

LEAS LIT

The Medford Leas Literary Journal



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LEAS LIT STAFF

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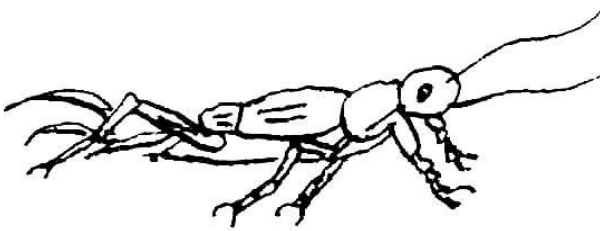
THE CRICKET

The cricket chirped every evening.
It seemed to go on chirping forever, despite Mideast Peace Treaty complications, despite inflation, despite sore thumbs, strikes, headaches, the energy crisis, Los Angeles busing difficulties, the whole gambit.

The cricket's chirping didn't change its pitch or frequency in the past when Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic or World War II ended, nor when our eldest announced her engagement or our youngest became president of his class.

The cricket didn't even miss a beat when the news was disclosed that Nixon knew about Watergate!

Jean Michener Nicholson



Rabbits, RABBITS, *RABBITS* !!!!

At first I thought they were cute, the few rabbits I saw frolicking in my yard. They looked so soft and cuddly while hopping nimbly across the lawn. Their effortless grace made them appear almost weightless. I was somewhat pleased that a pair of adults seemed to have taken residence beneath my deck. It was a nice protected place where they enjoyed privacy.

No doubt doing as bunnies do, you know, “quick like a rabbit,” the furry population began to explode. Big begat little and soon they were everywhere, and I mean all over the place. My deck mates probably were capably doing their share. Cuteness began to vanish from my thoughts.

I was surprised that foxes, hawks and other predators with a penchant for rabbit meat were not keeping the population in check. Just where were the natural hunters of my white-tailed friends, and why weren't they going about their business?

Living in such close proximity to us, the rabbits seemed to have lost any fear of people. They didn't scurry away as soon as they saw us strolling along the perimeter walking path. On many an evening we'd see five or six. As summer progressed, the path was positively crowded, with more than a dozen joining us.

They'd simply hop a few paces ahead, sit, and wait for us to pass. Sometimes it seemed they were looking at us straight in the eye, as though wondering why we were intruding into their space.

Often they played together on the front lawn totally unafraid and happy to share our community. Through our kitchen window we watched as they munched contentedly on grass and foundation plantings. They barely moved aside as our neighbors stepped out to pick up the morning newspapers from the driveways.

I knew rabbits were not like lemmings, unfortunately, rodents suddenly overcome with an irresistible urge to march to the sea. There would be no wonderful moment when I could witness their mass exodus to the shore.

As I stated initially, I like rabbits. Once we had a few as pets for our children. But their increasing numbers in the third and fourth year of our joint residency began causing problems. Our flower garden at the foot of the deck, became, I suspect, their equivalent of an open-air buffet.

What did they eat, you wonder? Why, just about anything they could reach. They were not epicures, with particular tastes. Asters, zinnias, daisies, snapdragons and even flowering petunias were all fine fare. It was, I must admit, fascinating to see a two-foot high hybrid daylily, the stalk stripped, leaves eaten with surgical precision, with four blossoms left at its crown.

They boldly went where I thought none would dare to go. The audacious critters were not intimidated by having to climb onto my deck for a meal. A potted hibiscus was defoliated as high as their hungry heads could reach. They also enjoyed the tips of tuberose as they emerged from their bulbs.

What was very surprising was their munching on marigolds. Now common folklore always led me to believe that marigolds not only were not on their menu, but were an actual deterrent. Marigolds were planted specifically to keep the little buggers at bay.

My bugging bunnies obviously were born with defective DNA, or population pressure was driving them to develop a taste for marigolds. Not only did they eat marigolds, they displayed a distinct initial preference for red-flowered plants. Only after all the red were eaten did they deign to munch on the orange plants. When these were gone they adjusted and devoured bright yellow flowered marigolds. I simply could not believe what my eyes saw.

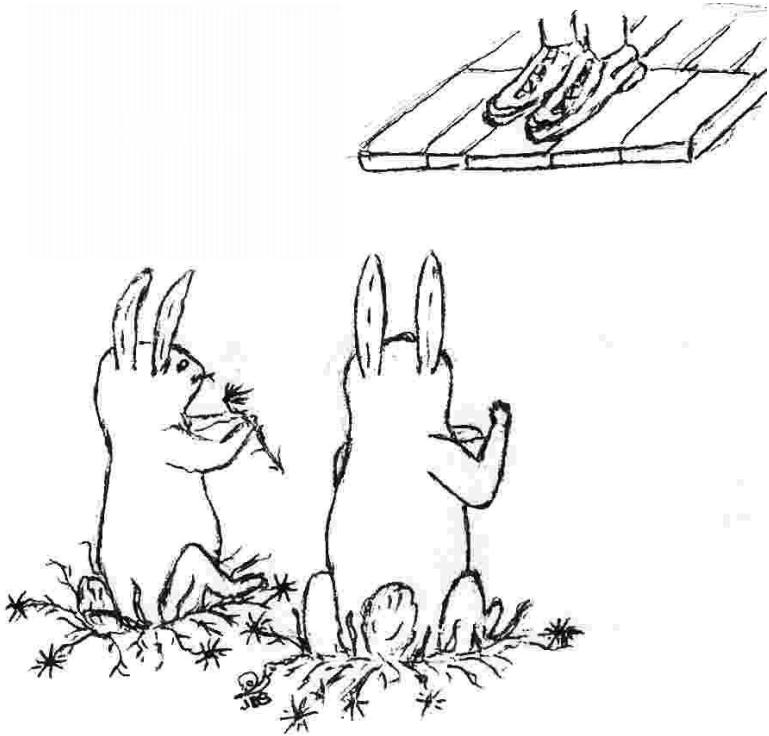
Not being a total animal hater, I decided upon a nonlethal, for rabbits, alternative. I hopped in my car, burned my four-dollar-a-gallon gas and went to Lowe's. There I used my hard-earned retirement savings to purchase "liquid fence," guaranteed to keep rabbits from eating whatever I sprayed.

Only one problem: After every rain, the repellent had to be sprayed again, a chore I didn't relish. Well, let me tell you, the odor was enough to keep me from spraying as often as I should.

One incident almost sent me over the edge. It was the ultimate indignity. I saw two adult rabbits enjoying a leisurely dinner on my deck and I thought to frighten them away. As I opened the door they dashed to the stairs, hopped nimbly down the five steps and into the edge of the flower garden. I followed shouting loudly at

them and waving my arms wildly as I demonstrated my ability to move quickly down the steps. I would surely fill them with dread at what would happen next.

They hopped a little farther into the garden, then turned to face me, not as panicked as I expected. The bigger of the two, a buck I presume, sat back on his haunches and lifted his right paw. He crossed that leg with his left paw at what would be a rabbit's elbow. So help me he was giving me the Italian salute. How did I know!!! I'm Italian and it's a gesture that's part of the blood. You just know.



What happened once could happen again. I bit my lower lip and shook my head. There had to be other solutions. Much more drastic measures were required. The gauntlet had been thrown. War had been declared. If need be, rabbit stew could become an entrée at our house. I would invite neighbors in to share sweet revenge.

I immediately thought of employing a wrist rocket as my weapon of choice. It was a nonlethal weapon, for humans, and a natural for me. As a boy I had been a rather good shot. In that era it was so easy to create such a weapon. Every lad could be his own weapons supplier.

Simply take a piece of an automobile tire tube (remember them, before tubeless came along?) cut two straps and tie the pieces to a crotch. A crotch was a Y-shaped branch from a tree or someone's hedge, sized to fit your hand. With the rubber strips anchored to the top of the Y, you had your personal equipment, a singular creation. If you were truly artistic, initials were carved on the handle.

But life is never uncomplicated. No sir. A simple solution yet ... Do you know that possession of a wrist rocket, *aka* a slingshot, is illegal in New Jersey? It seems in the mid 60s they were outlawed because young boys were accused of shooting out too many street lamps. A permit is also required for a pellet gun. Since I did not want to become known as the great white hunter by my neighbors, I had to seek other alternatives.

I think I have a solution, a creative one at that. I'll plant some marijuana. My bunny pals will become so mellow even a slow fox or nearsighted hawk will be able to do their job. Residents traversing the Lumberton loop, having taken Yogi Berra's sage advice when facing a fork in the road, would need to keep an eye out for wobbly rabbits crossing the road. You might notice a few lying on their backs on the lawns, their front paws neatly folded behind their heads, to watch the passing clouds. I'll keep the plants cut low so there is always a fresh crop of tender leaves within reach for their continuous enjoyment.

My California source must, of course, remain a secret. Nor will I make samples available for neighborhood "medicinal" use.

After my bunny buddies have developed a distinct taste for my exotic crop I'll complete my devilish plan. I'll remove every single plant. Properly hooked, let me say candidly, addicted, they will frantically search for more. Hungering for their mellow mood, they'll travel far and wide to satisfy their need. Perhaps most, if not all, will resemble lemmings and move *en masse* far enough away, never to return.

Who knows, perhaps hidden deep in the Pinelands, or possibly in a not too distant town, growing vigorously yet unobtrusively in a secret garden or in fancy pots in a seldom visited corner of the patio, they'll find the plants they seek, end their search, and **stay there...**

John Sommi

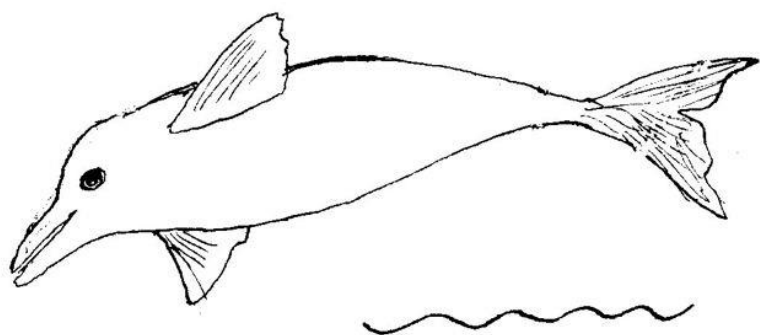
THE LONE DOLPHIN

It was a cloudy day. Heavy dark, threatening storm clouds hovered overhead. Despite the weather, after cleaning our beach house I needed fresh air and a short walk.

I took my binoculars hoping to see the dolphins I had seen so often in the distance leaping in unison among the waves. As I started my walk, bare feet sinking into the cool, wet sand, I had an eerie feeling that I was being watched. Watched? By whom? There was no one around in this miserable weather. I looked to the left. A lone dolphin was at the water's edge swimming and keeping pace with me as I walked. Don't dolphins swim in groups? Why was it alone? Possibly, I am just imagining that it is following me. I decided to put it to a test by turning and walking in the opposite direction. The dolphin also turned and swam in that direction and so it went on repeatedly, until tired of the charade, with a flip of its tail it dove into the water.

Since that experience, when I return to the beach and see dolphins frolicking in the distance, I like to think that my lone dolphin is happily among them, but I will never know.

Laura Farr



ALBERT ROSS

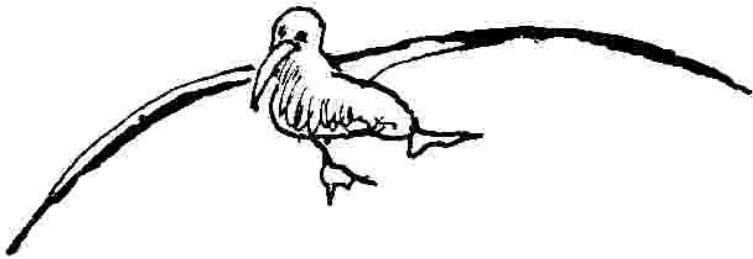
A True Story

We left the dock at Hobart, Tasmania, early on the morning of December 1, 1943. The two-man skiff that had towed our overloaded freighter to the dock in the quiet waters of the inner harbor on November 30 again guided us, this time to the beautiful outer harbor. Here we could watch swimmers enjoying a beach on the second day of Australia's summer. We could also see the Wrest Point Hotel where we had enjoyed the captain's homecoming party the night before. (The captain was a former lieutenant in the Australian Navy who had a permanently injured leg as a consequence of the war.)

After leaving Hobart, we resumed zigzagging to confuse enemy submarines and entered the Tasman Sea, which is north of the Antarctic Ocean. Almost immediately we were engulfed by a violent storm with hail-laced rain and towering waves. Our living quarters, a wooden deckhouse (sometimes called a doghouse), were severely battered and flooded by the waves. We were ordered to stay below the main deck while our ship managed to keep on course at a severely reduced speed. All hands, including passengers, were ultimately assigned to be lookouts for submarines because the crew was getting exhausted.

Finally we rounded southern Australia and started north toward India. The captain then ordered us to assist the twelve Navy "Armed Guards" by learning how to deliver ammunition from the "fan deck" and to shoot the anti-aircraft guns.

One day someone called for us to look at something spectacular. There we saw a big bird with ten-foot tan wings and a pronounced proboscis. He was riding gracefully on the airwaves just above our ship. “Albert Ross,” as we affectionately called him, seemed unaffected by our excitement at seeing him for the first time. Our captain said that, in spite of the stories, he did not consider the bird a mythical foretelling of disaster. For his part, he said, he admired the skill and fortitude of albatrosses that followed ships for thousands of miles and subsisted on the leftover food thrown into the sea.



We Army passengers immediately felt a kinship with the albatross. We had traveled thousands of miles from Washington, DC, between June and December, and we did not know yet when we would reach our destination of India.

When we were about twenty-four hours from our next port, Colombo, Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka), our captain called an “All Hands” meeting. He told us that he had been warned that a Japanese submarine was op-

erating in these waters and that all hands should be alert and watchful. Without exception, we followed the captain's orders implicitly.

The weather was clear and calm. There was a full moon. The ocean was almost still. It was a perfect night for a submarine to spot us. With the best of luck, however, we arrived at Colombo, where two British destroyers met and escorted us to the harbor.

We were so joyful about our peaceful arrival that everyone forgot about Albert Ross. We looked on both sides of the ship, but Albert was gone! Apparently all of the excitement on our ship and the arrival of the destroyers had disturbed him and caused him to leave our ship.

I can clearly remember Albert Ross with his beautiful wings and almost motionless body gracefully and silently riding the airwaves next to our ship.

Bless you, Albert Ross, wherever you are!

This account is dedicated to Sergeant Hugh Myers, who loved Albert Ross but did not survive our duty in India.

Bill Pickering

RIGHT TO THE DOOR

These days as I push my laden cart through the crowds in the local supermarket, I find myself thinking nostalgically of the days when such forages into the marketplace were unnecessary. There was a time, long, long ago, when much of the marketplace came right to one's door. True, there was the local A&P, a small building right around the corner that sold meats, canned goods, oatmeal, toilet paper and mouth-puckering pickles out of a large barrel and where the shelves went right to the ceiling, but most edible supplies arrived regularly at one's house. Not that it was difficult to shop at the A&P, which was presided over by Mr. Breske, who knew all the neighborhood kids and was used to reading the notes that came from their mothers about what particular item was needed on this venture. That was another feature of this time. If you went to the grocery store, it was usually for one or two articles at a time because you could always come back tomorrow, or the child could be sent, for whatever was needed that day.

But other supplies were forthcoming on a regular basis right to the customer. Castanea delivered every day. You put a note in one of the milk bottles that were set out on the porch the night before, and the required number of quarts was waiting for you when you got up in the morning. In those days, milk bottles were glass and the milk was not homogenized, so in cold weather when the milk froze, the cream pushed up the cardboard top and left a little cap of cream standing on top. We all heard about the miscreants who scooped off those caps

on their way to school at the houses where the milk did not get taken in early. When I was quite young, the milk wagon was horse-drawn and, on one memorable occasion, created a drama that was the talk of the neighborhood for weeks. The horse was, of course, long familiar with the route, which must have inspired a burst of overconfidence one winter morning. At any rate, he came around the corner at such a fast clip that he overturned the milk wagon in the street. The horse, being between the two shafts of the wagon, went over as well, as did all the milk and cream. What a crash! What a mess! What a picture of all the neighbors outside with overcoats hastily flung over their nightclothes! Mr. Kellock was still wearing his nightcap, the first one I had ever seen. What a rescue scene!

I do not remember any official recognition of this incident: no police, no "sanitation crew." Instead there was much bustling about by the neighbors. The first order of business, naturally, was to release the poor horse from the shafts since he was flailing around helplessly in the middle of the street. The milkman had somehow escaped his overturned wagon and was gesturing ineffectively at the debris. Brooms and shovels were procured, ash buckets lined up in the street to receive the broken glass; attempts were made to salvage the few remaining undamaged goods from the wreckage. The victims were inspected to see if they had suffered any permanent damage (none was discerned), and horse and wagon were reunited. After the wreckage was suitably removed, there was a feeble attempt to wash away the lake of milk in the road, but the project was abandoned as being too difficult with a few buckets of water, since garden hoses

had all been put away for the winter. The neighborhood cats, as well as outside reinforcements, probably completed the job.

And it wasn't only Castanea. Mr. Yates came by twice a week in his old school bus with fresh produce. Some came from his farm, some from neighboring ones. Everything was sold with the tops on. Beet greens with vinegar and horseradish was one of our particular favorites (except for my father; he was allowed not to eat vegetables). Fruit was available along with the vegetables, and my mother spent the summer canning everything that was available for those winter days when Mr. Yates and his bus would not be making their rounds. Not only did she can the fruits and vegetables, there was Philadelphia pepper hash, chow-chow, pickled watermelon rind, bread and butter pickles, brandied peaches (only for grownups), and corn relish. I have probably forgotten a few. As soon as my sister and I were old enough, we were pressed into service, and I remember the clouds of steam rising in the kitchen on those hot summer days when mother was canning with the "coldpack" method.

Mr. Hunter called with eggs and chickens. We ate a lot of chickens; they were a "good buy." Eggs must also have been a good buy because they turned up in a variety of dishes. Mr. Hunter was an affable man; he liked to stay and chat and inquire about the health of every member of the family. Since we were a three-generation family with the oldest generation prone to various infirmities, sometimes that took a while. He must have had a very short route!

Mr. Schnell brought the fish. They were whole and in big wooden crates filled with ice. On the side of his truck was a marble shelf that looked like a mini morgue slab where he chopped off heads and tails and gutted the fish (ugh!). We never got it filleted; that was too expensive, so we all got pretty expert at picking the bones out of our teeth. When the shad were running in the Delaware, my mother would cook a whole one, wrapped in parchment, for hours in a slow oven until all the bones dissolved. Once in a while, the shad was discovered to have a funny-looking thing in it that I was told was the “roe,” and which always went to my father. It looked nasty, so I was content to let him have it.

The gentleman who came about once a month with the horseradish and the coconuts was difficult to understand because his English was limited. We could not pronounce his name either, so we just referred to him as Mr. T. He could add and subtract like lightning, however, and could do it all in his head and give you the correct change immediately. Impressive! He ground the horseradish by hand on the spot; you could either add your own ingredients afterward, or he would mix it with whatever his mysterious potions were that he carried with him, delicious with beet greens! He would punch a hole in the coconuts, so we could drink the milk first and then crack the shell into pieces, so we could eat the meat. We ate a lot of coconuts!

Many of these supplies had to be kept cold, although some things could be kept in the cellar, so Mr. Darymple, who drove the ice truck, had to deliver every other day, every day in summer. He had an enormous ice

pick and knew exactly how big a piece each family needed, and he carved it up expertly in the back of the truck. Then he carried it down the side path to the back of the house with his big tongs and heaved it into the icebox. We took advantage of his absence to steal ice chips off the back of the truck with guilty pleasure. None of us was ever dehydrated in the summer!

We knew there were also Dugan's and Freihoffer's trucks, but they remained a mystery since first my grandmother, and then my mother did all the baking: bread, cakes, pies, cookies, muffins, crullers (no such thing as doughnuts!), and that luscious treat, Philadelphia sticky buns! My grandmother even had an instrument known as a rosette iron, a long handle to which could be attached fancy forms: butterflies, stars, flowers and little cups. These were dipped in a thin batter, and then immersed in hot fat until the little "rosette" floated free. They browned quickly, were drained on cheesecloth – no paper towels then – and dredged with powdered sugar. My mother balked at this.....too much work! Years later, I learned to do it, but she was right. Too much work!

It wasn't only food that came to the door; there were various services that were also available at home, although with less regularity than the edibles. I do not remember the name of the tinker. It came as a surprise to me when I visited Ireland much later that gypsies were called "tinkers" there. In my childhood the tinker was the man who came to your house and mended the holes in your pots and pans with nuts and screws of various sizes, depending on the size of the hole. Then he cut off

the end of the screw so expertly that the pot stood perfectly level on the stove. He also had a small grinding wheel on which he could sharpen knives and scissors. I can't remember the gentleman's name, but he must have been a hardy soul since he didn't have a truck, but carried all his supplies, including the grinding wheel, on his back.

I have been very restrained about recounting these memories to my grandchildren since they have a tendency to interpret them as having occurred on another planet or else at a time on this one when dinosaurs still roamed the earth. However, I cannot help but think that it would be very convenient to have at least *some* things come right to the door!

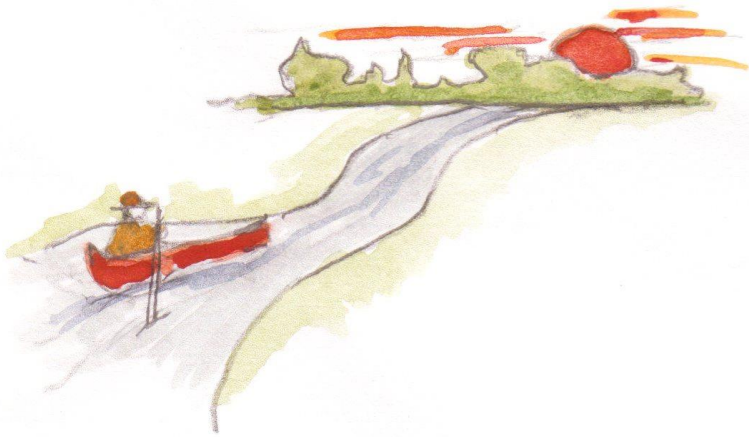
Ruth Gage

RIBBIT

While stretched out on a hollow log,
I see your world through the eyes of a frog.
There's helter skelter everywhere,
You human folk don't seem to care.
So I sit back and take this in,
You human folk who live in sin.
While stretched out on my hollow log,
I thank the Lord that I'm a frog.

Jane Walker





DAY ON THE RIVER

There are white puffs of clouds
In a light blue sky
As my canoe rounds a bend
A gold and yellow tree
Before me – like a sentinel
Draws me forward
What lies ahead?
I am torn, to stop
To drink in the beauty
Or to see it all
To know the end of the river
Common sense says
You will pay with pain
For this outing
You can only go home
Against the current
When morning comes
I ease out of bed
With caution
Old muscles make their protest known
It was a glorious day on the river

Howard McKinney



MY LOST HOLIDAY

With crimson apples
And Christmas plums,
With joy-wrapped gifts
And flour-white thumbs,

With staccato days
And tinsel nights,
With laughing angels
And Peter Pan flights,

With crispy cold
And hazy moons,
With piney pitch
And carol tunes,

With hurry, hurry
And red berry holly,
With endless rushing
And, oh dear, by-golly,

With startled surprise
And end cacophony,
I'm breathless, but wish –
Happy Epiphany!

Chris Darlington

LET NATURE BE OUR TEACHER

Let nature be our teacher.
Words once preached from poetic pulpits:
Ancient ideals of truth and beauty,
Guiding man's aesthetic hunger
Toward the pleasures of the good.

Did the poets know where nature was?
Did they know where man was? —
Hidden somewhere in
The hideous fortresses
Of Albion drudgery?
Packed cheek by jowl with
Hands and minds in endless motion,
Never keeping pace?
Man spewed forth civilized waste,
Leaving nature to wade in the muck
Of his much-prized handiwork.
Now man's delight in diversions
Diverts the mind from truth.
His tumors, called cities,
Grow malignant, resistant,
With insatiate need to people
The happy slavery
Of benevolent science.
With his magnificent intelligence,
And yet with utter unawareness,
Man spreads his rapacious selves
Unchecked upon this glorious,
Noble planet — forgetting,
Shoving, misshaping, killing
His once bountiful, sustaining host.

You poets, you voices still
Pleading for truth and beauty,
Your sorrow song is faintly heard:
Oh, good people of the earth,
Let nature be our teacher.

Chris Darlington

“GOOGLY” DIPLOMACY

January/February 1955

For the uninitiated, and since we're talking cricket here and the uninitiated includes most Americans, “googly” is a type of delivery bowled by a right-arm spin bowler. It kicks into the right leg of a right-handed batsman. The normal spin kicks away. In India and Pakistan this bowl is also called the *doosra*, the “other.”

A four-day cricket test match between India and Pakistan is scheduled to be played late in January at Jinnah Gardens in Lahore. The city is buzzing with anticipation and uncertainty. This will be the first time that Indian and Pakistani national teams have met in competition of any kind on the other's home ground since Partition in 1947 and the terrible religious communal “cleansing” that engulfed the coming of independence then. Both governments have agreed that there will be a temporary opening of the border between Amritsar and Lahore. Indian citizens, Hindus and Sikhs, any Indians, will be permitted to cross without visas, just with passes. A special train will bring Indian visitors to Platform 2 at the Lahore station. Amritsar municipal transport buses will have road access at the Attari-Wagah check point on the Grand Trunk Road. The way to Lahore is open!

But still, there are doubts about the wisdom of

all of this. So on the front pages of the *Civil & Military Gazette* and the *Pakistan Times* and in the Urdu press, the Punjab Governor publishes a public notice, reminding everyone of the rules of hospitality that govern the treatment of guests. A reminder to a citizenry that nourishes dark memories of atrocities and losses of loved ones and property just eight years earlier, and whose children are inculcated with a fear of Hindus and hatred of Sikhs, in particular. A Forman student, whose family was driven out of Julundur on the Indian side of the border, tells me that the final settlement can only be revenge and war, that Sikh losses don't count, that Muslim blood is worth more than pagan.

The day arrives. There's no choice but to declare it a holiday. No one intends to come to class, students or teachers. We're all down at the station or at the bus depot to see the Indians arrive. They pour into Lahore. Colorful turbans tied in the Sikh manner are everywhere, where they haven't been seen since Partition. On men walking along the streets and speaking Punjabi. In tongas carrying families. In buses and taxis. Meanwhile, conductors and taxi drivers are refusing to take any fares from the visitors. Tonga drivers, too. Tea stall and roadside food vendors and sweets sellers refuse payment. One doesn't take money from guests. Indians and Pakistanis are embracing, like old friends. Old neighborhoods, some of which still bear the scars of the Par-

tition riots, are the venue for conversations that were unimaginable just yesterday. Tears are shed as visitors arrive at places and view houses where they used to live in the Old City and Anarkali and in other localities. Not a single hostile incident is reported in the press. It's truly an astonishing moment in the history of the Punjab.

The Match? The teams played on January 29, 30, 31, and February 1, to a draw.

In the larger arena, beyond the cricket pitch, both sides are winners.

Stanley Brush

CONSIDERING ONLY WISE MEN

I have watched a fragile gray moth
As it came in from the night,
And then lay seared and dying
Beneath my candle's guiding light.

And I ponder the fate of Icarus
As he tumbled from the sky,
On waxen wings that melted
Because he flew too high.

But tonight I will consider only Wise Men
As they travel from afar,
Perhaps to share their joy in finding
A Child beneath the Star.

Pete McCord

COMMUNION

Listen, listen to the sounds of snow.
Poetry whispered at forest edge
And challenged stillness beckon heedless
Of lakeside merriment and civility
Where silver skates and unfettered youth
Joyously proclaim winter's first freeze.

Silent, shrouded, linked loosely by her hand,
Stooping, bowing as it was,
Beneath snow-bent birch and pine
Until again standing still diminished
Within a vault of arching oak,
Thus we enter the cathedral.

In fright the foraged fawn leaps,
Sending forth the cardinal, crimson-crested,
To shriek violence at our coming.
We thought we knew this place,
And in spring well we might.
Silence surrenders in despair.

And then in wisdom, or maybe fear,
We turn and behold our communion:
 Footsteps side by side,
 Fading remembrance
 Brought to presence.

All is silent
And the soft snow
Swirls down.

Pete McCord

HOW I DID NOT HELP TO WIN WWII

During 1941-1945 I was 8-12 years old and living in San Francisco. My father was a Congregational minister at Grace United Church of the Mission, and a mildly radical pacifist. I say “mildly” because Father was a quiet man, seminary-trained in “The Social Gospel” and devoted to issues of social justice and inequality in income and status in the United States.

He voted for the Socialist candidate, Norman Thomas, for President (until Roosevelt’s final run). If he preached sermons against the war, I do not remember any, but then again I don’t recall any of his sermons from that time! But I loved and admired both parents (my mother was more radical than my father), and willy-nilly that marked me as an outsider during a time of intense wartime propaganda.

Of course I failed to help win the war. I never bought a war bond or a single war-bond stamp. These were sold every week in my classroom. I believe I was the only one who never went forward to buy a stamp. I don’t recall being jeered at, though I was embarrassed to be alone in staying in my seat. I think if I was asked for a reason, I said something like, “my parents don’t believe in war.” I didn’t call them pacifists. It was a horrible thing to be a pacifist in San Francisco during the war.

Think of it. Most residents of the city thought there was a real chance that the Japanese might bomb San Francisco. There were floods of troops everywhere, especially downtown, for this was a point of embarkation (Ft. Mason) to the Pacific Theater. Everyone knew

that the dirty Japs had treacherously attacked Hawaii and bombed Pearl Harbor. The attention to details of the war was fierce and frightened, and certain areas provoked hysteria. I was aware of this, but I was mostly having a good time living in San Francisco, going to school, and hiking and trolleying all over that gorgeous city. (Our parsonage was in a dingy part of San Francisco, and the Mission District was filled with weather-beaten wooden houses and apartments lived in by the lower middle classes – a solid core of Italians, and mostly Middle Europeans. This was before the ethnic shift to Hispanics and/or Asians.)

I was too young to appreciate or understand very clearly why pacifism was important, or what its rationale was. And yet, I can piece together a fabric of resistance and otherness that I accepted, and that influenced me deeply. Here are some memories, ones that thoroughly obliterate the golden haze surrounding the popular concept of WW II as “the last good war.”

I did understand that no war was a “good war,” and I had some idea of what hollow notions most ideas of “winning” were.

I experienced (at a safe distance) the terrible injustices suffered by Japanese-American citizens, but in a personal, not a generalized understanding. My parents opened their home to a young Japanese woman who had a baby – her husband had gone on to a detention camp in California (of which there were many) but the mother was allowed to remain in San Francisco until her child could travel. I would hear my mother talking about the many Japanese businesses in San Francisco that were

closed down or taken over, their owners abruptly dispossessed and moved to a “detention center.” I heard enough about the injustice here, and the lack of legal protection and remedies, to have a clear notion of what was happening. My parents visited some camps (churches tried to help) and I heard about the severe conditions. They never, ever, used the word “Jap.”

**WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION**
Presidio of San Francisco, California
May 3, 1942

**INSTRUCTIONS
TO ALL PERSONS OF
JAPANESE
ANCESTRY**

Living in the Following Area:

All of that portion of the City of Los Angeles, State of California, within that boundary beginning at the point at which No. 14 Figueroa Street meets a line following the middle of the Los Angeles River; thence southerly and following the said line to East First Street; thence westerly on East First Street to Alameda Street; thence southerly on Alameda Street to East Third Street; thence northwesterly on East Third Street to Main Street; thence northerly on Main Street to First Street; thence northwesterly on First Street to Figueroa Street; thence northeasterly on Figueroa Street to the point of beginning.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 33, this Headquarters, dated May 3, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Saturday, May 9, 1942.

No Japanese person living in the above area will be permitted to change residence after 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Sunday, May 3, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding General, Southern California Sector, at the Civil Control Station located at:

Japanese Union Church,
120 North San Pedro Street,
Los Angeles, California.

The lesson continued as I grew up. It was clear that the population either had no idea of what was being done to the Nisei or did not care. *The dirty little, yellow little Japs!* As I stood on the playground with my class before school began, we all recited the Pledge of Allegiance (we were not yet “under God”), and then chanted together,

like cheers at a football game: KILL THE NASTY NAZIS FIGHT THE DIRTY JAPS!! Every morning.



1942 pencil sketch, courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

After the war, it was impossible for many years to recognize, let alone remedy, this dreadful stain on the American democratic system. Not until 1988 did Congress pass and President Ronald Reagan sign legislation that apologized for the internment on behalf of the U.S. Government. The legislation stated that government actions were based on “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.” That was not a universally popular piece of legislation.

I also gained a more vivid sense than many of my playmates of the horrors of war – through no virtue of

mine, but thanks to my parents. To start with, my mother was very sympathetic to the Quakers and their quiet strength in the face of war and violence. I knew that most people who reacted to the idea of pacifism saw it only as limp, passive, and chicken-hearted. The Quakers my parents admired were strongly proactive. The ones they met in the wartime meetings of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), were activists in the liveliest sense. I understood a little about reconciliation. It was how you worked toward nonviolent resolutions, how you respected your neighbor, even (horrors) loved your neighbor. It was how you worked to help and protect the loyal Japanese citizens; it was how you stood up for the rights and dignity of manual labor. (In her late 70s my mother was leading marches supporting Cesar Chavez and the UFW – and my father’s church in those days was largely supported by the prosperous grape growers of Lodi, California!)

I wish I could remember more about the meetings of the San Francisco chapter of the FOR, but to me it was mainly a chance to sample the smorgasbord of pot-lucks, and then to amuse myself for a boring length of time. I do know that the membership was hugely, even hilariously, diverse in their varieties of pacifism – some political, some religious (of different kinds), some artistic (“bohemians” – pre-Hippies). I did learn what *The Daily Worker* was, but was never quite sure about communism. I think we had more socialists than communists. I did remember one character (oh, they were *all* characters – I could see that, easily) who was a young poet, and who became (in the later literary histories) the “godfather of the Beats”; his name was Kenneth Rexroth. He visited

my father, who entertained visitors in the “first living room” of our huge Victorian-style parsonage, and at one time, perhaps due to some worry about the censors, he left a box of his latest volume of poems in my parents’ keeping. Mother advised me it might not be a good idea to read his poems – a lot of love poems that might be disturbing, she more or less told me. Of course, I feverishly scanned the poems but regret to say they were all Greek to me.

The horrors came to me from two very different directions. The first, and most extensive, were the movies. I went to a goodly number of movies, after receiving permission, for there were five separate movie houses within a short walk from our door. I wasn’t supposed to attend war movies, and I only saw some when the second feature (there was always a second feature) had not caught my mother’s attention. Yet the worst encounter came when the whole family went on the weekend to see a comedy (Abbott and Costello, maybe Red Skelton), and were taken unawares by the second feature. It showed a small platoon of American troops trying to stay alive in a Japanese-infested jungle. I’ll never forget the moment when one soldier who had been captured by the “Japs” was released to come back to his mates – with his tongue cut out. Yes, some nightmares. But two lessons: people at war did awful awful things to each other; and also, whenever there was a “Jap” in the movies or other media, he was demonized. My parents seemed more aware of that fact than most. I loved the moderately violent movies I was allowed to see, which included a lot of cowboys like Hopalong and Gene Autry, and liked some adventure serials off the radio. (But the Lone

Ranger only used his guns to shoot bad guys' guns out of their hands, and Red Ryder always disposed of the bad guys with his fists.) I'm sure there was a lot more violence I could have seen if I had been allowed to go (horror movies were out).

Never mind. Mother found when we went downtown to shop that the Newsreel Theater on Market Street, near where she had been in the Emporium, offered an entertainment we could both enjoy. That was mostly because the one-hour show had a lot of other stuff, mostly comic, besides the newsreels. But waiting for us always was *The War*. Everything exploding, people weeping, smoke and flames everywhere, utter confusion. The gap between those pictures, running continuously, and the tasks of Reconciliation was so hugely unimaginable, that I had no idea at all how it might be bridged. I could get no idea from the national picture; I needed real-life models, quiet heroes of courage and compassion. Those, when they came, would come later. They did not rant or bloviate; they were quietly strong ... and they acted. You might say I was waiting for Martin Luther King, but I didn't know that.

Closer to home was another horror, one that was not hard even for a young boy to understand. My father counseled young men who were considering becoming pacifists. (It was hard to succeed, but one could get a deferment ... and many Quakers chose noncombatant categories as a variety of religious deferral). But many of those my father advised were soldiers who found themselves deeply troubled by their military status – as always, some reasons were noble, others were foolish. A certain

young man was near breakdown and I knew that my father was spending some hours with him, and that he was invited to spend the night at our house – in the guest room just up the hall from my room. Next morning there was a flurry in the house and a strong medicinal odor, like a hospital. The young man was nowhere to be seen. I learned the facts a little later that day. Some time that night the young man had tried to commit suicide ... by drinking a bottle of Lysol. He had been taken to hospital. His insides were fairly well eaten out, and he died not much later. I found that horrible, confusing, painful. Had pacifism killed him? The war had killed him. I could see that.

I share with most people of my age a generally positive sense of those war years in San Francisco. I had a good time and apparently was never really in danger. But as I interrogate my slumbering memories, I see that a good many of them have at their edges, if you only see, deep shadow, suspiciously like tears, or very like blood.

Alan Gaylord

WALTER JOHNSON

Walter Johnson lived with his mother in the tin-roofed shack that was less than 50 yards in back of our house. But because we were separated from them by the chasm through which the railroad ran, as well a jungle of weeds and sumac trees, we never felt that we had to acknowledge that we had Negroes as neighbors. Furthermore, my father said that they were “squatters” and did not own the property.

It was 1951 in Philadelphia and the Johnsons didn’t have much of anything: no electricity, no central heating, no plumbing, and no money. Walter never seemed to work and would disappear for weeks at a time. Mrs. Johnson would explain that Walter had a little problem “holding his communion” and was “down in the County.” But Walter would invariably reappear and we would see him out back chopping wood for the stove while Mrs. Johnson stood over him with her cane raised.

One spring Mrs. Johnson made Walter pull out all the weeds alongside of their shack and had him plant corn. But with Walter’s subsequent inattention the patch was soon taken over by weeds and the crop withered.

In spring the Johnson shack would disappear from our view as the willow tree in our backyard filled out. But in winter when the leaves dropped and the landscape turned gray and stark, their existence would come back to my vision and conscience.

On cold winter nights as I lay in my attic bedroom beneath the quilts, I could see the glow of the oil lamp in

the Johnson shack and would wonder what they were doing and if they were cold. Neighbors said that Mrs. Johnson spent the night reading her Bible. Others said that Walter would drink and fall asleep with the lamp burning, and that someday he would surely burn the place down.

To my recollection, the only social contact I ever had with the Johnsons was through our neighbors, the Canons. The Canons had moved into the neighborhood from South Carolina. Mrs. Canon, who was called "Babe" by her husband and neighbors, had a custom of baking Christmas cookies for the entire neighborhood. These would be delivered on Christmas morning by her daughter, Ruth Ann.

One Christmas morning my mother got a call from Mrs. Canon asking if I would accompany Ruth Ann to the Johnson shack. They were, she declared, "neighbors" and as such were to be included in Ruth Ann's cookie route. However, on this particular Christmas she was afraid to allow Ruth Ann to go there by herself because Walter had just gotten out of jail and was drinking.

And so, on a frigid Christmas morning I walked with Ruth Ann across the railroad tracks and knocked loudly on the door of the Johnsons' shack. We waited a long time without hearing anything and then knocked again. After several minutes we heard slow footsteps from within and the door was abruptly opened by Mrs. Johnson. She was bundled in a thick coat and scarf and smelled of wood smoke and kerosene. Ruth Ann said "Merry Christmas" and handed Mrs. Johnson the tinfoil-wrapped package with its red and green ribbon. Mrs.

Johnson nodded and closed the door without saying a word. Ruth Ann and I then went back across the tracks thankful that it wasn't Walter who had responded.

Other than my observations of him from across the tracks, the only encounter I ever had with Walter took place on an evening the following summer when Tommy Logan and I returned from the cinema after seeing the matinee showing of "Quo Vadis." Inspired by scenes of Roman weaponry, we fashioned a catapult out of sumac trees on the railroad embankment. Between bent saplings we tied a burlap sack that was filled with crabapples. The saplings were released and the apples were hurled across the tracks onto the tin roof of the Johnson shack. After a series of direct hits, the bushes in front of our catapult suddenly parted, and in the fading light we saw the bloodshot eyes and nappy head of Walter. He yelled incoherently and staggered after us as we ran screaming into our back yard. My father, who was inside our house, heard our terror and came out and ordered Walter off our property, telling him that he would call the police if he ever saw him cross the tracks again.

That winter Walter knocked over the oil lamp and, although he and his mother managed to escape, their home was burned to the ground. Nobody saw the Johnsons after the fire or knew where they had gone. Tommy and I completed fourth grade and spent a lot of time during the summer growing up and building a fort out of the tin roof that was left on the property.

But it was only in the years that followed when I grew in other ways that I reflected on the injustice that I had committed and allowed against Walter.

Pete McCord



PORTRAIT IN BLUE AND WHITE

On my first glorious Parisian morning,
Walking from the Place du Palais Royal
Into the passage of the Louvre Pavilion Turget,
I came upon a small, dark-skinned boy
Sitting with his back against a solid zebra barrier.
The youthful bravado of his delicate features
Exaggerated the Algerian melancholy
Encircling his coal-black eyes.

He sang, and his voice came
Raucous and threatening
From his small frame.
As he sang, he played
A small blue and white bandonion,
The colors of his dirty balloon pants
And his soiled child's blouse,
A lost portrait in blue and white.
A clear plastic cup,
Close to his small crossed legs,
Received French coins, not for charity,
But for his abysmal performance.

Later, in the cool waning afternoon,
In the long gray shadows of the Louvre,
Behind the same protective barrier,
The boy nestled with his mother and younger sister.
Ignored above the quiet incessancy of the
Arrhythmic tattoo of polished leather –
Parisians converging on the adjacent Métro stop,
He played softly and piped a child's sweet lullaby.

Chris Darlington