



A SPECIAL MEETING

# THE MONT PELERIN SOCIETY

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FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE:  
IDEAS AND ACTIONS FOR A FREE SOCIETY

CHAPTER THREE

MILTON, ROSE, ME AND POETRY  
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HOOVER INSTITUTE • STANFORD UNIVERSITY

## Milton, Rose, me and Poetry

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What was the source of Milton Friedman's success? He was a unique blend of scientist and salesman. George Shultz musically highlighted his scientific approach with a song about theories supported by facts which you can see in this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4bUppCNIM> or read what he said:

*"A fact without a theory is like a ship without a sail. Is like a ship without a rudder, like a kite without a tail. A fact without a theory is as sad as sad can be. But if there's one thing worse in the universe it's a theory, I said a theory, I mean a theory without a fact."*

Milton himself gave some credit for his success to his disciplined avoidance of personal attack when debating Ideas. In an interview I asked him about his ability to disagree without being disagreeable (also on a video)

*Chitester - Over the years I've watched you calm down a debate by saying, "go slowly, go slowly, urging the participants to control their emotions and think carefully. Is that a personality trait, is that something you were born with or did you train yourself to do that, to maintain civility and avoid ad hominin attacks?*

*Friedman – "In a way I'm inclined to say yes. In the following sense. Way back when we were in Washington during the New Deal. I was at the National Resources Committee. I, at one point in a meeting with Faith Williams, who was a woman at the Bureau of Labor Statistics - we were cooperating on this project of a study of consumer purchases. At any rate, at one of these meetings I lost my temper, and I accused her of ill faith or something and I later discovered I was wholly wrong. And that had a very big impression on me. And I decided I was never going to let that happen again."*

To those I would add his curiosity.

His interest in everything.

His twinkle in the eye "let's go slowly," questioning that led to numerous break through public policy ideas.

The search for truth.

For the winning ideas that improve human well-being.

For emerging order through nearly infinite voluntary agreements of individuals.

But let's also keep in mind, this search for truth also includes intuitive assessments of what consciousness perceives as reality.



As Fred Rogers would sing in “Sometimes People are Good”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro2qQuWUEs0>

*Sometimes people are good,  
And they do just what they should.  
But the very same people who are good sometimes,  
Are the very same people who are bad sometimes.  
It's funny, but it's true.  
It's the same, isn't it for me and...*

Fred Rogers at his best. Can anyone deny the truth of those thoughts? Do we not admire the creative way Fred introduces children to a very complex idea in a simple way?

The impact of Friedman on human society was from transferring his scientific wisdom to others through his instinctive talent for storytelling.

Two days over 43 years ago, on January 14, 1977, thanks to an introduction by W. Alan Wallis, then Chancellor of the University of Rochester, at an apartment on the northeast corner of Jones and California streets in San Francisco, I met Milton and Rose Friedman.

I was then President of the public TV station in Erie, PA, which I had founded ten years earlier.

That evening I read two poems to the Friedmans, hoping to expand their understanding of “who” I was. I had no idea poetry was already a part of their life. Their son David had memorized a large portion of Rudyard Kipling’s poetry and had authored some himself.

My goal was to persuade them I had the skill and artistic sense necessary to complete the ambitious project I was proposing. And I was also hoping to impress Rose. Alan Wallis had advised me, “to get Milton to participate you must convince Rose.”

The first poem uses a moral quandary to start us thinking about the meaning of life.

Traveling Through Dark  
By William Stafford

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
That road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
And stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
She had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason her side was warm;  
her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.  
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
Under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
Around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all – my only swerving –  
Then pushed her over the edge into the river.

I had read *Capitalism and Freedom* before meeting them and had picked up a few of the key ideas. With this and the following poem I emphasized choices and being free to choose long before we decided on a title for the resulting TV series.

Hay for the Horses  
By Gary Snyder

He had driven half the night  
From far down San Joaquin  
Through Mariposa, up the  
Dangerous mountain roads,  
And pulled in at eight a.m.  
With his big truckload of hay behind the barn

With winch and ropes and hooks  
We stacked the bales up clean  
To splintery redwood rafters  
High in the dark, flecks of alfalfa  
Whirling through shingle-cracks of light,  
Itch of haydust in the sweaty shirt and shoes.

At lunchtime under Black oak  
Out in the hot corral,  
-The old mare nosing lunchpails,  
Grasshoppers crackling in the weeds-  
“I’m sixty-eight,” he said,  
“I first bucked hay when I was seventeen.  
I thought, that day I started,  
I sure would hate to do this all my life.  
And dammit, that’s just what  
I’ve gone and done.”

Despite the farm hand's claim to the contrary, I think the economic way of thinking leads me to conclude he did not really "hate" doing farm work.

In February 1977, the Friedman's agreed to proceed with the creation of a TV series, which became "Free To Choose." In the fall of 1977, Milton came to Erie at my request, to speak to the Rotary Club and help me show my Board of Directors and the local community, the project was moving forward.

I had the pleasure of introducing Milton and in doing so emphasized his curiosity by reading the following poem.

Overland to the Islands  
By Denise Levertov

Let's go – much as that dog goes,  
intently haphazard.  
The Mexican light on a day that  
'smells like autumn in Connecticut'  
makes iris ripples on his black gleaming fur  
– and that too is as one would desire –  
a radiance consorting with the dance.  
Under his feet rocks and mud, his imagination, sniffing,  
engaged in its perceptions - dancing edgeways, there's nothing the dog disdains  
on his way, -  
nevertheless he keeps moving,  
changing pace and approach but not direction –  
'every step an arrival'.

Milton started his speech by turning to me and saying, "Bob, thanks for that introduction, but I didn't know you thought of me as a dog." My heart stopped, then he smiled, the audience laughed, and I relaxed.

I often associate Milton with Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken." Not in the context of his scholarly work in economics, which was in the mainstream of economic thought, with his ideas influencing scholars for decades to come.

Where Milton stood above all his contemporaries was applying his inventiveness, his curiosity, his creativity to the development of new ways to address critical public policy issues.

The Road Not Taken  
By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day;  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

When Milton died in November of 2006 I made every effort to help Rose endure her grief. She lived almost three more years, dying in August 2009. At Memorial Services for her at Hoover Institution and the University of Chicago, I reflected on her life and shared the following poem to emphasize how much she missed Milton in those final years.

For Sale  
By Robert Lowell

Poor sheepish plaything,  
organized with prodigal animosity,  
lived in just a year -  
my Father's cottage at Beverly Farms  
was on the market the month he died.  
Empty, open intimate,  
its town-house furniture  
had an on tiptoe air  
of waiting for the mover  
on the heels of the undertaker.

Ready, afraid  
of living alone till eighty,  
Mother mooned in a window,  
as if she had stayed on a train  
one stop past her destination.

Every occasion I spent time with Rose after Milton died, she would say in her grief, “I want to be where Milton is.”

Milton helped all of us understand freedom, economics, politicians and ourselves, through his concise and witty quotations, squeezing new meaning from common phrases. The following poem illustrates the power of words to convey far more than any picture.

A Box of Pastels  
By Ted Kooser

I once held on my knees a simple wooden box  
in which a rainbow lay dusty and broken.  
It was a set of pastels that had years before  
belonged to the painter Mary Cassatt,  
and all of the colors she’d used in her work  
lay open before me. Those hues she’d most used,  
the peaches and pinks, were worn down to the stubs,  
while the cool colors –violet, ultramarine –  
had been set, scarcely touched, to one side.  
She’d had little patience with darkness, and her heart  
held only a measure of shadow. I touched  
the warm dust of those colors, her tools,  
and left there with light on the tips of my fingers.

And I use this poem to remind people, were it not for the wealth created by free market capitalism and the personal freedom it supports there would be no discretionary income to support the arts which contribute so much to our happiness.

Finally, I share with you, Milton’s favorite poem. The basic message is: no free society, no kingdom, no empire, no dictator, no tyrant can change the immutable laws of the Copybook Headings. When we let them erode, when our children no longer learn them, when they no longer come readily to mind, societies crumble.

Sayings like:

“sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me,”

“a penny saved is a penny earned,”

“actions speak louder than words.”

are an important way to reinforce commonly held guides to a happy life.

I was surprised to learn (quote) “actions speak louder than words” originated in the 1600s, projecting a concept consistent with our understanding of the economic way of thinking.

The Gods of the Copybook Headings  
By Rudyard Kipling

AS I PASS through my incarnations in every age and race,  
I make my proper prostrations to the Gods of the Market Place.  
Peering through reverent fingers I watch them flourish and fall,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings, I notice, outlast them all.

We were living in trees when they met us. They showed us each in turn  
That Water would certainly wet us, as Fire would certainly burn:  
But we found them lacking in Uplift, Vision and Breadth of Mind,  
So we left them to teach the Gorillas while we followed the March of Mankind.

We moved as the Spirit listed. They never altered their pace,  
Being neither cloud nor wind-borne like the Gods of the Market Place,  
But they always caught up with our progress, and presently word would come  
That a tribe had been wiped off its icefield, or the lights had gone out in Rome.

With the Hopes that our World is built on they were utterly out of touch,  
They denied that the Moon was Stilton; they denied she was even Dutch;  
They denied that Wishes were Horses; they denied that a Pig had Wings;  
So we worshipped the Gods of the Market Who promised these beautiful things.

When the Cambrian measures were forming, They promised perpetual peace.  
They swore, if we gave them our weapons, that the wars of the tribes would cease.  
But when we disarmed They sold us and delivered us bound to our foe,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "Stick to the Devil you know."

On the first Feminian Sandstones we were promised the Fuller Life  
(Which started by loving our neighbour and ended by loving his wife)  
Till our women had no more children and the men lost reason and faith,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "The Wages of Sin is Death."

In the Carboniferous Epoch we were promised abundance for all,  
By robbing selected Peter to pay for collective Paul;  
But, though we had plenty of money, there was nothing our money could buy,  
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said: "If you don't work you die."

Then the Gods of the Market tumbled, and their smooth-tongued wizards  
withdrew  
And the hearts of the meanest were humbled and began to believe it was true  
That All is not Gold that Glitters, and Two and Two make Four



And the Gods of the Copybook Headings limped up to explain it once more.

As it will be in the future, it was at the birth of Man  
There are only four things certain since Social Progress began.  
That the Dog returns to his Vomit and the Sow returns to her Mire,  
And the burnt Fool's bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire;

And that after this is accomplished, and the brave new world begins  
When all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins.  
As surely as Water will wet us, as surely as Fire will burn,  
The Gods of the Copybook Headings with terror and slaughter return!

Forty-three years after meeting Milton and Rose, reflecting on our relationship I am humbled by the faith they had in me and proud to have managed to justify their faith. I hope our work together will continue to help advance human freedom and well-being for decades to come.



## **BOB CHITESTER**

### **FREE TO CHOOSE NETWORK**

Bob Chitester is the founder and executive chairman of Free to Choose Network. After completing his BA and MA degrees at the University of Michigan, he created closed-circuit educational television systems and launched a public television and radio station, which he headed for sixteen years. He created numerous public television programs, including Milton Friedman's world-changing 1980 series, *Free to Choose*.

Chitester also created *Stossel in the Classroom*, which morphed into Izzit.org, a source of educational videos serving more than 300,000 middle school and high school teachers. He started the Idea Channel, a library of more than two hundred recordings of intellectual discussions between the world's leading scholars, which includes sixteen Nobel Prize laureates.

Currently he is leading the effort to develop several community engagement activities associated with the upcoming series on the US Constitution, *A More or Less Perfect Union*, hosted by Judge Douglas Ginsburg. Chitester is also guiding the development of Capitaf, Milton and Rose Friedman's summer home in Fairlee, Vermont, as a venue for residential student colloquiums to discuss Friedman's public-policy ideas.

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