, another invaluable labor that served to redouble his love of the fascinating scenery and bracing elements in the out-of-doors. (I can personally attest that admiring nature from a boat, particularly one that is being propelled by one's own muscle, and/or one's own wife, has a nearly magical sense of satiated relish.)

He wrote, "I suppose it sounds archaic, but I cannot help thinking that the people with motor boats miss a great deal. If they would only keep to rowboats and canoes, and use oar or paddle themselves, they would get infinitely more benefit than by having their work done for them by gasoline." Not only will such a strenuous program reinforce a body's muscle and circulation, but it also affords one the advantage of intimacy with all the ineffable pleasures to be found once one steps over the threshold of domestic comfort into the wonderland of woods or prairie. Perhaps within this sentiment lies a clue to enjoying one's life with a Rooseveltian vigor; by metaphorically choosing a path of more resistance, a person can provide stimulating challenges to himself or herself on a daily basis.

Roosevelt's encouragement inspires me to get outside and hike, bike, or row rather than remain in the homogenized climate control of the gym. I am also warmed by his sure-footed stance regarding the balance

Re-read  
This section talks about being a hiker  
woman  
domin  
by practicing  
yourself in  
Challenging  
Situations

of play versus work in a healthy life: [Play should never be allowed to interfere with work; and a life merely devoted to play is, of all forms of existence, the most dismal. But the joy of life is a very good thing, and while work is the essential in it, play also has its place.] In order to successfully execute such a life as Roosevelt's, it's apparently important to "keep one's blood up," maintaining a steady focus on victory, all the while cultivating the horsepower to leap dynamically into action. "It is only on these conditions that he will grow into the kind of American man of whom America can be really proud," he said, but I'm sure he meant to include girls in that pronouncement as well.

Theodore Roosevelt Sr. was a substantial supporter of his son's endeavors, morally and financially, as well as a role model of integrity. As number twenty-six wrote, [He combined strength and courage with gentleness, tenderness, and great unselfishness. He would not tolerate in us children selfishness or cruelty, idleness, cowardice, or untruthfulness," and "I never knew any one who got greater joy out of living than did my father, or any one who more whole-heartedly performed every duty."] Theodore Sr. died tragically at forty-six of an intestinal tumor, while his son, nineteen, was attending Harvard. If he could have lived to see the life that Junior accomplished, he would certainly have been comforted by the striking resemblance the younger Roosevelt's ideals bore to his own.

Theodore Roosevelt rode his proactive methodology straight into a political career that started in the 1881 New York State Assembly, when he became the youngest assemblyman on the floor by winning a Republican seat at the age of twenty-three. [Charging immediately into the fray by staunchly opposing the rampant corruption he found

Teddy  
Falkland  
1900  
Wisdom

Fights

### THEODORE ROOSEVELT

there led quickly to some heated altercations. As Edmund Morris writes, "Big John' MacManus, the ex-prizefighter and Tammany lieutenant . . . proposed to toss 'that damned dude' in a blanket. . . [but] fortunately Roosevelt got advance warning. . . . Marching straight up to MacManus, who towered over him, he hissed, 'I hear you are going to toss me in a blanket. By God! if you try anything like that, I'll kick you, I'll bite you, I'll kick you in the balls, I'll do anything to you—you'd better leave me alone.'" aka, it happened more than once.

This event hardly proved to be singular, as the young assemblyman found himself establishing his turf again and again:

*They stopped at a saloon for refreshments, and were confronted by the tall, taunting figure of J. J. Costello, a Tammany member. Some insult . . . caused Roosevelt to flare up. "Teddy knocked him down," Hunt recalled admiringly, "and he got up and he hit him again, and when he got up he hit him again, and he said, 'Now you go over there and wash yourself. When you are in the presence of gentlemen, conduct yourself like a gentleman.'"*

Such grit is certainly rare among the politicians I have watched in my life, and I am thrilled by Roosevelt's display of fisticuffs in the defense of decency. Part of my exhilaration is no doubt due to the fact that such a valorous example could simply not occur in our modern litigious society, without the "J. J. Costello" suing the "Roosevelt" for his bloodied nose and bruised public image. I completely agree that we should always strive for decency and politeness, but the animal in me will never fail to enjoy a well-deserved ass whuppin'. That is why I practice the policy of "hug first."



Surviving the jungle of American politics required a particular attitude of a man, which Roosevelt famously described thusly: "He must walk warily and fearlessly, and while he should never brawl if he can avoid it, he must be ready to hit hard if the need arises. Let him remember, by the way, that the unforgivable crime is soft hitting. Do not hit at all if it can be avoided; but never hit softly."

In the interest of maintaining his own ability to never hit softly, Roosevelt, now governor of New York, engaged the services of a championship wrestler to swing by the Albany office three or four afternoons a week to wrestle him. This program, agreeable to Roosevelt, did not, however, meet the approval of the comptroller. He refused to honor the bill for the wrestling mat, suggesting that a billiard table might be more appropriate. Roosevelt acquiesced by terminating the wrestler and hiring a professional oarsman instead. The oarsman would also swing by the office, but instead of rowing, they would wrestle each other. By God, our man Roosevelt was going to see himself wrestled! This apparent solution didn't last very long either, however, as on the occasion of only their second grappling session, the oarsman had one of his ribs broken, while Theodore badly bruised two of his own and nearly dislocated his shoulder in the balance. Roosevelt finally but reluctantly relinquished his insistence that wrestling occur at his office.

Later in his administration as president, he decreed that "each [military] officer should prove his ability to walk fifty miles, or ride one hundred, in three days."

Thanks to the stringent upkeep of his body's constitution, Roosevelt was able to withstand slings and arrows of every sort, figura-

to  
Too.

tively but also quite literally: While campaigning in Milwaukee in 1912, he was shot in the chest just as he was about to speak. The bullet passed through a thin steel case for his glasses and a fifty-page copy of his speech folded in half in his inner breast pocket. Like some magnificent Hector, he merely paused, considered the wound, determined that it had not reached his lung and so was not immediately dangerous, then stepped to the podium to say, "Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot; but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose." Come on. What? Then he spoke for ninety minutes. Blood slowly soaked his shirt a bright scarlet, but he stood and staunchly delivered his oratory. It was later decided that the least dangerous solution was to leave the bullet in the muscle of his chest, and so he carried it there for the rest of his life. Gumption

Besides wrestling any strapping cuss he could get his hands on, Theodore Roosevelt also continued to see his love of the outdoors made manifest as he grew into middle age. There are men who love out-of-doors who yet never open a book; and other men who love books but to whom . . . nature is a sealed volume. . . . Nevertheless among those men whom I have known the love of books and the love of the outdoors, in their highest expressions, have usually gone hand in hand. Which means that if you're reading this right now in the woods, or floating down the Sangamon River in your canoe, then you would have been held in high esteem by old number twenty-six.

Roosevelt's love of nature and adventuring led him to the great frontier beyond the Mississippi River, where he enjoyed the exploration of the wilderness almost as much as he loved hunting wild game.

A well-born East Coast Yankee, he found that he flourished in the trappings and environs of the great hunters of the West, as well as the "cowboy life" of the great cattle ranches of his era. He even went so far as to try his hand at ranching in the Dakota Territory, a rugged and unforgiving land that brooked no weakness of body or, as it turned out for a few unlucky thieves, of character.

Whilst working the Elkhorn Ranch along the Little Missouri River in the early spring of 1886, Roosevelt and two companions awoke one morning to find that their boat had been stolen. The ice on the flooded river was just breaking up, rendering it extremely dangerous to navigate. The ranchers rightly suspected three known local horse thieves, but there was little to be done, as theirs had been the only boat known in the vast wilderness. Roosevelt and his companions, however, were not about to take this setback lying down. In a few days' time they constructed a flat-bottomed skiff in which to give chase to the thieves.

On top of his service as an assistant deputy in Billings County, Theodore Roosevelt also took this criminal action as an attack on his personal pride and safety. In the lawless wilds of the Badlands, where one couldn't call the sheriff or even send him a telegraph, a person needed to depend on himself for protection. As Roosevelt relayed in his book *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, "To submit tamely and meekly to theft, or to any other injury, is to invite almost certain repetition of the offense, in a place where self-reliant hardihood and the ability to hold one's own under all circumstances rank as the first of virtues."

Naturally (albeit impossibly), Roosevelt and his merry men caught

up with the thieves and captured them with no trouble. Now, normally in this wild land, as I've said, each man got to play judge and jury when it came to doling out punishment for known crimes. The three criminals were known to be wanted for not only cattle-killing but horse-thieving, which was considered the greatest crime one could commit on the frontier, thereby punishable by an immediate hanging. Throw in the boat-stealing (the rowboat was clinker-planked, no less, a hand-hewn craft made with care and skill), and nobody would have blamed Roosevelt for shooting these reprobates on sight.

But that was not the way of our Bull Moose. He boated them laboriously down the river, commenting, "The next eight days were as irksome and monotonous as any I ever spent: there is very little amusement in combining the functions of a sheriff with those of an arctic explorer. The weather kept as cold as ever." Roosevelt then marched them overland through ankle-deep mud for thirty-six hours (!) to the town of Dickinson, "and I was able to give my unwilling companions into the hands of the sheriff. Under the laws of Dakota I received my fees as a deputy sheriff for making the three arrests, and also mileage for the three hundred odd miles gone over—a total of some fifty dollars."

There is little about this anecdote that doesn't beg flat astonishment. I suppose the fact that they were running a cattle ranch in the wintry, Native American-infested wilderness can begin to give us an idea of their mettle to begin with, but by then literally risking their lives, Roosevelt and his two fellow champions amaze me. All done just to see justice served, for as he described the miscreants further, "They belonged to a class that always holds sway during the raw youth of a



frontier community, and the putting down of which is the first step towards decent government." The paperwork of decency was well ensconced faraway in the more modern urban centers of government, so maintaining the integrity of the law on the frontier depended wholly upon citizens like Roosevelt and company.

The second of my many favorite details from this story is the fact that these redoubtable cowboys, when faced with a seemingly irredeemable loss, simply gathered the best planks they could find, along with some tools and a modicum of gumption, and built themselves a solution, one of the most venerable objects a human being can create: a wooden boat. Somehow, in my examination of a list of Americans with gumption, boats, particularly those crafted of wood, seem to keep cropping up in a substantial way. I may have to look into that as we proceed.

The final tidbit from this tale (a story so heroic that it would have needed toning down if it were a Jack London fiction) is simply that in the midst of this chase, both when the pursuers would stop each night to camp and then after they had collected their quarry, continuing to camp at night, Roosevelt pulled out the only book he had brought along. "As for me, I had brought with me 'Anna Karenina,' and my surroundings were quite grey enough to harmonize well with Tolstoi." Most any one of us soft, modern Americans would scoff—and loudly, at that—were you to suggest that we trek out even to the mailbox in inclement weather. Theodore Roosevelt not only took it upon himself to achieve this vigorous pursuit worthy of an Indiana Jones movie, but he did so at times putting his feet up by the fire and perusing the Tolstoy novel in his pocket. What a stud!

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Among the many tributes to him in present-day North Dakota, including Theodore Roosevelt National Park, perhaps the most appropriately august recognition is to be found at the Pitchfork Steak Fondue, gleefully pointed out to me by that extremely well-traveled woman of letters, Sarah Vowell. Every evening 'round suppertime, the cowboy chefs load several raw steaks onto a pitchfork and fondue 'em, cowboy-style. This, of course, means they dip them in a barrel of hot cooking oil. Imagine my shame to have been caught unaware of this repast of glory sizzling in our midst. By the time you are reading this, I fully intend to have severally sampled this barrel-fried beef in the town of Medora, North Dakota, especially after glimpsing this tantalizing morsel in a review on the computer web: "The Fondue is served before the musical." Tickets booked.

On a more sober note, it's hard to deny that Theodore Roosevelt's stance on many hot-button issues would not fly with our modern, progressive society. His outspoken views on the American Indian and women, for example, would be enough to place him in hot water, and I don't intend to defend him. He was an irrepressibly virile man, the sort one might describe as "macho," living in an era when such a personality could be richly celebrated and rewarded, particularly by the white supporters of an imperialistic American worldview.

If one were to mount a defense on behalf of his principles, one might argue that his good deeds and acts of valor could be thought to far outstrip his rather archaic, occasional sexism and bellicose approach to foreign relations. The degree to which his misdeeds might overshadow his innocence is a complicated topic, to be sure, but in no arena so much as his love of killing wild animals.

If one examines the young Theodore's fascination with a seat skull at age seven, then observes his penchant for not only claiming wildlife prizes of every stripe for his trophy collection but assiduously cataloging them and describing their behaviors and habitats with a scientist's eye for detail, only then perhaps can one fathom the lust that besotted the man when presented with the teeming wilderness of the American West.

Roosevelt was absolutely smitten with the romance of traveling into the unbroken frontier, tracking and stalking his prey, and then most of the time successfully shooting that prey for food or display. He killed a great many creatures, a hobby for which he received a lot of criticism, even during his lifetime. As I have stated, I stand in support of hunting and fishing as incredibly satisfying methods by which to put dinner on one's table. If you are a person who disagrees with that stance, I am okay with that; I just won't take you fishing. I feel that these, like all forms of harvest, should be performed responsibly with respect for the ecosystem and future generations, but that doesn't mean you can't have a beer in the boat.

Now killing critters for a reason that doesn't involve a practical use—that is not my bag. Wasting a large elk because its head will supposedly look good over the fireplace does not appeal to me. But when such a sticky topic comes up, I try to remember that my own position has a lot to do with my time and place. I was brought up catching fish, not shooting bighorn sheep. If I had grown up in Colorado or Wyoming, or really just in a different family in Illinois, then I might well be an avid hunter. This perspective keeps me from feeling I need to judge the hunters, just because it's not what we did at my

**THEODORE ROOSEVELT**

At the same time, I also try not to judge the folks who gitter about the hunters, because that's also not what flies in my house. It's

A funny thing about Roosevelt is that when he wasn't out killing a large pile of black-tailed deer, he was fighting fervently to preserve our nation's forests and wildlife. The thing I try to remember about a figure like him is that, for all his epic accomplishments and feats of bravery, he was still a human being. This means he was as fallible as any of us. For example, how many of us (rightly) rail against the evils of corporate fast-food fare, only to catch ourselves in the devil's drive-through some late and ravenous night? That happens to me about once or twice a year, and I simply shrug and try to wolf down the briefly delicious, offending pap before it cools off and turns to inedible rubbish. This doesn't make me a supporter of fast food as a lifestyle; it merely exposes me momentarily as a human being who contains just the type of lager, or "weakness," upon which fast-food companies prey. We all have such weaknesses by definition, and understanding this to be true is an important step toward curtailing a lot of the whining we do about things like shooting a deer for venison or using a pair of leather work gloves.

To my way of thinking, Roosevelt knew, or at least he intuited, that the type of unrestricted hunting he so enjoyed had a very definite expiration date. On one hand, he made incredible strides toward the preservation of nature in all her beauty with the legislation he passed and his instituting of our National Parks. On the other, he swooped in and selfishly indulged himself on the flesh-and-blood fruits of that same nature's bounty for his own pleasure. In his defense, when he arrived at the party, there was still plenty of beer, as it were, but

knowing well the magnitude of the approaching traffic, he was able to enjoy his sport while at the same time comprehending that such pillage must come to end.

In his book *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, Roosevelt takes pains to obsessively detail each of twenty-seven discrete species of quarry, their habits and attributes, and how best to hunt them. At the same time, he also speaks to the responsible thinning of the herds in order to preserve the wildlife from a conservationist's point of view. Thus, he manages to wear both hats even while hunting in his prime, which I feel speaks very well of his character. He did not approve of the killing of animals just for the sake of sport but instead considered hunting just one of the avenues by which he could learn about the nature and topography of a given area. Consider this passage from *The Wilderness Hunter*:

*In hunting, the finding and killing of the game is after all but a part of the whole. The free, self-reliant, adventurous life, with its rugged and stalwart democracy; the wild surroundings, the grand beauty of the scenery, the chance to study the ways and habits of the woodland creatures—all these unite to give to the career of the wilderness hunter its peculiar charm. The chase is among the best of all national pastimes; it cultivates that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone.*

On one famously unproductive 1902 hunting outing in Mississippi, a scout finally snuck ahead and cornered and chained a black bear to a tree so that Roosevelt could claim its life and they could all

*Invention of the  
Teddy Bear.*

go home. The scout was disappointed when the big-game hunter refused to senselessly slaughter the shackled beast on the grounds that it would be extremely unsportsmanlike. Newspapers loved the story, and Clifford Berryman immortalized the moment in *The Washington Post* with a humorous cartoon of the scene. A Brooklyn candy-shop owner saw the cartoon and got the idea to sell his stuffed animals under the new moniker "Teddy's Bears," which is how the teddy bear got its name. And that's one to grow on.

Even when Roosevelt wasn't in the woods, he was still avidly fueling his pursuit of the ideal masculinity, for himself and also for America. While serving as William McKinley's assistant secretary of the navy in 1897, he aggressively took over the command of our country's navy, bolstering its readiness for battle. When war was officially declared with Spain, Roosevelt shocked those around him by resigning his (civilian) navy post and enlisting in the army so that he could go to Cuba and fight. He and army colonel Leonard Wood formed the first US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, which the press immediately christened "the Rough Riders." Roosevelt once again proved his mettle, and then some, when he led the limping regiment uphill into flank enemy fire at the Battle of Kettle Hill.

*On the day of the big fight I had to ask my men to do a deed that European military writers consider utterly impossible of performance, that is, to attack over open ground unshaken infantry armed with the best modern repeating rifles behind a formidable system of entrenchments. The only way to get them to do it in the way it had to be done was to lead them myself.*

*- Teddy.*



Say what you will of the man, but he was as good as his word. When the going got tough, his rough-riding ass got going, so much so that this civilian volunteer was promoted to colonel during the fighting and nominated for a Medal of Honor. Upon his return to the States, he preferred being called "the Colonel," stating that the decisive battle had been "the great day of [his] life."

We should all be infinitely thankful that Theodore Roosevelt was on our side. In his political career, he worried no adversary more doggedly than the corrupt corporate influences that aimed to take advantage of the citizenry: "To dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics, is the first task of the statesmanship of the day." As effective as he may have been, we apparently have not escaped this unholy alliance in our modern society, as Washington lobbyists openly spend billions on the purchase of congressional favors. Would that Colonel Roosevelt were present today to whip some sense into all of us.

I'd love to imagine paddling my canoe down, say, the Snake River with Roosevelt (he'd be in the stern, of course) and engaging him in a discourse about the great advances in equality between the genders since his day. That is, if I could get him to shut up about all the great blue herons dipping frogs from the shallow water. Despite his very vocal opinions on the proper indoctrination of boys and men, the colonel was also actually rather instrumental in the advent of women's suffrage on the eve of its success. His Bull Moose Party was the first political party to grant women any recognition in the voting arena, to the extent that Roosevelt's 1912 nomination was seconded at the Bull Moose Convention by none other than Jane Addams herself.

The world was a very different place then, particularly in the way

that world powers regarded war, before either of the world wars had occurred.

— Imperialism... Look it up.

Roosevelt ruled in a different era, one in which a person could remain popular while also openly advocating for war. "All the great masterful races have been fighting races" is not really going to put you in the White House these days, which is why Ted Nugent has not yet seen a nomination. One could argue that behaving more or less like a "man" succeeded insofar as helping the Allies defeat the fascist Axis powers in World War II, but then the same brute force caused us to throw a couple of punches too many when we obliterated countless numbers of Japanese human beings by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I have to wonder what the colonel would have thought of our contemporary warfare that ultimately can be conducted from a distance of thousands of miles with the push of a button. Methinks he would have a hard time finding the honor in it.

That said, I wonder if I could convince Theodore Roosevelt (whom I would never call "Teddy," as it was a nickname he despised) that perhaps what America needs, if we hope to evolve into a more decent people, is a little more of the woman's touch? When our citizens are determined to openly wear pistols on their belts to go shopping at Walmart, that signifies to me a failure on the part of the macho ideal. Ostensibly, the handgun is displayed to let evildoers know, in no uncertain terms, that this is not a person with whom to trifle. It then follows that the wearing of the pistol presumes a situation in which the bearer will need to shoot someone, rendering the brandishing of the weapon a badge of fear, does it not? It occurs to me that if we keep on turning to such "masculine" methodology to solve our conflicts,

the only inevitable ending is a bunch of somebody's family lying in a bloody schoolhouse, movie theater, or smoking Japanese city. I guess we just hope it's not our family? I don't like the odds.

As will often happen with me, an interesting train of thought will bring to mind a Tom Waits song, and "Day After Tomorrow" is one of his best ever (cowritten with his bride, Kathleen Brennan).

You can't deny

The other side

Don't wanna die

Any more than we do.

What I'm tryin' to say,

Is don't they pray

To the same God that we do?

Tell me, how does God choose?

Whose prayers does he refuse?

[ Sure, we and our allies have succeeded (so far) in keeping the specters of fascism and communism from overtaking the globe, but there are some extremists in the Middle East these days who are doing things in a way that's awfully hard to stomach. I think we have to examine how at least some of their hatred is fueled by a nation (us) that has succeeded in remaining the reigning bully on the playground for many, many decades. What do our methods amount to, exactly? Have we taken their lunch money one too many times? One hundred too

many times? I can't answer that. I am literally just a handsomely paid wiseass, but I do think it's a question worth asking. Would Theodore Roosevelt, the man who said, "The most practical kind of politics is the politics of decency," approve of our casual "policing" wars? Hard to say, but given his stance on the amount of corporate influence governing the "conflicts," I think no.

All in all, the more I read about Roosevelt, the more human he seems, however inspirational. Whether I agree with all the strong opinions he held, I can certainly refuel my own well of gumption with the example he set in a life packed to the gills with adventure. If I could go back in time and help out with his final bid for president, I would have suggested the campaign slogan "Bull Moose: Balls Deep." I do believe we could have left Mr. Taft crying in his fat soup.

In the final reckoning, I will always be grateful to Colonel Roosevelt for providing us with this instructional sentiment, which grows more poignant with every passing day: "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

I'm getting that fat too.