

Juggler's World: Vol. 38, No. 1

Joggler's Jottings

by **Bill Giduz, publisher**

Davidson, North Carolina

Definitely not a ghost story about a graveyard

"Hello Americans, this is Paul Harvey! Stand by for news!"

"Helaman Pratt Ferguson juggles!"

"To keep in shape this B.Y.U. mathematics professor juggles. He, ah, juggles while he jogs. Sometimes he juggles bowling pins heavy enough to work the arms as well as the legs."

"It makes an aerobic exercise out of jogging and he says it takes the boredom out of it if you juggle while you jog. Sometimes to work up a good sweat he keeps seven chair legs in the air at one time while he's juggling."
(Sigh)

"Stay tuned for page two!...."

Seven chair legs indeed! Don't believe everything you hear on radio... Helaman Pratt Ferguson is a mathematician, but he's no superman! He juggles up to four rings or three clubs or three balls. Wherein Paul Harvey fabricated the figure "seven" is a mystery.

As a dedicated jogger for nearly two decades, Ferguson one day several years ago stooped over, picked up three rocks and began juggling them as he chugged along. No big deal, he thought, but he liked it. He could work up a sweat with less strain on his legs by working with his arms at the same time. And with a wife and seven children depending on him, Ferguson takes his health seriously.

The 25 seconds of national fame courtesy of Paul Harvey last December 5 were less important to him, but flattering all the same.

I contacted Ferguson. And, as kindred spirits are wont to do when they get together, I learned some new things in our exchange. For one thing, he calls it "ruggling." Hmmm...

My wife spoke for me when she responded, "It's just not as good a word as juggling." But, who cares what you call it. What's important is that you speak the same language, which we do.

Paul Harvey's reference to chair legs in talking about Ferguson is in part true. Before Ferguson bought clubs, one of his running routes passed through a neighborhood of big dogs, so he began juggling sticks and a

hunting knife for protection! Now it seems his biggest problems are wind and a buildup of sticky snow on his high-tech plastic clubs. If the weather gets too bad he juggles in place or does a figure eight in his basement.

I am in my fifth year of juggling now, and have been making my own discoveries about it lately. Most of them came to me on a single occasion - a bright winter day's long juggle through a peaceful hillside cemetery. The grid of roads through the acreage allowed me to choose paths uphill, downhill or flat. With no traffic to dodge, I weaved with delight uphill and down in an S-shaped pattern, leaning steeply into the hillside and pumping arms and legs hard. I felt the balance of the pattern of three juggled balls in a new physical sense, one that clarified a joy of juggling I had never been able to explain before.

As a juggler, the top half of your body takes the lead and your legs simply follow beneath. The experience is distinctly different from running - almost like snow skiing.

I had never tried juggling backwards, but there between the tombstones I enjoyed working on the delicate touch it requires. In a fit of inspiration I executed a huge windmill swing with one arm and tossed a high throw with the other. The timing wasn't difficult to work out and the effect of that long wing whizzing around was a big zip for the routine.

I sprinted 200 yards at a time, lunging forward until the sweat poured. To cool down, there was an elevated porch clear around a refreshment gazebo that I circled slowly dozens of times.

Recognizing I was on a hot streak, I added a fourth ball. The faster steps felt awkward but I relaxed into it. While five ball juggling is beyond my skill, four proved to be a not-too-difficult step up from three. Save it for flat, open spaces, though. You have to look up at the pattern rather than straight ahead at the path you're traversing.

Besides discovering some new moves that day, I ran through my standard inventory of tricks. My all-time favorites include: the one-high toss; a continuous right-handed bounce off the pavement (especially uphill, it pulls you along); and straight up double high tosses on each side as the middle ball bounces back and forth from hand to hand.

Another favorite is to "put" a ball about 18" over the other hand and drop it straight down. This keeps your head up and back straight, and makes for a great finish line flurry.

Most three ball tricks seem adaptable to running. Except the head put. I'm always on the up-jog and bounce it uncertainly off my pointed head into the void. The behind the back toss frustrates me too, though Ferguson says he does it routinely with clubs!

My personal vista on juggling continues to widen. I knew before that Billy Gillen juggles five balls in New York and that Wally Eastwood can juggle five clubs across a circus ring as easily as a baby sucks a bottle. I hope that Tom Kapp, the first juggler I spotted "in the wild," is still juggling where I saw him one evening in Washington, D.C. How about Kirk Swenson? Has this IJA champ broken the 4:15 mile yet?

Now I'm happy to discover that Helaman Ferguson is out there slogging his clubs through blizzards in Orem, Utah.

Despite different styles, I'll bet all public jugglers share one experience - witness reaction. Initial sheepishness at being stared at and laughed about as the oddball jogger generally becomes pride of accomplishment. Ferguson stated it eloquently: "To me juggling is another celebration of the marvelous experience of being alive and proving it. Running at the same time moves the celebration around."

But even having juggled in front of thousands of persons in races and on back roads, I felt uneasy juggling through that graveyard. It passed, though, when I realized it was probably not sacrilege. Instead, it was the best show these souls had seen since they were laid to rest.