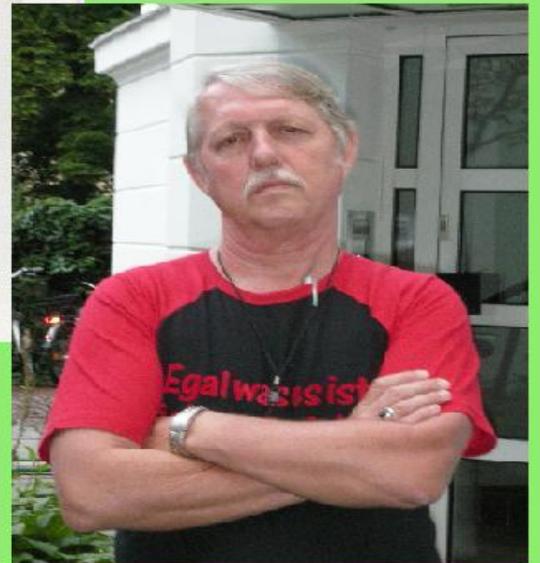


LIKE A MAGPIE



Christopher K. Starr
2009

LIKE A MAGPIE

A sort of an autobiography

Cover photos: Author in 1954, 1967 and 2008.

Christopher K. Starr
Caura Village, Trinidad & Tobago 2009

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INTRODUCTION AND A FEW ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I believe in autobiography. It is a good thing to reflect on one's own life, and I expect most people do, at least fleetingly. And one should at least once write an account of that life, which most probably do not. I have never yet met a life that was not worth recording.

Like anyone of advanced years and a sense of narrative, I have accumulated stories from personal experience with which I regale young people in idle moments. Not so long ago a student said that I should write them down. Okay. Not a bad idea. What you have before you, then, is a sort of autobiography in anecdotes. Like a magpie, I have pulled out the shiny ones and arranged them on the pages, leaving the dull ones to fall into oblivion. If it seems rather fractured, well, you are at liberty to regard it as the reflection of a fractured life.

Thanks to Paulette Belfonte for production assistance, Dawn Phillip for editorial assistance, and Jo-Anne Sewlal for the cover and other production assistance.

This compilation is dedicated to Ginger, who wants to hear it all, and to Dyan, who doesn't.

A CLOSE CALL WITH MANIC SIKHS

In 1947 my father, Francis Starr (1916-2000), was riding a motorcycle through Punjab in northwestern India. In the center of one town he found himself surrounded by Sikhs. They were armed and not at all pleased to see him. The cause, as he presently learned, was his beard. It was naturally red, but the Sikhs interpreted it as that of a Muslim, dyed red to show that he had made the hajj to Mecca. In those days a hajji riding through sikh territory was considered a grave provocation, and the question wasn't whether they were going to do him in but how, and who would have the honour. The problem was greatly compounded by the fact that they had no language in common.

Just then a schoolboy came along who could sort of speak English. My daddy got him to explain to the Sikhs that he was a british Christian, not a Muslim at all, with the result that they let him go, he lived to tell the tale, and here I am. I regret that I never learned the name of the town. I would love to go there to look for that schoolboy, who must now be about 70 years old. What fun to show him pictures of me and my siblings and our families, so that he could see for himself what a big difference he made one day long ago.

HOW THE CHINESE COMMUNISTS CRAMPED MY STYLE

Although I was born in Canada, lived almost a third of my life there, in total, and am a lifelong citizen, I never really felt at home there.

At the time I was conceived in what is now Pakistan, my parents were supposed to be transferred to southern China. However, just at that time the Communists were victorious in the south and sealed the border, so that my parents' organization sent them to Canada instead. Accordingly, in August 1949 I was born in the public hospital in Newmarket, Ontario.

I didn't learn about this until I was past 30. I was telling my daddy one day that, even though I spent many years in Canada, I never felt like I belonged there. His astonishing reply was "Thee was almost born in China."

And after he had told the story of how it came about, my silent, enraged reaction was "Well, goddamn those Communists." I have always considered the Chinese Revolution a good thing, but their timing really ate it on a stick. I was supposed to be Starr of Sichuan, and instead I am Starr of Newmarket, Ontario. It has really put a kink in my legend, and I do not forgive.

"CHRISTOPHER, WOULD THEE LIKE TO GO BUG COLLECTING?"

I got my start in entomology in the summer of 1954. One day on the ancestral farm north of Toronto my grandmother, Elma McGrew Starr (1890-1985), came to me with a question that I still hear clearly after more than 50 years. "Christopher, would thee like to go bug collecting." I had no idea what that meant, but I knew my grandmother had good ideas, so I said "Yes." It was the smartest thing I ever said.

I have no idea what possessed my grandmother to go bug collecting that day and the next couple of days, as I am not aware that she ever did so before or later. Our methods were of the very simplest. We would wander about, pick up whatever bugs could be safely caught and drop them into a jar of methyl alcohol. (Ethyl alcohol, being an instrument of the Devil, was not present on the farm.) We kept our collecting on a shelf in the bathroom, and I would go in their every now and then and just stare at these creatures, with my eyes hanging out. They had these faceted, staring eyes, these delicate little antennae reaching out from their heads, and jointed legs. They were positively from the moon.

My life in science can fairly be regarded as a series of footnotes to that "Yes".

MY LITTLE BROTHER HAS MY NAMES

The only traditional name we have in my family is Francis. My father was the first son, and he was Francis. His father was the first son, and he was Elmer Francis. His father was the first son, and he was Mordecai Francis. All the way back to the first Francis Starr in 1824. You see how it works. Two of my cousins and two nephews have Francis as their middle name.

Now, I am the first son, so by all rights I should be Francis, or at least Somethingorother Francis. So, what were my parents thinking when they named me Christopher Kenneth? Christopher Kenneth! That's just barely a step above Cuthbert Percival, or some such, if you ask me. Somebody must have been on downers when they came up with that one.

With succeeding offspring, my parents improved in the onomastic art. Margaret Sushila. Not bad. Lucie Marian. Even better. And then came my little brother on 8 July 1954. Andrew Francis.

Andrew Francis! Sharp, manly names with just a bit of crocodile in them. Those should have been my names! When I was about 40 years old I pointed out the error to him and suggested that we rectify it by trading names. He didn't mind, but his wife wouldn't have it, so I'm stuck with Christopher Kenneth.

When my boy came along, I was taking no chances. Francis Andrew. Sure, I asked my wife about it before filling out the paperwork, but it wasn't really a question.

CAST OUT OF PARADISE

The happiest of my early years were spent on the ancestral farm north of Toronto. Starr Elms was the home of my grandparents, Elmer & Elma Starr, and it had a row of elm trees where the long driveway met the road. For a time we lived in a house just next door, so that I had only to go up a hill to be in Starr Elms. There were a barn and livestock pens and 100 acres of fields and woods to explore, and I can hardly remember anything from time in our house. The spirit of that early life is wonderfully captured in Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill".

This all came to an end just after my seventh birthday. My family and that of Gordon & Betty McClure had agreed to move to Ottawa in order to establish a meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers). I had very little idea what was in store for me, but I quickly came to consider that I had been cast out of paradise. I won't say that people in Ottawa treated me rudely or that I had to contend with any special tortures, but the city seemed like a place of horror in comparison with what I had known. It was many years before I was able to view urban life as in any way legitimate, and I still prefer to take city life in very small doses.

I ONCE SANG FOR THE QUEEN MOTHER

I once sang to the Queen Mother. I sang the national anthem of Canada, first in English -- "O Canada, our home and native land ..." -- and then in French -- "O Canada, terre de nos aïeux ...". I and several thousand other school children in a great big sports stadium in Ottawa. But she was looking right at me.

THE TALE OF THE VULGAR TOAD

At age 13 I began a two-year herpetological period. I didn't turn away from bugs, but amphibians and reptiles led in my scientific interests for a time. An important factor in this was two companions who shared this interest. Harold Parsons, Don Rivard and I often got together, especially in the summers, and talked about the fabulous herptiles of which we had heard or had actually encountered. We dreamed of one day seeing a genuine gaboon viper in the wild, and after a visit to the Washington zoo I was able to report to them seeing the legendary matamata turtle up close and other-worldly.

However, our most frequent focus was toads. At summer camp a year or two earlier, I had seen a graffito on a cabin wall: "Hop hop hop. Hop hop hop. Toads are vulgar, so are we." A silly bit of juvenilia, to be sure, but it fired our collective imagination as we embraced the idea that vulgarity was really and truly the essence of toadness.

The common *Bufo americanus* became the focus of our researches. It was fairly common in some of our haunts during the warm months and seemed as vulgar as any. So it was that we entered into a competition to see who could find the vulgarest toad. *B. americanus* tends to have a thin stripe down the middle of its back, and somehow we conceived the idea that the vulgarer toads had a paler, more contrasting stripe. And a truly vulgar toad would stare at one with great contempt when held in the hand. It also helped if the toad urinated on one's hand. Other criteria could enter the calculation, but these were the quick indices that let one know whether a particular animal was a contender.

That contest ended abruptly one day. It ended because I picked up a toad that simply could not be beaten. The one I found was somewhat larger than ordinary, but not outstandingly so. He had a fairly pale stripe, although we had all seen paler. But he blew away the competition in other ways.

First of all, as he sat on my hand he made no attempt to escape but looked up at me with a sneering gaze that said "You are dirt. You are nothing. You are positively lower than a snake's belly button. I refuse even to take note of your zero existence."

And then, in an offhand manner, he peed. He peed and peed until my hand was drenched and it was flowing through my fingers onto the soil. He peed more than I thought an animal his size could possibly contain.

And then, I reverently put him on the ground, and Harold and Don and I

walked away in a state of utmost respect.

A PRACTICAL EXERCISE IN DECENCY AND GOOD MANNERS

I spent the 1965-66 school year at the Evangelische Internatschule, a lutheran boarding school in the village of Gaienhofen am Bodensee at the southern end of Germany. We were on an arm of the Lake of Constance, and I could probably have swum across to Switzerland, although I never tried. The most famous inhabitant of the village was the painter Otto Dix (1891-1969). He was already a very old man at that time, and I occasionally saw him trudging slowly along, but I never spoke with him. That was a missed opportunity.

The school had several dormitories. Mine was the Schlossheim. It really was an old castle, although a very basic one. The walls were just straight up, without parapets. I believe there was a moat it had long since dried out, and the drawbridge was perpetually down.

Walking about in a little thicket beside the Schloss one day I came upon a genuine european hedgehog, a young one. I had of course heard of hedgehogs since early youth in Canada and recognized this one right away, but I had never actually seen one. The hedgehog curled up right away, with its nose tucked away under its tail, and waited for me to just go away.

I didn't go away. Because the hedgehog kept perfectly still, I could touch it carefully without fear of being pricked by its spines, and after a bit I conceived the idea of rolling it up in my handkerchief. I did this very gingerly, both to avoid alarming the hedgehog and so as not to lacerate my hands, and then I carried it around for a bit, quite pointlessly. It was a delicate balance. Then, having proved whatever it was that I might be proving, I put the bundle down and let the hedgehog free.

ANALYZING SYNTHESIS

One day in Mathematics class at the Internatschule the teacher announced that we were now beginning the subject of Analysis. He wrote it in large letters on the blackboard and then asked if anyone would care to tell him what the opposite of analysis was. I looked around the room, saw that no one seemed to know, and raised my hand. "Synthese." And the teacher said that was quite right. My classmates were quite flabbergasted. How could an American who had only been there a few months and still spoke rather haltingly in German possibly know a German word that they did not? I expect most of them figured it out sooner or later.

AN AUSTRALIAN GIRL SHATTERS HER OWN IMAGE

After school let out for the summer in 1966, I did a tour of northern Germany with my classmates Rainer Krell and Peter Merk. Much of the time we stayed in youth hostels. One day I was sitting in the lounge of the youth hostel in a long-forgotten town, reading a book and discreetly digging the lovely girl sitting on a couch across from me. No rude ogling, you understand, but I was definitely checking her out in an appreciative way.

And then one of her friends walked in and addressed her. The lovely girl opened her mouth and spoke, and my image of her was most rudely and abruptly shattered. She was from Australia, with an accent that would curdle milk. One day I may recover from that shock, but I don't think it will be any time soon.

NIGHTMARE ON A NUDE BEACH

Just about everyone has had the dream of being at a party and suddenly realizing that he/she is naked, while everyone else is clothed. That actually happened to me.

The island (a peninsula, in fact, but for some reason called an island) of Sylt on the North Sea is a popular vacation spot in the summer. Rainer and Peter alerted me before we got there that nudism was popular on the beaches, although one has the option of remaining clothed. Approaching the beach on the first day, I felt a mixture of discomfort and adolescent excitement. Both of these evaporated within just a few minutes. For one thing, after I forced myself to follow the trend and get undressed I felt exposed for only a short while and then quite at home among all the other nudists. For another, I quickly learned that most people tend to look better with their clothes on. I recall sitting in our sandpit when a group of twenty-somethings established itself in the next pit. I watched discreetly as this one young woman undressed and found the effect, all in all, rather disappointing. She kind of sagged where I had expected a great deal more pertness. At least I was in no danger of getting a hard-on and having to lie on my stomach for the rest of the day.

The rule on Sylt -- at least in those days -- was that one could go nude on any beach except one, where clothing was explicitly mandated. I remember walking along the clothed beach one day and coming to a rhyming sign advising that it was coming to an end and anyone who preferred not to see nudies should take this path and pass by on the bluff above.

"Willst du keine Nackedeis sehen,
so musst du diesen Weg aufgehen."

Even so, the transition wasn't entirely abrupt in practice. As one walked along an optional beach toward the clothed beach, the proportion of clothed people increased, and almost all were clothed well before the boundary. You see where this story is going. I was idly strolling along one day, not really paying attention, when I was suddenly conscious that everyone around me was clothed. I kept my cool, but I turned about and headed back to the comfort of the majority-nude zone.

CHEERING FOR THE WRONG SIDE

The first FIFA World Cup of which I was aware was the 1966 championship in England. I was in Bavaria at the time and saw many of the games on television. Most memorable in the early rounds was Portugal against North Korea. North Korea scored three goals, and then Eusebio, with that stride that made him look like a stalking lion, scored four goals for Portugal.

However, I wasn't watching the games with any regularity and hadn't even taken note of the date of the final between England against Germany. I was in Munich on that day, 30 July, going through a major museum, when I happened into a big, crowded hall where the game was playing on a huge wall screen. The second half had just started, with the score 1-1. The game was so transfixing that I forgot my surroundings. At minute 77, Martin Peters scored for England and, without thinking, I jumped up and cheered. There was total silence as hundreds of pairs of unamused German eyes looked coldly at me. Fortunately, these were disciplined Germans, and I came to no harm. Even so, you can be sure that I kept very quiet as the minutes ticked by. Then, with only a minute to go, Wolfgang Weber scored for Germany, and the populace erupted in loud jubilation. As it happened, England won in overtime, probably their only world championship in all my lifetime. When I got onto the trolley outside a little later the conductor was just putting his radio away, looking ever so sad.

"AND WHAT IS A TRAFFIC LIGHT?"

When I started high school in Germany my German was okay, but not fluent. Often a teacher would crack a joke in class and everyone would laugh except me. About halfway through the school year I, too, was laughing at the jokes (if funny) and toward the end of the school year my German was pretty good. One of my classmates told me that my speech was pretty much free of any foreign accent, which I thought was an exaggeration until one summer day.

I was in an unfamiliar town, trying to get to a particular street. I stopped at a newspaper kiosk to ask directions, and the woman told me to go there and there, turn left, "and then you come to a traffic light [Verkehrsampel]." I didn't drive and had never heard the term, so I asked her "What is a traffic light?"

She stared at me in mute astonishment. Then she found her voice and asked "Oh, so you're not a German?" That was when I realized that I really did speak without a foreign accent.

MY DADDY AT THE FIELD HOUSE

The religious-ethnic group from which I come is the conservative Quakers. We tend to be a plain-spoken and unemotional lot. There is a story of a Nantucket whaling captain who came home after a three-year voyage. Walking into town, he met his wife, who was on her way to the communal pump with a bucket. "Oh, thee's back" she said, and then after a pause handed him the bucket with "In that case, thee can get the water." It sounds like comedy, I realize, but it fits the character of the conservative Quakers.

After my year in Germany I returned to the USA with the group of exchange students, all from different American schools. Arriving in Philadelphia, we dispersed. The exchange office put me on a plane to Ottawa. I had figured there would be someone to pick me up at the airport in Ottawa, but it seemed that no one knew when I was coming. No matter. I stashed my stuff and hitched a ride into the city.

My ride went right past Carleton University, where my daddy worked in the athletic Field House, so I got out and walked toward his place of work. Just then, he came driving along. He pulled over, shook my hand and said "Oh, thee's back", and then after a pause "Does thee want to take a shower?"

ESOPHAGEAL JABBERWOCKY

In high school in Ohio I discovered the trick of esophageal speech. This is a fancy name for drawing air into one's stomach and making words as one burps it back out. Not something to try on a date, but good for many moments of adolescent humour. In the semester that I roomed with Allen Starbuck, Dana Zak and Gerry Grant, the four of us had amazing concerts after lights out. I had my burping noises, of course. Allen had mastered the trick of drawing air into his anus, which he could then fart back out. Dana did the most amazing underarm farts I have ever witnessed; while most people just pump away, eliciting whatever noises they can, Dana would raise his arm, put his other hand in place, and bring the arm down slowly, modulating the sound as he did so. And Gerry played the cello.

I very much regret that I never learned how to speak in Donald Duck's voice. I can do the voice okay, but I've never been able to turn it into intelligible words. Chris Starbuck and Jeff Toothaker were masters at this.

They and would sometimes have furious arguments right in each others' faces, issuing threats and calling each other very nasty names, so that it had all the appearance of something about to turn terribly violent, except that it was all in Donald Duck's voice. It was a wonderfully incongruous performance, in which I would have loved to participate.

I was plainly the greatest belcher in the school, but this position did not go unchallenged. Every year some young whippersnapper would challenge, and I would have to blow him away in order to demonstrate who was the champion. This got rather tiresome, so one night during my last year I belched the entire poem "Jabberwocky" from the window of our dormitory room, one line at a time.

(Draw in air)

"'Twas brillig and the slithy toves"

(Draw in air)

"Did gyre and gimbel in the wabe."

(Draw in air)

"All mimsy were the borogoves,"

(Draw in air)

"And the mome raths outgrabe."

And so forth.

That put an end to those pesky challenges, once and for all.

LUZ FRANCO GIVES ME NIGHTMARES

Luz Franco was an intense little mexican girl, one year behind me in high school. When our school put on a medieval morality play about the seven deadly sins, she was Wrath, for which she was wonderfully well cast.

One day I said something to Luz in jest that she didn't think was the least bit funny. In fact, she was mighty pissed off and came at me with clear intentions of mayhem. I of course fled. She chased me all around the administration building, until I finally ran into a little room in the wings of the assembly-room stage and locked the door. So, I was safe, but not really, since there was only one door, and I figured Luz would wait in front of it for as long as it took.

There was a window, which I could open, but the assembly room was on the second floor, and it was a sheer drop to the concrete below. Out of the question. As the minutes wore on, though, and I didn't dare even crack the door to look out, the window got to looking like a definite possibility. After all, it was just one floor down. How hard could that be for a strapping young fellow like me? I got my courage together, opened the window, stood on the sill, and leaped.

It was a hard fall. I sprained one wrist and was in acute pain for a while. Even when the pain let up somewhat, a dull ache persisted through the rest of that day and the night that followed. I slept hardly at all. Instead, I had nightmares, in which sharp green triangles came flying through the air at me, each representing one or another evil or hard-assed genius. Nietzsche's triangle hit me especially hard.

By the time Luz caught up with me the next day, her ire had cooled, so she took no action. Besides, whether she knew it or not, she had already had her revenge.

HOW TEACHER PAUL DEMONSTRATED HIS COOLNESS

I very much doubt that Paul Reeder was ever comfortable with his role as an authority figure, but neither did he shirk it. He taught history in my Ohio high school, where he was held in deepest respect and affection. (It is an amusing, but fruitless, to speculate how we might have reacted in those days if we had known that he played for the pink team.)

I don't believe our class of 1967 was afflicted with any acute case of senioritis. Nonetheless, we did expect to receive our props and were displeased when these were not forthcoming. They were definitely not forthcoming from a certain brash freshman. He not only did not defer to his elders and betters but seemed to go out of his way to show us contempt. We forebore it loftily for a time, but one day in the dorm a breaking point was reached.

I don't recall exactly who said "We need to do something about Dave Williamson", but there was instant unanimity. Four of us marched down the hall and burst into Dave's room, intent on teaching him a lesson. I don't think we had anything definite in mind, but something had to be done. As we entered, I had a bright idea. "Hold him down on the bed" I said to two of my confederates -- their names are withheld to protect the guilty -- which they did.

And then I took Dave's pants off. And his undies. And took out my knife. And while another of our group spread Dave's legs wide, I stared him python-like in the eye and brought my open jackknife inexorably closer and closer to his exposed genitalia. The whole time, Dave was twisting and struggling and cussing a blue streak, but the moment the tip of my knife touched his balls he lay there stock-still. He kept up the loud cussing, but he moved not a muscle, as the tip of the knife ever so gently traced the seam of his scrotum.

It had just come to rest at the base of his dick when the door burst open. It was Paul. Imagine the scene before him. Three big guys are holding down one little guy, while another big guy is holding a knife to the little guy's balls. Paul took in all of this in a glance and did not hesitate. He looked straight at Dave Williamson, said with utter sternness "Sir, I heard the language", and turned on his heel and walked out. He didn't even look at the rest of us.

At that, I folded up my knife, the others released Dave, and the four of us walked out of the room. Dave was just a new kid who had to be told that his language was unacceptable, but we seniors knew that Paul knew

that we knew that he was deeply pissed off at us. He didn't have to tell us that, then or ever.

From that day forth, Dave Williamson was a changed freshman who showed us seniors our props. I'm not saying what we did was right, just making an observation.

A LITTLE BUY WITH A BIG CONCH

Many years ago I had a big conch shell with the tip of the whorl cut off to make it into a trumpet. One day I was showing some kids how to make it sound. One little kid really wanted to try it. He jumped up and down eagerly, asking me to let him try it, and I had to tell him "I'm sorry, but you're much too small. It takes a lot of breath to play this shell, and it will be a long while before you can do it." He kept insisting, and finally in exasperation I handed it to him and said just a bit derisively "Okay, if you can make this shell sound, you can have it."

You probably see where this story is going.

He raised it to his lips and brought forth a wonderful clear note that reverberated down the street. He may still have that shell, for all I know.

A TRENCH COAT IN EAST BERLIN

In the summer of 1968 I returned to Germany with a group of canadian students. An exchange programme had arranged a cheap flight, accommodation and a job for each of us. I worked in Stuttgart at the Allianz life-insurance company, which was already a big company but not yet the international giant it later became.

Before dispersing, we had a few days of orientation in Berlin. One free day I went over into East Berlin by myself. The next free day a couple of the other students wanted to go there. They were in Germany for the first time, and their spoken German was only so-so, which made me the leader.

One of our destinations was the main post office on Friedrichstrasse, as we were all interested in getting stamps for our collections. As we were standing at the large philatelic display, deciding what we wanted, a heavy-set man in a trench coat approached the teller right nearby. He glanced at us, three harmless young foreigners, and then began speaking to the teller.

"Okay, you guys" I said to my friends, "don't look at the man to our right. Do not look at him. Just keep on talking about stamps, like those ones right there. Now, that man is with the secret police and is trying to track down a political unreliable. I will now give you a running translation of what he says -- but keep pointing to the stamps, such as that particular set. And now he is saying"

My friends were so shaken that they could hardly keep up the pretence of talking stamps. The big bad stalinist secret police -- in a trench coat, no less -- right there beside us in East Berlin. It was right out of the *Reader's Digest*.

And then the trench coat walked out, and we got our stamps.

THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME

In the bad old days the people in the eastern part of the city were kept far away from the Berlin Wall, which they could only glimpse in the distance. In the west, on the other hand, one could walk right up to it in many places. I once pulled a loose piece from it as a souvenir.

On my first day in East Berlin I had fallen in with a local guy, who expressed an interest in seeing what the wall looked like up close. I had taken some photos and told him I would bring them along on my next visit.

So it was that I had pictures of the Berlin Wall in my briefcase when I went over with the two other students.

We were sitting on a park bench, doing nothing in particular, when I felt a certain urge. There was a public bathroom nearby, so I took the shortest route, right across the grass. Perhaps you see where this story is going.

Just as I hit the sidewalk on the other side of the grass, I saw the People's Police (Volkspolizei) come creeping along in their People's Car (Volkswagen) and knew right away what it was all about. I had walked on the people's grass, a definite no-no.

They were very polite, and the proceedings were a model of swift justice. I was charged, pled guilty, judged guilty, sentence was pronounced and carried out right there on the spot. It all took maybe 90 seconds. I was fined one mark and received a receipt for it. While this was going on, I discreetly signaled to my two friends to stay over there, out of it.

There was an element of disappointment in all this, because I would really have loved to plead not guilty and let the full judicial procedure run its course, or at least to the point where I got tired of it and was ready to change my plea to guilty and go my way. However, my briefcase with the pictures of the Berlin Wall was over there on the park bench, and I didn't want to be searched.

CLEVER BUTTONS IN A FIELD OF RUBBLE

After I had paid my debt to society in East Berlin, we wandered about the city. We got onto some of the backstreets where nobody resided and next to nothing was happening. Many places still showed damage from World War II, which had ended more than 20 years before.

We came upon a great big field of rubble that was evidently the result of very heavy bombing, an entire city block reduced to little fragments. Some workmen were clearing away the rubble with rakes and shovels, but they showed no urgency about it. We ambled over, and they seemed happy enough to stop work and converse. What was going to be built in this block? I asked, to which they replied that there were no particular building plans, just cleaning up the old rubble.

This was at a time when north-american students went in for wearing buttons with political or humorous messages. As it happened, I was wearing a jacket with just such buttons on it. One of the workmen was curious about them, so I told him what one of them said. In fact, they all seemed quite intrigued by the buttons, so I asked the first workmen if he would like to have one. He shyly allowed that he wouldn't mind, so I took one off and presented it to him with a translation. The others seemed interested, as well, so I got to taking off each button in turn and presenting it to one of the men with a translation. "Behalte die Glaube, mein Lieber" [Keep the faith, Baby] is the one that I can recall, although I believe one of the others had to do with VietNam.

What hadn't occurred to me as I started the distribution was that there were six of them, and I had only five buttons. However, one of the men had evidently made that same calculation, because he suddenly had some urgent raking to do over there on that pile of rubble. It was an impressive demonstration of fineness of feeling in these ordinary german workmen.

As I had finished with the buttons and we were shooting the breeze a bit before moving on, the foreman came up. Yes, the big bad stalinist foreman, of whom these poor slaves lived in mortal fear, if you can believe the *Reader's Digest*. Not exactly. Our guys made no move to get back to work but instead proudly showed him their new buttons, which the foreman evidently thought were quite cool.

MY DADDY'S NIGHT IN THE HOOSEGOW

My siblings and I were taught to be frugal, and for the most part the lesson stuck. When I was a teenager, my father often had occasion to travel between Ottawa and Toronto, and sometimes he would economize by hitchhiking one or both ways. So it was that he told us at lunch one day that he had been nabbed for hitchhiking on a major highway out of Toronto. The police had arrested him and then gone to the trouble to take him to another highway where it was legal for him to hitchhike. That, I thought, was quite polite and civilized and canadian of them.

The charge carried a \$10 fine or two days in jail. Obviously, our daddy wasn't about to pay the \$10, especially as he was quite sure we was innocent. He laid out his case to us. My siblings and I kept our mouths shut, but even without hearing the other side of the story we thought he was guilty.

A few days later a sergeant from the Ottawa police phoned the house. "Mr Starr" he said, "I have a warrant here for your arrest. When would it be convenient for me to come around and arrest you?" My daddy had things to do for the rest of the week and asked if next Monday might suit, but the sergeant didn't think he could wait that long. So my daddy suggested that he come down to the station on Monday and turn himself in, and that was acceptable. It was all very polite and civilized and canadian.

So on Monday he turned himself in, and two officers drove up from Toronto just to take him back to serve his two days. He was booked into the jail in the late afternoon. The rule at the jail was that if one got in before supper, that counted as a day, and on one's last day one got out right after breakfast. In fact, then, my daddy's two days just amounted to overnighting in jail. Even so, he was annoyed at the perceived injustice of it all, so he did something that is really hard to believe. The towels in the shower room had "Toronto Don Jail" written on them, just like in a hotel. My daddy wrapped one of those towels around his middle, put his shirt over it, and walked out with it. He stole the towel out of the jail. I saw the towel, and the audacity of it took my breath away. Somehow, I had my doubts that what he had done was entirely polite and civilized and canadian.

JOHN DIEFENBAKER RISES TO THE OCCASION

During my years in Ottawa I occasionally went up to Parliament Hill to hear the House of Commons. The preferred time was the question period, which is basically an opportunity for the opposition to try to embarrass the ruling party. The exchanges tended to be much shorter and sharper than during regular debates.

One day in the summer of 1969 a couple of american friends were visiting, and I suggested that we go up to hear the question period. From down in the lobby I phoned my member of parliament to request passes to the members' gallery, which provided a better view than the public gallery at the end of the chamber. Our member was in the ruling Liberal Party, so that he gave us passes on the side facing the government benches. Even so, by leaning over the railing we could see the first two rows of the opposition benches.

I drew my friends' attention to an old man in the opposition front bench, the legendary John Diefenbaker, famed for his rhetoric in Parliament. And as they were leaning forward to see him in person, as if on cue, John Diefenbaker rose to address the honourable members. Assuming his Old Testament aspect, he pointed a shaking, accusatory finger across at the iniquitous Liberals and intoned something about "our sacred british institutions".

My friends were appropriately slack-jawed. It was as if Winston Churchill had risen and promised to fight to the bitter end on the hilltops and the beaches.

DROWNING IN THE RIDEAU RIVER

The day after we visited Parliament, my friends and I went for a swim in the Rideau River. That had been one of my regular summertime haunts as a child. The summer that I turned 11 I think I went there just about every day. One day I came back with a terrible case of sinus congestion, and ever since I have had to be careful when swimming in freshwater, so that I don't to let it get into my nose. I have tried various kinds of noseplugs in order to keep my hands free when I dive, but I finally had to conclude that the only way to be sure was to hold my nose with one hand and use just one for swimming. That takes a lot of fun out of swimming, and I haven't gone into freshwater nearly as much since that summer day in 1960. Forty years later I found that I was under no such restriction when diving in the Caxiuana River, a blackwater tributary of the Amazon.

We were at the end of our swim in the Rideau, and I was just coming out of the water, while the others were already dressed, when Dave "Roguer" Stanley yelled to me that a guy had just gone under over there. I looked, and sure enough, there was someone just under the water surface right beyond a sudden drop-off. I dove under and hauled him to the surface. In primary school we had had films and exercises in life-saving, which I reviewed in my head as I kept the unconscious guy afloat, struggling to get him toward shore.

There was a fair current going away from the beach, and with my burden I was making no headway. It was a tiring business. I had a keen sense of how much strength I had left and was soberly watching the approach of that point where I would have just enough left to save myself. Then I was going to let him go. Then, just before it reached that point, some kids came along with an inner tube and saved us both.

Stumbling onto shore, I was too exhausted to attempt artificial respiration, but there were others ready to do that. I and my friends went home, and I never did find out if the careless non-swimmer lived or died. One thing was certain, though. I was mighty pissed off at him, because I was dreadfully sick with sinus problems for a day or two.

WESTWARD WITH \$15

In the summer of 1969 I was all by myself in Ottawa, unemployed and almost broke. My parents were out of town for a while, and prospects were looking decidedly grim. I had a job waiting for me in the Okanagan Valley, almost at the other end of Canada, if I wanted it, and one day I decided to make my move. I had all of \$15, and there was no sense in waiting around in hopes of a job in Ottawa in the next couple of days.

So I hit the road. I got someone to take me out to the Trans-Canada Highway, and I hitchhiked my way west. It took about four days, and I got there just as I was down to my last dollar.

A FREIGHT TRAIN IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

When the job in the Okanagan Valley was finished, I could afford a bus or train ticket back east, but what for? I was used to hitchhiking and preferred to save the money. An associate of my boss was going as far as Calgary, a good piece of the way, and from there I continued in mostly smaller pieces until I got to Kenora, on the western edge of Ontario.

There I got stuck. It wasn't a good place to hitchhike. There were no good chances for the motorists to look one over at a slow part of the road, and there were hitchhikers spread out along the stretch leaving town. I was there for more than a day. Some of the other luckless individuals told stories of people who had been unable to escape from just such a situation and had ended up settling down in Kenora, a prospect that filled me with horror.

On the second day I fell in with another young fellow from Ottawa who told me that he was going to hop a freight train that night. I could join him if I like. Now, that was more like it. In the evening we went around to visit a former teacher of his who took us out for chinese food, a good way to set us up, and after nightfall my friend Ken and I went down to the yards, where I hopped my first freight train. (I had been on freight trains before, but always as part of a job moving cattle, all perfectly legal.)

We got a good ride that took us to somewhere north of the head of Lake Superior, and then our train declined to move anymore, so we hitchhiked some more. Then, somewhere around the Lakehead (north edge of Lake Superior), we got stuck in another small town. After several hours trying to get out, we figured this was not the way to make progress and we had better see that the railway had to offer.

In small places, riding freight trains is not a very tricky business. The risk of being caught is small, and one just has to be sensible and take some basic precautions. We eased on down to the yards and entered into conversation with a brakeman. Was there an eastbound coming through here any time this afternoon? Yes, there would be one in about an hour and a half. And what about cops? "No, he's off duty."

Under those circumstances, we saw no reason whatsoever to hide in the bushes. In fact, we went right in and sat down in the waiting room for the passenger trains, two moderately scruffy young hoboes with duffel bags. There were legitimate passengers in there, but they didn't pay us any particular mind until our eastbound arrived. Then we went out, got the engineer's permission to ride his train, and we climbed up into the last

engine and sat there, leaning out the window in broad daylight. We could see the passengers inside, waiting for their train and room looking at us, thinking "Of all the bloody cheek."

A MINORITY OF TWO

In the Philippines unfamiliar foreigners are customarily addressed as "Joe". This evidently comes from the presence of many american soldiers (GI Joe) during World War II and later. Some of the foreigners I knew there (1981-1987) disliked this habit, but most of us warmed to it and took to addressing each other as Joe. It even became a sort of title. If one wanted to speak of Greg Hall, for example, he was Joe Greg, and I was happy to be Joe Chris.

After a while it occurred to me that we should have a counterpart form of address for the locals, and I quickly settled on "Bill". I got the idea from the great blues guitarist Albert King, who cannot be bothered to learn names and just calls most men Bill.

There was a precedent for this. When Henry Miller -- at one time my favourite writer and one that I continue to hold in affection -- lived in Paris in the 1930s, he and his friends decided it was an unnecessary nuisance to address each other by individual names, so everyone became Joe. My distant cousin Allen J. Starbuck and I found this practice attractive and took to calling each other Moe, which we still do after 40 years.

One day in 1970, Moe & I were in the Toronto airport on standby, having trouble getting onto a plane and airborne to Cleveland. Standing in line, making yet another try at yet another plane, we went into a spontaneous routine:

"You know why they're discriminating against us?"

"No, why?"

"It's because we're black."

"This is so."

Then we would switch roles:

"You know why they're discriminating against us?"

"No, why?"

"It's because we're jewish."

"This is so."

And so on, through homosexual, communist and who knows what else, until we decided to give it a rest. At that point someone behind us remarked amiably "It must be tough being a left-handed black jewish homosexual communist." And Moe & I turned around and responded in emphatic simultaneity "This is SO!"

THE 20-YEAR-OLD TOEJAM WINTHROP JUNKIE

I liked Cleveland so well that I decided to stay for a while and got a job in an aluminium foundry on the west side. My job was to take care of one furnace, making sure it stayed full of molten aluminium at the right temperature. As long as I did that and the moulds at the other end kept filling for the guys on the assembly line, all was well.

It was solitary work. I would stand up on a platform in front of my furnace, with a face mask that kept my head from baking, and sing Tom Rush and Janis Joplin songs. No one could hear me over the roar, and no one could see my face through the glare off my mask, so I was all alone. I had long hair, which would occasionally catch on fire if I let it get outside of the mask, and on those occasions I would smell it and step back to put out the fire. The job suited me so well that sometimes when the break guy came around to spell me I would signal to him I didn't want to go on break, so he should give it to someone else.

Sitting at lunch break one day I was shocked by something one of the older workers said. He noted that he had only nine years to go to retirement. The bottom dropped out of my stomach. I was just 20 at the time, and the idea of remaining a factory worker for a whole nine more years just waiting for retirement -- for what? -- was too astounding to contemplate. I had no thought of staying in aluminium until I was old.

One day Moe and I decided to visit our old high school in southeastern Ohio. That was a fateful visit. In the course of it we rambled extensively over the hills, as in the old days. On one of these rambles we went by the settlement of Slabtown. Now, a nice little creek runs through Slabtown, and during our high-school years I had drunk from it on more than one occasion. As we passed it this day I decided to take a drink. That was really rather foolhardy, as it ran through farmland, and Moe told me I really shouldn't drink from it. I heeded him not.

Back in Cleveland a few days later, I started having some peculiar nausea and other symptoms, which got progressively worse. I went by the Case Western Reserve University Hospital, where Moe and most of our housemates worked as orderlies, to see what they could make of it. At first they thought it was mononucleosis and were treating me for that, but then one of my tests said something quite different: Typhoid fever. They immediately put me in a room by myself.

Typhoid fever was by no means common in Ohio at that time -- and probably even less so now -- so that I was an object of considerable

interest in a teaching hospital. The doctors would bring the medical students around on rounds to have a look at me, which I didn't mind at all.

One of my doctors had a clipboard with "Salk" in big letters on the back. I thought he was quite a funny guy and maybe I should get a clipboard and put "Darwin" on it. After all, this was only about 20 years since Jonas Salk had all but wiped out poliomyelitis with his vaccine, and it was still a very famous name. Then Moe and I learned from one of the nurses that it was no joke. This was Dr Peter Salk, son of the great Jonas. However, she told us, we shouldn't bring that up with him, as he was rather sensitive about it. This set Moe and me off on a round of imaginary questions for the younger man. "Dr Salk, what have you discovered lately?" "Dr Salk, are you as great as your daddy?" We played with these and other possibilities in the nurse's presence, while she looked daggers at us.

I was in a lot of pain. Dr Salk tried out a number of analgesics on me, some of which I abandoned because I preferred the pain to the bad trip they gave me. After a few days, though, he hit on one, Talwin, that did the trick nicely. It removed the pain and didn't get me more than a little stoned. He told me I could have it every three hours as needed. It came as a little pink pill with a groove across the middle on one side and the legend "Winthrop" on the other.

So I lay there in the hospital for two or three weeks, popping Winthrops. I was in bed for so long that when the fever was finally beaten and it was time to get myself moving again in preparation to leave the hospital I found that I couldn't walk. My feet and legs were so weak that I needed help at first just to amble down the hall, and even after that I was reduced to a careful shuffle for a while as I exercised to bring back my strength.

Then came the day to go back into the real world. The pain was quite manageable by that time, but I had clearly developed a dependence on my Winthrops. When Dr Salk came to say goodbye I protested. "But, Doctor, you can't just let me go like this. I'm hooked on this stuff." He chuckled and assured me that it wasn't addictive, but I insisted that he should humour me. So he gave me 15 of them, and I took myself off it over the next five days. It wasn't a hard addiction to beat, but it had to be faced.

Six months later I read in a newspaper that Talwin had been put on the addictive list. Dr Salk, are you reading this?

"DO YOU DIG THE MOTHERS?"

After typhoid fever and being a Winthrop junkie, I was invited to take up my old job in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. I took a plane to Calgary and then went to the train station to get a train the rest of the way.

In the train station there was a substantial record store, so I got to looking through them, even though I didn't have a record player and had zero probability of buying anything. Looking through the rock section -- ludicrously labeled "teen hits" -- I found that they had a fairly impressive selection of Frank Zappa & the Mothers of Invention. As I was looking at these, the manager, a wizened old codger, came over to see what I had in mind. Looking at the records under review he astounded me by asking very seriously "Do you dig the Mothers?"

I was so beautifully incongruous that I wanted to laugh out loud, but that would have been rude, so I evenly told him that indeed I did. After a pause it occurred to me that I should be reciprocal and so asked "Do you?" He gravely assured me that he did, as well, and that was the end of the conversation.

Later I realized that I had missed an opportunity. I should have engaged him in further conversation in an effort to map the extent and pattern of his youthful enthusiasms. Between us, we could have abolished the generation gap then and there.

I'VE NEVER BEEN IN PRISON

I've never been in prison. Now, let me qualify that. I have been inside several prison buildings, but always just visiting. It is a damn interesting experience to be inside a maximum-security prison and know you can leave any time you please. Bang on the wall, "Guard, I'm going now." They have to let you go. The brother you came to see will be staying a while.

My job in the Okanagan Valley turned out not to be all I expected, so in the summer of 1970 I quit and started hitchhiking to Toronto, over 2000 miles away. Outside of Calgary I got lucky. Jim was mighty good company, and he was going all the way to Toronto. We spent the next couple of days breezing across Alberta and Saskatchewan, talking of all manner of things, stopping when we felt like it, sleeping in the car or under the trees. But then, at Brandon, Manitoba, our luck ran out. Car trouble, not the kind that gets fixed quickly. I hung around there for three days, and then I wished Jim all the best and headed down to the railway.

The Trans-Canada Railway is a single main line all across the prairies and deep into Ontario, so all I needed was an eastbound that would take me to the other side of Lake Superior. And luck was with me. As I came down the embankment, an eastbound came rolling in, nice and slow. Because there is just one line, the trains are often very long, a mile or more, pulled by three or four engines working together. Customarily, guys like me rode in the last engine. No boxcars for us.

Of course, you don't ride a man's train without his permission, but I was never denied it. The fireman was sitting at the window of the first engine, so I put on an interrogatory face and pointed to the last engine. He turned and spoke to someone I couldn't see, and then nodded to me, and that was that. I climbed up and was on my way.

It was dark as we came into Winnipeg. I had been sitting up and watching the prairie night go by, but now I sat down on the floor. In those days Winnipeg was one of four cities in Canada that we hoboes feared, as the railway police were especially tough. So I sat there, out of sight, waiting for the train to get to the other side of town. The train slowed down as we entered the freight yard, then slowed even some more, which I thought was uncalled for. Then it came to a complete stop right in the middle of the freight yards, and a dreadful realization came over me. This train was not continuing. It was going to sit right here, maybe for days.

There was only one thing to do. I had to get out and find another eastbound in a hurry. So I was discreetly walking about, hoping to find a

brakeman or someone not in uniform to point me to my train, when a car screeched to a stop beside me, and an officer invited me to get in. What was I supposed to do? Go scampering about in unfamiliar territory in the nighttime, hauling a duffel bag, still looking for that eastbound train? No, I did the courteous thing and accepted his offer.

Then we proceeded through those vast freight yards toward the office where he would process his arrest. He said I had been going to hop a train, hadn't I?, and I allowed that that was so. He didn't ask if I had just gotten off of a train, and I saw no reason to burden him with this intelligence. Thinking out loud, the officer regretted having to take me in, but if he let me go I would just go back in there and get on one of his trains. This was accurate, but he hadn't directly asked me, so I was silent.

One could understand his regret. He was a middle-aged man, quite likely with kids about my age. And this was the Canadian National Railway which routinely sent trespassers up for the maximum 30 days. For once in my life, I had my wits about me. "You know, Officer" I said as we slowed down to approach the front office, "the Trans-Canada Highway is just a few miles from here. It would be easy for you to run me out there, but too far for me to walk back to your freight yard. I could hitchhike from there." He thought about that for a moment and allowed that I had a point, so, instead of stopping at the office, he picked up speed and drove right out the gate. He took me to the highway, and I was free to go. He even shook my hand as he wished me good luck.

He was a French Canadian, and even now, almost 40 years later, I can hear his parting words to me. "It is a good ting de sergeant didn't catch you, or you would be spending some time in Winnepeg."

THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

I was once a dean and a half, for about three hours. The School of Continuing Studies at the University of the West Indies was about to hold its graduation ceremony, and my dean couldn't attend. Or maybe he just preferred not to. In any event, he couldn't very well be unrepresented at such an event, so he asked me to go in his stead. Then the deputy dean found out about it and asked me to represent him as well.

I had thought I would go in, sit inconspicuously somewhere in the back, and then leave just as inconspicuously after no more than half an hour. It didn't work out that way. I was a dean and a half, which meant I had to sit up in the front row, facing the dais.

It was a big graduating class, and the delivery of diplomas went on for a very long time. After a bit I noticed something about Max Richards, principal of our campus (later the fifth president of Trinidad & Tobago), who was handing out the diplomas. Everyone else up there was plainly bored out of his skull, and I have no doubt that Max was too, but he didn't show it. Far from it. As each of the hundreds of graduands approached, Max made eye contact and leaned forward ever so slightly, with just a hint of excitement, to shake hands. Over and over again, hundreds of times.

I turned to deputy principal Compton Bourne and remarked on how good Max was at his ceremonial duties. And my mind turned back to a similar situation many years ago. Every New Year's morning the Governor General of Canada has a levée, to which all Canadian men (as well as a few high-ranking women and the diplomatic corps) are invited. One New Year's eve in the early 1970s I had a novel idea. I was a Canadian and of age, and I took a notion to go to the levée. Early morning in Ottawa at that time of year is of course miserably cold, and to this day I have no idea why I didn't just stay in bed when the time came, rather than pouring myself into a suit and taking the bus to Parliament Hill, but I went.

I was very much out of my element. I saw one person that I knew, the famous portrait photographer Yousuf Karsh. (I'm not claiming that he knew me, just that I had met and spoken with him a few times.) And I certainly didn't know the drill, so I just watched the people who looked like they belonged, and did as they did. It came time to be presented to the Governor General, Roland Michener. We all got into line, and it was requested that one have two of one's business cards for the sergeant-at-arms at the door to the great hall. Like the few other working-class types who had no such thing, I was given two blank cards on which to write my

name. One went into the record, and the other was passed to the officer standing beside the Governor General.

My turn came. The officer picked up my card and declaimed "Mr Christopher Starr". I approached, and the Governor General leaned forward to shake my hand, saying "How do you do, Mr Starr?" like he really, really wanted to know. I was perhaps 200th in line, but in that moment I had the unshakeable impression that he had been waiting all that time just to meet me. And as I walked on to the waiting tables of rum toddy, I shook my head in wonder. Roland Michener was good at his job.

THE GUY WHO LOOKED LIKE WILLIE

Everyone has certainly had the experience of looking at someone and thinking that she/he bore a certain resemblance to someone familiar. And occasionally one notices a third person who looks like this second person. Does person C then look like person A? Certainly not, as you have probably noticed. There is no such transitivity.

In one of my classes in undergraduate school was a student who I thought looked like my second cousin Willie Starr, whom I usually did not see from one year to the next. This was passingly amusing, but not worthy of any special notice. Then I was at a football game, the University of Guelph was playing my university's Carleton Ravens, and while we were all wandering around during half-time I noticed an unfamiliar human being. My train of thought after that is clearly remembered:

"Oh look, there's someone who looks like the guy who looks like Willie. Isn't that funny? But why is the guy who looks like the guy who looks like Willie looking at me oddly? Oh my goodness, it's Willie!"

A CELEBRATION OF JOHN DAVID THOMAS'S FIERCE TEARS

As a young fellow, I had a much-appreciated record of Dylan Thomas reading his own poems. He was a masterful declaimer. Around that same time, I was reading a book by Brendan Behan -- another writer who drank himself to death -- and came upon a short disquisition on Irish whiskey. Well, I thought, I like a little drink every now and then, and I believe I'll give Irish whiskey a try. So I went down to the local booze store to ask about it, and there I was introduced to Bushmill's. I found it to be mighty tasty, and for a while Bushmill's nine-years-old was my preferred tippie.

I think it might have been around 1970 that Moe visited Ottawa. I happened to have a bottle of Bushmill's on hand, and he and I were having a drink of an evening while listening to Dylan Thomas reading his own. Now, one of his best-known poems, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night", is about the approaching death of his father. John David Thomas had been the local school teacher in Dylan's youth, a towering figure of authority, but now he was an old man near death, a shadow of his former self. The theme of the poem is "Okay, Dad, we know that you're on the way out, and there's nothing anybody can do about it, but do not accept it. Don't go gently. Be your old self and fight it to the bitter end."

The last verse is

"And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

And in the very same instant, as Moe and I sat there sipping Bushmill's nine-years-old, we were struck with the same grand inspiration: We were drinking John David Thomas's fierce tears.

Ever since that moment, we refer to Bushmills as Fierce Tears and consider the drinking of it a sort of sacrament. We have a sort of a dream about it. We are in a fancy hotel restaurant and the waiter -- somehow, we always think of him as coming from somewhere in the Far East -- comes over to us. One of us takes the waiter's hand, look into his eyes and intones with consummate solemnity "Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears I pray." Then the waiter very briskly says "Very good, Sirs" and goes off to get us two lovely glasses of Bushmill's nine-years-old. Realistically, that will probably never happen.

BE NICE TO THE MOTHER

When you're courting a lady, always be nice to her mother. The mother can make or break you. Show sympathy for her views on life, no matter how bone-headed they may seem. If you're dining at their place and the mother offers you a second helping of something, show enthusiasm and put it away with warm appreciation. As a young man I developed this cardinal rule on my own. No one had to tell me. Somehow, I just knew it.

Long ago and far away, I was courting a lady of the Irish Catholic persuasion who did, in fact, become the first Mrs Starr. Oftentimes of an evening I would be over at the house, and her mother would say "Chris, Anne and I are going to mass. Would you like to come?" Now, a strictly truthful answer would have been along the lines of "Actually, Mrs Regan, I'd rather stick needles in my eyes", but when you're courting a lady you have to be nice to the mother, so instead I always said "Well, yes, Ma'am, I believe I would."

We always sat about halfway back in the large church with a fair-sized congregation. Of course I was not praying, so I occupied myself in observing human behaviour. There is a great deal of standing up and sitting back down in mass, and I wondered how the people knew when to stand and when to sit. I soon saw that there was a pew of oldsters in the front, and the congregation just followed their cue.

Okay, but how did the oldsters know when to stand and sit? The priest didn't make any apparent gesture, and he certainly didn't say "Stand up" or "Sit down". I observed some more, and in time I found that whenever the oldsters stood it was right after the priest had used a certain phrase -- I believe it was "Thus saith the Lord -- something innocuous that could be slipped in just about anywhere. And before they sat he said one of two other phrases.

I sat through a couple more masses, making sure I had it right, and then I didn't bother waiting for the oldsters to make their move. If the priest gave the "stand" signal, I stood, and if he gave the "sit" signal I sat. Now, at 21 I was a lot quicker than the oldsters, so I was on my feet or seated before them. And the people around and behind me got to following my cue and not waiting for the oldsters. I became the pace-setter for half of the congregation. And the amazing thing was that neither my intended and her mother nor anybody else ever questioned it. Some of those folks had undoubtedly been Catholics for decades, yet no one questioned that I knew when to stand and sit and they didn't.

As you can well imagine, I would have loved to take half of the congregation up at a very inappropriate moment, throw the whole place into confusion. But I never did, because that would have pissed off Mrs Regan. And when you're courting a lady always, always, always be nice to the mother.

MY DADDY DRIVES THE ANTI-WAR TRUCK

In the late 1960s and into the 1970s the ever-present political question all over the world was the war in Vietnam. By about 1969, the anti-war movement was well organized and able to mount a major spring and fall mobilization every year in many north-american cities. In Ottawa the organizing arm of the movement consisted mainly of young radicals, led by the trotskyist Young Socialists, of which I was a member.

As the time for the 1971 spring mobilization approached, I was present at some of the organizing meetings. One day a mundane but difficult question arose: Who would rent and drive the sound truck for the march? We had plenty of people who knew how to drive, but one had to be at least 25 to rent the truck, and none of us was that old. After we had sat in puzzled silence for a few seconds, I hazarded a suggestion: "Why don't you ask my dad?"

Some of the comrades guffawed. After all, it was well known that parents were not on our side. But then they saw that I was serious, and Bert Keser said "Yes, I know Chris's father. He's cool. Let's ask him."

So it was that my daddy rented and drove the sound truck in the spring mobilization that year. And for a while afterward the comrades were in a sort of puzzled awe of me. I was someone whose father was actually on our side.

BOB HOLLIS WANTS TO MAKE ME

When I was about 15 I was at a demonstration against nuclear weapons outside La Macaza, Québec. It lasted the weekend, and we all crashed in somebody's big house. It was interesting to meet a whole lot of old and young peaceniks, some of whom had come from quite a distance. One of these was Bob Hollis, a middle-aged veteran of the peace movements. We got along very well and kept in touch by letter over the next few years.

When I was 20 years old, Bob suggested that I might like to spend a week or two in New York. I could stay at his place and explore the city, and we would socialize when he wasn't working. Any time I was ready, he would send me a bus ticket. Spring Break was coming up, and I was curious about New York, so we made arrangements.

Bob met me at the bus station in Manhattan, and we took the ferry over to his place in Staten Island, passing by the Statue of Liberty on the way. I had a grand week in New York, but what really stands out is something that was entirely unplanned, at least by me. Soon after I got there, Bob and I stayed up late into the night, talking at top speed and drinking sticky-sweet Mogen David wine. By and by I said good night and staggered off to bed.

The next thing I knew, Bob was in bed with me and getting really close. Geez, he was trying to make me. In my befuddled state I wasn't entirely sure what was wrong with this picture, but I had this feeling that something definitely wasn't right. I protested to Bob that what was going on was untoward. What was wrong with it? he wanted to know. Well, for one thing, I told him, I'm straight. Are you sure? he asked. And the bitch of it was that I was so damn drunk that I was not sure, although I was convinced that there was something that would prove that I was really and truly of the heterosexual persuasion. Rarely have I wracked my brain so hard for something that I thought must surely be there, if only I could grasp it, like Richard Burton after he heard the wind chimes in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

And then a fact occurred to me. "Bob, I just remembered. I have a girlfriend. Yes, I most definitely have a girlfriend. So, I am unquestionably straight. I'm sure about it."

And that was that. Bob was a gentleman about it, but I could tell he was disappointed.

HANGING OUT IN MARINE SHIPPING

In the summer of 1971, I had a job in the marine shipping section of the Canadian government. The government was very good about finding and making jobs for students, so few of us were unemployed during the summers. The following two summers, my last as an undergraduate, I was the research assistant for spiders in the Canadian National Collection of Arthropods, a really dandy job that has left me with a lifelong affection for little eight-legged creatures. But my time in marine shipping was just a job.

Still, it was a pleasant one. We occupied one great big floor of a building in downtown Ottawa. On our side of the building the floor was, for the most part, not divided into separate offices. Rather, there were dividers that only partly separated the various desks. And my desk was right out in the open, behind the receptionist at the entrance.

I had been accustomed to working in industry, with decidedly different norms of efficiency than in the civil service. My first day in marine shipping, my boss put me to work sorting and moving a mass of material in a storage room. He apparently figured that would occupy me for the rest of the day and was taken aback when I came back an hour and a half later and asked what I should do next. Without saying so directly, he let me know that I might like to slow down a bit.

In time I realized that, as far as my boss was concerned, the principal reason in giving me that job was so that I could earn enough to go back to school in the fall. If I happened to do some work that aided the enterprise of Canadian shipping, fine, but that wasn't the main reason I was being paid. He was quite open about this. And this was no wild-eyed radical; he was a middle-aged career civil servant and looked the part.

I had friends with comparable jobs in the civil service who, when there was nothing for them to do, were obliged to pretend to be busy. There was none of that in marine shipping. I would bring a book to work and, if my services weren't required, would sit and read at my desk behind the receptionist, in full view of everyone coming in. Sometimes one of the captains, noticing that I was available, would ask my boss to borrow me for some task, but more often the people would just glance at what I was reading and keep walking. One day I was sitting there reading the *Communist Manifesto* when a captain looked over my shoulder. "What are you reading there, Chris. Oh, the *Communist Manifesto*." And on he walked, just like that.

One morning my boss took me aside as I came in and confided "Look, Chris, that shelving we ordered still hasn't come in, and frankly there's nothing for you to do. So, why don't you just go out that side exit over there and go swimming or something? Come to think of it, don't bother coming in tomorrow either. We'll cover for you."

I wish I could remember his name.

A SERGEANT VIOLATES GOYA'S GIRLFRIEND

Every year in undergraduate school I acted in the spanish plays. These were organized, I believe, by the Dep't of French & Spanish, and were quite a big deal. We performed every night for about a week, and during two years we were invited to universities elsewhere in Canada to put on our plays.

One of the plays, *El Sueño de la Razón* was about the painter Goya and the difficulties he suffered as a liberal in a reactionary society. I played the sergeant of a semi-official royalist goon squad that went to intimidate Goya into silence. We kicked in his front door, and my minions dragged him into another room to humiliate him, while I grabbed his girlfriend and violated her behind the couch in the living room. The audience could hear us and could see my boots and her bare feet as I took her against her will.

On the first night, I stood up with disheveled clothes and a satisfied grin, and the audience laughed. I was appalled. I was supposed to be a mean, swinish son-of-a-bitch, and they thought I was funny. I made damn sure that in subsequent performances they found no humour in my character.

"SHE KNOWS SHE'S WRONG"

During the last days of 1971, I was at a political convention in Montreal. After the last session, on New Year's eve, a bunch of us were sitting in a car downtown, ready to ride back to Ottawa. A light snow was falling, and the air was replete with advancing revelry.

On the sidewalk beside us, an old Englishman and a young woman were having a political debate. She put forth her points earnestly, but he was just baiting her, and it worked. After a time, she got fed up and stalked away.

The old Englishman, plainly very pleased with himself, just stood there on the sidewalk, saying over and over to everyone passing by and even to no one in particular "She knows she's wrong. She knows she's wrong. She knows she's wrong." That was ever so amusing, and I got to imitating him in different intonations from the back seat of the car. "She knows she's wrong. She knows she's wrong. She knows she's wrong." And so forth. After a bit the old Englishman noticed this and started walking toward the car. He had an insane gleam in his eye, and I feared violence. I started discreetly winding up the window. It was most of the way up, but not quite shut, when he was right there in my face, still with that mad gleam.

But he just said "You speak terrible English" and turned and walked away down the street.

Every now and then -- especially when a certain individual speaks up in staff meeting -- I still hear that Englishman insisting with satisfied conviction "She knows she's wrong."

A PHONE CALL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

During my last years as an undergraduate I was a stalwart of the Young Socialists, Canada's trotskyist youth group. The authorities definitely frowned on us, and during the application of the War Measures Act in late 1970 some of the comrades in Montreal were interned. In Ottawa they didn't detain any of us, but Ray Smith was tailed for a couple of days, and I was pretty sure the phone was bugged at my house.

In 1971 Anne Maureen Regan became the first Mrs Starr, which meant that I married into the Regan family. These were not radical folks but members of the ruling Liberal Party. Annie's father, Walter, was the head of personnel for the federal Dep't of Justice, and her uncle Gerry was the premier of Nova Scotia.

In the summer of 1972 we took an extended driving tour of the maritime provinces, a part of Canada I had not visited before (or since). To our regret, we had to turn back without reaching Newfoundland, but we visited the other three provinces, including a grand several days in Prince Edward Island.

We were expected by the Regans in Halifax, Nova Scotia, but we arrived to find that that our aunt and uncle were away. (It was later made public that they were negotiating something or other with Aristotle Onassis.) No matter. The housekeeper made us welcome. As she settled us in the master bedroom, she pointed to telephone by the bed. "That is the hot line" she told us. "It only rings in cases of nuclear war or similarly momentous events. If it does, don't answer it." You can be sure I took her words to heart. After all, I was a known subversive, and for all I knew if I took cognizance or some big state secret they would have to kill me.

In the middle of the night -- you see where this story is going -- that very phone rang. I sleepily reached for it, but Annie was quicker. I was jolted awake by her full-strength grip on my wrist and a hissed "Don't touch it!" We heard the housekeeper take the call in another room.

At breakfast in the morning we were of course very curious. Annie mentioned casually to the housekeeper that she thought the phone had rung in the nighttime. Without asking directly, we hoped she would tell us. What was the national disaster, comparable to nuclear war, that had made the hot line ring? And she did. The labour-affiliated New Democratic Party had won the provincial election in British Columbia.

MY ONE MOMENT OF GLORY

In the summers after my last two years of undergraduate school, I worked as the research assistant for the spider experts at the Canadian National Collection. While my main interest continued to be in social insects, as a graduate student at Kansas I did Robert E. Beer's course in the biology of arachnids and was very receptive when I noted that the American Arachnological Society would be meeting that year in nearby Warrensburg, Missouri.

On the first day of the meeting, as I was entering the building, I noticed an elderly man who looked familiar to me. I was fairly sure I had seen his picture in a book about spiders. I approached and asked him in French "Excuse me, Sir, but aren't you Professor Bonnet?" Indeed he was, Pierre Bonnet, the dean of living spider specialists. And he was glad to meet me, because he spoke only French and Spanish and so had little conversation with most of the colleagues present.

During a coffee break a couple of days later, Bonnet wanted to talk with the American luminary Benjamin J. Kaston. The best French speaker was nowhere to be seen, and the best Spanish speaker was occupied in a business meeting, so he came to me. That was how I, an unknown student, came to be standing in the middle of the coffee break, translating from Bonnet to Kaston, from Kaston to Bonnet. A crowd gathered, the people hanging on my every word, as I translated from Bonnet to Kaston and back to Bonnet. It was positively my moment of glory, although it was all too short. I was not amused when the president came out and called us all back into the session.

A PRAIRIE HOME NUTHOUSE

During my years in Kansas I was friendly with Yong Sonii Lee. He was doing 1 to 10 in the state penitentiary at Lansing. One day Sonii decided that he wanted a change of scenery, so he pulled a nut act and was transferred to the prison wing of an insane asylum in western Kansas. That sort of thing was apparently not uncommon, as Sonii told me that there were only two genuine nuts in his entire ward. Never having been in such a place, I thought this would be a good time to pay him a visit.

After a pleasant drive over the prairie, I reached the town and was directed to the asylum. It was a big place of many buildings, looking rather like a college campus except that most of the doors were locked. There was hardly anyone outdoors and no indication of where the prison wing might be, so I went wandering.

Finding an unlocked door, I went inside one big building, expecting to find someone right away who could assist me. The place seemed deserted.

Wandering down a hallway, I came to a locked door with a window in it. On the other side were several women in hospital gowns, doing nothing in particular, obviously patients. Seeing me on the other side of the soundproof window, they slowly gravitated toward me with looks of fascination. Now, I am not accustomed to interacting with insane women, so I wasn't quite sure what was expected of me. Still, it seemed discourteous not to do something to reward their fascination. So I made a series of funny faces and then pretended to snatch my nose off my face and clutch it in my hand, all of which was much appreciated. Seeking to top this, I took out a sheet of note paper, rolled it into a tight ball, tossed it in the air, caught it in my mouth, and swallowed it with a look of replete satisfaction. This last antic was such a success that the ladies howled in delight, attracting the attention of Nurse Ratched, who strode over in manifest displeasure, unlocked the door, and addressed herself to me, the miscreant. That was how I got directions to the prison wing.

I had of course written ahead to be put on Sonii's list of visitors, but when I got to the front desk I found that I wasn't on record. I was furious at this slip-up and went looking for director -- the word I heard later was that I had "stormed out of there", which created something of a sensation, as they were unused to anyone who wasn't an inmate showing any temper -- to get things straightened out. It was his day off, but I found him in a park near his house, playing over the ground with a metal detector. I don't know that the director was especially sympathetic to Sonii or me, but he

was clearly miffed at his staff's carelessness and quickly made a phone call. When I got back to the prison wing they were mighty helpful.

So, I had a good visit with Sonii, talking of politics and black power and such. Shortly afterward, he was diagnosed as not crazy, after all, and shipped back to Lansing.

A TRUE ARACHNOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM

As a teaching assistant at Kansas, I occasionally took classes into the field to see wild plants and animals in their habitats. In one class I had a farm boy from out west who came up with the damndest things. Hal didn't talk a lot, but when he did it was entirely unpredictable what would come out of his mouth.

I was leading that class on a nature walk when I came upon a fine big orb-weaving spider in her web. Stopping to point out a few things about it, I said "This is a spider of the genus *Argiope*, a mature female." And then Hal opened his mouth and spoke in his distinctive drawl. "How do you know which pair of legs to look between?"

Much of the class collapsed in laughter, and the curious thing is that we didn't know whether Hal was kidding or not.

MANUEL ON THE RAFT

One of my main buddies in graduate school at Kansas was Manuel Olivares, a rather zany Indian from Venezuela. By the time I got there Manuel had been there two years and was almost finished his master's degree. I quickly noticed that his English wasn't nearly as good as it should be. He spoke with manic enthusiasm, and one could pretty much make out what he was getting at, but in all that time no one else had bothered to help him over his errors, and Manuel seemed to have no idea just how fractured his English was. In the few months before he returned to Venezuela, I made a point of tutoring him in the course of everyday interactions.

Then, as now, I liked to put pictures on the walls of our lab. One day I affixed a full-page photo from an old *National Geographic*, showing a couple of tramps on a raft in Washington or Oregon. When he noticed it, Manuel came over and peered at it intently and asked me about it. On a sudden inspiration, I told him "Manuel, this is you, and this is me, and we are making an epic trip down the Orinoco River."

That night I had a dream. The two of us were, indeed, on a raft on the upper reaches of the Orinoco. Suddenly, out from under overhanging branches on the shore there came gliding several canoes with wild Indians in them. Their spears were raised, and they plainly did not have friendly intentions. Turning to my companion I said "Well, Manuel, it looks like we're done for this time."

"What do you mean we, white man?" he said.

I'm not making this up. I literally had that dream.

SHORTY DELONG'S ADMIRABLE LONGEVITY

Polistes fuscatus is a social wasp in which new colonies are usually founded by single queens (haplometrosis) in the northern part of its range and by a group of queens (pleometrosis) further south. In the early summer of 1976 I made a driving tour from southern Ohio up into Michigan in an attempt to map and characterize the transition between these two habits.

One thing I needed to be able to do with confidence was to distinguish between this species and *P. metricus* in that part of the country, so I stopped by the entomology museum at Ohio State University to examine specimens. It was a Saturday, but Dwight M. "Shorty" DeLong (1892-1984), co-author of the standard textbook in insect taxonomy, was expecting me.

Riding up in the elevator, it occurred to me that Dr DeLong was of decidedly advanced years and yet seemed to be in fine condition. Thinking I could learn something, I wanted to ask him why he was still alive, but of course I couldn't put it like that, so I asked to what he attributed his long good health.

"Well," he said "I just do the best I can with what I have. I don't drink or smoke and try to take care of myself."

And, you know, I damn near gave up drinking and smoking right there on the spot.

HOW HENRY HERMANN BECAME MY MAJOR PROFESSOR

In the fall of 1962 my cousin, Dave "Roguer" Stanley, told me the Boilsucker Joke. It is extremely vulgar. With its drawn-out, disgusting details and "Madam, must you be so gross?" punch line, it instantly became my favourite, and I have told it many times over the years. During one semester at boarding school it became the custom in our room that I would tell it every night after lights-out, adding new details each time. It got to be quite an extended ritual, much appreciated by my roommates.

Then a new semester came, which meant a new room with new roommates. The first night I told the Boilsucker Joke to much approbation. The next night, though, when I announced "Okay, it's time for the Boilsucker Joke" I was shocked and astounded to be told that they already knew that one, not to bother. I thought maybe they were kidding and started telling it, anyway, but someone threw a shoe at me, and I had to stifle it.

Over the next weeks I was consumed with repressed rage at this indignity. Here I was offering these guys the crowning glory of gross-out humour, and the ungrateful philistines spurned it. Now, when I say that the joke was well-received on that first night, I don't mean to suggest that it was unanimous. In fact, skinny little Peter "Penis" Holvik hated that joke from the beginning. One day some weeks later Penis provoked me sorely by peeing in my shoe -- my foot was in it at the time -- and the moment for revenge had come. I chased him all around the dormitory and finally cornered him in the upstairs bathroom.

"Okay, Penis," I said "the time has come." I wrestled him to the floor and sat on him, so he couldn't get away. I held his hands, so he couldn't plug his ears. I covered his mouth, so he couldn't scream. And in elaborate detail, I told Penis the Boilsucker Joke. When I was done, he was mighty subdued, actually looking kind of seasick.

Years later, long after we had graduated and gone our separate ways, Penis provoked me again, this time by letter. I don't recall what it was about, but I retaliated by composing a long narrative poem, "The Return of the Son of the Boilsucker", and sent it to him, whether he liked it or not. He had to learn.

The Boilsucker Joke remained my favourite for many years, even after Lou Kudon told me the almost equally gross Airplane Joke and now that I have heard Gilbert Gottfried do "The Aristocrats".

When I went to Georgia in the summer of 1976 to start my PhD, I was

attracted by the presence of Henry R. Hermann and Robert W. Matthews, either of which could serve as my major professor. It was my choice. The Hermanns had an infant son, on whom they doted as couples do with any spanking new firstborn. One day at work I told Dr Hermann a tasteless joke: What's red and sits in the corner? Answer: A baby eating razor blades. I thought no more of it until a few days when I was over at their place and his wife told me pointedly "Chris, I didn't think much of that joke you told Henry." That was rather abashing, as it hadn't occurred to me that he would repeat it to his wife, but I was outwardly unrepentant. "Well, Mrs Hermann, at least I didn't tell him the Boilsucker Joke."

Dr Hermann was instantly alert. "The Boilsucker Joke? What's that?" Well, he was a professor, and I was a student in his department, so that was as good as a direct order. Mrs Hermann having, mercifully, absented herself, I rose to the occasion and drew it out in all glorious grossness. And when I was done he laughed so hard that the tears ran down his face. Literally. I couldn't imagine Dr Matthews appreciating that kind of very very low humour, and in that moment I told myself that Henry Hermann was meant to guide my thesis.

STUNG TO THE QUICK BY *VESPULA MACULIFRONS*

Even so, I was very much interested in learning what I could from Dr Matthews. At that time, his research was mostly on yellowjacket wasps. These are commonly a nuisance in suburban areas, as some species develop large colonies underground and in out-of-the-way places, which may greet those who stumble upon them with a multitude of stings. Accordingly, Dr Matthews often got inquiries from householders with inconvenient colonies on their property. Sometimes he would direct the caller to a pest-control professional or give advice on getting rid of the little darlings, but if it was a species of interest he was often pleased to go out and collect the colony.

Colonies were almost always collected at night, for two reasons. First, all of the workers are in the nest, so that one can collect the entire colony and get an accurate census. And second, if things go wrong one can turn off the lights. The usual drill, in the beginning, was that Dr Matthews would ask me and another student, Robert S. Jacobson, if we wanted to go out after yellowjackets that night. Almost always, we did. So, we would ride out to the site with him, get suited up for protection, and get to work.

Now, I noticed early on that the two Bobs had quite different ways of working. Jacobson took forever to get ready, adjusting and readjusting his protective gear, fiddling with equipment, and generally finding a thousand way to delay the start of things, but once the action was going down he was all business, wonderfully efficient. Matthews was just the opposite. He was quick to get started, but when the colony had been gassed and the nest opened, the whole thing ready for bagging, he would take the most maddening time fiddling about with it. Often the ether started to wear off before we were done, and then we really had to scramble. In time, Bob Jacobson & I made a pact that we were better off doing the job ourselves, just the two of us, so when the call came we politely suggested that if Dr Matthews had other things to do that night we would be happy to take care of it. We knew the drill forward and backward, and Dr Matthews -- a family man with kids and a demanding wife -- always had plenty else to do, so he usually was happy to leave it to us.

The thing that really determined us in this policy happened one night when the three of us went for a colony of *Vespula maculifrons* -- big colony, short temper -- in a backyard earth bank. Things followed the usual script, and then the colony was wide open, and Dr Matthews was fiddling with it, while Bob and I tried to think of a way to goose him along

to finish the job. He did, indeed, play with the colony too long, and the wasps started to wake up, which they can do rather suddenly.

I was standing a few meters back, my flashlight trained on the nest, when one of the little darlings flew up the beam and stung me in a very delicate location. I let out a strident groan and exclaimed "One of them just got me in the ... [remembering that I was in a residential area] ... aedeagus." At that, we turned off all lights and scrambled to bag as much of the colony as we could and get out of there. For a long time afterward, the salute among the Georgia wasp-watching students was a grimacing "Hunnnhh", after the noise I had made at the critical moment.

Word got around quickly, and the next morning the professor of insect ecology, D.A. Crossley, came into the lab in great excitement. "Did you get pictures, Chris? Did you get pictures?!!" he practically shouted. "Just think, with a case like this you could be the only entomologist in the world with his genitalia in the literature." I assured him that the pictures wouldn't have showed anything in particular and left it at that. I wasn't about to show him. If you must know, there was plenty of aggressive redness, but no appreciable swelling.

STUNG BY *VAEJOVIS CAROLINUS*

In Georgia I often kept the small local scorpion *Vaejovis carolinus* in the lab. They are pleasant little beasts to have around, and I liked to play with them in idle moments. Often, when I needed to transfer one from one container to another, I couldn't be bothered to look for tweezers. I provoked it to raise up its tail and then just grasped the bulb of the stinger between thumb and forefinger in such a way that the tip pointed ahead between my fingers. How dangerous could that be?

Then one day I got careless, and one of them stung me squarely in a finger tip. Now, I had read William J. Baerg's papers, describing in clinical detail the symptoms from various arachnids that he had induced to sting him, so I was mentally prepared. I sat down immediately with a stop watch, notebook and a mirror (just in case I should get any interesting facial rictus) and waited for the symptoms. Very patiently. And after about 20 minutes, when there was nothing beyond a moderate soreness in the tip of that finger, I said to hell with it and went back to work. So, if the symptoms ever came I didn't notice them.

FIVE STINGS IN ONE DAY

The local *Athens Observer* newspaper in Georgia carried a story one day about one of its reporters who had received about 30 stings from a colony of yellowjackets and was rushed unconscious to the hospital. When he came around, he asked the doctor how close he had come, and the doctor just showed him his EKG and pointed to a flat-line area in it.

Well, that struck me as just a bit far-fetched. A healthy person couldn't really die from just 30 stings, could he? But the very next day I was in the field, working with my paper wasps, and happened to get five stings over the course of about an hour. With that fifth sting, I could feel my heart starting to beat irregularly. So I quit work for the day and never did find out what six stings could do to me.

HOW I BECAME A SOCCER REFEREE

At my boarding school in Ohio our autumn sport was soccer, not american football. I never wanted to play anywhere except in goal, and in my last two years I was the school's first-string goalie. When I went to Carleton for my undergraduate degree I the pool of players was much bigger, and I was the second-string goalie. At Kansas for my master's degree we had a lot of very experienced foreign players, and I was the third-string goalie.

When I got to Georgia for my PhD I said "I'll be damned if I'm going to be the fourth-string goalie for the Georgia Bulldogs", so I trained to be a referee instead. That worked out well, as it allowed me to participate in a higher-level game than I could as a player.

A GENTEEL ENCOUNTER IN A LAUNDROMAT

As a student in Athens, Georgia I often did my laundry in a laundromat at Five Points. My usual drill was to get the wash cycle going and then go across the street to a booze store for a bottle of wine. By the time the laundry was done the bottle would be finished and I would be drunk.

One day I finished my wine early and stepped outside to smoke a cigar. An old drunk came ambling up the street and engaged me in conversation, which soon turned to the topic of booze. I regretted that I had finished my wine, or I could have given him some. But he didn't think much of wine. He was a whiskey man, he said, and pulled out a half-full bottle. Would I care for some? I allowed that I would. He suggested that it might go down better if we could mix it in something, and I allowed that he was right. Did I know where we might get some Coke? Well, yes, they had Coke at that drugstore just down the street. How much would it take? he wondered, counting out his change. I thought he probably had enough right there. At that, he got a bit indignant. "Well, goddamnit" he slurred "if I'm providing the whiskey, don't you think you should take care of the Coke?" He had a point there, and I went for a bottle of Coke and two cups.

And so we sat in the laundromat, where he mixed the Coke and whiskey while I screened him from any officers of the law that might pass by the big front window. Then we shot the breeze, getting even drunker than we already were. He told me he had been all over the world and could speak all the languages of India. I thought that was far-fetched and told him so. (Actually, I told him he was talking horseshit.) I noticed that the drying cycle seemed to have finished and got up to check on it. As I did so, in order to prove my point, I turned and said something extremely rude [tari ma ki choot] to him in Urdu.

Instantly, this bumbling old drunk was on his feet and at me. He grabbed me by one arm and started swinging at me with the other, loudly asking "Did you say ...?" And he repeated the obscenity, accurately. I fended off his blows without difficulty and sat him back down with soothing assurances that I had just been testing his knowledge of Urdu. He was too feeble to keep fighting, but he was still pissed off, and the two of us kept up a stream of urdu curses at each other from opposite ends of the laundromat, while the Americans in between looked distinctly nervous. The difference between us was that he didn't have to repeat himself.

MY GREAT MOMENT IN SHOW BUSINESS

British feature films are almost always about social class, much of which is conveyed by accent. This megacommunicative dimension tends to be lost on American audiences. I was in an American cinema, watching the Monty Python movie *And Now for Something Completely Different*. It came to the scene in which John Cleese enters a pet shop to return a defective parrot and gets into an argument with Michael Palin about whether the parrot has, in fact, died. They had just gone a couple of rounds when the sound went out. I waited a bit and then figured I might as well pitch in. Whenever John Cleese (upper-middle-class accent) was speaking, from my position near the back I would say something like "I tell you, good man, this parrot is deceased. He has been translated onto a higher sphere. He is not of this world." Then, seeing that Michael Palin (working-class accent) was speaking, I would cut in with "Oh no, he's not, guv'nor. He's just sleeping. He has to get his rest, you know." And so on. After a few rounds of this, I thought this was really ego-tripping, so I stopped.

And the people applauded and insisted that I continue.

"AND YOU PEOPLE, THE SPANIARDS"

In January 1979 I went to the tropics for the first time. For the second year, I had failed to get admittance to the Organization for Tropical Studies field course in Costa Rica, and I saw no sense in waiting around for a third try. It would be demoralizing to leave such a thing in the hands of others, so I made arrangements to go down there on my own.

That worked out very well. For the first few days I based myself in the entomology museum at the University of Costa Rica under the generous facilitation of its director, Alvaro Wille (1928-2006; http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81lvaro_Wille_Trejos). I had met Don Alvaro a few years earlier in Kansas, and it was a pleasure both to socialize with him and make use of the museum collections.

Don Alvaro's boss, María Eugenia Bozzoli de Wille, is an anthropologist, at that time working with the Bribri indians of the Talamanca region on the atlantic side. When I first got to Costa Rica, she was getting ready to return to the village of Amubre with a couple of assistants. Would I like to go along? Indeed, I would. It would be my first real chance at tropical field biology, and I would get to interact with a whole new people.

My time in Amubre was so fruitful that I stayed for a week after Doña María Eugenia and her crew left, and I later went back for another while. I collected a fine mass of social wasps and made many good observations, but the most interesting research was an exercise in ethnobiology. I of course expected that the Bribri would have their own names for some of the bugs that interested me, but Doña María Eugenia told me one day that it went beyond that. There were stories or myths associated with some of the social insects.

That got my attention. I collected specimens and nests of the most prominent social wasps and one outstanding ant, *Paraponera clavata*, and used them to get names and stories/myths from some of the older Bribri. Not surprisingly, the younger members of the community tended to be somewhat more acculturated than their elders, so I made it a general rule not to bother with anyone under 50. My best informants, overall, were the local traditional medicine man, Arturo Menéndez, and a very old woman who could not speak Spanish. This was my first experience in anthropology of any kind, and I have ever since considered that the best possible informant is a witch doctor over 70 years old.

I took all testimony with a tape recorder, pronouncing the scientific name of each specimen as I inquired about it. The monolingual old lady of

course gave all responses in Bribri, of which I understood hardly a word. However, her granddaughter was on hand to translate my questions and summarize her responses in Spanish, so that I could continue. Back at the university there would be people to provide a full translation. The result was a paper on "Social wasps among the Bribri of Costa Rica" (<http://www.ckstarr.net/cks/1990-BRIBRI.pdf>).

Speaking with the Bribri about their traditional beliefs was a real eye-opener. Although they all appeared to be Catholics, there was plainly a great deal of syncretism with pre-Christian beliefs. Over and over again, with respect to the origin of one or another of my creatures, I heard "When Christ first created the world ..." followed by a set of events that certainly did not come from Spain.

The arrival of the Spaniards also came up from time to time. To judge by the tone in which it was mentioned, my informants thought of this as a rather recent event and -- although they were too polite to say so -- a temporary situation that would pass in time. The old lady, especially, made frequent mention of the interlopers in a way that amused me. She evidently did not recognize that I was a foreigner and more than once made benign reference to "you people, the Spaniards".

However, the greatest eye-opener came with respect to *Polistes erythrocephalus*. This wasp is familiar to rural people in much of Central America, as it nests abundantly under the eaves of houses and other buildings. It has an all-black body with a deep-red head, and its sting is impressively painful. "We call this the Spanish wasp [avispa americana]", she told me right away when I proffered a specimen. Why did they call it that? "Well, it has a red head, it is fierce when angered, and it builds a lovely little house." Then, after a pause, she added "And it works hard. It loves to work."

At that, the scales fell from my northern Protestant eyes. I saw in a flash that this love of work was not intended as a compliment, that to work for the sake of work, without any particular pressing need, was regarded by the aboriginal people as unnatural, if not mentally unhealthy. That one remark by an old woman in the interior of Costa Rica did more damage to my daddy's teaching of the ennobling effects of labour than a lifetime of alternating hard work and hard laziness.

DON ARTURO TAKES IT LIKE A MAN

As noted above, one of my most valuable informants in the ethnobiological study in Amubre was the medicine man Arturo Menéndez. I got to know him well from asking him about traditional beliefs and practices, and he once took me on a long walk up into the hills to hunt for plants. Like everyone in the community (as far as I was aware), Don Arturo was a Catholic and thus obliged to show the two local priests -- both long-time german missionaries -- due respect. This respect was not reciprocated. The elder of the two priests, in particular, made it plain to me that he regarded Don Arturo as a charlatan and prejudicial to right thinking. He very much resented that many in his flock continued to trust in Don Arturo's remedies instead of relying entirely on the spanish nuns' clinic.

One morning I chanced to meet one of the nuns, who asked if I would be attending mass later. In truth, I hadn't given it a thought and hadn't even been aware that it was Sunday, but I saw no reason to burden the good sister with this intelligence. Yes, I would attend, I told her, and asked when and where.

In my experience, all central-american Indians are short, and the Bribri are no exception. The difference between them and me could be overlooked while we sat, but when we stood I towered over them. Some of the kids openly stared at me.

The elder priest, Bernhard "Bernardo" Drug, was officiating that Sunday. His preaching was forceful and fluent. He had lived in Costa Rica so long that he was more accustomed to speaking Spanish than his native German. At that time I was more comfortable with German, but in speaking with him I had noticed that he sometimes had to think of a german word, the spanish counterpart of which would come to him automatically.

After a lot of prayers and ritual, we got to the sermon. Mr Drug was in full cry that morning, but he knew how to warm to a subject by degrees and indirectly. He began by talking of false prophets in biblical times. That seemed ordinary enough in a sermon. Then he turned to false prophets in more modern times in far-off lands, followed by similar misleaders elsewhere in Central America. He brought it closer to home, referring to a dangerous false-talker on the radio right here in Costa Rica.

About this time I had started to wonder what he was talking about. Then I noticed that the man sitting right beside me was snickering and looking across the room. I followed his gaze, and there sat my friend Don Arturo. This whole sermon was about him! The priest never came close to

mentioning Don Arturo by name, but he circled long enough to leave the people in no doubt as to which particular false prophet he had in mind. The Church does not afford equal time for a dissenting opinion, and Don Arturo just had to sit there and take it.

Then came communion, and Don Arturo showed what he was made of. He could have sat there inconspicuously on one side, but no, he stood up and got in line to take communion with the others.

In time, the mass was ended, and we all wandered out to stand and shoot the breeze in the front yard. Don Arturo was standing off to one side, all by himself. He had been thoroughly scorched by the ecclesiastical blowtorch, and no one was going anywhere near him. When I went over to greet him, he exclaimed "Ay, hombre" and shook my hand with real fervour. In time the people would need him again, but for now he was so glad that somebody, anybody, was willing to associate with him.

A HAMMOCK, UNINTENTIONALLY

When it came time to leave Amubre, I hitched a ride on a little plane to the coastal city of Puerto Limón. From there it would be a straight bus trip to San José. I got my ticket and then went for a beer and a bit of a stroll. In the central square, I was approached by a man selling hand-woven hammocks. They looked fine, but I didn't need or want a hammock, so my indifference was unfeigned.

His opening bid was 150 colones, which he dropped to 100 before I could even comment. "And it's strong" he assured me. Thinking to terminate the negotiation, I asked if I could test it by yanking on it here. "Yes, go ahead" he called my bluff, so I yanked one side of it hard between my two hands, hoping it wouldn't tear. There was little fear of that, it turned out. "Here, pull it here too" he said, pressing his advantage and proffering another part of the hammock. And I did, with the same result.

It was time to retreat. "Yes, it certainly is strong" I told him, "but I don't really need a hammock. Now, if the price were 75 colones" That was another bluff, and quite a foolish one. Just at that moment a friend of his came along, and they discussed my "offer". "Pardon me" the friend asked, "did you say 65 [sesenta y cinco] or 75 [setenta y cinco] colones?" I responded truthfully that I had said 75, and with that the deal was sealed.

The friend advised the vendor to accept it, and I couldn't very well back down, so I acquired a hammock without intending to. Back in San José, I learned that 75 colones was just about the right price. And after I hauled it all the way back up north my sister was happy to take it off my hands, so I suppose it all turned out well.

A RUMBLE IN GUANACASTE

During my first visit to Costa Rica in 1979, I spent about three weeks in the Guanacaste National Park. One evening the park staffers were doing a little boxing. One young fellow seemed to dominate the field, beating all of his opponents in turn. It got to where no one else wanted to fight him, and it looked like the entertainment might be over.

Then one of the women spotted me, leaning against a tree over there in the dark. "The gringo, the gringo, put the gloves on the gringo" went up the cry. Now, truth to tell, I didn't really want to fight, but they had made it a matter of national honour, so I stepped forward. They assigned me a manager, he put the gloves on me, and the first round began.

It was no contest. The young fellow bobbed and weaved and hit me at will, while I don't think I landed one decent punch. I lasted about a full round and was then so groggy that I had to stop. As my manager was taking the gloves off, the park director came up and asked me how the fight had gone. "I'm tough enough" I told him, "but he's much too fast for me. I only lasted one round."

"Don't worry about it" said the director. "He's the provincial champion in his weight class. He was just playing with you."

WAITING FOR THE JAGUAR

After Guanacaste, I spent some time in the Corcovado National Park, at the other end of pacific-side Costa Rica. I had heard from Alvaro Wille many of the experiences that would later go into his book *Corcovado: Meditaciones de un Biólogo*, including tales of jaguars. Accordingly, I was both eager and fearful of meeting with one of these fearsome beasts.

One day I was wandering in a half-swampy area far from the park buildings when I heard a heavy approaching rustling in the dense underbrush. Was this a jaguar? Had he been trailing me, waiting for his moment? In my fevered imaginings I knew it would be quite futile to run or climb a tree, so I determined to make a stand. I jumped up on a fallen log that lay about half a meter above the ground, opened my jackknife, and prepared for a fight to the finish.

The rustling got inexorably closer, and then the cause of it burst into view. A band of peccaries. I looked hard and was relieved to see that they were the relatively timid white-collared peccary, not the fierce and dangerous white-lipped peccary. And then I felt resentment at the worry they had caused me, so I jumped up and down on my log. That scared the hell out of the little bastards, who fled in squealing disarray.

Getting down from my log, I noticed for the first time the buzzing and biting around my head. The log contained a colony of stingless bees, one of the pugnacious species, and they were making their displeasure felt. So, after I had stood my ground against an imaginary jaguar and put a band of wild pigs to flight, I was myself driven off by a swarm of little black bees.

IT'S ODD TO BE HOMESICK

There are many places that I hold in great affection, some that I would very much to revisit. However, homesickness of the usual kind is alien to me. The only homeland to which I have ever felt any strong attachment is the English language. As long as I can hear English spoken at least a couple of times a week I am at home.

This is not to say that I have never known homesickness. I have felt it exactly twice. The first time was while walking through an abandoned farm in Costa Rica (not long after my non-encounter with the jaguar). I have no idea what I was thinking at the time or what brought it on, but suddenly I found myself subject to a very peculiar emotion. It lasted less than a second and then was gone, just like that.

In her story "A Beneficiary", Nadine Gordimer has a question about this: "How do you recognize something that is not in the known vocabulary of your emotions?" In my case, I had no difficulty. Homesickness is a common theme in literature and popular song, so I had long since learned to recognize it in other people. And now I recognized it in myself.

The second instance happened just a couple of years later, was just as fleeting and, as far as I could tell, just as unprovoked. It was as if there was a Spirit of Homesickness flitting about, which just happened to alight in me and instantly said "Oh, geez, I don't belong here" and flew off. Anyhow, it's good to have had a glimpse of what it feels like.

OF MARYANN DOBBS AND HER DOBERMANS

MaryAnn Dobbs and I were students at Georgia together, although not in the same degree programme, possibly not even the same department. Truth to tell, I never quite knew what she was studying, and it may be that she didn't either. One night she and some friends were going out on the town and invited me along. Fine, especially as the first stop was my favourite club, the Last Resort. I have heard some truly memorable music in that small place, including the late great John Lee Hooker twice, up close and personal.

Once we were all seated and a waitress was asking us about drinks, MaryAnn suggested that I have a Flaming Asshole, which I believe was vodka with Tabasco sauce. Good idea. That woke me up. Another of the women, whom I had just met, asked me how old I thought she was. Being of a truthful disposition, I responded with my real estimate, 36, after which she was coldly miffed with me. (It turned out that I had guessed exactly right.)

I don't recall what was playing that night (and may not have known at the time), but after a while it was time to go. MaryAnn & I drove to an apartment building where one of our friends lived. When we got there, some of the others were already naked in the outdoor pool. It was late, the pool lights were off, and we were quiet enough, so if any of the other residents were bothered by us we never heard of it.

Then the party broke up, and MaryAnn & I drove to her place. Now, one of her peculiar activities was keeping and breeding dobermans. She had three of them at the time, and they normally spent the night in her bedroom, as did I on that occasion.

In the middle of the night I needed to use the osmoregulatory facilities, so I got out of bed and headed for the door. Then I heard something that damn near made my hair stand on end. A shuffling in the corner. Geez, the dobermans! I had forgotten all about them. Still, my back teeth were floating, so there was no choice in the matter, I had to go. Moving very slowly, so as not to alarm the wakened, curious dogs, I made it to the door, opened it, and was home free on the other side.

Returning from the bathroom, I had a truly horrifying thought. I now had to open the door and get past those powerful guard dogs in the dark. Plus, I had been away for minutes, and these were purebred dogs. You know what that means. They're not bred for intelligence. What if they had forgotten that they knew me? Gathering my courage, I opened the

door slowly then just stood there, naked and utterly vulnerable, while dobermans sniffed my crotch. One false move on my part, and they could have taken my balls off with one snap. In time, they seemed satisfied and went back to lay down, while I inched my way to the safety of the bed. I kid you not, it was the scariest damn night of my life.

TOM WAITS TOTALLY WHIPS IT OUT

The greatest music video I know is Tom Waits's "Chocolate Jesus" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wfamPW3Eaw>). It utterly knocks me out.

I have only heard Tom Waits once in person, in Athens, Georgia in 1979. At the outset, his band was on stage in darkness, with a single spotlight on a stand-up microphone in the corner. Tom Waits came out and stood at the microphone, looking just like himself, brilliantly setting the tone for the evening. He would throw out a sudden angular gesture, like an elbow up in the air, accentuated by the drummer. I have no idea what that first song was about, but it was absolutely about alley cats. At the end of the concert he did three encores. There was demand for one, but he was too generous to limit himself to demand.

I went to the show by myself. Sitting up in the balcony, I noticed that the girl beside me was not totally enraptured of her date. I knew this, because her arm was flirting with my arm. After a while, someone to my right passed me a large, loose joint. I took a toke and passed it back. Presently, someone on my left passed me a small, tight joint. Another toke, pass it back. Then someone behind me, totally unprovoked, passed me a bag of popcorn. Tom Waits was down on stage blowing my mind, while up here a whole lot of strangers were taking care of me.

HOW BUTCH AND I GOT WARM IN MISSISSIPPI

My friend Sonii did almost the maximum of his one-to-ten sentence. After some years he was transferred to a state prison in Missouri. Then the word came that on a particular date in January 1980 he was to be released. I thought it would be nice to pick him up and take him home to Kansas City. I had never seen him outside of a prison.

As I approached Jefferson City I phoned ahead to the warden to let him know I was coming and to ask about the drill. The warden informed me that Sonii was in solitary at the moment, as he had been in a dispute with a guard that morning, and it wasn't certain that he would be getting out that day, after all. Well, I told him, when I get there I'll come to your office, and we'll see what's what. I wasn't threatening him, you understand, but I was threatening him. It makes quite a difference to an inmate's treatment if someone on the outside is looking out for him.

So I checked in at the front desk, told them my name and that Warden Soandso was expecting me. The next thing I knew, there was Sonii coming out, released along with one of his buddies who was also going to Kansas City. The warden really didn't want to deal with me.

We hit the road heading west, and by and by the guys reckoned they could go for some non-prison food, so I pulled into a highway diner. I sent them in ahead of me on the pretext that I wanted to check the oil. I did check the oil, but that wasn't what it was about. They were still in prison clothes, and I thought to create a little stir. I'm such a rascal. It didn't do any good, though, because neither the management nor the diners seemed the least bit perturbed. What do you have to do to shake things up in Missouri?

I stayed with Sonii's family in Kansas City for a few days, visited some old friends in Kansas, and then started the long wintertime drive back to Georgia. On Highway 65 near Sedalia, Missouri I picked up a hitchhiker. Butch was a short young fellow, very pleasant, headed for Florida. He had just gotten out of the Pettis County jail, doing a year less a day for car theft. He didn't claim that he wasn't guilty, which was as much as admitting that he was. That's how it works.

It was already getting on toward dark when I picked up Butch, and we powered it on through the night, drinking flavoured brandy to keep warm and coffee to keep awake. We also talked a lot and took turns driving, one of us sometimes taking a nap in the sleeping bag in the back while the other drove. I didn't ask to see Butch's license, as I was pretty sure he

knew how to drive. Even with the heat of the vehicle and the sleeping bag and the brandy, it was cold in there, and I got very little real sleep. I think Butch did a little better, although he, too, complained about the cold.

We made a turn at Tallulah, Arkansas and headed east into Mississippi. A few miles the other side of Tupelo, passing through a silent town in the very early hours of the morning, we noticed a big flickering light off to the left. We were curious and in no big hurry, so we drove up a side road to take a look.

And there we came upon a house in full flame. There was not a soul about. No fire engines, no neighbours standing around, not even any neighbours watching from their windows, just this whole house in the latter stages of burning to the ground on New Year's morning.

I went and rang the bell at the house next door. It was answered without resentment, and I learned that everyone was well aware that the house was burning down, but the nearest fire department was Tupelo, too far away to get there in time to do any good, and the people of the burning house were visiting relatives in Michigan. Had they been informed? No, no one knew the name or phone number where they were visiting, not even the town, so there was no way to get in touch with them.

So, there it was. Those people would drive south in a few days, turn up that side road in full anticipation of being home, and with no warning whatsoever they would be slapped in the heart with the sight of their home burned to the ground.

And, as we stood there by the still burning house, contemplating the shock that awaited those poor folks and speaking more broadly of the human condition, for just a few minutes out of that whole night, Butch and I were warm.

ENCOUNTERS WITH SUN RA

My favourite piece of music of all time is "Space is the Place" by the late great Sun Ra (1914-1993) and his Arkestra. It is 21:14 minutes long. I used to listen to it once a day, lying on my couch in a trance, and at the end of those 21 minutes I would always rise with the awed conviction that, by God, space is the place.

When I moved to Georgia I played that song often in the lab, so that it became a sort of theme song for Jung-tai Chao & me. One day Jung-tai rendered the title into Chinese in the form of a genuine classical *cheng yu*: 那個這個地方就是太空 (Nei⁴-ge di⁴ fang¹ jiu⁴ shi⁴ tai⁴ kong¹). Literal translation: That place is none other than outer space. It was a very classy bit of composition. When I moved to Taiwan in 1990 and Jung-tai & I saw first each other after almost ten years, we instinctively bowed to each other, intoning "Nei-ge di fang jiu shi tai kong."

My first encounter with Sun Ra was attended with very fortunate circumstances. Mitchell "Abdul" Feldman -- he of the Soul Pad -- wrote on music for the *Athens Observer*. Sun Ra was coming to play in Atlanta, and Mitchell was going to cover it. He told his editor that he wanted a photographer, to which the editor said he was sorry, but they couldn't afford it. "I want Chris Starr" Mitchell said, and the editor -- knowing that I did my occasional journalism for free -- cut me a press badge.

On the afternoon before the concert there was a press conference in the great big Peaches record store. We journalists were standing in there when Sun Ra, himself, suddenly appeared on the other side of the counter. I got to taking pictures, while the reporters got to posing their questions.

The trouble was that, except for Mitchell, these were not specialist jazz reporters, and Sun Ra and his music are quite unlike anything else. They had little idea what to ask in order to elicit commentary that they could use. I watched this scene for a couple of minutes as I knipped away, and then I had an inspiration. I eased my way to the front and asked "Sun Ra, when did you first decided that space is the place?"

I don't claim that his answer cut very deep, but it did provide a metaphor that all those journalists could use. For the rest of the press conference they wrapped their questions around the phrase "space is the place", to good effect.

A little later there was a reception at a hotel, to which Mitchell & I were also invited. Sun Ra was sitting on a couch, engaged in easy conversation with people who came and went, and over there was a table

of munchies. I asked him if he would care for some sustenance, and he allowed that that would be acceptable, so I piled a plate with an assortment of victuals and brought it to his couch. Then I sat right beside the legendary Sun Ra and engaged him in conversation. Now, it is well known that he was born Sonny Blount in Philadelphia, but those mundane facts had been banished from the legend that he had crafted. He was Sun Ra and came from Saturn, and to suggest otherwise would have been terribly discourteous.

"Sun Ra, you come from Saturn, isn't that right?" I asked. He gave me a sideways glance, plainly wondering if this white boy was having a joke, but he saw that I was all sincerity. "Yes, that's right" he replied. "And how do you know that?" I asked. Again, he saw that I was down with the metaphor. He got this little smile, like he was party to a too-delicious secret, and said "Well, Saturn has been on my case for a long time." And that was just about all I could get out of him on the subject.

The concert that night was the first time I heard Sun Ra in person. What an absolute gas. I was standing in the wings, clicking away, when Mitchell came back to tell me about some particular shots he wanted. We had our backs to the stage, discussing in earnest low tones, when the big band suddenly swung into "Space is the Place". We turned around in slack-jawed simultaneity, standing just meters away from the whole Arkestra playing that great iconic song. It was a positively thrilling moment.

Years later I heard him twice more, first in Washington and then back in Georgia. I didn't speak with Sun Ra on the second occasion, although I certainly joined the second line when he took the Arkestra in a walk around the audience late in the concert. And before the concert I asked lead singer June Tyson if they would be doing "Space is the Place". "Of course", she responded brightly.

The third and last time, I took two-year-old Nova along. My buddy Rob Gibson had told me that he had taken his baby boy backstage in Atlanta to meet the great man some years earlier. "Sun Ra, I'd like you to meet my son. His name is Bo." And Sun Ra smiled at that baby and intoned "Bo. Bo. Bo-realis."

Truth to tell, I was hoping for something comparably personal for my baby when she met Sun Ra. But he just shook her little baby hand and said "How do you do, Nova?" Still, that was blessing enough for anyone.

HOLLY JOY PRICE SPEAKS HER MIND

During the latter part of my time at the University of Georgia I was very friendly -- yes, I do mean that friendly -- with Holly Joy Price. Holly is a marine ecologist, now at the Monterey Bay National Marine Station Sanctuary in California. Our relationship was fortified by shared scientific interests, especially in ecological and evolutionary theory. I tended more to flights of theoretical speculation than did Holly, and I often found myself spinning out a line of hypothesis to her.

On those occasions, her response was always the same. She would look at me, taking it all in, not interrupting, her eyes brimming with affection. And when I finally stopped and was catching my breath, she would pronounce judgement: "You're so full of shit." Ah yes, the good old days.

WAITING TO COME DOWN

In the summer of 1980 I drove northwest from Georgia into Ohio for the annual meeting of the American Arachnological Society. I won't say that the city of Cincinnati was a rare and exotic experience for me, but the meeting was enjoyable and fruitful. Following that, I kept driving north, with two destinations. First, I headed for Kenton, in northern Ohio, to see my old classmate Peter "Penis" Holvik and his bride. I hadn't seen Penis in the 13 years since we graduated from high school, not long after he peed on my shoe and I forced him to listen to the Boilsucker Joke.

Getting close to my destination, I had some doubt about directions, so I pulled over at a country intersection to consult the map. Just at that moment a low little car came putt-putting along in the opposite direction and stopped at the intersection, right beside me. I looked down, and there he was, quite oblivious to my presence. "Penis" I called, and he was appropriately flabbergasted. Sometimes these things just fall satisfyingly into one's lap.

After my visit with the Holviks I continued further north toward Chicago. A couple of years earlier I had made contact with the Surrealist Group of Chicago and was eager to meet them in person. I had a very fruitful and exciting several days in Chicago, interacting with Franklin Rosemont (1943-2009) and other members of the group.

But here is the peculiar story from that leisurely trip north. I took along a little stash of high-quality marijuana, and it became my daily routine when on the road to do up as soon as I was on the highway and the traffic was loose and uncomplicated. That first morning out of Cincinnati, reaching the highway, I was struck by a big red graffiti on the first overpass I reached. "Roxanne will rock" it proclaimed. I thought that was a mighty fine prognostication, an excellent omen for the journey ahead.

But then I was struck even more forcibly by another thought. I had smoked about half a joint and was just getting off, and it occurred to me that I had not asked myself whether I wished to be stoned that morning. And, in point of fact, I did not wish to be stoned. I wanted to be straight. "It would be so cool right now to be straight", I told myself.

There wasn't a damn thing I could do about it. For hours after that, I just had to drive along, waiting to come down, yearning for the far-out experience of being straight again.

WHO'S THE REAL POPCORN KING?

Driving back south from Chicago, I proceeded more quickly with almost no long stops. I did, however, make one overnight stop. I was in southern Indiana, figuring to reach Tennessee that night and then check into a motel, when I noticed a roadhouse beckoning to me. The roadhouse plainly thought I needed to rest and have a drink, and it had a good point. So I parked and went in to sit on a bar stool and have a tall cold one.

By and by, these two old boys on my right got to telling tales. "You remember Dave Johnson?" one of them asked. "I think so" the other allowed. "Well, do you know the story of Dave and Orville Redenbacher?" asked the first. "No, I don't believe I do" responded the other.

"Well, there was a time when Dave used to sell great big garbage bags of popcorn outside the Omega Theater on a Saturday night. One night he went into Kelsey's Diner, still hauling a couple of those bags. This old white-haired guy was sitting near the counter, and he asks Dave 'How much do you get for one of those bags?' And Dave says 'I get about four dollars for one.' And the old guy says 'Well, that's too much.' And Dave says 'Well, now, what would you know about it?' And the old guys says 'You mean you don't recognize me? I'm Orville Redenbacher, the popcorn king.' And Dave says 'Not around here you aint. Around here I'm the popcorn king.'"

Just about this time the man on my left got up and asked who wanted a game of pool. Now, I seldom play pool and have never taken it very seriously, but this was a genuine american roadhouse, and I figured why not? So I got up to play, and as we walked toward the table he asked me about the stakes. "What shall we play for?" I hadn't thought about it, but he suggested we play for a drink, which was fine by me. I was already at my limit, but as rarely as I played there was no risk of winning, so I figured we would have a game, he would win, and I would buy him one.

Well, you see where this story is going. The game was only about half-way finished when the other guy scratched, which meant it was over and I had won. I didn't really want another drink, but it would have been most uncool to turn down my winnings, so I had a glass of white wine.

After that, I stumbled out to my van. I was over my limit, way over, so I didn't get very far before I had to pull over, turn off the motor, and put myself to bed in the back. So, instead of being in a motel in Tennessee that night, I was drunk by the side of the road in Indiana.

COMING CLEAN IN OSAKA

In the summer of 1980 I attended an entomology congress in Japan, my first time in Asia. Together with a few others, I stayed at the wonderful home of Takeo Kawamichi. One evening, our host suggested that, rather than doing my ablutions at the house, I might like to go to the nearby public baths. Genuine Japanese public baths. He was right to think I would regard it as an interesting cultural experience.

Takeo gave me a bath kit, and I walked down the street to the public bath house. There I encountered a problem. It was clearly marked at the entrance which side was for women and which for men, but of course in Japanese. I had to stand there in the street like an ignorant foreigner until somebody walked in, to know which side was which. The custodian took my fee and gave me a towel, after which I got undressed and walked into the main room, which was like a shallow heated swimming pool.

The men and boys in there played it cool, but it was plain that they had never seen a naked foreigner before, so I was the object of much discreet curiosity. We all have a bit of exhibitionist in us, and I exercised mine.

The outer changing room was walled off from the counterpart room on the women's side, but a single custodian staffed a long desk that ran between them. When I had first come in, this was a man, but when I went to get dressed a woman was in charge. I confess that that really brought out the exhibitionist in me. She was plainly both very curious and very shy, so I made sure to look away while I stretched and dried myself extensively before slowly putting on my clothes. I expect she had a story to tell her family afterward.

ILLITERATE IN TAIWAN

After Japan, it was a pleasure and a relief to get to Taiwan. While I hold many individual Japanese in great respect and affection, I must confess that Japan as a whole is not to my liking. The hectic tone of life and frantic consumerism often gross me out, and in Taiwan I felt much more at home, as if the people were more like me.

The plan was that Jung-tai would meet me at the airport in Taipei, after which we would travel to his parents' place in Hsinying. There was, however, a miscommunication. As I came out into the public area, I didn't see Jung-tai, so I did the usual thing and stood there trying to look conspicuous. After a decent interval, I had to conclude that he really, truly wasn't there to meet me.

What to do? My first, down-hearted inclination was to get back on a plane and continue to the Philippines, but I quickly steadied myself. I was a lifelong sinophile and told myself sternly that wasn't about to let this little complication stop my first visit to a real Chinese place.

Fortunately, Jung-tai had had the sense to write his parent's home address on a piece of paper, which I had had the sense to keep handy. Going over to the tourist-information, I asked where Hsinying was, and the lady showed me on a map. It was about 2/3 of the way down the island. And how do I get there? "You take the train." How do I get to the train station? "You take that bus out there."

That seemed straight-forward enough, so I asked her to write in Chinese that I wanted to go to the train station. I labeled that piece of paper "1" and put it in my shirt pocket. Now, please write down that I would like a ticket to Hsinying. She did, and I labeled that piece of paper "2" and put it in my pocket. Now, please write that I want to go to this street address (in Hsinying). I labeled that one "3".

So I hauled my stuff to the bus and silently gave the conductor paper no. 1. He gave me a ticket and wrote down how much money to give him.

He let me out at the station, I walked inside and gave the ticket agent paper no. 2. She sold me a ticket to Hsinying and pointed where to go. By and by, a train pulled up on that track, I pointed to it and asked the uniform "Hsinying", he nodded, and I got on.

There followed a most frustrating and nerve-wracking journey. I like trains, and I was elated to be in Taiwan for the first time and to watch the landscapes slipping by, but one thing was missing. I was illiterate. I had been in places where I was weak in the language, but never anywhere

where I couldn't tell one word from another. Early in the trip a young man came through the train, handing out newspapers. I just had to hand mine back with a shrug that said "I'm sorry buddy, but I can't read." I felt like a class-A jerk. I was almost 31 years old, and I couldn't read.

And in that moment I had a flash of insight. I had always admired the Cuban and later the Nicaraguan literacy campaigns, but the fervour with which they were embraced baffled me. Sure, it's good and useful to know how to read, but why were the people going wild for the campaigns? Now I understood. To be an adult and illiterate is to feel powerless, to be daily aware that a part of one's humanity is missing. I had some inkling of what it felt like to be a Cuban peasant before the revolution.

Seats were assigned on that train. About half-way along, a beautiful young woman came and sat beside me. We sat there in silence for a time, then she turned and spoke to me, demurely eager for conversation. Oh, how I longed to speak with her, but I couldn't. I could only mumble that I couldn't speak Chinese, and that was it. At one point she was hitting her knee with her fist, she was that mad at our forced uncommunication, and I assure you that I was no less frustrated.

The nerve-wracking part came later. I figured it was time to start looking for my station, as the train paused only very briefly at each before continuing. Coming into each station, the name was written large and clearly on a sign, but what did that Chinese writing mean to me? I had Hsinying written in Chinese, and I could compare the two characters with those on the sign, but it was still a struggle. They mostly looked alike to me.

At last we came to a station that was unambiguously Hsinying -- although I took the precaution of pointing to it and pronouncing the name to a uniform, just to be sure -- and I got out in a state of great relief.

THE TRUE AND CORRECT TAXI FARE

Arriving in Hsinying, the last task was to get to the Chaos' house. Of course, I had no idea where it was. I approached a cluster of taxi drivers just outside the station and gave paper no. 3 to the one who acted like he was next in line. He looked at the address and pointed me to his taxi, but I didn't move. There was the little matter of negotiating the price.

On the same piece of paper I wrote "NT\$____" and handed it back to him. He wrote a figure over the underlining and handed it back to me. I looked at it in mock astonishment, crossed it out disdainfully and substituted a figure one-third as much. He looked at that, crossed it out, and substituted an intermediate figure. After one more round of silent haggling -- which the other drivers found immensely enjoyable -- we agreed on a figure around 60% of his original proposal, and we were on our way.

What really tickled me was that he had to stop twice to ask directions. Like me, he didn't know where it was. I later found out that our agreed price was just about right, even though we had both been bluffing in the dark.

Reaching the house, I knocked on the door, expecting Jung-tai to be at home. I was chagrined when, instead, a middle-aged woman answered the door. I managed to ask if she was Mrs Chao and, when she said yes, I told her who I was. Once inside, I met the elder Mr Chao, who speaks English, so communication was much easier from then on. Jung-tai, it turned out, was still in Taipei looking for me, but no matter, I was home.

"WHAT LANGUAGE DO WE SPEAK HERE?"

In the Taipei departure area, waiting for my flight to the Philippines, I noticed a member of the extended chinese-filipino family nearby getting ready to take a group picture. I got up and asked if they would like me to take the picture, so that they could all be in it, which they did. Then they asked me to join their convivial group, and we were one big, happy family until it was time to get on the plane.

One of the women told me something that has stayed with me. She traveled a fair amount, and in a foreign place she found that the most comfortable thing was to go native. I have taken that lesson to heart. Unless a custom is distinctly distasteful or goes against one's principles, it is best to do as the locals do. Over the years I have run into people -- mostly english -- in far-foreign places who are simply unable to go native, and it has been my observation that they tend to be unhappy, as if in a kind of prison.

Truth to tell, I had not prepared well for the Philippines. The sensible thing would have been to read a couple of books and some encyclopedia articles, to at least take the edge off of one's pristine ignorance, but I did none of that. Let me give an indication of how ill-prepared I was. As we were starting our descent toward Manila, I turned to my seat-mate and asked "Oh, by the way, what language should I speak here?" He told me that I could get by quite well with English, and I allowed that English would suit me fine.

A couple of days later, in the insect museum of the University of the Philippines, the curator introduced me to Dr Dely Gapasin of the Visayas State College of Agriculture (ViSCA, now Visayas State University). After a few minutes of pleasant conversation, Dely suggested that I come to Leyte. That sounded like a good idea, so I asked her where Leyte was, and she showed me on a map. Can you beat that? I hadn't even bothered to learn the main islands. This was quite a fortuitous meeting, as I had a wonderful visit to ViSCA and returned the next year as a member of staff.

THE BULLDOGS GO ALL THE WAY

When I first went to Georgia, the head coach of the Bulldogs was the legendary Vince Dooley. Every year during that period the Dawgs were pretty good, but Vince was a believer in realistic expectations and lost no opportunity to say that they were "an average football team". He had to stop saying that during the 1980 season.

There are a few teams that the Bulldogs play every year, but the real rivalry is with the Florida Gators (despite some attempt to maintain fervour against the Georgia Tech Yellowjackets). The game is always played at a neutral site, Jacksonville, Florida, and it is a big deal.

The 1980 game against Florida came early in the season. I watched it on a big screen in a crowded downtown bar. Georgia was unbeaten in the season, but it was too early to make much of it. The deciding moment came right at the end of the game. With one minute to go, Georgia was behind down 21-20, near their own goal line on third down and long. Anyone could see that the game was over and average Georgia was no longer unbeaten. Still, the game had to be played to its grim conclusion.

Georgia's quarterback, Buck Belue, was a handsome blond-haired youngster, the kind to bring out the mothering instinct in women old and young. He took the snap and had drifted back into the end zone, looking all around for a receiver, when something horrible happened. A bunch of big mean Florida Gators broke through the front line and were bearing down on him. Not only was Georgia going to lose the game but Buck would be viciously sacked in his own end zone. I kid you not, women in the bar screamed in anguish. Buck managed to slip away, but the Gators were still after him. And then a miracle happened.

In desperation, Buck threw the long bomb, and Lindsay Scott caught it at the 25-yard line. Now the Gators were after him, but he kept going downfield. 30. 35. 40. And just about the time Lindsay Scott hit the 45 yard line it occurred to everyone in that bar at once that HE WAS GOING ALL THE WAY. The air became a fine mist of beer and salt as people threw whatever they had into the air, and there was total jubilant noise in the place. I timed it. It lasted for a little over seven minutes.

So Georgia won that game and went on to win every other game that season and the post-season Sugar Bowl, to come out as the national champion. Because Buck Belue got a pass off and Lindsay Scott caught it.

GARY GOLDBERG DANCES IN THE MEADOW MIST

I only once did LSD. One day my housemate, Gary Goldberg, said that he and some friends were going to spend the night at Ball Pump Lake in the countryside outside Athens and suggested that I might like to join them. Further discussion showed that what they most wanted was the use of my van, Waddell, to transport the party. Even so, it sounded like fun, and I was happy to be part of it.

As we were getting into Waddell one of the party pulled out some little pieces of blotting paper. Would I care to take a hit of acid? Now, this was a responsible guy who knew his drugs, and I was curious, so I figured this was as good a time as any to give it a try.

At the lake we made a fire and sat around it through the night, alternately snoozing, telling stories and taking dips in the water. Sometime after midnight we all went to sleep. The experienced drug-takers in our group later told me that that was some unusually good acid, but it hardly did anything for me. I was past 30 at that time, and I guess I had pretty much seen it all.

Getting up early the next morning, we got our stuff together and walked slowly up toward Waddell. Passing by a large meadow, I noticed something that has stayed with me ever since. It was a misty morning -- like just about any early morning in the summer -- and the bedewed spider webs all stood out distinctly. Furthermore, they were everywhere. There literally did not appear to be anywhere that a fly could land in that meadow without running into a web.

What I hadn't noticed as we headed up the hill was that Gary was not among us. As I stood there marveling at that continuous sheet of silk, Gary emerged from the woods on the far side. There was a thick layer of mist up to about knee height, and as we, his stoned buddies watched him approach, Gary got to dancing in an attempt to dance on top of the mist. And, you know, he damn near did it.

NO WORK PERMIT FOR AN ENEMY OF THE STATE

Late in 1980 I was winding up my PhD at Georgia and thinking of where to go next when an attractive proposition came my way. Denis Brothers was going on sabbatical and looking for someone to take his place for a year at the University of Natal in South Africa.

This was alluring for a number of reasons. There are wonderful bugs in South Africa, all very unfamiliar to me. It is culturally an extremely interesting country. And I was very much interested to actually live in a police state for a while. I had been in East Berlin a couple of times as a young fellow, but that was tame compared with the apartheid regime. So I told Denis I would be very happy to substitute for him, and we set the paperwork in motion.

This paperwork promised to be rather demanding. The south-african government was unusually slow and bureaucratic about work permits, and the reason was not obscure. It was a pariah state, well aware of the general hostility to it, so there was a lengthy vetting process. They couldn't very well expect that many applicants would be friendly to apartheid, but they wanted to keep out any active enemies.

I was of course just such an enemy, but how could they possibly know that? I was a member of the Young Socialist Alliance and anti-racist organizations, but I wasn't prominent in any of them, just one of the troops. You could read the newspapers for a year and never come upon my name.

But they did find out. In time, the word came back that my work permit had been denied. The secret police had blocked it, and without their approval it was going nowhere. What's more, it couldn't be contested, because they didn't have to give a reason. My south-african department head got his member of parliament -- a member of the ruling party -- to ask about it, but even he met with silence.

I of course knew perfectly well why they blocked me. I was a communist kaffir-lover, but how did they know that? It wasn't as if South Africa had any significant spying capability in North America, and this was long before Google. It couldn't have been Canada's national police, the RCMP. They were well aware which side I was on, but it would have been far too risky. If it could be proven that the RCMP had ratted on a citizen to the apartheid regime, the leader of the NDP (labour party) would have risen in Parliament and embarrassed the government severely. No, it had to be the FBI. They, too, had the goods on me, and their government

wasn't nearly so coy about holding hands with South Africa.

So I never did get to live in a police state. And with apartheid now blessedly swept away, I probably never will.

TRANSLATING FOR ROBERTO MACHUS

I can speak four languages well, can get by in a couple of others if I have to, and regular read in six or seven of them. Some have accused me of having a natural knack for learning language. I don't think so. If there is any element of "talent" (whatever that is) in it, I am convinced that it is a very minor factor. What really counts is motivation, together with an intelligent approach to building fluency. As for "picking it up", that is nonsense. If there is anyone out there who can do that, but I have certainly never met him. Several times I have had someone tell me that he was in another country for a few years and picked up the language, as if by osmosis. Upon examination, I have always found out that he isn't very good.

There may also be many who, despite giving it the old school try, simply cannot make headway in learning another language. I have only known one such person. In 1980 and 1981 I made three trips to Costa Rica as Robert W. Matthews's research assistant. Our base was the Corcovado National Park, where we studied the nesting biology of a very small wasp, *Microstigmus comes*. I had assumed Bob wanted me in part because I could speak Spanish, but it turned out that he didn't even know I could until we got there. It was just a nice unexpected bonus.

Before we could get into the field, there was a certain amount of running around for permits and such, and in this we were a good team. Bob is a diplomatic guy, but his Spanish was rudimentary. I am a fluent speaker but with few diplomatic skills and little patience for bureaucracy. We very quickly got into a drill. Bob would say what he had to say, and if necessary I would translate. He did not try to speak Spanish, and I did not proffer any viewpoint of my own. The result was diplomatic, grammatical Spanish that eased our way through all government offices that we entered. We were sort of like a tag team, Roberto Machús & Cristóbal Estarr.

After our first trip, Bob decided that he really needed to learn to speak Spanish. He tried, he really did. Back in Georgia, I saw him taking classes, and he practised all the time out of class, but somehow it never paid off.

I realized his Spanish was not coming together during our second stay in Corcovado. We were sitting in the open-air dining hall, sorting through some specimens on the tables, when the cook came out of the kitchen with a newly-baked cake. She placed it on a table to cool in the breeze. As she did so, Bob's eyes lit up, and he enthused "Ah, caca." He should

have said "queque". The cook was not amused, and for the rest of the day she could be heard muttering "Roberto dice que mi queque es caca."

However, this exception aside, I am convinced that we are all much the same when it comes to language acquisition. If you put orderly effort into it, you will learn. Otherwise, you won't.

A WRECKED PLANE IN A HORSE PASTURE

The usual way to get to Corcovado was in a small plane. I have a great liking for this kind of travel. In a big plane one is inside an airplane, but in a small plane one is in the air. The pilot would radio ahead to get the horses out of the pasture beside the main building that served as landing strip. The landing was always a bit bumpy, but nothing spectacular. However, at the end of the pasture was a trenchant reminder of the vagaries of such travel. Some years earlier, a plane had flipped over on landing, and it was left there, upside-down, with weeds growing through it. I am told that it has since been removed.

In the rainy season clean clothes were a constant concern. For one thing, they got dirty much more quickly when the ground was muddy, and clothes worn for three or four days became much nastier than in the dry season. For another thing, days when laundry would dry on the line were few. Accordingly, if it looked like a sunny day there was a great rush to wash clothes and hang them up to dry.

I always took along one set of especially raggedy clothes that I didn't plan to bring back. I got all the others clean if I could, and then I wore that designated set for the last three days. When the radio indicated that the plane was on its way, I quickly got cleaned up and into some clothes that would pass in civilization, threw out the disreputable ones, and I was good to get into that plane and fly up and away from the wrecked one at the end of the horse pasture.

CHURCHILL SPEAKS TO ME IN CORCOVADO

During our third trip to Corcovado, Bob & I were really on a roll. We were in the field for three weeks, 21 days, and between the two of us we averaged one really good discovery a day. It was toward the end of this period that I had my audial hallucinations.

During the darkest period of World War II, from a british point of view, Winston Churchill made his most stirring speeches in Parliament and on radio. In one of these he proclaimed "These are not dark days. These are great days." And it was while walking up a ridge in Corcovado one morning, full of anticipation of what the day's results would reveal, that I first heard Churchill behind my right ear, intoning in his distinctive gravelly voice "These are great days." It happened twice more on later days, always behind my right ear, always the same clear phrase "These are great days."

I didn't for a moment doubt Churchill's assessment of what Bob & I were finding, but I admit that it was a bit disconcerting.

I ONCE HAD BALLS OF STEEL

As a graduate student at Georgia I customarily had breakfast or occasionally lunch at the Snelling cafeteria. One or the other, not both. One paid one's money at the front, and then it was all-you-can-eat inside. Breakfast was the cheapest meal, lunch a little more expensive, and supper even more so. I never went for supper.

When one eats just once a day, one eats a hell of a lot at each meal. The policy was that one could get just three eggs at once, so I would usually go to that station three times in the course of a breakfast. In addition to my nine eggs, I typically had a liter or so of juice, some coffee, and maybe three bowls of grits, as well as some fruit or flavoured yogurt.

As a young man I fell in love about once a year. I don't mean that this was a matter of policy, just that it happened about that often. I would know that it had happened by a peculiar tightening in the stomach, a sort of nausea, quite distinctive. One night I had a date with a beautiful blonde from North Carolina. Donna and I hit it off. We really, really hit it off, walking and talking until the early morning.

As I went around to the cafeteria for breakfast I was wondering if I was in love with Donna. I didn't have long to wonder. I got my tray, got my three eggs and some trimmings, sat down and ate them, and went back for another three. And then I sat at the table and stared at that second batch of eggs. I couldn't eat them. I couldn't eat anything more. It was definitely true love.

Of course, it takes two to make a relationship, and Donna wasn't in love with me, so it came to nothing fairly soon afterward.

I like to put hot sauce on my scrambled eggs. A lot of it. In the early days I would ask for the bottle of Tabasco Sauce in the Snelling cafeteria, but then I used it up quickly, and it took them forever to get a new bottle, so I got in the habit of bringing my own. And I would pour it onto those scrambled eggs and stir it in until everything on the plate was orange.

I didn't think anything about it until the day I went to breakfast with a chemist, Nick Takas. He sat there while I poured on the hot sauce and then happily ate the orange collation, observing and chewing in silence, and then he pronounced judgement. "Man, you must have balls of steel." It was the nicest compliment I ever received. I felt like I had been awarded the Nobel Prize.

AN ACADEMIC CHAIR OF SOME IMPORT

As a new graduate student at Georgia I often spent extended periods sitting with my feet propped up on the desk, doing theoretical stuff. That is a grand way to spend one's time, but it was attended with a peculiar difficulty. My butt got sore and numb. Plainly, what I needed -- and what theoretical biology deserved -- was a much more comfortable chair. So I went around to an office-supply store to see about something cushy and mobile that would leave my butt undisturbed.

That was a lucky day. The store had a fine executive chair that had been returned by the client, because they had gotten the colour scheme wrong. The colours looked fine to me, and the chair was just right in other respects. Retail price US\$160, but I could have it for \$95. And, before I could say anything, the clerk dropped the price to \$85. He was glad to unload the chair, and I was glad to acquire it.

So it was, that I came to have the second nicest chair in the entire department, after the department head's. Just right for doing theory. It was also much appreciated by other students, who referred to it as my "throne". Often I would come into the lab to find one or another student sitting in it, a look of easy satisfaction on his face.

When it came time to leave Georgia, I couldn't take my throne with me, so I did something that I had long wanted to do. I established a chair. I named it the C.K. Starr Chair in Behavior Physiology and delivered it to a deserving psychology student. When her time came to graduate, she presumably passed it along to someone else, and so forth until it fell apart.

So there is probably at least one individual out there whose résumé includes the detail that during a certain period she occupied the C.K. Starr Chair in Behavior Physiology at the University of Georgia.

ANNIE MAE FLEES FROM A TERRIBLE FATE

Some of the basics of psychoanalysis are the common property of all western educated people, so much so that we take them for granted. This is seen in the jokes we crack, which often have to do with symbolism, dream work and sexual transference. In the Philippines -- the first non-western country in which I lived -- I learned that psychoanalysis is not necessarily part of everybody's cultural heritage.

When I joined the staff of the Visayas State College of Agriculture (ViSCA) in 1981, my assistant was Mae-Ann Duatin, known to me as Annie Mae. We worked together well and occasionally shared confidences, even though we were very far apart in background. One morning she told me about her dream of the night before. "I was running away from a man who was chasing me with a big knife. Then you were protecting me. But later you were the man with the big knife."

I just sat there thinking that she obviously had no clue of even the poppest psychoanalysis, or she wouldn't be telling me this. And the thing about it was this: I really did have a big knife for Annie Mae.

A COBRA IN THE MUSEUM

The native cobra in Leyte is *Naja samarensis*, a fairly common beast in farmland. It is also quite a lovely snake, with a gleaming black body and a lemon-yellow head and neck. From time to time local people would capture one of these and bring it to the ViSCA museum for our live displays. We were happy to have them, but it made us uneasy that people were taking such risks on our behalf, so we put out a bulletin that in future anyone with a cobra that needed removal should contact us about it, rather than attempt the capture on her/his own.

One such cobra we had for quite a long time in a big glass terrarium near the entrance to the museum. It served us well. For one thing, it never habituated to the approach of humans but would rise up facing the intruder and spread its hood, a magnificent display.

A few asian and african species are called "spitting cobras", but I am convinced that most or all cobras can project their venom on occasion. I walked into the museum one day and thought to take a close look at this particular specimen. As I approached its terrarium, it gave the hood-spreading display, and I crouched down close to the glass for a good look at it. Then, from a distance of just a few centimeters, it squirted two jets of yellow venom right at my eyes, so that they ran down the intervening glass right in front of me. I don't mind admitting that I walked away quite shaken.

One morning I came in early and turned to greet the cobra. To my consternation, the terrarium was empty. The snake had found a weak joint in the glass and used its considerable strength to push it open. There was a hole in that corner and a piece of glass on the floor.

As a public servant, I immediately thought cover-up. We were expecting a class of school children to tour the museum that morning, and it would have been very uncool if word got out that we had had a cobra escape. My first idea was to lock the front door and go looking, but then it occurred to me that if I were bitten I certainly didn't want the door locked.

So I stood outside, and when my assistants showed up I told them to come inside and keep their mouths shut. Then I locked the door, put on a lot of protective clothing, and we started searching. I took the lead in this, because I was the boss with the responsibility, and the others didn't get paid enough to take that kind of risk.

Within minutes, we located the cobra hidden away between a couple of cabinets. I soaked a rag in chloroform and pushed it in next to the snake,

and when it emerged groggily, one of the assistants collected it in a bug net. Meanwhile, another assistant had repaired the terrarium, so we put the cobra back in place, unlocked the door, and the public never knew.

MISTAKEN DIAGNOSES

When I go to see the doctor for something unannounced, I like to facilitate the process by presenting her/him with a diagnosis as soon as I arrive. At ViSCA I had occasion to do this twice.

One morning I woke up with a sharp, nauseating pain in the middle. I thought about it and soon decided that it bore the marks of a mild heart attack. It seemed to be a bit low down, but other than that it fit what I had read about heart attacks. So I got up and got myself to the clinic. The clinic was about a kilometer away, and there were no vehicles going that way, so I walked. Slowly and methodically, all the time thinking I was having a heart attack.

When I got there I presented Dr Miranda with a full diagnosis. He examined me and said "No, I don't think so. You have an enlarged liver."

The other time I was pretty sure I had the clap (gonorrhoea). It wasn't so much the pain as the shock that that nice nurse wasn't as pure and wholesome as she appeared. But Dr Miranda said "No, I don't think so. You have a rather ordinary urinary infection."

Sometimes it's a pleasure to be mistaken.

RAUL SUMMARIZES

Many of us bachelors had supper every evening at a particular house. The fare was good, the price right, and it gave us a chance to socialize and shoot the breeze at the end of the workday. Almost every evening we would get to talking about a particular topic, a sort of free-wheeling symposium that would go on for half an hour or so, until we lapsed into silence. It was quite a distinct rhythm that repeated itself with great regularity.

During one of the post-discussion silences, it occurred to me that it would be good practice if someone were to summarize. The idea came from my years in the trotskyist youth. The Trotskyists were perhaps the best organized political force in Canada, with meetings that were very orderly, while allowing for great freedom of discussion. After the delivery and discussion of particular report, the chairperson would routinely ask the comrade who had given the report if she/he wished to summarize. If no summary seemed necessary, fine, but if it seemed like a good idea it was expected that any comrade should be able to give a tight extemporaneous summary of the report and discussion. Summarizing, then, was part of my education.

One member of our supper group was Raul B. Ruiz, a graduate student in my department. On the evening when the idea came to me, I turned to him and asked if he would care to summarize the foregoing symposium. And Raul rose to the occasion. In fact, on succeeding evenings we never saw reason to go to anyone else when the time came to summarize.

The striking thing about Raul's summaries was their astonishing unpredictability. He was very attentive, took in everything, and was scrupulous about his facts. At the same time, there was no way of knowing what strands or details he would choose to highlight.

This reached its peak on the evening that my dear friend Krishna K. Singh and I occupied most of the discussion period with a slanging match. I have no idea what brought it on, but each of us seemed determined to establish once and for all that the other was a deeply flawed individual and absolutely hopeless in the sexual sphere. (It wasn't until about a year later that it became apparent that I had been very much mistaken about Krishna in this latter respect.) This went on for a while, all good clean fun, and then we gave it up, because it threatened to become repetitious.

The whole table had gone into pensive silence when we became aware that Raul was leaning forward in tense eagerness. Having caught my eye,

he asked “I shall summarize?”

“Oh yes, by all means, Raul” I said. “Yes, please, summarize. Let’s have it.” Raul cleared his throat and pronounced with happy earnestness “Krishna continues to amaze us as a representative of another species.”

Later, no one could recall what else he said, as we were all too slack-jawed at this opening. The habit of summarizing sort of fell into abeyance after that, because there was no way Raul could top that evening’s formulation.

FISH FLOPS ON THE BEACH

One of my dearest and most valued colleagues in the Philippines was the mosquito specialist and catholic priest Henry Schoenig. Originally from Germany, he had been in the Philippines so long that the land of his birth had long since become foreign to him, and I don't believe he ever returned to it while he lived.

Henry was already in his 70s when I met him, but he was in fine shape and got around very well. We went on three extended bug-collecting trips to other islands, going right into the wilds. The grandest of these was to Palawan, an island that I visited again twice and to which I hope to return to observe the transit of Venus in June 2012.

Our wanderings took us not only to the main island of Palawan but to two smaller ones lying to the south. The second of these, Balabac, is the last philippine island before Borneo. I will always remain grateful to Henry for leading the way to places that I would probably never have visited.

We stayed in Balabac about a week, and I had many hours of happy exploring and a good haul of specimens. When the time came to leave we got our stuff together and went down to the beach to catch a boat to Bugsuk, the next of several stopping places on our way back to Palawan.

Our boat was delayed, and a crowd of curious locals gathered to watch the strange outsiders. After a bit, I thought it was a shame just to stand around, so I got to doing fish flops right there on the sand. (The fish flop is a gymnastic technique, in which one somersaults backward, goes into a hand stand, arches one's body, and then lets oneself down smoothly onto one's convex front.) The people were openly amazed, and for all I know the foreigner who did fish flops on the beach may have passed into local legend.

BEING THE OLD BUG WATCHER

As related above, I became enthusiastic about bugs in the summer of 1954 and have stayed that way ever since. For many years I referred to myself as an entomologist, but the label never seemed entirely right.

Then in 1982, Reinhold Aman, the legendary editor of *Maledicta*, the international scholarly journal for the study of insults and cussing, referred to me in an offhand way as "that old bug watcher". And I instantly embraced it. I was most definitely a bug watcher. It's such a grand thing to find oneself.

On another occasion, Dr Aman called me a "freudian commie dog-eater", which is accurate enough, although it lacks the revelatory force of "old bug watcher".

A TRULY STINKY BEETLE

As a graduate student at Georgia, I had frequent association with Murray S. Blum and his students, from whom I learned a thing or two about chemical ecology. For a chemical illiterate like me, it was quite an education to go into the field with these guys. One of them would pick a bug off a plant, sniff it and hand it to me, saying "Here. What does this smell like?" I would say it smelled like cinnamon or something, and he would say "That's right" and name the compound, remarking that the bug had independently come to evolve the same substance. The real education was not so much in such details as in the realization that there are people who walk about in the field with their noses wide open, taking in a whole new dimension of which I had been all but unaware.

I didn't recognize that I had picked up the chemical-ecology attitude -- although very little of the concrete knowledge -- until I moved to the Philippines. The striking incident came as I was walking along a trail and happened to pick up a darkling beetle (Tenebrionidae). Holding it close to my face for a good look, I became aware of a powerful and pungent odour. While most people would have dropped that beetle in disgust, my immediate response was an appreciative "Wow! What a stinky beetle."

IN TREMBLING FEAR OF THE CAVE COBRA

For a time I was based in the town of Borongan, Eastern Samar. In two caves in the area I had found a social wasp that is only known to nest in caves on that island. As far as I know, I am the only biologist to have seen it alive. One day I thought to go to the village of Surat, where I could stay with my buddy Leo Maliban and explore nearby caves.

The next day Leo & I went wandering over the countryside to see what we would find. Here and there we ran into farmers and stopped to talk with them and ask about nearby caves, with the result that some of them decided that their farming could wait while they joined our party. After looking in one cave and finding nothing in particular, one of the farmers told us about another not far away that opened as a vertical hole in a field. That sounded good, so we headed in that direction.

Presently, our guide began to have misgivings. Actually, he told us, maybe we shouldn't go to that cave, as there was reputed to be a cobra in it. I responded with derision, as I was quite sure that the local cobra, *Naja samarensis*, did not live in caves. As we advanced, so did my sarcasm. I got to telling imaginary stories of (shudder) "the dreaded cave cobra", which quite abashed our guide. Perhaps you see where this story is going.

We reached the cave, and it did, indeed open straight down into the ground for the first couple of meters. I climbed down first, followed by our guide and a couple of others. In the horizontal part I soon noticed a great big spider on the ceiling with a handsome egg case in its web. So I climbed up onto a ledge and was taking pictures of the spider when our guide said "Uh, there's a snake right behind you."

This was not a moment to appear worried, so I just said "No kidding?" and took a couple more pictures. Then I turned around and saw that there was, indeed, a fair-sized snake in a crevice right at my back. Maintaining absolute outer coolness, I said casually "Yes, that does look like a snake" and then went back to taking pictures, even though I already had all I wanted. Having demonstrated utter unconcern, I turned around and looked at the snake again. "Do you think that's a cobra?" I asked. "Could be" answered the guide. In truth, from what I could see it couldn't very well have been anything else. So I took a couple more unnecessary photos and then climbed down from the ledge and up out of the cave, looking not the least bit shaken. It was probably the finest acting I have ever done.

IN PRIMITIVE PURSUIT

Having exhausted the nearby caves, we all headed back toward the village. Strolling along, talking of the events of the day, we all saw a monitor lizard (*Varanus salvator*) in the middle of the field, just as the lizard saw us. Monitor lizards are highly prized as game, so this one scrambled for the cover of a bamboo grove many meters away. Immediately, the young fellow beside me charged after it, eager to take it down.

Now, let me say something about hunting. I am a highly sophisticated, terribly over-educated dude, very far removed from primitive humanity. In particular, I have always considered the hunting impulse to be not only economically unnecessary in modern times but terribly destructive and rather ridiculous. Today, for example, whenever I see four Trinidadians and their 11 dogs going after an agouti, I have to wonder how anyone can have any association with hunting without acute embarrassment.

This disdain for hunting was on my mind when I saw the young fellow running after the monitor lizard, but not for long, because in an instant I saw something truly amazing. Right behind him, howling in unslaked blood lust, was Starr. I saw it with my own eyes, Starr instinctively on the hunt. There was no reasoning with him, as a truly primal instinct was moving his fibers.

The monitor lizard got away, we all calmed down, and I returned to being an educated sophisticate, but I had learned that there is something of the primitive in each and every one of us.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE BUYS THE BEER

Having spent a pleasant and productive couple of days -- even if we didn't find any cave wasps -- in Surat, it was time to go back to Borongan. I was standing at the bus stop in the center of town when a uniformed gentleman came over and asked if they might have a word with us in that bar over there. Just another nosy official feeling obliged to interrogate any outside in the area, I thought. I was just on the point of telling him to buzz off or at least that we could have a word right where I was, when he invited me to have a beer with them.

Well, if they were buying the beer, of course, I could put up with a little interrogation, so I followed him inside. There he introduced me to his buddy, who said he was from military intelligence. I suspected that was nonsense and they were just a pair of ordinary uniformed busybodies, but they were buying the beer, so I took care to be courteous.

One thing about interrogations, I have learned and heard, is that they are often posed as just friendly conversations in which the suspect/witness is under no obligation to make comment, and so it was on this occasion. We conversed about the rebel New People's Army (NPA), about whom I affected almost total ignorance and certainly mentioned no names, and I asked more questions than I answered about philippine politics.

Finally, I had reached my beer limit, and the bus might be arriving at any moment, so I asked Military Intelligence if the interrogation was over. I shouldn't have done that, because he seemed distinctly embarrassed and very quickly assured me that it was nothing of the sort, just a friendly conversation.

So we rose, shook hands and parted the best of friends. I look forward to further such interrogations, as long as the uniforms are buying the beer.

A NOVENA IN BORONGAN

On a lazy afternoon in Borongan I was having some refreshment at a little road-side bar when a hearty old doll, Mother Kawayan, hailed me from across the street. "Hey, Starr, would you like some chewing gum?" That seemed like a daffy question, but I was feeling sociable, so I got some more beers and glasses and walked over to join her and her two associates.

It turned out that her "chewing gum" was betel nut. In much of South Asia the rustic people spend hours of the day chewing the seed of the betel palm, *Areca catechu*, along with some additives that vary from region to region. Betel nut contains a mild narcotic, arecaine, but I must admit that I never got a buzz from it. Maybe I just never chewed enough of it. In many areas the trimmings include a substance that stains the teeth red, so that habitual chewing lends a distinctly unsexy appearance. And even where the red stain is not part of the chew, betel nut provokes a copious flow of saliva, so that there is always a great deal of spitting.

Truth to tell, I have no special appreciation for betel nut, but one tries to be ethnic, so I have chewed it on many occasions. Accordingly, I told Mother Kawayan that I could, indeed, go for some of her chewing gum, and she passed me a prepared chew. As she did so, she reminded me not to swallow the juice but to spit it over the side here.

Meanwhile, I noticed a low, durable, collective moaning coming from the house right beside us. Mother Kawayan explained that they were having a novena in there. A novena, what's that? The grandmother of the family had died, and nine days later they were holding a prayer meeting for the eternal repose of her immortal soul. Curious, I took a look inside the house, and there in the living room a whole lot of people were droning lugubrious songs toward an altar.

My curiosity satisfied, I went back out to join my friends. Besides, in those few moments inside the house my mouth had accumulated a fair pool of betel juice. As I spat it out behind the bench, Mother Kawayan remarked that it was good that I had remembered not to swallow it, to which I agreed. "Yes, I can tell by the taste that if I were to swallow it, nine days from now they would be praying over me."

A rather bold thing to do, cracking a joke about the death of their friend, but the old dolls were a jolly bunch and laughed as loudly as the proximity to the novena would permit.

"GET LOST" SAID THE GNOME

Of the several species of fungus-gardening termites (Macrotermitinae) in the Philippines, only one builds the mound nests that are to be seen in almost all lowland rural areas. The mounds of *Macrotermes gilvus* are such a conspicuous feature of many landscapes that it is no wonder they feature in a number of popular sayings and beliefs.

One of these was related to me by Eunice Montes in Borongan. The country people regard the mound as the haunt of a mischievous, usually invisible little man who typically sits on top, wearing a typical conical hat (*salakot*). He is very jealous of receiving proper respect, so whenever one passes by it is best to put on a supplicant air and humbly ask permission to pass. There might not be any invisible little man sitting atop that particular mound, but it is best to take no chances. If the little man feels slighted or unacknowledged, you see, he is likely to cast a spell to make you lose your way.

This was all very interesting, but I certainly wasn't about to go all supplicant every time I passed a *Macrotermes* mound. It is far beneath the dignity of a doctor of gonzosociobiology to ask some invisible little good-for-nothing sprite whether he may, please, go here or anywhere else. And I assumed I wasn't the only one. What does one do, I asked Mrs Montes, if the gnome gets malicious and makes one lose one's way? "You turn your shirt inside-out, and you will then find your way again" she told me.

One day I was going way up in the hills to collect ferns for a herbarium. I didn't have a guide and certainly didn't have a map, but I wasn't worried. After all, how hard could it be to come back down in approximately the right direction, hit any part of the town, and get home from there? On the way up I walked right past a big termite mound, almost brushing it. I paid it no mind. You see where this story is going.

It was a fine day, and I happily wandering for hours in the woods, far above the town and farms. Getting toward late afternoon, I figured it was time to go back. The simplest thing would be to return the way I had come, but simple and easy are often two quite different things. In just a few minutes I realized that I had lost all trace of my trail. The sky was heavily overcast, and I was without a compass. I was in the middle of a forest that was altogether unfamiliar in all directions. I was lost.

In that moment there came over me a grand exultation. To be utterly lost without at least a mental map is to be enveloped in one's surroundings. The environment comes closer, more intimate. And there I was in most

intimate contact with a forest in Southeast Asia. I was perfectly content to wander aimlessly for half an hour, reveling in my lostness.

However, there came a time when I had to focus on finding my way back home. I had been lost in the woods many times, on three continents, but I had always been able to get out before nightfall, and I was getting hungry and thirsty and preferred not to overnight up there. I thought I had at least a vague idea in which direction Borongan lay and headed that way, but my main aim was just to get down to civilization. I was mostly just walking fairly fast in search of any trail into the lowlands. And of course I was walking downhill. Lacking any other method, one can always get to civilization by following a stream bed downhill. A small stream opens into a larger one, which will in time open into a river, and river banks tend to be inhabited. Still, walking stream beds is a method of last resort, as they tend to be difficult terrain, especially in rugged areas, so I simply sought lower ground and cast about for a trail.

In time I found a faint trail. Moving fast as the darkness approached, I followed this down to a broader trail, which in time led to a still broader one through farmland. And then I came to houses and recognized a village not two kilometers from Borongan, just as night was falling.

And as I walked among people again, they looked at me and knew instantly what had happened. Because my shirt was still turned inside-out.

ENCOUNTER WITH A PLEASANT HOMOPHILE

The students of the Faculty of Science at De La Salle University (DLSU) in Manila hold a week-long celebration of their area every year. During my time there the motto was always quite clever, sometimes a mixture of English and Tagalog. One year, I recall, it was "KonSiensiya". Another year it was "**One Week of Science EXperience**". That wasn't especially clever, but it got attention.

Not long after that particular celebration, I happened to be in another city. In the nighttime I had insomnia and mosquitoes, so I decided to take a long stroll down to the market district and get some mosquito coils. Wearing my "**One Week of Science EXperience**" t-shirt with the slogan on the back, I walked down the street. Ahead of me was a young homophile couple, walking arm in arm, and as I passed them one of the gents asked very courteously "Good evening, Joe. Where are you bound?" I told him and kept walking. As soon as I was ahead, so that they could see my back, the same pleasant homophile called out "Hey, Joe, I would like one week of sex." I turned and wished him all possible success in that department. "No, Joe, I mean with you" he clarified. I thanked him for the compliment, but told him that I was happily, heterosexually married, so that particular wish of his would have to remain unsatisfied.

It was all done with such grace and good manners that one could not possibly take offence.

A BASKETBALL FOR SALVACION

Until a fairly recent period in human history, most people were hunters and/or farmers and lived in villages. That time is past, but the world is still dotted with a great many villages, and I have lived for varying periods in a number of them. Village life has quite a different tone and rhythm from that of more anonymous places.

For one thing, social roles seem more distinct and settled. Especially around any ceremonial event, it is understood that the different sexes and age groups have particular parts to play. On such occasions, all the young people are effectively in school, being taught by their elders how to perform the tasks that will later fall to them. Whether there are severe sanctions against those who rebel against their roles is unknown to me, as I have never noticed any such resistance. My guess is that in most cases the rebel would simply be slotted into a pre-existing role as one of several kinds of excentric.

The first village in Southeast Asia in which I actually resided -- although only for short periods now and then -- was Salvacion in the province of Sorsogon, southern Luzon. I was taking the bus down there to look for good bug-collecting places and happened to fall into conversation with Romeo Arcos, an off-duty driver for the bus company. He was on his way to his home village and suggested that it might be good for my purposes. That sounded good, so I accompanied him home and spent several happy days there.

It was an especially good time to be visiting, because the village was just beginning an important annual celebration -- something to do with Easter, if I recall correctly -- and the whole tribe was there. Furthermore, the Arcoses were the recognized first family of Salvacion under their patriarch, Romeo's father, Mang Domingo. After nightfall that first day there was an all-night religious observance, with candles and songs. There were mats spread out in the yard, and I and the other villagers slept under the cloudless night sky when not doing other things.

The next day there was an important annual baseball game, played on a meadow from which rocks and other offending objects had been removed. It was the old men against the young men. At 35, I was borderline, but the old men argued successfully to have me on their team. Furthermore, they assumed that a large American must be a superb ball player, so they put me at the critical position of first base.

Truth to tell, when I had played 20 years earlier I had been distinctly

mediocre and had the nondescript position of third base, but luck was with me that day. I made some good saves and, as I recall, batted reasonably well, and for the first time in years the old men won the game. I didn't think that my own performance had anything much to do with the outcome, but the other old men were certain that I had made the difference, and my popularity soared.

There is a clear diagnostic sign that one has been accepted into a new family or village. It comes not when one is so informed -- that might never explicitly happen -- but when one is called on to do one's duty. In Salvacion, during one of my several visits, it happened like this. I had just arrived and was walking through the village when I ran into one of Mang Domingo's daughters-in-law. After some greetings and sharing of news, she casually remarked that "The young men in the village don't have a good basketball. Would you please send one for them?" It was said as if I was her cousin, the extended family needed something in particular, and she knew I earned more than most of them, so it made sense that this need should be brought to my attention and I should do something about it.

When I got back to Manila I got a new basketball and took it around to the bus station for Romeo to carry south when he went that way. I have since then been accepted into membership in a couple of other villages and families in far-away places, but it was the basketball for Salvacion that showed me for the first time that I was no longer an outsider.

A GHOST IN THE MARINE STATION

We have all heard of houses or other locales that are thought to be haunted. All my life, I have been curious about these and have wanted to meet a ghost. I have deliberately overnights alone in two known haunted houses in hopes of actually meeting a ghost.

The closest I ever came was at the DLSU marine station in Matuod, Batangas province. Some of the students had suggested that it was haunted, relating nighttime incidents that seemed to admit of no other explanation. I had never noticed anything of the sort during my many visits there, but that could just have been because this was a shy or subtle ghost, whose presence would not be noticed when a noisy throng was in the station. I determined to make the ghost's acquaintance. I went to the station by myself one weekend, spent the day wandering the environs and studying bugs, and as night approached I bedded down attentively on a cot in the big main room.

I lay there, dozing lightly, and after a time I heard a rhythmic creaking noise. What could that be? It might be the ghost, and then again it might just be a door that wasn't properly fastened, so that it moved in the wind. I turned on the light, got up, located and closed the offending door, and went back to bed.

After a while I heard light footsteps right there in the room. This was plainly no door or other loose piece of the building. I wondered if a cat had gotten inside. I turned on the light again, got up, shooed the cat back outside and fastened the open window, and went back to bed.

Not long afterward, as I lay with my face toward the wall, I had the clear feeling that a disembodied personage was leaning over me in melancholy curiosity, trying to figure out what manner of being I was. There was nothing at all threatening about it, just a mild and gentle sadness of someone trapped between two worlds and unsure what, if anything, could be done about it.

So I turned over quickly to get a close and personal look at the marine-station ghost. And sure enough, there was nothing there.

HOW SUPERNOVA YERAKINA GOT HER NAME LONG IN ADVANCE

Before we were married, the second Mrs Starr and I had the good sense to reach an explicit accord about kids. After due negotiation, it was agreed that we would have one girl and one boy, in that order.

One night, before the first of these was even conceived, I had a prophetic dream. My buddy Karma Bob was at the house. The old lady brought our daughter to me and told me to take her down to the town hall and register her name. And she told me what name to put. Fine. So Karma Bob and I and the little girl started walking down to the center of town to do what had to be done. We were about halfway there when I stopped and asked "Say, Bob, what name are we supposed to register?", to which he answered "Gee, I don't know. I thought you were paying attention to that."

Well, this was a bit of a fix. Two doctors of philosophy would look pretty ridiculous if we had to go back and admit that we couldn't remember one little girl's name. On the other hand, if we went and registered the wrong name there would be trouble on the home front.

Then I had my bright idea. "Look, Bob" I said, "this kid is about six years old. Why don't we just ask her her name?" So we hunkered down there on the sidewalk and said "Uh, little girl, would you be so kind as to tell us your name?"

And she responded, confident and clear as a bell "My name is SuperNova Starr, but you can call me Nova."

So it was decreed. And in case some of you may cling to this wimpy notion that giving a kid an outstanding name is somehow cruelly unusual, let me inform you that when she was a teenage I got an enthusiastic e-mail from a certain college student: "Oh, Daddy, thank you so much for giving me such a cool name."

A CLOSE CALL WITH *LUFFA CYLINDRICA*

There are two common species of the genus *Luffa* in the Philippines. Both grow on vines, but their fruits are quite distinct. *L. acutangula* gets about 30 cm long and has several fairly acute longitudinal ridges. *L. cylindrica* is much shorter and smooth, rather like a cucumber in shape. It is the familiar bath gourd, used throughout the world for scouring the skin.

I was having lunch at the home of a former student in southern Luzon and became curious about one of the vegetables in the stew. His wife informed me that it was *Luffa cylindrica*. That surprised me, as I knew that *L. acutangula* was commonly used in cooking, but I had always assumed *L. cylindrica* was inedible. Well, I thought, I have just learned something new. As it turned out, she was mistaken.

Some weeks later, I was rambling through farmland and came upon a nice big patch of *L. cylindrica*. Many of the fruits were of full size but still young, not yet full of seeds, so I picked a batch of them and took them home. My wife made a sort of stew with them, which looked and smelled delicious. With the first bite, however, I found it distinctly bitter, much too bitter to be truly tasty. Still, I wasn't about to waste good stew, so I ate a bowl of it, and then I suddenly realized that I wasn't going to eat any more. I rushed to the bathroom, knelt before the toilet and threw up violently, over and over, until I could retch no more.

And as I stood up, exhausted and feeling dreadful, I had one overwhelming thought. It was just a good damn thing that my very pregnant wife hadn't partaken of that toxic dish.

A STRANGLED DOG IN MANILA

It is well known that many people in East Asia eat dogs, in my experience always as a stew. However, it is not a meal. Rather, it is *pulutan*, something to have along with one's beer or palm wine.

My dear friend Leo Maliban in Eastern Samar has a dog. I haven't seen Leo in more than 20 years, but I know he has a dog. I even know the dog's name. Pulutan. That dog is a genuine family pet, but one day Leo will be sitting around with some of his political cronies, tossing back the beverage, and maybe the mayor will remark that it sure would be nice to have something to go with the liquid refreshment. At that moment, Leo's eye will fall on the dog, whose value as pet will suddenly have dropped below its value as stew. He will call to his wife Carmen with a request, and in due time he and his buddies will have bowls of spicy pulutan to go with their libations.

That will of course leave the Malibans without a dog, but only temporarily. Before very long a neighbour will notice that they are dogless and will present them with a puppy. Which they will name Pulutan. That pup will grow and flourish, a treasured family pet, until one day

This sort of down-to-earth attitude seems dreadfully cold to some folks. The English, in particular, would deem it downright beastly, although I'm not sure why I tell you this, because I care what the English think about as much as you do, possibly even less. Still, if you are upset by Leo's relationship with the series of Pulutans you had better skip the rest of this story.

For a time we lived on Leon Guinto Street near Taft Avenue in Manila. Our immediate neighbours' dog that made a great deal of noise in the nighttime. Every night. I reasoned with them about it, asking them to exercise some discipline to get the dog to shut the hell up, but they didn't take it seriously, so I had to take care of it, myself. I went out in the middle of the night and sat around the side of the neighbours' house, where I couldn't be seen. I silently called the dog over to me and patted it into a state of satisfaction. Then I strangled it.

Nothing cruel, and it didn't take long. Then I put it into my pack, walked over to the university, and put it in a freezer. The next day I took one of the students aside and asked if he and his buddies would care for a frozen dog. You bet they would. A weekend was coming up, and a little pulutan is always a welcome thing at one of their parties. So I took him up to the freezer, handing the package over to him, and he disposed of the

evidence.
Isn't that a pretty story?

A GENIUS RIDES THREE BICYCLES

Anyone with a bicycle knows that riding with only one hand on the handlebar is no special trick once one is underway. Occasionally it happens that one must ride while steering another bicycle alongside, holding to it with the other hand. This is not too hard if one proceeds slowly and with care.

I was walking along Taft Avenue, a busy street in downtown Manila, when I observed something truly remarkable. Riding very slowly toward me was a young man on three bicycles. That is, he was riding one of them, while on each side he steered another with one hand. I was astounded that such a feat was even possible, but he was managing it in traffic. A car would come up behind him, and he would pull off to the side, so that it could pass, all the time maintaining a steady forward motion.

I just stood there in amazement and watched him pass, then continued watching until he was way down the street and lost to view. I was so awestruck that it didn't occur to me until it was much too late that I should have trotted behind -- an easy task at his very slow pace -- until he got where he was going and then ask him his name, how he came to perform such a feat, and what else he could do that was fantastic.

And now I'll never know.

A LAWYER STEPS OUT OF HIS WEIGHT CLASS

After a couple of years I was fired by DLSU. I don't recall what the official reason was, but it was really about insubordination, of which I was guilty. One must be suspicious of anyone who was not insubordinate under those conditions. So I sued for wrongful dismissal. I knew I had, at best, a weak case, but the university had been decidedly crass and devious, even if its conduct was not strictly illegal. I had heard of an earlier staffer who had won a similar suit from DLSU, so I retained her lawyer to represent me, and the process began.

It wasn't clear to me how the lawyer had won the earlier case. It couldn't have been his outstanding vigour or legal acumen, because I never saw evidence of either. We had two or three hearings, at which his performance was utterly desultory, and then he missed a critical hearing altogether. The judge made it plain that if there was any further such lapse he would dismiss the suit, so I scrambled to get a new lawyer. Despite his name, Kenneth Paul Davis was a regular Filipino, and he represented me well. We finally lost, but he did what he could with what was, after all, a weak case.

In the meantime, there was the matter of my previous lawyer. He had damn near left me in the lurch, and I was mighty pissed off. I have no evidence that he was bribed by the other side, so let's be charitable and assume that he just couldn't be bothered to do his job.

I wasn't about to let him get away with it. I learned how to go about filing a malpractice suit against the old one and set out to prosecute it myself. I filed the complaint and claim for damages and waited for his response. When this came through, I saw at once that he was not taking it seriously. A foreign layman against an experienced local lawyer? No contest, he must have thought, and his response was careless and weak. That was when I knew I had him by the short hairs. He had misjudged the situation badly, and his response was on record. My counter-claim was tight and hit hard. It must have shocked him -- either that or the senior members of his firm slapped some sense into him -- because after that he tried to treat the matter seriously.

At our first hearing I asked the judge's leave to represent myself in court. Leave was granted, and I geared up for the main event. This was going to be great fun. The judge had told me that I could examine myself, so I prepared a full transcript of my questions and answers. I came to the hearing with this transcript in triplicate: one copy for me, one for the

court, and one for the poor, misguided lawyer.

And then the bastard double-crossed me. While we were sitting in an adjoining conference room, waiting to be called into court, he settled. In full. I had absolutely no grounds to continue the matter, because he pulled out his wallet and paid what I had asked. Damn it, if I had known he was going to pull that one, I would have asked for more than he was willing to pay.

So I used the money I had squeezed out of the old lawyer to pay Paul Davis. Still, I was sorely disappointed that I never got to make him really squirm. All that lovely testimony just went to waste. I probably have a copy of it around somewhere.

TOO DRUNK FOR THE PHILIPINE REVOLUTION

In early 1986, the political situation in the Philippines and especially in the Manila area was plainly moving toward a critical point. The government's claim that a single petty gunman, Rolando Galman, had assassinated Benigno Aquino in August 1983 (and then was, himself, conveniently shot by soldiers) was believed by no one. Mr Marcos had called a snap election for early February 1986, which his electoral commission decided in his favour against his opponent, Corazon Aquino, a result that also had little credibility. The people were restive, with almost daily mass demonstrations, and the Marcos dictatorship was losing its grip on power.

On the afternoon of 22 February, some students invited me to a party in a highrise apartment overlooking one of Manila's main boulevards. As the party proceeded toward nightfall, it got raucous in an entirely amiable way. We got to playing a drinking game called Quarters, in which whoever makes a losing move has to drink a small glass of beer. I was losing badly and drinking a great deal of beer. At one point it suddenly became too much for me, and I staggered to the bathroom to hug the toilet and talk convulsively to Ralph -- for those of you who have led a sheltered existence, this happens when the sufferer leans over and yells "Raaalph Raaalph" into the bowl -- while my buddies cheered from the doorway.

Then the tanks started rolling. Our host, Patrick, looked out the window and drew them to our attention. We had known that the political situation was heading toward crisis, and now it was plain from what we saw far below us on the boulevard that the action was going down. What we didn't know was exactly what action, just that the government was moving heavy weapons through the city. The radio was no help, and it wouldn't be until morning that we knew what was happening.

The next morning the crisis was deepening around Camp Crame on the other side of Manila, now in the hands of anti-Marcos soldiers, while outside the loyalist tanks awaited orders and each side called on members of the other to come over. The area was also choked with masses of civilians, all anti-Marcos, standing in front of the tanks and calling on loyalist soldiers to desert and switch sides.

That was the place to be that day in the Philippines, but I wasn't there. I was flaked out hungover in a highrise apartment, unable to go home or anywhere else until late afternoon.

ONE DAY IN THE MANILA HOTEL

The good guys won a decisive and almost bloodless victory in the Philippines in February 1986. The loyalist soldiers refused to fire on the people standing between them and insurgent Camp Crame, and after about two days they were loyalist no more. They deserted in twos and threes and dozens until Mr Marcos had no army. During those two days my wife and I joined the throng of civilians inside the camp, and there I saw a recruiting table staffed by officers, with Mr Marcos's soldiers lining up to switch sides.

Marcos fled the country on 25 February. As soon as the news came over the radio, I picked up a bottle of booze and some glasses and went out into the exuberant street to congratulate people and pour them a tippie. Then I got a ride to the newly Marcos-less Malacañang Palace. The square in front was a popular celebration, as expected, but what caught my attention was the moveable barriers that had served to protect the dictatorship from the people's wrath. These were substantial structures, about chest high and two meters long, made of heavy steel tubes and topped with thick barbed wire. When it came to the implements of repression, Mr Marcos was no cheapskate.

Each barrier was now attended by several people, who were removing the barbed wire. (It would have been rude to do this earlier, when the barriers were still guarded by armed soldiers.) Some had come prepared with wire cutters, but the rest of us had to make do by bending the wire over and over again until the metal fatigued and broke. In this way, I got a piece more than a meter long, which I then coiled into a wreath for easy carrying. Walking in the throng later, I had to hold my barbed wreath up over my head to avoid snagging people, and every time two of us wreath bearers came together in the crowd we knocked our wreaths together, a sort of political high-five. Walking home later, I passed a side street where a couple of young men were applying a hack saw to a barrier stripped of barbed wire, undoubtedly to sell that mass of good steel for scrap. I was glad to see honest people realizing some economic gain from the past dictatorship.

That, then, was the point of no return in the philippine revolution. It was not, of course, the end of the struggle, as the remnants of the dictatorship had not given up. Mr Marcos's vice-presidential candidate in the stolen election had been Arturo M. Tolentino, at one time a respected legal scholar. On 6 July, Tolentino and a few others, with about 100 rebel

soldiers, took over the luxurious Manila Hotel. With Marcos in exile, Tolentino regarded himself as the legitimate acting president. He set about formulating a rump government and called for the massive popular support that would establish it in power. It was a breath-takingly deluded thing to do, as a government of Marcos stooges was exactly what the people did not want.

The Manila Hotel was within walking distance of my place of work, so I went down there to have a look. I was expecting to find a number of things when I got there. There would be tight security at all entrances. And there would certainly be a command post in the lobby to coördinate all activities. What I found was rather different. There was, indeed, someone checking people as they entered, but I bluffed my way in without really trying. (I had prudently left all identification back at the office.) And in the lobby all I saw was a bunch of people standing and sitting around, doing nothing in particular. If my students had planned a class outing as sloppily as these turkeys pretended to organize a national government, I would have had some sharp words for them.

I wandered around as I pleased, with a camera in plain view, unchallenged by anyone, and made my way up to the presidential suite. Tolentino was not in there, but it was full of rebel soldiers with a good vantage point over the main approach to the hotel. I walked about, chatting with them, and then I had the daft notion of asking if I could take their picture. Can you beat that? "Excuse me, but would it be all right if I compiled photographic evidence of you in an act of armed sedition?"

And they were only too happy to have their picture taken! Then they wanted me to get in a picture with some of them, which I couldn't very well refuse. And after one of them had taken a picture of me being buddies with them, one of them put a goddamn loaded assault rifle in my hands, and they took another picture. I definitely wanted to wipe my finger prints off before I handed it back, but that would have been discourteous. I got rid of that negative as soon as the roll was developed, I assure you.

Then a rumour swept the hotel that the government was getting ready to attack. I thought that was very unlikely -- in fact, Tolentino's crew gave up two days later without any shots fired on either side -- but I wasn't sure, and I preferred not to be arrested. I bluffed my way back out, but not before I picked up a few books of matches with the presidential suite label on them. I went back to my department, casually mentioned where I had just been, and distributed matchbooks to the incredulous colleagues.

It's the only time I have ever been inside an armed rebellion, and I must say it was great fun.

UNDER A "WANTED" POSTER

After the People Power revolution of 1986 in the Philippines, the new regime under Corazon Aquino attempted an accommodation with the communist New People's Army (NPA) that had fought the Marcos dictatorship for so many years. I had met many low-level comrades over the years, but now some legendary figures who had long lived in clandestinity were able to come into the open and argue their case publicly. At the same time, the NPA refused to disarm completely, as they were by no means certain that the new government's policy of "maximum tolerance" would last.

As it turned out, they were right to be wary. The accommodation wore thin, and in time many of them had to go underground again. It reached a point where the government was putting out a bounty on some of the comrades. Wanted, dead or alive.

I became aware of this Wild West turn during a visit to Baybay, Leyte in 1987. Waiting in the marketplace for a bus ride, I noticed a couple of wanted posters affixed to a telephone pole. Each had a picture of the comrade on it, as well as the size of the reward, which was considerable.

Then I noticed something striking. One of the comrades sort of looked like my friend the taxi dispatcher, who was standing just over there, and the other looked very approximately like me. I called the dispatcher over to see if he, too, recognized the similarities, which he did. That done, I did exactly what you would do under the circumstances. I took out a pen and altered the pictures to heighten the resemblances, and then the dispatcher and I sat underneath the posters and waited to be captured.

Several passing citizens stopped to look at the posters, then looked back and forth between the posters and us, so we were pretty sure they saw what they were supposed to see -- I had even added to the dispatcher-lookalike's head a cap such as the dispatcher wore -- but they just smirked and continued on their way. They were unarmed, so maybe it was too much to expect them to take us down, but they didn't even report us to the constabulary. Maybe these folks already had more money than they knew what to do with. Or maybe they were just sympathetic to the NPA, or to us.

So, after a while we gave it up and went about our business, so that we are both still at large.

NAMING PANTOT

I have always been very fond of the island of Palawan, ever since I first went there with the late Henry Schoenig. In 1987 I was based for a time at the Palawan National Agricultural College (PNAC) in Aborlan. For some reason, I took a notion to go to the dinky little offshore island of Sombrero for a couple of days. I found a boat that was going across and showed up in the village without any advance warning. However, Filipinos are tolerant and hospitable, and I had no trouble finding a place to stay.

I was a great novelty to the urchins of that one-village island, and they followed me everywhere as I roamed in search of bugs. The diet in that place seemed very limited, mostly root crops and dried fish. Starch and oil. It reminds me of what I have heard of prison food, and you can imagine what it does to the bowels, even if you haven't experienced it. Farting. A lot of farting. And not dry barking farts that come out crisply, smelling like sagebrush. No, we're talking about gag-inducing oil-based farts that coat the skin.

Now, before I proceed I should explain two things. First, there is a burrowing mammal in Palawan, *Mydaus marchei*, known locally as *pantot* and in English as the stink badger. The name is well chosen, because it has a pair of glands on either side of the base of the tail that give off a sulphur-based, extremely stinky defensive fluid that smells to me just like that of the north-american striped skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*.

Second, every Filipino has a nickname that can be considered standard. When one meets someone for the first time, one commonly asks about the nickname, if it has not been automatically proffered. It is most often a contraction of one's regular given name, or it may refer to one's position in the family or even to a personal characteristic. Okay, stink badgers and nicknames; maybe you see where this story is going.

So I had my coterie of urchins on the first day when I stopped for a while to examine a colony of wasps on a small tree. And as I did so an unmistakable pungent smell wafted my way from their direction. Turning around, I yelled at them "Oy! Sino ang pantot?" [Hey, who's the stink badger?] That set off a furious round of accusatory finger-pointing among the urchins, until one bandy-legged little fellow at the periphery could take it no more. He jumped up and down and vociferously confessed that he, in fact, had been the farter, after which a new round of yelling and finger-pointing was directed at him alone.

That night I was sitting with a bunch of women in a half-finished house,

shooting the breeze and tossing back palm wine. Pretty much the same crowd of urchins was standing about watching us. One of the women casually referred to the farting kid as Pantot. It wasn't a joke, nor an insult. That had just become his name.

I want to be in Palawan for the Transit of Venus in June 2012, and it would be amusing to go over to Sombrero and see if that young fellow, at the age of about 35, is still known as Pantot.

NO SEXUAL HOSPITALITY IN NORTHERN LUZON

In those years I often went to unfamiliar parts of the Philippines just to wander and see what bugs I could find. I visited all 11 major islands and at least an equal number of minor islands. I got what advance information I could, but if I didn't know anyone from there it was often a shot in the dark. During a few days at the northern end of Luzon, my practice was to ride on the top of a bus and, if I saw a promising place, bang on the roof for the bus to stop, get down and walk into the village.

There I would ask for the baranggay captain (the elected village headman) or, if it seemed likely that the captain and I would have no language in common, the school teacher. The immediate question was whether the captain could suggest a place for me to stay for a couple of days, during which I hoped to wander the hills in search of interesting bugs. This was a blatantly manipulative question, because I knew perfectly well that the captain would be concerned for the very bad politics if a foreigner came to grief while staying in his village and so would either put me in his own house or that of a trusted associate.

So it was that in early 1987 I found myself in the village of Subec in the baranggay captain's house. They fed me well, and at the end of my stay I asked them to accept a financial contribution, so everyone came out ahead. When I say they fed me well, I refer in particular to the weaver ants, *Oecophylla smaragdina*. It was the season when the colonies are producing queen pupae, and the villagers would cut the silk nests and catch the falling pupae, which were quite rightly regarded as good food. These people were so rustic that they didn't know that westerners don't eat bugs, and I wasn't about to tell them. At every single meal I had stir-fried weaver ants. When the nest is cut one doesn't get pure queen pupae but a mixture of other castes and stages as well. It was the only time I ever saw weaver-ant males, just before I ate them.

Of an evening I was sitting in the captain's house, writing up my notes and looking over specimens. The people were not about to ignore a curiosity such as me, so that the room was fairly packed with villagers, asking questions and commenting on what I was doing. Presently, the captain pointed to one young lady -- no, not that young; she was of age -- sitting in the corner and suggested that I might like her to keep me company in the night.

Now, this posed something of a dilemma. As far as I knew, the christianized lowlanders in northern Luzon did not practise sexual

hospitality, and I suspected that the captain was having a joke with me. However, if I just laughed it off and it turned out that the offer was sincere, that could be very uncool. Just imagine, the elected authority offers me the flower of the village's young womanhood in front of a host of his people, and I spurn it. Very bad politics, indeed. On the other hand, if I accepted the proposition and it was just a joke, I would look very foolish. (The fact that I didn't especially desire the lady was quite irrelevant to my calculations.)

I did the only sensible thing. I put on my most lugubrious look and informed the captain that I was already married (true), and that my people were monogamous (largely true), so that I was unavailable to accept his kind offer.

And that was that. I never did find out if his proposition was on the level.

ARMY ANTS STRIPPED ME BARE

After a couple of days in Subec, I packed my stuff and got on a bus to take me further east. I didn't get far. Just 7 or 8 km up the road we stopped for a moment at the village of Balaoi. It looked mighty delectable to a bug-watcher on the loose. There was a big stream running down to the sea from an area of forested hills. I was just thinking I should perhaps get down and explore those hills when the bus started rolling again, and I regretfully dismissed the option. But then, just around a nearby bend, it stopped again to let someone off, and I seized the situation. I got down and paid off the puzzled conductor, just like that. It was an excellent impulse.

The villagers of Balaoi were reservedly surprised to see the amerikano heave back into view, walking with a load. They directed me to the captain's house, who seemed to find it not at all out of the ordinary when I reported my intentions. My field bag was already packed, so I had only to stash the rest of my stuff and head for the welcoming hills. I was in forested solitude before 08:00.

After about two hours of happy wandering, climbing ever higher and away from civilization, I came upon the most fabulous column of army ants I ever encountered in the Philippines. I first spotted them moving along a fallen log, from which it was easy to trace the column to its nearby nesting place under some raised tree roots. A raiding column was coming in with prey, and the main column I had first noticed was evidently emigrating. I set out to trace the emigrating column to the new nest site at the base of a plant with raised roots.

Unlike most *Aenictus* spp. that I have encountered, these ants were uncommonly pugnacious. A hand or foot carelessly touching the column was quickly covered with biting, stinging ants. I reached in several times for tweezer-loads of specimens and got all I wanted before I had to back off and brush myself free of attacking workers. A raiding column was coming into this site as well, and I squatted beside it to collect a few of the voracious little darlings. In doing so, I didn't pay attention to where I was standing, which happened to be on top of yet another raiding column.

By the time I realized the situation a great many angry ants were already in my boots and pants and even in my shirt.

There was only one thing to do. I picked up my stuff, walked a few meters away, and took off all my clothes. I shook them out, laid them out separately on branches, and then just stood around in the altogether,

picking the remaining ants off my body and waiting for the others to desert my duds.

Being stark naked in a southeast-asian rain forest makes one feel like a real child of nature, to be sure, but it was just as well none of the villagers came up that way, or I might have found myself decidedly less welcome.

THE SINKING OF THE DOÑA PAZ

During my years in the Philippines, I often took the boat between Manila and Tacloban on the island of Leyte. The boat was the Doña Paz. I always got a 2nd-class ticket. The berths were the same as 3rd-class, but the food was 1st-class. And it was plentiful after I made friends with the kitchen staff.

On perhaps my second trip, a big tureen of soup for six people was placed on our table at lunch time. In fact, there were only four at our table, so there was plenty of soup for me, and it was uncommonly good. When it was all done, I wondered out loud to my table-mates if they might have any more back in the kitchen, and one of them -- greatly amused at how much I could put away -- suggested that I go and find out. That was worth a try. So I went back to the kitchen, and an obliging cook re-filled the tureen. If my table-mates had wondered at my capacity before, now they were positively astounded. No one else wanted soup, and I put that whole tureen away by myself before attacking the solid fare.

That incident set the tone for all subsequent trips on the Doña Paz. The kitchen staff and I became good buddies and often socialized during their leisure hours. And it quickly got to where they couldn't be bothered to re-stock my plate, themselves, during meal times. "Hey, Romy, is there any more ...?" I would ask. "Go ahead, Chris, you know where it is" he would say, and I would walk right into the kitchen and help myself. Yes, indeed, we were the best of friends in those days.

They are all dead now. On 20 December 1987 the Doña Paz collided with a tanker in the night and went down in a sea of fire, with at least 4375 dead and very few survivors. It was the worst peacetime shipping disaster of all time. If I had been on that trip I would almost have certainly died with them. I always requested a berth on the lowest level -- on one trip with few passengers, the lowest deck was closed, but the purser gave me the key, and I had it all to myself -- so unless I happened to be up on the top with insomnia I wouldn't have stood a chance.

AN ENGLISH MEDIUM REVEALS ALL

My first visit to London (and first time in Europe in almost 20 years) was in 1987. Working at the British Museum (Natural History) at South Kensington, I had much pleasant conversation with the Hymenoptera specialists during morning and afternoon tea. And one weekend I went to Colin & Marta Vardy's home in the suburbs for a wonderful evening.

Now, Colin is not entirely a scientific materialist. Like Alfred Russel Wallace, he entertains views of the spirit world and mediumistic communication that most of his colleagues deem absurd. Still, Colin is not thin-skinned and is always ready to expose others to what he thinks is what, if they are interested. And when he suggested that he could invite a medium friend of his over that night if I liked, I was interested.

To all appearances, Ron was just an ordinary middle-aged Englishman. No fancy robe or hat, no accoutrements, just a regular guy. Colin had told me that I should bring something that was close to me for Ron to use in his reading. When the time came I handed him my swiss army knife, which I always carried in my left front pocket. He held it for a few moments and then began. I believe he asked me if my mother was still alive, and when I said that she was not, he assayed to contact her.

Although it now seems silly, I admit that at first I was a bit nervous. What if he really could do it? It would challenge my deepest materialist view of the world. However, my misgivings quickly vanished.

Now, let me note right away that Ron was no charlatan. He didn't try any of the standard cold-reading tricks and made no excuses when his conjectures were wrong. He also didn't mind that I took notes as we went along. Whenever he asked me something I answered, making note of what I had told him, and I often commented very briefly after a conjecture in order to help the flow. Mostly, though, I just let him tell me what he was seeing/hearing after contact with my knife.

What I was doing with my note-taking was of course keeping score, and Ron didn't score well at all. Anybody could probably have done as well just by guessing. I did, however, learn that the spirit world is far from an omniscient medium when he made mention of the Chicago Red Sox!

The next day Colin, who had been in the room the whole time, amazed me by asking how I thought Ron had done. I told him that he had been right there and heard for himself that our friend had been mistaken about most things. He objected that many things had concerned the future and so could not yet be known, to which I replied that, in fact, most could be

known at present and they were erroneous. The lesson from that was that Colin, a true believer, had taken in the few lucky hits and disregarded the mass of Ron's misses.

POSITIVELY THE DAMNEDEST SERMON I EVER HEARD

My association with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church began with a project for a course in the History of Black Nationalism in Kansas. The AME was founded in 1816 in Philadelphia out of a dispute within the Methodist Church. The black people, tired of being made to sit at the back of the church during services, broke away and formed their own denomination. Doctrinally, they have no differences with the regular (mainly white) Methodists, but there is an enormous difference in style.

I found the AME style very appealing, and when I moved to Georgia I got into the habit of attending the Greater Bethel AME Church several times a year. I don't believe I ever saw another white person in there, but I always felt warmly welcome.

The hymns at Greater Bethel sometimes amazed me. I recall, for example, hearing "Steal away, steal away to Jesus" and being struck that it had Underground Railroad written all over it. I could just imagine Ole Massa taking a stroll down by the slave quarters in the nighttime and hearing those happy slaves singing a song about getting close to our Lord. There's a lot in those songs that was hidden from Ole Massa. And some of them were later adapted to overt political purposes. Early in my association with Greater Bethel I was struck by a hymn that I had known as a civil-rights song. "If You Miss Me at the Back of the Bus". It simply hadn't occurred to me that it had started out as something else.

While the choir was singing that hymn and we were all clapping and swaying, the pastor got to walking about and greeting everyone. When he got to me I whispered that I would like to get the words to it, so I could learn to sing it. Back in the pulpit he turned to the choir master and said "You know, Brother Starr was so impressed by that last hymn that he would like the words to it so he can learn to sing it." And the choir and everyone else just beamed at me like I was the precious thing that ever wandered in there.

On those uncommon occasions that I go to church it is mostly the sermon that interests me. It was in Greater Bethel that I heard the most jaw-droppingly amazing sermon ever. It was delivered by a young man still in the seminary, present as a guest. He was a burly guy with a shaven head, wearing cowboy boots under his black robe. The pastor announced that the next voice we would hear would be that of our guest and sat down. The young man rose, gripped the pulpit like a boxer and turned to the choir, with which he engaged in some wordless, moaning call and

response for a few moments.

The he turned to face us, and his opening words were "Many years ago, Brother Ferrari developed an automobile. He said 'It has no equal.'" I sat bolt upright in my pew, wondering "What the hell is this about?" He continued, "But then a few years later Mister Lamborghini came along with his new automobile, and Brother Ferrari sort of had to take back his statement." He went through a few more rounds of one or another individual producing something, claiming that it had no equal, and being proven mistaken, before I saw what he was driving at. His topic was monotheism. Human beings produce many admirable things, but they can always be bettered by something else. Only the works of God are without equal.

It was a simple enough theme, but an extraordinary way of approaching it, and to this day I recall my bewildered thrill at his opening sentence, "Many years ago, Brother Ferrari developed an automobile."

TWO DARLING LITTLE TERRICLOTH BIBS

Francis Andrew Starr was born on 23 January 1990 and named after his grandfather Francis Starr and uncle Andrew Francis Starr. Soon afterward, I had the good fortune to be unemployed. I sent my wife and kids to visit relatives in the Philippines and took myself to Ottawa to live frugally as a guest of my brother for a while.

Not long afterward, a package arrived in the mail from an old girlfriend, addressed to "A.F. Starr, c/o C.K. Starr". That kind of baffled me, because I didn't think my brother was acquainted with the lady, but I dutifully took it home to him, and he cracked it open as we sat in the living room. Inside were two lovely little terricloth bibs, without explanation. And we sat there, just staring at them, wondering why in the world Miss Kathy was sending two little bibs to my middle-aged, 300-pound brother. It literally took us several minutes before it occurred to us that they were intended not for A.F. Starr but for newborn F.A. Starr.

LOADING SIX TRUCKS ONCE A DAY

Being unemployed in Ottawa had its benefits. I was welcomed at the national bug collection as an unpaid visiting researcher, and most weekdays I went in and did entomology during normal working hours. Sometimes I even went in on weekends. After all, I wasn't getting paid, so I had no reason not to work during off hours.

It was a productive and happy period, but there came a time when it was getting economically unsustainable. I had been submitting applications for regular academic and research jobs, and some of these were still out there and under consideration, but in the meantime I would have to do some earning. So, I started looking for just an ordinary job to tide me over. This wasn't an easy thing to do. In fact, I contemplated it with horror. The great mass of humanity goes to work every day at a job that is just a job and considers this perfectly normal, but I had been spoiled by 20 years of working in science. The prospect of ordinary work almost made the bottom drop out of my stomach. Still, it had to be faced.

And then I got lucky. I landed a job loading trucks for United Parcel Service early in the morning. Every weekday morning from 04:00 to 08:00, I would load my six trucks, and then I would drive to the Experimental Farm and put in a normal day of work with the bugs. The job paid me a living wage, and it neither cut into my research time nor left me too tired for my real work. The only drawback was that I had to go to bed by 19:00 every night, so I had no social life, but who cares about that?

HOW I GOT TWO JOBS AND KEPT THEM BOTH

As the spring of 1990 turned into summer and I kept loading my six trucks every morning, the search for a real job in science was not going so well. In an employer's market, employers are not obliged even to acknowledge applications that do not make the short list, and many did not. Those that did often sent two-line ding letters ("We acknowledge your application We regret to inform you"), although I did receive quite an elegant, thoughtful one from the University of Rochester. John Jaenike thanked me for my interest, informed me that they had chosen someone else, and then went on to tell me couple of things about the successful applicant and his expertise. I won't say it was a pleasure to receive that letter, but it showed class. In any event, I was not at all determined to remain in North America and was really looking for something tropical or subtropical.

Then there came a most remarkable week in September. With the help of my old classmate, Jung-tai Chao, I had made application for a one-year research fellowship at the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Taiwan. It was a strong application, but my area was not a priority one, so it was regarded as a long-shot. The word came in that, against all expectation, my application had scored. I was elated.

Then, just a couple of days later, I received a very curious telegram. The University of the West Indies (UWI) in Trinidad was pleased to offer me the position of Senior Lecturer in Entomology. My first reaction was "This is great, but how did they hear of me?" The selection process at UWI takes so long, and so many employers do not bother to respond, that one gets used to erasing files -- both mentally and on paper -- after a while. It took me a while to draw up the vague memory trace of that long-ago application.

It was a very attractive offer. Still, I had just received the offer of a one-year fellowship in Taiwan and -- as a life-long sinophile with only three dependents -- I wasn't about to give that up for something as insignificant as a permanent academic job. So, I got on the phone to UWI and explained to the head of personnel that I was very much interested, but that I had agreed in principle to go to Taiwan for a year. And then I said "Now, if you would be prepared to wait a year, I am ready to commit myself now." I was standing right there and actually heard Starr say that, and I was thinking "Holy shit! Can you believe the balls on this guy? In an employer's market with plenty of qualified applicants for every position, he gets offered a really juicy job and he asks them to wait a year!"

And then I heard something even more amazing. The head of personnel said that they probably would be willing to wait a year, although she would have to consult with the head of Zoology. So, I got on the phone to the head and asked him about it. He told me that the administration would make that decision, to which I said "Yes, I understand that, but they will ask your opinion. What will you recommend?" And he said he would recommend that they go for it.

I thanked him, put down the phone and just sat there stunned for a while. In the space of less than a week I had gone from having no real job to being offered two very attractive ones. And I got to keep them both.

MY FIRST CHINESE INSULT

I was walking through a market in an unfamiliar city in Taiwan, not sure of the way, just taking whatever passageway seemed to go in the right general direction. Walking down one such passageway, I found myself in a dead end and had to backtrack. Seeing me coming back, a retarded kid jumped up on a wagon, pointed a finger at me and taunted me furiously, "你笨蛋! 你笨蛋!" [You dumb-ass! You dumb-ass!] And I was thrilled. Wow! My very first (as far as I knew) insult in Chinese.

"CHRIS, YOU MUST TEACH YOUR WIFE YOUR CHINESE NAME."

While we were students at Georgia, Chao Jung-tai -- now a leading forest entomologist in Taiwan -- had fashioned a chinese name for me. There was no immediate need for it, just that we both thought a sinophile like me should not be without one.

Now, there is a misconception that one can simply ask what the chinese form of one's western name would be, and there it is. Occasionally one can sort of translate a name into Chinese, but that doesn't yield a chinese name. For example, when my father lived in China in the 1940s he used the surname 星 (Xing¹), meaning Star. That sounds sensible enough, except that 星 is not a chinese surname, so that it immediately identified him as a foreigner.

The name Jung-tai designed for me, 石達愷 (Shi² Da²-kai³; 五, meaning Stone, is the 63rd most common chinese surname worldwide) is classical, elegant, and perfectly authentic. Its authenticity was impressed upon me after I had been some months at the museum when I was introduced to a colleague from another department. Her reaction was "Ah, so you're 石達愷." She knew that there was a new staffer of that name, and she had noticed that there was now a foreigner at the museum, but it hadn't occurred to her that the two might be one and the same.

What surprised me was that no one seemed to question that it was my name. Those with whom I worked on a daily basis, of course, knew that I had a different name, and if they spoke English they commonly used it, but it was as if most of the people with whom I interacted just assumed that I had been 石達愷 all my life. That was the name I used on my permits to enter the national parks, even on my bank account, and it never seemed to occur to anyone to say "Wait a minute. You don't look like any member of the 石 family I've ever met. Could I see a birth certificate, please?"

I was not a good Chinese speaker, by any means, but my wife hardly knew word one. This led to some ironies, as she was only one-eighth chinese but looked like a lot more than that. She could have passed for a non-han Chinese from Yunnan or thereabouts. On more than one occasion in the market, a vendor would address her, and she would turn to me for translation. I could just see the wheels turning in the vendors' heads. "Why is this chinese woman asking the white man to explain to her what I just said in Chinese?"

We all had telephones, but no direct lines, so that all calls went through a switchboard. Although the science museum was an important

national institution, the telephone receptionists were not especially sophisticated, and as far as I know none of them at that time spoke anything except Chinese. One day my wife phoned in to ask for Chris Starr. The receptionists had never heard that name -- I hadn't thought to tell them that I also had another name -- but they readily recognized the caller as a foreigner. So that they bounced the call all around the museum among the better English speakers on staff in search of someone who could make it out. It ended up with another entomologist down the hall from me who called me to his phone. And when I was done he told me very gravely "Chris, you must teach your wife your chinese name." He had a point there, I thought.

THE MYSTERY OF KARAMSIM-NO-MINANGAVANG

Orchid Island (蘭嶼, Lanyu) is an oceanic island in the Pacific Ocean 26 km east of the southern tip of Taiwan. During the colonial period it was known by the Japanese as Redhead Island (紅頭嶼, Kô tô sho) and sometimes as Botel Tobago.

This is the home of the Yami, one of Taiwan's nine aboriginal peoples. It has long been believed that, unlike the other eight peoples, they came originally from Luzon in the Philippines. I am not aware that this hypothesis has yet been put to a phylogenetic linguistic test, nor am I aware that modern genetic techniques have been brought to bear, but the folkloric evidence speaks unequivocally to a philippine origin. Even so, their language was entirely unintelligible to me. I seldom heard words that were cognate with any I knew from Tagalog or any of the other Luzon languages with which I had a passing acquaintance.

During two visits with Hsiau-yue Wang I spent some very happy weeks on Orchid Island, mostly studying the native pachyrhynchine weevils (<http://www.ckstarr.net/1992-PACHYRHYNCHUS.pdf>) and trying in vain to get up to the top of the compact central range, from which one species of bumble bee had been reported. (I doubt that it was there; more likely a mistaken record.) Recalling the great fun of doing ethnoentomology among the Bribri of Costa Rica, I thought to make notes on yami names for various bugs. This was not entirely virgin territory, as the great Tadao Kano (1906-?1945) had recorded a number of such names. Still, there was still plenty of original fun to be had.

My basic method was quite simple. I would show my informant specimens and/or pictures and ask what they called the bugs. And, in order to gain a better understanding of the implicit classification, I often asked if this one and that one had the same name. The questions had to be kept very simple, as the Yami and I had no common native language. We spoke in Chinese, in which the older (thus more valuable) informants were not fluent, as I also was not. Still, it worked well enough and gave rise to a published contribution in the subject (<http://www.ckstarr.net/1993-YAMI.pdf>).

With one particular kind of insect, however, I had a special difficulty. One of the several native pachyrhynchine weevils, the jewel-like *Pachyrhynchus tobafolius*, was so common that I could have collected hundreds of specimens from its abundant food plant. The Yami were unanimous in calling this and other pachyrhynchines *karamsim-no-*

minangavang. On several occasions I asked an informant about the significance of the name, and then the trouble erupted. She/he would get excited, give up speaking Chinese in favour of Yami, and give me an animated explanation in that inaccessible language. And on those particular occasions I never had a tape recorder, so I couldn't take it back to the Yami speaker at my museum.

If I ever had another daughter -- which I will not -- I would certainly want to name her after that beetle. Karamsim-no-Minangavang Starr. Now, there's a name with which to reckon, and if any of you should get careless, please feel free to name your baby girl Karamsim-no-Minangavang.

And I will give you another fine name while I'm at it. On the island of Margarita, Venezuela, there is a great big grasshopper, *Tropidacris collaris*, one of the two biggest grasshoppers in the world. At rest, it is wonderfully cryptically coloured, like a leaf, but in flight it reveals bright blue hindwings. The local people call it ñangaragato. It would be grand to have a son named Ñangaragato Starr, but again, that's not going to happen, so feel free to apply this beautiful name to one of your own indiscretions.

DEEP DOWN IN A PIG TRAP

Green Island is north of Orchid Island, also to the east of Taiwan. I went there with Hsiao-yue Wang partly to study pachyrhynchine weevils and partly just because it was a new place.

One day, while we were exploring up in the hills, Hsiao-yue was busy photographing some bugs while I walked off in another direction. I was trying to reach a particular tree over there, but I found myself oddly unable to take a direct route. Something was always obstructing me from going right where I wanted, so that I kept getting diverted in a different direction.

Then the ground fell out from under me. Even before I hit solid earth I thought "Hot damn! I've just been caught in a pig trap." And as I hit bottom my second thought was relief that it wasn't one of those pitfall traps with sharpened stakes sticking up.

Many years before, Henry Schoenig had told me of falling into a pig trap on Mindanao. It was deep, and the sides had been smoothed against any escape, so that it took him a long time to get out. I had no such difficulty.

Standing upright, my eyes were just about at ground level, and I climbed back out with ease.

I went looking for Hsiao-yue and informed him that I had been caught in a pig trap. "Show me" he said, and I led him to it. "Get back in" he said, and I jumped down inside, so he could take my picture.

It was a wonderful primitive experience, giving a whole new meaning to the expression "I'm game."

A DREAM OF MANIFEST SIGNIFICANCE

Nelson Mandela was released from prison on 11 February 1990 when my boy Francis was three weeks old. When Francis was about a year old, I had a dream that I took him to meet Nelson Mandela. Upon waking, I wondered about this dream. What did it signify? To be sure, I would love to have my boy talk to such a stand-up freedom fighter, but why this particular confluence? Was it just a matter of parity with his older sister, whom I had taken to meet Sun Ra at a similarly early age?

And then it all came to me in a flash of insight. If Nelson Mandela was half-white, bald-headed and only two feet tall, he would look just like my Francis.

"DADDY, WHAT YOU ARE WEARING IS NOT NICE."

At an early age, SuperNova Yerakina was already quite a willful child. On occasion she could even be rather bossy. On her fifth birthday, I was sitting in the living room, waiting for the party guests to start arriving, when she came and stood beside me. She came right to the point. "Daddy, what you are wearing is not nice. You go and change." I was so paralyzed between surprise and amusement that I could think of no course of action except to do as she said.

WAITING FOR BROTHER BRET

When we moved to Trinidad in 1991, I had had been through two or three hurricanes in the Philippines and one in Europe. However, I had never actually experienced one personally, outside and aware of what was happening. Each time I had noticed a great deal of wind and rain (not in the chinese sense) in the nighttime and had awakened to find the world littered with fallen trees and masses of standing water, but I had slept through the main event.

With the approach of tropical storm Bret in August 1993, I saw my opportunity. He was expected to hit us in the early nighttime, so a bit after dusk I went outside to wait for him. Every now and then I would see dark clouds come boiling over the Northern Range and call into the house "It's happening", but it was always a false alarm. I finally got tired of waiting for Bret and went to bed.

As it happened, he hardly touched either Tobago or Trinidad. Rather, he ran through the strait between the two islands and ravaged the north coast of Venezuela of Venezuela, where he caused about 200 deaths.

A HARANGUE AGAINST SODA POP

One of my delights on immigrating to Trinidad was the public speeches in Woodford Square in downtown Pain of Sport. I don't refer to the staged events, scheduled and with official permission, but to the informal presentations that adorn the area around the big blackboard. It was there that I had a close call during my first year in Trinidad.

There was one old lad who commonly spoke on nutritional matters. I heard him a number of times and on one of these I thought he spoke uncommonly well. (I don't suggest that his nutritional theories were at all convincing, just that it was a pleasure to hear him hold forth, rather like listening to John Diefenbaker.) Over at the side a man was selling home-made soft drinks from a cart, and I was getting bit thirsty. I walked over to the vendor, thinking to get an additional bottle, which I would place on the ground in front of the speaker for whenever it pleased him to take refreshment.

And just at that moment, he launched into a tirade against the evils of carbonation and sugar. If that had come just 30 seconds later, the bottle would already have been at his feet, and I would have laid a really big egg.

A RASTAFARIAN'S BEAUTIFUL HARANGUE

Another occasional speaker in Woodford Square in those days was a scrawny old coot in a red robe. He would hold forth on his religious views, which were written in point form on a big wooden poster that he set in front of him. He wasn't an exceptional speaker, but his appearance was so wonderfully loony that I like to listen to him.

Now, in Woodford Square it would be a serious breach of etiquette to shout down a speaker, no matter how agitated one gets, and I have only once heard anyone intrude to such an extent that the speaker could not continue. (The speaker, incidentally, was Morgan Job, who handled it very well. He simply told the people that those who wished to hear his interruptor should remain here, while he would continue his discourse over there. He then walked several meters away, taking the whole crowd with him.) It is, however, perfectly permissible to heckle or interpose questions, as often happens.

On the occasion in question, a listener raised a question for the old lad in the red robe. The robe pretended to address the question, but in fact he slipped away from it. I waited a couple of minutes, and when he persisted in his evasion I interrupted. "Excuse me, but I don't believe you have answered the brother's question." And I posed the question in such a way that it could not be mistaken. The robe slipped away again, and we didn't bother trying to pin him down.

Very shortly afterward, however, a young Rastafarian broke in with a most beautiful harangue. The earlier question had been about discrepancies in the gospels, but this brother took it a fundamental step further. He said that, even in the absence of such discrepancies, the gospels were the written word and thus removed from the true source, the spoken word.

And the scales fell from my eyes. For the first time, I saw the primacy of the spoken word as a central, rock-bottom feature of traditional african religion, in radical contrast to the judeo-christian-muslim tradition. It suddenly made sense that the heart of the vaudou experience, for example, must be what Jean Price-Mars calls "the crisis of possession".

And, as he was holding forth, his little son was looking up at him in rapt admiration, and I thought "Isn't this marvelous? This man is a hero to his little boy."

DID ALEXANDER FOUND ALEXANDRIA?

One of the great joys of life in Trinidad is that the barriers between the various racial/ethnic groups are not taken nearly as seriously as in many other places. I have been a believer in black power and pan-africanism since my teenage years and have been in a fair number of civil-rights and anti-apartheid demonstrations. However, as long as I lived in North America I rarely got close to the real discussions of such matters. My solidarity was welcome, but I remained an outsider to the cause and its wellsprings. In Trinidad, I found that it didn't much matter how pale I was. I was welcome to reason and debate as long as I talked sense. This was especially impressed upon me one day in Woodford Square.

I came upon a knot of men in loud, earnest black-nationalist debate. Each side had a tattered book of african history, and they were arguing with much vigour about whether Alexander the Great had founded Alexandria. After a bit, I saw that they were talking at cross purposes, hung up on a question of definition. "Excuse me, brethren" I broke in. They stopped talking and turned to me, so I continued. "The problem, it seems to me, is what you mean by 'founded'. If you are asking whether Alexander went there and supervised the earthworks, then I believe the answer is no. As far as I know, Alexander never set foot in Egypt. But, if you are asking whether he drew up the plans and gave the order, then, I believe the answer is yes. So, what do you mean by 'founded?'" (It would have been nothing but mischief to ask which of several Alexandrias it was about; we all knew which one they had in mind.)

And they were delighted. I had cut through the problem and allowed them to proceed to what they really wanted to debate, which was whether the Greeks founded Alexandria from scratch or simply usurped an existing african city. For the next few minutes, some of them kept glancing in my direction, waiting for a further intervention, but I had no idea what the truth of the matter was and kept quiet.

AN ABRUPT FALL FROM GRACE

It is easy to be a hero to one's children when they are young, but such a status rests on no very secure basis. When my little girl was introduced to one of our neighbours, the first thing she said was "My daddy is the greatest." Then, just a week later, I was explaining something to her, and she looked at me disdainfully and said "You think you know everything."

MUGGER OFF

Muggers, like predators, are not interested in the challenge of a hard struggle. They seek out those who look weak, down-hearted or just too tired to put up a fight. If you are ever walking through an area late at night that may be mugger-infested, be sure to look strong and confident, as if you are just itching to fight somebody. Then you are much less likely to present an attractive target.

Late one night I turned off the Eastern Main Road in St Augustine onto a dark side road. I wouldn't say I was tired, nor do I appear especially weak, but in other respects I must have seemed like a very suitable subject for a mugging. A middle-aged white man with a brief case who just happened on that particular day to be wearing a white dress shirt.

I had only walked a little way up the side road when I heard a running behind me and the command "Hold it right there." Turning, I saw three young men approaching fast, and it was instantly apparent what was happening. Then next thing I knew, I was running not from them but toward them, swinging my briefcase at their heads and yelling unkind and almost certainly inaccurate things about their relationships with their mothers. They stopped right in their tracks with a look of astonishment. One of them was pointing something at me that he evidently thought was a gun, but it was too dark to be sure, and I wasn't about to stop. My blood was up.

I ran straight through them and on to the main road, where it was easy to make my escape, while they remained rooted to the spot. Later, upon reflection, I wondered that I hadn't even stopped to think about it, just ran at them in a rage. I guess I was just really pissed off that they took me for a patsy.

COCA ON THE BACKROADS

I spent the month of December 1993 in Argentina, my first time south of the Equator. The greater part of the month I was in the andean provinces of the northwest, where I first encountered coca leaves. In Bolivia and Perú, just about everybody chews coca or drinks the tea at least occasionally, but in Argentina it seemed much less common, and I had been there more than a week before I was even aware of it.

I was walking past a little corner grocery store in the province of Salta when I noticed "COCA" in big letters on the blackboard outside. Curious, I went inside and asked the proprietor whether that was short for Coca-Cola or referred to the leaves. He told me it was the leaves and showed me packages, 25 g for the equivalent of US\$1 (surprisingly expensive, as I later learned in Perú). So, I got a couple of packages and became a daily chewer.

Coca of course contains cocaine, although in minute amounts, and I never got any perceptible buzz from it. Still, it is a great and ethnic pleasure to be barreling down the backroads in the Andes toward a field site, with hopes of novel specimens in one's mind and a wad of coca in one's cheek.

YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE WHAT GOES ON IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

On those (infrequent) occasions that I attend religious services, the feature of greatest interest to me is usually the sermon. It is here that the preacher tells us explicitly what she/he considers to be true and important. Still, in some churches the sermon isn't necessarily the main event.

Occasionally on a Sunday morning, I used to stop by the Pentecostal Church in Tunapuna. Their services go on for hours, and the faithful are not expected to be there from start to finish. People are entering and leaving all the time. The pace and tone change throughout the morning, so that I imagine some deliberately time their presence for the part that suits them.

On one particular morning, I arrived as the choir was getting the congregation heated up. It was much like being inside a maxi-taxi, except that instead of "Wine wine jam jam" it was "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord". Then, having gotten everyone into the right mood, the choir slid into something slow and earnest. They would sing a verse, and the congregation would respond ever so slowly "Nothing I desire compares with you."

Now, it is my conviction that women look their best when they get ready for church. I am aware of H.L. Mencken's dictum that "Women turn to God when the Devil no longer wants anything to do with them", which is undoubtedly true of some churches, but not for the Pentecostal Church and some others. Some men find women in Carnival costumes stimulating, but I have always found them distinctly un-sexy. Women give their appearance a great deal of attention when preparing for church and very often achieve a state that can best be described as jaw-dropping beautiful.

On the occasion in question, the "Nothing I desire compares with you" refrain was ever so soulful, and half of those singing it were looking ever so fine, if you see what I mean. In particular, standing right near me was a stone fox, and when she sang "Nothing I desire compares with you" her face was glowing. With every chorus, she leaned forward yearningly. "Nothing I desire compares with you." I'm quite sure that I wasn't the only brother in that congregation who imagined that she was singing to him, not to Jesus.

Meanwhile, a painted old doll nearby was definitely getting into the spirit of it. She walked back and forth in the aisle, intoning low but fervently "Oh, Jesus. Oh, Jesus. Nothing satisfies like Jesus!" The air was so thick with sexual transference that you could have cut it with a knife.

I have to tell you, those services in the Pentecostal Church are enough to make Dr Freud want to cross his legs.

"WHY THE BROTHERS ARE SELLING PEANUTS?"

Some of the rastfarian brothers in Trinidad are to be met selling roasted peanuts in the streets. When he was just a little lad, Francis was very fond of these, so if we were walking along and found ourselves approaching a vendor I would give him a dollar and he would get himself a bag of nuts.

One day he asked me "Why the brothers are selling peanuts?" That struck me as a good question, so on the next such occasion I put it to the vendor. His response was enlightening. They much preferred to be self-employed, and this is something they can do on their own. If he had wanted to put the matter strongly, he might have said that they considered it demeaning to work for wages for someone else.

JUST TWO VIALS OF SALT

Immigration officials are obliged to inspect everyone who comes through the line, but Customs officers pick and choose. I am convinced that they rely mainly on profile. This makes sense, because after a year or two they have probably seen just about everything and learned who fits one or another profile.

The first time I ever went to St Lucia was with the Trinidad & Tobago Field Naturalists' Club in 1994. After the organized trip, a few of us stayed on for several days in a house on the beach. One day Dan Jaggernaut, who managed our kitchen, told me we were out of salt and asked me to go to the store for some more. Now, my parents were with Gandhi in India, and I had heard stories of the people going down to the sea to boil off their own salt in the salt-tax revolt. That had stirred the imagination, and besides, I was brought up to be frugal. So, I got a big pot of sea water and cooked it down for the salt. (Truth to tell, it probably cost more in cooking gas than the salt would have cost at the store, but never mind that.)

The time came to leave St Lucia, and we still had some of the salt. It would be a shame to discard something that I had made, myself, and besides, I was brought up to be frugal. So, I put the salt into a couple of clear-plastic vials and took them with me. At Customs in Piarco I cracked open my bag for the officer. The two vials were sitting right there on top of everything. He looked in the bag and said "Good. Proceed."

Now, a prudent person would have closed the bag and walked on, but I had to wonder. "Officer" I asked, "aren't you just a bit curious about those two vials of white powder?"

"What are they?"

"Salt."

"Very good. Proceed."

"Well, officer" I persisted, "I certainly don't mean to be telling you your job, but are you just going to take my word for it?"

I thought of insisting that he open them and taste the salt, but what for? He was so utterly un-interested in me.

HOW I GOT TO BE SO RADA

In 1993 one of the Trinidad newspapers had a feature article on the Hubono (high priest) of the Rada Community in Belmont, Pain of Sport. That caught my interest, so soon afterward I went looking for him. By and by, I was directed to a particular house on a hillside, went up to the porch and rang the doorbell.

It was answered by the Hubono, Sedley Antoine, himself. I introduced myself, explained that I had an interest in traditional african religions, and asked if anything was coming up soon that someone like me might attend. The timing was excellent. Rada ceremonies center around the annual Thanksgiving celebrations early in the year. Thanksgiving was just a couple of weeks away, and I was cordially invited.

The early morning ceremony at the traditional rada yard positively knocked me out. What I had not realized was that the Rada people came from Benin (Dahomey) and that their religion is the one from which Vaudou is derived. In Benin today, it is known as Vaudou and is a major, respected practice. I had been able to enter the Rada religion just by knocking on a door and expressing an interest. For a comparable entry in Haiti, I would likely have had to reside in a village for many months or at least been familiar with a facilitating vaudouisant.

I don't know to what extent the adepts were vetting me, but I evidently passed the test on that first occasion. In conversation after the ceremony, the Hubono's brother, Patrick Antoine, prefaced a comment with "Now that you are one of us ...", and as I was taking my leave the Hubono hoped that I would be back for the next ceremony that night. That was the first I knew of the second phase of Thanksgiving, and by saying that he plainly endorsed his brother's remark.

I have been Rada ever since. Just a few years after that first encounter, the Hubono announced to the community that I was to be regarded as his son. He didn't ask me about it in advance. He didn't have to. And if anyone has ever questioned it, I didn't hear of it. To the end of their days, I addressed the elder Antoinnes as "Dad" and "Mom". And it is understood that when my time comes I will join them and a host of other ancestors in the Rada cemetery in Belmont.

At traditional african religious ceremonies -- whether Rada or allied -- I never manifest (enter into possession). It should probably happen sooner or later, but I am in no hurry, and I am not aware that I have ever come close. Sometimes, when we have long been clapping and ululating amid

the drumming, a certain feeling starts to ease over me, but I shake it off.

In christian practice, being entered by the Holy Spirit is regarded as something to be welcomed, and I know some in traditional african practice who evidently like to manifest. Most, however, seem reluctant, and I can see why. Being ridden by a deity really takes it out of one, and those who manifest often seem quite drained afterward.

In the morning phase of the rada Thanksgiving there are always blood sacrifices. A few chickens, some pigeons, and a male goat. Early in my association, the duty fell to me to manage the goat. This makes sense, as the other able-bodied brothers were otherwise engaged, mostly in drumming.

I should note that when one is closely involved in sacrificing a goat one should be prepared to get blood on oneself. It comes with the job. One year I had to go directly from morning Thanksgiving to the university for an 08:00 class. I changed my shirt, but I hadn't thought to bring a change of pants, so there was still a bit of blood spattered below the knees. Some of the students asked me about it, and I told them that I had been in Belmont in the early morning. Then, seeing that that could be misinterpreted -- some parts of Belmont are fairly rough -- I hastily explained that I hadn't been in a fight, just at a vaudou ceremony, where we had sacrificed a goat.

One muslim student looked at me in amazement tinged with horror, and I just couldn't resist. "You know" I told her, "polytheism is so cool." I'm sure she thinks to this day that I am in league with the Devil.

Another factor of note is that managing the goat is a rather demanding task. A full-grown male goat is a strong beast, and he is very definitely not interested in being sacrificed. It takes alertness and a firm hand to keep him under control, and sometimes I come away from it panting and quite worn out. I told the high priest last year that in future they should think of either getting a weaker goat or a younger man to handle him. In fact, I picked one young fellow to assist me last year, and if he stays with us I am going to ease him into taking over my job. After all, he will only get bigger and stronger as the next years pass, while I ... well, let's just say that I will be ready to retire.

FOUR WORDS FOR A HUMMINGBIRD

One thing about the money of tropical countries is that it tends to be both elegant and of little value. The first time I was in Jamaica, for example, I made a point of getting a quantity of nice, crisp \$2 bills, because they were colourful, well designed and had a fine portrait of Paul Bogle on them. And they were so low in value that I could give them to kids elsewhere as exotic bookmarks.

The Trinidad & Tobago penny is like that. It has a hermit hummingbird on it, and shiny new ones are plentiful, so I accumulate them to give away.

On my first visit to Venezuela many years ago I was walking across farmland in a rather remote part of the country and got thirsty. Stopping at a farmhouse, I asked for some water. The kids in the family gathered around, openly fascinated by me. I suppose they had never met a foreigner before. So I stood there imbibing and conversing, and I had an inspiration.

"Do these kids like birds?" I asked their mother. She allowed that they did, so I reached into my pocket and counted out four pennies before I pulled my hand out. Extending a coin to one kid, I said "For you I have a colibrí." To the next, "You get a tucusito." To another, "For you, a picaflor." And to the last, "And here is a zumpadora."

And just at that moment I realized what a lucky break I was having. There were four kids, and I knew only four words for "hummingbird". If there had been a fifth kids I would have had to repeat myself, which would have been uncool.

SITTING DOWN FOR THE POLICE

In 1995 the UWI students were in uproar over the racial-discriminatory policies of some of the nightclubs in Pain of Sport. The Guild of Students called for a mass protest, which marched through much of the campus. Looking over the crowd, I noticed that I seemed to be the only middle-aged person present. This was probably the first such demonstration for most of the students.

Now, a march like that is a show of strength. It is intended to get attention, put backbone into the people who are on our side, and intimidate the enemy. It should be loud, disciplined and should look as big as possible. When I noticed at one point that the march was much too bunched up, I figured it time to be a teacher. I went forward to the leaders and told them to spread it out, make it look bigger. There was room for improvement in the formation, too, but that requires more training, and I was pleased when some of the leaders went back to give the line some more dispersion.

At the junction near the Stockdale Building, we stopped to hear some speeches. We were blocking the road -- as was only right and proper -- when a police car came along, desiring to move through. The students started to move aside, which was certainly not right and proper. The police could damn well wait until we were good and ready to move. I figured it was time to go into teacher mode again, so I sat down in the middle of the road, my back disdainfully turned to the armed agents of the state.

There were plenty of journalists in attendance and, as I should have predicted, still and television cameras were instantly in my face. After all, how often on a black-power march does a middle-aged white man block the police? It wasn't exactly deep news, but it made for a striking image, and in the next news cycle I had my moment of fame.

Then, the speeches being over, the Guild president came over and suggested that it was time to move, so I might as well get up and let the police move along. Truth to tell, that was a relief, because if he hadn't given me that out I don't know what I would have done.

OF COOKING AND A FRANTIC LAWYER

One day, while I was still in the process of taking my distance from the second Mrs Starr, I phoned my lawyer. "Did you happen to see today's *Express*?" I asked her blandly. Her response was far from bland. She had damn near freaked out when she had seen me in the news, defying the police on a black power march, and had told me that I was positively to stay from all controversy until we had no more business with the court. "Starr!" she yelled, "What have you done?"

"So, you are telling me that you have not looked at page 12, is that right?" I asked, and she got even more frantic.

Then I told her that I had a cooking article in the paper, and I could hear the unamused teeth grinding over the line. After all, what's the use of having lawyers if you can't drive them to distraction every now and then?

BE CAREFUL WHAT WORDS YOU WEAR

Walking toward my building at the university one day, minding my own business, I came upon a student with a two-character chinese slogan on his baseball cap. 好色. Now, depending on how you want to pose it, that can either mean "ladies' man" or "ass bandit". I believe the second reading is much more common. "Young man, do you know what your hat says?" I asked him, and he allowed that he did not. So, I told him. Ass Bandit.

He kept his mouth shut, but he plainly didn't believe me. I have no idea why. Well, if they won't learn, what can you do?

"I'M GOING BACK TO AFRICA WHEN I DIE."

I like to step into lab sessions of other classes, in order to get a better idea of what the students have seen and done. Sometimes I ask questions about what they have in front of them, and occasionally the talk turns to something extracurricular. One day, for some reason, it turned to religion and fate, and one of the students challenged me: "So what happens when we die."

Without a moment's thought, my mouth said "Well, I don't know about you, but I'm going back to Africa when I die." And they looked at me. And I looked at myself. And in that moment I realized that I wasn't kidding.

THE WRONG LANGUAGE IN KENSCOFF

The status of creole languages in the West Indies is uneven and often ambivalent. I am told that almost everyone in St Lucia, Martinique and Dominica speaks French Creole, and I have heard it a great deal in St Lucia. I don't recall ever hearing it in Martinique, though, and seldom in Dominica.

When I first got to Haiti I was so ill-prepared that I didn't even know that most Haitians cannot speak French. I realized this very quickly, and with working-class people I took to speaking my basic French Creole as a fair facsimile of Haitian Creole, making changes over the next few days as I learned them. It wasn't pretty, but it worked well enough.

The status of Creole has improved a great deal in St Lucia in recent decades, so that it is no longer regarded as low-class. The same cannot be said of Haiti. I learned this the hard way. As a visitor at Quisqueya University, I had occasion to visit their field station at Kenscuff. This village up in the hills has the honour to have figured prominently in Jean Price-Mars's *Thus Spake Uncle*, the pioneering classic of haitian folklore. Wandering idly about the station, I came upon a young woman whom I took to one of the local workers, and I made some remark to her in Creole. She was, in fact, a university student and responded very frostily in French. It was as if she were saying "What? You think I'm uneducated and can't speak French?" There was no covering up that I had laid an egg.

A SPIDER INTERFERES WITH MY ACTION

The village of Fancy is at the northern end of the island of St Vincent in the Lesser Antilles. There is no perimeter road all the way around St Vincent, so that Fancy is really at the end of the line and has a definite remote feeling about it. For one thing, they speak the goddamnedest English I have ever heard. It seems to be about one third Yorkshire, one third Nigeria and the other third from the moon. I have spent a great deal of time in Fancy just listening to the people's speech patterns, with my ears hanging out.

In 1997 the distinguished american entomologist (and notorious ass bandit) Allan W. Hook and I spent a couple of weeks in Fancy. Over the course of the days we became friendly with a lady and her daughter. I have ungallantly forgotten the mother's name, but the daughter was called Katyann. How friendly? Well, Al and I had some quite definite ambitions in that department. In fact, we had agreed that if things went the way they should, then the mother was mine and the daughter was his.

One evening we were doing the gentlemanly thing and walking the ladies home, protecting them from guys like us. It was all very smooth and promising until I noticed a great big fishing spider (Pisauridae) by the side of the road. I went to pick it up, with a finger on either side of the abdomen, figuring it couldn't bit me in that grip. I was mistaken. The spider twisted around and bit me solidly in the end of one finger.

Well, I did exactly what you would do in those circumstances. I turned to Al and exclaimed "Hot damn! I've just received my first ever pisaurid bite." Al quizzed me about the strength and quality of the pain, and right there on the road we held an enthusiastic discussion of spider bites.

And then we looked up and saw the ladies. They were edging away from us, their expressions plainly showing that they thought we were dangerous lunatics. In that moment Al and I knew that things were not going to be as they ought between us and the two ladies. Not that night. Not ever.

A VERY FINE FIELD OF GANJA

For us entomologists, there was one consistently frustrating thing about Fancy. It was hard to get up into the good forest habitat high above the village, a problem that we never really solved. For one thing, the forest could only be reached by struggling through a stretch of miserable, tangling scrub, an exhausting and thoroughly unpleasant task.

For another thing, as one got up and away from the village the crops tended increasingly to be of an illegal nature. And many of the marijuana farmers led quite an outlaw existence, so that it could be dangerous for an unknown individual to approach their fields. It is always best in such places to be accompanied by a local person who is known to everyone, as a sort of badge of innocent intent, but even that may not be enough in the upper reaches.

On one particular walk, I was leading a column up a hillside far above the village when I rounded a corner and found myself suddenly in a field of tall, healthy marijuana plants, with a drying shed right ahead. I didn't give it a moment's thought, just turned around and ordered the column back down the hill. The others knew without asking what it was about, and we were soon at a safe distance.

As we later found out, we were personally acquainted with the farmer of that particular field, so that we were in no danger. Still, they tend not to label their fields with their names, so we didn't know that.

"YOU REASONABLE, MAN!"

Wandering the back streets of Kingstown before getting on the boat back to Trinidad, Al & I came upon a rastafarian handicrafts vendor. We greeted him, and I made it plain right away that we were not there for business, just being sociable. He seemed fine with that, so we were pleased to converse about him and his work.

I noticed a number of calabashes on which he had carved handsome pictures, including some recognizable St Vincent landscapes. When I asked him about these, he told me that was his homeland. "Excuse me" I said, going into the reasoning mode that is so familiar to all Rastafarians, "but I believe your homeland is Ethiopia, and St Vincent is just a part of Babylon."

To this, he responded that Ethiopia is not, strictly speaking, a physical place, and that one could be there while remaining physically in St Vincent. "Excuse me" I countered, "are you telling that Marcus Mosiah Garvey was mistaken when he founded the Black Star Line specifically in order to transport all african people physically back to Ethiopia?"

And in that moment the brother saw that he had been bested. We had a couple more rounds of reasoning before Al & I saluted him and walked away, but he had pretty much conceded that I had a point about his idyllic calabashes. And, as we walked on, he called after me "You reasonable, man!" I explained to Al that he wasn't saying I was not a hard-ass, rather that I was that rarity of his experience, a white man with whom he could reason.

A HAITIAN LADY IS NOT AMAZED

In the summer of 1990, when Iain Main & I were mapping the northern limits of *Polistes* wasps in eastern Canada, we drove far up the Gatineau Valley of Québec, stopping at farm houses and barns to look for nests. Along the highway outside of Kazabazua we noticed an establishment called La Binerie, advertising sand-baked beans. That sounded promising, so we pulled in and were pleased to take it easy and partake for a while.

We were also pleased to shoot the breeze with the proprietors, a very congenial couple whose name I very much regret having forgotten. The husband was a regular Habitant, but his wife was from Haiti.

Years later, I took a leisurely drive up that way and was blessed with a healthy appetite upon reaching La Binerie. In the intervening years I had been to Haiti and learned to stumble by in Haitian Creole, so upon entering the establishment I greeted the lady heartily with "Bonjou, Madamn. S'ak pase?" That should have been enough to flabbergast her, don't you think, but she acted as if it was an everyday occurrence for a white man to walk into the place right there in the canadian backlands and speak Haitian. We had some wonderful conversation, especially after she learned that I had been to her home town of Jacmel, but I couldn't shake the disappointment that she had failed to be suitably amazed.

MAMAGAY KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

Mamagay is an important concept in west-indian social life. In its strict meaning, it refers to flattery laid on thick, but more broadly it can mean just about any kind of generously applied goosegrease. When my old Georgia classmate, Al Hook, came to do his first sabbatical with us, I heard him remark after a few weeks that he now understood why the Starr felt so much at home in Trinidad. It was a place where there was a ready-made appreciation for his constant upwellings of mamagay. That was rather enlightening, actually.

My third wife had a fundamental misunderstanding that I was never able to overcome. I would be laying the flattery on with a trowel, and she would accuse me of mamagaying her. "But, Baby" I would protest, "this is true, sincere mamagay." Somehow, she could never catch up with the basic truth that mamagay could be true and sincere, so in time we had to part company.

I was in Bogotá, attending the annual meetings of the Entomological Society of Colombia, with a graduate student and my two kids many years ago. One morning we were in the diner attached to our little hotel, having breakfast. The waitress came over and poured me a cup of coffee. Thank you very much. Then she plunked down a container of sugar. "That's very kind, my dear" I told her, "but no thanks. However, perhaps I could get some milk." And then my mouth kept talking. "Normally I like things that are black and sweet, you see, but this is an exception."

She looked behind her, I followed her gaze, and it was plain that the black cook had overheard. As far as I could tell, she was blushing. And in that moment, I realized that for the first time in my life I had committed mamagay in Spanish.

PLAYING SOCCER, BUT GINGERLY

One Friday late afternoon, a group of students passed me on their way to their weekly soccer game. "Sir, why don't you come and play?" one of them asked. I excused myself, on the grounds that I had no proper soccer shoes, and told them I would join them next week.

That weekend I got the first real soccer shoes I had ever owned. We played the game in high school, but I had to make do with ordinary running shoes, as the real thing was beyond my means. And I did go out and play the next Friday.

The following Friday, I was out there playing again. Now, as a teenager I was a competent but undistinguished player, and as far as I can tell I am about the same now as I was then. The difference is that now, if I get injured or strained, it takes much longer to recover. On that second occasion, one of the students noticed that I was moving rather carefully, almost gingerly, and asked me what was wrong. I had to tell them that I had stopped playing just about the time they were born.

UTTER ACRIMONY IN FRENCH CREOLE

Up until a couple of generations ago, French Creole was a lingua franca in Trinidad. Today, a great many creole expressions enrich daily life, but as loan words into English. Hardly anyone speaks the language.

I was at the cashier in a small supermarket when a scrawny little old guy came in and was beleaguering the management about something. The management told him to go away and come back when he was sober. The old guy didn't like that and got abusive, so the management just turned away and ignored him. I thought the situation called for something a little more active, so I took to haranguing the abusive one in (sort of) Italian. Mostly nonsense -- Zucchini zabaglione fornicazione dei paparazzi -- and an exaggerated apology that none of us could speak English, for which we begged his lordship's pardon.

After a moment's puzzlement, the old guy took to haranguing me in French Creole, and right there in the supermarket we got into a very uneven contest of abuse. Uneven, because I was limited to such mild things as "Ou pa sav ki sa ou di", "Mwen pa kwè tou sa-a, a vwè di", and the like, while he had plenty of grown-up invective at his disposal. It was great fun, especially as the others in the store found it all so bewildering. The management even asked me later what language we had been speaking.

I very much regretted performing so poorly, so I have asked Anthea George for a glossary of really choice creole insults. That was years ago, and she has yet to oblige me. Most likely, she is taking her time, in the interest of completeness and strict accuracy.

SWIMMING WITH PIRANHAS

The Goeldi Museum in Belém, Brazil has a field station on the banks of the Caxiuanã River, a blackwater tributary of the Amazon. In 2000 my son Francis & I spent a pleasant and productive week there with Mild Bill Overall. Much of the fun was swimming in the river, which Francis & I did at least once a day. On the first day it jumped into my mind that the sinus allergy that had restricted my fresh-water swimming for the last 40 years might not apply to black waters, so I didn't bother to hold my nose, as an experiment. To my delight, I had no problem.

After about three days, Mild Bill casually mentioned to us that there were plenty of piranhas in the Caxiuanã. He was of course telling the truth, but he also did it for effect. And, after our consternation, he explained that the popular image of piranhas was grossly distorted, that under most circumstances they subsisted mainly on fruit. He's such a rascal.

NO SAXOPHONE LAUGHS IN AFRICA

In my youth I had hardly any contact with black music and was entirely clueless about jazz. Then I read Frank Kofsky's *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* and decided that, as a white radical, I should learn to dig jazz. That sounds like an unfeeling way to approach it, but it really happened that way. If one had asked me in those days whether it was programmatically correct that I should listen to and appreciate hot jazz, I would have gravely responded in the affirmative. Fortunately, it turned out to be no task at all, something that came quite naturally once I gave it a listen.

One of Kofsky's theses was that the sound of modern jazz was the sound of the ghetto, that it mimicked ghetto speech patterns. He said that this was especially true of the saxophone and accounted for that instrument's pre-eminence in jazz. I believed Kofsky's thesis, but I didn't feel it, until one day in a laundromat in Georgia. Two women were talking around a corner and out of sight of me, when one of them evidently said something funny. The other let forth this long, magnificent laugh that came right from the middle of her being, and in that instant I heard a saxophone.

Ever since, that distinctive laugh of black women has been known as the saxophone laugh. My third wife has two different laughs. She has her tinkling-brook laugh, when she is delicately amused by something, and the saxophone laugh, when the amusement shakes her to the core.

So it was that I went to Africa for the first time in 2001 with a number of grand expectations. I would see plenty of fabulous fabrics and amazing asses, for example, I was certainly going to hear major saxophone laughs. The fabrics and asses were just as I imagined, but to my consternation I heard no saxophone laughs. Not once in three months in West Africa. I still don't understand it, but the saxophone laugh appears to be the exclusive property of black women in the western hemisphere.

HOW BROTHER NICENESS GOT HIS NAME

For a long time we had no regular public transport up and down the Caura Valley. Then the government assigned a rural-bus route, which we have had ever since. I wouldn't say it is regular public transport, far from it, but it runs many days, and not just when an election is approaching.

One afternoon, soon after the route was established, I was on the bus waiting for the driver to crank it up and take us up the valley. The driver got on and noticed that the clasp that holds the door open had come apart and needed some attention. A Rastafarian, whom I had often seen up our valley but didn't exactly know, stepped over to see about it. After fiddling with the apparatus and fashioning a knot in some twine he got it to working. Then he stepped back, smiled at his handiwork and, in an intimate voice that was close to a whisper, pronounced judgement: "Niceness". That knocked me out. It was a soulful one-word poem. Niceness.

It put me in mind of an incident in which my hero, Jean-Henri Fabre (1823-1915) was showing a cabinet minister around his village in the south of France. The minister was addressed in the local provençal dialect by an elderly peasant woman, who ended her exhortation with "Pécaïre". I have forgotten what this means, but Fabre explained that it is a one-word poem of considerable emotional force.

In my youth in Ottawa, the boys had a comparably heartfelt expression that was really very funny, although I didn't realize it until much later. As an expression of awestruck admiration (e.g. when one of the boys showed us his very nifty new jackknife), one might say "Oh, s-e-e-e-e-x." I don't believe any of us knew at that time what "sex" meant. It was just something one uttered in the face of the marvelous.

So, right there on the spot I named the Rastafarian "Brother Niceness". We have since become the very best of friends, and he is similarly cherished by my kids. It is because of him that my daughter, SuperNova, is now known within the family as Sistah. They were down here on a visit not long after Niceness got his name. The three of us were waiting for the rural bus down the valley one morning when he came along in his pickup truck. Of course, we were pleased to take a ride with him. Nova sat beside Niceness, and he got to explaining something to her, addressing her very seriously as "Sistah". She thought that was unutterably cool, to be so addressed by a genuine Rastafarian.

When she got back to Toronto she sent me an e-mail, in which she

explained her admiration for Brother Niceness and characterized him as positively one of the coolest people in Trinidad. I printed it and carried it with me for when I would next encounter him. That wasn't for about a week, but one morning I was walking on the road when he came driving along with a bunch of others in his truck. I stepped out boldly and called for him to stop. I whipped out the e-mail and, rather than simply handing it to him to read later, I declaimed it to the whole assembly right then and there. After all, I figured, they might as well be aware that Brother Niceness's legend was spreading over the Earth.

Niceness is a family man. He and his wife have several kids and probably an equal number of grandchildren. He explained to me one day that he would be happy to have plenty more grandchildren, "because I like the smell of babies too bad." I thought that sounded like as good a reason as any to be fruitful and multiply.

With the name Brother Niceness established, it occurred to me that his wife required a similarly suitable name. After wrestling with the question, I named her Sister Serenity and so informed her. She had that name for a year or two, and then one day she informed me that she had passed the name to her new granddaughter. Baby Serenity. She hadn't asked me about it, and she didn't have to. It was her name to do with as she pleased. Still, it did raise the problem of bestowing a new name.

Again, I wrestled with the question, and after due consideration I renamed her Sister Harmony. That remains her name to this day, although next year they might have a new baby granddaughter, and I will have to start again. That could happen, you know, because they like the smell of babies too bad.

CULTURE SHOCK ON THE HIGHWAY

One fine day I stopped by the taxi stand just off Independence Square in Pain of Sport for a ride to St Augustine. It was a slow time of day, so we had to wait for the taxi to fill up before hitting the road. As we waited, the driver and I got to shooting the breeze about things in general. Somehow it came up that I estimated that I would live about another 32 years if I took care of myself and didn't step in front of an buses.

We got a full load and hit the road. I was sitting up front with the driver, and the conversation turned to aspirations. He asked me what I hoped to accomplish in the remaining 32 years, and that was when I got careless. "For one thing," I said "I would really like to run before the bulls in Pamplona."

And he exploded. "Man, you sure is a white man" he exclaimed, and he didn't mean it as a compliment. "Sure, we black people will take risks, but only when there's a real reason for it. We don't go out and do crazy dangerous things just for so." He kept on in this vein for a bit longer and then addressed the fellows in the back seat, "Are you with me on this, brothers?" And two of them were, with conviction.

So there I sat, having major culture shock in a car roaring up the highway, wondering if maybe I shouldn't keep my mouth shut if I'm going to be so very white.

FRANCIS REASONS WITH THE BROTHERS

I am very much interested in my kids acquiring a familiarity with cultural diversity. Accordingly, I have been delighted that they relate so well to Brother Niceness and the other Rastafarians. On one of their visits to Trinidad, I threw an afternoon barbecue, to which I invited Brother Niceness. I was very pleased that he not only came but took the initiative to bring another of the Tumbasson farmers, Brother Silent (as he was still known at that time; he has since then become more loquacious, so I have renamed him Brother Cogent).

We were all standing around on the patio, eating and drinking and speaking of all manner of things, when Brothers Niceness and Silent figured it was time to roll one. They rolled a spliff, fired it up, and proceeded to partake of that particular sacrament. Francis observed this for a minute or two and then raised the question of whether this was altogether a good idea. His argument centered on the legality of it, which was certainly pretty weak, even for a 12-year-old, but the brothers did not disdain to engage the question and present counter-arguments. As the talk went back and forth, my paternal heart swelled with pride. My boy Francis was reasoning with genuine Rastafarians.

To be sure, his reasoning was not on a very high level. It was rather mechanical, and after a while it got downright circular. After it had been played out and Francis showed no sign of giving it a rest, Brother Niceness got just a bit exasperated. "We have to smoke we damn ting" he declared with finality, and that was that.

I CAN CLEARLY SEE YOU'RE NUTS

I have dreadful work habits. In particular, I am an inexcusable procrastinator. Having been raised as a Protestant, I was aware of this personal shortcoming at an early age, and over the decades I have made numerous attempts to rectify it, to little effect. The best I have achieved is some modest success with Robert Benchley's approach of pretending that I should be doing something else, so that I perversely attend to the real task as a diversion. One would not like to claim that this method works very well, but one does what one can.

There came a time when I got really exasperated with myself on just this account. With no excuse whatsoever, I had wasted several days in not attending to a paper that my long-suffering editor was awaiting. I had a particular job to do, perfectly within my capabilities, and I just put it off and off and off, letting myself get distracted by almost anything.

So I thought "This is ridiculous. It's pathological." And it occurred to me that our health-insurance plan covered psychiatric treatment. "Sure" I told myself, "psychiatry is for people with serious mental problems, like delusions and drug addiction, and this is nothing but some persistently sloppy habits, but it's not healthy, and you're going to get your head examined."

So I made an appointment to see a psychiatrist at the university's medical school at 15:30 the next day. I arrived a few minutes early and checked in with the receptionist. Dr Hutchinson wasn't there right then, but she would phone him and tell him I was there. Fine. I sat down in the waiting room, where there was a woman already waiting. She chattered away on her cellular phone, but other than that she appeared to have her wits about her, so I didn't really pay her any attention. 15:30 passed, and it got to be 15:40. The receptionist came out and told the woman that Dr Hutchinson was on his way to see her, and then she told me that I would be next.

15:45 came, and the woman was called in, while I just sat there, waiting for 15:30 to occur. Finally it was 16:00, and I got to examining the situation. I had come to see the psychiatrist about a problem of chronic procrastination, and this silly twit wasn't even in the building when it was time to meet me. Then 15 minutes after he was supposed to have started with me he finally got to the person before me. Did this really sound like somebody who could help me with my problem? It didn't seem so. I got up, told the receptionist I was in the wrong place, and walked out.

So I never did find out if I was crazy.

THE ART OF BEING POWER-2-LARGE

The quadrennial congress of the International Union for the Study of Social Insects (IUSSI) in Sapporo, Japan in 2002 was a great success. Among other things, I arranged that the members of evening symposium that I had organized should go out to supper afterward. At my request, my old friend Sôichi Yamane selected a suitable venue and invited a few Japanese colleagues to join us. Among these latter, to our delight, were both the president and vice-president of the congress.

At an affair such as that, one does not look over a menu. Sôichi had arranged all that in advance with the management, and all the rest of us had to do was partake of what was set before us, while we chatted away in the greatest conviviality. As the leader, I had come prepared with some toasts and presents for Sôichi, President Tadao Matsumoto and a couple of other luminaries.

The congress vice-president, Kazuki Tsuji, is sometimes rather un-Japanese in his outspokenness. At one point, he had some news for us. Pointing to one of the dishes that we had been eating, Kazuki asked if we knew what it was. We did not. Whale meat.

You see what the clever guy had done. He was well aware that Westerners -- especially biologists -- frown on the hunting of whales, so that if we had known in advance what it was we would have felt obliged to spurn it. However, he must also have figured that we would be curious and so would be happy to try it if we could do so innocently. So he waited until we had all had some. I don't know about the other foreigners, but Kazuki was quite right about me.

Later in the congress we had a half-day designated for excursions. Sôichi and a couple of Japanese colleagues arranged a trip into the countryside for the wasp specialists among us. That was pleasant and interesting, although I don't recall that any of us encountered anything special. On the way back, it was arranged that we would stop at a sushi place for lunch. This was of a type that I had not seen before, in which the chef puts the dishes as he prepares them onto a conveyor belt that rotates around him. The diners sit at a circular table and take dishes that they want off the belt. The price is indicated by the colour of the plate, and at the end each diner's bill is calculated from the stack of empty plates before him.

As we came in, I glanced at the hand-written daily menu on the wall and noticed an item whose three characters (力二大) literally meant "power

two large". Of course, it was just a phonetic device to name a dish that had nothing to do with power, two and large, but the name in English amused me. After we had been dining for a while, I asked Junichi Kojima what power-2-large was, and to judge by his description it wasn't anything that had yet come around the belt. I wanted some. I asked the other foreigners, and four of them were game to try it, so I wrote "power two large" on a slip of paper and handed it to the chef, holding up five fingers. The consensus, I believe, was that it was okay.

That's how I came by my entomological rap name, Power-2-Large.

"WHY DON'T I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?"

My friend Gerard moved into the Caura Valley a couple of years after I did. I saw him around occasionally, a short little middle-aged red fellow, but it was some weeks or months before I ever spoke with him. That happened on a day that I rode the rural bus down in the morning and found in the afternoon that the bus had stopped working. I looked around for another way to get home and noticed a familiar truck parked outside a little bar up the road, so I went over to see if there was a ride to be had. There was. In the bar were Gerard and his co-worker Taj. If Taj was driving, I figured, I was glad to see that they were having a drink first, because I won't ride with him when he's sober. As the village drunkard, Taj has very little experience with sobriety, and I don't trust him to keep it on the road unless he's at least a bit drunk.

So, I was sitting there having a beer with the guys and asked Gerard about himself. He told me he was a Trinidadian who had just recently returned after some years in Germany. Right away I switched to speaking German to him, and it had the desired amusing/amazing effect. We sat there, hoisting our beers and speaking German, a very convivial scene.

But then I noticed that Taj looked troubled. I was about to ask him what the problem was when he shook his head vigorously, as if trying to shake off an inner haze and shouted "Why don't I understand what you two are saying?" That's when I knew Taj was fit to drive, because he was so damn drunk he didn't even recognize that Gerard and I were speaking a different language.

ARGUING THE LAW IN TUNAPUNA

I once got a traffic ticket in Tunapuna, for parking my motorcycle right by a "No parking" sign in front of the market. That part of the case was plain enough, but what struck me was that there was a whole line of vehicles parked in front of the market, and they weren't getting tickets. Furthermore, I had gone past there many times, and at least on any market day there were plenty of unticketed vehicles in the same place, just down the road from the Tunapuna police station.

Obviously, I was going to contest the charge. So, I gathered my evidence -- photographs of that same no-parking stretch at the same time every day for two weeks prior to trial, always with a plethora of unticketed vehicles -- got advice on the proper way to present it in court, and arrived to do battle.

My case was called, I stepped up, obtained the court's leave to represent myself, and pled not guilty. I then drew the court's attention to a detail. The alleged violation had taken place in November 2003. The court date on the citation was given as 21 March, but also for 2003. "If it please the court, that date had already passed, so I took the liberty of appearing on the next available March 21st" I intoned with great sobriety.

Now, the magistrate was a bald-headed old lad with the severe demeanour of a hanging judge, but he actually smiled at this. I had seen that he was fed up with lawyers burdening the court with picky little objections that had nothing to do with the substance, just in the hope of gaining some petty advantage, and here was someone saying that the citation had a rather glaring discrepancy, but that didn't matter, as the intent was clear. And for another thing, it was pretty funny, although I knew better than to get really hilarious in his courtroom.

Then we hit a snag. The arresting officer was not present. The prosecutor was at a loss, looking decidedly awkward, and the judge was plainly peeved. "What are we going to do about this?" he wondered out loud. I was afraid he would just dismiss the charge, so I hastily intervened, pointing out that we didn't know why the officer had not appeared, it might be for a perfectly legitimate reason, and moving for a one-week adjournment. The judge looked surprised, but granted my motion, and that was that for the day.

This requires some explanation. I was representing myself for two reasons. I had seen the lawyers in the Tunapuna Magistrate's Court, and I was pretty sure I could do at least as well, while saving some money. More

importantly, the court recorder was damn cute. I figured that after she had seen some of my moves, I might find an opportunity to suggest that we get acquainted in a less formal context, if you see what I mean. That was why I moved for an adjournment. I was going to examine myself, cross-examine the arresting officer, present evidence, if it please the court, maybe even throw in an objection or two, right there in front of her admiring eyes. For that, I needed my day in court.

So, the new date rolled around, and I was there. The judge asked if I was ready to proceed. I was tempted to say "Your Honour, I was born ready", but I knew that wouldn't go down well, so I just said "Yes, sir." And was the prosecutor ready to proceed? Uh, well, the arresting officer was once again absent, so no, he was not ready.

And that was where I slipped up. In the moment of silence that followed this disclosure, I should have moved for a second adjournment, but I didn't, and before I could gather my wits the judge dismissed the charge. What was I supposed to do? Object? I just had to stifle my ire, mutter "Much obliged, Your Honour" and walk out.

So, I never did get to strut my stuff in front of the cute court recorder. And, worse still, I never found out if I was guilty.

THE GODFATHER STEPS UP FOR THE MONK

Ricardo Pillai is well known to everyone up the Caura Valley. He is admired as a good worker and one who will always come to his neighbours' aid in an emergency, but he never attended finishing school. Stated more bluntly, he is just a bit of a primitive man. Because he is an adept woodsman -- it was he who taught me, for example, to recognize the smell of a macajuel (boa constrictor) even before I could see it -- he is generally known as Monkey, although I find it more dignified to call him the Monk.

Like a few others up the Caura Valley, the Monk likes his strong drink. Few of his daily activities require sobriety, so one is not surprised if he is occasionally drunk during what most folks would consider non-drinking hours. And when he is drunk the Monk is not subdued.

So it was that the Monk, under the influence, got onto the rural bus one afternoon as it was about to make its last run up the valley. As we rolled, he took to strolling up and down the aisle, proffering uninvited comments and fingering the women's hair. This latter, in particular, was not appreciated, and my neighbour Yolande slapped his hand away with some heat, at which he just laughed. Still, he took the hint and went to bother some other women, while Yolande sat their fuming. Presently she made a comment under her breath about "certain elements in the community".

Well, I know better than to involve myself in such a situation, but my mouth does not. My mouth fairly shouted in mock amazement "Whaaatt?? It have elements on this here bus? Elements!?" and turning to the Monk in accusatorial fashion I declared "For truth, Monk, you is absolutely a element." The people went wild with laughter, joining in the accusation and finger-pointing at the abashed Monk. My mouth was on a roll and called out to the driver, "Hey, Pencil, I thought this suppose to be a element-free bus, ent? Since when you letting elements ride?", and the bus fairly rocked. By the time we got to Yolande's stop, which was also the Monk's, harmony had been restored, and he was helping her to carry her stuff.

I wasn't trying to be a peace-maker, you understand, it was just a matter of the Starr mouth going off in its own direction. Still, in village life it is important to maintain harmonious relations as much as possible. In a big city one can live in isolation from one's neighbours, but not here, so that people tend to avoid lasting quarrels and to be alert to opportunities to patch things up. Even so, let me go on record that the Monk -- our very own Monk -- is most definitely an element.

There came a time when he was involved in a late-night altercation at a bar, the upshot of which was that he injured another party. The other party brought suit against the Monk and obtained a significant monetary judgement. The date for the hearing at which the judgement would be enforced was approaching, and the Monk was in a situation. He didn't have that kind of money, but he certainly didn't to go to jail. And he didn't have a lawyer.

What was needed, I saw, was a schedule of payment through the court that the Monk could make and that would also satisfy the aggrieved party.

As one of the few educated people up the valley, I tend to become a sort of godfather in such a situation, so I figured to go to court with him. When his matter was called I would stand up in the observers' gallery. If the judge told me to sit down, that would be that. If she asked why I was standing, I would introduce myself and request to address the court. If the judge said no, that would be that. If she said okay, I would propose a suitable schedule of payment. It was worth a shot.

As we were standing outside, waiting for the court to open, I happened to see the aggrieved party and his lawyer. This was an opportunity. I called everyone together and told the other side what I proposed. Opposing counsel was very glad to hear it. "Yes, that's exactly what we want", he said. And so it was settled. The lawyer would present our mutual proposal to the court, the Monk would stay out of jail, and the aggrieved party would get his money. I didn't even need to stick around for the hearing, as my work was finished.

It was the easiest negotiation I ever did. All it required was to sweep away the miscommunication and see that both sides wanted the same thing.

YOU CAN'T REASON WITH THE FORMER MRS STARR

One day in 2005 I phoned ex-wife number 3, Karen Mary Granado, and positively told her what was what. "Baby, you're being ridiculous" I said. "You know perfectly well that you belong up the Caura Valley with me, so knock it off and come home." She said she'd think about it but, truth to tell, she had quit on me 10 years earlier, so she had probably done all the thinking she was going to. And not long after that she moved to Connecticut, which I thought was kind of extreme.

GENUINE KVAS AT THE PRIMORSKAYA STATION

When I got home from my first visit to Leningrad I went through a real slavophile period. Every evening I would settle into my reading chair with a glass of vodka and a story by Chekhov. And about once a week I would make a big pot of borshch for yet another ethnic experience.

When I went back in 2005, I was ready for more ethnicity. Every day I would walk from my hotel to the Primorskaya Station and take the subway to Vasilieostrovskaya station near the university, where our congress was meeting. One afternoon, coming back out of the Primorskaya station, I came upon a table with a most welcome and unexpected sign. They were selling *kvas*, a thoroughly ethnic russian drink, 10 roubles for a 300-ml cup.

I had seen *kvas* mentioned many times in russian fiction, but had never had it, so I unhesitatingly plunked down my roubles and drank it down. It was mighty tasty, but more importantly, it was ethnic.

Every day after that I looked forward to riding that long, long escalator (373 steps) up from the deep Primorskaya Station and having my cup of *kvas*.

PROSELYTIZED IN LENINGRAD

Walking from Primoskaya to my lodging one evening, I was approached by two dear little old ladies with tracts in their hands. I saw right away what it was about. Now, I get proselytized several times a year, but it is almost always here in the West Indies by irony-free black people. I sometimes get aggressive and ask what in the world they are doing, pushing the message of the slave-holders, that they might like to show a little gumption and shake off those shackles, but none has yet shown proper appreciation for this intelligence.

Anyhow, I let the dear ladies open their discourse and then informed them ever so courteously that I could not speak Russian. (Hearing my accent, they evidently knew what I meant and had the good sense not to object that I was speaking Russian.) I figured I was off the hook, but not quite. One of the ladies asked if I could read Russian. I gravely assured her that I could not, and waited for them to indicate that the interview was over. But they weren't done yet. Where did I come from? they asked, and I told them I was from Trinidad & Tobago. It was evidently unfamiliar to them, so I added that it is in South America. And what language do you speak there? they wanted to know. I thought this was quite harmless and readily told them that we speak English.

"Ah, Angliskii" one of them said with a note of enthusiasm as she sorted intently through her tracts. Oh no, I thought, she's got some of these damn things in English. As it happened, she didn't, but she did find the name and address of the bible society in English on one of them, which she drew to my attention before presenting me with it.

I had been that close to a clean getaway.

DYAN'S GOT TO HAVE PERFUME

Dyan Maria Nelson has a positive genius for giving gifts. When we were together, if she went off on a trip -- or sometimes even if she stayed right in Trinidad -- she would bring back something really quite imaginative for me. I admired this and sought to emulate it. So it was that, when I was getting ready to go to France and she suggested that I should bring her some french perfume, I was happy to oblige, even though she and I no longer kept company in the way we once had.

It was about a year and a half after I had given her the perfume that I got a phone call from Dyan. "The perfume that you brought me is all used up." I churlishly thought "Well, yes, but what does that have to do with me?" After all, we were quite emphatically no longer together. (Dyan's many breakups with me all had a tone of finality about them.) But then I gathered my gallantry and took the hint. "Okay, I guess we had better get you some more. Shall we take a drive down to Ellerslie Plaza some time soon?" Agreed.

We took our time in the perfume store, trying plenty of samples until we found one that was sufficiently breezy and floral, with just a discreet hint of slut. Driving back, I finally posed the question that was on my mind: "Doesn't your present white guy get you perfume?"

Dyan turned to me with a look of utter surprise and replied "Yes, but I want it from you."

It was just about the most disarming thing anyone has ever said to me. As far as I am concerned, that girl gets all the perfume she ever wants.

STANDING IN A TWISTER

In the summer of 2006, Francis & I took a grand two-week road trip in the southwestern USA. The greater part of this was in Texas, but we were also pleased to visit New Mexico, Arizona and Nevada, with a very slight incursion into California.

Because this was a road trip, we wanted appropriate road music for those wide open spaces. My knowledgeable cousin David "Roguer" Stanley had made some fine suggestions about Texas music that we should acquire, and Ed Simonoff had sent us the Taj Mahal record that includes "You Aint No Street-Walker, Mama Honey, But I Do Love the Way You Strut Your Stuff". This latter became our theme song for the road. The one disappointment was that we couldn't find any Kinky Friedman records, even though we looked for them in several towns in Texas.

In West Texas we had taken a drive out into rather desolate ranchland, just to have a look around. No people in sight, few cattle, and we saw our first jackrabbits. Climbing up onto a rocky hill, we were impressed by the utter stillness. Then Francis pointed out a twister down in the valley below and wondered what it would be like to stand inside one. We resolved then and there to look for an opportunity to find out. In the succeeding week or so, we saw plenty of them, but always at a distance or beyond an obstacle.

Then, heading west and north from Tucson, we left Interstate 8 on a blue highway near Bouse, Arizona. It was there that I noticed a twister in a field just off the road. I quickly brought the car to a stop, and we piled out and ran right into the middle of the twister. It kept moving slowly, onto the road, with no traffic coming either way, and we stayed in it until it crossed the road and into the field on the other side, where it soon faded. So it came to pass that, on that particular day, my boy and I danced in a genuine western whirlwind.

A LIZARD DULY WATERED ON TUMBLEWEEDS

According to Kinky Friedman's *Guide to Texas Etiquette*, it is customary in that state for men to urinate outdoors. It's known as "watering the lizard".

Francis & I thought it only right and proper to respect this local custom, even at highway rest stops with indoor washrooms. It seemed like the Texas thing to do.

One day in the Panhandle, we were at the side of the road, watering the lizard on some tumbleweeds, when a passing trucker honked his horn. Kinky had said that Texans will often honk in approval when one waters the lizard, and here was the confirmation. It was a deeply ethnic experience. Years later we were in a similar situation by the side of the road in southern Germany when two passing cars honked at us. Francis wrote Kinky a postcard about this, noting with satisfaction the spread of the Texas ethos.

Driving back east, we were on the lookout for a particular place. Almost 40 years earlier, Christopher J. "Dobert" Starbuck had peed on the Continental Divide, so that half of his micturation eventually went to the Pacific Ocean and half into the Gulf of Mexico. When I heard about that, I resolved to follow Dobert's fine example at the first opportunity. And Francis was absolutely down with that.

We knew we would cross the Divide in New Mexico, somewhere between Gallup and Grants, so we were on the lookout. As soon as we entered New Mexico we started drinking water, and when we reached the marker, we were ready. So it was that we watered the lizard right on the Continental Divide.

NOT THE ORIGINAL KURT VONNEGUT

It has been my habit when working in Washington to stay with my old buddy Dave Hardy in Baltimore. We take the early train into the city, work all day at the Smithsonian Institution, and take the last train back to Baltimore. Part of my business is to see that Dave eats right while I'm there, so in the evening I cook our supper and prepare the next day's lunch. Sometimes we break from the evening routine by stopping at Jennings's, a familiar bar/restaurant near Dave's place for the purpose of eating, drinking and socializing with a few of the regulars.

On one such evening we pulled into Jennings's and sat at the bar, where I ordered a large, dark beer and the Friday-night special, prime rib. That seemed like an excellent start. Sitting to my left was a pleasant-looking old dude. He was just minding his own business, but Americans are easily approachable, so I asked him amiably whether he got annoyed at people telling him all the time that he looked like Kurt Vonnegut. He told me that it made him want to punch the bejesus out of such people, to which I noted that I was glad I had made no such suggestion, myself, only asked how he felt about such a hypothetical situation.

He was a retired English teacher with a special interest in Emily Dickinson. I've never had much appetite for her, so I was especially keen to hear his remarks, and he did have some things to say about her great economy of expression. He then noted that he couldn't abide my beloved Walt Whitman, as it took him forever to say what was on his mind. I kept my retort to this point to myself, as Dave had chimed in right away that he too had no use for Whitman, and I didn't want to encourage either Dave's silly-ass literary views or any distraction from the topic at hand, which was Emily Dickinson.

We continued on this for a while, and the final thing that the old lad said really tickled me. A colleague had once pointed out to him, he told us, that you could sing just about any of Emily Dickinson's poems to "The Yellow Rose of Texas".

Dave later told me that he had often seen the old lad in that place, even sat beside him on occasion, and had taken him for a complete wash-out. He freely admitted how mistaken he had been.

I haven't been back to Jennings's lately, but according to Dave the word is that Kurt Vonnegut look-alike has died. We never did know his name, but I doubt that either of us will ever forget his parting remark. To salute his passage through this world, I now transcribe some verses from Emily

Dickinson. If it's not too much to ask, I would like each and every one of you to rise and sing them to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas".

At half-past three a single bird
Unto a silent sky
Propounded by a single term
Of cautious melody.

At half-past four, experiment
Had subjugated test,
And lo! her silver principle
Supplanted all the rest.

The day came slow, till five o'clock,
Then sprang before the hills
Like hindered rubies, or the light
A sudden musket spills.

The purple could not keep the east,
The sunrise shook from fold,
Like breadths of topaz, packed a night,
The lady just unrolled.

The skies can't keep their secret!
They tell it to the hills --
The hills just tell the orchards --
And they the daffodils!

A bird, by chance, that goes that way
Soft overheard the whole.
If I could bribe the little bird,
Who knows but she would tell?

WHY CAN'T I HAVE A HOT FLASH?

Damnit, why can't I have a hot flash? Half of all the world's people in my age group have hot flashes or have had them, and I am very curious about it. It's been described to me, and I have a sort of a vague idea what it's like, but I would like to experience it for myself. Just once. Maybe twice.

Half of my old class-mates have had plenty of them, while I've never had even one, and I kind of resent it. I tell those classmates that I would like to have a hot flash, and they say "No, no, you don't. Trust me." But I don't believe them. So, could I please, please have a hot flash? Just once. Maybe twice.
