

INTERVIEW WITH JACK WHEELER

by
Karen Reedstrom

Dr. Wheeler has had two parallel careers for many years: one in the field of adventure and exploration as the owner of Jack Wheeler Expeditions; the other in the field of political freedom and human rights as President of the Freedom Research Foundation. Regarding the first, at age 12 he was honored in the White House by President Eisenhower as the youngest Eagle Scout in the history of the Boy Scouts. He climbed the Matterhorn at age 14, swam the Hellespont (*Life Magazine* 12/12/60) and lived with Amazon headhunters at 16, hunted a man-eating tiger in Vietnam at 17, started an export business in Vietnam at 19, and wrote *The Adventurer's Guide* (New York: McKay, 1975), described by Merv Griffin as "the definitive book for anyone wishing to lead a more adventurous and exciting life." He has three "first contacts" with tribes never before contacted by the outside world: a clan of Aushiri Aucas in the Amazon, the Wali-ali-fo in New Guinea, and a band of Bushmen in the Kalahari. He has retraced Hannibal's route over the Alps with elephants; led numerous expeditions in Central Asia, Tibet, Africa, and elsewhere, including 16 expeditions to the North Pole; and has been listed in *The Guinness Book of World Records* for the first free fall sky-dive in history at the North Pole.

Regarding his second career, Dr. Wheeler received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Southern California, where he has lectured on Aristotelian ethics. Author of numerous articles in political philosophy and geopolitics, he began in the early '80s a series of extensive visits to anti-Soviet guerrilla insurgencies in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Laos, and Afghanistan, and to democracy movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, becoming an unofficial liaison between them and the Reagan White House. Based on this, he developed the strategy for dismantling the Soviet Empire, adopted by the White House, known as the "Reagan Doctrine." It worked. The Freedom Research Foundation, founded by Dr. Wheeler in 1984, continues to provide information to a number of Congressional offices on issues regarding political and economic freedom throughout the world and in the United States. As Contributing Editor to *Strategic Investment*, one of the world's most influential investment publications, his column "Behind The Lines" has developed an avid international following.

Dr. Wheeler has been called the "real Indiana Jones" by the *Wall St. Journal*, the "creator of the Reagan Doctrine" by the Washington Post, and an "ideological gangster" by the Soviet press. He has traveled to 180 countries and all seven continents, and leads 3 to 4 expeditions a year. He and his wife, Rebel Holiday, have two sons, Brandon (age 12) and Jackson (age 4). Their home is in Falls Church, Virginia, near Washington, D.C.

Q: Tell us where you grew up, and what early influences helped form your thinking and life style?

Wheeler: I grew up in Glendale, a very prosaic suburb of Los Angeles. Growing up in the '50s in Southern California is about as benign as you get. It's the time of "Happy Days." I was just a regular, average American kid. For the average American, America is an island, and the rest of the world is out there some place in the mists over the horizon somewhere. When I was 14 years old I picked up this book; it was a rainy Saturday afternoon, and I didn't have anything better to do. It was by a man named Richard Halliburton. (Halliburton was a very famous guy in the '20s and '30s. He went all over the world, doing fantastic things, and was lost in a typhoon in 1939 sailing a Chinese junk across the Pacific.) This book was called *Richard Halliburton's Complete Book of Marvels*, and it was picture after picture, story after story, of all these places in the world. I just sat there transfixed. That book changed my life more than anything else. Finally there was this picture of the Matterhorn, entitled "The Tiger of the Alps", and I read Halliburton's account of his climbing the Matterhorn. I found my father in his room, reading a book himself. I put the book down on my father's lap, pointed to the picture, and said: "Dad I want to climb that mountain." My father didn't laugh. He might have thought that I was completely crazy, but he also saw that I was serious, that something had touched me. He said: "Okay, sit down, let's talk about it." My father treated me and my dreams seriously, which is probably one of the most important things a parent can give to any child. It turned out, just by luck, that there was a fellow from Switzerland at the television station where my father produced television shows. We were going to go to Europe through the television station that was taking my father to do some filming. Well, this fellow at the station got very carried away about the idea, and said that he had a friend who was a famous mountain guide at the Matterhorn. So we contacted the guide, who said that nobody at that age had ever climbed the Matterhorn but agreed to guide me up as high as he thought was safe. Off we went. For two days my

whole universe was three feet in front of me, following Alfons' steps. We made it all the way.

Q: Your father must have been very proud of you.

Wheeler: Yes. So that did it for me. For some reason I've always had this sense, from very young, that we have one chance to make of our lives something special. There's no second chance. People collect things. They collect stamps, coins, records, all different kinds of things. Well, I decided at 14 that I wanted a collection of extraordinary experiences. You can lose your stamp collection; it can burn down in a fire. But nobody can take away what you've done; that can never be lost.

Q: What political background did you have?

Wheeler: I have always been passionately for freedom ever since I can remember. What really did it for me was in 1956. I was 12 years old, and I saw the pictures of the tanks, *Soviet tanks*, crushing the Hungarian freedom fighters. I realized, at 12 years, that the Soviets were just the same as the Nazis. What I didn't understand and have never quite understood to this day was why the Soviets weren't looked upon with the same moral disgust as the Nazis. What could be more obvious? There were the tanks crushing these people. What more do you want? When John Kennedy was inaugurated President I was a senior in high school. They brought a television into our homeroom, so we could watch the inauguration. I turned my chair around, and I sat with my back to the television. I wouldn't watch it. I said he cheated. He was not elected President of the United States. They stuffed the ballot boxes in Chicago; they stuffed the ballot boxes in Texas, and I'm not going to watch this. That's how hard-core I was back then. I was of course for Barry Goldwater in '64. When I was a senior at UCLA in 1965, Ronald Reagan came to the Student Union, and he said there's no such thing as left or right; he said that's the wrong way to look at it. A political spectrum should be up and down, up towards freedom, down towards tyranny. Communism and Nazism are down at the same end of the spectrum of tyranny and totalitarianism. I'm for freedom, he said. Well, that was that. I said that's my man, that's the guy, that's what I believe in. Now my father was well known in Southern California in entertainment circles. So I said: "Dad, you know Ronald Reagan, right? Can I meet him?" And he said: "Yeah, sure." He picks up the phone, and he says: "Ron, this is Jackson. My son heard your speech at UCLA; he wants to meet you; come on over." That's interesting, but it wasn't that big a deal. I mean he was an actor who'd gotten a lot of notoriety giving these speeches, and there was a lot of talk. So we met and there was just the three of us—Ronald Reagan, my father, and myself—and he talked like he always talks. Finally he put up his hands and he said that's the way I feel, and I said that's the way I feel too, I've never worked in a campaign, but I believe in what you say, and I would like to help you.

Q: You had a business at that time also, didn't you?

Wheeler: I'd had a business in Viet-Nam exporting cinnamon, and I was going back and forth to Viet-Nam, and it was pretty crazy. I was first there in 1961 hunting tigers. It's hard to run a business in a war. Like Grant said war and capitalism don't mix. Obviously every time war breaks out the stock market goes down, that should tell you something. At any rate, from first hand experience, I found out that it doesn't work.

Q: How were you introduced to the writings of Ayn Rand?

Wheeler: Well, I became State Chairman of Youth for Reagan in the original 1966 Reagan for Governor campaign. There were all these kids who were fire-breathing Reaganauts, and a lot of them had read Ayn Rand. I'd never heard of Ayn Rand. So they started bugging me, and when somebody bugs me I naturally resist. "You gotta read this book!" "Yeah, sure, get lost." Finally, two guys brought in this old beat-up copy of *Atlas Shrugged*. They slammed it down on my desk, and they said: "Damn it, Wheeler you're going to read this book, and that is the end of it!" So I've got a bad attitude because they've been bugging me so much. I'm reading this book, saying so what, a long ways into it—and then, I'll never forget it as long as I live. It was late at night, and I'm really not interested in this book, because I have a bad attitude, when I start D'Anconia's speech on money. All of a sudden I'm yelling and screaming: "Yes, yes, that's what I've always wanted to hear!" I'm jumping up and down, and I can't believe it. All of a sudden I realize that I've got to start all over again. I had to go back to page one. It was far and away the single greatest intellectual experience of my life reading *Atlas Shrugged*. So then I read everything else.

Q: What did you do after Reagan was elected Governor?

Wheeler: Well, I didn't want to work for any government. The Saigon Cinnamon business had cratered. I ended up in Hawaii. More and more I thought about what Rand said—I'm paraphrasing it because I can't remember it exactly—but it was to the effect that the state of the world is not a tribute to philosophy's impotence, but rather to philosophy's power. I realized that if I was going to find out if she were for real or not, in any kind of systematic way, it had to be now. So I went into graduate school at the University of Hawaii with the intention of studying every philosophical system that I could and comparing it against Ayn Rand. It turned out that there were some "Randians" around on campus. This was 1968, '69, and we're in full-blown '60s radicalism—shut down the

campus, cause the riot, the whole anti-Viet-Nam deal. We wanted no part of this, so we formed a student group called Students for Laissez-Faire. We had buttons with dollar signs on them, and we drove all of the campus liberals completely crazy, which of course was our intention. As a student group we had access to student funds, and we could get our own speakers onto campus instead of all these left-wing Marxists, who were always appearing. We invited Ayn Rand, and she turned us down.

Q: Did she say why?

Wheeler: No. We invited her to *Hawaii*, that's not a bad invitation. It's not Peoria, Illinois.

Q: I would have gone in a minute. I think she didn't trust flying.

Wheeler: Maybe so. But at any rate then along comes the break, October 1968, when the "excommunication" of Nathaniel Branden takes place. And of course being fire-breathing Objectivists we are all on Ayn Rand's side. We all agree that Nathaniel Branden is the apotheosis of evil, until we get the letter that he sent out to everybody. When we read the article in *The Objectivist* that excommunicated Nathan, even though we said oh, he must be evil, nonetheless we began looking at each other and asking what is going on here, because it's never said exactly what he did. Then we get the letter from Nathan that he sent out to all the subscribers, and you could read between the lines. It was pretty obvious what was going on. We looked at each other, and said what do you know: hell hath no fury. What's going on is another woman. So we figured, look, Rand turned us down, let's invite Branden. We wrote him a letter, and it turned out to be the very first letter that he ever got from any group of Objectivists after the break. So he accepted, and he brought Patrecia. And Nathan and I have been friends for not quite 30 years. This was early '69. Over the next years I got to know Nathan and Patrecia very well. She was just the most wonderful person.

Q: What do you think now about how he's written about Rand? In the book he went into intimate details and everything. Some people don't think that's too classy.

Wheeler: No, it wasn't. You know, Nathan sent me a copy, and then a while later I was in L.A., we got together. He asked me, of course, what do I think of the book. I didn't want to tell him that I was disappointed; it was so self-absorbed. Barbara's book is far more touching. He was eager to have me say something nice, and so I thought of the one thing I could honestly say did reach me and that was his description of Patrecia and how he first met her. She was very special, and I—as Nathan well knew—had suffered a tragedy similar to his. You know how Patrecia died?

Q: Yes.

Wheeler: I had been engaged to a lady named Jacqueline; she was from the French Alps and had been the star of the Folies Bergère. I'd had all these expeditions and adventures with her, from the North Pole to New Guinea to elephants over the Alps, and when she died in my arms of cancer, Nathan was the first person I called. I was crazed with grief. This was 1980. I was literally crazy. But he was the one person I knew who had gone through something like this, and I called him up, and he really helped me.

Q: When you were sixteen you lived with Amazon headhunters. What were they like?

Wheeler: After the Matterhorn people began bugging me about what I was going to do next. Somebody kidded me by suggesting I go live with headhunters. And of course I said: "What headhunters?" Subsequently I found out that there's a tribe of headhunters who live in the Amazon, shrink heads, and never put up with crap from anybody. I thought these people sound like interesting folks. I was a beginning anthropology student by this time at UCLA, so I found out about them. A medical doctor was doing medical research on the plants they use to shrink the skin. (He thought that might be effective against cancerous skin.) He invited me down and so I ended up spending the summer of 1960 with a clan of Jivaros in Ecuador.

Q: What were they like? Were they nice?

Wheeler: Oh, yeah, they adopted me into their clan. I had a wonderful time.

Q: How different are they from ourselves?

Wheeler: In many ways they're very good people. I have been to 180 countries. I have lived with people all over the world. People are people. They're all human beings.

Q: Are they cannibals?

Wheeler: No. There's only one tribe that actually shrinks the human head. What they do is they shrink the head *skin*. They don't shrink the head itself They skin their enemy's head. (There's no trials in the jungle, no law courts.) They cut their enemy's head off; they skin it, and then sew it back up, and then boil it in a solution of these plants, and then put hot sand in the cavity. That takes out all the oils, and it starts to shrink and makes it plastic. They start shaping the face the way it looked in life. Then they shrink it more, and smoke it over a fire. Then they perform a ceremony with the shrunken head, now called a *tsantsa*, up on a pole, and call in the *tsantsa's* spirit. The

ghost comes and recognizes its home. Then they trap the ghost, and now its malignant power is shrunken because the head is shrunken. They've trapped him in there, and he can't get out. And they adopt him into the tribe, and render his magic non-malevolent. It's a ritual.

Q: Some professors are saying that there is no ritualistic cannibalism in the world, that it is a myth propagated by one tribe to make their warriors fear capture in battle. Is this true? Have you observed ritualistic cannibalism of any sort in your travels?

Wheeler: I'm not sure of what they're talking about. The Wali-ali-fo that I was with in Papua New Guinea explained to me that when an old man dies, his friends go to his head wife and they offer to exchange a pig for the body. Pigs are wealth. They exchange a pig, and they take the man out into the forest, and they perform a ceremony. They told me: "Cook-em, eat-em." Cooked human flesh is called "man-long-pig." Man-long-pig means man as pig. The purpose is so that he will continue to live in the body of his friends.

Q: Have you watched this?

Wheeler: No, it's a sacred ceremony that only the man's friends may participate in. I have witnessed *tsantsa* ceremonies, as the Jivaros adopted me. At any rate, after living with the Jivaros I made up my mind that I would have these kind of experiences. One of the books I brought with me to the jungle was *Bulfinch's Mythology*, and I read about Leander and his swimming the Hellespont. The Hellespont is the strait that separates Europe from Asia where the Black Sea pours into the Aegean. It's where the Trojan War was fought, where Xerxes crossed to attack Greece, and Alexander crossed to conquer the Persians.

Q: Is it dangerous?

Wheeler: Yes, because of the currents. The great myth is that Leander swam the Hellespont to see his sweetheart, Hero. She would light a lantern, and then he would swim over and see her, and then swim back. One night a storm came up, blew out the lantern, and he was swept to his death in the Aegean. Ever since it's been this legendary feat. I persuaded Pan American Airlines, for the publicity of it all, to fly me over there and fly me back. And I swam it.

Q: What was it like?

Wheeler: I almost drowned! (Laughter)

Q: Did you prepare beforehand?

Wheeler: Yeah, sure, and I still almost drowned.

Q: Because of the currents?

Wheeler: Yeah, and because of the cold, and a Russian cargo ship that damn near ran me down. But I made it, and was delirious. They fished me out of the water because the boat couldn't land with all the rocks, but I figured I made it. There was a big story in *Life* magazine. Some years later I went back, and with the same Turkish guide who arranged the swim before, we actually figured how the currents went and how Leander must have done it. I swam it again and it wasn't so bad.

Q: I have just finished a biography of Stanley, the great African explorer. What advice can you give people in overcoming moments of unendurable hardships? What do you do mentally and physically to transcend physical pain or grief?

Wheeler: Well, I can tell you that mental pain is a lot worse than physical. Physical pain you can deal with. People very rarely kill themselves over anything physical, unless it's one of these terminal diseases where they know they're going to die and it's just excruciating pain all the way to the end. It's mental anguish that people kill themselves over. I came very close to it when Jacqueline died, very, very close. Nathan helped, and skydiving helped me. If you want to kill yourself, you can do it skydiving. So it taught me that I really wanted to live. I don't think people in ordinary life face the kind of hardships that Stanley underwent. Mental anguish though can come at any time in anybody's life. Five days after Jacqueline died my father died in the same hospital, also in my arms. And a friend of mine said: "Jack, this is just a period of your life that you are going to *have to* live through." Someone else said you've got to realize she would have wanted you to live, that's what she would have wanted. And it's the realization that you do only have one life, only one. The universe is, who knows 50 billion years old and in all that time each one of us has a picosecond, this infinitesimal short fraction of time, but that's the time that counts *because it's ours*.

Q: It's helpful to think of that in times of trouble.

Wheeler: It's ours, and once it's gone it's gone *forever*, so we have one chance to make of our lives something special. You've got to hold onto that thought.

Q: You have made first contact with primitive tribes. What do you do when meeting a new people who know nothing of modern culture?

Wheeler: Be very friendly. (Laughter)

Q: What do you say to them?

Wheeler: You don't say anything, you just smile an awful lot.

Q: Is that pretty universal to every culture?

Wheeler: It's not only the smile, but all kinds of gestures. There's all kinds of non-verbal communication that are "hard-wired" in us. Shrugs and facial gestures that a person who has never seen somebody from the outside world will understand, and so you can communicate with them.

Q: Do you think that benevolence is in every culture?

Wheeler: Pretty much. People are people. They've always been that way. I think that people in the main are good. If you treat people with decency and just ordinary respect you get that in return.

Q: What are they like, philosophically? Have you found any similarities between primitive tribes in all parts of the world?

Wheeler: I am not sure. It's interesting because they're our ancestors; we all came from hunter and gatherer tribes thousands of years ago. But they're not the same, and there's one tribe in particular that stands out as different.

Q: Which one is that?

Wheeler: The Bushmen of the Kalahari. They're special.

Q: How are they different?

Wheeler: Did you ever see that movie "The Gods Must Be Crazy"?

Q: No.

Wheeler: Well, go to a video store and rent it. It's a funny movie, and they're portrayed as Hollywood noble savages, innocent and pure. For just about every other tribe that's not true. I mean there's tribes like the Yanomano in Venezuela. They're very unpleasant people, vicious and murderous. There are other tribes with that kind of reputation, like the Aucas in the Amazon who murder all the missionaries, but were very nice to me. I didn't have any trouble with the Aucas at all.

Q: Why was that?

Wheeler: Because I was nice to them, and I wasn't trying to sell them a spiritual bill of goods. But the Bushmen are really like the way they are portrayed in that movie. I have never ever seen a people more genuinely in complete harmony with their environment like the Bushmen.

Q: Do you think the modern world could learn something from them?

Wheeler: It's possible. I'm not sure. What we should do is leave them alone. There's not many bands left; there's hardly any left. The one I met was a very small band on the Botswana/Namibia border, and they did not need anything from us whatsoever. It's the original way of life that mankind evolved from. It's dying out, and will be extinct in our lifetimes. I think it's a great tragedy.

Q: You have retraced Hannibal's route over the Alps with elephants. There is some disagreement as to which route he took. What is your opinion? What was the trip like?

Wheeler: If you read Polybius and Livy and their descriptions of the pass, it's very clear that one pass in particular fits all the various requirements. Like Hannibal camped right at the pass. Since he had thousands of people it can't be some narrow cleft, but has to have a large plain right nearby where an army can camp. There's only one pass in all the Alps that fits: the French name for it is the Col du Clapier. It's forgotten now, but there's an old Roman road over it that's lost. So that's where we took our elephants over. We were quite confident that that was Hannibal's route.

Q: Was this a tourist group that went over?

Wheeler: Oh, no; this was a private expedition, just myself and one other person.

Q: I see, so you took a couple elephants?

Wheeler: That's right two elephants. I'd never do it again.

Q: Why?

Wheeler: Because it was too dangerous for the elephants. The path is a footpath; it's not a road, and it's kind of cut into the side of the mountain. There were times when we would have to walk right out on the edge of that path (the drop-off was fairly substantial) so we were between the elephants and the edge, or else they just wouldn't go. They'd just get terrified. If the elephant bolted it could ruin your whole day. Plus there was a landslide coming down on the Italian side and we had to inch the elephants down step by step. So I would not do it again because of the chance of killing a wonderful animal. It's not worth it. But it was an extraordinary experience, making one of the great epic adventures of history—Hannibal leading elephants over the Alps! — a part of your

own life.

Q: What was your most hair-raising experience in all your travels and adventures?

Wheeler: Well, a tiger almost killed me, a man-eating tiger, in Viet Nam.

Q: What happened?

Wheeler: I'd wounded him. It was the middle of the night, and I had to go out and try and find him with a flashlight at the end of my rifle. I was 17 years old, all alone in a pitch black jungle with a wounded man-eating tiger. It was close. I ended up shooting him in the chest. Then there were a lot of battles in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, firefights in different places, but in Afghanistan the closest was when the Afghans I was with blew up the Soviet high command in Ghazni. A lot of mortars and fireworks, 24 Soviet officers were killed, and we got away with only one of our guys taking some shrapnel in the leg. Winston Churchill said there is nothing so exciting than to be shot at with no effect. (Laughter)

Q: You've been to Tibet. I've read that the Communists have devastated the country; can you tell us anything about this situation?

Wheeler: Well, everything you've heard is true. What the Russians did to destroy Afghanistan and commit genocide upon the Afghan people, they learned from the Chinese and what they did in Tibet. I've seen hundreds of monasteries just completely obliterated. I love the Tibetan people. I've driven maybe 8,000 kilometers in Tibet, passed out maybe a thousand pictures of the Dali Lama.

Q: It seems like these poor people have been really neglected. It's as if the world has forgotten about them.

Wheeler: Yes, it's ridiculous how the world kisses China's derriere and it doesn't have to be that way at all. That's why I was very glad that the Chinese fired all those missiles and "intimidated" Taiwan the way they did. I said to a Congressman on the Asian Subcommittee: "It looks like the Chinese have really shot themselves in the foot with this." And he said: "They haven't shot themselves in the foot; they've shot themselves in the head." Taiwan now realizes that it is a real and independent country. They have created a new country in the world. They don't want to be part of the mainland anymore, so now they're starting to think that if it is the enemy maybe it should be busted apart. China can be broken apart just like we broke apart the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was, in effect, the Great Russian Empire, and China is the Han Empire. There's very large parts of it, like Manchuria and Mongolia and East Turkestan and Tibet, that don't want to have anything to do with the Han Chinese. Plus there's other vulnerabilities that China has. Those are going to be exploited, and maybe there will a map with some new colors in Asia in the next few years.

Q: Ayn Rand said that we shouldn't have trade or cultural exchanges with these Communist countries but it seems that cultural exchange has actually "corrupted" the people to really like the West and desire more and more Western values.

Wheeler: Well, up to a point. You know that Lee Kuan Yew, the ruler of Singapore, is saying that Confucianism is far more appropriate to capitalism than Western values, meaning Christianity.

Q: How's that?

Wheeler: If you teach, he says however subliminally, that the meek shall inherit the earth, and the poor can get into heaven better than the rich, and everybody is his brother's keeper, then you're going to end up with the kind of social democracy that is bankrupting the countries of Western Europe right now. That, he thinks, will ultimately bankrupt the United States. A large part of this is quite frankly the insufferable Chinese superiority complex. But he does make a point that is very powerful and must be answered, and that point is that capitalism cannot work unless families take care of their own. He thinks that Confucianism is far more conducive to reverence for the family than Western values. It is a powerful, argument and has to be dealt with. Remember, by the way, that Objectivism's founders, Rand or Branden, never had children or raised a family. Being a father (or a mother) and raising a family is one of the most wonderful and fulfilling experiences life has to offer, but Rand never had the courage to do it and had nothing to say about it, save for that cursory comment about kids in Galt's Gulch.

Q: You've led 16 expeditions to the North Pole. As the leader of so many expeditions what can you tell us about leadership of men, creating team spirit, dealing with egos, all in an environment that is particularly unforgiving?

Wheeler: One thing I've learned is that people will put up with a lot if they're fed o.k., and Amundsen had that figured out. They ate their dogs.

Q: He was criticized for that.

Wheeler: Too bad, he could care less, he and his men came back alive. Amundsen had a famous quote: "There are those who say I've had good luck, but what some people call good luck, I call good planning." And that sums it up. He was the greatest arctic explorer there was; he thought it out and he came back alive.

Q: You wrote a book called *The Adventurer's Guide*. Can you tell us what this is about and if it still is in print?

Wheeler: No, it's not; it was written 20 years ago. I didn't want to write a book like every other adventure book, you know, the guy climbs the mountain or goes up the river and sees the tribe and that's the end of the book. I wanted to tell an adventure story, but also to tell the reader how he or she could do that very thing themselves. The purpose of the book was to encourage people to realize that they only had one life, and to make their lives a thrilling adventure.

Q: When I was 22 I hitchhiked to Hawaii and had a grand adventure. Everyone thought I was crazy to do it. What advice can you give to the average person about getting up the courage and having a grand adventure?

Wheeler: One would be not to let other people's negativity get in your way. People are always trying to put you down for your dreams. You have to ignore that. They've got their lives; you have your life, and you have to follow your dream. It's your life not theirs. Second is overcoming inertia, that is overcoming: "Yeah, someday I'm going to do this... I'm gonna do it... someday..." And of course someday is like tomorrow, it never gets here. You've got to make a decision that the someday is going to come now. You've got to do it *now*. Take out a piece of paper, and write down five or ten of the best excuses about why you can't possibly live your dream. You'll be amazed at how reasonable and logical you can be in figuring out reasons why you just can't do what you really want to do. Write them; take a look at that paper, and then crumple it up and throw it away. Say: "The hell with it, I'm going to do this!"

Q: What about people who don't think of themselves as risk takers but would like to be? Is there any further advice you can give?

Wheeler: Absolutely. That gives me a good excuse to talk about Aristotle. Aristotle's Golden Mean is very much misunderstood. Aristotle came from a tradition of physicians, and knew that a good doctor has medical principles which he applies to every patient, yet applies those principles to the individual patient; he treats every patient as an individual. So for Aristotle the Golden Mean is an individual balance between excess and defect. Courage is a balance between recklessness and timidity, but that balance is different for everybody. What is reckless for one person may not be reckless for someone else. Or what is timid may not be. His example is Mylo the wrestler. Everybody needs food; everybody must eat an appropriate amount of food, not too much, not too little. But that amount is not the same for everybody. The right amount for Mylo the wrestler would be way too much food for you or me. So that's the way it is with all the practical virtues for Aristotle. And that's applicable for courage. We can't start comparing ourselves to other people. If I compared myself to someone like Reinhold Messner, the greatest mountain climber the world has ever known (he climbed Everest alone, without oxygen, in three days, the greatest mountaineering feat in history), I'd feel really inadequate. But we cannot compare ourselves to other people. We've got to treat ourselves as the individuals we are, and take into account the actual identity of who we are. An adventure has got to be something that is a challenge for that individual, not too reckless, not too timid.

Q: Aristotle describes courage as: "facing what is painful." Ayn Rand doesn't include courage as a virtue. Would you and if so, why?

Wheeler: I wrote a big essay on comparing Randian and Aristotelian ethics. It's in Den Uyl and Rasmussen's book *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand*.

Q: I read it, it's good.

Wheeler: Thanks. I was always puzzled as to why Rand put down Aristotle's ethics. It's pretty obvious she never read it very well, or cribbed from it and wouldn't admit it. Nonetheless, their ethical systems are in many ways remarkably the same. When I got into graduate school and started studying philosophy (I got my Ph.D. in philosophy with John Hospers at USC), I realized that Aristotle was my real home. *Eudaemonia* should not be translated as "happiness." Aristotelian *eudaemonia* should be translated as *success*. We can say, "he is a successful businessman;" it makes sense. We can say of a woman, "she's a successful mother;" that would make sense too; you wouldn't think it strange. But if we said, "he is a successful human being, he is a *success at being human*," that would strike us as odd, yet that is what Aristotle wanted to say. Each of us should strive to be a success at being the individual human being we are.

Q: Would you include courage as a virtue?

Wheeler: Of course. It's a key practical virtue.

Q: As a philosopher can you tell us how does one derive what a virtue is, and what should the list should include? Rand has her list; Aristotle has his; they're different in some respects.

Wheeler: Well, I'm not sure they're different. When you take a look at their derivations of a value they both agree that it doesn't make sense to talk about a rock having values. Aristotle really isn't a Platonist. There isn't

something “good” floating around in the world that things partake in. Is it good for that rock to be there? Is it good for this mountain to be there, or is it good for the cloud to be in the sky? What does that mean? He would say, just like Rand, that it doesn’t make any sense. It’s gibberish. But is it good for the bee to pollinate the flower? Sure, because “good” means good *for*, good for something in particular, i.e., the *eudaemonia* of an individual living thing. Rand says much the same.

Q: So would a virtue be that which is good for the continuance of the life of the entity? An action oriented kind of behavior?

Wheeler: Well, Aristotle would ask what happens if the life is one of screaming pain? Sheer survival is not an ultimate value, and is by no means equivalent to *eudaemonia*. The key, in terms of moral action and political rights, is that only an individual can possess *eudemonia*. He says this very clearly in the *Politics*. He wrote one part of the *Politics* when he was young and still at Plato’s academy, but when he finished it off later in life, he comes to the clear conclusion that the state exists for the good of the individual, not the other way around.

Q: David Kelley recently wrote a monograph including benevolence as an Objectivist virtue; would you agree with this?

Wheeler: Well, I have not followed that so I’m not sure exactly what he means. It sounds appropriate. I don’t think it is in people’s interest to be jerks. To be grumpy and crabby and angry and upset at people and not friendly. I don’t think that person is a success at being human. I don’t think that person is very happy with himself. A benevolence towards people in general bespeaks of what Aristotle would call a Great Soul. Aristotle says that man is by nature, by his human identity, a social animal. He said no one would choose to live if he had all the good things in the world, riches, food, whatever, yet it was at the price of not having any friends at all, of being a complete and total hermit. There are those people, but they are very strange, aberrant. We are social animals. We get a genuine selfish pleasure from the companionship of other people. When you’re genuinely friendly and benevolent it’s returned to you, that’s just the way it works.

Q: And the natives don’t eat you.

Wheeler: Right!

Q: What is Jack Wheeler Expeditions?

Wheeler: For many years I organized different expeditions to different places. I never repeated a trip, except for the North Pole; that was my signature trip, and—I did it 16 times.

Q: Have you ever been to the South Pole?

Wheeler: The South Pole is too difficult. It’s too far away, and the logistics are prohibitively expensive. There is one outfit that does it, and they do it well, but it costs \$30,000 a person. That’s pricy. I have a certain clientele, mostly presidents of their own companies, but even for my clientele \$30,000 is too much.

Q: What is the typical price for an expedition?

Wheeler: Anything from \$4,000 to \$10,000. Now I’m back to getting off into the world by myself and my eldest son, Brandon. We’ll be spending the summer in Indonesia, and I’m about to embark on a seven summits expedition with him. That’s climbing the highest mountain in each of seven continents. Obviously it will take us a few years. He’ll be 13 this summer. I’m not doing this commercially, but by invitation. I’ll put a small group together with my son, with friends I’ve traveled with.

Q: Another one of your “lives” deals with the Freedom Research Foundation. Can you tell us about that?

Wheeler: After the ’66 Reagan campaign, I got into philosophy, and by the time I got out with my Ph.D. we’d had the debacle of Vietnam, then Watergate, then had just elected Jimmy Carter. After all that I did not want to have anything to do with politics in any way whatsoever. Even though I had my doctorate in philosophy, I decided to just organize and lead expeditions. And I wrote the *Adventurer’s Guide*. But then Ronald Reagan was elected President, and all of these people that I used to know, when we were kids in Youth for Reagan, all of a sudden they’re in the White House. The one thing that I’d loved about Ronald Reagan, along with what he said about getting the government out of our pockets and off our backs, was that he was so unapologetically anti-communist. I’ve always hated the Left for being so pro-socialist, pro-marxist, pro-communist. I began thinking about the Soviet Union and ended up writing an article for *Reason* magazine. It was entitled “How to Dismantle the Soviet Empire.” It was exploiting various nationalisms within the Soviet Union. One day it dawned on me that all of a sudden anti-Marxist guerilla movements had popped up in Soviet colonies. Nobody had really spotted this. So I mentioned this to a friend of mine at the White House, Dana Rohrabacher. He was startled and said: “I haven’t heard anything like that; how are you going to prove it?” I said: “I’ll tell you how I’m going to prove it; I’m going to go out there, and find out, and come back and tell you!” And so, with a grant from Bob Poole and the *Reason Foundation*, I was gone six months in 1983. I went into Nicaragua with the Contras, and Afghanistan with

the Mujaheddin, and Angola with UNITA, and Mozambique with RENAMO. I was all over the place. I told them I was studying people who were fighting the Soviets all over the world, and they'd never heard anything like it. So I came back, and we had a big meeting late November 1983. I hadn't even been home yet. I flew from Costa Rica back up to Washington. There was a meeting on the third floor of the OEOB of the White House. There were CIA people and NSC people and West Wingers whom Dana had put together. I showed them my pictures, and for the first time a lot of them actually saw what these people looked like. I said: "There really is a world wide rebellion going on inside the Soviet Empire. We should support it. We should have a program of support for the whole phenomenon of anti-Soviet liberation movements, and our goal should be to break apart the Soviet Empire, to attack its structure." That was so radical in 1983, you have no idea; they thought I was crazy! But nonetheless it was the start of the Reagan Doctrine, the strategy to dismantle the Soviet Union. We didn't want to live in the same world with them; we didn't want to get along with them; we wanted to get rid of them. We wanted the Soviet Union off the map, and it worked!

Q: How did you go about this?

Wheeler: We divided the structure of the empire into three layers: the peripheral colonies, the border colonies, and the inner colonies, the colonies inside the Soviet Union itself like Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine. We supported liberation movements, actual armed guerilla movements, in the periphery where it would work. Not in Cuba, that is too consolidated, but where the rule is much less consolidated and there are indigenous people who really want to fight for their own freedom we should support them. Americans don't have to die. All we have to do is give them arms and training. We argued that all we have to do is win *once*, because once we win, and the myth of invincibility is over, then the whole thing is going to shatter very quickly. It will move very quickly into Eastern Europe. We only have to win once in the periphery, then it goes to the border, where we're not into guerilla movements but urban unrest, uncontrollable urban unrest, and once that starts we do it inside the Soviet Union itself. And it will happen fast. That's what I preached. Once it begins to go it will shatter. It's *brittle*. I gave a lot of speeches like this. The Soviet Union has a brittle structure that can't bend. It will maintain its shape for a long time, but once it begins to go, *bang!* One moment it's strong, steady and unyielding; the next moment it's in pieces, and it can't be put back together again. That is exactly what happened. In February 1989 the Soviets retreated from Afghanistan. Eight months later in November the Berlin Wall was down. That's how long it took. Because the people figured it out if a bunch of guys in sandals and beards up in the mountains with bolt action rifles can take the Soviets, then we don't have to put up with their crap anymore. All of a sudden, the whole thing crumbled in Eastern Europe, and once it crumbled in Eastern Europe, boom! I remember a conversation I had with Jean Kirkpatrick, trying to explain this. I was at her summer home in southern France in June of '89, and we were talking about the Reagan Doctrine. I said "Well you know Jean, the ultimate goal is not just Afghanistan; it is not just Eastern Europe; it is the Soviet Union itself. We want it gone." And she looked at me, and said: "Ah, that they will never allow to happen." I didn't bother to ask her who "they" were. I just said: "Jean, *they* don't have any choice in the matter. That is exactly what is going to happen." And that is what did happen. So I wasn't surprised at all, because we brought it about. It was done on purpose.

Q: Tell us about some of your experiences in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Laos, and Afghanistan and the guerilla insurgencies in those countries.

Wheeler: Oh, my gosh! I'm writing a book about it. There are a lot of adventures, a lot of extraordinary experiences and people. People were just so sick and tired of being tyrannized by these frigging Communists.

Q: When is the book going to come out?

Wheeler: Probably next spring.

Q: Let us know, we'll advertise it.

Wheeler: Sure. It's called *How We Got Rid of the Soviet Union: A Personal Account of the 20th Century's Greatest Adventure*.

Q: Was the understanding of freedom or democracy clearly understood by these antiSoviet groups or was their attitude just "we want the Soviet Union out and our personal agenda in"?

Wheeler: It depends upon what you mean by "personal agenda." They want to be left alone. The Contra movement was a genuine peasant rebellion, just like the Marxists were claiming they always have. If you grow beans the Sandinistas told you how much you could charge for them, and you got an artificially low price. But to buy some flour you had to buy it from the Sandinista co-operative at their artificially high price. If you complained about it you got beat up or your fingernails would get pulled out. Anybody is going to rebel against this stuff. It is just rebellion against tyranny.

Q: Did they understand any concepts of freedom or democracy, or did you try to educate them in that? Or

would that be more like missionary tactics?

Wheeler: They just didn't want to be tyrannized. They wanted a normal government. They would say yes, democracy, but really democracy for them means that they get to run their lives, and they don't have some fascist bureaucrat beating them up, throwing them in jail, and tyrannizing them. It is as basic as that.

Q: Do you know anything about the situation in South Africa since Mandela has taken over? I've heard that he is a communist. Is that country becoming communist?

Wheeler: Nelson Mandela is not a communist. Mandela is very popular among the whites; he rejected socialism when he came to power and embraced a fairly free market. The question is not South Africa since Mandela, but what happens to South Africa when Mandela dies? And it is going to be a mess.

Q: Why?

Wheeler: Because the problem in South Africa is not white versus black. The problem is black versus black, the tribes. This is the typical liberal thing. Liberals really don't care about blacks; they could care less. What they care about is assuaging this guilt complex that they have inside themselves. As long as that is dealt with they could care less. The largest tribe in South Africa are the Xhosas; Mandela is a Xhosa. The second largest tribe is the Zulus. And actually there are two white tribes, the British, and the Boers or Afrikaaners. The Zulus and the Xhosas hate each other. I don't want to get into a lecture about Africa, but the ANC was originally supported by the Soviets. The ANC reached out beyond the Xhosa to the detribalized urban blacks. (Marxism has always been an urban movement.) They reached out to these urban blacks, and got them. But the Zulus remained tribal right there on the Natal, and there's going to be a Holy Mary mess in South Africa when Mandela dies. I won't like to see it, because South Africa is a wonderful country.

Q: How badly are the wild animal populations being devastated in Africa?

Wheeler: It's the poachers, and the general encroachment of people farming and destroying the habitat, like in Kenya, for firewood.

Q: Is that just the inevitable result of civilization?

Wheeler: It doesn't have to be inevitable at all. Wildlife is a valuable resource and people in Tanzania have figured it out. In Tanzania the wildlife are not in jeopardy.

Q: In the early '80s you predicted that Mexico may be the next to fall to Communism. How do you analyze the situation today?

Wheeler: I think Mexico is bankrupt. At that time the Sandinistas were on the march. They were sponsoring war in El Salvador, and if that had succeeded and the Sandinistas had consolidated and moved into Guatemala, believe me, Mexico would have been next. But history didn't turn out that way. Mexico today is in a very bad way. The banks are broke. We may have an anarchic situation. The ruling PRI is in total cahoots with the cocaine drug cartels. It's irretrievably corrupt. Nobody is paying off on their loans. There's 80% interest on home mortgages, and nobody is paying off. It's a very desperate economic situation.

Q: What do you predict?

Wheeler: I'm very pessimistic.

Q: Even with the Free Trade Agreement and all?

Wheeler: I don't think it matters. The banks are insolvent.

Q: A couple of years ago people were predicting Castro's fall in six months. It hasn't happened. Right next to us is a Communist dictatorship still in power and shooting down rescue planes after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Why hasn't there been a revolution there? Should we keep our embargo, or open the island to free trade, and hope the Cubans will like the good life and get rid of their boss?

Wheeler: I've been to Cuba. I thought I was going to get a chance to meet Castro, and tell him the Cuban people were going to piss on his grave, but he didn't meet us. It's a long story; that was in '92. The Cuban people are kind of zombies, the lights are on but nobody's there.

Q: Communism has totally killed their spirit?

Wheeler: Yes. Castro has been in ruthless power for almost 38 years. So nothing is going to improve until Castro dies or until somebody kills him. Then it is going to be a mess for a while. The Miami exiles think they are going to march in and take over, but there's a lot of hatred and envy towards them, so it's not going to be pretty.

Q: There is debate as to whether the Soviet Union has fallen at all. Some think that it is all a ruse as predicted by Anatoly Golitsyn in *New Lies for Old*. He maintains that the fall was just to lull the West into feeling safe. Are you familiar with his theories and if so, what do you think?

Wheeler: I think it's idiotic. Marxism is finished. It's gone, and this theory is a pathetic joke. The Soviet Union was the Russian Imperialist Empire with Marxism/Leninism as an ideological justification. Now that

justification is gone, so the Russians are trying to reconstitute their empire based on pure, naked imperialism. But as far as Marxism having any pull with people, it might have pull with geezer pensioners in Russia, but that is about it.

Q: Have you talked to the people there lately about what they think is going on?

Wheeler: It depends on *whom* you talk to. The young people don't want any part of it. All this stuff about a ruse is ridiculous. The Soviet Union is gone. It will never be reconstituted. Communism and Marxism are finished. But Russian imperialism is not. Yes, they have nukes, which are useless. On the other hand, the Russian army right now couldn't conquer Romania. That is not an exaggeration. If the Russian army decided to conquer Romania, they just couldn't do it. They are empty as a military power. They can't even deal with Chechnya which is the size of Connecticut.

Q: What about all these terrorist groups they are funding all over the world?

Wheeler: I don't know about all over the world. Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov is a very dangerous man. He has 20 year old friendships with Hafez al Assad in Syria, Saddam Hussein, and the dictators in Iran. He is trying to bully the Saudis into jacking up oil prices. That's the one thing Primakov thinks will save the Russian economy, to have oil prices go through the roof. So there's a lot of games being played. But they're mostly straightforward imperial power games. It's not the ideological enemies thing. That's gone. It's a different game. It's still a dangerous game.

Q: How do you fight this game?

Wheeler: We've got all the high cards. All we have to do is play them. The Russians don't have anything to say to us. They're in no position whatsoever. They haven't got any military. They haven't got any economy. The only thing that will get a Russian to respect you is to kick him in the face. If you don't do that when you can, he despises you. We're not doing that, and that is the problem. Our problem is not the Russians, because they are doing what they've always done. The problem is the terminal testicular atrophy in our own State Department.

Q: How do you think the Republicans are doing in Congress?

Wheeler: In some ways it's valiant and in some ways it's really irrelevant. I like Newt Gingrich, I like a lot of these freshmen. I, of course, think Clinton is the greatest slimebag ever to occupy the White House, right up there with LBJ. But there's a very high probability that he will not run.

Q: Really, why?

Wheeler: Well, I think that Hillary is going to be indicted. There's just too much stuff that is going to come out. After all, Jimmy the Greek is offering 8-to-5 odds that Clinton will not be the nominee. That's less than 2-to-1.

Q: Do you think we will end up with another Democrat because the Republicans are battling with themselves to much?

Wheeler: It's possible if the Democrats nominate Bob Kerry. I think its more likely that the Republicans will win. My own personal project, that keeps me here, is to eliminate the IRS.

Q: Oh really, how?

Wheeler: We may have a chance to make that the campaign theme for the Republicans in '96. That is what I'm trying to persuade them to do.

Q: How successful have you been?

Wheeler: It's proceeding. Gingrich wants the campaign theme to be "The Great Decision," but there's got to *be* a great decision, and it can't be over welfare reform. So "Elect Republicans, Eliminate the IRS" is what I'm trying to get them to do. I think the IRS is doomed anyway. I think that certain things are coming that are going to doom government as we know it. I don't see how it is going to be sustainable for very long. The Federal Reserve is about to lose its monopoly on issuing currency. Once that happens you can't collect an income tax. The income tax is gone, finished, dead. The Federal Reserve and the income tax were created and made legal in the same year, 1914, and there was a reason for that. Once private digital currencies and electronic cash on the Internet and anonymous encrypted international financial transactions are made available, income tax receipts are going to fall off a cliff within 24 months. Income taxes are going to be completely uncollectible within 36 months. There are people who understand this like Bill Archer, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. That's why they are trying to get rid of the income tax, and substitute a national sales tax or something like that. I like Ayn Rand's idea of a voluntary contract tax. People would pay a fee to have contractual relationships made legally binding and to have judicial recourse, because the most important thing a government provides is legality. That's why anarchy is such a fraud, because if you can define what constitutes the ownership and transfer of property any way you want and change your mind at any time, it doesn't work. Only a government can provide a legal code of what consti-

tutes ownership of property. Ownership is a legal term as opposed to mere possession. So, Rand's concept was a contract tax. That's what I'm pushing right now. I'm really making headway with explaining to people why the income tax is doomed. It also turns out that the IRS does not have the necessary implementing regulations for their enforcement statutes. This is very, very interesting. I'll run this by you briefly. When Congress passes a law, the parts of the law are codified into statutes. Then the relevant agency, such as a regulatory agency, has to issue the implementing regulations specifying to whom and under what circumstances the law applies, or else the law has no force. For example, Congress passed the Family Leave Act in February of '93 and by August of '93 the regs were issued. So between February and August the law had no effect. It was not enforced because they couldn't; they have to have the regs. And the regs have to be published in the Federal Register, o.k.? It turns out that *there are no implementing regulations for the IRS's enforcement statutes in the Federal Register*. They are not there. They can't be found. And that means that the IRS has no authority to require somebody to file a return, no power to place criminal penalties for failing to file or filing a fraudulent return, no authority to place liens on your property. The regs aren't there! And if the regs aren't there, the music is over. There's a reason why this happened. I could go into it. It's very interesting, and a lot of people have gotten out of IRS harassment by just insisting they cannot proceed any further until they produce these regulations, and the IRS cannot do it!

Q: What do you think of these new militias springing up across the US? Are they misguided weirdos or new patriots?

Wheeler: Well, yes and no. Most of them are weirdos, but people just can't stand it any longer. A lot of them are paranoid to the point of no return. For example, there's now a big rumor that Pat Buchanan really did win all these primaries, but "they" rigged the voting machines. Pat Buchanan is going absolutely nowhere, and these people can't stand it. So there's a lot of paranoia against the government that is in many ways irretrievably irrational. These people have gone around the bend. It makes absolutely no sense to say: "We're going to fight off the Feds with our rifles." The best way to do it is to figure out a way to kill off the income tax, and deprive the Beast of the food it needs, namely taxpayers' dollars, to survive. That's the way to do it.

Q: Should we be optimistic or pessimistic about politics today?

Wheeler: I think we should be optimistic, because there are a lot of things happening that the government cannot control. Let me give you an analogy. The information technology of the '80s — fax machines, widespread photocopiers, satellite radio — doomed the Soviet government's attempt to maintain a monopoly on the control of *information*. It couldn't keep what was happening in the world and within its empire from its citizens. There were alternative sources of information. This same technology in the U.S. resulted in the overthrow of the monopoly the liberal establishment media had in informing Americans. National talk radio shows with satellite radio, local all talk radio shows, fax networks, the Internet, have overthrown the monopoly. The liberal media establishment is still with us, but it doesn't have a monopoly anymore. And so we have the Democrats' 40 year old stranglehold on political power broken and Republicans in power. Not that it is the best of all possible worlds, but it certainly is a step in the right direction. The key point here is that the information technology of the '90s, with superfast personal computers, explosion of the Internet, and public key encryption programs like PGP means that our government is going to lose its monopoly over the control of *money*. Once you have private digital currencies, once anybody can encrypt his transactions and have an offshore bank account like international drug dealers and multinational corporations do now, then everybody will do it. When you have an economy of competing and invisible currencies, there is just no form of taxation that can generate the revenue to keep the government in the style to which it has become accustomed.

Q: So what will happen to the huge welfare state?

Wheeler: Gone. It's finished. And I give this... well, five years. It's going to happen fast, very fast, because receipts are going to fall off a cliff. The best thing about this is that it's an epiphenomenon. This is going to come about not because of the direct efforts of some political movement, some anti-tax protest movement, it's going to come about because of the way business has to be done on the Internet. The Internet is the greatest machine for making money the world has ever known, and it's running on idle because transactions on it are not secure. You cannot buy anything on the Internet because it's like putting your credit card number on a postcard and mailing it. The transactions have to be secure enough so that hackers cannot get at them. To make those hacker proof you have to encrypt the transaction so strongly that the NSA or the IRS or the CIA or the KGB can't get at them either. Encryption programs are that strong and they're easily available, such as ViaCrypt. Once transactions start being encrypted it's over. And that's the way business has to be done. Bill Gates just said it in a speech in Europe: strong encryption is being hardwired into the Internet. It's already been decided by the Internet Architecture Board. It has to be done this way. There's too much money at stake to be made. Private digital currencies backed with gold will

soon be competing with the paper dollar. All of a sudden, this gigantic monster of a Federal Government has to be dismantled. I predict with the next Congress, Republicans will begin to say their goal is to reduce the Federal Government to four departments, Justice, State, Treasury and Defense. That's it, with Social Security privatized.

Q: What about Social Security, will we be able to say we don't want it?

Wheeler: Ultimately, yes. The model will be Chile. The Chilean model has been a tremendous success.

Q: On to the philosophic side of you. Do you see our society moving toward or away from Aristotelian ethics?

Wheeler: I don't know about society as a whole. Most people conduct their lives through a set of randomly accumulated memorized slogans. When asked to comment or think about something they will respond by uttering whatever memorized slogan they think is most appropriate. So the examined life, as Socrates says, will be conducted only by the few. That applies to any society. On the other hand, Schumpeter said, "What capitalism really is is what people do economically when they're left alone." Just leave people alone and they start to trade. Once started in that direction, it is really hard to turn back. It takes a lot of force. Marxist and Socialist countries have always been poor because poor people take orders so much better. Prosperous people don't take orders well, and so it's very hard to have a prosperous free-market economy and some kind of tyrannical government. It can be done. It is being done in Singapore, but that is a very small place. The direction, since Gutenberg, of technology and market economies is to take us always towards the expansion of freedom, unless some weird aberration comes along like Marxism. Marxism was like civilization went on some kind of cocaine trip, like some person getting hooked, screwing up their life and going crazy for a while. When (and if) they get off it, they look back, and say: "What the hell was that all about?"

Q: The sense of life of the 19th century was one of optimism, of adventure in exploration and science. This seems to have lasted until we landed on the moon and then it kind of died away. What have you observed? Will the computer nerds be our salvation, or is the adventurous sense of life just dying?

Wheeler: That's a very complex question. You made an interesting statement, that all this optimism ended when we landed on the moon. I have a particular theory on that. Landing a man on the moon is the single greatest achievement in the history of man. But the trouble is that, for too many Americans (and especially liberals) it was too great. It put America too far above the rest of the human race. I think that the two great engines of human behavior, to a very large and tragic degree, are envy and the fear of being envied. What motivates a Marxist is envy. What motivates a Liberal is the fear of being envied. Von Mises wrote a book, *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*, and he talked about the envy of the "cousins." People who inherit wealth and don't feel they earned it are very subject to being envied, and they apologize for it. Somebody who has earned it himself knows what it takes, and doesn't apologize for it. So Liberalism is really a psychological strategy to avoid envy, it is an envy deflection device. "Please don't envy me for my wealth; look at all the money I'm giving to all these welfare programs." You begin to get apologetic if you're susceptible to this, not just for the prosperity that you have yourself, but for the prosperity of your culture. You set up envy deflection devices and you're apologetic to the rest of the world for your culture. This is the source of the liberal guilt complex. When we put a man on the moon, it just drove everybody crazy. Americans just couldn't deal with the envy of the rest of the world. So we stepped back; we retreated; we couldn't stand being on a pinnacle which separated us so far from the rest of the human race. I mean, putting a man on the moon is super-human! We couldn't deal with it, so we retreated. We retreated in Vietnam, and we continued to retreat until finally Ronald Reagan said: "Look, we want to be proud of ourselves again. We want to be proud of being Americans." He gave us our belief in our country and our culture again. It was a great gift, but we can always falter because of the fear of being envied.

Q: What in Rand's works don't you like or that you disagree strongly with and why?

Wheeler: I think that Ayn Rand was the greatest philosopher of the 20th century. I thought that when I was studying her, and I think that to this day. That doesn't mean that you buy into everything, but the basic concepts of what constitutes moral action, what constitutes how the individual should relate to the world, the primacy of reason and one's capacity to think and choose for oneself, there's nothing to compare with that. I think it is important to separate her persona from her philosophy. She was a very unpleasant person, and in many ways she didn't live up to her principles. She was hooked on Dexedrine, which makes you really unpleasant and angry. In many ways I think she was a Platonist, because she created this ideal world, and she couldn't stand the real world because it didn't measure up.

Q: Do you think she also tried to create the ideal man in her husband, and he wasn't that guy, and she tried to plug the men she was attracted to into that ideal, and that was a Platonic mistake too?

Wheeler: It was. *Atlas* is really composed of stick figures. We all know what she wrote about this, and how

she argued it wasn't the case. But they're not "real" people, maybe Francisco was the guy you could identify as somebody real. There are some real people in *The Fountainhead*. But mostly they are these Platonic ideals. The ideals are very worthwhile as long as you realize that they are ideals, and that you don't feel inadequate or feel that your culture or country is inadequate. A lot of libertarians, especially of the Rothbardian strain, feel this way. Murray Rothbard hated America. There wasn't a single issue, *not one*, in which he didn't take the side of the Soviet Union against the United States. He hated America because he was a Platonist. He had this ideal of a perfect, absolute, pure unadulterated freedom, and because America came up short we were depraved. What we've got to take a look at is the real world and how America stacks up to what freedom is like in the rest of the world.

Q: You said that Rand was not a good Objectivist, how do you think that was true?

Wheeler: The continuous venting of Randian rage. Her moral pretentiousness and the way she treated her followers. The pretentiousness of "you're not Objectivists, you're just *students* of Objectivism". I And that, of course, is reflected in the insufferable pretentiousness of many of her official followers from Peikoff on down. Who can stand those people? I've never had anything to do with them, and I probably never will. You have to read the philosophy, take it into your heart, apply it to your own life, then go your own way.

Q: Is there anything you disagree with in the philosophy itself?

Wheeler: Aside from the silly nonsense like the anti-Beethoven trip? One example might be the tabula rasa stuff, that we have no instincts.

Q: You think we do?

Wheeler: Yes, there's all kinds of genetic programs we have running in us. They've been around for a long time. We have a lot of ice age genes.

Q: Like what?

Wheeler: The double standard, for example. Every society on earth that has ever existed has had a double standard. And why is that? It's because when a woman gives birth she knows *for sure* that that's her child and her DNA is in that baby. A man never, ever, has that kind of 100% knowledge. There is always doubt. So men have always tried to reduce the amount of that doubt by restricting the woman's sexual activity, to make sure that her offspring has his DNA because it is a very bad genetic investment to go out there and risk your life being eaten by a lion to get the food to feed the kid when the kid is somebody else's DNA. So there's always been a double standard. Now once we become aware of that, we can override it, but there's all kinds of ice age genes, all kinds of GROMS, genetic read-only memories, operating in us. To say: "Oh, it doesn't exist; the brain is somehow exempt from evolution," just seems to me completely non-empirical. Rand is making an assertion based on her feelings, not evidence, which is not very Objectivist.

Q: You have a wife and children. How do you be a good father and husband and have adventures too? How has marriage affected your goals?

Wheeler: First, I take Brandon with me on adventures, and have since he was five. When you've got very young children it's very hard. If I'm away from my little boy, Jackson, I miss him very much. I'm looking forward when he gets a little older and I can start taking him too.

Q: Does your wife like adventures?

Wheeler: Ever so often. She has her own business. She is in many ways the embodiment of an Objectivist heroine to me. She conducts her life naturally that way. She is extremely reasonable, and uses an extraordinary amount of common sense, and operates on a win/win principle of mutual benefit. She is a wonderful mother, and yet she has a very strong need to be productive.

Q: How does she do that when she has a young child?

Wheeler: The magic word is *housekeeper*.

Q: She doesn't put the kid in daycare?

Wheeler: We've always had housekeepers. That's the key... the live-in housekeeper! We also both have our offices in our home, so we can always be there when our kids need us.

Q: Is it difficult for her that you are away so much?

Wheeler: No, because she realizes that this is what my life is all about, and she knew that coming in. She just focuses on her work, and she knows more about teaching women about looking better than they ever looked before in their lives, that's her business. She's coming out with a national television program. It's called *Rebel Holiday's Ultimate Fashion Secrets*, and it should be on dozens of stations around the country soon. And yes, her given name on her birth certificate is Rebel Holiday. She realizes that not many young kids have been to the North Pole or on expeditions to the Himalayas. The experiences I've been able to give Brandon are priceless, and I hope to be able to do that with our youngest boy, Jackson.

Q: What plans do you have for the future?

Wheeler: A long list! Good grief! I'm finishing *How We Got Rid of the Soviet Union*. Now the question is, how to do to the Washington Colonial Empire what we did to the Soviet Colonial Empire. That is the goal at hand. The best way to do that is eliminate the IRS. I have got a big expedition project, which I'm hopeful of getting sponsored, called "Global Traverse." It will be the first complete circumnavigation of the world by automobile. All six land continents end to end, back to back.

Q: Wow!!

Wheeler: Yeah! From the tip of South America to the Arctic Ocean, from the Bering Straits to Gibraltar, from Tangiers to Cape Town, and from Perth to Sydney. All in one go, seven months.

Q: Sounds like fun!

Wheeler: Yes, and I get to take Brandon. So I'm planning that and a number of other expeditions like the seven summits. People say the world is getting smaller. That is not the way it works. The more you get out into the world the bigger it gets, not smaller. If you could live to be a thousand years old you wouldn't be able to see and accomplish all that there is on this planet.

Q: I'd like to personally thank you for all of the things you have done trying to help this country and the cause of freedom around the world. I think our readers will feel the same. Do you have any final thoughts on what you've learned about life?

Wheeler: Thank you. I really do appreciate that. I think, especially when we live in a free country, that we need to treasure the freedoms that we do have while working to make this country more free. We need a spirit that is positive, a spirit that appreciates the freedom that we do have. This country is unique in the history of the world. It was the first country to be explicitly founded on moral principles, and a lot of Americans still revere those principles embodied in the *Declaration of Independence*. When you read DeTocqueville who wrote about America in the 1830's, you can still recognize a lot of America. We do need to get this monstrosity of a government super-structure out of the way, and we can do that. But we need to appreciate the freedoms that we do have, and realize that every one of us has the opportunity to make of his or her own life a thrilling adventure. That's the challenge, and that's the opportunity. And each one of us should seize it.