

**An
Anthology of
Short Stories,
Poetry and
Favorite Quotes**

**by
"Jayce"**

INTRODUCTION

It is not every child that is raised with Zen koans, war-time flight instructor retellings of near-misses and first-hand accounts of trips to Egypt and China!

My father was a most interesting man. In fact many people have told me exactly that, sometimes with a stern warning-glare that added "I don't know if you appreciate it or not!" Well, I did appreciate Jayce, enough to want to create and freely share this anthology of his musings over most of his 80 years of life.

I don't need to add much to these writings, except to say that one of my father's favorite Zen sayings was:

"When you're 90% of the way, you're half way."

It took me several decades to finally understand the wisdom in this phrase, and I think it highlights two of my father's most unique qualities -- a lifelong curiosity and a his keen sense of "knowing when you know".

Thanks Dad for being the greatest tennis coach I could have had, for being a friend on the weekly bike rides into town for Saturday "fun shopping", and most of all for always being a true individual...and thus the best friend anyone could ever have.

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One More Day

The dawn sky was a description. Good enough to be skipped over in a reading, but stared at in practice. This early sky was just that way, a spectacle formed by a huge dome of grey shaped as a massive lid that had been lifted a foot or so above the horizon. Soon the dawn sky would rise underneath.

The figure sat alone on the edge of the world. His slightly bent body was quite still, topped by a lined face. Clothes were merely coverings. The lotus position suggested an emptiness and patience. The eyelids, partially open as the sky, he seemed to calmly await the furnace of the sun to roll back the cloud cover, as a large telescope opening for business.

Slowly and minutely his planet moved down to greet the brilliant tip of the sun's circle, as it rose out of the earth's shadow. The thin slice of gold was like a message to him -- a confirmation of a new day. He sighed gently in awe of the magic of a dawn miracle that had been performed millions of times before. He mused upon the steady state of sun star and planet, considering their relative movements were a hundred times faster than a jet aircraft.

He continued to pay homage to the expanding disc of light that almost hissed and rumbled with nuclear violence, yet seemed so calm. The bend of the sun's line rose higher to become a diamond of white fire. The term 'sun-rise' amused him, when the action was really due to the opposite effect, namely an 'earth-fall'.

The sphere was now suspended in clear space. It was hard for him to accept that it, too, was in free fall, moving through the galaxy dragging his planet along. He began to feel the weak glow of its warmth, and eased his position on the hard ground. He meditated upon billions of tons of matter in rapid motion without notable expenditure of energy. And the distance away was so great that a jet would take about 7,000 days to travel it!

His contemplation deepened a little, something like the detachment he felt when driving his car without conscious awareness... But the deep cloud cover today was to be impervious to the sun's authority. In fact the gold rose high enough to be consumed by the cloud. It suddenly turned cool again, and the ground seemed a little harder. As a signal, he rose, stretched and slowly moved away, hands in

pockets and head bent into a rising breeze.

Once more he had paid homage to Nature, his only God. Sounds of the work force on the move came to him. Traffic was increasing and soon children's voices on the way to school and, finally, shoppers.

Once more he counted days... less than a month now, according to best medical assurance. Each dawn scene brought new strength and serenity and understanding; yet making more profound his aloneness and soon-to-be departure.

"Living should be made compulsory since death is overrated," he thought.

It's About Time

The first letters of complaint to the editors made very little impression on the general public. But when the subject was aired on open-line programs it was a different matter. Had seniors suddenly, on mass, all gone soft? What they proposed was even more satirical than the voting of Pat Paulsen for President. They sounded too old to be seniors.

Their complaint was about that most abstract and intangible of substances - time. They felt that their criticism of time contained a message for every person on the planet who one day expected to grow old. An eight-fold manifesto had been drawn up with a strange list of complaints. And an even stranger list of recommendations. This incredible document now lay on the Prime Minister's desk.

Perhaps I may refresh you on what I remember of their discomfort with time. In essence they said:

- (1) Days slide by as though stuck together. Some weeks appear about 2 days in length. They found themselves agreeing with Mahatma Gandhi who once said "There's more to life than increasing its speed."
- (2) As well as time moving too quickly, days were too much alike. All days appeared like Saturdays and Sundays so looking forward to a weekend was meaningless.
- (3) Nighttime was definitely longer than ever. The dark hours dragged. Clock hands only moved when you finally gave up and went to sleep.
- (4) Getting dressed for a social outing had to be done much sooner than before or they would be late in leaving. They said all clocks went excessively fast during this period.
- (5) Time was handled very poorly when catching a flight. Often people arrived over an hour ahead of schedule.
- (6) Distortion of time took place at football and hockey games. Both one hour games taking up to three hours to complete.

- (7) Seniors were being victimized playing sports like tennis where the time interval between ball returns was shortened making the game faster.
- (8) When looking forward to happy events, time dragged. Poor events like a trip to the dentist came to quickly.

In all, time was much too capricious.

Seniors even added that young people were listening faster these days. And they quoted the sign in a Japanese inn that said "Sleep faster, we need the pillows." Their recommendations for change were inventive, bizarre and the stuff illusions are proud to be made of.

They said to slow down the planet's rotation by firing retro-rockets until the day becomes two days in length, making time run at half speed. To slow down the year would require a super booster to put us in a wider orbit, taking longer to go around the sun. This would make the year last twice as long, people would then retire at the age of 33 and get married at 12 to 14.

An alternate proposal suggested adjusting all clocks to run at half speed. Kind of neat to have one's pulse rate at about 30 to 35. All sport clocks would run in real time like in soccer. A late goal in hockey might be scored in the 179th minute.

On the subject of all days being alike, they suggested that the day of the week be sky-written in huge letters, perhaps even in different colors or patterns. A glance up would make older people feel a little closer to the mainstream of things.

Since gentic magic had not been invented to give them a younger, more balanced feeling towards time, this was their earnest request for parliament to budget for these changes. And if rocket powered maneuvering was approved they would brace themselves that day and tighten their seat belts. In the age of Aquarius, all was possible and only infinity was unattainable.

Meanwhile, only time will tell!

Aphorisms

1. When Gandhi was asked what he thought of western civilization, he said "It would be nice".
2. When a dog runs at you, whistle for him. - Henry David Thoreau
3. The atoms and molecules within me dream they are people. - from Seth tapes
4. I imitate everyone except myself. - Pablo Picasso
5. Blind people don't have the faintest idea what darkness is. - unknown
6. The little I know I owe to my ignorance. - Sacha Guitry
7. Freedom of will is the ability to do gladly that which I must. - Carl Jung
8. Whatever I take, I take too much or too little. The exact amount is no use to me. - Antonia Poschia
9. One must bear in mind one thing. It isn't necessary to know what that thing is. - John Ashberry
10. We learn nothing from the things we know. - John Cage
11. To see is to forget the names of the thing one sees. - Paul Valery
12. We do what only lovers can, make a gift out of necessity. - Leonard Cohen
13. There should be a day-care center where you can drop kids off without coming to a complete stop. - Pat Paulson
14. It takes a very long time to become young. - Pablo Picasso
15. The sort of man who, throwing a stone upon the ground, would miss. - Idries Shah
16. Message to deep sea diver: "Surface at once. Ship is sinking." - Roger Fry
17. Mirrors would do well to think before they cast their reflections back at us. - Jean Cocteau
18. Personally I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught. - Winston Churchill

19. Responsibility is to keep the ability to respond. - Mahler
20. In the highlands of New Guinea men place photographs of themselves on their foreheads so they will be recognized. - Ted Carpenter
21. Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash. - Leonard Cohen
22. Inside my empty bottle I was constructing a lighthouse while all the others were making ships. - Charles Simic
23. If you don't get lost there's a chance you may never be found. - unknown
24. Life must go on. I forget just why. - unknown
25. Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed. - Irene Poter
26. Eskimos have 52 different names for snow because it's important. There ought to be as many for love. - Margaret Atwood
27. When I can accept myself as I am, then I can change. - Carl Rogers
28. The mystery of life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced. - Van der Leeuw
29. Sleep faster. We need the pillows. - Yiddish proverb
30. There is not enough of nothing in it. - unknown
31. Writing the memoirs of a person who has lost their memory. - Eugene Ionesco
32. Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler. - Albert Einstein
33. Money causes cancer in rats! - Jayce
34. Living should be made compulsory, death is overrated. - Jayce
35. Those who do not understand your silence, probably do not understand your words. - Elbert Hubbard
36. Women make money meaningful. - Jayce
37. The hardest thing to understand about the world is that it is understandable. - Albert Einstein

38. Only a mediocre writer is always at his best. - Somerset Maugham
39. Pessimist: A man who thinks most women are bad.
Optimist: A man who hopes they are. - Chauncey Depew
40. If it was fashionable to go naked, the face would hardly be observed. - Lady Montagu
41. Nudist sunbather in search of perfect tan leaves no stern untuned. - Charles Dwelley
42. A man who is much talked about is always ver attractive. - Oscar Wilde
43. It's very sad when a beautiful theory is killed by a brutal fact. - Aldous Huxley
44. Martyrdom: A way to become famous without ability. - George Bernard Shaw
45. Died from fast women, slow horses, crooked cards and straight whiskey. - Ken Rexroth
46. It's in its own interest that a cat purr. - unknown
47. Darling, the only way to make the body more beautiful is to get a good man. - Zsa Zsa Gabor
48. A fat woman is a guilt for the winter. - Hindu proverb
49. The older you get the faster you ran when you were young. - Steve Owen
50. Middle age is when you're not inclined to exercise anything except caution. - Arthur Murray
51. Sometimes I give myself excellent advice but I am incapable of taking it. - Lady Montagu
52. Small children disturb your sleep, big children disturb your life. - Jayce
53. To get new knowledge requires new questions. - Jayce
54. Fear not that life will end, rather fear that it may not begin. - John Newman
55. Women begin by resisting man's advances and end by blocking his retreat. - Oscar Wilde
56. The love game is never called off on account of darkness. - Tom Masson

57. Man -- harder than a rock and fragile as an egg. - Anon
58. Men are no more liberated than women. - Indira Gandhi
59. Not only is it hard to be a man, it's harder to become one. - Anon
60. Use not only the brains we have but all we can borrow. - Woodrow Wilson
61. Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth. - Alan Watts
62. Some people have no goals, only assists. - Jayce
63. It costs a lot of money to die comfortably. - Samuel Butler
64. If you don't get everything you want, think of the things you don't get that you don't want. - Oscar Wilde
65. A diplomats life is made up of three things: Protocol, Geritol and Alcohol. - Adlai Stevenson
66. Diplomacy: The art of saying "Nice doggie" until you can find a rock. - Wynn Catlin
67. Heaven defend me from a busy doctor. - Welsh proverb
68. Wanted: A dog that neither barks nor bites, eats broken glass and excretes diamonds. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
69. Dreams permit quiet and safe insanity every night of our lives. - W. Dement
70. For a bad hangover, take the juice of a quart of whiskey. - Ed Condon
71. An editor is a person who knows what they want but doesn't know what it is. - W. Davenport
72. One of the rarest things a man can do is do the best he can.
73. Experience: The name given to our mistakes. - Oscar Wilde
74. It's easier to rule a kingdom than a family. - Japanese proverb
75. Fate: When its time has arrived, the prey comes to the hunter. - Persian proverb

76. If you resemble your passport photo, you are too ill to travel. - Arthur Black
77. One joy scatters many griefs. - Chinese proverb
78. To judge wisely we must know how things appear to the unwise. - George Eliot
79. No one engaged in serious work has time to learn.
80. A person too old to learn was probably always too old to learn. - Henry Haskins
81. There is more to life than increasing its speed. - Mohatma Gandhi
82. To live is like to love. All reason is against it, and all healthy instincts are for it.
83. Luck, the residue of design. - Branch Rickey
84. Women manage to love the man they marry more than they manage to marry the man they love. - C.B. Luce
85. I do not fear computers. I fear the lack of them. - Isaac Asimov
86. Moral indignation is jealousy with a halo. - H.G. Wells
87. Patience: A minor form of despair disguised as a virtue. - Ambrose Bierce
88. Illusion: One of the first of all pleasures. - Voltaire
89. A good rest halves the work. - Yugoslav proverb
90. A retired husband is often a writer's full time job. - Ella Harris

The Applicant

It had been quite a busy day, but at last, the final applicant. I recalled how it seemed that the last one of a sequence often took longer and was the most difficult. This was certainly proving true today. The applicant sat before me.

He was giving odd answers to routine questions. I tried to be patient. I was tired. And puzzled.

"Mr. Venture," I continued. "Would you mind if..."

"I know," he interrupted. His tone still pleasant and resonant. "You are bothered by my not knowing what an Oxo is..."

"Its not an Oxo," I cut in with an edge of correction. "There is rather a lot of it about you know."

"And the Python Montys I didn't know..."

"Monty Python. They are a crazy comedy group." I thought everybody knew that.

Venture's frank and level gaze made me hesitant, and a little guilty for the sharpness of my remarks. I sensed that facing me, behind that youthful gaze, was a high level of intelligence.

"What is the other questions you wish to ask me?"

"What are the questions," I modified. "Well I find it a little odd that someone with your academic background should make such elementary mistakes." This produced a protracted silence. I scanned his documents in front of me.

When I finally looked up, I saw again the composure and the expression. There was a much greater awareness of reality here than in any of the other applicants. I waited. I knew he was keen to impress me. He needed the job. His hands rested lightly on the chair, strong and well shaped.

"Perhaps you might try me on specific subjects," he said, breaking the silence. "Science, art, philosophy..."

"Alright," I added. "What does Oolong mean to you?"

"A tea growing area in China."

"What can K2 be applied to?"

"Possibly the 2nd highest mountain. It is in the..."

I stopped him. He sounded intimately aware of this last subject. "What do you know about the following?", I continued. "Doppler effect, gravity waves, contrapuntal music forms, Koans in Zen, megabits?"

As fast as I fired them, he answered. Clean, sure, and accurate. It was something. I had half expected this but hardly hoped for it. The office seemed suddenly warmer. He looked cool and assured. It was now suppertime. The outside traffic rush had lessened.

This now seemed to me like grilling a spy. Well primed on major issues but less informed on local actions. I decided to have one last go at the important questions. Maybe he was warmed up now and would make up for early mistakes.

"What is a Coke?"

"From coal?" The answer as a question.

"What is a strike?"

His voice now sounded assured. "A find in mining?"

"No."

"A miss hit in a ball game?"

"What is Bingo?"

When I saw his expression change from uncertainty to something akin to hopelessness, I regretted my below-the-belt attack. His unusual limitations and knowledge had a worldliness to them. And curiously he had somehow invoked the thought in me that there was some sense in my last, oblique observation. Foolishness...

I had at least made up my mind by now. He definitely was not suitable. No way. Reluctantly and gently I said to him, "Mr. Venture, I'm sorry but we no longer can consider you as a prospect for the staff of Trivia Pursuit Inc."

Back To Pink Floyd

The rock group playing on my big set is pouring out its all. Slick intricate rhythms from bright easy guitars. As usual my son and I are in fine listening form. Every phrase is clarity and feel. The weak winter sun touching his face defining the closed eyes and head moving to the beat.

A lull in the action allows me a flashback to one of my first symphony concerts as a teenager. Oh, the incredible differences between it and my first rock concert. In those early days it was Beethoven and Berlioz, giants who thrilled me with their tremendous color ranges and romantic patterns. As middle age came and went my tastes had grown to include ragas, court music and music for meditation.

The big attraction of the symphony concert was the name of the major work being performed, with less emphasis on the conductor and orchestra. The major item had to be a symphony to give the concert guts. Interesting isn't it that with a rock group the opposite is true. With a Pink Floyd or Supertramp as the Beethoven and Stravinsky of classical rock and their names alone will produce a sellout. And so intricate and together are they that conducting is not necessary.

But going back to the symphony concert, one of the first surprises was being handed program notes as we entered. They were supposed to give us details of the menu but mostly contained heavy words dealing with themes, figures, counterpoint and developments -- suggesting that an anatomical understanding of the structure and scales enhanced appreciation of the music. Another surprise was being ushered to our seats like in church, and we quickly noticed how most of the audience seemed overdressed.

When seated we pretended to read the notes in between looking around in a cool and sophisticated fashion. No one was going to call us dumb bunnies. Besides nobody else seemed puzzled by their notes. We also did some detailed scouting of local female talent for possible dates.

By now the orchestra had fully assembled on the stage and were making tuning noises. It reminded me of the story told about a Belgian Congo native chief being entertained by the King of the Belgians. While the orchestra was tuning up the chief was asked what music he preferred. He paused and said "that". And they had tuning-up the rest of the evening.

We soon realized this classical concert was going to be a head trip only, hiding our feelings until the very end. The problem was that there were often several endings in a major work with the distance between each called a

'movement'. So it was utter quiet. We couldn't even cough. And only people of low breeding kept time with their feet.

The orchestra players in their black and white clothes looked very formal, and their leader with a little stick in his hand had long hair. We had feelings about long hair. He offered a short bow and we clapped. He turned and faced his work force and then paused, really waited. It seemed he was looking for a precise moment when total paralysis gripped us all. Nobody dared to even glance around. His arms were then raised. The suspense was marvellous. And then we were off!

Alas, we were off all too quietly for our raised adrenalin levels. We felt cheated, an insult to our young passions. A hundred or more players up there and the only sound was from a lone woodwind? Nowadays four solid guys in jeans with guitars and drums would punch a huge hole in the glass dome of that building with their power. And that's just for starters, at a hundred and twenty decibels...

I looked around a lot. I fully expected similar boredom everywhere. Not so. These people were enjoying this stuff. I could tell this by their absence of emotion expression. They were not counting chairs or inspecting the back of people's heads like me. I felt a bit guilty, like peeking at prayers.

Much later in the program, after lots of day dreams, I had wished that the few familiar passages had not been so varied and distorted. Then suddenly I became aware of a series of explosive endings. All the instruments were being worked to their utmost. The chief was bouncing up and down like an excited cheerleader. He looked to be in total command of this frantic activity. My blood began to tingle. My hopes were raised for more of these dynamics. And then it all stopped, as though the needle had suddenly been lifted.

For an eternity of seconds there was utter 'stopness'. And then, as though on cue, we came alive, clapping madly. The driver up front looked a little out of breath but very satisfied. He quickly got his flying hair under control, put his stick under his arm and left the scene.

To prevent his total escape we cheered louder. He came back to investigate and bowed again. He turned to the orchestra and lifted them with his arms. We applauded even louder at his generosity. I got quite warm at this stage and we were all standing and there was great joy and we could talk again and it was very lifting and noble and I wished I had been able to listen better because these people were not fooling with their appreciation. It meant something to them.

meanwhile, back in my chair, I gradually drift into the strains of Led Zepplin's famous ballad "Stairway to Heaven". I glance out of the window onto a winter orchard lit with gold and I recall some score of years ago my first rock concert.

At the time I was very attached to straight classical music of the early masters. Grudgingly I had allowed my eldest son to convince me it was worth going to a local rock concert. No special training was required, he said.

It was performed in a huge building called the Coliseum. There was an enormous crowd. No program notes. No ushers. And we were frisked by security as we went in.

It appeared that blue jeans and sweat shirts were the appropriate dress, even for the artists on the stage. I was told that the overly loud music I was hearing was not the show, merely the warm up music on the public address system. I was only in that crowd a few minutes and I was ready to call it quits. This was a real test of my established values of decorum, namely sane, calm listening.

The concert had been chosen because of the names of the groups. Refined, sensitive names -- "The Grateful Dead" and a backup group called "Blood, Sweat & Tears". Unbelievable titles.

The crowd was raucous -- moving, smiling, smoking, swaying and later dancing on the main floor. During the show. Because of the show. And everyone looked very young.

Eventually four guys came out onto the stage and randomly spaced themselves between the forest of speakers, amplifiers, microphones and cables. I couldn't believe it! I counted over ninety speaker enclosures. I counted again and worried about my eardrums. A large mixer and light console dominated the centre of the main floor and a screen above the stage began to display a bewildering pattern of slipping, sliding and pulsing light changes, synchronized to the beat of the music. At first I thought the drummer's feet were causing this effect. His whole body was electric with vibes. I thought of the calm and detached percussionists in an orchestra. Wow! This one was on fire!

The opening power acoustics from those speakers stunned my nervous system and just about rearranged every molecule in my body. I was staggered by the pressure of the hurricane coming from the stage. Four fairly frail guys controlled about five tons of explosive electronics. Did I say control? During the enormity of this eruption I found myself amazed that the delicate parts of my cortex were not being vaporized. I mean hold tight, the ride was for real

and I was trying to survive, bruised and deaf perhaps but still in charge of my head.

The thunder of the band's glory soon dug deep into my cells and I was all feel. Cascades of chords and pounding rhythms flooded my being. I wished that I had been made structurally stronger. The question was would my general dynamics stand up to this strain? And the state of mind called 'thought', would that survive this sonic flux?

Gradually, incredibly gradually, and with great care I began to slacken my grip on this flash storm and I was even able to lick my dry lips. Smiling was some distance away yet. The crowd was now pleased that all the breathable oxygen had been replaced at last by the smoke from thousands of small pot fires.

Later in the evening I was able to accept the massive amount of whistling, shouting, screaming and jumping that signaled with such finesse the end of the first group's offering. This was enough to bring them back and they socked us with an encore. It sounded identical to all previous efforts. I was down to my vest and still not winning the heat battle. I brooded on several cups of cool mint tea...

The second group started in where the other had left off. Vicious tearing chords produced streams of high frequencies like a steam turbine starting up. Amplified words joined the battle. Foolishly I expected to make sense out of them. I gathered that their emphasis was on love, feel, lust and going home. I missed the program notes.

As they neared the end of their act, I managed to loosen again a few cramped muscles that had been fazed slightly by the sonic guns. And so we all piled out happily -- sweaty and with ears ringing. I wondered what kind of a group a Beethoven or Stravinsky would have dominated if they had been alive today. Would Bach have superimposed his triple rhythm form on the rock fusion scene? There was no guarantee he wasn't already here disguised as "Brand X" or "Weather Report".

The masters of old have given me much intellectual food for thought and it seems that they make inspired contrast to the classical rock pressed deep into my glands and blood. A visceral body-organ trip combining rock fury, tension, hollow irony and tender sweet love ballads as they sing...

"And the men who hold high places
Must be the ones to start
To make a new reality
Closer to the heart."

-- Rush

Days later the ringing in my ears had cleared up nicely and gradually I became a social member again. The cost you ask? Just a little change in my mind chemistry. A commitment to experiment more. To treat life support system earth as the haven to do it all.

And the end results so far? A total bonding of my self to the classical rock scene for the last fifteen years. Many times while listening to this music I have been switched to the centre of a smaller universe where questions are never needed and answers readily given.

Back in my living room the big set is playing on. My son still moves to the music. His eyes are still closed. His mind very open. Again the words deliver hammer blows at 'privilege', structure and dishonesty.

"Now they're planning
The crime of the century;
Well what will it be?

Read all about
Their schemes and adventuring.
It's well worth the fee.

So roll up and see
How they rape the universe.
How they've gone from bad to worse.

Who are these men
Of lust, greed and glory?
Rip off the masks and let's see

But that's not right-- oh no, what's the
story?
There's only you and there's me
That can't be right!..."

-- Supertramp

Mr. Barrett, The Butcher

It was called a 'delivery bike'. It was very heavy with a large carrier in front, a wicker basket fitted neatly in the carrier and was usually full of meat packages. I wore the uniform of a 'butcher's boy', an almost white apron. At 14 years of age I was skinny, fast-moving and always hungry. This was my first full-time job.

Two things had just ended for me: school and my paper route. The latter had been a morning and night delivery every day for two years. I had left school one day, then was working the next. Never had holidays, in my family anyhow. The four shillings a week from the paper route had helped supplement a larger that all too often contained merely sugar, a little jam, a loaf of bread and a small pat of butter.

I don't remember how I came to work for Mr. Barrett. His shop was all of four streets away and our gang rarely had cause to stray that far from our lively ghetto in the working district of my hometown in the midlands of England. The fact that a bike went with the job clinched it for me. Since nobody in our gang had one, I sensed prestige here, because once in the saddle of this rugged machine I became a grinning, whistling, humming expert in the delivery of top quality meats.

My new boss was 'Mr. Barrett'. No first name. Just Mr. Barrett. He was tallish, dark and steady in all his motions. He rarely got excited and smiling was not in his nature, though once he surprised me with a broad grin after I had slipped on a grease spot, skinning my bare knees. He always seemed to have very clean pink hands, with tobacco stains on the inside of his fingers. His wife was stocky and kind of round, with large friendly eyes. I remember her legs were sort of curved too. But I liked it when she smiled occasionally. It seemed to make up for the unchanging mask he wore.

Since neither of them had first names I would sometimes test a few out on them. But no matter how hard I tried, nothing seemed to fit. All the names I could think up sounded out of place, contrived. I was never to learn their full names.

The shop was quite small. It was actually a converted front room of their home, one of hundreds of row houses in the neighbourhood. Each week there would be sold the equivalent of one cow, pig and lamb. No more, no less. On the inside wall a small spy window gave a view of the shop to the Barretts from their living room, including knowledge of my activities as well as customer presence.

Making deliveries was my specialty. There was such total freedom as I, humming and whistling, pushed those heavy wheels through narrow streets and back lanes, through the varied seasons. When I knocked on customers' doors I nearly always had a high expectation of someone friendly answering. The meat would be handed over as I said "Good morning, Mrs. Browning. Best of meat today" and she might say "Thank you, sorry. Do drive careful now". Such pleasant little rewards acknowledging my performance that to me was important work and I was a natural at. Quite different to all my chums in the gang who worked in a die casting shop in the next street where it always smelled of burnt metal and cutting oil from the lathes. Not working there meant a bit of a wedge between them and me. But having rides on my delivery bike helped to bridge it.

I remember the first time I was allowed to take the bike home I couldn't wait to see the reaction of my chums on the street corner. From a distance they looked a little bored and in need of some distraction other than smoking cheap cigarettes and whistling at the local girls, who always ignored them. Seeing me approaching on this strange cross between a tractor and an iron bed they hooted with delight.

It was my turn to howl later, standing back watching each in turn trying to manhandle the metal brute. Unknown to them the front forks were badly out of alignment from some previous accident, making the steering utterly lethal to handle. It required two hands all the time to counter the pull to one side. My chums were falling all over the road in their frustration to make it run straight and level. It took quite a while for them all to tame this beast... Years later, riding a normal healthy bike was a scary experience with steering that was too accurate.

Monday was clean up day at the shop. The neat sign on the door said 'Closed', and I felt a little smug being the only one allowed in besides Mr. Barrett. "You can start on the chopping block first" he said. This thick wooden table was the very heart of the action, a kind of sacrificial altar. Its wave-worn surface was covered with stains, while some of the deeper cuts in the top could only have come from poor chopper skills of apprentices like me.

"What do I need to work this thing?" I asked. "Over there" the chief said, pointing to a small bowl of sawdust and a heavy wire scrubbing brush. So with the stiff brush and wetted sawdust spread all over I attacked the worn hills and valleys until eventually I got a grudging pass mark from Inspector Barrett.

Counters, windows and floors were then all attended to

by me to his reluctant satisfaction. I don't remember what he did other than supervising too well. And then it was time for some special action in the backyard.

Mrs. Barrett did her laundry there in the open. I would watch as she bent over her tub, shaking the wet clothes up and down. Her small breasts moved in step and I gazed in awe.

"Come on now, look sharp" cried the chief, breaking up a perfectly good day dream centered around naked breasts, and we marched past the laundry with knives and choppers in hand. We thus approached a vintage sandstone sharpening wheel with a large handle. It was easy to guess my part in this operation.

I looked in amazement at the worn curved shapes of the cutting edges of the tools. They must have been sharpened scores of times... I cranked and cranked and switched hands and shifted body weight and threw water on the wheel. I also tried to see how the bent body of Mrs. Barrett was doing as she swished away up and down. Meanwhile each deadly weapon had to pass Mr. Barrett's careful thumb test. When I day-dreamt too much, a sharp bark from the master had the wheel back to speed.

My last job on Monday was out of the shop. Great! Free at last again. "You can take the bones to the glue factory now" was the order. "And don't mess up the clean basket." He was always so thoughtful about his equipment...

The factory itself was situated a mile or so away in the middle of a working class district. I gathered together a couple of big shin bones, some breast bones and a section of tough looking fat. The bones were totally naked of meat -- razor-sharp knives and Mr. Barrett's close scrutiny had seen to that.

I loaded them into my basket and sped in the direction of the factory. The smell from several blocks away was strong, while inside it seemed harmful to breathing. Steam rose from greasy vats, and walls and floor were covered in grease. Somewhere in the background the bone grinder machine was, as usual, working at full blast with noise and violence like a cascade of rocks on a tin roof. The workers wore rubber aprons and hob-nailed boots, their faces red and sweaty as they slid more than walked. The smell from the cookers was almost physical and stayed with me and my clothes so long that I only nibbled at food that evening.

The basket was taken from me, bones carefully weighed, results noted and a quick calculation made. Then a few pennies were handed to me. And that was that. No names, no words. I would make a hurried exit and cycle back with them

in my hand.

One afternoon when I handed Mr. Barrett the money he continued to hold out his clean pink hand. He looked mournful and definitely disappointed. He jiggled them a bit, then said "Is this all?" in a quiet voice, the ash falling from his cork-tipped cigarette. I nodded and shrugged. Being dishonest never entered my head. And certainly not with my employer. Wasn't everybody around here poor like our family? He shook the coins again emphasizing their barrenness. Removing his cigarette he repeated "Only two pennies?"

This was the first time I had been questioned about money. I stood in dazed silence. The shop till was as safe from me as if it belonged to the King of England. But his hand seemed to remain outstretched forever. His face became sterner and his cigarette was down to the cork tip. He seemed to be searching me for a confession and I was grateful when at last he went to the till and straight-armed the coins inside. My over-developed innocence had frustrated him.

Very gradually with time I had been allowed to serve a few customers. "You can handle some of the meat sales you know" he had said. But he failed to show me how, so I started on pieces already cut or simple stuff like sausages or liver. And as I expected, difficulty came when a customer asked for pork or lamb chops. The broad bladed chopper would be waved around too much in my hand and the misses would lacerate the meat and splinter the bones. With my back to the customer I would try to patch the wounds as best I could.

But creating chops was nothing in comparison to cutting a hung animal into quarters. This was a major task for even the most skilled. For me this event came much later in my career, in fact just about ending it right there!

The animal would be hung by the legs which in turn were spread wide apart. Chopping was then started at the crotch and hopefully finishing at the neck. A perfect job done by the Mr. Barrett himself would see the white cord of the spinal marrow split evenly on each quarter.

"Here you see how its done" he said, without any theory words to support the demonstration, "so have a go." Again no words of caution or finesse. I was allowed only one attempt at this high level task as Mr. Barrett shook his head in disbelief at the slaughter and rescued the scarred splintered mess part way through. He would never have agreed with Thoreau who said "I think we may safely trust more than we do."

As always, pedalling the route was my real life with the weather never an issue. I don't seem to remember it ever raining. My fitness and hunger made parallel gains as time went by. Only at home did problems exist as my small contribution of twelve shillings a week only brought a small benefit to a family of four, with my father out of work most of the time. We couldn't afford to buy our meat from Mr. Barrett and, in my year and a half of service with him, he had never offered any as a treat. In fact I would have been puzzled had he done so... But one time he did surprise me when he suddenly said "Here!" and thrust in my hands a small cutting of beef lungs which we called 'lights'. "Give this to your cat" he added.

Our family shopped at the local open market for meat, fish and vegetables. This was done the very last thing on a Saturday afternoon. Since the merchants didn't want to keep the produce over the weekend, we bought the cheap cuts they auctioned off. The suppliers were aggressive and angry, grudgingly wrapping the fish or meat in newspaper, convincing us they were giving the food away. Our best meals at home were on the weekend.

Forty years later, on a return visit to my hometown, I called at the Barretts. The shop had been converted back to a living room and, when the door opened to my persistent knocking, a person I took to be Mrs. Barrett said, very quickly, "No thankyou!" and hurriedly closed the door.

To compensate, I decided to walk my old route. Very little seemed to have changed in all those years. And I hummed a delivery boy's tune of long ago.

I walked slowly, wondering how much of it all had been real... So little was left in my memory as I recalled someone once saying 'The older you get, the faster you ran when you were a kid'.

Some Of The Reasons Why
You're Glad You Never Played Bridge...

"Do you think the game of bridge is a compelling occupation?"

"Of course."

"Would you care to enlarge?"

"Well it must be the most significant card game played."

"None other compares?"

"Not even close."

"Please explain."

"It is possible to be dealt hands every day of your life and not have two the same. And a different interaction with the other three players every time, too."

"And..."

"A good grasp of the guiding conventions are needed to evaluate the strength of hands. A shrewd feeling for estimating card value is necessary, based on the bidding."

"That doesn't sound too difficult."

"You may be right. The better players use not only the point rating of honor cards, but also suit length, voids, singletons and even gaps between aces and lower cards."

"That seems a little more involved."

"Not only that, they take into account whether they are vulnerable. Whether they want to overbid and prevent opponents from playing. Take a small loss to stop a potentially big gain."

"I see. You seem to make hand evaluation and bidding something more profound than just card sense."

"Naturally card sense is vital. A big part of the game. But the more advanced players enjoy the psychology used in misleading opponents."

"Bidding is big business, then?"

"Emphatically so! Many people employ bidding statements unrelated to the cards they possess, but this

effectively yields vital information for declaring most aggressive bids."

"An example?"

"Bids indicate strength, length, or both. Some are forcing a response. Others ask for specific information; how many aces or kings does partner have? Other conventions reveal information on, say, major suits only. Or when to stop bidding. Or which card you expect partner to lead first and so on."

"Now it's getting complex. How about the playing? Is that the easy part?"

"You can't be serious. One aspect of play difficulty may be seen by the fact everybody, and I do mean everybody, wants to win. This specific desire and the concentration required to achieve it, results in people showing much of their true nature during the play. Could practically tell how these people would respond to many life situations by the way they behave at the table."

"I don't quite understand..."

"Well, the funny thing is we are all self-conscious. We often know how we are coming across to other people. Sort of aware of the image we create..."

"I understand that but..."

"...and yet when we are immersed in something deep we lose ourselves."

"And...?"

"This leads often to total concentration required during play. So absorbed are we in competing or defending our credibility that we expose a model of our base instincts, desires and uncertainties."

"I can see where peoples' characteristics get displayed here."

"Yes. In our club we have a fine range of personalities. There are even a few that operate at the lower limit of their calm. They're impatient toward slower players."

"I've seen them strumming fingers..."

"And quick prompting to remind someone it's their turn."

"Frequent glancing at the score or their watches, too!"

"Another characteristic, determination, is a good one. And incidentally, the ones with the louder attitudes are often the better players. One skilled player sits very upright, quite relaxed, takes his time, makes his well-thought-out bid, places his tricks in precise patterns, and usually wins. Everything tidy. A brick wall of authority. Determined."

"Some seem to be as intent and lost as chess players."

"Yes. Did you notice the ones that slapped their cards on the table to emphasize a winning move?"

"Right. I also noticed unrepressed joy from some on winning, and critical disappointment on losing."

"Just another facet of determination. Fortunately, we play 'Social Bridge' and therefore degrees of friendliness are acceptable!"

"I was pleased to see a sense of humor in one or two people. Even though absorbed they could smile or quip at the vagaries of the game. But most seemed laid-back and reserved a fuller range of themselves for the coffee break."

"Winning is obviously the big one. We all show healthy desires here. To some this is what the afternoon is about. They see winners as being so in other areas. Perhaps even luckier than most. Certainly more desirable as a partner. So they play with an exactness that spans standing guard on every aspect of the game from rules to who shuffles the cards. Fortunately there are enough others who can live the rest of the week comfortably even if the cards run unfavorably. These are the less aggressive. The ones the winners watch with impatience and concern."

"Hmmm. What are some of the intrigues of the play?"

"As you know, the big-boy cards--aces and kings--play themselves usually. But skill is required to make lesser cards count. A special effect here is called 'finessing'."

"Yes, I've heard of that."

"When to lead trumps based on length and strength is another issue. Often best not to lead them if they can be more effectively used for cross-trumping. And there are guidelines here as well."

"An interesting decision that."

"Yes. More advanced plays come under the heading of

squeeze plays and end plays. In the former a succession of winning cards are played until eventually opponents are forced to throw away some they'd rather save. They are squeezed into choosing which defense to keep."

"And the end play?"

"As it suggests, near the end of the game the lead is deliberately given to an opponent who then has to lead for instance from king and jack into declarer's ace and queen. Thus giving up one trick to make two."

"And throughout the play declarer must keep track as much as possible of all the cards played and estimate the important ones left?"

"Emphatically so!"

"Are discards of special significance?"

"Here again is yet another advanced perception of the game. Discards are noted when counting, used as an indication of strength or weakness of that suit; it sometimes tells partner what or what not to lead. And here I may add is where the tricky players sometimes deliberately make false discards."

"Little bit of psyching-out, eh?"

"Sure. One man I know takes delight in doing this and with an impish grin."

"Well... I sense the answer to my original question to you is, 'Yes it is a compelling game'."

"There's a lot more than I've mentioned or even I know. But time has run out and if I don't hurry I'll be late for my bridge class."

"What kind of class would you attend then?"

"A beginners, of course! I don't even know what the name of the game 'bridge' means."

"Groan....."

Business

Interesting that one of the recommendations of the committee on prostitution was that the business be carried on from a home."

"Prostitution a business?"

"Well as you know something is bought and sold."

"Funny usually think of sales yielding material or beneficial goods."

"Like buying a can of paint?"

"Or advice from a counsellor."

"Or insurance?"

"Yes."

"I imagine you are against prostitution?"

"Yes."

"On what grounds?"

"That it is morally corruptive and probably spiritually degrading."

"I take it you are morally and spiritually a strong person?."

"I'm no saint, but I have principles."

"And these would keep you from, say, harming others or abusing your body?"

"Most people don't harm others. That is straightforward. But what do you mean about abusing my body?"

"Oh, nothing too puritan really. Perhaps modesty in eating and drinking and sexual distractions."

"I like to think that all good things in life have their proper place and time."

"Sort of following a universal law, eh!"

"Of course. Ask any decent person."

"And such laws are written somewhere and apply across

the centuries?"

"Certainly and its 'men sana in corpore sano'."

"Mens what?"

"'A sound mind in a sound body'."

"Ah..! So if the mind is strong most else is likely to fall into place?"

"Not as glibly as you imply. You have to keep working at it. Its discipline that counts."

"So you would never need or consider such base things as the service of a prostitute?"

"No more than my need for drugs or a psychiatrist."

"You sound convincingly self reliant."

"Enough."

"I'm curious. What would you like to see happen to them?"

"The whole sordid business should be made illegal. Those responsible including pimps and hangers-on should be put in jail, and while there submitted to extensive therapy treatment."

"Wow...! That'll do it eh!"

"Don't see why not."

"May I ask what you have against sex?"

"I didn't know my ideas had indicated that I was. However since you are crass enough to pursue a very private matter, my wife and I see it as a revered act, in fact, a lofty act of procreation."

"Procreed what? Oh yes, of course, reproduction to use a polite word."

"An act of divine love uniting man to his destiny."

"Wow...! That sounds beautiful."

Campsites And The Group

The train had really picked up speed as we were nearing Fredericton, up to about 110 km/hr I estimated. It would cover in one hour a distance equal to a full days travel by bike.

We had spent a free day in this compact, clean town with a fine range of shops. I managed to take in a lunch hour rental in the cathedral and, as a special treat afterwards, to have the organist demonstrate for me the incredible range of this instrument with its over 3,000 pipes. At that point the resident priest came along and started to discuss the music to be played for the funeral about to follow!

Later, I found the art gallery to be large, modern and well stocked with a blend of traditional and modern works. A huge 18 ft by 12 ft painting by Salvador Dali dominated the entrance, unofficially valued at over a million dollars. Taking photographs was not welcome.

Staying in over 70 campsites involved a wide range in comfort and service levels. It seemed that we were usually placed furthest from entrances and washrooms were usually strained by our group's needs. It became a standing joke that we could guarantee we were on the right road to our planned campsite because we were well off the highway, the road had a rough surface and the campsite was on a hill. These were the features that a tired body readily noted.

One private campsite in Quebec was ideally located above a lake and also produced an amusing incident. This haven, with a wrap-around view, had a friendly owner who overpowered us with attention and consideration. Usually we were merely tolerated and expected nothing more. Later I went up to him and said "I have a special request of you."

He gave me a broad grin and said "Shoot."

"Well, I don't think anyone has asked this of you before..."

He expanded a large chest saying, "I've been asked every type of question possible."

"I bet this one is different" I countered.

"A beer I've heard it before" he proposed.

"O.K., you're on! Here it is. Do you have a weigh scale?"

For a moment his grin froze. I continued "Two of us just have to know how much weight we have lost."

He slapped me on the back, roaring "You win my friend".

When we found a neighbor with scales, all four of us had a fun time joking about all our results. Most riders in our group had lost 8 to 12 pounds and both Dennis and I turned out to be in this range as well.

It's time to see if I can afford a VIA Rail supper. My luck was in as stewards and service managers were to make generous gestures for me in this direction. I still had a vast hunger, standard on this tour.

Outside the late evening sun was catching the steel and concrete form silos. They look like vertical silver bullets or missiles at the ready. Generally the New Brunswick landscape consists mostly of the cash crops of potatoes and oats, and modest farms.

Night, and what a marvellous feeling to be in a real soft bed after sleeping bags and hard ground for weeks. The berth ran lengthwise with the train and, since a train rolls more than it pitches, this pleasant motion induced rapid sleep. In other countries, the berth is often across the train, a somewhat more stable platform.

Morning brings the handsome scenery of Quebec into focus. I enjoyed viewing the exceptionally well farmed land. Many farms seemed prosperous, with a wide variety of crops in long narrow strips often only about 50 to 100 yards wide -- a way of sharing road or river frontage more fairly. Buildings and homes were very close to the highway. I also enjoyed the extended suburbs that joined villages and, of course, the old world nature of the small towns was a pleasant contrast. One major limitation for enjoying this beautiful province was the weather. Rain and low cloud kept us from seeing more than half a mile away.

This was the first time we saw overt signs of religion -- crosses and angels dotted the countryside. Even the farm animals seemed to have a denomination factor with Holstein cows definitely Catholic because of their large number. Graveyards had more crosses and angels in marble than elsewhere, and a multitude of tall and elaborate stones. Many houses were tall, old and with charming verandahs. Also, the windows were more vertical than wide.

My second day off and already I am restless for that riding machine stowed safely on board. My thoughts turn to the group and to the two major surprises that stayed with me daily.

The first was to learn that the 10 women were just as self-reliant, capable and high spirited as the men. Somehow I had expected them to fall behind and not possess the toughness required to combat the great distances, thunderstorms, head winds, hundreds of hills and constant traffic. When I added their natural gifts at moderating our maleness, coupled with excellent inventiveness in the culinary arts while camping, I realized how attractive their contribution was. And how it never faltered to the very last day.

My second surprise dealt with the group in general, though perhaps the men in particular. All looked fit and healthy, and showed enough strength of will to take on an epic journey. The mix was well balanced and there was never any doubt that this group would be successful in its main drive -- get to Halifax and do it safely. We were lead by an ex-teacher, Martin McCready, whose impressive size, personality, wit and intellectual curiosity was more than enough to satisfy achiever and free spirit alike. Also, a sound executive helped to establish a fine camaraderie.

Apart from three or four others, and Martin, the rest of the group was not too interested in open discussion on a range of subjects, or even a modest exchange of ideas. Perhaps it was the very strength of their character that made them independent of other people's way of living. They seemed quite content to talk primarily about bikes, past cycling tours and a whole range of small talk. I felt very grateful for the few with a wider range of overviews. They were excited enough about life in general to develop a better understanding of the world. Twelve weeks would have been a long time to be cut off from normal recharging devices such as music, books, community service groups and regular friends if it weren't for my closer riding friends.

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CIMLAM

At last the new unit was complete. Final checking out had been done and now everything was ready for its ultimate use.

Yesterday had seen the last of the clean up and checking activity. Now everything was silent. Faint lengths of fading sunlight patterned the ground. The gentle quiet of anticipation had taken over...

The plant layout looked clinically new and bright, an emblem in quartz and stainless. A sort of tribute to the bonding of science and architecture. A blending into one common function to produce, efficiently and in great gobs, the latest rocket fuel powering stellar satellites.

Dome-capped decimators and the newer krypton attenuators, reflected their usual green glow above the pale yellow triangular bases.

A silent grid of the now famous spread rays contained the boundaries of the products in the film vessels. All storage residuals were at least 15 ft. underground. Just their spool vents were showing...

As expected, the design team had made another winner. Truly a finished article, functional to the last instrument. The largest vessel was just waist high, while a single floor control tower commanded the area with brazen sheerness. The fused steel and quartz walls glistened like crystals. 'Stable impenetrant' they said was the purpose of such a structure, impervious to all radiations from outside.

Sound was still at zero. And ironically after start up not much more was expected. Perhaps a gentle pulsing of the air but no more than that. Piezo alternators, the heart of the ceramic accelerator pumps and furthest from the control room, seemed like watch dogs ready to obey.

A shadow moved.

The man was intently contemplating the scene, his eyes indicating a lostness in memory and thought.

So this was to be the means of making a fuel with a high capacity binadyne power index, he thought. Similar, he

mused, to the earlier analogy of octane ratings in gasoline.

His body seemed to lean into the aura of the new plant as though attracted to its powerful magnetic influence.

He thought of the area as similar to a small cemetery - slab and block shapes, granite against green, marble with color.

Compact, static and packaged units, the solid state cube decimators and triangular cryptomaxs' stood exact, like pieces on a chess board. Pawns in an opening gambit, they were there to give their all in the giant game of production.

There was no moving form anywhere. No visible pipes or tubing lines. No motors and no pumps.

His thoughts were many and reflective. Startup of this spread giant was less than an hour from now.

As manager-coordinator of the matrix, he and one technician would share the responsibility for commissioning the plant, setting a 50 million dollar machine in motion. He felt old enough to wonder at it all and still young enough to act. Was it just yesterday that we eliminated such antiques as grid trays, furnaces, columns, fractionators and stinking treatment plants? And did that old fashioned specialist eventually disappear too, the one who immortalized the use of physical and mechanical instruments and controllers, the instrument mechanic? With his bag full of jargon -- PBs, feedback, DP cells, flare nuts and 12 x 7's.

The moment crept closer.

He casually stroked his grey thatch, recalling early analyser controllers, the smoke breaks and bull sessions at lunch time, and the once a month meetings in a Vancouver basement, all to mull over the wonders and binder problems of refinery and pulp mill complexes. They had been a relatively happy band of pioneers, in at the beginning of automation and first stage robots.

He shifted his weight, sighed and glanced at his watch. Time to go. As he walked to the control room, he thought of early scanning and logging equipment, forerunners of the now famous Code Inventor Matrix with Linear Monitor, CIMLAM, based on the principle of random meson nuclei, ironically called anti-matter, a distortion at the philosophic level.

The names and applications now were mouthfuls of technical jargon. What on earth would you expect to do with quasi-strobe block detectors or Fromm differential

sibilants? In any case, they were used for component structure reduction. Providing a book size power-pack with enough energy for a boundary satellite's lifetime.

Outside, it had changed to twilight, inside was cool and bright as he opened the door of the operation centre. The instrument engineer was already there before the consoles. Both smiled a grimace and crossed their fingers.

The consoles were laid out in a semi-circle, each containing a plexus of control centres. For the moment he was content to watch the engineer make his careful and confident checks. He had seen many start ups and drifted back through them in time. The clinical atmosphere of the room had an effect on him. It reminded him of an operating room -- same sterility, same brevity. With the feeling of being exposed to routine and repetitions he suddenly felt older. His mind questioned the need for and over-emphasis on material perfection and the pushing back of barriers in nucleonics. The desire to accumulate endless heaps of engineering data. The many specialists and super specialists. They were always reaching out into remote regions of space, mind and subatomics for the last remaining handful of physical phenomena. Was all this the totalness, the completeness of exposure that a human animal could experience?

Gradually, as the radiations from the now heated negative ion lamp reached him, his mood changed back to normal and the disturbing questions on self-fulfillment and awareness slowly left, leaving a state of relaxation... Funny how much we relied on radiation and biochemical boosts to relieve memory and metaphysics.

He turned in time to notice the engineer switching on the power outside and in. The generator monitor pilots were O.K. Now control cubes were a suffusion of faint postage-stamp size glows.

The stereo traces gave depth on depth patterns as each main control circuit came alive, all to be subordinated to the one common robot brain. The engineer turned the calibrators, flux grid reticules modulated the maze patterns and with one quick operation of the synchronizer switch the plant was committed to automatic control. For a few moments they both watched the consoles intently. A thumbs up from the engineer signaled no noticeable out of resonance from the calibrators.

The plant was stable and quiet. A suggestion of a general throb in the air, similar to that from earlier electrical sub-stations, was the only external indication of activity. No smell, smoke or steam. Robot control was usually good for the first twelve months, with just a quick

inspection for wear and alignment before another year of automated programming.

The engineer shook hands with him. He muttered the expected cliché, of congratulation and watched him pick up some coder material and leave the control centre.

He took one last look at the deep pattern of synchronized signals, each acting as a master leader control to the many individual control loops. As he looked, a familiar feeling came over him, as though his usefulness had ended yet again. Instead of satisfaction and success from a job well done, he felt only indifference and a sense of too little hope in a world of control and stereotyped robots.

The time lapse since start up, ten minutes. There were no leaks, plug ups, wrong connections, reverse flows or out of phasings, lost suction, variable levels, high or low alarms, lifting of relief valves, leaking seals or a hundred other matters that were once the essence and stimulation of the start up fight.

Finally he left the bright, busy control command and walked back through the graveyard of gently pulsing components, all motivated in a matrix of exactness.

He half wondered how plant 357 would be. It was commissioned almost a year now and was due for a quick check. It would not be a bad idea to drop in. You never could tell, there might be a remote chance that the computer robots were having trouble. Just a thought anyway. A fellow still got paid whether he was a robot himself or if he sought expression and challenge.

The sky was now dark overhead, the air decidedly cool. Some stars had already begun forming that same geometry of design since planet year one. The light in the south was a soft band of color. And tomorrow or maybe the next day, or the next...who can tell.

He was just opening the first security gate when he heard the main alarm. Immediately his mind flashed to CIMLAM. What had that blasted robot done now?

He rushed back into the control room, just ahead of the engineer. Sure enough that mechanical genius had blown its top. There was a strong smell of ozone and a pall of pale blue smoke hung over the controls. The engineer drooped his shoulders in a what-now posture.

The manager's face was expressionless. New plug-in units for the consoles would take weeks to arrive. He sighed a second time. Once there used to be instrument mechanics on hand who could troubleshoot and repair... Ah

well, they were human and had to be dispensed with in the name of technical evolution.

All the equipment had failed safe.

They both shrugged again, checked that there were no leaks or fires and then retreated from the quartz and steel cube, returning to their office desks and paperwork to set about start up number two and a new CIMLAM...

Confusing?

It was thought that a series of meetings first took place many thousands of years ago. Probably by a number of young agitators putting pressure on the elders. The purpose of these gatherings, in the largest of their caves, was to introduce better means of vocal expression with a view to replacing grunts, growls and screams with something called 'words'.

The time had come for strangers meeting on hunting trails to exchange more friendly greetings and have fewer club bashings.

Simple pithy words were gradually introduced over hundreds of years with modest success and it was just a matter of time before young innovators were pressing for more advanced ones to be built. This they eventually did by a series of simple tricks. First, they added a letter in front of an existing word. A new name for rock came by adding an 'S' to the front of 'tone'.

The more visionary peasants found the lack of relevance between old and new words fascinating, the elders said 'neat, but puzzling!' And so hundreds of new words came this way, wine led to swine, honest from nest, open from pen and so on.

The second trick was the realization that what they could do at the beginning, they could do equally well at the end. This produced lawn from law, puny from pun and others.

Trick number three - caught in the excitement of such revolutionary goings-on, the brighter ones went further, producing flower from flow, treachery from reach and danger from anger - words that even sounded different.

It was just a matter of time, perhaps only a few centuries, before yet another structural change was made. Letters before and after were added, with delightfully illogical effects. Middle words like 'can' became 'vacant', 'prod' led to 'reproduce' and 'jest' to 'majestic'. Even the word 'word' came to describe a weapon, when an 's' was added in front of it.

Even more complex arrangements were worked out by these elitists. Multiple single words were added together with confusing results. 'Fun', 'Dam' and 'men' were all united to form 'fundamental'. This absurdity peaked perhaps with the amalgamation of 'ward', 'cow' and 'ice' to produce 'cowardice'.

Paralleling the advent of wheels and levers in these

early days was this primitive attempt at aptness in word communication. Elders were pleased that such a non-sensical word system would act as a barrier to keep out unwelcome strangers, thus protecting their system of rule and prayer.

As the spirit of word fantasy gripped the land, it was suggested that learning centres should have special words to identify them. This allowed words like 'hool' and 'brary', previously unknown, to become 'school' and 'library'.

There was yet a final clincher in the new system of wordology. The land they roamed on the west was to be called 'england', even though the word 'eng' did not exist at that time. Then they took 'lan' and 'guage' to produce 'language' and called the whole system the 'english language'. Lastly, they added exotic ways of spelling these words, such that foreigners would take years to learn the language. The first of these was the alteration of 'foriner' to 'foreigner'.

Perhaps in the final analysis, this word extravaganza was a better defense system than our present one of new clear miss isles.

A Country Called Ontario

Funny, having a last look at Quebec, it looked just as much a part of our country as any other province. I didn't see it as being as exclusive as the absence of all signs in English suggested. Its extensive patchwork of fields of barley and corn and alfalfa reminded me of the red-soiled fertility of Prince Edward Island farmland. People were friendly and natural. Traffic and roads were no different to elsewhere. Since the land looked and smelled so rich, it seemed that leaching into creeks and small rivers had turned the waters muddy.

And now in Ontario. Here the group had a big share of flat tires and minor mishaps. The roads in the northwest were narrow, two laned, poorly patched and danger traps for the unwary. Frost heaves, ridges, holes, gravel shoulders, heavy traffic and even fog provided a constant challenge. We saw very few other cyclists on this section of the Trans Canada Highway. I was grateful that we often travelled in twos and threes to be more visible and generate more respect from the traffic. Two fatal accidents, one a few weeks before and the other to one of our group, served to emphasize the element of danger present. Our sensitive machines and unprotected bodies rode the narrow edge of survival here.

My senses had been stretched to the limit. My eyes were focussed, trance-like, on road and traffic. Could only look away for a few seconds. Eyes were used extensively to evaluate noise behind me in terms of how far away, how heavy the vehicle, speed and ultimately, how close it may pass to me. I usually made about three seconds of lead time this way to sharpen concentration even further. Three seconds to ride exactly on the white line at road edge, or to slow and pull off onto treacherous gravel shoulders. Strong reserves of nervous energy were vital.

Big cab-trailer trucks were often so well driven that we could trust them. All we had to do was to live with the strong bow wave of air that pushed the front of the bike away and the tail eddy that tended to suck the bike back. It was ironic that New Brunswick, a poorer province, had excellent roads for cyclists and traffic alike. Almost as good as Alberta.

The senior next to me in the washroom that morning, owner of a recreation vehicle, says "You'll have no trouble from here to your next campsite." I pause from cleaning my teeth. Much of our journey had produced such people with their well meaning advice on distances, hills, winds, etc. At first we had believed them.

"Mostly level once you leave Matawa" he continued.

"Aah!"

"Sure a good road too."

"Right."

"Even the wind is favourable" he added.

As I worked my teeth I glanced at him. A perfect stereotype of the caravan trail. White hair which he was carefully arranging. Soft white skin and a well filled belly.

"Which kind of bike do you ride" I venture.

"Oh no, no -- no, no. No, not me. No sir!" he emphasized.

"I had you down as one of our riders."

He paused with the comb. He seemed a little irritated. He gave me a hard look as if to measure if I was being facetious. He then tapped his comb on the edge of the sink as though shaking out lumps.

"I don't want anything to do with riding those machines" he said slowly and carefully.

"You look just made for cycling" I pursued.

This time I sensed the vibes were full of static as he detached his comb once again. He looked intently in the mirror for a few moments. Putting his comb down he turned and eyeballed me.

"You seem to have not noticed my feelings about bikes. They are dangerous. They upset traffic. They cause accidents. And they don't pay road taxes! Do I make myself clear?"

He was a big man and through the tension I detected his clarity was in high gear. As I moved to the door I gave a parting shot.

"You know, most of our seniors started with your limitations. You look like good material for a beginners program."

His expression was now dark anger. He made jerky attempts to collect his toiletries.

"Darn your bikes and club. There should be a law

against you. That's what I think!" he snorted, breathing heavily.

Ottawa was a pleasant surprise. Not dull and conservative. In fact, exciting. Outdoor cafes, gardens, parks and well designed high rises contrasting well with old world government buildings whose green copper roofs had several layers of windows in them. Fine road, fountains and sculptures, with large trees crossing overhead in residential areas. Joggers and cyclists everywhere. Add river, canal and an open air market for good measure. To get some aerial photos I used an elevator that travelled 24 floors in the time it took to lean against the rear wall. It moved at over 800 feet per minute! And with little sense of motion.

The art gallery must be the finest in the land. I was told that less than 10 percent of the paintings are on display at any one time. Security guards are everywhere. The Group of Seven originals were breathtaking.

I stayed with friends that night and had a 'home cooked' dinner and 'home' bath. Was pleased with the shape of my body in the mirror. Made a new year's resolution to keep it this way all winter. Saw our group on television for the first time. We had good publicity from radio, television and press all the way, even the odd mayor laying it on for us. Seniors at drop-in centers were generous with beverages and meals that provided a pleasant break in the camping pattern.

Just have to mention one last Ottawa item, the city hall. A megalith with a large multi-level open foyer that looked more like a combination cathedral/arts centre. Spiral staircases, brass rails, fountain, windows 60 feet high and even a theatre stage, all in this open vaulted entrance! Couldn't imagine taking my humble light and power bill into this palace for payment! Or maybe I could...

Riding the Ontario highway was tough. In my tent after the ride I had questions and doubts about the wisdom of it all. The constancy of hills, thunderstorms, winds and traffic made me wonder what summer and old age was about. I questioned this crucible of action. Had I perhaps had enough? Should I call it quits? Riding that narrow road edge... what am I proving? And to whom? And of course I only got partial answers...

After I have rested, I begin to know again exactly where I am and why. A setting sun suggests fine weather tomorrow. I feel refreshed from the outdoor exposure, recall vividly the quiet aloneness of an early start with a real nip in the air and, perhaps as much as anything, reflect in awe at my body's power.

Appeared November 23, 1981 in The Penticton Herald

Cycling In Peking A Risky Adventure

First sights of the city, from behind the isolation of bus windows, was of extensive foot and bicycle traffic on roads that were almost as wide as a football field. As many as four rows of trees lined both dirt sidewalks partly hiding heavily walled workers' homes and hundreds of apartment blocks.

Construction was everywhere, trying to keep pace with increased population, even though family size is 'limited' to one child. Salvageable debris stayed on the street for months or years after occupancy.

Cyclists numbered in the thousands, on bikes identical in every city, while taxis and trucks passed within inches of body contact. The driving pattern of our bus driver was kamikaze -- horn, gas pedal, brakes, in no special order. We'd been told of many accidents. Alertness and luck were vital parameters for survival.

BIKES PULLING TRAILERS

The single speed bike dominated the traffic scene: mobile, economical, body-building and a work horse for a wide variety of loads. A common sight would be a whole family on one bike, wife on carrier sitting side saddle and probably with a babe in arms. With a trailer attached, a dozen 80 lb. bags of rice or a full-sized chesterfield (complete with someone lying on it) could be carried by one cyclist.

In response to my keen desire to cycle, our liberal-minded group leader replied that tourists never make such requests. Our national tour guide, Mr. Xia, also a member of the Communist Party, was puzzled at my request. At my age? Cycling? In the busy streets? But there were no bicycles for rent or even for sale!

Suddenly he seemed to see me as a less stable member of his carefully categorized group, even a minor threat to his serenity and official destiny. Suggesting that maybe I could arrange for a bike myself brought the right balance of amusement and well-modulated scam.

BIG RISK

Next morning, to my surprise, I had it all arranged. A young hotel attendant, He Yentin, finally worn down by me, not only surrendered his bike but volunteered to accompany me. My practise spin in the hotel compound left him unimpressed -- he knew the magnitude of the risk he was taking.

Then we were off with high spirits and moving fast, passing everybody in the endless cavalcade of two-wheeled vehicles. A whole book of instructions from an apprehensive Yenlin warned me of 50 dangers. After a few miles he gave up and said I was on my own. "But use your bell more often!" he warned.

Stopping once for ice cream produced a larger than average crowd. I took pictures and got amused smiles. After an hour of delightful movement we passed the 100 acre ceremonial square, dodged nimbly through a slow flock of pedabikes and three wheeled van-trailers and into the 'friendship' store. Unlike other stores, the lights were on all day.

RUSH HOUR

Here I discovered what seemed the true reason for my friend's risk-taking assistance. He wanted to buy two nice 'tourist' shirts. Normally, he would not be allowed in 'friendship' stores nor to possess foreign money. We completed his transactions with ease and were then onto the freeway again, except that now it was rush hour. No wonder the streets were so wide.

At a very busy intersection we made a left turn through eight lanes of traffice by a combination of precise timing, weaving, braking and much bell ringing. A policeman with loud hailer shouted in our direction. Yenlin seemed embarrassed. Pressing for details he said he'd been reprimanded for letting a foreigner ride so fast and so dangerously.

A short-cut landed us among about 60 handcarts. The operators, with their one-ton loads, would jog along and then press down on the heavy handles. They were thus lifted and carried in giant 30 to 40 foot strides.

We arrived back in time and, despite the short-cuts, safely. Accidents or incidents that afternoon were -- like the city's cats, dogs, birds and bug population -- non-existent.

Back at the hotel even Yenlin smiled a victory grin.

Daisy and Harry

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.
I'm half crazy over the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage.
But you'll look sweet
Upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.

Harry, Harry, here's my answer true.
You must be crazy to think I'll marry you.
If you can't afford a carriage
There won't be a marriage.
'Cos I'll be damned
If I'll be crammed
On a bicycle built for two.

Daisy, Daisy, that answer will not do.
You're as crazy for me as I am for you.
If pumping those cranks you fear
I'll get a wee Grannie gear.
And a brake and a bell
Will do you just swell
With wheels that are round and true.

Harry, Harry, I think that you're soft in the head.
Instead of cycling I'd rather stay in bed.
But since you do love me
And want me for your wife.
Make a seat of foam
Leave the pedals at home
And I'll marry you and your bike.

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Penticton Herald

To Be A Dancer

I am old...

To most people very old. In fact by the calendar I have completed scores of space flights on our earth satellite around the star we call our sun.

Young people call me 'sir' or 'mister'. I no longer need to show identity to buy a senior's bus ticket. The driver extends a hand when I leave. In general people speak a little louder and slower to me. One more proof of age, members of my family say "I'll do that for you, Dad!"

Get the picture? How could you miss. On my next trip to the garbage dump I consider leaving me there... But wait! Wait, I'm not through yet. I got this crazy idea that I should learn to ballroom dance. For, shall we say, private reasons. No, no, no it's not so much the handsome ladies that go to the over-40 dances. No really. But I must admit...

So I found myself one morning at the Retirement Centre being introduced to a very attractive lass whose generous smile had my legs a touch wobbly. I'll disguise her name as Margaret in case she gets a flood of requests from some of you active males.

There was a band playing old time tunes. Stuff I hadn't heard in years. Margaret introduced me to several other lady friends. Their smiles seemed sympathetic; poor guy, he doesn't dance. Already I felt out of my element, but gritting my teeth I prepared to face the firing squad.

I didn't realize at first what a winner I had in my dancing teacher. She was to be friendly, patient, a breeze to hold and not only had she danced all her life but was doing it now four or five times a week! Yet she had the freshness of youth. She would grow on me.

Anyhow, for now, back to the first primitive and hesitant steps. She held me in open posture so we could watch our feet better. I could see how my farm boots lacked finesse. She explained the waltz and I jerkily made my way around the floor. There were only about four other couples dancing. Lots of room. For this I was grateful. Had enough to think about without collisions.

In clear voice she spelled out the steps in numbers from one to three. First to the left, then right and left again. Heck, I almost got the first turn without mishap. It was a minor thing really. We picked ourselves up quickly and limped our way through the next series of turns. I forget whether I was putting in too many or not enough steps in the turns, because they were failing miserably.

Come to think of it, starting the dance, you know the very first step was not straightforward. I managed to do it off the beat, with the wrong foot first and halfway through the steps instead of beginning... The maximum of mistakes humanly possible.

I glanced at the other dancers. They all looked expert, confident and flashy. I carried the same envy when as a tourist in a foreign country like China, baffled by the language, I heard children everywhere talking it fluently!

But my teacher, Margaret, kept up a calm counting while guiding me with her arms. She also kept a wary eye on my feet. I was surprised how much dance floor one's partner's feet took up. I think mine had been digging a spade into a big garden too long. They were almost as wide as long.

"Well now that wasn't too bad was it?" she said, giving me a warm smile and hand squeeze. I mumbled something neutral. It wasn't easy to admit a poor connection between my cortex and feet. In my disabled state it took a moment to realize the band had stopped. The dancers were waiting on the floor for more and, sure enough, the band guiltily got the message and started in again.

At this stage I was more than willing to sit out the rest of the dances. Defeat had quickly eroded my confidence. Margaret chose not to notice my subdued spirit. "Don't forget, left foot first and slow, right foot right and slow and left to right quick," she commanded, then gave me an earnest look as though I had a learning problem. Yet it all sounded so simple. Any child could do it. But the words helped straighten my bent shoulders slightly. After all hadn't I completed one full dance? Well, hadn't I?

So off we went again. In trying to avoid further damage to her left foot that I had picked on, I managed to scuff her right ankle noticeably.

My next series of dances contained erratic patterns of movement as though I had circulation difficulties or springs under my shoes. I was emitting quanta of nervous energy in creating awkward shuffles, a little like a football half-back doing broken field running. The band had their problems too, largely in keeping step with me. Worst of all, I was conscious of repeating so many times the same

mistakes.

We finally made a number of dances. I don't remember much about those first early starts except a score of restarts, a dozen major errors, several innocent mistakes and that I got very warm.

It was funny how Margaret accepted it all in her stride except for those little mistakes of my inserting steps that had nothing to do with the dance but were still in time to the music. She said, "We are going to dance the waltz precisely by the book, complete with long strides." I nodded admiringly. "And," she continued, "we don't care what steps other people take." She was to repeat this assertion many times over the weeks, and eventually the message entered my bloodstream.

If someone had said to me, at the end of my first lesson, "John", (my disguised name), "you're going to have a ball with this ballroom armed combat", I would have given them a hard look and questioned their knowledge of human nature.

I said goodbye to the dancing team, thanked them, smiled sadly at their bruises and promised to meet next week. Inwardly I was very unsure about continuing this form of social pleasure. But, unknown to me, the virus was already at work in my genes as I remembered the few good strokes I had made. And how attractive the feel of the little warm body, easy smile and open arms of my teacher had been.

Seven days later, I was there waiting for the show to begin again. I had been promised a trial run at a frisky number called the Quick Step. Meanwhile, I would enjoy the calm before the D (Dance) Day storm.

Was it really only a few months ago that this senior started to ballroom dance?

Gad, it seems I've been doing it for years. At about three dances a week it has worked out to probably 25 miles of fox trots and, in waltzes, close to 1,000 turns and 400 or so pivots. My feet are now well seasoned and bigger than ever. From the waist down my muscles are fatter than ever. In all, much more evenness.

When sitting out I try and improve my style by watching others at floor level. The owners of those feet all seem to do different steps to the same music. A little confusing, true, but as a reward to such a study I note with pleasure the ladies' deliciously slim ankles, sexy high heels and

silky legs. A pleasure not to be sniffed at. And many of those graceful ankles cut flashy patterns.

It has been said 'We learn nothing from things we know', which proves what a good learner I must be since I still know so little about the dance - except perhaps that it is high in spirit and fun.

Was it not some obscure artist who once said 'It takes a long time to become young', and he spent over 90 years working at it? A name something like Pablo Picasso... Well this youngness is getting into my veins, too. Lately pension officials have been taking a second look at my birth certificate. Also, my gal figures I should get married and settle down and raise a family.

At home where once I saw hills and lake and orchard I now only see inside my dance head. A picture of a champion dancer with lean body, narrow hips and truly graceful style. And in his arms the perfect partner, his teacher. Others on the floor stand back in admiration and gently applaud. He glides in the golden glow of it all, modest and sure... But wait, wait, his name is... Why of course, it's me!

Then I blink my eyes, sigh a little and the scene shifts back to hills and lake and I start breathing again.

Meanwhile, on the real dance floor, the band is playing Sentimental Journey, a juicy, moody number. I look for a romantic partner and notice many of the ladies are being snatched up faster than items at a \$1.49 day sale. Often by the time I recognize the music as being danceable by me, chairs are empty and the sale is over!

But this time I am ready. My hand is held out. Our eyes are held. She rises without a sigh, great for my morale.

I do the first steps in time and on the right foot. That happens to be my left. Super! Nothing like a good start when you have a handsome lass in your arms.

We begin with an open stance. She is quietly cautious of my skills, so I try and build some credits by a series of moderately difficult turns, followed by a deliciously delayed pivot with a 2.3 degree of difficulty.

The warm tones of the music flow over us. She yields to me and we become one. I bathe in the total length of her softness, good right down to her toes. Inwardly I marvel how ladies in general can follow my moves so well, considering I don't know myself until I am halfway into them.

Her head is now on my should... Great! I mean this is high level acceptance. With long and sure steps we are so synchronized it seems I have four legs but only two need do the work.

We don't talk. Words would reduce the mood. I groan with pleasure as she floats and hovers and smells so nice.

The band is coming in strong. 'Gonna take a sentimental journey...' Gad, those words apply to me, the sentiment and the travel. I barely notice other couples. Just enough to avoid them. Most times we are phantoms. This is ballet. Our feet are alive, requiring no formal directions from the mind. And now if I continue to be serene I will be granted the highest reward of all, she will cushion her cheek against mine and I will be made a Knight of the Realm. And the night will be young, the journey endless and my energy increasing!

As we walk back to our table a glance shows joy in her smile. This pleases me. I feel like the dancer in my daydream. She, as my teacher, has made me in her image - bent and shaped to her sculpture. Exploring the limits of my bendability, I am flushed and warm and happy. She says something nice about my efforts. I believe every word.

Dancing has been an experiment in freedom. Free to express, using language of the body. Free to be lifted and responsive to a throbbing beat urgent to my central needs. All my molecules want to be miniature dancers. Yet the dance makes a prisoner of me, lost in the grip of my senses.

A sign in an old Japanese inn says 'Sleep faster, we need the pillows'. I say to myself, "Dance faster, I want to learn more quickly."

To the cynic who said "Life must go on, I forget just why", I recommend dance as a beginning of a new understanding. But listen! What's the band leader saying? A polka next? Good, that should burn off a few extra calories and make us a few days younger again.

Now if I can just get over there in time before those chairs empty on me!

She sits alone, empty and almost invisible. As I move toward her she looks up expectantly. There is a faint smile, a signal to me of acceptance.

I bend over, hands held out. She gives me hers and rises. We move onto the floor and into the dance. Confidently we change from open to closed stance. The

closeness of her supple body, pleasing scent and a dance tune measure for me, incites a familiar surge of unsurfaced emotion. I groan with pleasure. This is going to be as delicious as in my better day dreams...

Funny, just a few months ago I would have to think my way around the floor, wondering how best to handle my simple steps with a minimum of bumps. But now my involvement is visceral and I usually give full range to feelings. Many dances have come and gone for me and I expect there are several hundred more in my DNA program, before my 'senior' energies evaporate. Men do seem to be in short supply at these events.

The dance is the fox-trot. A favorite of mine and of my dance teacher, a teacher who taught quite a bit more than steps and who left in me the passion she shares for dancing.

And now this other partner, with cool hands and smooth style, shows an elegance I have grown to expect from so many partners. We are utterly free and the effort is minute.

Usually my first entrance at a dance is made exciting just by seeing the 'ladies of the dance' -- friends I have come to know well -- sitting, waiting for the band to start up. Handsome in fine clothes, trim figures, alive eyes and friendly smiles, they exude health and fitness. They can grind out a mean boogie or rock 'n' roll at the Singles Dance...

...Her slim length is pressed firm against me and I feel both softness and strength, drifting in and out of this spirited moment.

Our two shapes are one. The mood is pleasure. Her sensitive radar reads every unexpected motion of mine and she follows with ease. The gentle touch of hair against my face makes me sing. I inhale her scent and become weightless, free falling. The dance becomes a classic and we are immortal.

As we glide close to the band, the increase in sound level gives us a booster shot and we spin off the gain in energy. The band is strong and together, and the alto sax pumps fresh adrenalin into my bloodstream. Other couples on the floor appear to be in touch with their feelings, too, judging by the joy in their expressions. I slip easily into the golden quality of it all and play my part.

The dance ends and, as we walk back to our seats, fingers entwined, there is a smile on her face and I actually feel like a dancer. I'm an addict who doesn't want to kick the habit, who doesn't want to analyse what makes it all a grabber. I just want to follow the compelling urge to

do my part, without consequences or complications, to be part of an act of surrender, without demands. As a man called Antonio Porchia once said, "Whatever I take, I take too much or too little. The exact amount is of no use to me."

I still haven't yet got over the fact that I can go up to a perfect stranger and, moments later, be holding her close in my arms. I sometimes wonder what it would be like trying it in, say, a shopping mall!

We completed our dance without a word spoken. No names, even. To have asked may have broken the spell. I had almost welcomed an error or two so I could squeeze her hand in apology.

I return her to invisible aloneness. But I will be back. She has touched a centre in me. And I will know her name.

Back in the company of the ladies of the dance, I reflect on how these charmers have nursed me through early beginnings in this art form. It makes me keen to share whatever I can with others, in particular those who sit too often alone.

"Freedom of will is the ability to do gladly that which one must," said Carl Jung.

And I must...

Dear Sir,

Dear Mr. Pierre Elliott Trudeau,

I should have written my regards and appreciation to you some years ago. My reason for this letter is to include you in my hero hall of fame. This communication has to substitute for a couple of informal hours on my sundeck, complete with peasant wine and Okanagan Lake view.

In my 69 years I have voted a total of once. Some years ago. For you. How can I increase my interest in politics when the daily headlines scream the wrong party is governing again? The opposition should be the leaders, being so skilled in destroying and so weak in praise.

Is it because we seek perfection so much? We want idealism, honesty, courage, intellectual perception and, of course, personality. Are we merely children critical of our parents?

At times I feel like the unknown person who said "Life must go on. I forget why..." It seems so puzzling that, with all our high tech skills, education and wealth, we continue to mistake words for reality and show a preference for illusion and even fantasy. We expect virtues and insight in our leaders that only actors in a Hollywood film could display. The opposition must never concede anything productive to the enemy in power. Power and wealth are expected to corrupt and dominate. Peace is best achieved by invasion and killing. Greed is taken in stride, judging by the way we patronize the thousands of Big Macs and hundreds of Hiltons.

It seems a mystery to me how robotics, genetic engineering, television commercials and other distractions can take our minds off critical issues such as ozone layer holes, star wars weaponry, nuclear devastations, pollution and exploitation of land and wild animals. Do we know how to handle our energy systems and wastes? Are we in control of our destiny?

And of course when I think of the northern hemisphere taking over 40 years to try and negotiate peace or the United Nations being perplexed and overwhelmed by increasing world problems. I recall Irene Potter's words - "Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed."

I've admired your footwork immensely. Perhaps as much as your intellectual brilliance, spontaneity, and gift of articulation. You have taken your philosophy of youth and

freshness to such a refined level that many others around you look stuffy, dull and susceptible to your sting! I enjoy your global nature. I must assume that there is a generous splurge of asiatic philosophy in your make-up. It certainly has contributed to my wholeness and sanity.

In summing up I am optimistic enough to assume that there is a formula even though it may be beyond my future vision. It must include a deeper understanding of human and family relationships in our educational system. A greater evening out of goods and capital among nations. And certainly more women in leadership roles.

May I paraphrase Charle Simic and say "Inside your empty bottle you were constructing a lighthouse while all the others were making ships."

May your clarity of thought, wit, humor and charm be with us for a very long time.

Best feelings,

Jayce

Appeared in The Penticton Herald

Seniors Discover The Land And
Themselves On Cycling Tour

Let me say something on discoveries concerning our land, cycling, the group and perhaps some highlights.

The two weeks in B.C. were full of purpose and optimism. Even though our legs had not quite matured in a hardened and tempered way, our zest compensated.

The variety here was impressive. Valleys, canyons, fast-flowing creeks and rivers, lakes and rolling hills topped with good highways and the staggering Rockies. Our lungs drank deep the many scents of wildflowers, including roses, alfalfa, rape blossom combined with pine and sage. These were pleasure miles. We were free. The magnitude of our province created awe and respect.

We exited through the Himalayan Rockies. In the clear air these megaliths were a forest of snow-capped giants. It seemed there were hundreds. At 5,000 feet there was a tinge of frost in the air and we needed all the energy we could muster. But we roared back as we dipped down foothills into the flatlands of the prairies. Under such stimulation it was easy to entertain many trains of thought, ideas and insights. The fluid motion and freedom of it all increased my inner examination.

From the raw power of B.C. into a vast green emptiness of young wheat everywhere. We could see the earth's curvature in every direction. Thinly scattered clusters of trees provides oases for homes and villages. No buildings. No sounds. No dogs barking or laundry on lines. Few birds. Just eternal light from clear skies lit by a sun we saw rise at ground zero, to arc and eventually fall off its western ledge.

Highways were well kept and slide-rule straight. We could see towns up to 20 miles distant. Nearby oil rigs nodded up and down, a one-legged bird pecking the ground. I enjoyed the timeless color of the prairies. My self image was high. Stress was low. That elusive quality known as optimism was with us.

And then it all changed as we entered Ontario. Boredom and danger for days and days on narrow, patched roads with no place for bikes. We passed through hundreds of miles of forest: birch, pine and spruce. Debris from blown truck tires and exhaust systems cluttered the roadside. Ottawa

was a bright spot for me: well designed high-rises sharing the air space next to green-copper roofed medieval government buildings -- both very attractive. Here were river, canal, parks in profusion, fountains, outdoor sculpture and an open air market. And not forgetting a modern city hall that looked inside like a combination opera house and art centre. It even had a theatre in the main entrance.

Quebec was beautiful countryside and marvellous old world villages. The land had been worked for centuries and smelled strongly of animal fertilizer. Farms bordered the roads making for passing intimacy. The fields had been subdivided over the years into narrow strips so no one had too much dominance over road or river frontage. Barley and alfalfa were the main crops.

The Maritimes had fewer farms and farmland. The cash crops were potatoes and barley. Prince Edward Island looked like a miniature England, intensively cultivated with soils usually red in color.

Cycling is like jogging, a drag. It is also magic, make no mistake. At times it would take a hill or head-wind to remind me that my legs were doing the work. The machine stops, starts, turns and parks with uncanny ease. Many an hour I would look down at the spinning wheel. How true it ran. Sun glinting on clean spokes. I see a tire that almost appeared solid on the road because of fairly high pressure. I was fascinated with how precise all 15 gears could be smoothly selected in a well oiled system. It was a point of pride to do it accurately first time. Brakes were adjusted to clear wheels by just a few millimeters. Only when wet were they doubtful. Modern bikes are works of art in well engineered frames capable of carrying heavy loads on the worst of surfaces and tuned at concert pitch. They were optimum performers.

The group of 30 riders were a fine mix. They were extroverted and passionately attached to the recreation of cycling, most ready to share experiences, information and mechanical expertise. For the ladies, help was a mere flutter of an eyelid away! The longer our journey, the less our weight and the greater the color in our cheeks. Their spirit and energy had great carrying power for me. Heck, if that white haired old man in front of me can keep on pedalling, well--! We were lucky in having high quality leadership under Martin McCready, man of distinction. He and the executive had started planning nine months before. We knew each day where we would camp next, how to get there and, most of all, who would be next responsible for cooking the meals.

Quite a few of the seniors had 'junior' bodies capable

of riding in competition. The ladies were a daily surprise to me. I had a busy time trying to keep up with them. They played a vital part in group harmony right to the last day.

Lastly, in terms of highlights, some high moments have to include the contrast between endless peaks of the Rockies and endless flat land next door. Both wonderful experiences. The tallest chimney in the world at Sudbury appealed to my engineering nature, all 1,250 feet of it! Ottawa was another surprising standout, as was Quebec.

The Red Cross played a fairly big part in our itinerary, comfort and general well-being. Hats off to an organization that I thought only handled parcels and blood!

The Revelstoke dam was worth a long visit. So was a fish and chip shop in Charlottetown when my craving was only satisfied after a number of meals. Catching a well-earned snooze in my hastily assembled tent after the ride was sheer bliss and made my body young again. And lastly, the ride back in the train was four days and seven hours of pleasure: window watching and brooding, reading and writing, and good company.

Ah! There is one more item. I probably forgot to mention that, balancing all the glory of this cycling business, it was also hard work! Maybe I forgot that small detail...

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Do You Understand...?

"Name?"

"George."

"You're charged with being an alien--."

"And knowing too little of my monumental 3rd and 9th symphonies."

"And entering the United States of the World illegally--."

"My piano concerti are spread throughout the galaxy."

"I need a former address..."

"The Appassionata was perhaps the--."

"YOUR ADDRESS, SIR!!"

"You do fuss so. Had I known earthling officials would be this way--."

"I'm losing my patience... ADDRESS?!"

"Very well. My planet in Andromeda is called Shakespeare--."

"That sounds corny."

"In a small country known as Einstein, and the city called Ramakrishia."

"One more obstruction of the law and you'll be doomed."

"How will you doom me?"

"I'll give you one more chance. How did you get here?"

"You're not going to like this either. Most likely double-doom me--."

"Get on with it, blast you!!"

"You asked for it. But first, how informed are you on Particle Theory?"

"Part--what?"

"Just as I thought. Ah well..."

"I'm waiting--."

"Well, Thought Prolongation defined the journey."

"Ughhh!"

"My thought concentration was so deep as to time warp my proton base."

"GRRRR--!"

"And I can reassemble myself anywhere within the limits of nearby star clusters. Gravity waves being the vehicle--."

"At first I thought you were just sick on drugs. Now I know you are crazy... crazy!"

"I expected this from you. But I have an idea that might just convince you in an instant."

"Oh?"

"I'll just focus this Collector Quartz Stone on you--."

"I'll get the wagon ready--aaaaaahhh!!!"

"Tsk, tsk... It makes them vanish so quickly. Do hope other officials are less skeptical. But I must remember it was a very strong signal the Okanagan Symphony Society sent out into space, asking for help to meet the challenge of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in a best two out of three challenge match. I do hope my suggestions don't fall on deaf ears."

"The atoms and molecules within me dream they are people.
- Seth"

Dream Window

What do I see through the glass out to the wide river and beyond? Often a blend of the inside me and the nature of water, green island and varied sky.

It always surprises me when we can have our eyes open but the visual message is blocked by our thoughts. Often the switch triggered by some unknown desire or ...what? Just like listening to music that is pleasing but not too eventful where the ears are blocked by some internal listening device or merely a mind picture of more developed interest.

And then there is the many sided ability of the mind. Right now I see the disturbed river waves, pale sky and gulls. And hear the cello concerto of Elgar, though not with strong listening ease. And I smell my buns cooking in the oven using even less of myself in the analysis. Perhaps I even notice the cold of the morning in my float home and, of course, as all this takes place I use my hand to write.

The river is under my kitchen, water under my bed and motion under my feet when a boat passes near by. Security is a floatation word. It seems just a little unnatural for a whole house to be on the move although anchored, responding to the surging waves that flow in from the fishing boats.

So quiet here. Tall banks shelter totally from the shore side traffic sounds. There are only a few morning boats, then no other sound comes in. The sun strums the river ripples. And a few gulls follow a fishing boat.

And now the tide is coming in, tending to slow the 6 km flow of the river to less than half. And in the distance, all lands are flat and level -- few trees, and no hills. A true delta area.

My next door neighbour is going to be full of surprises. Just know that. Can't wait to find out what this self-reliant lass has been up to in her life.

Almost the end of my first 24 hours on my home. Note 'on', not 'in'. Of course it will soon become just another very nice abode. Sensible, well built, with so much storage room provided by a cunning previous owner... But right now it is like nothing experienced before, along with some Zen and good music of stereo.

Could this possibly make sense? Here I am halfway through my unpacking, having a well deserved cocoa break... Here on the water, on a river that flows, probably half a

mile wide and very fast. And how do I feel? Like the proud owner of a float home? All mine?

Do you know how I feel, do you? You, my deeper me... I pick up 'The Three Pillars of Zen', material I haven't read for years and I don't get past the introduction by, of all delightful philosophers, Huston Smith. He says "if we don't learn the mystery and beauty of our present life, our present hour, we shall not perceive the worth of any life, of any hour."

Zen, a method of attaining to the direct experience of the truth of certain affirmations dealing with non-attachment and 'voids'.

And as I stop at this page because the meal is so heavy already, I look at the huge river and I both see with eyes and mind a warm bliss within me... and... and the incredible feeling that I am at last really home. This right now is my organs, cells and blood in a state of supreme aliveness and lucidity!

Fear Is Not Enough

He couldn't put a finger on it and began to doubt his sense. Glancing around showed things looked normal. The sky was still there, blue and white. The lake calm. Fruit was sizing up nicely in the orchard. Traffic sounds filtered across the lake. And nearby birds were darting in food searches.

He stood still. Maybe if he listened extra carefully there might be a warning clue. But how would he recognize it? And what would it foretell? His stillness produced nothing. But he had unsettled feelings. It was as though a faint voice was trying to get through with an urgent warning.

A sign broke his slowed breathing and he bent to continue digging the fresh soil. The garden was one of his special joys. He had almost shrugged off his concern when into his deeper vision came a sudden reminder. It had been in this very spot and about the same time of day that he had heard the big dull bang of St. Helen's blowing its top. This at one hundred and fifty miles away! And his guts turned at the prospect of a sinister parallel of that kind.

He sat down. He felt a fatigue. Slowly he became aware of a special effect. The sounds around him had become definitely fainter--birds, road noises, distant voices. At first he thought the extended bending of digging had made his head fuzzy.

He looked around as though expecting the next sign of some gross disturbance. And then he saw it! The cats! No longer running and springing in the trees, but moving back toward the house with exaggerated slow motion. Their ears were back and eyes wide open as though an invisible force had distorted their space.

He quickly decided to go in and turn on the radio. And then he noticed how slowly his own limbs moved. It took minutes to go a few yards. At the door the cats pleaded to be let in with near soundless cries.

His anxiety had turned to heart-pounding alarm. Energy began to leak out of him. Operating the radio produced nothing. No sounds. No stations, yet power was still on in the house.

On the sundeck a large bird was prisoner, its open wings struggling to move.

From nowhere his thoughts switched to the massive explosion that had taken place in Siberia almost eighty

years ago, the above ground burst flattening the tundra for one thousand square miles. A circle as big across as Penticton to Kelowna. Again he felt a sinister connection, with magnitudes even greater. And then that air force document commenting on two new developments in UFO's. The first, that their activity had increased alarmingly. The second, a hint of an enormously powerful weapon they may have that would act like a nerve gas. The radiation from these devices capable of paralyzing all animal and vegetable life.

One astrophysicist had been scoffed at for suggesting "they", the unidentified, had reached limits of patience over our incredible immaturity at planet housekeeping. He added the thought that one day they may plan a form of deep freeze to put on hold our strikes, violence and killings. In other words, prevent our planet's suicide.

Near the radio he collapsed in his chair, his mind only a few images. He would never know how his scattered family would be making out. What if one was driving a car? Or people in any moving transport? He sank into a grey coma. He no longer felt. It seemed his breathing had stopped. Then the light went out completely.

Centuries of time passed as though in dreamlike fashion. Faintly, incredibly faintly, a thin voice was calling again, sounding like the first warning voice he had heard in the garden. With what seemed an enormous effort of will he fought to the surface. Every part of him felt bound and a great effort was required to break free. He struggled to develop this energy. Slowly a faint spread of light formed at the back of his eyes.

Now the voice was there again. Stronger, more insistent. With a last major effort his eyes opened to be burnt by the sun. The same sun.

His first concern seemed the need to silence the voice. With thick clearing of the throat he shouted a response. He had finally interpreted the two word message. It came from the direction of the sundeck and it said, "Lunchtime, Sleepy..."

Evening People

Who is the centre of this free group
That meets in friendly homes?
Who is the absent naked force
Among their very bones?

Who is the stranger tight within
Attuned to all their levels
Who moves their minds in these evening revels
Is here deep within their kind?

Around they sit
Mid sure voiced time
To search, express and aptly verify
Greatness of human form.

One such enrapt
In wordy duel.
Her partner too
In bright defiance.

It seems the room cube
Fills with life and meaning
And as in expanding shows
The very urge of their being.

A brow passing through
A pair of hands
As thoughts pool chaos
In the air.

And with studied choosing
They emphasize their cause once more.
Yet quietly still through it all
Truth shyly bows her head.

And then-- The stranger silent came
Paused briefly, intent
And sat alone.

Some of them saw
For they could see
While others lost within their minds
Continued as before.

It was odd yet right
For him to be
Gray, squarely silent
And aware.

He seemed to settle

And take delight
In all their actions
Wrong or right.

Though once his remoteness recalled
A passing glimpse of another world
How bleakly hard to really know
One part the life within those eyes.

And yet he seemed a common man.

Then--
But some little time
Before they planned to go
He moved himself to leave.

And those who saw
And knew before
Did see so
Once again.

And swear he paused
To touch the lips
Of she
With gentle quiet--

And truth ran down her soul.

They parted, and as she moved
Her warm lit heart aglow
She knew her memories would remain soft content
For child of love was she.

Appeared in The Penticton Herald

Family Money

I was watching with casual interest the careful way the hotel money clerks were executing the exchange of our traveller's checks for their currency in Yuan. They were unsmiling, firm and efficient. They had to be, since any one transaction, averaging \$100 to \$200, was probably equal to two years savings for them.

There were two girls and two men involved. The first would take the cheque, carefully study it and then, using an abacus, convert it into their money. The notes were then selected and counted with convincing effectiveness. The snap-flick-snap of each note had a crisp personal ring under those confident fingers.

Satisfied, the money and corresponding cheque were passed to the second clerk for cross-checking. She showed a similar competence and exactness. The drama only ended when the remaining two clerks made their contribution.

Words like 'infallible', 'business-like' and 'unfailing' came to mind. It is always a pleasure to see professional talent at work performing with excellence no matter their field of action. And these people were obviously tops in their line of work, where mistakes were both unthinkable and unforgivable.

It would have been almost an insult for me to have checked the amount handed me after this performance. I would rather have doubted the Pope's ability to speak Latin.

Several hours later, after a well spent afternoon in the Forbidden City in Peking, I had cause to examine my money while making a purchase. Imagine my surprise when I discovered what appeared to be an excess sum of about \$40. Error was impossible when remembering how those earnest souls had done their money counting duty. Perhaps my travellers check had been a higher denomination than I thought. I brooded over this situation slowly, taking one review at a time. They couldn't have made a mistake. Mao had ruled that out.

I eventually got back to the hotel, still half wondering. When I saw them on the landing outside my door - - two men and a girl -- waiting for me to approach, this confirmed what had only been a ridiculous, vapor-thin hunch. I recognized them as the money changing team.

"Are you Jayce?" they asked.

"Yes."

"Did you change a traveller's check earlier today?"

"Yes," I replied, more cautiously.

"Is this your check and signature?"

"Yes."

"Then we're very sorry," they said. "We've made a mistake of \$40 too much."

They looked concerned and uneasy, waiting as though they expected me to deny it or say 'Tough luck, chums, you counted it four times'.

As I handed the excess money back to them, their terseness lessened and a whole series of apologies were gratefully given me for the trouble they'd caused. There was a moment of confusion as they hurriedly tried to escape through the single doorway at the same time.

I smiled.

More apologies and another round of "Sorry's" as they scampered down the nearby stairs. Back in the hotel lobby, I was sure a senior official would be awaiting the results of this encounter.

It's funny now -- and I know it's purely a coincidence -- but for the remaining time I spent at the hotel it seemed all the old faces of the money changing staff had disappeared. I didn't recognize any of the new people.

I imagined, by their absence, that having to explain certain mistakes to the higher authorities proved very unrewarding.

Appeared January 21, 1982 in The Penticton Herald

A 'Foreigner' -- Lost Among
2 1/2 Million Strangers

It's simple. No trouble at all. All you need is one large city like Loyang, with 2 1/2 million people. Add a complete absence of any Chinese vocabulary. Include a strong desire to wander from the organized tourist group and a lower-than-average navigational ability on back lane circuits. The outcome is obvious: Which way is back?

Loyang is placed fairly centrally on a map of China -- quite easy to find, in fact. It is about 2,500 years old and famous for extravagant peony gardens and one of the largest tractor plants in the world. My friend and I found the gardens dull but a nearby children's playground more exciting. It was glee for us and amazement to the many families as we joined the children in their amusements.

I scorned the bus back but my friend shrewdly chose to enter the vehicle as I set off walking on a roughly circular route back to the hotel.

The back lanes had special flavors. A group of men playing cards on a dirt sidewalk idly scratched the backs of large pigs wandering in and out of their game. Further, a barber was shaving a customer on a main street. With cautious approach I raised my camera but managed a neat turn of speed as the customer rose up in anger and advanced in my direction.

It was a pleasant day, with something new down every road.

Children throwing a frisbee -- a plastic plate.

Onward again, glancing inside a dark noisy welding shop. Workers smiled in surprise. Absence of safety practises was noticeable, in common with the manufacturing industry as a whole in China.

Several families washing laundry outside, some in an open, flowing, brick channel. I waved and walked on.

Casually, I noted how very unfamiliar my surroundings were after two hours of walking... I should have spotted the hotel an hour ago. Ah well...

Interesting to see women sweeping broad sidewalks of dirt. On a large apartment construction site I paused to

mime with the workers, half of them girls.

I was now noticing that as far as I could see in any direction lay a jungle of red bricked apartments behind tree-lined broad sidewalks.

Time for action. A policeman at the next intersection looked at me blankly. We exchanged no words of understanding. Finally, he pointed in a new direction.

Along I went, seeing hundreds of workers going home for supper. I was now hungry as well as lost and very alone. Everybody stared.

After a couple of miles, it was back to the policeman. We stared at one another in a long empty silence. Finally he telephoned. I stood on the curb to await an anticipated taxi. It seemed everybody in town had heard about the lost Canadian. They were all here!

Eventually came a car. I heard a shout and the rear door opened. In I went. A Japanese couple were inside, smiling. Their Japanese was perfect. The taxi set off in a direction even I knew was wrong. It was getting dark outside. The driver began to switch on his lights, but only to pass other vehicles. We stopped occasionally. No hotels appeared.

Finally, many miles closer to Mongolia, the road ended at an entrance to a large army camp, with many grinning young soldiers. The driver was baffled in verbal exchanges.

Fate stepped in to prevent a night in the local police station. An important-looking officer got out of a car and tried to direct the taxi driver, with no success. Finally he said to me, "Step in, my driver will take you."

I left the generous taxi driver for an official, a top professor of English at an army college. He asked many questions, and gratefully I exchanged East-West impressions.

After a long drive, I was back at the hotel.

"Wait," said my rescuer. With a strong penetrating look, he handed me a large sheet of notepaper on which was his address. He suggested that at least I owed him future communication. Relieved, I accepted.

I was just in time -- four hours late -- to catch our bus going to a local restaurant. I mounted nonchalantly.

However, after a fine meal and a trip to a back lane public washroom, to my horror I discovered I had forgotten to bring toilet paper. The dilemma was reluctantly solved

at the expense of surrendering my only contact with that fascinating rescuer.

On The Road To Forever

It's hard to believe that some of the toughest riding is behind us and that we have taken almost two weeks to leave B.C. The miracle of old bone levers, muscle gears and heart pump pumping those pedals through the Fraser Canyon and the Rockies.

"You won't have much trouble on the next stretch."

"Ah."

"Mostly level."

"Right."

"It follows the Kicking Horse river."

"Great."

Thus spoke the cycle store owner in Golden. He had done lots of touring. So I listened carefully. He had also mentioned there was a hill just leaving town. Two hours later we reached the top of it! We seemed to climb the whole way.

We have cycled on good roads and with mostly fine weather. Probably made over a thousand gear changes already in our six hours on the road, averaging 80 km per day. We anticipate doing 100 km per day for the rest of the way. I estimate it will require a little over 2 million full rotations of the pedals to reach Halifax!

The number of mountains have been endless. Snow capped and some over 10,000 feet high. We have passed scores of rushing creeks and rivers, all at peak flows. Valleys and canyons have all been left behind. And through all this magnificence and superlative beauty has been the pleasure of many scents including rape blossom and wild roses. This province staggers my mind with its size, primitive nature and endless forests. We could have cycled completely around Britain in the time it's taken to leave this one province!

Our group of 30, men and women, is lessoned by one woman rider who found the strain a little excessive. Under the heading of 'discoveries' it has become apparent that I completely underestimated what seniors are capable of; what willpower women seniors in particular have; and how remarkably well organized the trip has been, with emphasis on camping procedures and cooking techniques.

Some of us seniors look old, have old bodies and may puff a little. But oh! the energy that can be generated

from that body machine with its spine of steel and lion heart. The girls keep absolute pace with most of the men. We are a bunch of grandmas, grandpas and even one great-grandfather!

It is also utterly amazing the ingenuity of the cooking teams which we all take part in. Meals become a major highlight of the day. We are almost permanently hungry. The range, variety and volume of the meals are a delight to very appreciative appetites.

Today we rest in Banff. One day off every six on the road. A day to recharge. Catch up on personal chores. Reflect on adjusting to road traffic and safety considerations in general. There has been only one minor mishap -- luckily only bruises and cuts. Above all we are grateful anytime our tenting is away from train and truck noise. Sleep is very important to our survival.

So far the group maintains good cheer. Always helpful to one another. And interactions and relationships have perhaps been strengthened by sharing the same purpose and direction.

Appeared in The Penticton Herald

The Great Wall Of China: Remarkable Engineering Feat

The train was crowded, mostly Chinese on their one day off. Our excitement and expectancy had risen the nearer we got. We would soon be setting foot on one of the most profound ancient structures ever built. There had already been mad scrambles to the windows to catch a glimpse and to photograph a few badly eroded sections seen in the distance.

Leaving the great plain from Peking, we were now in the mountains -- bare, brown and rugged. The large diesel locomotive was laboring on the grade.

I had brooded about China's many walls. The ancient capital city of Siam was circled by a wall 8 miles long by 40 feet wide at the base. Everywhere houses were shielded from streets by walls. Palace walls, commune walls. Forbidden city within a city walls. Mostly brick or stone. Many were mud. Even our hotel compounds were heavily walled. I had read that if The Great Wall was stretched around the earth, it would form a dyke 8 feet high.

We had been warned to dress warmly against chilling dusty winds in from Mongolia. Sure enough, we got off the train into stifling heat. We all ended up carrying great excesses of clothes, much to the amusement of the Chinese. And here we all were, like a couple thousand extras for a crowd scene in a movie.

At the station there were buses by the score. You could also ride a donkey the mile or so to the Great North Gate.

The attack began when we reached this magnificent and monstrous gate. In no time we were up the stairs nearby and onto the wall.

I suddenly felt a little like I was trapped in the Army and Navy store at Christmas time. There were thousands of us! Shoulder to shoulder we moved. I had a hard time even seeing the wall.

As we thinned out I noticed the excellent workmanship in the lines, angles and joints of the stone. Looking along its length in both directions, it seemed to purposely be attached to the most difficult obstacles, including near vertical cliff faces, as though the ancient surveyors 2,000 years ago had been just a little high on opium. In fact, the mountains were so wild and impassable that the wall

seemed redundant.

Being so close to so many brought out the strong smell of garlic, one of the few smells we'd noticed so far in this fine country. The Chinese themselves were so smiling, happy, very young looking and curious to see how far the old, out of shape tourists would climb.

Like a herd of excited sheep we moved through narrow doorways in the watch towers. It was getting warmer by the minute. The steps were steeper and deeper.

Statistically, its length is at least from Penticton to Montreal. The base averages 25 feet wide and the height is from 15 to 30 feet with a top width of about 13 feet. Cut-outs on top and small sloping windows enabled arrows to be fired while being protected from return fire. Since the defense installation windows were on one side only, presumably the invader knew this and played the game accordingly.

Large outposts, now converted to resting and storage areas, penetrated the higher points. The narrow doorways formed bottlenecks as our good natured multitude climbed higher. Steps were steeper and deeper now. I used my hands on them to steady myself. We still scorned the handrails.

About one mile from, and 700 feet higher than the starting point, was the end of the tourist section. The wall on the downside of this hill showed broken sections and the rubble fill.

A faint breeze brought coolness and I sensed the original quietness of the centuries, the middle of nowhere feeling and the forever up and down-ness of the zig-zagging serpent.

How did it all start? How did they assemble 2,400,000 slaves? In summer heat and winter cold? Tens of thousands of workers had exhausted their lives here. And what about the lonely vigil of the sentry guards.

On the way down the sweat on the smiling faces glistened. It was still hot. Many posed for pictures, the older did it stiffly and formally, putting back on their normal faces when the ordeal was over.

And then, to my great surprise and delight -- music. One group had a tape cassette, a rare luxury, and the exciting sounds of the rock group Boney M wafted over our heads, the wall, the hills and the greater distance of ancient years.

The music was a gay perspective for the younger Chinese

who had to defend themselves against the ponderous dignity of the place and conventions of their parents. For a moment in time the gap or wall between 'them' and me was non-existent.

A few families were picnicing. Their backs against a wall whose graffiti was etched in the stones and done very neatly.

On the train ride back I thought of home -- the retaining wall needed work...

Appeared December 5, 1986 in The Penticton Herald

I Like The Stars

What was his name then? Something like Greshk, or Gretson... it will come to me. Anyhow he had this bent stick and he used it a lot. And he would hit this black thing quite a bit. No, it wasn't a ball. What's that!? Eh? A puck? Yeah, that's it. I remember now.

And he'd pass a lot. Very accurately, like precise. And his chums would shoot and score all the time. But that's not the big thing. No, he'd twist and turn and dodge so much they couldn't get the puck from him. So Tricky, a real phantom. And he'd brake fast and skate like a whirlwind, beating so many like magic, as he ducked and dribbled by. Made the defenders real dizzy. But that's not what made him so famous.

Always shooting, clever like, and the black puck would rocket into the netting. Also he always led his team, captain like, and was picked an all-star each year. And of course he scored many goals and made more points than anybody had before. But there was something special about him... Wish I could... What's that? What d'ya say? Playing what? Hockey? On TV? RIGHT! THAT'S IT!! I knew I'd remember. Yeh, always young-looking and smiling he was. HE'S A TV STAR!!! That's what it was! I knew it would come to me. Never forget a STAR!

Now what was his name?

My Heroes

Actually, at my age, I'm surprised I have heroes. In fact I have five. True, they are not the kind to win an Ironman competition, fight in combat or conduct a major rescue effort. But they are one-of-a-kinds.

As an incredibly select few they are giants who struggled to master forces both within and without. In doing so they changed the direction of an age or at least stirred hearts and minds. Their enormous energy, discipline and paucity of worldly needs fascinates me. They defended important causes and in doing so realized themselves. Their names linger. Their style remains current. Their efforts have created revolutionary changes.

Let me start with a 110-pound, shaven-headed slip of a man -- with steel will and benign smile. His original passive resistance approach, combined with fasting, freed India. A humble peasant type who would have passed with ease on skid row yet moved with villagers and prime ministers alike.

The sum of his possessions might have filled a small cabinet. A walking liberator with the compassion of a Jesus. When alive, multitudes walked hundreds of hot miles to pay 'darshan' [homage], getting perhaps a mere glimpse of his presence.

My second hero, again a visionary but not with the Gandhi overview. More the single minded concentration of a laser beam on a target. He fights for self improvement of the disabled. He also needs a mechanical frame on wheels for mobility. His powerful arms are his only movable limbs yet are of such strength that they propelled his body completely around our planet while able-bodied people walk a few blocks or ride a one-wheeled device in the basement.

I admire his battle with weather, hills, length of journey and, perhaps greatest of all, inner uncertainties.

Rick Hansen and Mohatma Gandhi are truly one-only types. Perhaps the best word for such one-onlyness is unique.

My third hero was also handicapped. Not in body this time but in hearing. Ironically, his major pursuit in life depended on perfect hearing as much as anything else. He wrote music without the benefit of playback for corrections.

To have produced simple harmonies scored for full orchestra would have satisfied lesser mortals. To have designed and engineered monumental works from sonatas to

symphonies was perhaps like Shakespeare his masterpieces while blind.

In the classical music scene only greats like Mahler or Shostakovich come close to him but both were very good listeners... Beethoven for me would have been no less a giant even with ears.

The last two heroes on my list require a greater eloquence than mine. They made me look at myself in such a different way that my needs for science and philosophy became imperative.

My fourth hero was the first to successfully explore the world of contemplation and non-attachment. He pursued the most elusive goal ever set a human -- victory over one's self, self-realization.

Toward this end he spent years meditating under a Bodhi tree to raise his level of insight and calm to the heights of liberation. The purpose of this task? To produce wisdom and compassion which he gave to the needy in the form of spiritual and moral help.

This great soul's message, 500 years before Christ, remains undiminished to this day. It is incidental that he gave up a kingdom and family to become a stunningly holy man. The very name...BUDDHA!

My last hero is someone who in his quiet, respectable and somewhat shy manner turned the world of physical science completely upside down. Even today first class minds struggle to master the abstract concepts and equations of quantum mechanics and relativity.

His concept dealt with space and time with reasoning that was extravagantly beautiful and complex. His brooding on energy and mass produced one of the most profound equations ever, $E = mc^2$. In doing so he opened the door to the atomic age. From his revolutionary viewpoint of the universe came a new dimension of measurement, a fourth dimension called Space-Time.

He was a modest genius, using only the tools of pen and paper. No telescope. No computer. No analysers. Like previous heroes, Albert Einstein was the first in his field with mind-boggling ideas that left physicists of the day gasping and helpless.

When the famous scientist Eddington was asked what it felt like to be one of three in the world to understand the General Theory of Relativity, Eddington paused for some time and then said, "Who's the third?"

Heroes. So big! They leave me dry mouthed and wistful.

They lift my own perceptions and energy levels, expand my range of reality and help me survive the abrasions of our pioneering world.

And sometimes when I fantasize, which is quite often, I wonder what it would be like to be in the presence of these greats for just a couple of hours!

Maybe one day. Maybe. Who knows?

Hold-Up

She glanced up from her cage and saw the well dressed executive type placing his briefcase on her counter. To her he seemed more suited to be doing business with the manager.

The note was politely handed to her. She read it as she closed her money drawer. "I don't understand", she faltered. A less serious girl would have laughed at such a note from a gentleman of his bearing.

"Which one of the four words don't you understand?". The question was firmly voiced, the eyes twin lasers.

She wavered, "But this is a hold-up note", convinced that there was some stupid mistake.

"Look, I'm double-parked, losing my patience and have a gun in my case."

She began to look disoriented and gasped, "This is a friendly bank you know..."

His mind began to race. Of all the stupid tellers to get. Hadn't he purposely chosen the relative quiet of the mid-morning. "Now or I shoot!", he growled. His hand moved a bulge inside the leather case.

This was too much for her to handle and her mind began to shut down. Hold-ups happened at other banks, to other tellers, not to her. "Sir, do you have an account here?", she croaked, responding to the situation with irrelevance.

He gave an unbelieving look. This was impossible! "Open that stupid drawer and hand it over," he commanded, noticing her vague glance around as though looking for help. Elsewhere in the bank everything seemed quite normal.

"You should be ashamed of yourself. You are scaring me." The voice and words sounded junior high insecure. Then a thought registered in her stomach. The alarm! She had faint memory of a button somewhere, but his rivotted gaze erased the thought. She was held by his circle of energy. Time had run out, this she knew.

He fought the feeling that this couldn't be happening to him. The whole plan had been to produce one end result-- money. This he needed badly. Money, the great distorter of values. The deadweight on the world... Now, this encounter was foiling his plan. "Now you idiot", he hissed, flashing a glance at the main entrance. Still clear. It seemed that he had been frozen at this counter forever. His hand moved the gun.

Her eyes widened. "What would your wife say?", she whispered, holding a bundle of notes in her quivering hand.

In an instant it was over. Uncontrolled violence burst from him. His face was a frenzy, the gun poised.

But she had already slumped to the floor before the explosion.

"Great Carl! You too Anne!" The director was pleased and the film crew relaxed.

Inhale

Drag deep this high spaced night,
Stretch wide the loom up high.
Solemn mark this care checked pause
With quick gift given sense -
And lay awhile - and dream.

Slow down the dense dimmed chase
Of days that burst and jam the mind.
And stay this balanced etch of time -
Think true.

Slowly turns the horizon band
That meets the world within.
Lets in the graded sounds
To join the inner self,
And dwell the soul to glow this night
For we have touched but a fringe
Of future life on heavy planet home.

Invasion

"Well sir, I have to be frank about this."

"I expect you to, Captain. What is your name?"

"Charles, sir..."

"Very well Charles, you be frank."

"Yes, well... right. The problem, Mr. Minister, is we're having trouble on our border."

"Now that's not like our government, is it Charles? We're usually on top of things, are we not?"

"The situation, sir, is very fluid, but the Americans are gathering in the thousands."

"Do you think they will invade us, Major?"

"Well, they seem very disturbed, sir. Banners, flags are waving. It could lead to force."

"But wait just a minute, we have good relations with them!"

"No longer, Minister. They say we owe it to them."

"Are they on other provincial borders?"

"No sir, just our's... There have been a few arrests. One man called Reegan or something was picked up."

"But say, isn't he one of their leaders?"

"Some say he lives in a big white building..."

"Yes, yes, I've heard that, but isn't he the death-ray man for Star Wars?"

"We're sure now he was the one on our radar screen riding a satellite and looking through a big telescope at us."

"What's that? The cad! He sounds not only mean but unbalanced, Colonel."

"When we picked him up, sir, the bulge in his pocket turned out to be a small cobalt bomb."

"So he wasn't peacefully demonstrating then?"

"It was hard to tell, sir. Shouldn't like to judge too harshly because he had a nice smile, well landscaped hair and a blue suit..."

"Yes, yes, I understand. Now what was the reason again for this interview with me?"

"There are about five thousand of them, sir--"

"Five you say, eh? FIVE! Interesting it should be that very number. Did you know, General, that Beethoven, Mahler and Shostakovitch produced monumental fifth symphonies?"

"I beg your pardon, Minister. I'm not with you. Why do you mention this?"

"Oh, mostly to say how seemingly irrelevant things can be joined, so to speak."

"This could be serious, sir! Imagine five or even ten thousand flooding our country. All demanding the same thing. All hostile. In twenty-four hours it could be all over!"

"Yes, I see your point, Colonel. The tragedy had momentarily escaped me. But I do find it utterly amazing that the reputation of the new Kootenay beer has penetrated so deeply into the States."

"That's not it, sir!"

"Hooked on maple syrup then?"

"That would be some other province, sir."

"You know, Major, I never get told anything, and I'm losing my patience."

"It's air, sir!"

"What's that you say?"

"Their pollution problem..."

"Explain yourself, Captain, and make it quick!"

"We estimate, sir, that if they invade, they are capable of taking thousands of cubic feet of our clean air back with them in plastic balloons."

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get your men in position to intercept immediately. And issue them with pins right away!"

Jonesy

For some time now the problem in our gang had been a candy shortage. Due to no money, it had been almost three weeks since we had had any. It always seemed a bigger thing when we saw someone leaving our candy shop and pocketing the evidence as they saw our glances.

A new candy shop had opened recently in our street. Very small and with sparse, precisely placed display. The lady owner was friendly and smiled easily. We seemed to respond to such warmth, never getting that much from others usually.

The day had finally arrived. A Friday. Somebody's dad's pay day. A fast travelling word named it Jonesy's dad.

Now we all went through instinctive moves. There would be an unexpected assembly of us at the candy shop window at precisely the right time. Timing was very important.

We jostled and joked and eyed all the selections, with Jonesy enjoying a place of honor in the middle. We outshouted our preferences with nobody listening. And we boasted about the super candies we'd once had, like a Mars bar, or the elite ...toasted coconut caramels.

Jonesy was going through the expected procedure of choosing a halfpenny of this and a halfpenny of that. And then, as we knew he must, changing his mind quickly as though to avoid being a victim of a rash error. Finally, after a lifetime of minutes, we all marched in with Jonesy in command.

Inside was warm. There was a unique sort of high frequency smell of sweetness. To us this place was now a palace. We were reduced to a special devoted silence that was taut and expectant.

The warning door bell brought in our smiling dispenser. She spoke to Jonesy. We crowded him carefully. Our watching was so intent we barely heard the words. Yes, he'd made up his mind. He then gave her the first order. The smallest quantity sold of golden humbugs. There were quiet groans on this. Hardly our favorite.

Again we watched. The glass jar was opened. A small toy shovel moved inside. The pouring into the brass scale scoop. And then the most frustrating moment of all. We were hoping for a small mistake in the weighing in our favor. But she was too careful. The pointer moved slowly to its null, and hovered. Shovel back in jar. Lid firmly

screwed on. Scoop poured into a small paper bag.

She smiled. We felt let down and helpless and avoided her eyes. Such logical exactness in measurement reduced us.

Jonesy now gave the second order. Again a rustle moved through us. Great! This time mini-gob stoppers. Not big but long lasting. You only moved them occasionally to inspect the change in color. Again the weighing ritual. Again the precise weight. Again our reflexive protest.

Outside we all seemed to be talking at once and all about Jonesy's past generosity with candies. And of how we liked him. And of how we each knew him the best. We milled excitedly. And tentatively touched him. And would have carried him if necessary.

He opened a bag and selected. The first disappeared into his own moist chewery. An expected sigh. And then one by one we were all given a mini multi-colored gob stopper that seemed to suddenly turn the inside of our minds into a paradise of peace and refinement. Everything was sweetness and flavourful. The street scene and sounds were reduced to a slow motion silence. Our heads were high. And the message was joy. Jonesy had done it, he had joined us all as one. The beauty of life was a burning sun of power in every cell.

We boasted. One day we'd have a penny and buy some of these and give everybody one. And for one quick moment I wondered what it would be like to leave the shop firmly grasping a bag of glee and with only HALF the gang on hand. Half as good, I realized. They'd all be there! I sucked contentedly at the thought.

Love On The Stock Market

Jessica usually sat quite close to him when she wanted to have a serious talk. She felt her body presence could be useful leverage, being trim and well rounded.

"George, my pet, we have to take a moment about something that's bothered me for some time" she opened.

The words produced but a grunt from a man deep into his after-supper escape, the crossword puzzle. A grunt was all he could spare from his delicate concentration but he knew Jess would allow only one more non-committal response before turning up the heat.

She tried again. "I've been thinking about this for some time and I need your input." Her eyes were fixed firmly on him. His raised finger signalled 'hold it' as he was part way through an important clue.

George was of average height, weight and provider. He was in his late forties and Jess was eight years younger. Both were single and had been living together a full year. They gave well of their bodies to each other and were fairly relaxed in day to day living. Golf and dancing were common pleasures.

"Are you listening, pet?" she warned as he frowned over the sharper edge in her tone. The crossword didn't help either -- tougher than usual and loaded with American clues...

"O.K." he said "what's your problem?"

She hesitated slightly. "Well, it's important enough to be an issue and it definitely won't keep."

He studied her face. "O.K., shoot lass."

"Well, perhaps a good way of putting it is to compare it to something you are very familiar with, the stock market."

A slight shudder escaped him at those words, their edge slicing his cortex. He had always maintained that given proper academic study, a few graphs and that pinnacle of all wisdom, 'male logic', and the stock market would yield all its secrets. He had made it sound so plausible to her that the losses that followed his careful investments caused increasing resentment in her and the optimism of a kamakazi pilot. "What about the stock market?" he asked guardedly.

She had prepared for this reaction by intending next a

little extra softness and care. "It's like this dear. You know so well, expert that you are, that the best time to sell is when the stock is still rising. I believe they may call this being volatile. Partly for not being greedy wanting more profit and partly because a better sell never seems to come."

How well he had begun to know these truths.

"What was it Samuel Butler once said? 'To live is like to love, all reason is against it and all healthy instinct for it'.

He was sure there was a parallel to the market here. But his major defense against continued losses was that with just a little extra risk the pot may be increased significantly.

She reminded him of the sudden dips that had been read as temporary readjustments, like profit taking. And while hoping for the rebound, they had faced losses that cancelled any paper gains.

He frowned at the point of all this. For him the crossword was now forgotten, replaced by apprehension over the ultimate outcome of her needs, whatever they were... One of the house cats, a friend of his, showed poor timing by jumping on his lap. He opened his legs quickly and the cat fell through.

"So what's the point of all these stock market facts of life?"

Jessica felt she was halfway there now. Just relate this carefully and clearly she thought and the rest would be up to him, the lamb. "It's this, I need some form of commitment from you." She immediately realized that this had come out a little stark.

"Eh? What sort of commitment?" he asked warily.

"Well, my pet, we have gone through improving times in our relationship ever since we met almost a year ago and, although I like you very much, I wouldn't want to go much longer together without a more secure promise for my future." Her voice was holding well, her gaze was level and she was pleased with her delivery.

"Are you saying there is something wrong in allowing our closeness to continue this way?"

"No, no, not at all. In fact I think it would be ideal to carry on forever. But what I am really saying is that I wouldn't want our love increasing to where it has such a

grip over me that I would be very hurt if your affection cooled like a downturn in the market." She was distracted for a moment by a sudden display of brilliance from the late evening sun spreading a generous gold over the orchard. The room took on color and warmth.

George began to see another light as the details of her needs came through. "So, as in the stock market, you want action while things are still on the rise together, right?" He vaguely remembered a quote from Oscar Wilde about women in general, something about 'resisting man's advances and ending up blocking his retreat'.

She nodded. "Exactly, and if you can't give some sort of guarantee of hopefully a lifetime together then we should think seriously about ending our relationship quite soon. Sure it will be painful but nowhere near as bad as if it was left to continue longer. It's like selling while we are still ahead."

He gave a last glance at the partially completed crossword. Now he had two puzzles, with the paper one reduced to irrelevance. It was up to him she had said. Sure he loved her. She made the home. True there were times when he needed aloneness or to be with the boys playing poker or arguing at the local bar and she allowed certain latitudes here. But would that continue if a more permanent closeness was formed? Was this a little like when the time has arrived the prey comes to the hunter?

"When do you expect a decision on this?" he asked quietly.

Her voice was also soft. "It has to be now my love. There is just you and me. Here right now. With all our past memories and future hopes to measure things by." She showed a greater confidence than she really felt. And then she reached and touched him.

Her relaxed smile surprised him. He sighed, shook his head and took her hand. He remembered the good times, like at breakfast when he was forced to smile because of a teasing or funny remark. But most of all he remembered the warmth, scent and yielding of that very trim figure that brought arousal so quickly. He reflected on these times. Compared to the emotional up and down gamble of the stock market, Jessie's proposition seemed to have better odds. Funny, he thought, how women make money meaningful.

"O.K. lass, you've got it. Name your plan."

She paused at this invitation, trying to place a true value on it. "George, we could have a good marriage and you know it." She said this quietly and with a squeeze of his

hand which he quickly released.

The crossword fell and the cat underneath leapt up in surprise. He was perceptive enough to realize that this was the only settlement she would consider. He continued to discuss it for some time, but with less and less opposition. Finally it was settled.

His chums at work were all for it. There was much back slapping and the drinks after work were on them. 'You're doing the right thing by her'. 'Make a man out of you, George'. His legally coupled friends were especially delighted.

They would no longer be admitted to the singles dances that they both enjoyed, but something much bigger and different would change the picture he had of himself -- the baby that Jessie now carried. A new fulcrum around which his attention and responsibilities would turn. Men were no more liberated than women, he thought and that's O.K. too.

Appeared in The Penticton Herald

Once More The Masters

Truly a night to remember. Those masters of classical rock music were in town at 'The Dome'. For many they have been the Beethoven of rock for years, turning out very significant and imaginative sounds.

Their best album, "Dark Side of the Moon", has just completed 700 weeks on the hit parade. A ballad of feeling and sensibility. Most of their songs are very penetrating, dealing with social injustice, education, tycoons, war and the darker side of human nature:

"For long you live and high you fly
And smiles you'll give and tears you'll cry
And all you touch and all you see
Is all your life will ever be."

-- "Dark Side of the Moon", Pink Floyd

The sky train to Vancouver was crowded with a lusty mob of young bloods, bound for the concert. Once inside the mammoth hall it took about 10 minutes of travel to reach my seat. The artificial turf had been removed and chairs filled the floor. Soon this inflated building would be pulsing in the grip of awesome power judged by the scores of speakers in quadrophonic wrap around. Huge 100 foot high scaffolds on either side of the stage contained most of the speakers, while high above the stage another extensive scaffold network carried not only a large battery of lights but also four suspended moon lander type capsules. These would slowly move above the heads of the band, armed with extensive light systems as well.

Well muscled bouncers and crash gates helped to handle the 50,000 or so crowd. Similar handlers at the entrance had done a quick frisking job on each of us.

And then the big moment. One I had waited many years to hear live. It began with an earthquake outburst from one or more bass guitars, magnifide to jet take-off intensity. At the same time, the stage burst into light. We all roared. Those of us on the floor struggled to stand on our flimsy seats to see. This was my favorite group in action, coming in with the simplicity and delicacy of a riot! My small town virtues quickly vanished and I hung on for dear life in the rising tumult of acoustic energy. Hearing familiar words and music live seemed to recreate me and I opened up to the force, forming an emotional alliance.

Apparently, to put this show on the road for one week costs \$750,000. All metal work, speakers, mikes, laser generators, amplifiers, lights and special effects were all in duplicate. The other set was already being installed in the next town.

The first two numbers were old favorites. We generated great lung responses and thousands of lights flickered in appreciation. These from cigarette lighters. And then the group played their new album in full for the rest of the first act. I began to relax a little from the kind of tension I might have felt at The Cape for a 3,500 ton Saturn rocket lift-off... As I looked at the rocket gantry area called the stage I knew we were in for the most staggering eruption of light and sound ever experience west of the Andromeda galaxy.

My previous experience of light shows had been modest, their contents reasonably sane, so I was completely unprepared for the atmospherics and calibrations from the hundreds of lights and dozen or so lasers. For 2 1/2 hours the lights were to vary in color, intensity, mood combinations and movements. And never repeated! Lasers from the stage struck pencil-thin patterns of great width on the domed ceiling. At one time a double series of throbbing sine waves. At another, reflectors snapped the slim beams into sharply angled 'Z' patterns, like broken steel rods.

It was now time to stretch my limbs. For a while I turned inward to brood on the history of this special group that had given me hours of listening pleasure. Meanwhile, on the stage, a dim eerie forest glow with descending clouds suddenly turned into a brilliant starburst for the playing of "Shine on, You Crazy Diamond". The guitar, perhaps only equalled by Carlos Santana and a few other greats, reverberated a powerfully, both in the dome and in my head. I snapped to attention again.

The second half began with a long run of old favorites:

"If you didn't care what happened to me
And I didn't care for you.
We would zig zag our way through boredom and pain
Occasionally glancing up through the rain."
-- "Animals", Pink Floyd

Cuts from "Meddle" through to "The Wall" followed. Sounds only previously heard by me on my big set now laced the night with new dimensions. The woofer speakers were so powerful that I had to move away from the low frequency pressure on my body. My molecules were being re-arranged.

Hearing Gilmore with his excellent vocals made this truly the Pink Floyd of old -- as alive as ever. A band of

mature professionals turning on for posterity. This was them at their most innovative and inventive best. A group of acoustic bandits whose interjections and transitions between cuts were so unique that not even today are they duplicated by other bands. A quartet capable of igniting tension, satire, sadness or wistful compassion with words on ego, pain, family relations and even suicide! Even their album covers were thought provoking.

And so the band's magic continued climaxing several times with the diamond brilliance of comets. Naked and aggressive statements from synthesizers and tapes poured into the dense flux of impressions.

The light console was much larger than normal, with busy operators performing a perplexing choreography of change so bewildering as to, at times, drown out the music for me. Even the drum sticks at times were fluorescent tubes of light. And above the stage the four moon landers were moving, each with their own light system. A futuristic journey above a planet.

A tightly stretched wire across the full width of the dome allowed a 40 foot inflated pig to coast above us, with red eyes lit up. Later a full sized bed, complete with a dummy inside, travelled at speed on another wire from the furthest ceiling point away to down into the darkness near the stage. An explosion followed an instant later and flames rose 30 to 40 feet in the air!

By now the crowd noise was at a high level and made the music less clean. Interestingly, nobody actually clapped hands except me -- a hangover from symphony concerts! Also, there didn't seem to be even a middle aged person anywhere let alone a crazy senior. And the on-going fusion of light and sound brought not only ecstasy but near 'meltdown'.

Meanwhile I found that, as the evening advanced, I was moving a little further away all the time from the stage and the rising cumulus cloud of pot smoke. I had politely refused to blow smoke despite several offers. A 'together' gesture I didn't need.

Nearing the end of the evening I felt my fragile senses had been saturated enough with this glory to leave before the end. Getting outside, I was looking forward to being me again. My atoms were still just holding their orbits, my eyes were still unfused by the lasers and my lungs were modestly primed with second hand smoke.

Outside, as I waited for the Sky Train back, I could hear the final storm of the concert a few hundred yards away, and it appeared the inflated dome was settling back nicely onto its base after a "Night Flight to Venus". And

it set me wondering that if I was in the building the next day, in the cathedral stillness, if the reluctance of the evening to end might still be heard faintly in the vibrations from the ashes of the great sounds.

For me, the uniqueness and individuality of the Pink Floyd group may best be paraphrased by the words of Charles Simic who said "Inside my empty bottle I was constructing a lighthouse, while all the others were making ships."

The Melting Forge of Consciousness

Gay friendly group
Of quick laced talent
Free in prose and discourse heart.
Listen!
The walls suspend
The flat planed growls
And harmonic chords of music sound.

Played to ease
The active nerves
Back in soft spun cells.
A moment for
The quiet of themselves
And the survey of it all.

This friendly active circle sits
As children in the cosmic void.
Touched with flickering surface glow
From boiling crucible of thoughts afire.
While giving off its light
To the planet of the world.

A tense pose, firm etched word
A wit of icy chips
A sudden still or unsure glance
A tapered close to used ideas
Are but small part within
The melting forge of Consciousness

Molten In Time

Some of the most beautiful thoughts of man
Go down with the dying.
Some of the spiritual essence of age
Surrounds the departing mind...
For all, there exists but few rare moments
When the stimulus of life is shear
And crisp - in its exhaustive pattern.

There are but few who need
The meaning of life force,
Who seek the understanding of sublime way
And the power of the universe's rhythm.

We are but an ageless quantity of followers -
In the slow process of identifying our minds with man.
In the silent world of the dying
Their secrets lie molten in time.

Moments

Treasured crystal shining hours
Gentle bursting dancing joys
The flashing shimmer shades a stage-lit sky
Warm tremulous waves with singing beat.

The moments are here again down wakened pulse
The feel of nature's multiple touch
Is icy cool, and madly warm--
A cyclic swing.

Now is the time for contact and deep content
To live the other side of life.
A time to estimate and gladly drink
The heady fill and broad mellow gain.

Into the realm of summer freshness
Dense with searing frantic senses
Life the people's harmony electric strong
Bursts its cadence all day long.

Mood Flash

Listen--
Quick--
Is that a sudden flash ring
In a destiny
Did you hear a timely leap
In your orb rimmed hour
To awaken the mind--
Alert?

The ice tipped nerve shoots
And speed return echoes
Of promised deeds.
Speed haste release the grip
Of routine mode.
Inject a mood to fit
The metallated surge of tense power
And go--

Come, move on--
Remake another life
Stake another place
Grow the fertile seeds of future harvests
And stay beneath the elliptic motioned sky.
Listen!
The call?
Go soon.

Appeared October, 1961 in "The Vancouver Recorder",
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Society of America

Munday

Mun was definitely not happy.

It seemed to start with the dirty cave as much as with Wum, his still sleeping wife.

He scratched his mat of hair and shook his head, wondering where it was all leading.

Here he was, a married beast for 10 years, with a wife beast that could actually cook and look pretty in inexpensive sackcloth and hemp sandals, with several small boy beasts with the best snarls and greeds anywhere on Rock Hill and himself a skilled rock mechanic at the quarry. And yet with it all he was not content. Something was bugging him.

He reflected on how clean the cave used to be when Wum did it all with just a branch broom and hair hide duster. Look at it now! Debris of yesterday's living everywhere: old thongs, bed branches, fire rocks and rock tools littered the floor. All this even though they had invested the latest brontotail floor polisher; speedy granite flints for fast fire pick-up; and in thong-bound beating bongers, with genuine rock heads lashed to hickory handles, for smoother washing and super clean loin cloths. Not to mention the shelf he ad adzed out of the rear sandstone wall so that Wum could keep her leftovers hygienic and away from the bugs and mice. And that other rig too, the latest in cave comfort, a hole through the wall to let smoke out and light in. True, you could complain of a draft or the rain blowing in. As she did. It was said that they were going to name these holes 'windows'.

On the trail to work at the quarry, he recalled other sources of discontent. The main complaint was some unfinished trouble-shooting of the previous day to do with the new fangled lever system on the bongers. He sometimes wished, in weak moments, that levers hadn't been invented. A man beast was more a man beast in the good old days when there weren't the machines and automatic gadgets.

The other shadow clouding his walk was word that the company was installing more controllers on the flint bashers. It was even said that some men beasts would be laid off.

This last thought disturbed him. He remembered how tough it could be eking out a living from the jungle or trapping dinos and brontos, not to mention the constant war with scaly mastadons and slimy bats. This horror of survival was hard on his nerves.

His troubled mind brightened somewhat as his third thought of the trail -- the super new gadget the tribes were raving about. So well made was this invention, allegedly, that one could almost call it round (if one knew what round meant).

Actually, he thought, we are due for another change after so many thousands of years with the lever business. All the refinements of feedback and high gain couldn't offset the back-breaking job of hunking it around on log skids. And now the big talkers were at it again. Mun savored the name they had given this latest engineering marvel, the 'wheel', sounded good. It did something for you, brought new meaning and hope and the prospect of less aching backs.

True, promotion beasts would be hard at it rhapsodizing its uses but even allowing for their commercial distortion Mun was sure something really purposeful and revolutionary would come of that round chunk of rock with a hole through the middle.

At the quarry, most of his fellow workers were starting up their crushers, washers, sorters, counters and put-togethers. This was mainly required bugging the thong-lashed frames in position for another day's work.

Stub, his buddy and life-long beast friend, acknowledged Mun's slight off-color manner by joining him in a mutual blast at work in general, the quarry in particular, society in part and the trouble-shooting needed for that lever business.

Stub was a rock engineer. Quite often he was called upon to lay out new plans for changing the direction of the gouges in the rock face. This called for much skill with a stick, scratching new designs in the dust, and lots of pointing of fingers and waving of arms. These latter gestures were sometimes understood by the workers to be highly developed signals of sorts and it was expected that one day they would be recognized by more developed men beasts.

Stub was aware that one didn't acquire such engineering enlightenment without some abstraction of physical energy, and he was conscious of his lowering physical prowess. Sometimes he only ate 2 or 3 goona bird legs at one sitting and he could barely lift twice his own weight. Mun's toughened, scarred body, solid frame and dense covering of body hair were a source of secret envy to him. Ironically now, with production becoming more modern every 500 years or so, there was some talk of all engineers and other lofties having to wear grey flannel loincloths. Meanwhile, Stub was

often content to lose himself in the abstract and non-conformist world of the thinker, and this erupted in more meaningful scratchings on the quarry floor and notch cuttings on whittling sticks.

Mun bore down on his machinery, determined to root out the trouble. 'Ace' was the nickname some of his fellow beasts called him, essentially those who knew what 'ace' meant. As for himself, Mun was proud of the speed that he could spot a breakdown. He seemed to need the barest of symptoms to diagnose failures.

Off and on during the rest of the day, many of Mun's fellow worker beasts would find excuses for chit-chat. Piece by piece, Mun would gradually be exposed to much of the doings of his chums, both on and off the job. There was always some radical, off the cuff, plum such as talk about forming a society of skilled trades; the possible new discovery for minimizing wife club bashing each evening by using 'words'; the idea of being paid for labour; or being able to get a day off every third new moon; and so on.

Most of this angry young beast agitation was either to be laughed at or put in the no-good-will-come-of-it category. It seemed to Mun that things always started in the most innocent of ways. Besides, he was much too security minded to allow progressive nonsense of this kind to affect him.

And so the day wound slowly on. Mun worked some, ate some, had a few words, sucked a root and worked again. Finally, his tools were put away and he joined some of the fellows on the trail back to Rock Hill.

Once in the cave, it was obvious that there had been a distinct improvement in tidiness. Superior smells were coming from the cook fire. The young beasts weren't even snarling or fighting outside. A bowl of Bronto milk was waiting as an aperitif. And Wum's warm face was flushed with pleasure as she greeted him. Thongs were flung off, bronto milk sluiced down and Wun stretched out, content, on the special Mastadon hide reserved for Sundays.

Truly this, the first day of the new week, was the toughest of Mun's days.

Not More Dancing!

You know Lloyd is really quite a decent guy. Young, but friendly, with lots of live-and-let-live style. So I have to listen to him.

"Grant, you're a real drag" he says quietly.

"Yes" I allow, not quite sure of his direction of fire.

"You're supposed to be able to write on other subjects, right?"

"Could be" I offer as he heads for a nerve.

"Well, you're such a fanatic on this dance business. You're milking it all the time. You gotta stop man."

He was sipping sherry and eyeing some new talent just coming into the early evening bar. The band was due to start any minute.

"O.K. young Lloyd, but you've got to admit that the energy and expression in our jive and rock is a pretty high level of romance and exercise."

"Look Grant, we've been through all this before. It's just like the head trips you give us on Zen, music, cycling-
-"

"Lloyd my boy, you should have been at the Single's Dance last night, best in town."

But he's eyeing a couple of new gals across the dance floor. They seem to have a flashy elegance and are smiling freely. But Lloyd is not a passionate dancer. True, he can weave and lift his legs a little, but that's about it.

"Think of it Lloyd, being able to go up to those two attractive strangers and, moments later, have their dress and warmth pressed close to you."

Not looking at me, Lloyd says something about what if they dance open stance. You know, I think the man is schizo. He's an aggressive timeless pursuer of the opposite sex yet a kitten in their arms. Like Voltaire said 'Illusion is one of the first of all pleasures'. And the dance is a dream-fantasy pleasure for me. I give generously to the slim-ankled ladies of the dance. And no place is safe from my need to jive, although not yet at symphony concerts, churches or to elevator music. I'm truly a victim of a great hunger.

"Look at those two classy numbers. Kind of a gay innocence, eager to please. And when you get to know those bundles of joy, you get a tiger by the tail. You may wonder if you have a solution to your problems" Lloyd finished, taking a sip.

Suddenly the lights above the floor come on. The wood-panelled atmosphere seems warmer and more intimate. Even the huge chandelier above the floor is of carved cedarwood.

The band comes alive. Lloyd and I will separate into the arms of those sweet smelling luses. And our bodies will express without the need for words.

I approach the dark-haired older one. She puts down her drink and on to the floor we go. All my lively atoms are urging me on. Lloyd is still seated. He has an amused smile on his face and points a mocking finger at me.

The dance, beat, lights and this whisp of a phantom lady swamp my senses. Only the forever force of gravity holds me down, such is my buoyancy. Energized, my feet pedal a merry jig.

The paper-thin essence in my arms is totally feline along all her curves and she smiles at some secret understanding of my off-beat style and energy. We move into high gear as we spin, glide and throb.

Our embrace is a lock any Sumo wrestler would be proud of, my radar easily following the flight plan as we navigate the increasing number of couples on the floor. We sense, breathe and swing the dance.

Her scent is a lusty touch that threatens to break up our well-crafted steps. The music and night are beginning to be ours. She is unselfishly feminine and I have an artless tenderness for more. Later we would be cheek to cheek.

We break heavy traffic and enter a small clearing near the stage, freeing each other for the pleasure of rock. As I look at her slim sinewy moves, I think it a little cynical of Lady Montagu who said "If it were fashionable to go naked, faces would hardly be noticed."

As winter comes, the dance seems an even more significant part of my temperament. While Lloyd lays back and carefully measures it all. He's still very young...

--What's that you say? Wet prints on the carpet? Oh! Supertramp came on suddenly on the radio -- very danceable -

- and I was in the middle of towelling off from a bath.

Funny that Lloyd called me a fanatic. Still, maybe I should listen to him...

Orchard Mystery

We were a trio thinning pears in the orchard. My wife Rozel, daughter Jenn, and myself all working our separate trees. The ground was covered with about half the original fruit. It was boring work. There were about ten days of it ahead and I pondered the difference, if any, between determination and stubbornness.

At coffee time, I stowed my scissor-like thinning shears in the crotch of my tree. On the way to the house we had a chance to marvel at the sudden appearance of small clusters of pears on the trees we had supposedly just finished.

Returning to the work area afterward, I reached for my shears. Actually, it seemed as I approached the tree that they were missing!

"Having trouble there?" sang out Rozel.

"You know me and my eyes," I grunted. It didn't seem possible to have misplaced them. Probably fallen into the grass. Or left in another tree? Or what? In truth, they had disappeared.

"Still haven't found them, dad?" Jenn this time. I growled a negative.

'Let's go and rescue him Jenn,' I heard. I knew each of them had eyes and skills good enough to be live judges at a McEnroe tennis match. It seemed that 'lost items' hastily surrendered when these two started looking. So we all looked. And there was nothing. And they kept saying to me, 'Are you sure...', until we gave up and went back to work.

I thinned by hand, at the same time visualizing an exquisitely sharp faller's axe making clean accurate cuts into the trunks of these pear trees. And imagined the sound of the satisfying crashes that followed.

"Lunch time."

Halfway through the meal, there was a small bit of violence at the door and a large person came in with a 'Hi'. Followed by an 'I'm hungry'. A not uncommon utterance from boy number four, Philip, who had been to town. After eating, we mentioned the loss to him.

"Where did you leave them, dad?" he asked. Upon being told, he advised, "Have them back for you in a couple of minutes." Such friendly brashness. The rest of us smiled at each other, cleared the table and prepared to go back to

work.

Moments later this boyish brute was back. With the sheers. And pleased at our astonished reactions. I recovered first.

"Look Phil. Take them and place them exactly where you found them and each one of us separately will see if we can spot them."

There was never any doubt. Each one of us, even from thirty or forty feet away, could see them in the crotch of the tree. We joked over the mystery, but secretly we were baffled and had no explanation. I finished the day rationalizing it with invisible energy forces and aliens and U.F.O.'s and shifts in the earth's magnetic field and other delightful goodies, finally wearing the subject out.

There was to be one other slight mystery that week. Kind of unusual. None before or since. But two in a week.

I was listening to some after lunch music on the record player. Old, crumbly orchard hands like me are entitled to a little rest, apparently. And since I had enjoyed the disc, I wished it would auto-repeat. It didn't have this feature built in and in a thousand playings before and since had never obliged my request. Well, you guessed it! As I listened, in relaxed comfort, to the end-of-the-record shutdown noises, I came alive. The scrappings and clicks of hidden levers sounded different. And the tone arm did not go to the stop rest. There were no termination clicks either. And above all the record player started again! Never before or since, like I said. Great material for pondering and relating to others. Such amazing, amusing mind stuff. And of course an extra playing without having to get up and work the machine.

Some weeks later I recalled the incidents to a friend. He nodded. Showed no surprise. And asked, "How old is Jenn?"

"Thirteen," I gave. He then tried to convey details of how a relationship has been known to develop between a 'fun-loving poltergeist' (or disembodied mind) and any sensitive individual. I listened, intrigued but not fully comprehending...

A Break In The Pattern

They sat opposite one another at the kitchen table. It had been two weeks of separation for them and he seemed noticeably unsure. By contrast she looked composed. She had spent her time with the rest of the family while he on his own had been involved in an excess of self-examination. For him the gap between them far exceeded the table width.

"How do you feel about getting back together," she opened. He studied her slowly and carefully. Her face looked set. A desolate strength. Something turned in his stomach. Her soft brown eyes had given to a darkness that was both anxious and staring. He needed more words.

"It must have been much harder for you," she continued. "At least the family helped to take my mind off it..."

She patterned the knife and fork on the empty plate. He was conscious of the hands. They had worked hard over the years. Five children and their sicknesses had been demanding.

"Would you rather talk about the support money instead?"

He searched her face again for a lead into her true feeling toward him. Inside he still had scars from pain and anger and understanding, and this total feeling was now going to govern his responses. He still felt unsure of thoughts and needs.

She waited. The room suddenly seemed warmer. The sun's pressure and light made them like actors on a stage. The kittens played energetically nearby, unaware and free.

"Legal Aid said if we could come to some agreement ourselves it would save in lawyer's time and money."

She made it sound easy; matter of fact. Just another of the many attentions she had given the family over the years. He waited, bothered by his own delay and uncertainty. This was a new experience for his normal outgoing self. Emotion almost totally controlled his being. A flush of age stirred him as he suddenly realized the family of five children had grown up and were away. An unknown new direction and purpose were awaiting him.

Her words had unfolded so naturally and he longed for the male self assurance that had always been there in the past talks and fights. Before, adversity had emphasized the glory of his style. Meanwhile he struggled for identity in this new relationship. To navigate through he only had her

words and looks to guide him. She was not to be held in his arms and this was a special hollowness for him.

He discovered the salt shaker could be wedged between two plates and rotated by moving one.

"I must remember to do the bees before I go back," she continued with unexpected recall.

Another of the many thoughts she carried in her mind. He passed up this irrelevance with an empty nod.

"Then I'll only need to come back once more to feed them for the winter."

The knife and fork had formed a new pattern under the influence of her growing impatience.

"And then if they die, they die."

Somehow, getting away from the personal side of the talk and into the farm business was what he needed. Out of her opening moves he had finally collected and sorted enough direction to find a position. The salt shaker propelled slowly around. The empty plates seemed symbolic of separateness.

"There's no way I could have given you a quick easy answer. The issue is big for me. I had to wait and see where you were coming from." He now felt a little better as though discovering a strength and in some odd way a truth. He scanned her face for a friendly sign of encouragement.

"While you were away, the total effect of missing you and family took a week to adjust to. Friends in town helped. Although sympathetic, they quickly pointed out the only way to recovery was for me to live it out by keeping occupied and seeking company. They didn't waste any time on extra sentiment beyond the knowing of the aloneness."

The mind had opened up for the business of words again, but still with some difficulty. With an extra gathering of himself in his chair, he braved looking at her intently.

"Many times in the past your frequent visits to your mother for four or five days reminded me of how after the first day of isolation, a changed state of survival materializes and I quickly adjust to you not being there. Now I think we should continue living apart as you decided and by doing so feel the awareness and the new discipline involved and a measure of the responsibility that the marriage invokes. It might even be like a courtship again, not in close contact but apart."

He was relieved to find enough sense and clarity coming out of him. She nodded once slowly.

"There's one thing," she said. "If we do get together again, we certainly will have an improved respect for each other's responsibilities. Probably enough to reduce the amount of routine ordinariness that comes with years of closeness. Essentially, for me, it means being really needed."

He all too well understood the base cause of this last vital call. "I'll help you to get the car ready for your trip down to the coast. Special hello to family. I'll be down myself soon..." The sun had weakened. Cloud had glided over the scene. Traffic came into the room again. The kittens shaped up for more play. Outside the rooster crowed, a brazen maleness of sound. He opened the slide window and released a trapped bee. He left it open, an unintentional philosophic symbol.

Picture From The Past

How nice to be caught this way a little by surprise. It is kitchen cooking time. I am calmly assembling the rugged parts of a bumper vegetable pie. You know how it goes, each mound of sliced veggies not large in itself, but when added exceeds the size of the biggest pot. Yes, that kind of pie.

The radio behind me is on and I am about to hear a pleasant break in the backdrop pattern. Outside the sun is giving full gold to autumn leaves. On the counter I admire the orderly and colorful piles of sliced onions, carrots, squash, corn, beet and potatoes. I am in rolling form. Then I hear the voice of the radio... Roberta Flack killing me softly with a love song.

Ah...! This calls for some giving on my part. Tools are slowly downed. She is due to sing several ballads. Great! I am ready for her. Supper will be a little late.

The voice, cathedral clear, rises softly and free and into my kitchen and into me, and I quietly dissolve. My mind drifts slowly down through shadows of time and we are holding hands again a thousand years ago. We are young. She, my first real girlfriend. We are walking lost in each other.

She is in browns matching her hair and eyes; with a cream lace top. We are close and sometimes bump awkwardly. We then squeeze hands. She gives a quick smile of pleasure. We hardly use words.

The day is warm with an overhead blue above bright green earth. We move unaware of motion. We notice little of the scenery. There is a softness pressed against me from thigh to shoulder. I breath her faint scent. And her eyes, they search my face and I look into something tender and innocent. Her freshness excites me...

I lean against the counter brought back by "...there's more to love I know, than making love..." Through the window the lake is a stretched plastic of stillness. I disappear from behind my eyes, drawn back to the haunting dream. I feel again the warm flesh through summer thin clothes. Each time we lurch off course I am protective and steady us both. The nearness a sheer pleasure. Our fingers twist a timeless message. I can hardly wait.

The grass is dry and soft. We sit and hold. I thought she whispered. She shook her head, smiling. We press close and our lips join...

I am now sitting on the counter. The cats on the sundeck rail are squinting up at the sun, sphinx-like.

"The first time, ever I saw your face... I thought the sun rose in your eyes." I am being stirred deep within. Down I go again, trying to make clear this vague forgotten memory of Anne. She is now in my arms. Anne, should I ever be called upon to join this or another planet again, please let me have in my destiny another, you at seventeen. No matter how she looks as long as you are inside her. Is this the most feeling time of human closeness, disconnected as we are from reality? We should meet in some future. We are too young to start a life together...

I slump back on the counter. The miracle of the time shift triggered by Roberta "...and life's illusion I recall. I really don't know life at all..." Anne hasn't moved. Still waiting on warm earth. I rejoin the holding. We are breathless. The now is all we have. Yesterday is hidden, tomorrow unknown. Take joy and strength my lass, such are my gifts. Will I ever see you again as you are now? Or will age or distance or fullness bring parting?

Anne... Anne, even your clothes, soft with lace, they too are fresh and innocent. And those eyes... they search me and I'm happy.

I touch with care and shyness, with instant treasure of discovery. From face and neck and shoulder to small breasts surprisingly soft. Their peaks pressed under my palms. And then down, yielding flesh and quick shedding of tenderness. The animal in me racing, creating broken waves of motion, and ultimately escaping in great gasps. And you pressed and lifted me.

Back in kitchen life once more, flushed and stirred. I gaze blankly about as though a stranger. The song now more joyous and rhythmic breaks my mood.

With a large sigh I brood on the springtime of our youth pressed gently life a leaf in a book. Faintly preserved in memory's dream. Our bond was a shared passion. A flame was lit whose warmth I now feel kindled from surges of pleasure. And you started within me a caring for people and things that has been hard to live up to.

The moments here in the kitchen have been a bitter-sweet purge. And as I empty out, there seems one important item missing. Even as I usually enjoy the adventure of cooking and preparation, today, and maybe just this once, I would like my woman to be here. To come behind me and hold me and understand my frailty and kill me softly with her warmth... Supper would be even later.

Playoff Hockey

"Somebody is down on ice, hurt" says the voice of the announcer.

We look quickly at the television to see the color of the jersey. Ah!, it's O.K.! Just a red jersey down there. Good, as long as it's not one of ours!

Seconds later the battle starts again. Quickly the ice is covered, like a flea market, with gloves, sticks, helmets and several bodies, the latter usually in pairs. One on top of the other. Hands shaped into fists and striking out. The crowd is on its feet. Three officials are jammed in the surging mob of ex-players. Two major fights are going well.

The puck, a black disk, lies innocently in the middle of the ice. Once the focus of the game, once the reason for the hostile warfare practiced by these armour-plated warriors. Our studious appreciation of many fine aspects of the game is distorted by frequent ugly and primitive engagements. Our own pulses beat faster as we supportively watch these cave men interpret the sport.

During an interval between periods, the flushed face of the color commentator had screamed how he "couldn't understand how the Flames were doing so good!" "And against the Stanley Cup Champions too!!!" he continued, with a happy, sweaty grin.

Surely he must have been watching some of the hockey as well as the violence. Because he would have seen human tanks called 'defenders' charging the highly skilled puck handlers like wild rams butting heads. He would also have seen bodies being slammed into boards, the puck playing very little part in the defenders' crude ambitions. Any one of these so called 'body checks' -- what a friendly name for it -- creating maximum interference, obstruction and possibly harm. In other sports they would have whistled for penalties immediately. And if they had repeated would have been thrown out of the game.

Hopefully we will see some more extremely superior moments of sheer joy as darting forwards from both sides give fine displays of puck-handling magic -- precise passing, body feints, sudden accelerations and stops, and then, the lump-in-the-throat climax, a blistering shot on goal with perhaps a brilliant reflex save -- dazzled again by pace, skill and energy in an end-to-end duel.

The question now is what would happen if we minimized intimidation, brute force and injuries? Perhaps even removing Ghengis Khan and some Mafia from the rule selection

committee. And, hardest of all, decide we might try and play with the class and elegance of some European teams. Especially when their brand of hockey is visually and scientifically superior. Could we not experiment this way for a couple of years? Mind you, it's taken England over twenty years to realize that most international soccer teams have better style and ball control than they do.

Should not brilliant performers like Paul Coffey, Jari Kurri, Glenn Anderson and the number one of all time, master of the century, Wayne Gretzky, be protected like endangered species?

Ah! We see the game is starting again. We hear the penalty awards. We see the penalized in the box like prisoners in a line-up. They straighten their armour, touch a few tender bruises and hurl last insults.

Meanwhile, on the ice battle field, the tension stressed, adrenalin pumped, body crushing defenders are waiting... They are the destroyers.

Oh yes... There was an ending. The Flames win. After all, that's what counts isn't it? Ask any coach or manager. Heck, second best is as bad as being last, in our material world.

But we are not going to rush the raising of standards and expectations are we because, when the chips are down, we the spectators discover we're all human animals at heart. We too fight on the boards, in the corners, kill the opposition and battle to final victory.

Maybe one day there will be a better spirit, and fun. Perhaps requested by coaches and fans alike. Till then...

Precious Gifts

How in the drifting scheme of human form
Joy is found in sorrow frame.
How in the problem plan of complex thought
The mind returns to a simple base of changelessness.

The shadows cast by land swept stillness
Seeps into heart and home.
To gently smooth the upswept feeling
Compressed within the body walls.

This searching to express, this reflex to create
This quickened blood to build and grow
To give and be, to have and dream
Is driving deeper down veins of human life.

gifts
One day we'll know the timeless phase of precious
That sends its praise in space and depth
That daily asks for truth and love
And wretches from the impure odors of selfish grasp.

Purple And Gold

I have thought about him nearly every day since he disappeared. It is now exactly one year to the day since he said he would reappear -- that was the very unusual word he used. Now every cell in my body is listening, watching and waiting.

Tom Pritchard was slightly above average in height, with plain features and a lean body. He had distinctive eyes -- dark lenses with pupils that glistened like crystal. I had been fascinated by his exceptional reflexes. His movements were ballet fluid and panther light.

Tom was well liked. Mixed with all ages. Almost too well, now that I think of it. He lived nearby in a rented home in a comfortable bachelor style. Even I fell into the trap of hoping he would marry soon, settle down and become even more like one of us.

It happened one morning on my sundeck. It was a beautiful day -- cloudless, with young spring greens everywhere in the orchard. We had met socially a few times and I enjoyed both his range of reality and delightful sense of humor. We had been sitting, chatting and drinking mint tea when he turned slowly and looked deep into my eyes.

I felt drawn into the diamond brilliance of the centers.

"Grant," he said, speaking softly. "I want to show you a special quality before I tell you an unbelievable thing. This demonstration is for credibility only." His voice and eyes seemed one, and both deepened inside me. I felt my senses shifting into another gear. I began to hear the wing beats of birds in the nearby trees. The distant hills and lake were much closer and had binocular detail. My skin was extra sensitive, as though infused with static electricity. It was as if my mind had left my body and, at first I struggled to get it back inside before I lost contact with reason.

I heard his well-round voice saying, "Your mind is being entered. It will be a warm pleasure. Shall we say extra sensory pleasure. Relax and enjoy... Remember, this is happening in your cortex only." The words seemed to have formed inside a part of me. Meanwhile, patterns and shapes were already mapping my vision, a blending of light and movement. From somewhere the sound of music, electro-acoustic. I was an event in 3-D whose sequences of change were coming in waves. The heavy scent of nearby lilacs made me gasp.

Out of the corner of my eyes I saw a strange bending of the corner of the building but when I turned in surprise they appeared normal. Bark on the trees seemed to gently pulse. Orchard grass bent as grain in the wind. The sky suddenly was a hard deep purple. And all the time a compelling voice droned in my head -- more the Om sound than words.

I felt at peace, with joy and awareness. I began to believe this fantasy was real. Then I heard "You are coming back... You will be here again... Join me. Are you all right?"

The motion around me slowed. The cathedral golf of light everywhere faded and I gradually surfaced to see Tom looking at me intently. Then he smiled and extended a cool hand. "Welcome back" he said lightly.

"Good Lord man, what a display" I mumbled, throat and mouth leather-dry.. The words were spoken without me behind them. I struggled to catch up and guide them. I was puzzled but not upset. Who was this man and what was he up to? Inside, my genes felt cleansed as though from a generous orgasm. The whole scene had taken place in a sphere of gold and I wanted it all back.

Tom crossed one bare leg over the other. I noticed how smooth and clear the skin was. No hair! Then I realized his face was the same. He no longer looked deep into my eyes. "You have been suffused by color, form and scent" he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

I nodded, trying to imagine what had happened while I was in that trance. Was I that susceptible to suggestion? I was twice his age in experiences. My curiosity had carried me often into surprising situations. But what had the suggestion been? Or had there even been one? How could my head, so well rounded in science and philosophy, have been turned around so suddenly and impressively? All my senses had been altered.

Weight began to return to my body. I was glad that I didn't have to walk anywhere. I began to brood on this strange happening with its pleasure and innocence. Oddly, I had a desire for more of whatever it was and I found myself watching him with full attention. My adrenalin was flowing.

"Wow man, how did you do that?" I finally uttered in a voice that seemed to come from an echo chamber. I couldn't even tell how loud I was talking. No longer was this the Tom I had known. This was a stranger with built-in magic.

Tom lifted an opened hand. The palm lines seemed deep and unbroken. "Grant, please allow me to remind you of the

confidential nature of this event. No one else knows."

"Go ahead," I said, "I respect your privacy." There was more I wanted to say and question but it was as though I was being restricted to a limited ration of words. It was not quite asking time yet.

"Do you know anything about encephalography?" he asked. His tone was casual, the words were evenly spaced as though returning to another tongue, programmed.

Tom's casual question shook me. I felt chilled. The words struck a sinister chord, something I'd read long ago about mind control by aliens. Something about controlling all people on a planet except for a handful of governors that were impervious to manipulation. A group of elite rulers. They were the encephalographers!

I didn't answer but he seemed to have read my mind and didn't expand further on his question. Instead he continued in the same even tone. "When a civilization has been in existence for a thousand centuries, just about all discoveries have been made. Thoughts and feelings of others are known. The mind is infinite in its ability to share and be a part of everything from pets and people to plants and objects."

He spoke as though he had intimate knowledge of this. I had to challenge him. "You sound like an authority. Surely you are just quoting from the writings of an imaginative author?"

Time seemed to hang. He looked steadily at me but in a gentle way. One hand slowly stroked the thick dark hair above one ear. I still couldn't avoid his eyes and I noticed for the first time the shadows cast by his long thick eyelashes. Even the most sophisticated of women wouldn't stand a chance I thought.

Everything had turned silent. Tom shifted slightly in his chair, a sinewy uncoiling. He reached and drank from his cup, his body returning to form a sharp angle with the chair. As he put his cup down I couldn't help noticing how drawn out each of these small events had been. Each of his acts was measured, an act of patience. There was total control and almost a touch of boredom. Even when he looked away, and I was free of those eyes for a moment, I hung by a thread.

"Grant, I am going to tell you the main purpose of our get-together this morning."

I was more riveted than ever. My mind picked up pace, yet I felt calm -- an odd combination.

"I am a stranger to your planet. My home world is part of the sun-star system of Arcturus, one of your nearest neighbors."

I was suspended again in a spell. I had always wanted to live long enough to see the banner headlines in the newspapers of the world saying "Aliens Contacted". I would buy every paper possible.

I immediately began to look at Tom with critical eyes, searching for any signs of physical differences in the design of his person. From fingernails and ears, to lips and hair, there were no differences except perhaps those heavy eyelashes and thick, straight hair that almost seemed a little out of place with the rest of his hairless body. I tried to remember if any of Tom's past activities had revealed any giveaways, social errors or mysterious effects on others. But he came up clean, except for a lessened inflection in his voice. Already I was believing him, accepting this incredible statement of an out-of-world visitation.

"I don't want to talk about travel mode for now. You have enough to disturb you. Nor do I want to give details on how long I have been here or where my time has been spent. More important is the reason for my appearance."

Again those level tones underscored the message. A slight smile cornered what now appeared to me as very attractive full lips for a man, delicate curves. Feeling dry-mouthed, I reached for my cup. It couldn't be moved. It was glued to the table! I frowned.

"Now try again," the voice said, and I could have sworn that it was all in my head. The cup and saucer moved freely. Here was another act of suggestion without an audible command. I drank thirstily of tea gone cold.

"I know you have many questions, but the first should be related to my reason for being here." Tom had read my thoughts once more. While he paused for what seemed forever, I tried to measure his age. For the first time he shifted on his chair to a slightly more businesslike upright position. I almost reached to touch him to prove that he was real.

He continued. "It is only in the last century that we have mastered vector time displacements for distance exchange. So far we seem more successful than other space colonies, with the whole passage of exchange being controlled by robot pilots."

His eyes were distance-reaching and empty of emotion.

I hung motionless, tuned only to his presence, totally overcome by this tremendous contact happening on my sundeck. I could hear neighbors carrying on morning routines around their homes or working in their orchards. And why shouldn't they? It was no different to any other morning! For a moment I wanted to shout to them to come and see this miracle.

I began to wonder why this wasn't taking place before some great assembly of parliament, in a cathedral or at a university before major leaders and philosophers.

"Grant, I hear you. But you see there is a great scarcity of encephalographers on your planet. Does that answer your thoughts?"

He was serious and I was staggered by the implications. Suddenly I wondered: did I have encephalographic mind strength? I fired a question. "If I have some encephalographic quality in my nature that helps to resist mind manipulation, how can you enter my head so easily?"

Tom lifted his head slightly as though to observe a new fragment of me. "A sound question and the reason is that I am physically contacting you through one of your major senses, namely your eyes. Just about all others in your world can be controlled and organized from a distance. The reason for my appearance here is not connected to religion, nor to mediate the savagery of your black and white groups. It is to accumulate samples of the way you handle such things as personal relationships, energy resources, waste and pollution. In particular, I wish to document your abuse of nuclear power by using it as a weapon of enormous destruction. I am merely a reporter."

I began to feel annoyed at his apparently smug criticism of us, even though much of it was true.

"Grant, the days of most of your people are heavy with concerns. Sometimes it seems more a matter of luck than good judgement when you people manage to make it home at night, considering the quantity of vehicle accidents, muggings, terrorism, riots, war, radiation spills, earthquakes and heart attacks.

He sounded like a student expounding on our limitations. I began to recover a little and wished that I had a camera or tape recorder handy. I tried judging how old Tom was. Somewhere between twenty and sixty, definitely ageless.

"Occasionally my people need to be reminded how fortunate they are to have matured to higher levels of insight and intuition in relationships. The information on

your culture that I take back with me will shock and sadden my people but it should also act as a catalyst to make them more grateful for their own security, peace and awareness."

"Well, you know my response to this!" I exploded, finding my voice and surprising myself at the same time. "Here you are looking down on us ants crawling and scratching in our emotional jungle and yet you are so serenely uninvolved. Clinical even, taking notes on our primitive interactions. All done in the best academic style, without feeling, without seeing the finer aspects of our lifestyle -- the care and concern we have for one another, the raising of living standards, the important gains in areas like medicine, housing--"

I was out of breath and could feel the sun's heat. I was surprised that Tom had allowed me to say so much. Of course he continued to look cool, calm and collected. With little effort, he rose and stretched lightly. He watched as I rose too. Once more I became aware of the intensity of the scents from the blossoming fruit trees. Nearby a cock pheasant moved with slow pride. Cats basked in the warmth. A jet flew by overhead, exhausting its energy in white vapor.

Tom spoke again and I was forced to admire the return of natural inflection in his voice. "I am leaving now. You have enough to think about and adjust to. When I come back again all your questions will be answered. You will assimilate and resolve this experience so well that next time I will offer you an incredible opportunity."

"Are you going to tell me what form the opportunity will take, and how long you will be away?"

He turned from looking at the lake and smiled. In some mysterious way he became human again -- a neighbor, friendly and open. His smile was compassionate. He stretched an arm toward me, almost touching. "No details, but a hint. The opportunity will be related to extended travel if you can free yourself for a long period. I will return exactly one year from today."

I stiffened as I grasped his suggestion. Shivers ran down my spine. I had the time and the desire. Freedom, travel, the unexpected and the spontaneous were all essential to my nature. I was electrified by the possibility of a dream come true.

As Tom turned to leave he added, "I will leave this with you. It will become a very important focus for your meditations."

The object, smaller than a cup, was shaped like a

pyramid. It looked like the purest Burma jade I'd ever seen, but was almost transparent. Even a first glance caught my breath as it seemed there were layers of depth within its interior. From my years of study of Yoga and Zen philosophy I knew immediately that I would mentally and spiritually enter its presence as though before a master .

We shook hands. A part of me wanted to hold him close for a long moment, like a son, but I seemed drained of initiative. I watched his light, springy steps take him down the driveway to the road. He paused, turned, lifted a hand and waved. I followed him, dry-mouthed, until he was out of sight.

For days, weeks and months to follow I kept a silent vigil waiting for this coming event. Back and forth in my head voices argued from the angles of belief, fantasy, dream and reality, but most of all reappearance. Too many times I looked up at the infinity of space and brooded.

I found it hard to concentrate when talking to friends and neighbors on subjects that normally were interesting. The words seemed greeting-card shallow. How I wished I could pour out my mind-boggling experience.

Luckily there was one extremely vital feature that had never failed to return me at the end of the day to a state of harmony and strength. Such was the power and integrating force of the translucent jade pyramid. It often seemed to will my mind to rest.

I remember one morning soon after Tom's departure. I had left the pyramid on a window ledge. The early morning sun striking a surface was refracted into a most unusual sight. I caught my breath as I saw the broad, sharp spectrum of two bands of color. Two only, purple and gold. Laser bright and almost throbbing, the purple and gold of my altered state of awareness -- that astounding day on the sundeck.

365 days have passed. The climax of a year's doubts is within me. Has it all been a mirage? A daydream? My imagination? Yet there certainly had been a Tom Pritchard.

Today my body and mind feel at the bursting point, with a tension greater than when in love or despair. I have looked out my windows so many times that I am exhausted with expectancy.

What am I really looking for? My major concern had been that I might not be fit enough for a journey of this magnitude. Would the excitement and mode of travel be too much for me? The desire to be part of another world for a visit had always been with me. The ultimate culture change!

'They would perhaps marvel even more at me than I at them. What color was the sky or grass there? How much would I weigh? What did they grow and eat? How did they travel and live?

The day has lengthened into afternoon. I have not eaten and barely drank. I can't even listen to music, a true barometer of my inner stresses. Even the power of the pyramid crystal has failed to give me balance, although it is more likely that I probably failed it!

It is now so late that I look out to prove the emptiness of it all. A whole year of my life exposed to shattered and distorted hopes. He will never come back...

I open the door to the sundeck. In the shadow of the late sun, the miracle of my unlimited curiosity is before me, his face a beautiful smile and his uniform of purple and gold.

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Pyramid And Its Builders Mystify Traveller

The mountain alongside me is half-covered by low cloud, much like our [Okanagan] Valley hills in winter. But the "monster hill" is different. Its shape has precise tapered sides all rising to a single point. The top is 45 stories high, or more than 450 feet above a precisely square base. Man made, it consists of thousands of stone blocks. It is also known as the great pyramid of Giza, one of the ancient wonders of the world.

Seeing this incredible structure on film or photograph is very impressive. Standing within feet of its presence is overpowering, if only from the staggering statistics of its construction and planning.

I have just climbed up on one of the thousands of buttress slabs used as a base to brace against the enormous side thrusts. The slab is about six times the volume of an average freezer and weighs about 20 tons. Above me, rising at about a 47 degree angle, are giant steps made of blocks weighing about three tons each, cut in cubic shapes to within an eighth of an inch.

The more I look, the more difficult it becomes to accept this huge burial-chamber fortress in any casual way. The longer I look the more it grows in size. A veritable Matterhorn of the Middle East.

BIGGER THAN KING'S PARK

The cloud layer slowly rises under the influence of the morning sun. As I watch, some figures of dimension come to mind. The sides are about 750 feet long -- about two and a third times the length of a football field. This forms an area greater than many Okanagan orchards and is about twice the walled area of King's Park in Penticton, over 12 acres! The number of stone blocks resembles the population of our province, almost three million. The great slabs needed to form ceiling joists in the burial chamber exceed 30 tons in weight and have to support a dead weight equivalent to that of a small battleship.

Three of the world's largest cathedrals -- St. Peter's, St. Paul's and Notre Dam -- could easily fit inside with a little room left over for a couple more churches!

Many questions crowd my thoughts. I have only partial

answers at best, conflicting ones at worst. Since nothing like pyramids had been formed before, where did the original idea come from? Who decided to carry out the most extravagant project ever conceived? What part did priests and nobles play? Did they persuade the pharaoh that this would be an essential part of his passage into the afterlife, in mummified form? Who did the planning? Who organized the 100,000 workers -- an army greater than any used in battles of the day? And what about the logistics of housing, supplies, vehicles, tools? And where did the craft and engineering skills come from? Even today we'd need all the help we could get from lasers, computers, bulldozers and cranes to match these ancients of 45 centuries ago.

40 YEARS TO BUILD

For this mysterious wonder to have been formed by nature would have made it a tourist attraction. That it was assembled by hand, block by block, over a 40-year period with superlative accuracy of sighting and levelling comparable to our laser age technology makes the whole thing awesome. It would have taken a freight train stretching from Vancouver to the Alberta border to transport the six million tons of stone. With a height of 455 feet, the great pyramid of Giza was the tallest building in the world for 4,400 years, until the Eiffel Tower.

Much has been made of the actual orientation in relation to geographic meridians and it is indeed accurate to within one degree of alignment. Scientists have also read into its dimensions relationships to mathematical symbols and astronomical data.

Walking around the base allows me to continually brood on proportions and the ancients' preoccupation with planning for death and burial. What has begun in me as an item of curiosity is now quickly being converted into something of a dazed awe, with a feeling of being completely out of my depth. I wonder how the ancient Egyptians must have felt as they made pilgrimages to this unique achievement on opening day, with its gold colored cappings glistening in the desert sun scores of miles away like some giant star ...and of Cheops, the Pharaoh, who was to occupy, in aloof serenity, the King's Chamber with a silence inside unbroken by any external noise for thousands of years.

FANTASY AND REALITY

And now, as I finally become saturated with the continual vastness of the form, I begin to notice again the many tourists with cameras clicking, children playing games, money changers, postcard vendors, Arabs asking for hand-

outs, donkeys and camels and buses and taxis -- all because of this megalith of fantasy and reality.

I am having more difficulty now in accepting the academic views on how it all came about, this astounding high rise. In particular, the speculators' glib statement about using grease on wooden rollers to reduce friction in moving 35 ton slabs. Grease? Grease and sand? It must have been no mean trick building the sand ramps, especially to the peak. True, the pyramid blocks did not have the superior accuracy of those in temple walls and columns, where monster stones can top one another up to 80 feet without cement and with joints that wouldn't allow a razor blade to penetrate. (I know, I tried in many places until security guards threw me out.)

And not only one pyramid but at least four major efforts, with the second one by Neferti being about the same size as the big fellow, a height difference of only five feet.

I'm confused. All this, without advanced help of any king? Why didn't such skills continue in an evolutionary way to the present time?

And now, in my Penticton home, a piece of rock sits on my table next to a few chunks from the Great Wall of China. Taken from the majestic pyramid, it serves as a reminder to me of past greatness of energy and spirit.

Queeny

Dear Queeny:

How are you these days, lass? Are you still able to get around and check out those wonderful castles of yours? I bet you're also having problems with economic measures. Everybody feels the pinch, don't they? About the only satisfied customers here are bankers. Guess you heard they made 450 million this year. Isn't that great, because most everyone else lost some.

But say, remember me telling you about this guy I know here in Vancouver, the one who was next to me when we waved to you on your last visit? Well, it happens he's very good at garbage in the back lanes. I don't think you drove down our lanes here in skid row, did you? Anyhow, you didn't have to. You've got lots of main streets to inspect.

Well anyway, one time he was doing a good sorting job among old papers and empty beer cans, his name's Harry by the way, and I wanted to be careful about prying into his living, so I asked how he was these days just like I'm doing to you. So he stopped reaching long enough to give me a bleak look, as though hope was the enemy. You remember the time you had that problem with a corn on your foot. Well it just so happened that Harry had just got out of hospital then himself. Had left one lung behind. Funny you both suffering at the same time. But since then he's been a very mortal guy with mortal problems. His dress for instance. A real give away. No new cardboard in his boots. And you know how bare holes in the soles look bad. So I made a few round about words on the weather, his boots, his racking cough and the rich quality of garbage this Christmas time of year. And it turned out he hadn't heard about our lucky bankers. He even looked a little blank when I mentioned about Maggie's son getting hooked to the Texan oil baron's daughter and 150 million dollars on the side.

You know Liz, its really a shame some of the skiddy types here don't get to see how well you manage and smile and wave and speak to us at the end of the year. They'd be cheered the way you share your prosperity with others. Why only yesterday Harry actually smiled when I told him how your millions for expenses barely kept the fires burning in those fine buildings of yours, let alone handling the yachts and limosines and handsome tiaras. He likes to see unfussy warmth and comfort.

We were talking lass of how the Pope is holding up well this winter and his finely placed Vatican investments and businesses are still very competitive. Actually there ain't much competition, is there, when there is only one Vatican,

eh? At this stage Harry seemed very engrossed with his garbage can as I explained that a lot of money was required to run a church operation efficiently. And the extra care you must take when buying up a bank or company so that it will not taint the holy city.

Then suddenly Harry straightened up. A flicker of life in his eyes. And he showed me almost a whole loaf! No coffee grounds, beer stains or crow pecks. He looked pleased. Mind you dearie, just like you he often has to get up very early too. Got to get first pickings and drive off the crows. They're such noisy and scrappy eaters anyway.

You know lady, its wonderful how long your family has been going as kings and queens and princes and that. How can tribes possibly do without them, I say? I mean, you take that fine husband of yours--Phil isn't it?--and how he's president of the wildlife society like. And Harry and me know how he's against poacher killing of animals in Africa, or seals over here.

So the tribe you rule over lass must be made to realize that with all that personal control over his hunting emotions, its understandable if a little bit on the sly goes on at Sandingham or Buckingham or any other 'ham' home. So a few pheasants get shot by him and you and your daughter and your son. So what! And why shouldn't you be laughing and cheering, as seen by those long distance photographers, as you hold your prize. I mean you've got to have some friendly outlet for gunnery haven't you?

I was going to mention some of this to Harry but he's already deep into his fourth can of the morning and his paper bag is getting full. I'm rambling on and of course you want to get on with your busy schedule of planning cruises, horse back riding and checking your salmon and swans in your royal rivers and all. Why it makes me tired just thinking of what your job description must be. But how nice you get your application accepted just by being born. Don't need any special qualifications do yer?

So, keep up the good cheer as you do your Yoga breathing exercises and other such things. And should you drop over again, don't forget to sample my peasant bread. Oh yes, almost forgot, bring a gun or two for our wild chickens and birds. You'd have a ball. And as an extra bonus, you could take practice shots at the fruit on our trees.

Do keep on,

Yours

Willy (Harry's sidekick)

P.S. Long Live England...

Appeared in The Penticton Herald

Senior Cyclists Questioned On Trip

The questions most usually asked are, did you enjoy it? Why did you do it? Would you do it again? And, were the Rockies the hardest part?

The answers are often partial and varied, dependent upon memory and emotions. Enjoy it? Yes, mostly. Even the hardships and discipline became acceptable in the struggle for achieving the biggest goal of all, completing the full journey. But there was no way I was made that brought pleasure getting up at 5 a.m. in the morning. That warm sleeping bag had great holding power. To get up, pack, take down the tent, hike a couple of hundred yards to the washroom, have breakfast and be on the road by six was a drag! Incidentally, breakfast was always on the run. Because of wet park benches and tables or mossies, we stood or walked around eating our porridge.

Why do it? Because I had never seen the provinces before. A chance to spend up to 28 days in one province, Ontario. Also I obviously like cycling, and lastly, it was a distance long enough to be challenging. At our latitude of 49 degrees, the distance to Halifax is almost a third of the way around the world! (road miles that is).

Do it again? No, once is enough. But I like distance touring enough to consider Africa or China next time, say before my 90th birthday. A touring bike is mobile, responsive, reliable and seems custom fitted to one's body. It's easy to develop a timeless relationship with one. Like a friend. It carries me great distances, lets me breathe fresh air and see things as easily as walking. Carries loads and me all the way without even a flat tire. Just a little attention now and then -- some air in the tires perhaps weekly, clean and lube the chain maybe every 150 miles or so. Perhaps its biggest limitation is the seat. The first engineer that designs one to give comfort even beyond the first 30 to 40 miles will receive world recognition as a savior!

Rockies the toughest? They were magnificent. A huge wall of massive rock. A mental and physical barrier to travel. They were truly in our way and we had looked forward to them with awe and 100 per cent respect. We were concerned that as grandparents, our old bodies might fall apart a little bit on those high passes. The hills out of Golden and Field were worthy of the Guinness Book of World Records. Two hours on one -- averaging six mph! And

reaching over 5,000 feet. It probably took about 5,000 calories of energy that day. But when we came into Ontario from the north-west, we found the combination of countless hills, headwinds, bad roads and poor weather just as tough as the Rockies. And there were 28 days of this.

Peddalling a bike on the Trans Canada Highway was a physical act of good leg energy, over 10,000 precise gear selections, eyes well focussed on road surfaces and ears sensitive to the sounds behind. I used mine extensively to measure how far behind me the vehicle was: how big; truck or car; and how fast was it going. This information gave me a lead time of about three seconds to take special evasive action if necessary, like escaping onto treacherous gravel shoulders.

Sometimes road surfaces were so rough or 'pebbled' that the vibrations passed through the handlebars would 'freeze' our hands and wrists. I sometimes saw riders ahead shaking first one limb then the other to regain circulation. Foam rubber on the bar was a big improvement for me.

Each day we cycled found our old figures becoming more and more trim. The average loss of weight was eight to fifteen pounds. We noticed all too sadly the overweight, poor posture and general lethargy of many seniors we met enroute. We were pleased with our own feeling of energy, spirit and desire. Some days, when we were extended by hills or distances up to 90 miles to be covered, I would look in admiration at the 30 riders who all did their stuff with little or no complaints. I thought how nice if these 30 could become 3,000 or more really fit and alive seniors.

And so went the days, from an early morning start that often had us riding 25 to 30 miles before normal breakfast time, to lights-out in our tent at 8:30 p.m. or so and a sleep that was often deep and effortless. I didn't know what hard ground was until I got back home to a bed...and so the day ended.

Home On The Range

"What did you say you were celebrating?"

"Oh, nothing really."

"Come on."

"Actually, the end of my Christmas cake. It lasted three months."

"Your cake?"

"Yes, I baked it."

"I never knew--."

"Sure. First ever. But very pleased with the results."

"You sound as though you enjoy cooking?"

"That's right--."

"How come?"

"How come I enjoy it? I've done so little before that is is a new experience, with pleasant rewards."

"Like you were making new discoveries?"

"No question. Fits in with taking on any important new task."

"Mmm--it doesn't bother you doing what seems to be a woman's job?"

"Wow! Hold it man. Are you serious?"

"Well many men would snigger at you donning an apron and being tied to a kitchen. No?"

"Then let me open this up a little. First of all, men and women are more interchangeable now in the work force than ever in history, whether driving a bulldozer or delivering mail. Secondly, several of our world leaders have been or are, pretty high class dames. Margaret Thatcher, the late Golde Meir and Indira Gandhi are examples. Gad! If they'd had more women in their cabinets, who knows..."

"You would even consider babysitting, darning, or doing laundry?"

"Those chores may not give the same satisfaction or challenge as baking, but they are vital for the efficient running of a home and its harmony."

"Don't you think this is a waste of man's muscle and decision-making ability?"

"Don't you think you're missing a big point here? Far more credit should be given to a spouse's judgement and intuition in family decision-making. She is often the motivator and navigator in this area, operating from a home base in which she often feels a prisoner."

"But men are the masters everywhere else--business, policy making, higher learning, the military--you name it."

"Yep, they are the masters as you say. Witness strikes, wars and bombings as a compassionate means of resolving human issues. Like the irony of killing to achieve peace."

"How could women do better, I mean you're making a one-sided..."

"Look I realize you think I'm coming on heavy in favor of one sex over the other. But I do realize the important and difficult tasks that men face daily, where working conditions may range from boring to hazardous. I've worked in pulp mills and an oil refinery and seen some of this and I make allowance for the effect of this strain on their nervous energies."

O.K., but don't you think a woman would be even more handicapped in these areas?"

"Obviously there is no glib answer to that penetrating question. But if roles were reversed I suggest that women would insist our education and media systems work harder to remove prejudices and power tripping and excessive homage to material targets. They probably would also underplay the pursuits of science, recognizing our technological fetish, and transfer funds and energy into tackling poverty and the bettering of human relations."

"I must confess they can be very effective when it comes to demonstrating--probably a side result of oversuffering before complaining, thus giving solid justification."

"True--how true... Well, are you ready?"

"Ready?"

"Sure, the chores must be done. The ironing is waiting, regardless of my great skills as a bar lawyer. Your rocket engineering background may help you propel one saturn vacuum cleaner from countdown to completion. Here it is, with all the attachments you'll need."

Rebel

"But he is the king."

"So?"

"Kings rule well. They're just and wise."

"And rebels?"

"Kings bring peace and stability to a country."

"Have you followed history over the last 1,000 years?"

"Well if I was going to side with anybody it would be him."

"Why?"

"Who wants to see rebels take over."

"Whats wrong with them."

"They're rough and crude."

"And the King is clean and pleasant?"

"It's not that. He's friendly. Sort of at peace."

"You don't think he and his family are decadent?"

"Why would I think that?"

"Or overfed and exploiters of servants?"

"You sound communist."

"With too many castles and yachts?"

"No I don't."

"You don't what?"

"I don't agree with any of your ideas."

"Rebels are freedom fighters. Castro was a rebel."

"Right and ..."

"So was Mao."

"...and look what happened to democracy."

"Einstein rebelled against Newton's laws."

"That's got nothing to do with it."

"And Oppenheimer against the bomb."

"That's not the same."

"And Sweitzer against medicine in Park Avenue."

"Those are not good examples. Dictators are rebels."

"Trudeau rebelled against the establishment and procedure."

"Why do you go on?"

"Shostakovitch protested against political music."

"You'll be saying Jesus was a rebel next."

"Buddha rebelled against inequality, poverty and sickness. The Afghans against their invaders."

"I think the persecuted should appeal through the usual channels and not through riots or fights."

"This was tried in '39 by Neville Chamberlain."

"Fighting settles nothing. Its crude, primitive and animal."

"Would you physically oppose a burglar in your home?"

"That's hypothetical."

"Or someone attacking one of your family?"

"How often does that happen? Its never happened to me yet."

"Or damaging a possession of yours?"

"That could be handled legally and compensation made."

"I'm curious. What word for a dog attacking your pet cat?"

"Not the same."

"Or someone scorning your faith and beliefs? What, no glib answer to that?"

"You're a trouble maker."

"What trouble have I caused you?"

"You disturb me. Its people like you that cause strikes and demonstrations."

"And what do peaceful people like you do? Nothing?"

"No need to get personal."

"You're no better than the idle rich. You're lucky to have been born middle class. Your thoughts, what few you have, are middle class. Your dress and even your habits are middle class."

"I resent that. You make me sick. I could throw you out of this house."

"I take it you are angry."

"Stupid!"

"And your middle class emotions are a wee bit aroused?"

"I warn you."

"And you would defend against this hostile acquaintance needling you."

"OUT! OUT!!! GET..."

"That was a violent shove you gave me. Could it be that only your words are pacifist?"

The Road Home

It had turned cold again. The road a black slickness. Rain slanted down hard, with the wind head-on. Too many of the winds had been against us.

Strange that today it didn't matter that cycling conditions were poor -- I was seeing it all through the window of a train. I'm on the way back home. Inside it's very warm and dry and my quota of morning energy is not going to be spread over 100 km of highway, hills, wind and traffic.

I look wistfully as we slowly move out of what was our target destination, Halifax. I have many thoughts, all mixed. As I settle in my seat, a loud accented voice, hidden behind important looking luggage, bursts upon me.

"Hi!" it says, as I guess the worst. "I'm from Indiana, your new neighbor."

"Aah!" I groan.

"My family are here. I'm retired and I'm 72" he adds, so that I will divulge my statistics.

"Mmm..." I grunt, very unsure that this will satisfy him.

"We're getting off at Montreal and I live in Indiana" he repeats.

I begin to busily rummage through my two plastic bags of luggage. The important one has my food for the next four days. I take out a knife, butter, cheese and bread. He stepped back a little at this sight, as though I was putting out the garbage. After all, even though I was dressed like a peasant, I was occupying a berth seat.

"May I ask your age?" he pursues, with the finesse of a beer commercial.

I give him a hard look. What would he want next in this two minute opening gambit between strangers? I grudgingly mumble a response.

"Yeh... aah guessed you were a senior" he pronounces.

Somewhere in this one-sided exchange he found out that I'd cycled from Vancouver, after I'd explained where this city was...

"Well I'll be darned" he pooped. "Yes sir, I'll be..."

He managed to recover from his surprise and then remembered his son was a badminton champion and his daughter was...

By now I had buttered my bread, had the cheese sliced nicely and had taken an enormous bite into the unevenly cut sandwich. He left me with a long drawn out "Yesss sir..." and my journey home was left in peace.

Yesterday I had cycled the same highway outside from Truro to Halifax. It had been pure joy. There had actually been a warm sun, the road was dry and even the hills had been sensible in length.

I had been buoyant. After 80 or so days on the road, the cycling had become subliminal. If the Atlantic hadn't been in the way I would probably have finished up in Europe. My legs, after being hardened and tempered by 7,000 km of the Trans Canada Highway, need strict control to bring them to a halt.

But cycling hadn't seemed a leg problem. Excluding traffic and other externals, the major area of restlessness was my seat. Usually, after the first 50 km or so in the morning, I began to notice chaffing, bone arches and a clinging of the chamois leather of my cycling pants. It took a series of deliberate distractions for me to ignore this humble part of my body laying claim to major attention. The first cycle engineer that comes up with a comfortable platform for the sitting part of one's body will not only make a fortune, but will become a permanent hall-of-fame member of any long distance cycling group.

I bit deeply and with relish into the heavy rye bread. What a relief to eat real bread and 'aged' cheese. Often our camping bread was white foam rubber, the butter an orange plasticity putty and the cheese had been skillfully processed to remove any flavor so that it could be categorized as 'mild'. In fairness, our purchases of food for our camping meals was determined by local food suppliers and in village purchases we were lucky to do as well as we did.

I return to my reflections, stimulated by the pleasant motion of the train and the Nova Scotia countryside. We had completed an expedition-like journey with an Atlantic seaport as our 'Everest'. Since the number of hills totalled in excess of 500, we probably pedalled a height change equivalent to a couple of Everests.

When I heard about this cross-country cycling club doing a previous tour across Canada, I visualized them having a leisurely pace. I imagined them stopping

frequently to rest, charting gentle tours of the many shallow lakes, taking little side trips to historical sights and taking time out for naps. And, at the end of perhaps 80 km per day of cycling, collapsing into their tents until supper time.

It was not a bit like this. True, some days the mileage was low. But other days were as high as 155 km. Also, we were up at five a.m. and on the road by six. We rode 50 km before my normal breakfast time at home.

It turned out to be a working holiday, with distance the target. Added to this were numerous hills, winds, damp, cold, fog and thunder storms while on the road. At the destination campsite for the day there were wet tents to erect and meals to help cook.

All in all it was a much different form of adventure than I had expected. One that eventually we all accepted. We grew in spirit and strength of will because of the discipline required to cycle every planned day of our itinerary. Every rider developed pride from not giving in to the challenge. To cycle every mile became a personal ambition and only the sick or injured rode the support truck.

Outside the train, on the wet grass next to the tracks, in the middle of nowhere, a solitary figure stands. He looks glumly at each passing coach. He seems about my old age. This could be a minor highlight of his day. I wonder how many more trains he will watch before he says to his wife "Oh, to heck with it today..." And then he disappeared from view as we picked up speed.

The Sounds Of Mahler

I obviously did it on impulse. There were other good things for the evening. Good book, a TV documentary and even a special joy--Leonard Cohen interviewed on FM. But no, decided to take a chance on a man called Mahler who had designed and built a large structure called his second symphony. The announcer identified it as 'monumental.' Being fascinated by such adjectives that have an obscure relationship, such as 'color' and 'fabric' in music, I was sold on the engineering grounds of monumentalism.

Too bad that I missed Cohen. Dear Leonard. Oh to love half as well as in those enticing ballads of his.

This was a first return to the classics in many years for me. Guess I finally got saturated with other types of music. And of course Mahler was rarely available to me. Expensive albums and little air time.

And so it all began; just me, friendly chair, soft lights and Charles my favorite cat. Such dreamy sandy colored eyes. No fixed preferences. One noisy TV show is as good as another to him. My lap was to be his bed for some time.

I didn't expect to listen too intently since this would be a new and complex work for me. Merely go with the flow. At least that was the aim since intimacy in most profound things usually requires several exposures. But, Mahler with his forceful creation had other ideas. He was to establish an endless level of sound and color and tension. And glory and delicate harmonies. Taking it easy in an armchair seemed a little disrespectful. Perhaps a more humble attitude to express gratitude would have been better. At least a half Lotus!

The orchestra had been reinforced with extra players and exotic instruments. Harps, trumpets, marimba, bass drum and gongs. Many cameras covered every aspect of the orchestra's faces and fingers. A long line of French horns glistened in the lights. Even the conductor seemed special. Young, handsome, virile. Later, around the fifth movement, a large group of uniformly dressed people would add choir power along with two strongly built sopranos. One mezzo...!

From the very beginning, a broad warm abbey of sound spread confidently, rose and became suspended, only to eventually die and be replaced by more eager chords and phrases. Brahms would have approved this effect. The wood winds and strings led by a small group of oboes made a beautiful advance on the delicious techniques of Berlioz. And when Mahler wished for utmost graphics it was a

suggestion of how Bartok must have been influenced by the glory of it all, many years later. Searching statements of harmony in which I caught myself half listening and half living.

But oh those layers of sound, rising and bursting and dying to be born again with changes in key and rythm. I was impressed that such a small speaker in the TV could capture and re-radiate this volume of music.

As the symphony developed, I became a pirate for more in which I could both lose and discover myself. My capacity for enjoying this was now in high gear. Charles slept heavily, his head hanging by a thread.

In the next movement, the tough strident brass section was a no-nonsense power unit, making strong statements to support the milder figures from the strings. So many times little sections of the orchestra harmonized a combined complex blend of order; both profound, intricate and lifting. Gentle quiets were woven into the fabric to give balance and pause. The message now was harmony, glory, restraint, hope, pity and joy. The ebb and flow of this current seemed innocent and sincere.

I now had long passed the stage of being surprised by the total performance. The flood was upon me again with eloquence and compassion all tumbling about in a steady flow. Its impact was as that of cool sensitive hands touching bare flesh. It seemed as though the best from several works had been fed into this great display that became a journey leading to the centre of one's being. A work years ahead of its time by a first rate architect of the media.

Charles woke suddenly. The wild dog only existed in his dream. He changed position and drifted.

The applause was a massive act of stored energy escaping in gratitude to a fine orchestra. The outpouring raised my emotions. The dense cube of sound a tribute to the sheer sensual pleasure of it all. I wanted now only to sit and reflect on the extravagance and genius of it. Not to move. Or breathe even. Or do anything to weaken the spell. Ninety glorious minutes had dug deep into my cells.

Dry mouthed and stiff, I looked at Charles. He woke. Yawned. Licked a near paw. Purred and finally stretched. Then with delicate ease he walked the ridge of my bare leg to the floor. I thought of how well he had handled Mahler, for a beginner.

Space Station Heaven

"I just can't believe all the people you've got here. So many bent over working the fields that I couldn't see the ground."

"Let's see now, where did you say you're from?"

"Well it's not quite that so much. I mean were you ever on Earth?"

"Ah, you're one of those then."

"We were led to believe that only kind friends, mostly white, would be staying here. And so many funny things here like the water tasting like coffee smells."

"I see."

"How did all these others get here?"

"There are millions and millions from all over the galaxy."

"That's so confusing. We were expecting something exclusive about this place. We called it the Kingdom of Heaven."

"I presume mostly for the devoted who believed in the denial of pleasure?"

"...another thing, the food tastes like we were eating air, tasteless."

"I take it this is not the luxury haven you imagined -- palm trees, tropical fruit, golden sunsets. As you've discovered, we don't even have sky here."

"Grim. Only flat lands that I can see--"

"What did you call the people who considered they were the promised ones and would 'inherit the earth'?"

"Well, we were blessed by a great spiritual leader called Jesus Christ and we're called Christians."

"He undoubtably was very special then?"

"That's right. We saw him as a savior -- selfless and compassionate. ...Another thing, it feels like permanent jet lag here because there's no time. No clocks, moving sun or even clouds."

"And he led you to believe accommodation here was for followers only? You know that we only have tents, no buildings?"

"This is a shock -- billions here, all crammed together or floating just above the ground. I no longer feel like an individual. And the bodies you gave us have no feel at all."

"I imagine the noise and smells bother you too?"

"Yes. And so many different languages that I feel like the alien."

"Surely."

"Why weren't we issued clothes? And where's your transport system? Not a bike to be found and floaters everywhere! Don't you have any gravity?"

"You must have made many sacrifices on earth to win a spot here."

"Oh dear, such a letdown, and all that hard work in your corn fields or whatever is growing there."

"What do you think of all the sizes and shapes of everyone here, their photos pasted on their foreheads so they can be recognized?"

"I can only tell the women from the men by the vivid hair colors, mainly greens and blues. And where are the books to read?"

"We thought that meditation music might be better to keep you passive and stable."

"It sounds weird, almost sinister."

"Funny you should have thought this was your private piece of real estate..."

"Now just a minute. That assumption was based on beliefs and faith. Two strong intangibles."

"He should have told you this is merely a collection area for all star systems, not just for your 'Earth'."

"We saw ourselves as the only ones in the sky. And now no sky to rule over -- this is like a displaced person's camp."

"You should know we have evaluated your kind and classified you as a cluster of clumsy, backward planets

whose civilization is so primitive as to spend more time and energy destroying one another than solving social problems."

"Well sure, many of us also wondered how our god could allow such misery and horror... Are you sure this space desert is really called heaven? I mean there must be a major mistake somewhere like I caught the wrong rocket ship...or maybe this is just a refueling station?"

"Did it not occur to you, with hundreds of millions dying on your wee planet alone, that we might be a little crowded?"

"So many! And those funny transparent animals..."

"You're so innocent. A hundred years from now your world will see everybody dead. All 5 billion! And you are a minor outpost."

I don't feel very well. I miss my home and family. Even simple things like shaving and brushing teeth I miss doing."

"There are a thousand admission centres like this covering an area as big as your solar system. We officials see a tiny fraction of the whole. Redistribution centres are big business, really big. And you're my first whites, a new breed. A curiosity."

"What are you going to do with us?"

"Well, eventually we hope to recycle you back in further lives. Being so barbaric though, you need special lessons to make you more complete and aware of your true nature. Other harmonious planets would quickly reject you in your crude present state... By the way, when we send you back, what occupation would you like to have?"

"Well sir, you're not going to lie this I know but I would like to be a member of the rock group Pink Floyd."

"Aaaaahhh!"

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Spartan Life But With Deep Meaning For Chinese

We had left an all-too-modern hotel, airport and transport system in Japan to what looked like a flashback into history. One special surprise at Narita was a double eight-foot-high barbed wire fence containing the eight mile perimeter of the airport, manned guard posts every few hundred yards, and a system of road blocks at the entrance. Scores of heavily armed guards were complete with mace and body shields. The local people had resented the building of the airport.

By contrast, in Peking the airport was drab, empty, old and poorly lit by a few bare bulbs. Walls were void of any decoration, not even a Mao profile. There were no guards. The one official looked as though he would be pleased to give it all away.

The bus was bare-bones -- hard seats, little leg room and a pungent smell somewhere between garlic, smoke and basic sweat. The drive was made in fog with orange sodium lights sparingly used and no visible buildings or lights on either side of the road. It was gaunt and eerie, like from a Russian war movie.

Our group was subdued. A minor touch of culture shock set in. We didn't know that from here in it was all improvement except, that is, for our first hotel. This was to be cast in the same scene.

A Russian designed building loomed up like a phantom out of the mist. It had a bare entrance except for a small desk, one light, a clean-worn carpet, walls with loosened plaster, grey and green in tone, and ceilings ten feet high. Wiring and piping was mounted on walls with electrical switches operated by a length of string. The hissing radiator completed the scene.

I felt an alien. It would take a day or so to synchronize to this old documentary I was playing in.

In the next few days, in addition to the usual "important" places such as the Ming Tombs, Summe Palace, The Great Wall and various pagodas and temples, we enjoyed on-the-street sights. Buses were long, crowded and double-jointed in the middle for navigating sharp corners.

The wide, flat, lengthy streets were flooded with thousands of cyclists and many three-wheel trailer trucks, a

few taxis and buses but no private cars. We were never to see a garage -- there were quite a few bicycle repair shops but no service stations.

In houses, appliances were at an obvious minimum. Earnings between \$60 and \$100 a month allowed for perhaps a treadle sewing machine, transistor radio and maybe an electric iron.

People were all dressed the same, the color either blue or green. We saw no cats, dogs, birds or even bugs or flies. Stores were lit usually at rush hour times only. Public toilets never had toilet paper.

I was a typical limited tourist at this time using a material possession syndrome to try and classify a country and its people that had existed for thousands of years.

As days and visits went by the wider and deeper meanings showed up. We were to see self denial, simple living, excess honesty, policies of wasting absolutely nothing, hard work and even non-violence (except when revolution time came around). Above all, the family as a unit came through as tops. This was closely followed by dedication to country and education.

And somehow we never seemed to miss seeing dancing, pubs, active churches, salespeople, psychiatrists or commercials.

Perhaps the way they treat a difficult prisoner sums up their lifestyle -- they deny them the opportunity to work!

Lady And The Stones

He was halfway in his bicycle tour of England. The weather had been superb. It was September. Already he had managed to see quite a few of the unique collection of oddities practically non-existent elsewhere on this planet. No, not the wonderful people this time, even though several of these eccentric types had shown up in unexpected places.

His tribal journey on the back roads had focussed on megaliths, obelisks, dovecotes and follies. An occasional castle, a few caves and of course, for lofty serenity, the cathedrals of Winchester and Salisbury. All these rounded off with excellent bed and breakfasts on farms, and super lunches in pubs, where robust cheese sandwiches were easily downed with the local ales.

He found the days were running well. His camera was in constant use. The countryside was a bewildering pattern of colored fields and hawthorn hedgerows. Add blue skies, golden sun, and presto! -- a Turner landscape. Getting lost in these back lanes was easy and pleasurable. Directions given on how to return to the planned route were more clear to the giver than to the receiver. He thought they were mischievously sketchy! Once a local villager had suggested he turn right by the third largest elm tree, you know the one that lays back from the road. While his arm was pointing to the left!

He was now ready for an important climax, little realizing what a fascinating introduction he was to have at the site.

Stonehenge had been a major target in mind and spirit. He'd done his reading on this including modern interpretations related to the prediction of eclipses. He was as ready as a hungry pilgrim about to pay homage after days of trekking. This was his darshan. He brooded as a stiff Salisbury Plains wind blew him sideways. His journey reward was to be a close contact of an original kind with a profound mystery.

A few miles away he got his first glimpse of the huge triliths set on this large empty plain. It was like a needle in his arm giving an immediate fix. He was getting high. The wind was even stronger and slowed his wobbly progress. Lets not rush this sequence he thought. This is a one-shot deal. He would never be this way again. At least not in this life. A long time coming. Savor this one!

At last he was there. About fifty tourists were waiting for the place to open. He began to take in the

mirage like impression of the stones a few hundred yards away. Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed an anomaly amongst the crowd. What was an Egyptian queen doing here? She looked like a dazzling phantom.

She was perhaps in her late twenties. A faultless figure carrying a carefully tailored suit. High heels and make-up added to this stunner! She looked, on second glance, like an important film actress waiting for the director to shoot the scene, as much out of place at this gathering as the Pope at a wrestling match.

She seemed somewhat impatient, shifting her weight from one leg to another, and she struggled slightly with the stiff breeze and her flapping skirt. He felt he just had to put the stones on hold for a moment and go speak to her.

As he approached down wind from her, he fell under the influence of an exotic scent. He became a little lightheaded and his shorts felt skin tight.

As he neared, he was given an amused look. At least it wasn't rejection. Her presence extended several feet in front of her and caused him to forget his opening words.

Her generous lips parted to reveal inevitable faultless teeth and a pink moist tongue that seemed to hover a little expectantly inside. He quickly approached the main subject--what on earth was she doing here? This Bond Street-Mayfair prize in the middle of nowhere with just a pile of rocks to break the monotony.

He was ready to accept any unusual answer. After all she was the anachronism. But as she spoke he could hardly believe her simple explanation.

"Well," she mellow toned. "It seems to be my misfortune that on this ghastly, absolutely ghastly, wide plain, my journey has to be interrupted by knowing that this....place has the only toilet around for miles. And I really have to go." There was life and mockery in those violet eyes.

Some minutes later, the gates opened and she made a sophisticated dash to the nearest building, while the rest of us made our way closer to the mighty stones. It was funny how they suddenly seemed somewhat drab and ordinary to him. He tried to concentrate on their geometry, size, significance, construction and ancestry. Cameras were clicking and historical information was being devoured by the tourists.

He glanced wistfully back several times and eventually a shimmering shape appeared and moved towards a parked car

without a backward glance at the site.

Slowly circling the ring he gradually became a prisoner to the unfolding, but his thought pattern was mixed as he brooded on her destiny of the day. She had said that she had an important appointment with a Harley Street specialist later that afternoon...

The Stranger

"He asked me about our common aims. As a planet that is. Sort of what do we consider to be important issues, deeds and needs."

"And what did you tell him?"

"Well I had to keep in mind he is an alien."

"How would that change things?"

"And maybe he would be puzzled over some of our goals."

"Yes, but in awareness he is far ahead of us."

"True. Anyway, I took my time and tried to place an order of priority on my answers."

"I would like to have seen his reactions to them!"

"So I said that big issues are control over our energy systems and improved handling of wastes. He didn't change his expression."

"Pollution being a big factor in both these?"

"Definitely. I then added that our leading producer countries were busy gaining efficiency in such areas as engineering, agriculture, medicine and so on."

"He should have responded to those."

"Well, he had told me he was a cosmostat which combines physical sciences with mastery of body and mind, but I sensed he was going to wait until I had finished my list before commenting."

"Did you mention the ongoing battle with overpopulation?"

"Yes. I added that as an aspect of poverty."

"What else did you tell him?"

"I settled for statements on education and governments. At the mention of the latter, he added quietly 'Politics?' and I nodded."

"How about religion as a need and issue?"

"This I covered under the heading of struggles in philosophy."

"I can't wait for his observations on these pursuits and practices."

"Well the funny thing was this. I got the impression he knew all about these things before even landing here, because he seemed bored with the list, as though it was mostly mundane and primitive. This was confirmed at the end when he asked quietly 'Relationships?' as though he expected little positive in this area."

"Wow! How did you respond to that?"

"I was caught a little off balance. I hadn't really thought much about getting along with things and people and places and animals and nature. Or that this approached a primary target for our peoples."

"I'll say..."

"It seemed best for me to mention that to keep friction to a minimum in group relations, our police and armies were always active... but I never got a chance to finish this line of thinking as I saw his expression change, taking on a slightly impatient air. I waited, feeling a bit helpless and exposed."

"Son of a gun..."

"And then he looked down at his hands, as though holding back a volume of thought. It seemed a long time before he again looked up. Then his gaze was level and set and seemed to go through me. It felt in some funny way as though he was speaking without saying words that I could hear! Since this could have been my imagination, I tried to concentrate more on content than source."

"What was he saying?"

"His voice, or rather the words, came in a steady stream, something like what we expect from our voice computers. And the sounds seemed to register in several parts of my body as well as in my mind. Sort of reinforcing the impact."

"But you haven't told me anything yet."

"Since it took me time to accept a delivery this way, I was only able to gather the main gist of each statement. So, in general he spoke about misdirection of knowledge and initiative in areas of low importance."

"And what were the important areas?"

"Here he dwelt heavily on close relationships. He mentioned that many of our jungle and desert tribes harmonized in a superior way to us, and had developed family ties that we, the civilized, had lost. He even spoke of certain animal groups whose conduct showed more sharing, respect and feeling than we had for our neighbours and even our families."

"Doesn't this sound very idealistic. I mean isn't it every person for themselves in our capitalist system. Don't the big get bigger and the strong more aggressive?"

"Why sure. You don't have to go to school to find that out. Anyway, as he spoke, there was such a firm note in his delivery that the words seemed the most vital statements of the way to live that I'd ever heard."

"How did he justify this strange closeness business as the answer to so much?"

"He spoke about losing the warmth and intimacy of youth too soon in childhood. Being genuinely concerned for the young was the greatest form of discipline control."

"Did he give examples?"

"Yes, he said deprived beings suffer too much. Nothing compares to sharing and being honest and fair and becoming a one nation. He sighted the communes of China and Israel as examples of working in common causes."

"This still seems to come through like the social message of the old masters. You know... Buddha's eightfold path, the ten commandments and the six blessings of Tao."

"Yes. I wished I could have thought of those at the time and get his answer on how to make those virtuos goals practical."

"Sounds too intellectual to be useful in our dog eat dog ..."

"Oh, there was one thing special. Almost forget! He said something about you and I forming a group of followers. Like a circle of good intention friends, say about a dozen, and for us all to meet him again soon at his new home and he would teach us what he called 'the second coming way'..."

Summer Freshness

Treasured, crystal, shining hours
Gentle, bursting, dancing joys
Flashing, shimmering, stage-lit sky
Warm tremulous waves with singing beat.

The moments are here again, with wakened pulse
The feel of nature's multiple touch
Is icy cool and madly warm.
Now is the time for contact and deep content -

A cyclic swing
To live the other side of life.
A time to estimate and gladly drink
The heady fill and broad mellow gain.

Into the realm of summer freshness,
Dense with searing, frantic senses,
Life, the people's harmony electric-strong,
Bursts its cadence all day long.

Take Life

Quick lunge into the charge
Lash out with fast urge
And into the equation of being.
Into the swirling sphere
Of cryptic thoughts and dancing dreams
Lest we again evade our bearing.

Up with the arc of flashing reach
To solve fragments of the years.
Cross quest and human purpose dwells
In every drop of sterile dew,
As tread we must this passage of time
As blessed we are through fragile limits.

Memory pours a tidal flood
Down a mind of streets.
Each life lived
Ending in analysis.
To begin again on broader tangents
Brittle with keen design.

A purpose nears in sight
As each our wants do measure
And grows the selfish heart
In tinsel facets of this pleasure.
We ride the high wave deep into the years
And form a bond with friendly hours.

And some with select choosing do pull ashore
To see the patterned affairs of the moving mass.
And those with dying life condemned
By narrow plans or fringed aims.
Did neither know nor feel one part
The countless contrasts about their barrier senses.

And few with a knowing of the meager span
Did live in crested depths within themselves
And gained hope
From slender swift.
Paced content
Within the giant plan.

The Tenth Symphony

There certainly is a way of describing something that is much more than ordinary. The word 'great' has been used extensively here. I try to limit my greats to a handful of people and structures.

The Great Wall of China, over 3,000 miles long, gets my vote. Incidentally, it is a double wall, joined at the top by a road... Stand in front of the Great Pyramid of Giza and in a very short while you will know more than before about greatness. The Red Flag Canal, also a Chinese masterpiece, and the Golden Gate bridge are other typical more-than-ordinary structures. They too are great.

In the people area, where strength, vision and outlook have been dominant, my greats range from Buddha and 'Mahatma' (literally, 'The Great One') Gandhi to Rick Hansen and Albert Einstein. Such winners. They strode the lands as giants, turning hearts and minds with their elegance.

And now my midnight radio has just wakened me to a voice introducing the last work on the classical music program. The Tenth Symphony is about to be mine, all 52 minutes of Shostakovich at his galactic best. The electronics in my cortex switch to instant alert. I am about to hear what is undoubtedly the 'greatest' classical music composition of this century -- engineered and constructed by one who ranks as tall as Beethoven and Mahler. What greater praise can I offer than that?

I am pleased that even with this late hour, the chill of the room and my note by note familiarity, I am still looking forward to it with the freshness and elan of a first listening. I hold my breath, for the beginning is quiet, brooding and with sinewy tones in the strings' lower register. It is the routine taxiing out to the runway prior takeoff. A few minutes later I am airborne and so lost in mood and feel that my memory recalls only the general ecstasy of developing themes by strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. I am being bulldozed by the biting vigor and naked aroma coming from the electro-magnetics of my big stereo set. This first movement is as long as the remaining three together! I am at peak listening now.

The beginning of the second movement is really the middle of this crucible of sound, in whose deep interior I gaze in awe. I still gasp at the blistering harmonies from teams of instruments, passing through messages of urgency, appeal and sober logic from cellos and double basses contested by woodwinds and strident brass. Then out of the network of rhythm and chords, a powerful trombone rises like a missile from a silo, and my windows gently rattle.

I try taking a few notes. This becomes an injustice to the performance. I stop. Now a warning oboe voice protests the academic nature of the discussion groups with their independent emotions. It suggests more profound and philosophical phrasings. And always there are sudden changes, insights and unexpected peaks and rhythms. And repeats and repeats with dignity and command. Incredibly, this enormous generator of blended frequencies is under control, as always, by composer and conductor. My thoughts freeze with time as I no longer have memory because of this involvement with the now. I'm not even sure I'm breathing!

Into the pungent scherzo of the third movement we go. It is very short. So we are not going to lighten very much the brooding tones of the lower octaves, nor the agitation and mystery of the framework. Now a huge gong is struck with unusual delicacy signalling the master voice to be heard again, and gradually it stills the rising tensions. Every instrument, from flute to growling double bass, has been demonstrating and I wait for judgement!

"The mystery of life is not a problem to be solved but a reality to be experienced."

-- Van Der Leeuw

The final movement opens with the loft and reach of an oboe. So much like a voice. Waves of strings support from below. It takes a long time to herald in more massive statements on earlier theories and other new dimensions. A magnitude of feeling is being allowed to build because one again the symphony is taking charge even though Shostakovitch -- dear Dimitri -- has a long reach... I tighten my seat belt.

The swell is upon me. Cascading patterns of conviction, of joy and irony, of glory and hope. Every instrument is in unison, in agreement, echoing and repeating, insisting and ...and in my room the air molecules are alive with the dance and they take my body with them. The strength, color and range of the music is Mahler at his very best, with added directness. Once again the total volume reaches maximum expansion and I am willed by the impact.

A military display on drums and brass signals the first ending. One more breath of serene introspection with cellos staking more claims and a large tuba supporting the suggestions. Here we are with the clinical brilliance and sharp tones of trumpets and trombones putting their signature to the final document of new hope, destiny and glory.

The orchestra ends in sudden stillness. I hardly notice the landing and my seat belt is still on. Rest is in soundlessness only for the adrenalin is pouring through their veins and their instruments are still hyper. They and the symphony have done a superb construction job. They are to be great walls and pyramids for some time yet. The applause will go on forever.

The 10th has been a superb winner. I am so grateful to have been in its domain once again.

Then And Now

With the vigor of the day over, it was easy for him to slide into the mood of the room. Deep easy chair, shafts of gold from the late evening sun, and Gould playing Bach on the stereo. The dust pulsed gently in and out of the sun's light.

Running counter to the music was a persistent train of thought. It centered on a recent statement he'd read, suggesting experience of poverty was vital for growth and enlightenment. But as the ringing counterpoint of the fugue rose note perfect to the centre of his pleasure, he knew this provocative brooding must go on hold a while longer.

Eventually the music dissolved leaving as an ash the speaker's hiss. In the timeless minutes that followed, he took in the lake and distant hills. Slowly he began to connect up again to the original promptings on being poor. He began to travel the years into the early frames of his childhood, the route curving endlessly. From the comfort of chair, room and well-being and family and friends, the past seemed disc-thin. Hardships and struggles barely remembered. And then he was there... ..He began to feel again the increasing pressure of the old newspaper as it was folded again and again and shaping to roughly ball roundness. And while he held it Powelly ran the thin string around several times and several more at right angles. His finger pressed the string firmly as awkward fumbling eventually got the knot tightened. Again a soccer ball had been made. Good enough to last the two of them one short game, unless the ball got wet...

He switched off the set. Sipped his peasant wine and mused on the bright redness inside the glass, while his inner sight slipped quietly back to the past again.

...It seemed there had only ever been one overcoat for him. Bought second hand, the sleeves touching finger tips and having to be folded back, while the rest almost came down to his ankles. He wore it so little because the gang rode him. The death of the thing came when sleeve length was near elbows and his knees no longer warmed. There had been a cap too, that grew smaller with time and fell off when he ran...

The wine was blood red in the sun's beams. The two cats had moved in. They eyed his shoulders and lap. As they settled in they began to wash, a sign they were ready for a lengthy stay.

...Boots came next into his vision. Never new laces, mostly string. Boots that were often too big, then too

tight as they lived their history. Boots that had cardboard inside which had to be changed frequently as the holes in the soles grew bigger. Going to the shoe repair man was a highlight. Picking up boots that looked like new with shiny, smooth, smelly leather reinforced with heavy heel and toe plates, and then racing home and begging to be allowed to wear them right away, and then being slipper on the lino floor, and having the gang being very offhand and hiding their envy well. And walking was with a rocking motion with the stiffness of Dutch clogs. And the feet were now warm and dry. And the edges of the soles had been coated with black wax and this made them every bit as good as new. Specially when you don't every remember new...

The sun had finally given its all for the night. Sky was a pastel pleasure and the room seemed more subdued. The cats pretended sleep and the wine now but a small red ring in the glass. But the lake and the hills were there again, an immovable certainty in his fluid world.

...The dark cupboard in the kitchen had been called a pantry. Inside were a few cups and plates, a jar of jam, sugar, salt, some butter and a half loaf. Calling it a pantry somehow made it easier to accept the sparseness. And if he had ever gone there and found a biscuit it would have had more impact than seeing it on the table. Come to think of it he couldn't ever remember going to the pantry as one might now go to the fridge. Here he thought, not only fridge but freezer was full...

The sigh was purely reflex, a result of shallow breathing. He turned to his present peace of mind and possessions and successes and skills, all somehow rooting from long distance beginnings in childhood. It seemed his life had been a series of small opportunities, many as a surprise, nearly all adding to natural growth and openness. As an immigrant he had come to pay deep homage to the new land and people.

...She had just come out of the post office. Aunt Mary she was. Had just drawn her pension money. For some months now he had managed to coincide his positioning of place and time with hers. She was old and slow and wore dark bulky clothes. She smiled and half patted his head and as they shuffled away he watched closely as she opened her bag. An old bag. And then slowly picking out her purse and, while glancing sideways at him, untwisting the twin metal balls on the top of the clasp to allow the pockets to spring open. And the same bent fingers reached and moved some loose change and selected at last his life blood, his future dream, his power to purchase the joy of all joys -- candy. And he took the single coin and muttered something to a smiling face and deaf ears. And he ran and skipped and dodged and leapt to touch great heights and inside the

glands were mass producing catalysts of unbearable pleasure. Even from a distance he imagined he could smell the overpowering sweetness of the shop. And those same glands massaged the feel of a whole bag of candy in his hand and the tight bulge it would make in his trouser pocket. There was not one glance back at Aunt Mary who was now crossing Stavely road, carefully avoiding being hit by a delivery horse and cart...

The cats were getting heavy. Time to read again. He reached for a heavyweight called "Superforce". Quantum mechanics and partical physics were being handled with oversized words, yet revealing new discoveries about relationships between the minute and the infinitely small. Even the book reminded him of boy-reading pleasures and he made the elastic stretched connection between comics and the present profundity.

...The comic magazines were really devoid of comics. They were stories backed by a descriptive picture for each story. It was very important to be a skilled trader to get hold of such glories as "The Magnet" about Grey friars boys school or the other compelling paper world "The Wizard"--loaded with adventures and thrills. One day he thought, he would save his money and buy a new one! A real clean, print smelling new one that nobody had read before, no tears, no jam smears or critical pages missing! But they were too high priced at two pennies a copy... He now began to wonder about the value of being poor, in terms of gains and limitations, should one survive it! True, he'd learnt about survival and recycling and saving and a constant appreciation of comforts. He rarely took anything for granted. If a hope materialized, then great. If not then no big deal. Meanwhile his existing comfort and security made it more difficult for him to list handicaps and hang-ups resulting from spartan beginnings.

...The gang was in Jonesy's shed. It was night and dark. Two small candles dominated a makeshift table. The smells were of fish and potatoes. He sometimes wondered why Jonesy's dad never offered even once a small round of fish and chips. We sat on boxes and broken chairs. Perhaps seven or eight of us. We had matches for money. We were excited. Our faces flushed. The card game was played like "Snap". We were dealt equal number of cards, and carefully and slowly turning up one each in turn. Should two turn up similar numbers, the first person to shout the other's name won. Utterly simple except for one detail. The names we had chosen were of film stars and we obviously chose only the longest and most difficult to remember. Edward Everett Horton and C. Aubrey Smith were favorites and we fought to claim them. In fact we fought to prevent the other from saying our name. Remembering seven other names and rightly associating them at the critical time made for a heavily

charged atmosphere. The energy level ran high. Great things were happening between us. Our noises, denials and accusations of cheating rocked the shed. Frequently candles had to be anchored more securely. It seemed years later that someones's parent could be heard shouting from a distance for his own to come in for bed, and we broke up with groans and disgust and grabbed our small pile of winnings. I always had lots of matches...

From the chair the big book had lost its appeal. He eased it down onto the floor. Got to handle leptons and haydrons carefully when dealing with nucleonics. He drifted into relationships he'd known over the years. He had always been gregarious. Others had shared so much with him, he wondered what he had offered in return. Maybe a simplicity. He was so often impressed by small unknowns being made known to him. Maybe he appeared to envy the greater knowledge of friends and their qualities. It all added up to gains in being. In enjoying the new and the now. From eastern philosophy to western physics, from flying to sports, with travel thrown in to spread the overview.

In his present mood he had no intention of pursuing the more negative side of his person. He would not dwell on his poor response to birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas. Such times had little meaning for him as a child, being so little to celebrate and no money to comply. He would avoid thinking about his earlier hostilities against the affluence of his new country. His disillusionment with western religion and capitalism. His many years of poor communication in the family and antiquated understanding of the place and promise of children in a home. He preferred to escape to one of his favorite hideouts. The air force.

...He was in his late teens. Been in the air force just over a year. Joining at the lowest level acceptable, 'General Duties Group Fire Airman'. Most others in the barracks room seemed better educated. He had been trying to catch up by trips to the local library. He began to read. Not quite true, he tried to read. He had heard remotely of a few titles that had sounded exciting, probably used by name droppers. He was determined to investigate.

Fortunately he rationalized this incredible difficulty as being more the fault of the author. He was angry at their continual use of big words, of foreign words, of obscure plots, of places he'd never heard of. Somewhere between anger and determination, only an innocent awareness of his limits, he tried to read. His equivalent to a grade nine education hadn't prepared him for much more than comics and the Tom Sawyer type of book known as "The William Series".

He plunged in expectantly, only to be wondering what on

earth he'd tried to grasp. Often he made the first page only by constant use of a dictionary and knowledge that this tomb of Shaw or Cronin or Wells was a 'must'.

Line-ups and waiting, like empty space, was plentiful in the air force. He used the time to fish a book out of his pocket and have another go. He couldn't believe he would really ever be able to complete a book. And certainly never understand one. And one day they were lying in the dry summer grass. Both of them in uniform. Her absence of make-up gave him a special pleasure that he couldn't summarize. But he was now curious why so many other girls had thin eyebrows and heavy red lips. And she asked what he was reading. And he said weakly "Plutarch's Lives" because that was the title and it had sounded important to him. And she said read a little and the universe collapsed. She was kind and understanding and suggested they go for a walk to recover...

He yawned. A humble peasant yawn. A lazy day dream yawn. An end of the day reflection yawn. The wonder of so much had made him sleepy...

Appeared in The Penticton Herald

Seniors Cycle Coast To Coast / Time Out

Four Penticton seniors are back home again, none the worse for wear after cycling 4,350 miles across Canada this summer.

Local Orchardist Jayce found he had plenty of time on the road to do some calculating about the trip. He discovered that, averaging 11 1/2 feet per rotation, it took 2,350,000 cranks of the pedals to go from Vancouver to Halifax.

It took 11,700 gear changes to climb 500 hills more than one kilometre in length, of the grade of Haven Hill in Penticton.

For John and Corral Cameron, a highlight of the trip was a rainy night in Northern Ontario when the other 30 cyclists helped them celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary. The Camerons enjoyed the trip, but "three months is a bit of a stretch", said John, "particularly when you're tenting."

Also from Penticton was Norman Kjelson. The average age of the group, which included 10 women, was 66. "Everyone was a grandparent, and we even had one great-grandparent," said Jayce.

Most participants used 15-speed bicycles, averaging 60 miles a day. The tour was arranged by Cross-Country Canadian Tours, which have a similar trip every year.

The lake appeared -- liquid sky, hills and trees, all perfectly reflected. A timeless mirror of light. The stillness common to the very nature of relaxed liquids. The surface showed no sign of ever having moved. Countless storms and winds had changed nothing, it had the calm of always...

I leaned the bike against the road barrier. About 30 more miles to pedal. My seat had just started to signal it needed airing. I reached in my pack. Hunger and, to a much lesser degree, thirst were constants of this cross country working holiday. I could have nibbled and sipped the whole 100 km of each day's itinerary.

Out came the biggest sandwich. It was a pleasure to escape for a moment the continuous noise and danger of the

heavy traffic on this Ontario highway. I walked to the lake edge.

This break in the cycling pattern would quickly recharge me. The sun was still shining though with winter weakness. The weather lately had been cold, wet and foggy.

Looking, munching and unwinding, I gave myself to this oasis. The placid water spread its peace within me, replenishing nervous energy -- energy I would need to survive fast moving cars and the tractor trailers on the narrow, two-lane road. The bow-wave wind from big trucks pressed the bike off the road, while the tail end eddies sucked me back. It was understandable as these monsters often passed less than two feet from my shoulder.

But now, at the water's edge, I began to drift into a willing, dreamy, brooding space. I imagined carving patterns on the water's surface with a large knife, with the water stiff and solid like ice. In another mood I merely floated gracefully on its cool soft bed.

Hunger and thirst over, I began more unfocussed gazing, the kind I did into blazing fires. Sounds began to recede. No animals, humans or even birds. A deep aloneness leaned on me as I gently explored a more recent balance of my existence. And I was pleased with the present me. The sensitive contentment spread. Staying awake was impossible. I was a tiny atom losing its life to the drawing power of sleep.

The lake disappeared from my consciousness, leaving the weak sun to bathe my unknowing body. It would awaken soon, eager to mount that machine again. Go once more forward in time, in a direction called east. Over a distance known as Canada. For a reason I may soon have to invent.

And one day in the near future, these old bone levers and steel muscles and heart of oak will no longer be such. No longer able to support a me, called Jayce... And maybe this was a big part of the reason for being where I was right then, asleep by a lake.

Toast Anybody?

Our family always had the old fashioned type of toaster. You know the one that is hand operated and the bread has to be turned once. We've burnt out quite a few of these in our time, as well as several hundred pieces of bread. Over the years I've gotten used to darker than average toast.

Lately, this fancily designed heat exchanger has been my total responsibility. And I'm finding utterly overdone burntness to be a problem. Daily bread fires and carbon smells disturb my cooking routine.

Recently, I have detected a fickle quality in this brazen heat unit. Anything less than tense watchfulness and it's poof! Low clouds of smoke and burnt blackness have me flying into action. From a coffee-sipping daydream to panic struggle with this power-tripping furnace in a split second.

Somehow I wouldn't mind this unequal state of alertness, seeing that the toast doesn't burn, but for one sinister aspect. Let me give you an example. I am having a quiet cup of tea with at least one good eye on the device, when it arranges a clever distraction. The soup is about to boil over. And you've guessed it. By the time I've realized the trap, it's too late! Wild unplugging of cord, hasty lid flipping down and black evidence flung onto the lawn for the chickens. Later I noticed how scornful the chickens were with this offering.

In just one devastating week under my supervision, this enigmatic appliance had plotted such distractions as: two trips to the basement, one phone call, noise on the road outside and someone at the door. All the while it gloried in wholesale destruction of bread slices. The lawn doesn't look too good either.

Staring at its innocent appearance, I see another scene... Lucy spitefully snatching the ball away before Charlie Brown can boot it. My mind contemplates plugging the toaster in without any feedstock and overheating it!!

Say is that the car on the driveway?...

"Hello... Good to see you back... Did you have a good time at your mothers?... No, things were pretty good here... Yep, pretty straightforward..."

Tennis On A Table

"Two or three of us are entering the big tournament next weekend. Like to have you along."

"First I've heard of it Grant. Where and when?", I asked. Noting a negative element in my response, he encouraged, "I've been going for years and often get knocked out in the first round. No big deal. Think about it. Next weekend at Civic Arena."

The name of the building almost killed it right there. Only big competitions were held there. True my game was coming along at a fine clip and I was getting pleasantly too big for my boots. I mused on my forehand drive. Often a winner. A precise awesome stroke designed to impress and also cover up other obvious weaknesses. Then again my backhand drive was improving. A wrist-flick action that could be high speed magic. Could be, that is, when it worked. This usually for the first game in a match, then it burnt out.

Two things decided me for my first bash at a tourney. I was keen, and I just couldn't wait to try out some of my delicious spin serves. I was grateful others had to return them, not me.

So down we go. We strip and enter a huge building the size of a football field. There must have been twenty tables and a few players warming up. This was the B. C. Open Table Tennis Championship. Entrants from the States and Alberta. I felt big and small at the same time. My runners felt tight, shorts too short, and I'd forgotten my peppermints for concentration. Grant looked casual and bored.

I carefully inspected my new Stiga bat with its fast rubber. Just got to get those spins going well or else. Grant and I warmed up just as officials began announcing table numbers. I heard my name for table 7. So soon!

I took myself to 7 and found to my surprise a young boy there! He looked Chinese and about ten years old. "Hi", I grunted. He barely glanced up from checking one of several bats. "Is your dad playing here?", I continued. No reply.

I bounced a few sliced balls with my bat to test table dynamics and to impress junior with my underspin. He slid an official looking sporting bag under the table. I slowly adjusted to an awful possibility! The announcer had said, "Eddy Lo and Jayce on 7." And this 75 pound, 4' 8" was definitely Chinese!

Next thing I know he sent me a serve signalling warm up. How could this midget, one fifth my age stand up to my offense? Had the officials made a mistake? I half expected a real opponent to show up. And then I noticed he didn't seem to be having much difficulty in sustaining a rally! In fact I thought he looked a trifle confident in a modest way.

To heck, I'm going to play my normal attacking game, I thought and wondered if Grant was watching. The tournament table had marvellous life, and the Barna ball heavy and delightfully true. A small crowd had gathered and out of context I vaguely remembered reading somewhere once about an Eddy Lo. But no details. As our rallies developed it seemed he somehow made his lack of height an advantage as he got under my half-power back hand flicks and lazily converted them into top spin lobs! As they landed on my end, the tiny packages of dynamite inside exploded. Only exaggerated arm reach on my behalf provided a decent return.

The warm up ended with me making some definite discoveries and him winning the toss. I certainly had misjudged this child's ability and skill. The referee signalled play and the quiet Eddy Lo began to serve competitively.

No two balls alike. Gentle, hissing, wavering arcs loaded with spin and looking so innocent. He sent the usual five down with such command that I only floundered one back! This he dispensed with expressionless ease. Score 0-5, my serve.

At this stage I was more surprised than shocked. I obviously couldn't place this slip of a kid in perspective as a challenger no more than a grown man playing me on his knees. I let in on my serves. To my glory his stroke returns were less fluid and showed hesitance. The first three practically aces, the other two resulted in short rallies -- we each won one. I felt better, 4-6 the score.

I don't remember much how the score reached its ultimate in this first game. More important a series of images. He had been lightening fast. His positioning perfect, and his pen grip style made switching from forehand to backhand a snap. His smash-kill was wicked, exploding, like the crushed shell of an ostrich egg! His feints had been delicate touches that had me racing to the table to scramble back.

My forehand had to work overtime. As I ground away with a series of well timed top spin probings each stronger than previous, his returns were everlasting until I overshot with fatigue. His face forever emotionless. Not even joy. Final score first game 9-21. How did I make that many points?!

We changed ends and towelled. I began to feel a familiar concentration of cold determination taking me over. I was pleased. This said all stops out. It seemed blood and gland juices had pooled to feed a deep reserve of need inside me. That last score was not good enough. He was no Mohammed Ali of Table Tennis. He was blocking my way into the next round. The referee signalled play.

I started serving. Once again they were holding up. Clean detailed statements of crippling intent. Once again he showed unease. Then gradually he pressed me harder and often. My limitations became weaknesses. By a miracle of concentration and luck the score was even at the halfway point. And then as though he had been coasting and polite, he turned on his turbine, flicking off every conceivable angle shot and fancy drop fakes.

The end was near. The referee signalled game and match point. With aggressive desperation I won this. But the score of 14-21 told the story. He had won easily. He had needed no raw power. He had been so quiet about it, even submissive. He had fielded most stray balls. And I had been a light encounter on the way to bigger events. I was tired, subdued and puzzled.

We shook hands. A slender limb, cool and firm. That hand had dished out punishment.

The crowd clapped politely. The decision had been expected. I went back to the player's bench, met by Grant. 'How did you make out?', he smiled. He knew. Knocked out in the first round quite often he had said of this tournament...

The competition increased pace, weaker players dropping out until who should be in the final against last year's champion? You've guessed -- young Eddy Lo! -- that trace of a kid with steel springs in his legs and the reflexes of a lawyer.

After a two hour battle, he lost by a narrow margin. A large crowd applauded at the awards ceremony, and as Eddy Lo received his runner-up award, his age was announced. Another wrong estimate on my behalf. He wasn't ten after all. No wonder he won so much, he would be twelve next birthday.

Understanding

"I see its down again."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"What is actually down?"

"The dollar of course."

"Oh ...what part of it?"

"All of it"

"How can you tell its down?"

"Its in the papers."

"You mean its smaller?"

"Not in size, in value."

"What made it go down?"

"International speculators bought U.S. dollars you know."

"Did you answer my question?"

"Of course."

"It will take more to buy food and gas?"

"Mmmm, I don't think that's it."

"You've lost me."

"Its because their dollar is bigger."

"Who's?"

"America's."

"Food and gas cheaper there then?"

"Not necessarily."

"I saw Tony the other day..."

"It makes importing a problem..."

"...he had just got back into town."

"...and exports may suffer too."

"He really looked fit."

"Who did?"

"Tony, of course."

"Whats that got to do with the dollar?"

"We must have a session with him soon."

"I don't think you care about the country."

"Why, what happenned now?"

"About the economy and inflation and that."

"Sure I do."

"Do what?"

"Wonder how we're making out as a country."

"You don't even vote."

"That's true. But even those who do aren't pleased with the results."

"Doesn't excuse you."

"I would help if it came to a pinch. You know that."

"How?"

"How would I help?"

"Of course..."

"Well you know how we all pitch in, I'd do the same."

"Its because of uncommitted types like you that the country is where it is."

"Would the country be in a better location if I were committed?"

"I'm serious. One day you'll wake up to find the Russians or Chinese have taken over."

"And take over our low level economy?"

"You wait. You just don't care. A real ostrich in the sand."

"Rob's going to have a party next weekend..."

"See there you go again. All you think about..."

"...and Lorna will be there."

"...is your little personal world of trivia."

"She looks dazzling in velvet..."

"I don't understand what people can see in you."

"...and smells like springtime...delicious."

"I respect her a lot."

"She's got marvellous green eyes. You kissed her in public last time."

"You're jealous."

"It's funny, because you don't care about relationships and things."

"An economist has got to care about everything."

"She likes you a lot."

"So?"

"You could wake up one morning to find she's married some lucky guy."

"She knows I'm committed."

"I really don't see what she sees in you."

"That's my business."

"I think while you're busy with the dollar I'll invite her over."

"She couldn't care less about undecided men."

"It wouldn't take me long to decide. In a trade I think she's more exciting than your dollar."

War And Peace

Outside is an angry storm. A snow storm. The snow races level with the ground under howling wind force. Visibility is dropping fast, with hills, lake and orchard vanishing.

The valley is a venturi that transforms normal air movement into a hurricane wind. Now and then there is a sudden calm and the snow regains composure, falling lazily and with dignity. And then unexpectedly the giant in charge of the gate at the head of our valley flings it open again. Buildings groan, windows press in and laundry tears on the line.

A chicken tries to make it to home safely but the ground turbulence whips the feathers over its head and blows it sideways. The helpless bird spins and rolls.

Bursting pockets of air press their reckless thrust against the fruit trees. It is now day-dark...

Back twenty years ago... A Friday evening. We are in the ashram. All was well. We had chanted in a circle on the floor and meditated in the light of candles. We had listened to words from our swamiji, finishing in small groups over coffee. A solid old house, wood panelled and warm to our voices, the thick walls sheltering us against the outside.

It was close to midnight. We were leaving. A door opened somewhere and banged violently shut. Someone said, "Heh, that's some wind." But we were in high spirits and only interested in last minute disconnects.

Sure enough, getting to the car revealed a fierce wind. Tree debris everywhere. Luckily, it was only a few miles to a warm bed. I started and pulled away. The car seemed to keep up its speed without any gas. At the first intersection, the car received an enormous blast of energy. It tried to crab the turn and now the speed dropped suddenly as an avenue of trees shook their heads alarmingly. Leaves, small branches and paper rained on the windscreen. Garbage cans rolled over the road as though directed, their rubbish blown thin.

The noise had penetrated the car as a deep roar, with high shrieking overtones played by an orchestra the size of a city. Another intersection came up. No traffic. The traffic lights were no longer hung. They were horizontal, like laundry blown utmost. Several small cars seemed to be parked at unusual angles. A dog was blown backwards.

To get home now meant driving up a large hill. The extra five hundred feet suggested even more exposure to the frenzy. The car had been driving with a constant degree of insecurity, as though trying to detach itself from the road surface.

On the hill the wind had blown down trees. Roof tiles and sheets of duroid spun onto the road. In many homes, the lights were on. No other car moved. Power lines swung crazily.

The driveway was clear. The house looked intact. Lights were on. Walking to the house was a problem. The body seemed as weightless as on a moon walk. Inside the family was aroused and relieved that the car had made it. The question now was, would the old house make it?

One glance at the movement of the 'fixed' ceiling lights, the windows pressed in and the horrible springing of the walls was enough to get the family bedded down in the basement.

A street light outside showed the shingles on the neighbour's roof to be all bent backwards from gutter to peak. A domino effect. We phoned and warned them, though nothing could be done right now. One last look over the vast city showed sporadic flashes of light as power substations or industrial installations had electricity problems. One or two landmark trees were missing.

We were tired. Exhausted. We listened to the hurricane clearing its throat in mighty gusts as we lay on the basement floor. Eventually we slept.

In the morning, the media was graphic about damage. Many scores of magnificent trees had gone. A very high percentage of roof tops needed repair.

Outside objects, from garden tools to garbage cans, were spread all around. The utility trailer was wrapped around a tree. There was no damage to the house. We had survived a severe buffetting. Not even one damaged shingle...

The orchard storm had changed. It was no longer running. Exhausted by its mad expression, it lay panting and the hills, lake and orchard had quietly crept back on stage.

From war to peace with suddenness and impact both ways. Our complacency a little shaken by the momentum and threat of damage. For the time being, respect for nature was upped a few notches, a little like the added concern after passing the remains of a freeway accident.

For a few moments, I did a quick mental check on all my so called securities; friendships, health, material possessions... wondering what sudden flare up could reverse the established order. Detecting none, I allowed peace of mind to take over once again.

Warmers

Powelly and I stood around. The weather had turned cold. But it wasn't raining. Mrs. Mason, the neighbour, was hanging out the washing. A stray dog ran across her garden and she shooed it feebly. We could have spotted it easily with a rock but it looked underfed.

"Had a banana sandwich for lunch today" from Powelly. I stared at him woodenly. Jimmy Powell lived two doors away. He was thinner than me, kind of sharp features, with a red runny nose and a dad who used force. His home was untidy and often loud with angry shouts. He was always hungry.

"Said I could have another one tomorrow if I run some errands." He expanded by rubbing his belly. I became aware of my own innards. I was puzzled that the Powells could afford bananas, and equally envious. "This true Powelly?" I was bothered by his boasting. If he was lying he'd get it!

"Yeh its right. On my honor. Aunt bought them for us." I bristled with irritation. I hated the way our gang often boasted about something none of us had had for a long time. I kicked a rock forcefully.

Sensing he needed to heal the wound, Powelly said "Lets go and make warmers, eh? I know a couple of great cans. Big ones and clean. And even some wire I think..."

The sudden vision of warmer times and the making of one, was practically an instant magic. Bananas were forgotten in the initial planning for the construction job ahead. "And we'll get Jonesy and Wheeler eh?"

As we ran I pretended to trip him. We were skilled enough at this to cause interference with the feet without calamity. At Jonesy's backyard we called him. Running, shouting and long distance whistling were our forms of communication. Often we would call at someone's house for ten or fifteen minutes before getting any response. Sometimes a mother would shout 'Gonna have his lunch', 'Not coming' or worst of all 'Go away.'

Today we were in luck. They both were available and agreeable to our idea. "I'll use my old one," said Jonesy. Their house was a fish and chip shop. Smelled pretty rank, especially in the summer. Hundreds of big blue flies everywhere. Used to like watching the hand operated chip maker. It took a large potatoe and in one quick flash of the handle a bunch of uniform chips were added to the pile. Great!

Jonesy had red hair. And brown spots on his face and hands. And was good with a mouth organ or jaw's harp. And somehow when it came to hustling in physical games, it seemed I always squared off with him. We were evenly matched. Once he gave me a black eye by mistake.

Wheeler, our sort of leader, looked sleepy and only mildly interested. He never gave too much away with enthusiasm. "Yeh", he stated, "I've got mine from last year somewhere. Even got some matches too." With this last statement he flashed a quick hard glance, expecting that us bundlers had forgotten to include them. Jonesy smiled supportingly. "I had forgotten about lighting them," apologized Powelly. Lucky Wheeler was available. Trust him to clinch the last workable detail of our schemes. I used to look at Wheeler a lot. It was as though I might eventually get to know what was happening inside that big head if I kept looking often enough. But somehow I wasn't able to look with thinking, only with staring.

Powelly found the empty cans in a garbage place we normally didn't visit. Some neighbours would shout at us tearing the garbage apart. Once we found some comics in a can. Couldn't believe anyone would throw away such treasures. Once we picked up our cans, we quickly ran away.

Jonesy and Wheeler had now got their cans and were carefully inspecting them. They seemed satisfied. "Borrow the knife, Jonesy?", I asked. He reached for it and somewhat grudgingly handed it over. On another occasion he had said, 'Why don't you get one of your own?' This hadn't gone down too well with the gang. We had grown used to this old weapon with its broken blade. It sort of belonged to all of us, and we envied the edge it gave Jonesy.

Powelly was pounding holes near the bottom of his can using a rock and a large nail. I worked on mine, worming the knife to enlarge the holes. Jonesy watched, unsure of the effect of this on his knife. Wheeler strayed away to look for cigarette butts in the gutter.

"How come we don't have any cans in our garbage, Powelly?", I wondered.

"We haven't got a can opener, that's why," he scoffed.

That seemed to make vague sense. These cans were a good size. Probably could hold almost two full sized potatoes on the fire. I inspected my series of holes on the bottom and sides of the can. Should provide a good fire draft. It was a good feeling, starting a new season with new cans. And clean too. I finished it up by making two handle holes and scrounged some bailing wire from Jonesy.

Wheeler came back with no fags. He was getting impatient. "Let's go and get our fuel," he snorted. Jonesy reached into his pockets and gave us each a spud to carry. Mine had a green tip. I did a quick glance at the others. Ah well...

Wheeler got quickly into the lead. He walked with long strides. Sometimes we had to jog a bit to keep up. I wondered if he was even strong enough to walk through a hawthorne hedge! I pondered on this as we made our way in the gutters picking up small pieces of wood and paper and bits of coke. Ahead of me, Powelly's shorts showed me his patches were coming apart. A small part of me wanted to push the extended patch back in position and put some strong threads in to hold it. Wheeler's elbow holes had got bigger, too. So I worked on those as well. Actually, he needed a new jersey, bigger and cleaner.

It was slow going. There was never much useful stuff in the gutters. We'd have to resort to more private supplies. "Have to go to the coal yard," said Wheeler. It was so nice having our purpose defined by him. His determined stride, big, hob-nailed boots, and firm voice were certainties in our world. I dreamt of owning such boots one day, with their dozens of nails and the noise they made on hard stone pavements. Scuffing the heels made sparks at night time. An extra bonus.

Meanwhile, Wheeler had us there in no time. The place always seemed locked up. Several large piles of coal lay on the ground and the shed appeared locked too. Once there had been a big angry dog inside the yard. It had taken a long time winning him over, which had included a partially cooked potatoe.

"Mind we don't get copped by the police," warned Powelly. "Saw one going down Dunstall road on his bike." He often saw things sooner than the rest. I always seemed the last, as though I'd got my head lost in a game. Or dreamt too much.

"Your jersey this time Jonesy. Right?", I said. It was funny how many times we expected opposition to surrenders of this kind.

Reluctantly Jonesy took it off and threw it onto the high wall. Wheeler lifted Powelly up.

"Heh, the glass up here gets worse," he moaned.

"Get on with it," growled our leader.

Powelly dropped heavily on the other side. We heard him dragging an old box up to the wall so he could get back

in a hurry if he had to. We then heard him running towards the gate.

"Whats that?", I hissed. It sounded like a noise from the direction of the shed.

"Quiet!", snarled Wheeler. We moved towards the gate. It seemed to take a long while for the bolts to be slid back, but eventually the gate opened and a red face appeared.

"Out of the way," pressed Wheeler. In we went with the familiar tingle of excitement and alertness. We grabbed at the nearest pile, filled our cans and stuffed some in our pockets. Stuffing large things in our trousers made running more difficult, and running was a major part of our escape experience.

Suddenly, as one, we were racing back to the gate at high speed. We had sensed, more than seen, a figure of a man moving suddenly from behind a pile towards us. We practically dropped our cans in fright even though we knew we were hot shot runners and, if the enemy got too close, slippery dodgers.

"Come here yer ruffians," came a noise only feet away. Jonesy had been guarding the gate from the street side and hearing, had a strong lead ahead of us. Over his shoulder, Wheeler gave a nervous laugh and egged the guard on. I tried to join in but the squeak wasn't much. "I've got your names," came the voice again, but by now we were racing well ahead of danger and had time to holler more discouraging remarks about his chances of grabbing us.

The noise of pounding feet fell quickly away and we slowed down as we approached Mostyn street, our territory. We slipped down to Jonesy's yard and pooled our rich lode.

"What with a spud in one pocket and lumps of coal in the other, couldn't crank my legs." This was quite an admission from Wheeler. But we knew he wasn't serious. He had lots of reserve.

As I assembled my fire, carefully laying in paper and breaking small bits of wood, I wished I had the depth of attention and caring that Powelly gave to his. I saw him thoughtfully engineering the pieces in such a structure as to invite immediate burning and to defy relights. And those long thin fingers would accurately and gently place small pieces of coal in the most favourable way. He made it an important ceremony and I noticed a couple of drips from his nose fall onto the paper.

There were many daily marks of prowess in our gang. It

seemed often we would strive to increase our footholds by running faster, jumping further, boasting heavier and trading shrewder. In warmers, speed of fire development was a minor win and of course a big fire added prestige. Pownelly was humming now. I was pleased at this. He seemed to have less going for him than most of us. His humming was toneless.

I now concentrated on techniques of firing that would eventually ignite the coal which was a little wet and cold. Coal took a long time to go.

A match was struck and two warmers were being swung gently like pendulums. Even the smoke smelt good. All too often we didn't have enough bed material and we mostly resorted to verbal encouragement. Wheeler would threaten his forcefully.

The fast burning paper and wood shot long fingers of flames out of all holes. Flames around a foot long were admired most. A sort of measure of vigor. In fact, vigor seemed to be the god we always worshipped. Keenly aware of it in others whether in their loud noises or physical show-offishness.

By now all warmers were going well. As the coal began to take we could now swing in full circles. There were several patterns of style, but mostly overhead, forward, and coming down on either side of our legs. Fast enough to prevent hot cinders falling on us. This form of draft-making quickly stimulated a dying warmer.

The roaring sound of four sets of flames was a sensory experience. It was time now to pool all our warmers and make a big fire that had us warming our hands and making pleasure noises. Wheeler had motivated his so well it glowed red.

Time for the spuds. More swinging since the spud initially took heat away. Swinging the warmers through the air warmed us up and also gave us another chance to assert our individuality.

The sound of warmers, the sight of their turning patterns and the smell of burning potatoes had us all absorbed in the ceremony and its outcome.

"Mine's done," gloated Jonesy as he stuck his knife in and lifted out his black cylinder. A small whisp of steam climbed the blade as he broke the blackened object into two to reveal a white, edible, ash-filled pulp. One by one the charcoal lumps were ready. Being last was another low score. You also envied them, eating their's first and making exaggerated groans of joy.

The spuds were hot, smoke flavored and with just the right sprinkling of carbon skin on white flesh. The taste was all flavor, personal and intense. The world stopped being as we ate; as our cast iron stomachs digested the plaster hard surfaces. When the eating was over, we suddenly remembered and boasted of major meals we once had. And even second helpings were mentioned. But this was such an exaggeration as to be downright lying.

Jonesy was grinning. Wheeler's eyes were now alive, black as the coal and shiney. Powelly had stopped sniffing and was smiling. We had won again. United we saluted each other by the absence of scorn and the touching of knees in the circle around the fire. For a few glorious moments our warmth and boy fun overflowed our tough cores. We were good for each other. Our code of sharing was done by deeds not words. Warmers were deeds and action and bond making devices. I glanced at Wheeler. He looked one of us. We'd soon be playing word games now, like guessing the name of a soccer team, given just the first and last letters. There were 92 teams in the leagues and we knew every one intimately.

A Way To Lose

I tell myself it doesn't matter now. That it happened a long while ago ...when time was young. I say that it was that way then, not now. I tell myself that sadness and joy of memory is enough for now. Our relationship had lived its fullness. More would have been too much.

But still, sometimes I catch myself with images suddenly taking over a surprised me. And I find it necessary to screen out those less suited to my needs. I struggle against fragmentation and the present me usually wins. This I tell myself as I look outside a window at a lake so blue and still. It reflects back a calm...do you understand?

I tell myself that she was sometimes light itself. That she was essence and mother and bride, of this I know. I say it doesn't matter now if my colors are less and my sounds a little further away, for there is still much my senses probe. Of this I am aware for my rhythm now is a long, deep pulse -- firm as the hills that hold the lake. Constant as the hills that boast new greens of spring.

And I ask myself about my spring stirrings. Are they not the root of my wistful memory shifts, tuning into my wavelength against my wishes? What say you to this?

It can not matter now, the deep pleasures we shared, as we touched in many ways. Our needs were just to be with our ideas and trust and content, and growing family.

I see now her level gaze that cared. The spirit always strong came from deep roots, while I was a traveller in body and mind, bent on stopping only long enough to be ignited by a cool touch. "We do what only lovers can, make a gift out of necessity" -- Leonard Cohen. And this I feel again, though fainter now, and outside the sky is so blue and the sun a golden vision.

You know I was a dreamer and she the clear designer of how a home is made. I know it was so because we clashed in our directions and I needed space. But it doesn't matter now, I am getting on top of my images. I escape into the friendly ones that lead me to where I want to be. Was it not Ram Dass who said "If you think you're free there is no escape possible"?

But then what if it did matter? What if strips of me are still attached? What if I begin to see I am a prisoner whose design is escape but whose route is back inside? But surely my frail connection is no more than a shadow that follows me empty of detail other than shape. So, of course

it doesn't matter. Didn't I tell you so?

Yet I tell myself her scent, her sounds, her very movements are lost on me now. This I know because I tell myself and I know what the inner me wants to hear. Does not my life's fullness now more than balance? So, missing her is not an issue and I find myself nodding in agreement. And besides if I don't get lost there is a chance I won't get found.

In my room the big set plays my music and has been struggling to get in while thoughts and feelings and lake and orchard and pets and sun dominate. But you well know about this...

And now I seem a little less sure. At least not quite as sure as I should be considering my reasonable range of reality. Will her history always bite at my heels? Am I to be future threatened by the past? Me, so free of her tensions. Funny. Sometimes I think my thoughts are trying to solve things. Is not the equation balanced by all I like? For very curious am I, and experimental too. How well you know.

Yet, when family visits end and the house is a delicate quiet again, it seems more than the sun is needed to break up the stillness that has settled everywhere. But I mustn't brood on this because it really doesn't matter now, for we would live apart again, should we ever meet. And not forgetting that all gains and losses in single life vary all the time and hinge on changing perspective. But I see you frown...

The sun is still strong. The cats are on the sundeck rail looking timeless in their composure. I need warmth. I am a robot for needs, they start and end my day. A cycle of beginnings and completions, forever and in routine of habit. I nearly always ignore the Oriental wisdom that says "When you're 90 percent of the way, you're halfway..."

And now I must get back to some new unexplored search where the first step shall be to lose the way, for now my unlearning has almost reached a peak and, if I'm not careful I could easily grow young again and really lose my way. Did I not tell you so?

Five Stones

The summer grass had large brown patches. We found it stiff and prickly to play on, even though our exposed legs were seasoned the year round in shorts. In fact, it was almost a day of manhood when, at the age of 14 we first wore long pants.

We were playing skimmer with cigarette cards. I had forgotten that Harry Brown was one of our best at the game. Somehow when he stuck that cigarette card between his fingers and prepared his strong wrists to skim, you felt that only a 'weak' card would prevent him from getting at least five to ten feet extra distance over yours. Brawny was a little taller, touch heavier than me. It seemed odd that his fitness could come from just playing around with girls. We never saw him into sports or active games.

He had brown hair and dark friendly eyes. Had a trick of turning his head on one side when listening as though a little deaf.

"Let's do Jacks", complained Powell. He was losing. We all were losing. Only Brawny seemed anxious to carry on.

"Yeahhhh!", we all chorussed.

"You got your stones, Jonesy?", Wheeler asked. Even Brawny stopped agitating for more cards when he heard Wheeler's command. It was often a relief to have Wheeler take a stand and determine a new direction. We rarely questioned him and only gave puny muttered resistance with face saving scowls.

We moved onto bare ground. It was too hard playing jacks on grass. We needed unimpeded lateral movement for our collecting hand. Jonesy brought out his rocks. Each of his five pebbles had been well selected for shape and feel. He handed them slowly to Wheeler who assumed priority for going first. We sat in a circle; Powelly, Jonesy, Wheeler, Brawny and me.

"Heres five first throw," joked our leader. His head bent forward slightly, expression carefully intent and firm square hand ready to throw. With a quick controlled flick the stones leapt up in the air as he turned his hand underneath nursing each stone onto the back. It was effortless. The stones couldn't resist such influence and skill.

Nobody spoke. Powelly sniffled, while Jonesy's mouth was open. A soccer ball came rolling up from a nearby game. We pushed it aggressively away. Wheeler was our stage. He

was our model, showing us things without words. He would make us marvel at his authority over these stones. Sky, warm sun, firm ground and the other games played nearby in the park disappeared. Wheeler began to dazzle us.

"Four and threes," he quietly intoned playing without mistake. We always followed other's scores closely. He had only taken six throws yet already had made four games and was half way to another. If even one stone slid off his hand we grunted supportively. Sometimes I thought he was capable of moving stones merely by passing a broad hand over them. His sense of touch and accuracy had us all eager to equal.

"Aaahh!!..." from all of us in quick reflex response. Wheeler had dropped a stone. He must have done it on purpose to give us a chance. We were getting restless as he amassed 'nines and twos' already.

"I'm next," shouted Jonesy. We didn't dispute. They were his stones. He was sort of next to Wheeler in the play of things. The rest of us squabbled and argued the remaining order of turns.

We eased our positions on the hard ground. Jonesy was stiff competition. Probably as good as Wheeler. They both played with the same unhurried confident style. They expected results. Only an earthquake could have broken such concentration.

But this time Jonesy made an error which we all recognized as misjudgement. "Worst luck," he cried and grudgingly handed over to Brawny. What was unusual was he didn't dispute the fault. We all often defended slips and errors in our sports and argued bitterly that we deserved another turn. Jonesy was only 'one and four'. Wow, great for us.

It seemed ages but finally I grabbed and shouted "Mine!" I was last today. The waiting had made me a little over anxious and I felt the others wanting to get back in again. The stones were warm and trickily smooth. They could slip off the back of your hand so easily. I grouped them selectively in my palm for throwing. This had a bearing on the final display after the throw.

"How many did you get, Wheeler", I joked, playing for time, as though I would run right past him.

"Get on with it Walter", they growled.

I bent at just the right angle to keep my hand parallel to the ground. I wasn't going to slope off a stone if I could help it. "Move your hand, Powell", I ordered as

though it was too close to the play area.

"Come on you twit!", exploded Wheeler.

The throw felt good. They rose, well grouped. Not too high and my hand turned of its own under them, collecting and then sinking quickly at the same speed to cushion their fall. They bounced easy enough off our boney hands as it was.

An automatic 'aaahh' from the circle confirmed a beautiful and lucky first throw. All five beauties on my hand and in good close position to be thrown once more and hopefully caught this time with the open palm. I was pleased and perhaps only just a little too quickly hurled the stones into their short arc. As I reached to catch all five, one slipped past the grabbing hand and fell.

"Ehh!", came the delighted roar from the gang.

"These stupid stones!!," I cried. "Waiting all that time and blew it on the first throw! I should have another throw. It's not fair," I moaned. They jeered and laughed. I was mad and stood up.

Then Wheeler did one of his rare things. He did something that confirmed once again his grasp of situations and ability to step outside of us and put us back together again. He said, "O.K. Walter...Tough break...Special...You can start first this time."

My dark anger broke instantly. The words were candy in my mouth or like a thick sandwich when pained with hunger. I was hungry to play again and the gang made little protest. And Wheeler gave me a nod and I was allowed to mentally as well as physically join the gang once again. And the sun seemed warm and friendly.

Wheeler

It was raining. A faint drizzle. We leaned against the candy store and sensed rather than felt the cold rain. It was not an issue. Boredom was the enemy. Nothing was happening on the streets. Nothing had changed from one dark winter night to another.

With no money, the store windows seemed empty. We hadn't the interest even in dreaming about their contents. Wheeler lifted a boot. The hole in the leather sole was bigger. The cardboard was soaked already. Powelly and Jonesy did a reflex look at their boots. Once again we synchronized our responses to our leader. Wheeler was becoming very restless. We quickly offered suggestions.

"How about warmers, eh?", said Jonesy.

"Nah, let's get our conkers," echoed Watkins.

"Come on Jonesy, let's do cards in your shed," I moaned.

We hurried even more suggestions. Wheeler looked at us blankly. And through us. We hadn't reached him. He would soon break out of our circle and stride viciously away, looking firmly ahead. He was not impressed.

Ivan had the best idea. His mom and dad were out. We could play cards inside. Ivan was an outsider. He didn't play sports. He smoked heavily, and not just pickups but a real pack of cigarettes. It seemed he had no roots. His family had suddenly appeared one day and taken over the small grocery store. Even his age was a mystery. School unknown. And why did he collapse on the ground when challenged on a story that sounded beyond belief. We were impatient with anything we couldn't understand. He was our enigma. Never even saw him with a girl and that was serious in our gang.

Wheeler had been very still. Obviously summing up his options. We pretended excitement at house prospects.

"Come on Wheely, have fun."

Strong face, black eyes and crew cut hair, thick lips and altogether too large a head made Wheeler special material. He never offered alternative ideas on games or activities. He never had to. We would have been puzzled had he done so. We paid homage to his intangibles. To his possibilities. To the stories we heard about him but never proved. We would often call on Wheeler first when forming up our gang. Capturing him was often easy. Holding him was

an ongoing challenge.

Wheeler snorted. Eyes flashed. Ernie Watkin suddenly said he'd heard this great joke. Wheeler turned twin lasers on him, and enthusiasm died. This was one of the worst Wheeler nights. We pushed one another around to get something going. Tried a few one leg bunts on each other. This died too... A shuffling silence followed. Wheeler hadn't spoken throughout. The rain increased.

A bus slowed to a stop near us. It was a break in the pattern. The lights reflected off the wet road. The wheels splashed water over us. We gestured disapproval. I banged hard on the bus, then tried to hide the sudden hurt. Wheeler saw and knew but signalled approval. I wished I was stronger. The driver angrily opened his door. For a few moments it looked as though we would come alive. Then the bus left...

The evening wore on. The noise in the pub bar room across the road increased. Lurching figures moved in and out to the outside urinal. We never notice the smell.

Time bore down. Never measured by us, no watches or public clocks. House clocks unpredictable. Lateness was measured by sudden belly hunger, total quiet on the streets or the pubs closing. It never seemed to enter Wheeler's frame of reference. His head was full of more important things.

Then Wheeler was off. "I'm going," he threw back. We had expected it all night. It was almost a relief. But that he had offered us a statement of intent, actual words, was almost unique. We were generous in our parting words.

As the structure of our togetherness weakened, I imagined a ride on the parting bus. Through strange alien streets of the night. Feeling the motions of bends and accelerations and looking at people entering and leaving. Strangers everywhere. And I became a driver and lugged that big steering wheel around. And the passengers looked and smiled at me as I changed gears like a racer. And the big double decker reached its last stop in record time and I started back.

And then Jonesy said he was going in. And the night ended again. And I walked the black distance to a cold home.

Winter Ride

The winter was never really a hardship. If the temperature dropped below 60 degrees, signs would appear on many shop doors, "Closed on account of the weather." This referred to the door only. True, there had been a sprinkle of snow that morning, the first in fifteen years.

One of our last major exercises before graduating, was a solo night flying, cross-country. And being cadet pilots, not even navigators, our risk for getting lost was high. My risk factor even higher.

I taxied out to the flarepath. It was midnight; cold, clear and black. The frozen grass made the ride bumpy. As I sat in the cockpit, I envied my chums asleep in warm beds.

The duty pilot signalled take off. How bored he must have been handling all those aircraft doing circuits over and over again around the aerodrome. I was pleased that the still night air meant a very steady ride. And more accurate course keeping.

At height, I set my first course. The ground below showed only as black and white areas with a few scattered lights. I passed over the town of Johannesburg, still a carnival of light.

In the darkness ahead, I concentrated on flight. Panel instruments only. Constant glances at speed, course, RPMs and altitude readings. All was almost well, except for the cold seeping in.

At first it seemed like a trick of light or a reflection catching my attention. Then it happened again. The cockpit lighting had faded noticeably. Not just a flicker either. I tensed and readjusted. Looked. Listened. Felt. The engines were OK. Controls responded. What was the problem?... I felt very young, and alone. As though on cue, the cold became more possessive.

And then it really happened! I caught several important gauges moving where they shouldn't, namely downscale. This was not possible! Nothing like this had happened before to me or anybody. And still the plane flew. I tried the radio ...dead. Landing lights and navigation lights, too. The cockpit became like a void.

My small reserve of confidence and know-how was then given a final blow--the gas gauges were fast approaching empty. Sleet was now streaking the windscreen. It was all happening too quickly. There seemed no sensation of movement, no connection with flying. A lifeless cockpit

rigid in space. And then I realized what had happened--an electrical power failure. All the electrical instruments had given up.

In the sweat of discovery I made a quick decision. Turn back. I searched frantically for the glow that would be the city of Jo'burg that I had passed over centuries ago. It was now a journey on glands, low faith and limited experience. I considered increasing height in case I had to glide. Or even bailing out, as a last resort. Sure could have used some moral support, but the second pilot's seat was empty.

At last my squinting through the smeared windscreen was rewarded. There were some lights down there. And people. People completely unaware of my plight. I tentatively increased power to the engines. The brutes were behaving beautifully. I was thankful.

Past the city, the darkest of areas on the ground signified the aerodrome. Joining the circuit would be a test since I was practically invisible, especially to the training cadets practicing their takeoffs and landings. As I lost height, the sleet thinned. A welcome crumb! I eased the buildup of stiffness in my limbs. I strained to keep an eye open for potential interception and collision. My head swiveled, as though watching a tennis match.

At last, the final approach. Down to 300 feet and lined up with the flare path. I guessed I'd be a vague outline to the duty pilot below. A red flare came up to greet me. I was well aware of its go-away-intruder significance. He had probably tried to reach me by radio to give me a blast. I ignored the flare. At 150 feet, another almost hit my wing.

I was now totally intent on one thing only. Get this machine down in one piece. Without landing lights.

At a height judged suitable for flare out, I levelled and gently searched for the ground, adjusting throttle and elevators carefully. I was using up a lot of runway... And then, one last combination of moves did it. I hit hard. On the third bounce I decided to stay, fighting the swerve that was developing. I'd made it! Amazing! Back in life again, or almost...

As I stopped to turn off the runway, I heard the rear door open. A figure moved energetically through the cabin towards me. I thought I could see a parked Jeep outside. As I turned, I saw it was the duty pilot. He was furious. Between anger and shouts, I gathered that as an ignorant menace I deserved far more than being thrown off the course for disobeying air regulations. Eventually he let me go. I

was drained.

Later as I dressed for bed and felt the cold sheets, I pondered over the busy day of flying. Tired, cold and older, I climbed into my bed. For a long while there were red flares exploding and me struggling to express my reasons for my actions. I drifted.

Sleep must have eventually claimed me because now it was daylight and I recalled the scene. It hadn't been my imagination. Oh for a miracle in the form of an understanding commanding officer...

Many months later, on a troop ship heading home, I found out how it all ended from an instructor who had completed his tour of duty. It was very simple. The electrician responsible for the power failure had received a well directed punishment.

And I? I had been ignored. Neither praised or punished. It seemed that aircraft maintenance in the winter was of an even lower level than at other times. Something like being 'Closed mainly on account of the weather'...

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A Word On Writing

"Why do you write?"

"Well, partly out of obligation."

"Obligation?"

"Yes, but mainly the challenge of course."

"And you say you have difficulty?"

"Of course--most times."

"Yet once you start the end result is often agreeable."

"Probably, and this because I hit a lucky twist part way through."

"Lucky twist?"

"Sort of. Kind of thing where the writing itself seems to take over."

"How do you feel facing the blank page at the beginning?"

"Mostly, at least that I should make an attempt. A feeling that I owe this. And of course the challenge in the act of writing. That pleases me."

"Anything else like the nature of the start, or article length and probable ending?"

"The start usually runs well once I sit down and grit my teeth. And the first couple of paragraphs go with gusto. Then I get nagged by the thought that really most short articles are only a few lines long. Like the heart of it. The real substance could be said in a couple of sentences. And the rest a too slow introduction and a long tapered ending extending well past the reader's threshold."

"Mmmmm... Is this the usual procedure for much of your writing?"

"Yes. In fact if I was writing now you would see for yourself."

"So, you're not writing at the moment?"

"Of course not. I'm talking to you. Or rather trying to answer some silly questions!"

"What eventually propels you into sitting down, taking up pen and tackling the empty page?"

"We've already been through that! I told you. Something to do with owing the words, and the effort being a fair challenge."

"That's it?"

"Are you suggesting there should be more?"

"Well sort of. I really had in mind such extra intangibles as, say, pride of work and growth in skills. Possibly sharing something of one's inner self and actual fun in marvelling at what can drop out of the old cortex. And of course the sense of expectancy when others see your work for the first time."

"It sounds like you should be a writer. You've got a whole list of favorable guidelines, enough for at least one volume of your life. Here, I'll give you some scrap paper. Take this pen... Have my seat."

"If you had the chance, would you stop writing? I mean would that degree of freedom give you extra fulfillment?"

"What do you mean if I had the chance? And how could a negative act of stopping fulfill me? No! I won't stop writing. Nor is there a question of freedom. Perhaps if I was allowed one major factor of change it would be that there was some way of retaining the original excitement and urgency of the first writing through each of the rewrites."

"Perhaps you could develop some special techniques that may smooth your passage. Make it less of a chore. Charge, rather than discharge you."

"More likely learn to live with the stupid ups and downs of it all."

"Ups and --?"

"Why do you keep repeating everything. You know what I mean. If I was a real writer I could have said it all in the first few minutes of this dialogue. ..Have I put you off? No more questions?"

"Perhaps... maybe a couple. No, second thought, using your own thought on endings, I think you should write up this little talk of ours, and I'd be interested to see how

you struggle to a plausible if not compelling ending. One that would satisfy you."

"I've got an ending."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"May I enquire?"

"You may."

"Well...?"

"OK. You will take my place at the next Writer's Club meeting. They'll love your sauvity and skill in dialogue. They'll warm to your friendly questions showing such strength of curiosity. And ...oh yes, one other thing, I'll even wait up for you when you come back home, Dearie. Now how's that for an ending?"

The Yogurt Maker

I had been spending the last few days feeling my way around the kitchen so to speak. It was up to me to get the hang of this cooking business, and as soon as possible. There was no way of telling how long this man-wife separation would last. And cooking before by me had always been made very easy by the number of pre-cooked dishes left in the fridge, merely heating up and serving.

Somehow I just felt the need to acquire some of the intuitive touches connected with food preparation and that was why I was taking on step #2...to make a yogurt. Step #1 hadn't been much more than burning toast, on my own. Sure I can add soup making and egg boiling too...and that's it. What really gave me this wild idea was the unexpected success I had with poached eggs on toast.

The instructions left me by the good lady seemed reasonable enough. Naturally I intended to be cautious...retreat if necessary.

Opening moves began to a background of clear counter space, music on, all the cats fed and a bright fall sun showing the way. Next, chose the right mixing jugs, spurning one with queer pouring characteristics and another with a weak handle. Milk poured into one to the correct level. Quick trip to powdered milk storage, one and one half measuring jugs of this into half jug water, using jug number two. Just escaped a wicked trap here. Almost poured flour for milk. The bags looked alike. Made up for it though by using calculations to introduce precision in water level. Instructions had said approximately one half jug...this is exactly one half jug.

I began to relax a little as I inched my way into a more complex stage. Stirring the powdered milk with that hand operated, dual framed, intermeshed, rotating machine, produced mixed results and a cloud of fine dust. Next, this solution was mixed with the homogenized, pasteurized, 2% B.F., 1.2% solids, less than 4000 bacteria count, natural milk.

Off to the stove and an excellent test of my exact volumes. Poured both jugs into a pot and found there was just room for the lid. Element turned on, thermometer at the ready. Gently stirred and while waiting for the magic numbers 111 to 117 degrees F, mopped up the various minor incidents so far. Quick glance at cats. They look a little more relaxed than me. Even found a moment to enjoy the radio music.

Temperature ready. Take a carton of yogurt from fridge

for a starter it said. Then--oh no--I remembered. She had said as one of the many said things, that we were out of it. Quick trip downtown. Large selection to choose from. All of them flavoured though. Decided on one with weakest chemicals--peach by name. Speedy runback. Relief, I had turned off the stove. Verified temperature was OK!

Added full carton of store yogurt. More gentle stirring, getting much better mileage this time from stirrer. Something good for my self-assurance in this stirring business, maybe its the gentleness. Carefully, filled six glasses with this solution. Lids on. Set yogurt maker timer to 4 hours. Noted real time 11:00 am. Covered, plugged in and the rest is up to the machine. Celebrated at this stage by a big clean up of utensils and trifling spills again. Was beginning to suspect I was a little messy in my techniques. With casual confidence I set about lunch.

Four hours later, timer expired. Checked contents. Looked no different, still liquid. A moment of uneasiness filtered my confidence. But quick on decision I set another two hours on machine.

Much later that evening after a series of well completed outside jobs in the orchard, I suddenly remembered that manufacturing plant in kitchen. I guess the dying sun reminded me how late it was. Panic and dismay as I rushed in to test the result of a long time overshoot. Unbelievable, instead of ruin looking like rubber, the surface was a perfectly set, milky, smoothness...like a fine custard. A quick check of other samples--great, great, great! I did it!

Wanted to phone and tell somebody. I knew I could do it. Never really any doubt in my mind. Just can't wait to take on something even more difficult in that laboratory of science called a kitchen. Whats that smell? Oh no, that toaster again!

Young Feelings

Summer was the time when the cruel injuries to my hands finally healed. Not only the lumps on each palm but also the bruises. And since the swellings were down I was able to grasp and hold things better. Quite essential for our ball games.

Summer meant no school. No school spelt no teachers. No teachers, then the canes stayed in their cupboards. The palms of my thin, ten year old hands were always discoloured during school. It seemed the male teachers were quite satisfied that discipline was best achieved by violence. They taught by writing material on the chalkboard which we copied, while they daydreamed and spat into the fire. A fire that never quite reached us.

Their anger with us made them animal wild and with a pattern that never varied. Red-faced, teeth actually bared, eyes blazing, they strode viciously to yank us out of our seats and up to the front of the class.

I was luckier than some. Never any bones broken, though a veteran of many exposures. But I never adjusted well to the first angry flushing out and the biting pressure of large hands on my body, lugging me to the target area.

My left hand first. Held vice-firm by his left. In his right, the beautifully sensitive and deadly toy. A cane a little thicker than a pencil and of very correct length. It would be swished rapidly a few trial times and the sound through the air spoke of live power. Once when our teacher was at coffee break we, in desperation, burnt a cane. The consequences were inhuman.

After the trial strokes that warmed his pitching arm, the grip on my wrist increased. I usually turned my face away for the first one. Mostly because it would be one of the worst, inaccurately laid high and on the inside, crashing against the thumb. Also bad was low and on the outside, almost missing the finger tips. Regretfully, not quite. The nerve ends of those thin tips would blaze in explosive pain as though being dipped into hot water after being frostbit.

Sometimes I wondered about them having compulsory cane practise with a dummy hand.

By now his first massive act of hate had burst in my head and one more stroke followed. The second never seemed to be really able to penetrate the original pain until a little later when it would then mysteriously add and multiply in waves.

Somehow this day it was written in his bitter mind that the punishment had to be duplicated. So the first wounded limb was flung down and the right hand this time anchored firmly for attack.

By now I could gauge that I would survive because he really was on target. The red-faced, heavy breathing, pot-bellied striker was in his stride. He would have enough strength to even the pain on both my limbs. Twice more the weapon smashed. Twice more I watched. Twice more I saw survival... I looked -- my fingers were still there and could even be moved.

Then I was pushed back into the shocked, strained silence surrounding my seat. And I hugged my burning hands, blew on my fingers, flung them in the air, pressed them under my armpits and inspected them for bleeding. Back in my seat I tried sitting on them as surges of scorched hurt built to a climax. But in some unexplained way I was already passing the peak. I was starting to get on top of my struggle. And I knew it was going to be possible to make it back to a painless me.

One day I was caned four separate times. Four strikes each time. That day I must have been very disappointed with something I didn't understand, because I eventually gave up and cried. My hands had been so skillfully mutilated. Even one wrist had suffered. But it was to be many years into the future before I would need to cry again.

Beatings were school. School was compulsory. This was education. I never learned that my problem was that, after being one of the first to finish an assignment, I became bored waiting for the others to finish. Boredom produced restlessness and this manifested in fooling around.

I never spoke to anyone about caning. Not even my parents. It was only many years later that I pondered how such a primitive society could have existed in dear old England, and at a place called Christ Church Elementary School...

Zen Sunday

The sight of an Asiatic style temple on the island came as a pleasant surprise. It had its own modest park setting. The sign said "Soto Zen". Come Sunday morning I vowed to be there. I cycled on looking forward to a new experience in meditation.

With the dawn barely on the turn I began to cycle. The streets were quiet. The air surprisingly warm and moist. Color was slowly forming in the sky. I was still sleepy when I arrived and entered.

Inside was pleasing; a touch of incense, lots of space, heavy pillars and beams; a ceiling of darkness and an array of gongs, gourds, bells, drums and cymbals. The friendly atmosphere compensated for the place being empty. I walked slowly around, touching and sensing. There must be meditation somewhere! Perhaps a group too small for the main temple body.

A flagstone passage past the Buddha shrine seemed the route. My shoes cut the stillness with a series of taps. Weak window light guided me past closed doors. My hunch was a partially open door. And on cue a little ahead was just that. I entered as though a regular devotee and blinked at the scene.

Black robed figures sat on small hassocks facing four sides of the small room. In the centre sat one whose robes had more color. Whose hassock was taller. He must be the zen priest. I was a little amused and relieved to see one space vacant into which I crept. The group was chanting and didn't seem to notice me.

My hassock was small and hard. My face twelve inches from a bare wall. This was a poor mirror for my inner vision. I sighed. I was going to fidget. Some pranajama breathing helped as the chanting and bead counting continued.

I was just starting to make modest adjustments in my comfort when suddenly there was a rustle of a gown behind me and a strong pair of hands gripped my back. Was I to be thrown out? This wouldn't be the first time. They are a tight, fussy bunch, the Zens. A tap on the shoulder would have done!

The hands began to reshape my posture. I normally prefer a slumping western stance into which relaxation comes easily. The hands left me more vertical. The rustle retreated.

Very gradually my body unwound and slipped into forward comfort. More chanting, all in Japanese. And then once again gown rustling. Sounded like more than one. Again strong hands this time under my arms and I was lifted. What will they do next...!? I was getting annoyed. My hassock was whisked away and a larger one replaced...Zen discipline!

This provided an extra degree of improvement, but still more for their benefit than mine. My lotus, never attractive because of stocky muscular legs, now looked positively untidy.

I became aware of a change in the action. All had risen and turning to their right, slowly moved around the head priest still chanting. I followed and vowed I'd do whatever the guy in front of me did. I had no choice. Definitely getting out of depth here.

At a position in the room approaching the still partially open door, to my astonishment, the gown in front sidestepped neatly through the door and into the passage. Nobody else left. With mixed feelings I followed him.

Quietly I tracked the black robe ahead. My with-it-ness had fallen apart. Eventually we came to a large open room that could only be called a kitchen, at which point my leader turned, smiled and gestured me in. A little later I discovered it was his turn to make breakfast. I helped a little and he was amused with my story. Later when the whole crew turned up, breakfast was very pleasant.

Meditation, the original pursuit, came later, over the years, whenever I was reminded of this Sunday morning.