

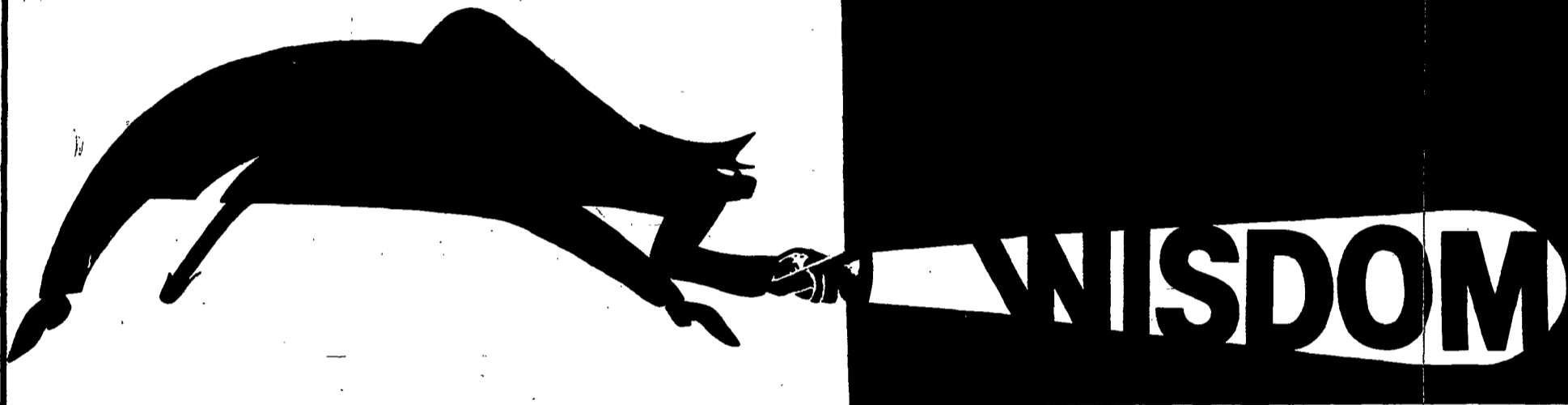
# COURIER-JOURNAL

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## Faith Today

### SEARCHING FOR



By Daniel Medinger  
NC News Service

Where I grew up the playground philosophy on wisdom went something like this: "Don't get wise, bubble eyes, or I'll knock you down to kindergarten size."

In that juvenile arena, wisdom — a virtue of the ages — was not worth pursuing. And while the threats have disappeared, still it is not easy to find someone who admits to being wise.

People today are gifted, talented, smart and, if older, respected. But wise? Wisdom's burden is a discomfoting thought.

In the distant past, it was different. The Greek temple on Delphi, where the oracle provided answers to life's great mysteries, showed that wisdom was marketable.

But this age is not so comfortable with role models for wisdom. The guru of India is a curiosity rather than a role to revere. Even the learned tribesman of native Americans has faded into legend.

However, wisdom has not left

us. Its nuggets are waiting to be mined, and Pat Wealon, a 77-year-old western Wisconsin resident, tells this story about how to go looking for wisdom:

Once there was a proud family so poor it was near starving to death. One night they prayed, asking God to send something to eat. That evening they heard a knock on the door and when they went out they found a package. Inside was a large yellow stone.

"What's this?" the father exclaimed. "We prayed for food and God sent a rock." They put it in the empty cupboard.

The next night they prayed again. But the same thing happened, except this stone was larger.

And the same thing happened a third night, but this stone was so large it wouldn't fit into the cupboard. The family plunked it on the counter.

The next day a neighbor came by, found the hungry family and went for help. While the family was regaining its health the townspeople wondered why a family would fill its cupboard with gold instead of food.

"That's the way it is," accor-

ding to Wealon. "So many of us don't recognize the gifts around us."

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Wealon declines the honor of being called wise.

"I don't know nothing about wisdom," he said, stressing the double negative. "I've just always been open to learning as much as I can from life's lessons. Now that I'm old, young people call it wisdom."

Wealon lives with his wife in the house he built in rural Wisconsin nearly 40 years ago.

His has been a full life. He immigrated to Canada from Ireland as a boy, studied languages and accounting at Columbia University in New York and became a U.S. citizen. During World War II he was a spy for Allied forces in the Middle East.

At war's end Wealon took a job selling band instruments and began writing to sustain his growing family.

"If you want to be wise, take a lesson from the angels," he said. "They fly because they take themselves lightly. If we do the same, we will have a better chance to listen to our own heart, to hear the breath of God."

Wealon is steeped in education. He has drafted position papers for governors and bishops. But, he said, wisdom is more than education.

"I've known lots of smart people I wouldn't want to have help me across the street," he said.

The difference is that a wise person "understands the ways of the world. Wisdom isn't learned in schools of higher learning, most of it comes from the school of hard knocks."

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Sue Brady empathizes with the school of hard knocks theory of wisdom. She leads a support group at a hospital in St. Paul, Minn., for parents whose children have died.

A wall-hanging in her office quotes an ancient Greek poet: "In our sleep pain falls upon the heart and through the awful mercy of God comes wisdom."

"Wisdom is God's gift to help us overcome life's pain," Brady said.

Two of Brady's children have died. During their extended illness she ran the gamut from denial to anger. Then one day she prayed, asking God to help her stay open so that she wouldn't miss whatever might be learned from these tragic and sad events. "That helped," she said. "Now I try to share that perspective."

Wisdom, she said, does not come from just living a long time. "Otherwise all you do is learn a lot of unrelated events. You have to stay open and store things in your heart like the mother of Jesus did. Staying open is the key."

(Medinger is editor of the *Catholic Bulletin* in St. Paul, Minn.)

It is wrong to think that wisdom can only be found in ancient stories and legends, writes Daniel Medinger. He talked to a Wisconsin man and a Minnesota woman who agreed that wisdom can be attained by being open to life's lessons.