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DON'T SHAKE HANDS: BOW FOR HEALTH

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ATTN: OP-ED Editor

I believe that we could vastly improve the health of our citizenry and save billions of dollars in costs associated with colds, flu and other illnesses if we, as Americans, would adopt the practice of bowing when greeting one another, rather than shaking hands.

Millions of Americans at any given time are infected with various viruses, the symptoms of which are often concealed by the use of the vast array of medications available, which allow sick people to continue working, rather than stay home in bed where they are less likely to infect others.

This fact was brought home to me this past week, when after working in the cold and rain for several hours, I came down with bronchitis-like symptoms. I should have stayed in bed for a couple of days to avoid contact with the outside world, but an extremely heavy work-load forced me to medicate myself to the point that I could continue working.

I made a point of staying away from my aged parents' house during the time that I might have been infectious, and further made a point of standing back from people when visiting with them. Yesterday evening, even though I was feeling much better, and felt that I would no longer infect others, I made a point of sitting at least two seats away from my family and guests at supper.

The biggest problem that I faced was in avoiding shaking hands with friends, new acquaintances, and business associates during the period that I felt that I was somewhat of a danger to society's health. When I would be approached with an outstretched hand, I would stand back a step and bow with my hands behind my back, or bow with my palms touching with my hands against my heart as do the Hindus.

At first, several of the people I encountered felt a certain degree of offense that I refused to shake hands with them, for in this country, refusal to shake hands is a sign of disrespect up to and including malice and even hatred.

Some friends even tried to insist that I shake hands with them, in spite of my attempts at explaining why I preferred to bow, especially while as a potential disease carrier. I would say, "It is because I love you and care for you that I prefer to bow – not because I am mad at you or don't like you."

If that explanation seemed to fail, I would continue with, "If you were my adversary, I would not only shake your hand with great gusto but would kiss you on the lips as well." That further explanation would always do the trick.

After each explanation, the friends or associates would accept my polite bow and bow in return. They would even express gratitude when I explained how human hands are significant disease carriers due to natural, unconscious human mannerisms, such as sneezing against the back of one's hand, coughing into the palm of your hand, or rubbing itching or watery eyes and nose.

I believe that if enough prominent Americans, including celebrities and politicians, would begin to politely bow in public and before the media rather than shake hands, that many if not the vast majority of Americans would abandon the unhealthy practice in favor of the polite "bow for health."

George H. Russell

George H. Russell, an outspoken opponent of the death penalty, is a resident of Huntsville, Texas, known worldwide as "The City of Death."

He is founder of The Patriot Network, and author of its 35+ web sites located at www.patriotnetwork.org, as well as founder of The Universal Ethician Church, an interfaith ministry with a worldwide following via the church's 275+ web sites located at www.salvationnetwork.org.

Russell, 60, is a film producer, educational video producer, environmental activist, historic preservation specialist, photographer, art and antique collector, philanthropist, American patriot and ethician.

Additional biographical information may be found in *Who's Who in America*, through Internet searches, and in other publications. Images of Mr. Russell suitable for downloading for publication may be found at www.salvationnetwork.org.