

Dr. W. Edwards Deming

In the first of my columns on the Old West, I mentioned Lillie Langtry's "Lash La Rue Sweet Potatoes" World Crusade, Or, Why You Can't Buy Quintessential Western Wear Boots. I call it a "comedy with undertones." It draws on one of my short stories that turned into a play and a screenplay. But it has perhaps more to offer in bringing together the heroine and Dr. "W. Edwards" Deming, who has influenced me in a number of ways. Its log line is "Adorers of the Old West and Ava Gardner Meet Total Quality Management Guru Deming!"

Dr. Deming (1900-1993), the father of Total Quality Management, grew up in the tradition of Western pioneer values. My knowledge of him began academically but was doubtless egged on his Old West connections. A "rugged individualist" type (but also humble), he yet had fellow feeling and seemed to know instinctively that the John Wayne-Clint Eastwood Syndrome, no matter how much he admired it, did not work, bare-fisted, in the increasingly complex global world.

The Demings had homesteaded in Wyoming and lived five years in a shack covered with tar-paper. Mrs. Deming, with her two boys, followed her husband by train. They left it in Cody, named for "Buffalo Bill," who frequently visited his sister Irma at her hotel there, and W. Edwards saw him. He never lost



his love for Western heroes, the Iron Horse, or statistics, which he used to help the railroad establish its rates and divvy up its routes. W. Edwards' mother also had Western pluck and a reach for betterment. She supplemented the family income by giving piano lessons and taught him to play organ, piano, piccolo, and flute. He composed liturgical music, and, in his eighties, played it with symphony orchestras.

Although W. Edwards began as a "bean counter," he later shifted to the infamous "red bead game" to apprise managers of their stupidity. He helped Gen. Douglas MacArthur rebuild post-war Japan, but he alone is credited with its present-day status as a major industrial nation. He had some help, of course.

My academic side led me to hold a Deming workshop (1991), on the Vermont campus where I was President, for students, faculty, staff, and special guests. I wrote "Ten Recommendations for Transforming Education and Valuing Differences: Collaboration Beyond Outcomes Assessment and TQM/Demingism" for a journal I founded [Small College Creativity, 2.2 (Winter, 1990-91): 16-25] and expanded it for the Conference on "Creating the Quality School," University of Oklahoma, March 30-April 1, 1992. [ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon. ED 346 606]. Also in 1992, I gave an invited presentation on "Total Quality Education" as Visiting Distinguished Scholar, Seminar on "Educational Leadership for a Competitive America," United States Office of Personnel Management, Central Management Development Center, Oak Ridge, TN. But the urge to create and find completion culminated in the play summarized below that took its heroine

eventually home to North Carolina.

At the Bean-Pardoo ranch outside a small town near Langtry, Texas, Lillie Langtry Smith Bean-Pardoo treats her husband, Quintus Bean Pardoo, to a preview of the menu being prepared as a welcome for the famous guru of Total Quality Management. [When I corresponded with W. Edwards, he rebuked me for calling him "guru"!] Dr. Deming has heard of the successes of the company founded by Quintus, Quintessential Western Wear, and wants to see it. The menu is "acted" by the Grub Line, under the direction of Bean Master the Cook, long with the Bean-Pardoos and their friend and self-appointed guardian. The Grubliners play various Western heroes/heroines, including Lash La Rue and Judge Roy Bean, devotee of actress Lillie Langtry, for whom the main character is named.

Lillie Langtry's life-long quest for the Old West has been fed by the sparse but intriguing information she has gleaned about her namesake, plus her childhood experiences at the movies. Through Judge Roy Bean, she became a "bean/Bean resuscitator" and vowed to marry a Bean, though she was wise enough not to insist that his last name be Bean. On a visit to Langtry, Texas, she is "discovered" by Bean Master, who plays Cupid for Quintus and her. ["Bean Master" is actually an Old West term for a cook.]

Dr. Deming meets Bean Master the hard way. The cook speaks only in quotations from Western movies until he takes the lay of a person's land. Still, they become fast friends, especially when Bean Master learns of W. Edwards' Western background.

Not generally ignorant of anything, much less anything Western, Dr. Deming, once he gets to know Quintus and Lillie Langtry, confesses that, of all the Western heroes who give their names to the dishes created for his welcome dinner, he does not recognize Lash La Rue. She obliges with Lash's story and an account of his recent death, then gives Dr. Deming a preview of Quintessential Western Wear.

Dr. Deming soon comes upon a downcast Quintus fretting over what can be done for Lillie Langtry, who needs something of her very own that serves humanity and is not overshadowed by Quintus's successes. [Deming's second wife, Lola, thought that each woman needed something of her own and insisted that Japanese wives accompany their husbands to the great feasts held for the Demings.] When Quintus describes Dogtown, the prairie dog playground he and Lillie Langtry "escape" to, Dr. Deming thinks he may have a solution—a new musical composition incorporating the prairie dogs' love parade, a side of the Old West most folks do not know.

Dr. Deming calls a meeting with Quintus, Bean Master, and Lillie Langtry to find a project for her, and they come up with "Lillie Langtry's 'Lash La Rue Sweet Potatoes' World Crusade." The humble sweet potato will be a vehicle for uniting the world. The crusade debuts in Japan, where, the night before, the Kobe Symphony has premiered Dr. Deming and Lillie Langtry's The Lash La Rue Symphony Number 1, Opus Number 1. All goes very well indeed until the last, when the audience refuses to leave and becomes angry. At length, the Interpreter ascertains that every person in attendance has been promised a pair of Quintessential Western Wear Boots for coming and behaving appropriately. Unbeknownst to the Bean-Pardoos, someone back home [Bean Master?], doubtless meaning to protect them, has inadvertently poisoned the Great Venture. Lillie Langtry is crushed, and Quintus tries his best to comfort her.

The Epilogue explains the subtitle. While only Bean Master and Dr. Deming know the whereabouts of Lillie Langtry and Quintus, who have disappeared into the sunrise, we can take comfort in a recently founded museum, "The Ava Gardner KNOWLEDGE BOX," in Smithfield, North Carolina. It has an attached tea room, where the specialty is Sweet Potato Scones, and The Lash La Rue Symphony Number 1, Opus Number 1, is piped in at least twice a day.

The first volume of my collected plays is currently in press. It includes Lillie Langtry's "Lash La Rue Sweet Potatoes" World Crusade, Or, Why You Can't Buy Quintessential Western Wear Boots.

Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler, of Burlington's The Village at Brookwood, a former college president, is widely published in academics and creative writing and works as a writer and an editor. As Central Region Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet 2013-2015, she mentored student and adult poets.

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Page Layout/Design + Ad Design
Hart Palmer • hpalmer@mebtel.net
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