

¿Quién Sabe?

Mas Historias de un Hombre Viejo
(More Old Man's Stories)



By J E Ted Thayer

¿Quién Sabe?

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Back cover – John & Janet Thayer 1980

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DEDICATION

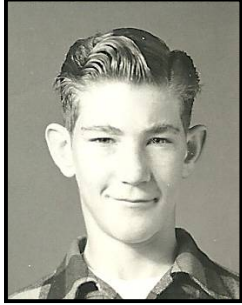
No suggestion was needed to discover for whom this book should be dedicated. She is Claudette Ann Thayer, my loving wife and mother of our children. Her constant support and affection made this a welcome project. Besides ... she's fun!



Claudette Thayer – 52nd anniversary - January 13, 2014

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Preface



I wrote my first book titled *Caca Pasa* so a lifelong wish could be fulfilled. It started in the spring of 2010 and seemed to take forever, but it was an enjoyment.

Marketing the thing was a problem from the get-go. Never having done such a deal before, I published it as a work in progress on my hosting website. A hard copy in a three-ring binder was left with volunteers at the local hospital and updated weekly. It was well received. A second copy was left at the neighborhood Bar. The help was hard-pressed to find time to read a menu, much less a book!

So, painful recollections from one's life can make good reading if properly presented. However, I don't think a memoir written by some dude from the sticks will ever be a best-seller. The reason for *Caca Pasa* was to fulfill a quest.

The writing was the easy part. The hard part was the editing and proof-reading. You've gotta read every page three or four times before it's just right. I have a writing style that makes teachers and English majors crazy! But, fact is ... I write the way I talk.

The first book's name was Mexican slang for *Shit Happens*. This one's name is also Mexican - *Who Knows?* Why did I choose another language for the titles? ¿Quién Sabe?

The reason for this second work is to keep me busy. I'm retired, so I can do what I please. A rich person might get away with saying something that presumptuous - but, an old fart like me? Yep. I guess that's it. It pleases me.

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Cleaning Up

I ran into an old friend a while back. Hadn't seen him for quite some time. We chatted for a little bit - more in passing than anything else. How you been, old friend? How's the family? And so forth. It's customary in these parts that when you meet someone and have a few minutes, you share a story. Dale, very late in life, using a walker, had one.

His wife had passed away earlier and he had adjusted very well to the loss. He was a volunteer at the Hospital and a member of the local Rotary Club. He had reached his advanced years because he was always busy. So it was after his loving spouse passed on that he picked up the banner of housekeeping, more-or-less of necessity, and ran with it.

He said he sleeps well when he goes to bed, but sometimes he wakes up in the wee hours of a morning and just can't get back to sleep. Older folks have that in common ... that waking in the middle of the night part.

Dale said he finally figured how to get back to sleep. He gets up and starts cleaning house. Vacuuming the floors. Washing dishes. Dusting. Tidying up. He said housework is so boring that it only takes about twenty minutes of it and he's ready for bed again!

L.S.M.F.T. Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco

My daughter Janet went out job-hunting. When she returned she wrote on her Facebook page, "*Job interview... round two callbacks. I can do this ... feeling nervous.*"

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A few hours later she wrote, *“Thought the interview went well... at the end, my interviewer told me, ‘We’ll let you know within 3-5 days.’*

“There was a message on the machine from them when I got back home... saying to call them. Did that immediately, but got their voicemail...”



“Word is, if they decide not to hire you, you just get an email, and if they want you, they’ll call... so.... feeling hopeful.”

In response her ex-husband posted: *“Remember you’re still a Creedon that means double EE foR Excellent. You got this.”*

My daughter replied, *“rotfl [Rolling on the floor laughing] - I was a Thayer first, and always will be... Dad insists the letters on a pack of Lucky Strikes don’t stand for ‘Lucky’s Save Me From Tar...’ They stand for, ‘**Lord, Save Me From Thayer!**’ Now git outa the way!”*

Motorcycle Jake

I sat down at the bar up the street for a quick snort. The guy next to me smiled as I ordered a double-shot of whiskey. We exchanged pleasantries and some small talk. He was working locally after deciding he didn’t need the meager offerings up north the other side of Phoenix.

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I shared with him that I was writing my second book. He looked at me like I was crazy and in a matter-of-fact way said, “Man, nobody reads books anymore.” I replied that I would be marketing it online, where people do actually read stuff. He laughed and asked what it was about. I said stories from people just like you. “Like what?” he asked. So I told him the story about the old guy and the house work. “I can beat that,” he exclaimed.

Seems as though when he was in high school he had a friend that was three years older, which was good because he didn’t have a car nor any license. That friendship blossomed over time and even though his friend was dumb - he used the word stupid – they remain good friends to this day. His friend, who we’ll call Jake, still lives up north.

The guy said the both of them got into motorcycles. It was a hobby a lot of guys pick up – modifying and customizing their bikes is a great pastime and they like to brag on their machines whenever possible.

Jake decided to install a roll bar on this bike, much like you might see on a race car. He acquired a length of heavy rebar, the steel rod used in construction to strengthen concrete floors and walls. He bent the bar and cut the ends to length and then attached it to the motorcycle frame. It was cool!

The two of them were out riding on a back road when they came to a sharp turn. Jake took the inside at speed, leaned his bike into the turn, and caught the roll bar on one of those reflective markers you see next to the road. That thing grabbed Jake and his bike like a giant hand and flung them both unceremoniously into the ditch! Jake came up holding his hand over his forehead, blood all over the place, crying that he had wrecked his head.

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A couple of friends happened along in a pick-up truck. They helped get Jake's bike off the right-of-way, loaded him into the bed, and they all took off for the restaurant over on the main highway. This was back in the day when the restaurant still had the facilities outside so it was a little iffy.

Well, they cleaned him up. He was just certain he was never going to be the same, but when they were all done with his face and head there was no sign of injury. Jake insisted it had to be a bad one because of all the blood. Not even! Not a scratch! That's when one of the guys checked out Jake's hand - the one that had been holding his forehead. Dumb ol' Jake was so worried about his pretty face he hadn't noticed there was no skin on his palm!

Apparently Jake was a real piece of work. He and his girlfriend were on a dirt road one morning, out for a ride in the cool northern Arizona air. She was riding her horse and he was tagging along on his bike.

They stopped for a few minutes when the gal decided she wanted to ride bareback. She said she hadn't ridden bareback for years. Jake helped get the saddle off the horse and cinched it to his motorcycle - on top of the seat. It seemed like a good arrangement until they had gone about a hundred feet. That's when Jake and his bike abruptly slammed into the dirt! Other than his pride, he wasn't hurt. But the bike was messed up. A stirrup had caught in the front wheel!

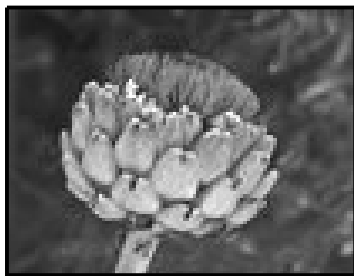
I finished my drink as my new acquaintance launched into a third dumb Jake story. I thanked him and excused myself, certain there were more whoppers to be had at that bar in Wheatfields ... just north of Globe, Arizona.

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Produce

On the Central California Coast, west of Gilroy on the other side of Hecker Pass, is a place called the Pajaro Valley. With its beginnings in the Coast Range between Watsonville and Salinas, the Pajaro River meanders its way to the Monterey Bay south of Santa Cruz.

This is some of the richest farmland in the country. Castroville is the Artichoke Capital of America. Gilroy, on the other side of the Coast Range, is the Garlic Capital. Further inland to the south is Salinas, the Lettuce Capital, home to Bud Antle Produce and Spreckles Sugar. Some of the most gigantic and luscious strawberries grown in America come from the Pajaro Valley west of Watsonville.



The Monterey Bay Area has a very stable climate - not too hot, not too cold, not too wet, not too dry ... the three bears love this place! This is one of the only climates in the country where the artichoke, a giant thistle, grows with abandon. The Pajaro Valley

has the perfect mix of fog, moisture and sunshine for growing Artichokes as big as Softballs. Once the artichoke flower buds are harvested, the monster weeds are harrowed into the ground where they immediately begin to grow again. After a few weeks, the new growth is thinned into rows, ready to produce more giant buds for harvest.



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Watsonville's strawberries are better-than-world-class. They, like the artichoke plants, grow with abandon. It's a perfect climate for growing this wonderful fruit and some of the dunes above the bay produce red, heart-shaped berries as big as billiard balls! These are prized world-wide with the biggest and juiciest selling at a premium.

Which brings us to the next story, which was told to me by a cook who once drove cross-country refrigerated produce trucks. She had just finished a run to Los Angeles and was ready to head out from the produce terminal, when another trucker caught her ear. He was overweight and couldn't take his load on the highway because it was too heavy. He had noticed that she was about to hit the road with a light load (nothing but air) and asked if she could use some strawberries from Watsonville. She knew the quality of the product and asked how much. He said he give it to her for forty bucks. One pallet would lighten his load just enough to get him off the scales.

They had no sooner transferred the goods into her reefer than she was on the CB, bragging that she had a pallet-full of Watsonville strawberries that she'd let go for eight dollars a



flat. A flat of strawberries is about the same width and length as a case, but only as tall as a basket of berries. There are eight one-pound baskets of fruit to a flat. Forty flats can be stacked safely on a pallet without them squashing in transit. So, if each

basket was worth a buck back in the day (eight to a flat), she picked up a pallet load worth \$320 for just \$40. Strawberries for a buck a pound? Hot damn! She said that load of world-class strawberries was sold to other truckers scattered across central California within ten minutes after she hit the road!

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Blackout

A friend was away when the lights went out at his store. His employee – we'll call him Bill - reported the outage and stayed at his post, waiting for the electric company to fix the problem.

It was dark in the store. Really dark - because there was no moon and no street lights. All Bill had to stave off the darkness of the night shift was a flashlight with old batteries.

He heard the solid-state computer power supply screaming that the equipment needed to be turned off before it ran out of juice. It was a piercing sound – Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Almost as bad as fingernails on a blackboard. He got the front turned off and went to the back where he shut the down main computer. Bill worked his way around the back room, felt for the power supply, found the switch and shut it off. At last. Dead silence.

Then a noise came from the front of the store and he worked his way to the front counter. There was a dark figure at the door. Bill asked, "Can I help you?"

"No," came the reply, "I was just going to ask if the power went off in here."

Without missing a beat, ol' Bill quipped, "No. We're part of the Green movement and we're having a no lights night to celebrate Earth Day."

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Thanks

I stopped by the Country Club the other day to say howdy and get a cup of ice to go with my Gatorade - I like it over ice because it's too flavorful for me without the dilution provided by the ice. Even though my dentist absolutely hates it, I like crunching the ice, too.

School was out for the summer and there were kids hanging out at the swimming pool and in every other nook and cranny of the facility. One youngster was lounging on the floor of the entry, rolling around on his leopard colored beach towel. I recall fondly those days of summer. Great to be a kid!

I went into the meeting room where the coffee-maker, iced tea, condiments and ice were kept on a table on a short wall. I was decked out in my summer gear: tennies, long pants, polo shirt and baseball cap. I have a Marine Corps cap that I wear a lot and it was part of my garb for the day.

Having obtained my cupful of ice, I headed for the entry, where the boy who had been lounging on the floor accosted me. He appeared to be about nine. He had spotted the Marine logo and mascot Chesty on the hat. What happened next just absolutely floored me.

Seemingly in passing, the youngster asked if I had been in the Marine Corps. I answered, "Yes, sir." When or where he picked up what he said next will remain a mystery to me. It made my heart swell with pride to be an American who, thank God, never saw live fire during the Viet Nam era - and yet, was still confronted with the respect of a little boy just hanging out at the Country Club.

"Thank you for your service, sir."

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Barbecue

Listening to the radio in the car is standard fare on the way to Phoenix. For a long time Claudette and I used to drive to the valley to play cards at one of the assortment of casinos. We listened to El Rushbo talk conservative politics on KFYI, Garrison Keillor's PBS presentations of A Prairie Home Companion on KJZZ, and those guys that fix things around the house on KTAR.

I had occasion to travel to the east valley to get a prescription filled for new blended bifocal tinted glasses. LensCrafters had a location in the Superstition Mall in Mesa only about an hour from home. They claimed to be able to provide new glasses in just an hour or two, a tremendous saving compared to the one to two weeks to get a prescription filled at home. They didn't let me down. I dropped off the prescription at 11:45am and picked up the new glasses at a quarter-to-two.

On the way home I was listening to the fix-it guys on KTAR. They were talking about barbecue techniques and sharing recipes with the audience. They'd been talking on the phone with a listener about making a great medium-rare steak on the barbie. One of the boys quipped that it sounded absolutely great tasting. He said, "You know your barbecue is great when your guests are all lickin' their fingers."

His buddy came back, "Yeah. And you know it's fantastic when they're all lickin' *each others'* fingers!"

One-at-a-Time Pills

We were watching TV the other night when a commercial came on for some sort of pills. It appeared to be one of those run-of-the-mill commercials pitching another healthy product.

But then, it happened. The actor poured out a single pill from the bottle. Now, when you turn a pill bottle up-side-down you don't get just one pill ... pretty much, they all fall out in a big rush and terrible clatter, usually all over the sink and the floor!

Well, that got me going. If just one pill came out at a time (and these were big puppies, kinda like Tums[®]) they were really on to something!

The odds of some outfit coming up with a special little plastic bottle that allows one pill at a time to drop out were miniscule! So, I suggested we go buy a bottle of these pills and see how the pill-drop thingy works. If it didn't work, we could always return the it for a full refund!

Just think: I get a bottle of these pills, take off the safety seal and cap, tip the container up-side-down, and BOOM! There are pills all over the sink and scattered all over the floor, and we have to shoo the cat away from them, and we have to gather them up from the counter and fish them out of the sink, and sweep them up and collect them off the floor, and then they all have to be corralled back into the bottle. What a mess!

Imagine, I jump in the car and zoom down to the store to turn them in for a refund because they don't do as advertised by coming out just one pill at a time, and they make a big mess when they come out, and you have to clean it up, and I'm so stressed I can hardly stand it! And then, the clerk has the temerity to peer over the counter with a straight face and ask, "Do you have a receipt for these?"

Teaching Independence

My sister Amanda Thayer contributed the following story.

For fifteen of my thirty-one years as an educator I taught middle school social studies. I set up a political party system and a full-on three branch government within the environment. There were always kids from two opposing parties (the names varied, but the split was always near 50-50 in terms of liberal and conservative). A few kids didn't want to join a party. Their votes always swung the elections and they were heavily courted by both parties.

By the time the younger kids were 8th graders, I had a harder and harder time getting them to join a party. They all wanted to be independent. I learned what the kids learned: that both parties are beholden to special interests and are full of baloney. Being an independent makes a lot of sense. The more independents there are, the less sway interest groups have. I hope over the years that I helped to create grown ups who are independent thinkers and voters.

Of course, the kids always took voting very seriously. They had to vote during their break times like after lunch. Some even voted after school. They had to give of their time to make their voices heard. I used to explain that if you didn't vote, you were just letting someone else decide how things were going to go. If you were ok with that, then not voting was ok too. In all those years, even sick kids showed up to vote. There was always a 100% turnout with the exception of one year. That year one kid's parents had taken him with them on a trip to Germany for a month (alas, I was remiss, I hadn't set up an absentee ballot system).

I am a registered independent, biding my time, waiting for more folks to come to the same conclusion I did.

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What's in a Name?

When my wife and I first became acquainted Claudette was a tall willowy drop-dead gorgeous blonde, the kind you always see with girls that aren't quite as attractive. Guys notice these things, which must be more subliminal for women.

One of her friends was a pretty hairdresser, cute actually, but hugely overweight. Another pal was a teacher, a fantastic dresser, homelier than a wooden post. Working across the street from the beauty shop was a young man that regularly hung out with Claudette and her friends.

The ladies' boy friend was a very nice guy, well mannered, well spoken and ever so slightly effeminate, with a slight lisp. He was by no means a limp-wristed flaming girly-man, rather a young man that growing up probably had no father and no brothers, and most likely didn't play sports in school. Willis was his name.

It was difficult writing about him in another book. There was no indication that he liked males better than females socially. He didn't flit like a social butterfly, flirting and flashing pearly teeth in a crowd. He simply blended in. He was a perfect fit with Claudette's friends. Still, his name was Willis.

Claudette and I were discussing his slightly off-the-norm demeanor the other evening when I mentioned how Willis' name was so perfect for him. She quipped, "Yeah. Just think how difficult it must have been growing up for that actor Bruce Willis."

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Hotter'n the Dickens!

Back in the mid-70s Claudette and I had occasion to visit a hole-in-the-wall family-operated Mexican food restaurant on South 12th Avenue in South Tucson.

There was nothing special about the place other than it looked more like a converted old adobe house with white stucco and red trim. Inside the front door was a room about the same size as most Tucson adobe living rooms and it contained four tables for four. Off to the right was a larger room, what one might expect as a family room for dining and visiting. It had a half-dozen tables that could seat four to eight each. It wasn't crowded but rather, compact and comfortable. The interior walls were white stucco decorated with pictures and trinkets. It was charming and welcoming.

The menu was Spartan with the usual Mexican fare. We were there because it was recommended by a local newsmagazine. I ordered Machitos, a dish made with tripe such as is used in Menudo, the traditional hangover cure. Claudette and the kids had ordered burros. There was the usual mild and hot salsas and flour tortilla chips for appetizers. Claudette and I ordered Margaritas. The kids had Cokes over ice.

As we waited for our orders we picked away at the chips and salsa. While the rest dipped their chips in the mild salsa, I tackled the hot stuff. It was fantastic! Absolutely delicious! Truly, the best I ever had.

I was munching out, savoring the chips and salsa, when I started to flush. Claudette mentioned that I looked sorta sun-burned. I was starting to sweat. She looked worried. The sweat began pouring off my forehead into my eyes, off my cheeks and chin. That salsa was hot. It toasted the corners of my lips but didn't burn my mouth or tongue. Hot enough,

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though, to make the pores on my head open like a thunderstorm and flow like a southwest gully-washer!

The staff peered around the corner of the kitchen door, wide-eyed, as the red flush moved slowly up my neck. They (and my wife) snickered as the sweat - pouring off my forehead, running down my face, dripping off my chin - became too much. "May I have a towel?" I asked. They brought three, one of which I draped over my head, a second around my neck. Wow! That salsa was hot stuff – hotter'n anything I'd ever eaten before. But God, it was good!

The Machitos was delicious ... especially with the salsa slathered all over it, pushed on my fork with a buttered tortilla. Sumptuous is the word.

I'll never forget that Mexican dinner. I wish I could remember the name of that little hole-in-the-wall restaurant so very long ago. Haven't had anything quite that good since.

Hispanic - Latino - Mexican?

I belong to a rural country club that's been a part of Globe-Miami in central Arizona since 1927. Originally, the Cobre Valle Country Club was built for the management and guests of the Miami-Inspiration Consolidated copper mine. It was a very exclusive whites-only private club.

The laborers who cared for the facility's nine-hole executive golf course were mostly Mexicans. While they shed copious amounts of sweat caring for the grounds and were very well paid for their skills, initially none were allowed to play.

After a while the club allowed selected employees to play golf after hours at dusk, which let them get in one or two holes.

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Finally, after many years, the club decided it needed someone to teach members the finer points of the game. It happened that one of the Mexican employees was a natural and they asked for his help. Bobby Lopez was his name and he earned a reputation as a skilled golfer and great teacher.

The members of the club were so impressed with Lopez' prowess they invited him to play with them and eventually invited him to become a member. Bobby had broken the closely-guarded color barrier at Miami-Inspiration.

It wasn't long before memberships were opened to the public. Businessmen, engineers, social climbers, and even Mexicans were allowed to join the prestigious Country Club. Over the years, even though some vowed never to frequent such a racist environment, more and more men and women of Hispanic lineage took advantage of the amenities. Bobby Lopez became a legend as the Latino who integrated golf in central Arizona.

Over the years, the expense of maintaining a country club and its grounds took a toll on the membership because the mine began to cut back its support. Eventually, it furnished only the corporate umbrella and water, leaving members to foot the difference. With expenses and dues increasing over time the club lost a number of its Latino members who began to feel unwanted. With the advent of a new world-class golf venue located on the adjacent San Carlos Reservation, many locals gravitated to the new Apache Stronghold.

In the 2010s the club made a number of advances, attracting new members from the mine, which decided to put up a health stipend for employees who worked out at the facility. The club in turn provided access to equipment, ball courts, running trail and swimming pool, in addition to golf. Past members began dropping by for occasional golf and refreshments at the bar.

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After a round of golf not long ago, a group of regulars were joined at the bar by three former members, well-known Latinos. They were having drinks and making small talk toward one end of the bar when the conversation turned to an up-coming golf tournament to benefit a local Hispanic man. He had contracted a very rare and debilitating disease but miraculously survived. Friends and benefactors worked up a golf tournament to help with his expenses.

A friend asked me to implore the three Latinos at the other end of the bar to sign up for the tournament. I knew all three men and approached them. I said, “My friend over there requested that I ask you fine Hispanic gentlemen to please join us for the tournament a week from Saturday.”

The oldest of the men, whom I had known for over two decades, said he’d consider it. “But first,” he exclaimed, “you need to tell your friend over there that we don’t go by Hispanic any more – we are Messicans!”

Rope Swing Accident

One of the bartenders at the country club had been studying nursing as a profession when she changed from Registered Nurse to Practitioner because the glut of RNs across the country makes finding a job difficult.

This bartender/almost Nurse-Practitioner had a son who she said had pushed the envelope physically since he was about four years old. She bragged on his motor racing skills, but worried out loud that one day he would be seriously injured. Even so, he continued to push the envelope. In addition to his bravado, he was a great practical joker.

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During his sixteenth summer, the lad played frequently with friends at the Salt River Bridge just east of Roosevelt Lake. The area was very popular with young adults and high-school kids. The water under the bridge was comfortable with deep spots great for diving. Further down the river were a diversion dam with a shallow lip good for wading and several rocky shallow spots accessible from the sandy beach close by.

There was a thick rope hanging from the bottom of the bridge used for swinging out over the river and jumping off. Access to the rope was via a giant boulder next to the bridge ... sort of the same setup you might see all across America where kids would swing off a rope hung in a tree next to a river or lake.

Late one the afternoon, after a trip to the bridge, the youngster arrived home with a slight limp. His mom noticed and asked what happened. "Oh, I jumped too far off the rope swing and hit a rock in the bottom." She continued her interrogation, wanting to know if he was injured. He said that maybe she could tell whether he needed to go to the emergency room, what with her studying nursing and all.

"Oh, dear. What happened to you?" she asked.

"I got hit in the balls, mom, and I think my right testicle either got smashed or shoved up into my body 'cause it doesn't seem to be there anymore," he said.

Steeling herself for disaster, the boy's mom told him to drop his drawers. He pulled his trousers down and said, "I don't know, mom, maybe you shouldn't look."

Undaunted, she was about to reach for his shorts when the boy started laughing. She recoiled, annoyed, and asked, "What are you laughing about, young man?"

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“Nothing, mom. I just didn’t think you’d fall for it!”

Rain Check

For over seventy years I’ve believed that a man’s word was his bond. One Friday I found out that’s no longer true.

Some friends had invited me to go play golf with them at the Apache Stronghold, a very nice course on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation. I was short in the allowance department so I wouldn’t have been able to join my friends, except that I had a rain-check, hand-written by the Pro at the time, way back in November of 1999. It said: *Rain Check 11-12-1999 Ted Thayer with cart* and it was signed with the head guy’s initials.

I had kept that rain-check (like the free Pie Card I was given way-back-when by Fay Lumley at Jerry’s Restaurant and the ancient, undated coupon from Pizza Hut) as something to be held for a special occasion. I called ahead the afternoon before the get-together to get assurance that the old post-it would be honored. The attendant said it would be and that a note would be left giving the morning attendant a heads-up. Special occasion. Play with friends. Outside. Good to go.

I showed up, waited my turn in the cue and finally presented the rain-check. “That’s no good,” the attendant said. I explained that I had called about it and she said they had received the heads-up and the boss said it was no good. Shamed in front of friends, I asked for the boss. The club Pro told me, “We only honor rain-checks for 90 days. Sorry.” Humiliated and red-faced, I took my clubs and left.

I had always believed that employees at all levels, including their bosses, represented the word and bond of their company.

Wake-up Call

We've had this little-girl kitty for going on 17 years as of this writing. We got Misty and her brother Murray at the Vet. They were two of the four offspring of the Office Kitty, a cat allowed to run free in trade for transfusions and company. Murray was a dark tiger-striped tabby cat. He had a color-matched sister. Misty was a charcoal-grey kitty with a brother that looked like her. Never heard what happened to the other two from the Vet cat's litter.

Our "Old Man", the cat that raised our kids, Tiger was his name, learned to talk when he was about twelve. He greeted me at the back door to the kitchen every day. I'd come in the door and shout, "Hellooo!" – and after many years he began to reply. It wasn't like Scooby-do's "*Ruh Roh!*" It was more like "*Hair Rowww!*" And it got louder the older he got. Ol' Tiger lived to the ripe old age of twenty-one – quite ancient for a Main Coon Cat. He was a good ol' boy.

Misty outlived her bother Murray, who withered and died from the cat equivalent of AIDs. His sister missed him terribly, but she finally adjusted to being the Guard Cat. She defends the porch and her kitty door, and chases the bad guys.

Like Tiger, Misty took to shouting "*Helloo*" whenever anybody came in the room. In the last year she's taken to announcing her presence when entering the living room or bedroom. And when the coffee pot goes off in the early mornings a little after seven, she jumps on the bed, whispers little kitty peeps for a while, followed by a hearty "Hello!"

The garbage man comes to our house very promptly at 7:00am on Mondays and Thursdays. Little girl, as we call Misty, lets us know that he has come and taken the trash away. Usually, she just jumps up on the bed and makes little whispering

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noises, quietly sounding the alarm that the garbage man has come and gone and done his job. But last week she showed that old kitties can learn new tricks with little or no help from mom or dad.

It was Thursday morning when I was awakened with a loud, “*Hellooh!*” from the foot of the bed. It was Misty calling. She jumped up on the covers and literally stomped her way up my body, tramping her little feet into my legs and torso before stopping next to my ear and shouting, “*Hello!*” She was insistent. “*Hello!*” And then she jumped down and ran into the living room, calling “*Hello, Hello!*” all the way.

On one elbow, I squinted at the clock. 7:00am it said. Again a loud “*Hello!*” came from the front room. Without a second thought, I got up to see what was going on. It was then that I heard the rumble of the garbage truck’s exhaust system as it pulled away from the neighbor’s driveway. The truck was gone by the time I realized that Misty had come into the bedroom to remind me to take the trash out. Too late. Drat!

Repair Mistakes and Blunders

Tom in North Dakota's story about the frozen cooling system (November *RockAuto Newsletter*) reminded me of a similar story that happened on my watch as a school bus mechanic.

One of the drivers was having problems with the heaters in his bus. After he warmed it up one frosty morning last year, I checked the operating parameters detailed by the gauges on the vehicle's dashboard. Everything checked normal, but there was no heat. I asked the driver if he had done a full pre-trip inspection on the vehicle before starting it. He assured me that he had. Well, somehow that didn't sound quite right, so I obtained the pre-trip clipboard and inspected it. There was a

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line drawn down the page for that day. None of the gazillion points had been checked and the driver hadn't signed and dated his entry. At that point I decided to do a full-up pre-trip inspection myself to see what I could find. There were a couple of by-pass knobs under the bus directing coolant through the heating system. Both were all the way open, meaning coolant was supposedly going through the heaters. I opened the petcock on the radiator and hot water came out - so what was the problem?

One of the first components of a pre-trip inspection - before the engine is started - are the levels of engine oil, power steering, window-washer fluid, and coolant. I got good reads for oil, steering and window washer but there was not enough coolant in the radiator to touch the tip of my middle finger. I asked the driver if he had checked all the fluids. He said he had, even though the components weren't checked on the inspection sheet.

Coolant on the tip of the finger is a sure sign the level is good, even on automobiles. I decided to top off the radiator. It finally topped out after two gallons of coolant! There had been just enough coolant for the engine, but not for the heaters. With a full load of coolant the bus heaters worked just fine! (BTW -The bus driver doesn't work there anymore.)

That's a Lotta Baloney!

Back in my early days in Broadcasting, I held jobs with dual responsibilities – Chief Engineer and DeeJay. When we lived in Aptos, California, I drove six miles from home every morning at about 5:00am to the transmitter on the Monterey Bay near Watsonville, checked to see that it was working as expected, and then commuted another twenty miles to Salinas where I did the morning show at KDON-AM. It was a good

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job and I enjoyed the engineering challenges and the equal challenge posed by the on-the-air competition for listeners.

My devoted bride of two years stayed at home with our new son Johnny. She took the responsibilities of new motherhood very seriously and postpartum depression bothered her for quite a while after the little boy was born. Nevertheless, she also took her responsibilities as a wife with equal seriousness. There was always a great meal for dinner and she made a bag lunch every evening for me to take along to work.

One day after my air shift, before the usual stint in the Production Room (where we created the commercials), I had time to eat my lunch and have a cup of coffee. It was 9:30am.

I got my nasty old cup off its hook. (Radio people usually have nasty coffee cups unless there is some sweet thing in the office with a strong stomach who will clean them occasionally!) A spoonful of sugar was shoveled into it followed by a glop of hours-old coffee. (Coffee made by broadcasters is usually made very early and sits very long, sort of fermenting, before someone breaks down, sloshes out the dregs and makes a fresh batch.)

I sat down at the console in Production, carefully placed my coffee cup away from the electronics, and gingerly peeled open the paper bag containing the goodies Claudette had prepared for her loving husband. There were two offerings ... a PB&J and a balogna made with butter, mayo, mustard and a big lettuce leaf. With them was one of those ubiquitous dark brown cupcakes topped with dark chocolate frosting with a curly-cue, filled with sweet, white goo – a Ding-Dong made by Hostess, I think. It's been at least five decades, but I think there was also a banana in the bag.

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There was no choice – after a sip of coffee, the old way to go was with the PB&J. (For those of you among the un-initiated, Skippy Chunky Peanut-butter and Boysenberry Jam.) Next came a couple of bites of the banana. Then the treat: Balogna!

Now, you'd think the Ding-Dong would be the star of the show, but remember it was mid-morning. Cupcakes are great with coffee on the way home in the early afternoon.

I took the balogna sandwich out and met with resistance halfway through the first bite. It was like the meat was a very thin piece of leather. I pulled it away from my mouth and discovered the balogna was just a picture of the meat! I peeled back the bread and there it was staring right back at me - the label from the package, clearly labeled Oscar Meyer!

I still think it was one of the greatest practical jokes ever played on me – but Claudette *swears* it was an accident!

The Lobsters at Clark's Camp

Talk to anybody not from the Deep South and they'll likely tell you tales about the crawdads they caught when they were kids.

Back in the early fifties the Thayer clan lived in Petaluma, California. The Egg Capital of the World is south of Santa Rosa, now famous for its place just west of the exclusive Napa Valley wine country.

Friends of the family had a cabin in the foothills between Santa Rosa and the Napa Valley and we used to go there several times a year where the folks partied and us kids played in the adjacent meadows and oak-covered hillsides. The cabin was typical of the time, what you would picture in the back of

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your mind - a two-story log affair containing a dirt floor with a large area (for cooking and eating and shootin' the breeze) and a huge loft running the width of the place, accessible up a log ladder. Outside the cabin was a refrigerator, probably among the first of its kind, with a spigot on its door. Payson Clark, our host, always had a beer keg in that thing, ready for guests.

Running through the meadow next to the cabin was a little creek that seemed to run clear all the time no matter the season. It was about two feet deep with a sandy, stone-peppered bottom and steep banks averaging about five feet apart. There were large rocks immersed along the banks, making fine hiding places for crawdads.

Northern California creeks and rivers, and those in most of the rest of the northwestern United States, are home to fresh-water lobsters known elsewhere as crayfish, mudbugs or crawdads. While southern mudbugs measure four to six inches in length, northwest crayfish are huge – a good eight to twelve inches long and an inch-and-half across– more like little lobsters!

Back in her childhood, my wife lived in Parkrose, a suburb of Portland, on the banks of the Columbia River. She has reminisced often of the times she and friends went out to an island in the river near home where they would fish for crawdads. She, too, remembers little lobsters much larger than the tiny crustaceans they trap in the bayous of the Deep South.

At Clark's Camp we caught monsters! We were given a bucket about a foot tall – maybe three gallons – that we put them in. We cut three-foot switches from low-hanging tree limbs and tied five or six foot lengths of string to them, fashioning kid-sized fishing poles. We'd look around to find a stone of the right size - maybe an inch around – and tie it to the end of the string on each pole. Then came the pièce de résistance: a slice of bacon. We were ready for bear!

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We'd find a likely spot on the bank of the creek with a rock on the bottom that looked like a place a wily crawdad would hide. Then the bacon would be slowly lowered into the water next to the rock. The grease from the bacon would rise to the top and slowly drift downstream, enticing others. Soon, a pair of pincers would appear from behind the rock and a crawdad would carefully grasp the bacon and pull it toward its little mandibles. Crawdads really like bacon! They love it so much, they won't let go! All we had to do was slowly retrieve the string, rock and bacon - along with the crawdad - and lower it into the bucket. When it felt the bottom of the container, the crawdad would let go! Shazam!

We'd catch eight or ten of them and pack 'em up to the cabin where Miriam - Payson's wife - would boil up a pot of salted water and cook those babies 'til they turned bright orange. We cracked them with a hammer and ate 'em with melted butter and lemon juice. And a Coke. Boy! Those were the days!

Am I Supposed to Feel This?

In my book *Caca Pasa* there is a story involving my annual visits to the local hospital for a colonoscopy. It's very graphic and to some grotesque. In essence, the doctor puts a tiny camera on a long, flexible tube up your backside and looks for defects inside that could lead to cancer. Be that as it may ...

Some years ago I was on the table in the outpatient operating room. The doctor and I had exchanged pleasantries just before the nurse-anesthetist floated me off to a sedated dreamland. I recall being all warm and comfortable - and oblivious.

I awoke in a fog to a feeling of pressure like gas in my tummy. Only it was moving around in there! I don't recall any pain.

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But it caught me by surprise. I opened one eye, looked at the nurse and asked, “Am I supposed to feel this?”

The nurse, quite calmly replied, “Well ... no.”

Being a little closer to things than the nurse, I noticed that the I.V. line had somehow come unplugged from the connection to my arm. “Is that blood dripping out there?” Meanwhile, the movement and pressure continued in my insides.

“Well, let’s fix that right now,” said the nurse, reconnecting the I.V. to the line furnishing the anesthesia. The next thing I recall was waking very slowly in the recovery room.

In retrospect, I’m glad it wasn’t surgery ...

McGuire Island

His name was Bob McGuire and his wife hated it on his island, according to Claudette, who learned to swim there, just across the Columbia river from the paper mill at Camas, Washington, the home of pop-singer-to-be Jimmy Rogers.

Bob McGuire was a friend of Bob Kiewel, Claudette’s first step-father. Bob and Bob would have a big get-together on the 4th-of-July week-end and all sorts of family members would show up for the festivities. Some would go home when the day was done – some would stay on the island to sober up.

Log rafts were brought upstream from Tillamook, where they were cut and constructed, to provide the fodder for the paper mill at Camas. The whole Kiewel family would go out on the log rafts tied up on the Oregon side to fish for crawdads and river fish (including catfish, salmon, and whatever else was hangin’ out there, according to Claudette.)

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Bob's wife hated it on McGuire Island because ... it had no amenities – no pumbing, no toilet (except for the outhouse), no telephone, no nothin'. If she wanted to go for groceries, she had to find a boat to take her across the river to the place where the car was parked. Then it would require her to haul the load from the car to the boat and back to the island. It was like pioneer life in the middle of a modern city!

In the spring the water level on the river rose as the Bonneville Dam released the water from rainfall upstream. The island would flood every spring, forcing Bob and his wife to evacuate, only to return when the waters receded.

They would muck out the mess left by the high waters and start over every year, until one year she said, "That's it!" She insisted that she would not return to the island and that spartan lifestyle. She and Bob parted company. She took the kids and moved to town. She never returned and he never left, except in the spring. When the water rose on the river, he would go to town and stay with her until the waters again receded. They remained good friends and attended parties together, but she never again set foot on McGuire island except to visit for a while. She always made sure there was a way to get home before dark.

Violet's TV set

The phone rang the other morning. I picked it up, "Hello?"

A tiny voice - it appeared to be quite elderly - asked "Can you come fix my TV?"

I have a friend with whom I'd had a short conversation earlier. He's a practical joker and I thought perhaps it was he on the

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phone. Not wanting to offend if the caller wasn't him, I asked, "What seems to be the problem?"

The voice – it sounded like a very frail, elderly woman – said, "It won't turn on."

Thinking quickly - still not wanting to offend - but suspicious, I remembered the most common cause of such a problem. Without being facetious, I asked, "Is it plugged in? You know, a lot of folks move their TVs to vacuum the floor and then forget to plug it back in."

"No. I didn't vacuum. It's plugged in. It just won't come on. Can you come over here and make it work?"

I was stuck, had no clue who it was. So I asked, "Where is 'over here'?"

It was quiet. No answer. Then there came the tell-tale clicks and thumps of a phone being hung up and the line went dead. It very well could have been my friend giving me a bad time!

I went into the bedroom, where we keep another phone that displays caller ID. A quick check showed a calling number I didn't recognize. A look in the phone book showed an address two blocks up the hill from the radio station in Central Heights. The woman's name was Violet. So, I called back.

"Hello?"

"Violet, is that you?"

"Why, yes. Who's calling?"

"It's Ted Thayer. You called asking me to come over and turn on your TV. Are you up the hill from the radio station?"

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“Yes.

“Did they give you my number?”

“No. I must have mis-dialed.”

“I’m sorry. Did you get the TV going?”

“Oh, yes,” she said, “It’s working fine now.”

“Violet, I’m 74 years old and I used to fix TVs many years ago ... and I worked for the radio station for a while, so I thought they might have given you my number.”

She giggled a little-old-lady giggle and said, “No. I’m sure I just dialed a wrong number. Thank you so much for helping.”

What are the odds that a little-old-lady with a bum TV would accidentally call a wrong number and connect with a guy who used to fix TVs and worked just down the street? Another of those Twilight Zone moments, wouldn’t you say?

Walmartians are REAL!

I dropped by a local fast food joint to pick up a couple of burgers to take home for an afternoon snack.

I waited for a few minutes for the girl behind the counter to take my order. She was busy filling soft drink cups for other waiting customers. When she had finished she turned to me and asked, “May I help you?”

“Why, yes,” I said, “I’d like a couple of hamburgers with everything on them to take home with me.”

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“Do you want them here or to go?” she asked in reply.

“Oh, I guess I’ll take them with me,” I quipped.

“How many did you want?”

“A couple, please.”

How many is that?”

“Two.”

“What would you like on them, sir?”

“Everything, please.”

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She was a pretty little thing, but I don’t think she stuck around very long when they were passing out brains at school.

The bill was eight dollars and change. When I gave her a Twenty, she fidgeted until the computer told her how much change to give me. Then she asked the boss if pennies were ok for making change.

Another customer wrote on Facebook of her experience with the same cashier, “I had ordered a half order of biscuits and gravy and received only the bottom halves!”

Another Facebook customer writes “The menu has Onion Rings at \$4.50 and there were 3 onion rings that showed up! When I called to have them rectify the situation, their response was "That's all that comes in the order."

And I thought this stuff only happens in emails!

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First Days of Camp Quien Sabe

Before Camp Cawatre could first be used in 1952 the place had to be cleaned. Years before it had been a Girl Scout Camp - but sitting idle with no maintenance or upkeep meant it was a mess that Mother Nature was trying desperately to take back to her bosom. There were weeds and new growth everywhere. If there was a crack, there was something growing in it. The building(s) - I can't remember one, two or three - were covered inside and out with dirt and dust. There was absolutely no evidence that people had been there for several years.

The worst part was the swimming pool. Yek! It had not been drained. It still had water in it ... about half full ... and what there was of it was green with algae and aquatic plants. And there were dead things in there ... a couple of decomposing rats, I think. There were a couple of water snakes lounging on the green goo floating on top. It smelled like a sewer, all gawdawful icky and nasty! Well, it had to be cleaned and made ready for a crop of campers coming in a couple of weeks.

I recall the first day for the crew was spent shoveling and sweeping for the most part. It's a little hazy all these years later. I think the clean-up crew included "Big Phyl" Clark, her brother Kenton and her mom Miriam, as well as my brother Bill and me, among others. (Sister Mandy was very little at the time and was given little-girl-sized chores by our mom Ruth.) I wouldn't swear to it, but I think Jim and Ruth Speakman and their offspring also participated. (I'm sure I'll be corrected by those who were or were not present those first few days!)

A couple of us went with my dad Duke to see what could be done with the water supply because there was none at the spigots. We went upstream from the camp to see if there was enough elevation to sustain a good flow of water, and to see if the system still operated. (Creek water was collected upstream and filled a tank that fed the pipes and spigots in the campground.) The water system was in good shape because it

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had been drained and the source had been capped. There were a few lizards living in the tank, which had its share of dust and growth in it, but the pipes were intact and the spigots had been closed so that part of the job was a snap. We caught the lizards and cleaned out the tank before un-capping the piping upstream. It seemed like it took forever for water to start flowing into the tank. It was going on dusk, so we were relieved that it would fill overnight.

With water available, the second day was spent cleaning, and sterilizing buildings, pulling overgrowth and mucking out the pool.

There are few things on the face of the earth more gross than a swimming pool full of stagnant water, green stuff and dead animals - except maybe the diaper on a toddler with loose bowels! Those of us who participated in the "great pool clean-up" went after the job with panache! Using shovels and buckets and a wheelbarrow (from God-knows-where) we cleaned out the goo and actually got down to real water!

It was a concrete pool with no cool-deck, just concrete like a sidewalk, as I recall. The edges around the pool were local stone, cut in what I remember were maybe 12 by 6 inch pieces. It was quite attractive after all the muck was gone and it had been scrubbed with the same kind of brushes they used on the buildings. With fresh water available, the chore turned to sterilization. Clorox® - five or six gallons of it - were poured into the nearly clean pool. (Back in the day, Clorox® was not a poison that killed people - is was a potent disinfectant and bleach.) We waded around in the bleach water concoction and scrubbed anything exposed to the air. Turns out - there was no drain (that I remember) so the pool was refilled with creek water until it over-flowed. Clorox® was used to keep the pH balance right, preventing the proliferation of bugs and algae.

By the third day, when we had finished, the thing looked and smelled (and tasted) like a real honest-to-goodness swimming pool, ready for the first batch ever of Camp Cawatre campers!

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The rest of the camp readiness team had completed their work about the same time we pool-rats did. In a mere three days we had taken an old, run-down, neglected Girl Scout campground from disaster to ready to rock-'n'-roll. The reward for our toil was a piece of history!

Lettuce & Politics

Back in the day – as they sometimes say – I was a stone-cold, all-American, long-haired, hippie freak (at least that's what a number of folks thought.) My beautiful bride and I were not unfamiliar with Saturday evening gatherings at our humble abode. It was a three-bedroom, one-and-a-half bath, 1600 foot adobe home with air, in the northeast section of Tucson.

Over a period of several decades we and a number of other families with children became well-acquainted – well enough that someone was always available to care for the kids, including ours, so the others could party ... just about every Friday or Saturday. We all had great stereos and music to match, and there was not a bad cook in the bunch so tables were always set with – as they say – everything from soup to nuts ... mostly pot-luck and BYOB! And everyone was always glad to see the others. That was the culture of the 60s and 70s.

Some partygoer always had a “stash” – either at the house or brought along in a baggie for the occasion. Sometimes a taste of coke would turn up, secreted away in a bathroom with a mirror and a razor blade. We never did “blow” like they show in the movies - with a hundred-dollar bill. A drinking straw was just fine. And the idea was to perk up after a little too much to drink or maybe a little too much marijuana. I never snorted Coke - stories of deformed sinuses, I think. I tasted it instead. After a few tries to very little effect, I blew the drug off as much too bitter.

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So the stage is set. There was a party at the Thayer house with maybe thirty folks in attendance. The spread of edibles was great! There was a plate of meats including hard salami slices, ham, roast beef, chicken, even balogna! There were bowls of fruit chunks, nuts and assorted cheese cubes and several different dips with Fritos, Ruffles, Clover Club potato chips, carrot and celery sticks and little chunks of cauliflower and broccoli. And there were all the ubiquitous comestibles: Mustard, mayo, kosher dill pickle chips, white, yellow and red onion slices, olives, deviled eggs and of course, salt and a pepper corn grinder. There were big bottles of Coke, Seven-Up, A&W Root Beer, and Hawaiian Punch. Pretty much all the good stuff!

So the stage is set. There was a bunch of us sitting in the living room on the teddy-bear furniture ... it was huge! The couch set four; the love-seat three, the ottoman and rocker accommodated another pair. We had big pillows strewn out on the living room floor, an inch deep in carpet and three-quarter-inch padding. It was a very comfortable place for at least a dozen, maybe fifteen people. We were spread out all over everywhere, watching the TV.

I don't remember what show it was – *Saturday Night Live*? At any rate ...it was something involving vegetables. And like Public Television sometimes, they were showing artistry. You know - orange carrots, green cucumbers, yellow bananas, red apples – you get it. Whatever it takes to capture the hearts and minds of long-haired hippie freaks! We were enraptured by a head of lettuce! As Ben Stein might say, “Wow ...”

There we were, hangin' out on the couch and the floor. And there was my brother, the kid who read Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* at the ripe old age of eight. He was as liberal as Joan Baez had ever imagined in her wildest expectations! Billy

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was espousing the political virtues of something-or-other to no-one-in-particular, but especially poor Gary who was perched on the opposite end of the couch, the other side of his wife Sandy, seated next to me. Yadda yadda yadda brother Bill went, blathering political gobbledygook to the masses. Poor Gary just stared at the TV.

That's when it started. First, Sandy noticed. She giggled. Then Claudette noticed. She, too, giggled. Some of the other TV watchers noticed and started to laugh. Billy had pre-empted this slowly rotating commercial vegetable on TV! Pretty soon, everybody was laughing. Laughing is not an apt description. It was more like a gang-guffaw!

The commercial was almost over by the time my little brother finally got it and asked: "What ...???"

My Stars!

I was outside the other night taking the trash out to the street, something I do every Sunday and Wednesday evening. For no particular reason, I looked up, checking out the sky. "My goodness!" I thought, "Far out!"

In an earlier book I had written about my adventures as a Boy Scout. But, I don't fully recall the joy of sky-watching. Maybe it's just something that comes with age. I really don't know. At any rate ...here we go.

In my youth, as a Cub Scout I think, I learned how to find my way if I got lost by using the North Star to assure travel in a predictable direction. That education also included identifying constellations scattered across the heavens such as Orion, Cassiopeia, the Big Dipper and the Pleiades - better known as the Seven Sisters.

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I learned that finding the North Star was as easy as locating the Big Dipper and following a line from the two stars in the outer lip of its “bowl” to the first star in the “handle” of the Little Dipper. That’s Polaris, the North Star. You know you’ve located the proper constellations if you see both Dippers pouring into each other!

Polaris is more accurate than a compass because the North Star is always positioned directly over Earth’s geographic North Pole - unlike a compass, which points to its magnetic North Pole, located near Ellesmere Island in northern Canada. Making a compass even less accurate is the fact that the magnetic North Pole moves! Yes! ...as much as fifty miles a year toward the northwest! Polaris, on the other hand, has remained solidly anchored in the same spot in the heavens since eons before dinosaurs walked the Earth.

Using the North Star for direction finding works only in the Northern Hemisphere. In the Southern Hemisphere another constellation, the Southern Cross, is commonly used to show lost souls the way.

When we are young – before puberty – we see the best we will ever see. Hormones affect the lenses in young eyes as puberty approaches, dimming visual acuity, crispness and clarity ever so slightly. Only adults who have had lens implants as a result of cataracts see as well as they did when they were children. That’s my situation.

Lens implant surgeries more than two decades ago drastically improved my vision. I remember being stunned by the sudden brilliance, contrast and clarity. My wife had the same surgery some time ago and was equally stunned. On a trip to Tucson one weekend, Claudette ooo’d and aah’d at each new view around every bend in the road. She said she didn’t know

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Arizona landscapes were so beautiful because she had never really seen them. That's pretty much the way it is with me, especially since I suffered the detached retina a number of years ago. I cherish that clarity of vision even more because it comes from my "good" eye alone. Maybe that's why star-gazing has returned to my vocabulary.

I remember watching the sky while lying on my back on the grass in the front yard at home in Monterey. I recall basking in the starlight, picking out the constellations while on the chaise lounge in the patio. And I remember reclining on my sleeping bag, hands clasped behind my head, watching the skies. While it goes without saying that those were opportunities for star-gazing, I can't say that was foremost in my mind at the time. It was better to watch for shooting stars! There was a time when my girlfriend and I kicked back on a blanket spread on a beach near Big Sur gazing at the stars. That was good ... watching the stars ... romantic. Both of us were camp counselors, so we were versed in the location of the constellations, and we pointed them out. But I don't recall anything spectacular or particularly outstanding about the skies above us in the summers of the '50s.

There was a time driving northbound in California's central valley about dusk one evening in the early '60s when something strange, a bright white light – like a star – rose straight up from the horizon into the sky and appeared to almost stop, suspended. I pulled over to the roadside and got out to take a look. The light crossed the sky above from north to south, much like an airplane but faster, and disappeared straight down into the southern horizon. After some thought, it dawned on me that what we had just seen was a satellite, high enough that the sun lit it up from high above the Pacific. There was a good possibility that it was Echo 1, the first telecommunications satellite, predecessor to the Bell

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Telephone Laboratories Telstar project. Now, that was a trip! Seeing the future!

Other than the moon, the brightest objects in the night sky are the planets - Jupiter, Venus and Mars, which almost line up in a line with Jupiter highest and Mars closest to the horizon. One other bright object in the sky is actually a star – Sirius. They call it the Dog Star for its prominence in constellation Canis Major. All four of these bright lights are the first to appear in the skies just after dusk. Usually Venus and Jupiter appear first and brightest as the night comes.

These days, I like to stop and look to the skies with my remaining good eye, the one with the razor-sharp vision. How nice to peer at the stars and imagine what it would be like to see them again with two eyes. It would likely be twice as clear and the stars surely would twinkle twice as brightly as they do now ... better than I recall from my youth.

Ah, yes. While one is forced to accept the vicissitudes and inclementcies of life ... we can appreciate the contrast so fittingly imposed upon us by the splendor of the night skies!

Summer Rain

Ah, the smell of summer rain in the desert! What an extraordinary jolt to the senses!

I recall vacationing in central Arizona back in the late 40s and early 50's. My folks would load up the Chevy Woody (station wagon) and traipse across California and Arizona to visit relatives at Cottonwood and Mayer, and old friends at the Orme Ranch and on the Hopi Reservation.

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We always went on vacation in late July or early August. And we always ran into the summer rains - especially in the deserts of southern California and central Arizona. Back then they weren't called *Chubascos* or *Monsoons* or *Haboobs*. It was usually, "Look at the size of those raindrops!" or, "Wow, that's a good one!" They were just the summer storms that made the creeks and washes come down.

I remember looking over the front seat behind mom and pop at the grand dessert vistas with huge puffy white clouds billowing off in the distance. Sooner or later, we'd have to roll up the windows to avoid getting wet. Those were the days when you strapped a canvas drinking water bag to the front bumper and you drove with all the windows open to keep the heat at a minimum.

One summer, pop decided to rent one of those in-the-passenger-window air-operated vehicle swamp coolers. It was ok, but the person sitting next to it (my mom) was uncomfortably cool, and it only worked at highway speeds.

Then there was the summer we drove through a sandstorm in the Mojave desert. It was a dilly! The car had to have a new paint job and windshield when we got back home to California. A Phoenix weatherman came up with a new word some years back, so now we call a sandstorm a *Haboob*.

I moved my little family to Tucson in the late 60s. Michael Goodrich, a TV weatherman in the Old Pueblo, brought with him the *Chubasco*. That's what they call summer squalls with thunder and rain along Baja California and in Central and South America. The name is not Mexican, but rather originated from the Portuguese-speaking natives of Brazil. Goodrich made a name for himself and remained in Tucson, not moving on after a few years as so many other broadcasters had done.

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Some time later, just before Y2K I think, a still-wet-behind-the-ears Phoenix NOAA weathercaster brought us the *Monsoon(s)*. Nobody remembers his name.

I think the weather people have dropped all the fancy words for the most part and just call them *Thunderstorms* anymore.

I don't recall flash floods. At least that's not what they called them back in the day. One summer we were at the T-Anchor ranch visiting Uncle Charlie and Aunt Verde. Just after we were bedded down for the night a huge storm blew in with lots of thunder and lightning and torrents of rain. My little brother and I had been stashed in the bunk-house for safekeeping - just the two of us. Talk about scared! I thought we were gonna get blown up and Billy was sure we'd be blown away. Hiding under the covers is uncomfortable when it's still 85 degrees or so inside. We survived. The next day after breakfast Uncle Charlie said we'd have to wait an hour or two before going on our way. He said, "The creek came down last night so you'll have to wait a while." So, we got to ride horses and went out to see the water still rushing by, all brown and rumble with dirt and rocks. There was no mention of flash flood. Just "*The creek came down.*"

That's how it was in Tucson many years later. "*The Rillito just came down*" was a good reason to go stand on the banks of the normally dry Rillito River and gawk at its dangerous growling splendor.

Sometime in the mid 70s or early 80s, they began to call the water rushing down the washes and creek beds *Flash Floods*. I wouldn't swear to it, but I think the words were coined by the EPA or the Corps of Engineers. With the influx of new residents to Arizona, it became important to educate folks about the dangers of the great Southwest. Since the newbies had mostly used mass-transit to get around in their hometowns, the first thing people from New York, New

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Jersey and Chicago did was go out and buy a car! Natives had to learn defensive driving very quickly as a result. It seemed like not a summer's day went by for the longest time before at least one poor soul got stuck in a swiftly-running wash or creek crossing. Fortunately, there were not that many fatalities.

Since the days of the Great Migration to the Southwest, summer TV and Radio has been peppered with PSAs warning about the dangers of Flash Floods. Both Phoenix and Tucson passed ordinances making folks who had to be rescued from cars stranded in flash floods liable for the cost. Arizona's Legislature passed the "Stupid Motorist Law" in 1995 (ARS 28-910), making it a crime to attempt to cross a flooded crossing, creek or ford which was barricaded. Any person *"driving a vehicle into any area that is temporarily covered by a rise in water level, including groundwater or overflow of water, may be liable for expenses of any emergency response,"* it says.

Call it what you will. *Chubasco, Monsoon, Haboob*. Could it be the smell of dust washing out of the air? Or the scent of newly wetted Mesquite bushes? Is there some sort of chemistry in the air involving Ozone? I don't know. Who cares? It's really of no consequence in the overall picture of *Life, The Universe and Everything*. There is just something very special about the smell of summer rain in the desert.

Tasty

Did you ever stop to think what turns your taste-buds absolutely in-side-out? Is it that first remembrance of pabulum when you were an itty-bitty? How about a tug straight out of the bottle of Jack Daniels? Ok, then. To phrase it differently ...

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How could you go for a bowl of Kellogg's Corn Flakes swimming in half-and-half topped with a big glop of fresh strawberries and not one, but two, tablespoons of sugar?

Maybe it's a Ritz cracker topped with a sardine fresh out of one of those little blue and white tins. Not so much? How 'bout smoked oysters? On a Ritz - or straight with a tooth-pick.

Alright, let's get serious here! Shrimp, clams, mussels and raw oysters with a spicy seafood cocktail sauce and a dip made with red wine vinegar, salt, pepper and olive oil! Throw in a tossed salad topped with croutons, red onion slices and Italian dressing - and big slices of San Francisco sourdough garlic bread - not to mention a big glass of Dago Red!

Not tasty enough, you say? Red Blanchard, a west-coast radio personality of the fifties, pitched the Zorch Cow made with Belfast Old-fashioned Mug Root Beer and a whopping scoop of vanilla ice cream stirred into a tall glass. That's your classic Root Beer Float. Oh, boy!

Is there anything wrong with two pieces of bread, buttered on both sides, toasted, with a slice of Velveeta cheese melted inside? For that matter, how 'bout mac and cheese made with America's favorite?

Could you go for a big ol' plop of fruit cocktail with a double super-humongous-spoon-full of cottage-cheese on top, served with a 'mater sammich made with real mayo and a sprinkle of garlic salt?

Then there's that T-bone steak, sizzling in its medium-rare perfection just off the barbeque. In the preparation, just the tiniest dusting of garlic salt always brings out that caveman flavor! So, if barbeque isn't your style, how about a big juicy

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slice of Prime Rib with a dollop of creamy Horseradish sauce on the side. Oh, mama!

Did you ever eat a lemon? With no sweetener? How 'bout a Grapefruit?

Food isn't the only challenge to the taste-buds. How about wet stuff?

Did ya ever just sip a shot of Jose Quervo - straight - with no lime or salt? Does Sun Tea over ice sweetened with a little sugar do something for you? Could ya do with a cool Mint Julep while sitting out there on the porch on a nice, warm summer afternoon? Can I get a big Amen for that one, brothers and sisters?

When it's dark, cold and foggy outside, have you ever tried Coffee, Kahlua and a Twist? Speaking of coffee ... while it takes a bit to get used to, there's nothing quite like a shot of Espresso. Have you ever experienced the delicate bubbly tingle of a tiny sip of Extra Dry Andre Champagne? Did you ever drink Carnation condensed milk straight out of the can? How 'bout Eagle Brand?

There's hardly a sensation like sipping from a warm mug of hot chocolate cupped in your palms. Did you ever get a strawberry milkshake mustache? There's nothing quite like an almost-frozen, super-cold Bud on a hundred-degree summer afternoon! For that matter, what is there in the whole world even remotely as delectable as a sip of fresh water from a babbling brook high in the mountains?

Not to be too gross ... But, when you were laboring in the sun out in the yard, did you taste the sweat that dripped down your face onto to your lips? Ok. Did ya ever taste dirt? How 'bout dog poop? Do you remember how old you were when you ate

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your first booger? When you were very young, did you ever eat a worm? Most folks can't recall at what age they first sampled it, but do you remember what your big toe tasted like? Don't even get me started on finger-nails!

There is nothing quite like a long piece of dry grass gripped between your teeth, is there? Twigs are good, too. Even for a non-smoker, there's nothing like the taste of a rum-soaked Crook. How many folks do you know brave enough to put just a pinch of Copenhagen between their cheek and gum?

Speaking of gum - a fresh new chunk of Fleer Double-Bubble, anyone? Fond memories go with Black-Jack, Dentyne, Cloves, Beaman, Wrigley's Spearmint and Double-Mint. Ever try a little wax coke-bottle? Hooray for pink and white Good & Plenty! Did you know that a Big Hunk kept in the fridge will crack into pieces instead of bending? And there's nothing in the world like a frozen Snickers bar. Oh, yeah!

The sensations created in the mouth range widely from sweet to sour, salty to acidic, soft to hard, wet to dry, delightful to disgusting!

The sensitivity of our lips and tongues began at the breasts of our mothers, heightened during our pre-teen years with that first tentative, feathery touching of the lips - later the tongues, and matured when we discovered the sensuousness of kisses ever-so-gently placed on private places all around our partners' bodies. Why is sucking your partner's fingers so sexy? Who but star-crossed lovers can say for sure?

Taste is just one amazing segment of our human senses. It runs the gamut of sensual delights from breakfast to bed-time. Try to imagine ... where would we be without it?

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Now Hear This

Not long ago I wrote a story about star-gazing. Another deal touched on the smell of summer rain. That was followed by a treatise on the taste of stuff. Logic dictates that there should also be something about the way stuff sounds, so here goes.

Back about a gazillion years ago I was the track announcer for the stock car races in Wheatfields, a few miles north of Globe, Arizona. Being the mid-morning announcer on a local radio station, and living immediately adjacent to the track property, it seemed only natural that I should take the position when track announcer “Stormin’ Norman” decided to quit.

When Claudette and I first moved to Globe we had no clue that come summertime we’d be driven crazy on Saturday nights by the noise generated just over the side-yard fence. There were always many heats and many different classes of race cars to while away a Saturday evening. Sleep was out of the question until after ten o’clock or so!

The racket would start as soon as race teams showed up just before dark. They had to back their machines off their transport trailers and move them to spots assigned to each team. Stock car racers don’t put mufflers on their cars. No muffler means more power – and a lotta noise! After I took the job announcing the races Saturday nights weren’t quite so bad.

The announce booth was elevated about fifteen feet above and back from the track, behind the spectator seating. There was room in it for a group of four or five people consisting of the announcer, time-keepers and spotters. I was supplied with information sheets about each team, its members and drivers. It took a few weekends, but I finally became familiar enough with the participants that calling the races turned from hard work to honest-to-goodness fun!

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This story is supposed to be about sound – or hearing. At the races in the early 1990s I used an across-the-noggin earphone-microphone combination so I could hear the PA system as well as the noise from the track and still be able to announce hands-free. The earphone was worn over my left ear and had to be pretty loud to overcome the noise from the track. In retrospect, it turned out to be a bad idea. These many years later, my left ear hears only two-thirds as well as my right. So it goes. What remains is an appreciation of life's sounds.

My first recollection of sounds was when I was little ... maybe two or three. The family lived in Park Merced San Francisco. My dad was in the Navy and he and the neighboring men were getting ready to go to sea to fight World War II. The wives doted on their men and they got together for dinner and drinks regularly. The littles, which included me, were bedded down after dinner so the adults could enjoy each others' company and cocktails. I recall getting out of bed and creeping out to the top of the stairs, where I could sit quietly and watch to old folks party. They made lots of sounds ... clinking glasses, laughter, and the Victrola. This was the very early '40s and very fragile records spun at 78 revolutions per minute (78rpm) on a machine that had to be wound up with a crank to play them. RCA's logo for many years was a floppy-eared dog sitting in front of a Victrola. So - those were my first sounds.

I miss the sound of the miniature steam train at the San Francisco Zoo way back in the early '40s. Mom and Dad took my brother Bill and I to ride the "Little Puffer" at the Flyshacker Zoo. It was a treat to ride that little train. The sound of the wheels clickety-clacking on the rails, the huffa-chuffa of the engine and its steam, and the whistle in the little tunnel. Wow! Those were the days!

Then there was the sound of the wind high in the Redwoods at Big Sur on the Central California Coast. When I was in my

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teens I was a Boy Scout, an Eagle to be exact. And I was also a Camp Counselor at Camp Quien Sabe, operated by my folks for the Monterey Recreation Department. It was in the '50s at a campground in Big Sur. Camp lasted five days each week and we slept under the stars. After the kids were bedded down, we Counselors would gather together to share stories around the campfire. After a while we'd break off and hit the sack. It was great lying on my back, looking at the stars peeking around the boughs of the giant Redwoods, and listening to the wind gently blowing through the tree-tops - a comforting sound no sane person could ever forget!

It took close to five decades to assemble the stereo system in my home. The United Audio turntable was bought in the late sixties. The Fisher speakers were purchased out of chattel from a Tucson Audio Repair shop. I traded a tube-type Sherwood Tuner/Amplifier for a 160 watt Pioneer SX-727 Stereo Receiver that matched the speakers perfectly. When we moved to Globe, Arizona in the early '90s, we bought a Park Model Mobile Home, perfect for an older married couple. The stereo was awesome in that little space! Along the line, we'd bought a CD/DVD/Videotape player/recorder, a 36 inch flat-screen TV, an eight-foot motorized movie screen and a computer-driven projector. It all hooked together to create a fantastic home entertainment system for the classic audiophile. It finally came together when I rounded up a dual voice-coil 15-inch sub-woofer. That was the kicker. In my living room now is a monster sound system that beats the dickens out of the best anybody could create for a big-boom car stereo! The audio my stereo makes is the product of decades of collecting and tinkering, resulting in unbelievably pleasurable sounds.

There's one more sound that makes my life worth while. It fills me with satisfaction and huge pride. It's the sound of my wife's whisper whenever we share a hug after all these years.

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Apricots

My neighbor Frank has an Apricot tree. He turned 84 this year. I have no idea how old his Apricot tree is. Maybe 30? Whatever.

Frank showed up on the porch a while back with a small Ball Jar containing a very special home-made jam. Kathleen, his wife of some 60-some-odd years, had made Pomegranate jelly and she wanted us to have some. Oh, it was good!

Frank has a Pomegranate tree in his back yard that cut loose last fall with a plethora of fruit. Whether Kathleen saved the fruit for spring or made the jelly last fall is of no consequence. It was great!

Recently his Apricot tree decided to disgorge fruit like it was going out of style! The little fruits were falling off in droves and the birds were yumming them up like crazy. Well, old Frank put a bunch of foam rubber mats and blankets on the ground under the Apricot tree to catch the fruit whenever he shook the tree or when the wind blew. Reasoning there was something special there, I snuck up on Frank's cache and tasted one of those little puppies. Oh! Mah goodnezz!

I remember when I was a kid on vacation in the late 40s, riding along with the family in the old Chevy Woody down California's San Joaquin valley on the way to visit relatives in Arizona. There were always fruit stands along side the road in the summer and we always stopped to sample their wares.

My folks wanted me and my little brother and sister to be responsible, so we each had an allowance. They would not buy fruit for us. We had to figure out for ourselves what we'd like to have. It only took a couple of summers before we figured out that we could each get something different and

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then share our booty! Plums, peaches, pears, green and purple grapes, tomatoes, and apricots. The best of the bunch were the apricots!

There was only one lesson we had to learn ... how much can you eat of any fresh fruit before you get too much? Overload on vitamin C and you break out in hives. Too much pulp and you get the “runs.” It was a long way from Bakersfield to Mojave and too much fruit made for an exciting ride!

Well, we developed a taste for just the right amount of fresh Central California fruit to make the discomfort of summer vacation worth every minute.

Kathleen had made a big batch of Apricot jam from the fruit of the tree next door. It was wonderful. And it reminded me of summer vacation back in the 40s and 50s.

Shakespeare with Brother Bill

A while back, we left my brother Bill wondering why everybody at a party at the Thayer home in Tucson was laughing at him.

It wasn't the first time. One evening, the whole extended family left him in a Chinese restaurant on Tucson's east-side!

We had been out to my mom's home at the ranch north of Sonoita. The extended family was there to clean up the property – pulling weeds, raking leaves, smoothing out the gravel driveway. This was a gift from all of us shortly after my dad had passed away ... something that would have been too great a task for her all at once. Out of gratitude, she decided to take us all out to dinner. Since the girls always liked Chinese, we hit a restaurant on East Speedway Blvd.

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The restaurant staff arranged three tables to make a place for the family to sit, chat and eat in comfort. To set the stage ... Mom, the matriarch, was seated at the head of the table. Being the eldest son, I was at the opposite end. Claudette and our kids John and Janet with her husband Mike sat along one side. My brother Bill, his wife MaryEllen and the girls were seated along the other side, Billy at Mom's right.

The Thayers pretty much always get a lot of stuff from the a la carte menu ... it makes for a large variety of foods scattered across the table. There was a Pupu platter, shrimp fried rice, deep fried shrimp with hot mustard, chicken and beef chow mein, chop suey, fluffy white rice, any number of sauces and dips, a pot of hot green tea, a couple of shots of rice wine, and a couple of bottles of Chinese beer. Oh, boy! What a spread!

Brother Bill had his wife MaryEllen drive their family in from the ranch because he'd been drinking beer during the work detail. He wasn't sloshed ... just talkative and happy. He conversed readily with the restaurant staff as we ate. They checked on us regularly and they smiled as he chatted.

Nobody quite knows what got him going, but brother Bill started quoting Shakespeare, perhaps for mom's benefit. He went on as if on stage. Others in the restaurant quieted as he articulated the words of the Bard formed so many years ago. In fact, the whole place fell silent, he was doing such a magnificent presentation! Patrons ensconced in the booths even stopped to listen to Billy's elocution.

Mother was impressed for a while, but - as parents are prone to become bored with their off-springs' rantings, especially when a non-paying crowd is involved - she finally had enough and suggested that it might be time to adjourn.

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As the family worked its way toward the door, even as the bill was being paid, brother William continued his impressive articulation of the Queen's English. The thing is ... he stayed right in his seat ... not wavering, hand pressed to his chest!

The family gathered outside in the parking lot getting ready to head out for home. Billy was still inside. With some urging from mom, his wife returned to the restaurant to recover Billy from the clutches of his audience – which she did with some dispatch. He was still quoting Shakespeare when they cleared the door. His wife said the customers were applauding when the pair headed outside. The question of whether they were happy with his performance or that he was leaving has never been answered!

The Fourth Sense

So far, during this particular adventure, we've explored in reasonable depth three of the five senses: Seeing, tasting and hearing. We haven't really plumbed the depths of feeling and smell. Why don't we explore our sense of smell? A tome on feeling has to be over the top! So, we can save it for later.

I asked my wife Claudette what her first remembrance was of smell and she said she couldn't recall. She was little when she was first introduced to the treats of a barnyard, however. No problem! No matter how old one is, there is no mistaking the smell of a barnyard! It's a not-so-subtle mix of chicken, cow and horse poop and pee, fresh mown hay, oats, chicken feed, leather saddles and bridles, grease, dust, mud, old wood and musty woolen blankets. Claudette thought she was about five at the time.

Probing the infinite depths of my own gray-matter was close to useless until I remembered my first whiff of a new baby.

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My little brother Bill was something else. He didn't smell bad at all. He didn't smell like a dirty diaper when he first came home. And he didn't smell like baby-powder. He smelled like a baby – a human – at least until he loaded his first diaper! Woah! That may have been the second or third smell I recall, except maybe my mom. That really presses the memory a lot. I'm not sure, but I think she smelled like me at the beginning.

I can't imagine how difficult that must be for a new mom. Here, she brings her new baby home from the hospital all swaddled and what-not. The kid is just so pure for a short while and everybody dotes on it. All the extended family and most of the neighbors come to visit and they're all struck with the new-ness of this little person. This has to be heaven for a new mom – everybody loves my baby! Right. Then, after a while, there's that first big diaper-bomb. That's what your postpartum depression is all about! Wheeew!

Speaking of malodorous. What are the worst smells you can recall? How 'bout the fetid stench from your shoe when you realize you've stepped in fresh dog poop? Remember when you wanted to vomit, but somehow held it back, when your little brother threw up right next to you up in the car? And you were on vacation? Did the locker-room skink as badly at your high school as mine did? There's just nothing on earth quite as vile as the combined perfume of sweat, crotch, turf, mud, armpits and feet! A skunk smells fresh as a newborn compared to that locker room! Why is it that natural gas from the Utility and a skunk's pew smell so similar? I think the worst is the smell of death. Once a carcass has swollen and stiffened with rigor-mortis and finally become crawly with maggots it takes on an unforgettably putrid odor so strong that carrion-feeders from miles away come to dine on the remains.

Now then, moving right along to a little more comfortable subject, I can recall the scent of a newly cut Christmas Tree

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centered on the front window in the living room. There was always an assortment of forest-smelling little pine boughs placed just so around the house. The Holidays were always a fragrant time! Thanksgiving and Christmas in the Thayer house were always a cacophony of olfactory experiences. Just the slightest whiff of roasting turkey or just-opened cranberry sauce had the capacity to get anyone in the vicinity salivating in anticipation. The sweet bouquet of the adults' just-poured champagne was a treat made even better by the time we reached our majorities.

One of my favorite quotes wafts into the air from the holiday movie *The Christmas Story*. Raphie (who has been lusting after an Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model Air Rifle [BB Gun] for Christmas) describes the situation when the neighborhood dogs break into the kitchen and make off with the holiday turkey. "*The heavenly aroma still hung in the house. But it was gone, all gone! No turkey! No turkey sandwiches! No turkey salad! No turkey gravy! Turkey Hash! Turkey a la King! Or gallons of turkey soup! Gone, ALL GONE!*"

Ah, yes! There were animals. The sweetest, must cuddly were the worst. Cleaning up after a parakeet is the pits! Changing the cat-box was (and still is) challenging. Did ya ever smell a wet dog? Pew! Washing the dog was fun yet fairly pungent until the suds were rinsed off, the shaking was completed and his fur toweled dry. Just when ol' Pete (our English Bulldog in the '50s) was dried off and smelling fresh as spring, he'd let fly with a doggy SBD (Silent But Deadly!) Buzzy, our Springer-Setter mix in the '60s, was little better than Pete. He had an eau-de-pew that could make your eyes water!

There is something special about the scent of a newly-lit fireplace – that charcoal and wood smell that reeks of winter coziness with loved-ones. Speaking of warm ... the furnace

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always creates a special musty smell when it's fired up for the first time each winter. I've had to vacuum the registers in my home each year almost forever in order to keep that odor at a minimum. Still, there is something special about it, you think?

Bedtime has always been special in the smell department. Who knows when I first appreciated the smell of cloud-white sheets and pillowcases fresh off the clothesline in the back yard. What with automatic clothes dryers anymore, the smell of newly cleaned and dried bed linen just isn't quite the same. A while back a detergent manufacturer tried adding "A Breath of Sunshine" to their product. Nice, but still not the same.

Speaking of bedtime. The special smell of one's spouse is a welcome respite from the mundane odors of the day. The sweet bouquet at the nape of a partner's neck can be so relaxing and sometimes very arousing! I don't believe that anybody, not Shakespeare nor any of the myriad quantity of talented smut authors and poets of erotic literature, has quite completely described the musty perfume of a loving and gentle sexual encounter between two lovers. Go figure.

It Sounded Like Cellophane

I woke with a start. It was three-fifteen in the morning. There was this noise in my right ear! It sounded like somebody was crumpling and scratching cellophane inside there.

Cellophane – you don't notice the stuff much anymore, except maybe as that clear wrapping that covers many gift baskets and flower assortments. Back in the day cigarette packs and cigars came wrapped in cellophane. It remains a popular meat packaging wrap, but it's been replaced mostly by plastic wrap.

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I was a smoker for just shy of forty years. Quit on August 25th of 1996. You used to pull on a little plastic band around the top of a pack of cigarettes to zip open the cellophane protecting the product. Then you carefully ripped open one side of the little envelope-like top to reveal five or six of the cigarettes inside. That packaging changed over time and was replaced on some brands by the flip-top box, making the opening of a pack of cigarettes easier.

At any rate ... we were wide-awake just after three o'clock in the morning with this sound like something scratching on cellophane inside my right ear. I knew in a flash what it was. I had a bug in my ear. Nothing anywhere close to as large as a Lady-bug or even a carpet beetle. It was something very much smaller than that. It somehow had become stuck in my ear wax and its tiny little beetle feet were clawing mightily on my ear drum in a gargantuan effort to escape.

Almost a year ago we had an infestation of tiny beetles that kept turning up in bread, cracker and cereal packages. After finding out what the little bugs were called, I researched how to get rid of them. Poison is out of the question, according to the local pest-control person, because they only infect food. They do, however, migrate hither and thither around the house in search of additional food sources.

The cure is the trash can, a cloth moistened with bleach-water, and a vacuum cleaner. All opened paper and cardboard packages have to be checked for the little creatures and thrown out, even if just one is detected. Then, the chore turns to finding better ways to adequately seal packaged materials made from flour. Folding and rolling paper packages like those used in cereal and some cracker boxes works very well if the packaging is secured using clothes-pins. Flour needs to be kept in a container like a Ball or Mason jar or one made specifically for the purpose. Breads should have their own

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spot in a bread-box or the refrigerator. Once the storage areas are secure, every nook and cranny must be vacuumed and then wiped down with a bleach dampened cloth to get rid of any residual baby bugs or eggs. That's what the experts say about quelling an invasion of those itty-bitty beasts. There will be some who are missed – probably hanging around like carpet beetles – and will only be visible to the naked eye on counter-tops and smooth bedding like sheets and pillow cases. I've found a little bug every now and then on my pillow. They don't run or even crawl fast, and they don't fly often, so they're easy to catch (and smoosh!) The ones in my house are called Red Flour Beetles and they are about as big as a ten-point apostrophe, one that you might find in an email. (If you look in the upper right corner of your computer Window, the little dash in the Minimize box is a little larger than a Red Flour Beetle.) This dash in this sentence (-) is a tiny bit larger than one of them.

Not having found a beetle on my pillow in some time, I knew almost for sure it was one of those little guys in my ear. I got up and tried rinsing it out of my ear – first with warm water, then with alcohol, and finally with ear wax remover. It was a futile effort on my part except that it apparently killed the bug because the noise stopped. I was unable to get it out using a Q-tip[®], so I phoned the hospital and asked if they had anyone there qualified to extract a bug from someone's ear. The gal on the other end of the phone giggled and said she thought there probably was a bug expert somewhere around the Emergency Room. She said they had a light load and invited me come on down, they'd give it a try.

When I walked into the ER, there were grins everywhere. After mandatory triage, I was put in room number two: The Bug Removal Room. A support nurse and the triage nurse took turns peering into my ear with a little flashlight-in-a-tube. They finally saw it buried in there in a glop of ear wax. So the

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procedure began. They took a huge syringe full of hot water and sprayed it in, rinsing debris out as I held a large clear plastic cup under the ear. No bug. More peering. It was still in there, firmly cemented to the eardrum with a tiny piece of ear wax. More hot water. Still no bug. Even more peering. One more mighty gush of hot water and finally, out it popped, met with more peering and oos and ahs. Such a gigantic effort for such a tiny creature! It worked, and with the wax gone I noticed new sibilance in everyone's speech. And except for that poor little Red Flour Beetle - a good time was had by all!

Oh, The House is Gone!

An article at www.anythingaboutcars.com/70s-cars.html , “In the 1970's, America experienced its worst recession in years and Detroit felt the effects of American consumers' fascination with the more quality-made imports. AMC responded to the situation with the Gremlin, a tiny two-door hatchback with a base price starting below \$2,000. Available in various unpleasant earth tones, the Gremlin was one of the quintessentially ugly cars of the 1970s.” We purchased a new one in 1972 from the local Tucson dealership. We traded in a late '60s Ford Fairlane to make the down-payment. Claudette loved it and so did the kids. She thought it was cute!



Unlike the one above from 1974, ours came in dirt brown!

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This story really isn't about a brown '72 Gremlin. It's about why I don't get to leave the heating pad for my back plugged in after using it. We'll get to that part soon enough.

It seemed like it took forever to get the paperwork done so we could take the new car home with us. We were left several times in "the box" while the haggling went on between us, the salesman, and the (always in another room) sales manager. It's an old sales technique designed to extract the most cash out of the customer while making them feel like there is some serious dealing going on. "The box" is the salesman's cubicle, usually just large enough to seat three people at a large desk. First there was The Application. We filled it out and were left to sit in the cubicle while our credit was checked. Then came the haggling over the worth of the trade-in. There was a question about how much cash we could put down. (I had gotten roped into a short-term loan to make a down payment once – that was not going to happen again!) I think we pungled up a hundred dollars cash after another trip left us sitting in "the box" again. The young salesman was well-dressed and very personable. Every time he left, there was a good reason for it and he always apologized. It took quite a while to get the financing done – we wanted it through our own bank and the dealership wanted it through a loan company. There's a thing called "the hold-back." In those days car dealers arranged the financing and they liked loan companies better than banks because the banks would "hold back" a larger percentage of the loan proceeds for a longer period than loan companies. I held to my guns and insisted on my bank as the lender. And the deal was finally done.

We had enough time with the young man to share a little about our families. I was on the radio at the time and had a wife and the two kids. He was married with two kids - little girls. Sadly, there had been three, but his son had drowned in the family

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swimming pool. Our conversation was like that between friends. He and I did visit later on a few occasions.

We had just eaten dinner when we started the deal for the Gremlin. It was still light out. When the deal was finally confirmed, it was dark. After vigorous hand-shakes and kind words, we hopped in the new little car and headed for the house. Everything went well until we were parked in the breezeway at home. I couldn't get the ignition to turn off! After fussing and fuming for a few minutes with the only light available from the dome above us, I finally found the button you had to push to turn the ignition switch. There was a long period that began in the '70s where cars and trucks had buttons or bars that had to be depressed to shut down the engine and lock the steering wheel. It was supposed to be a keen anti-theft device.

The car salesman had taken his daughters to work with him one day and he decided to drop by the house afterwards. They were sweet kids and you could tell he doted on them. We never saw him again after that. I read the news as part of my radio program and recognized the name and address that went with one of the stories. I found out later that our salesman friend and his wife had left town after their house burned down with their little girls in it. It turned out that the tragedy could have been avoided had an electric heating pad been unplugged.

And that, my friends, is the reason Claudette will never leave our heating pad unattended without being sure it's unplugged.

How Gross Does It Get?

I remember being a teen (and pre-teen) back in the '50s. It was a lotta fun! My friends and I used to do all kinds of silly stuff.

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Much of the time we tried to gross out the neighborhood girls. Mud was always fun. The old dog poop in the burning paper bag on the front porch trick was great for a few laughs. Smooshing pill bugs or stink bugs was a keen gross-out, too. But the best was parsley. My best friend had a whole row of parsley, the green finely-leafed herb used in everything from salads to sauces. There was always plenty of parsley between the house and the driveway outside the kitchen window. He taught us to pop a handful of the stuff in our mouths and chew it up very fine in sight of a bunch of girls. Then we'd approach them and drool the green goo off our tongues and then double over in tears of laughter as the girls grossed-out! Needless to say, we tried it on our moms but they were not impressed. It was sure fun being a kid in the '50s.

Christmas Chimney – 1970

Each Christmas from 1967, when we first moved to Tucson and our new home, we always made some improvement to the house.

One year we built a huge planter just inside the front door next to the red brick stairs that led down to the sunken living room. We picked long, narrow, sand-colored chipped bricks for the sides and red bricks matching the stairs for the top.

Another year, we built the living room wall out to match up with the front entrance. We included a pass-through from the dining room in the new wall-space.

Yet another year, we replaced the living room carpet with new deep-plush carpet with three-quarter inch foam backing, making it a wonderful area to lay on while watching TV! That same year we installed reflective film on the living room windows and put up new room-wide black-out curtains.

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1970 was an eventful year. Not only did we get a smokin' deal on a new Gremlin just before the new models came out, but we also built a fireplace and chimney on the house. Now that was an adventure!

In December we decided to build a fireplace and hearth to match the planter at the front door. The mantle and the hearth were the same red brick as the stairway. The wall containing the fireplace was composed of the same sand-colored bricks that made up the sides of the planter.



This is my dad Duke and my son John taking a cardboard box apart in front of the fireplace not long after its construction.

I have no idea how we pulled it off without a building permit and all the other requirements, but it turned out just perfect!

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Tune out “Spurious Emissions”

I’ve been a broadcast engineer for many years, a technical qualification that began in 1963. After I had built the new broadcast studios for KIKX-AM in Tucson a gazillion years ago (1967), I went to work tweaking the audio properties of the radio station.

I had set up the studios so that everything sounded the same, whether in the control room, the production room, the newsroom, and even the trailer used for remote broadcasts. The entire audio chain, as it’s called, was set up so you couldn’t tell if it was “Live or Memorex.”

The transmitter was an old three-bay Gates 5,000-watt machine feeding three towers at night and one in the daytime. Its audio properties were nothing like you could hear on the FM band, much less your stereo. (Technically, the AM audio range was 100 to 7500 Hz give or take a little bit, while the FM range was 50 to 15,000 Hz.) Typical home stereo systems delivered 20 to 20,000 Hz quality in which the bass was deep and the treble was higher than most ears could hear.

I set about making the KIKX transmitter reproduce what it was getting from the studios – home stereo quality within the allowed bounds of AM bandwidth, which ranged up to that of FM. I tweaked that puppy so it sounded just like an FM – big booming bass and sibilant highs. Then I added a couple of new ways to process that audio so it was really loud without breaking the rules governing over-modulation at the time.

Oh, it was sweet! When the thing finally went on the air with the new rock-n-roll format it was awesome! It was loud and smooth and clean and it dominated the airways!

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I got a call from the Chief Engineer of one of the competitors, KTKT, a station that had dominated the Tucson market for decades. He said his people were pressuring him to “juice their station” to make it not sound so “muddy.” And he said it looked like KIKX was over-modulating. I told him to look at his ‘scope under at least ten-times magnification and he’d see we were pushing the envelope, but not breaking the law. He was astounded and asked how we did it. I explained that if he got the latest technology in audio processing and opened up his bandwidth some, he’d do fine. I don’t think he understood what I was taking about and I didn’t take it any further!

I’m sure that KTKT called and made a complaint to the FCC. You see, our old Gates transmitter always had a second-harmonic that you could barely detect at 1160. (KIKX was at 580 on the AM radio dial.) But after I took advantage of all the available bandwidth, 1160 was as loud as any of the other local stations!

Well, I got a visit late one day from the Southwest Division FCC field agent. He said he had a complaint that we were broadcasting on 1160 and had to get rid of it. I had already done my homework and knew that transmitters built before 1949 were exempt from the more recent harmonic restrictions. The KIKX transmitter was built in 1948, so we were home free – I thought. Wrong-oh, barnacle-breath! The exemption was only good unless somebody complained!

The field agent had seen just about everything in his day as a public servant, but he said he’d never heard anything like what we had at KIKX. He said he heard it loud and clear in the field office at Fort Huachuca in southern Arizona. And he said he picked up the second harmonic, also loud and clear, just outside Benson. Wow! Totally awesome!

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Well, I had to fix it and he wanted to chat about the things I did to make the station sound so good. So, I asked if he'd like to help. To my astonishment, he agreed. I needed a coil and a big capacitor to make what we call a "trap" to get rid of that signal at 1160AM. I had a cap, but no coil.

He asked if I had any quarter-inch copper pipe. Just happened that we had installed new pipe to the swamp-cooler and had a bunch left over. Then he asked if I had a Thermos Bottle ... sure did! By wrapping six turns around the Thermos, we fashioned a coil, pounded the ends out and drilled them to make connections.

We connected the cap to the final stage wall of the transmitter and hooked the coil between the cap and the final output. The 1160 signal was way down when we fired up the transmitter. With a little tweaking, we got that signal below the allowed amount! What a trip!

That FCC Field Agent was delighted that he could help us out in trade for information on how we made KIKX such a huge piece of Tucson broadcast history.

Milk and Refrigerators

Back in 1999, I was diagnosed with a form of colon cancer. It was a difficult time that quickly depleted my savings and credit, and while surgery brought the threat to a halt, it also brought my ability to pay to a halt. I had to declare bankruptcy.

Bankruptcy is tough - a least for those of us raised in the early parts of the 20th century. It comes with shame. Shame that you couldn't take care of yourself and family. Shame accompanied with the stigma that you couldn't make it the

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American way. It comes with crushing guilt. Guilt that deforms happy days into depressing hours for those in its steely grip.

America's justice system allows folks trapped by misfortune to escape the bonds that not so long ago sent people to debtors' prison. Unpayable obligations can be forgiven and new lives begun because we are allowed to start over with the help of our American Federal Courts.

Our attorney directed that we stop paying everything but the space rent, utilities and insurance. The two cars were free and clear, as was our Park Model home. We were to pay our attorney two-hundred dollars a month while we worked through the bankruptcy. Every remaining penny was to go to create the documentation for the bankruptcy procedure. We ended up with a huge binder crammed full of documents including detailed descriptions of all of our assets, our liabilities and everything that would be subject to the bankruptcy proceedings.

Every family going through bankruptcy is entitled to a year's worth of "supplies", which our attorney said is equivalent to what would be needed to survive for one year if we were moving from the frontier to settle in the West a hundred-fifty years ago. That means the housing, transportation, food, clothing, tools and equipment necessary to survive for one year. Wow! Talk about a hand up! It's truly the start of a new life!

Well, we got carpet and drapes, replaced old furniture and bedding, obtained two-weeks-worth of underware and socks (we had plenty of other clothing), bags, boxes and cases of canned, dried and frozen food as well as the equipment needed to store it, which included a new Gibson refrigerator and matching freezer from Hi-Tyme Appliance Center in Miami.

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This business of gathering up a year's worth of supplies took quite a while, consuming all the spare cash from the time we filed until it was time to go to the final hearing before the Federal Court in Phoenix.

The legal proceedings, roughly eight months after the initial filing, were uneventful. And then, all of a sudden, we were out of debt - no credit card bills, no medical bills, no contracts - starting out on a new life from scratch!

I wrote this little treatise for three reasons. First, folks should know that bankruptcy is not as horrible and shameful as it was once perceived - it grabs families in debt, hauls them up by their bootstraps and gives them all the tools necessary to make a complete new start in life. Second, Gibson makes a fantastic refrigerator. Third, Fry's supplies Kroger brand milk and half-and-half that can last literally for months, if properly stored.

For some reason I don't quite understand, Claudette had taken but one small glass of milk from the quart she bought on February 29th. For similar reasons, I had not used any of the half-and-half purchased in mid-January. I was in the fridge cleaning out the unused leftovers in early June when I noticed the date on the milk. Claudette said to throw it out - it had to be bad after three months. I decided to taste it instead. It was still fresh and sweet as if bought the day before! I poured my wife a small glass and she tasted it. "Great!" she exclaimed. And here it was the first week in June! Then I turned my attention to the half-and-half. It, too, tasted fresh and sweet.

This tale leads me to one irrefutable conclusion: If we had not gone bankrupt and been put in the position of having to buy a new refrigerator over fifteen years ago, we would have had spoiled milk and putrid half-and-half last month!

The Lord sure works in mysterious ways. You think?

Golf Clubs

Back in 1989, I won the distinction of Worst Golfer in Tucson. This was before our move to Globe in 1992. Part of the prize that came with this dubious honor was a full set of custom-fit Henry Griffitts golf clubs. At the time a full set consisted of a 3-Iron through Pitching Wedge, a 4-Metal Wood and 1-Metal Wood Driver – ten clubs in all. The set came with lessons, too.

Over the years I've added the 1-Iron and the 2-Iron, the Sand Wedge and the Weak Wedge. Over time, all of the clubs in the set have been refurbished at least once. Some time ago, the 4 and 1 Metal Woods were replaced with a state-of-the-art Fairway Wood and a Driver, both with graphite shafts.

Almost a year ago, I underwent a medical procedure that took me off the golf course for twelve weeks and as a result I was left weak and out of condition. When I was finally given the go-ahead to hit the links again, I couldn't hit the ball as far as I could before the procedure. (The doctor said my golf would be self-regulating because of the pain!) My handicap began a plunge, finally reaching a shameful 34 – just two pops shy of the absolute worst ... 36!

I struggled to regain the strength lost since the procedure. At three-quarters of a century, that's not all that easy. Where I had been able to hit my seven iron the requisite 135 yards, I found it wouldn't get me more than 110 yards. That's a huge loss. My Fairway Wood used to be good for 180 to 200 yards, but I was unable to get more than 150 out of it. Frustrating

There was only one thing to do: Talk to a Pro.

I emailed the pro who is the interface to the Henry Griffitts manufacturing floor. He has access to the data on my original set of clubs – information on loft and lie, shaft length and

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stiffness, and grip type and size. Also contained in this data is the history of changes made to the clubs, both individually and as a set including dates and prices.

My email contained all the information I wrote about earlier. After reviewing the email my pro wrote back that they had a new graphite shaft made especially for older golfers. He said we ought to try one on the seven-iron and see how it works. So I dug out my Henry Griffitts shipping box, pulled the single club shipper out of it, and sent the seven iron off to Coeur D Alene, Idaho.

A few days later I got an email from the billing department, notifying me that the re-shafting was going to run some \$103.49, of which \$19.49 was shipping! I could buy a whole new set of clubs for less than \$1000. \$103 was way outa line for just one club. So, I called and talked with billing and then my pro, trying to get a better deal. Finally, the headman picked up and we negotiated. I already had enough new grips to do the whole set, so we settled on a discount that included just re-shafting. With that, I authorized the resultant billing, then packed and shipped my 4, 6 and 8 irons.

The newly re-shafted clubs arrived a few days later. I sent an email to my pro telling him I was about to ship my 5, 9 and Pitching Wedge, and asking whether I should re-shaft my Fairway Wood or the Driver. He wrote back that I shouldn't ship anything until I had tried out the new ones. Sage advice.

The next day I hit the practice range at the golf course with the new 7-iron. It took a little getting-used-to, but I finally got a handle on it and started hitting it straight. After about 50 balls I figured out that it hit much higher and longer with a slight "cut" to it. The ball was going the required 130 to 140 yards! It would be a gross understatement to say that I was delighted.

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For those among the un-initiated, a ball hit with a “cut” shot starts off a little to the left of the target then “cuts” back to it, dropping softly and stopping quickly. When you’re 135 yards away from the center of a small green, a “cut” shot makes it easier to keep the ball on the surface and get it close to the pin.

Well, I packed up the 5, 9 and Pitching Wedge and then added the Fairway Wood to the shipment. More distance from the Fairway Wood (FW) would help me get to the green in fewer strokes. The Driver is used off the Tee, but the FW takes you the rest of the way. It was taking me four or five strokes to get to the green with the un-modified FW, so with a new shaft, it should get me home at least one stroke less – that could mean taking four or maybe five strokes off my game, dropping my handicap from 33 to a more respectable 28 or 29.

The clubs showed up after a few days. I put the grips on them and let them cure overnight. The next day I took the FW and the Pitching Wedge to the practice tee at the Country Club to find out how they worked with the new shafts and grips.

The FW was a stinker! The first few balls I hit went hard right and not even a hundred yards! You could say I was unhappy. Yeah, well I was for a few minutes until I figured out how to use it. A new stance was required and I had to go way back in my memory to some lessons from the pro at Ventana Canyon in Tucson. When hit properly, the new FW goes high and long – about 180 yards. Yowzah!

Next came the Pitching Wedge. Different surprise! Popped the first ball up like a baseball into the dugout ... maybe 50 yards! Can you say “Arrrrrgghhh?” Like Charlie Brown about to kick the point-after when Lucy yanks the football out of the way! Well, it took a coupla dozen balls before I finally got a handle on that club. Like the others it goes high and just about right. The Pitching Wedge is supposed to be good for 100 yards or

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so ... and this thing was doing just that. It even backed up a few times. (It's very desirable when you can hit the ball over the pin, "stick it" on the green and back it up close.)

The object in golf is to hit a golf ball from tee to green around eighteen "holes" or fairways with the fewest strokes (hits of the ball.) What makes the game so intriguing is that a player always plays against his (or her) best score in the past. While tournament play appears to pit the players against themselves to find a winner, the best contestants always "play their own game." This is because all players are assigned a "handicap", a number of strokes subtracted from their total score to even out the odds of winning.

I'm sorry if there are folks who don't understand golf and the challenges it poses to those who play the game. Some call it "cow pasture pool." Others refer to it as "the gentleman's game." If you're among those who don't appreciate why golf is held in such high esteem by so many people, just consider Baseball. That venerable game is America's favorite sport, even though it involves grown men trying hit a ball flying at close to 100-miles-an-hour into the middle of a big field, and if successful, running around in a circle without being "tagged out!"

Then there's Basketball – that one's a winner! A bunch of folks run up and down a "court" trying to "shoot" a ball through a hoop without taking too many steps or bumping into players from the opposing team.

Football? Andy Griffith described it better'n anybody else in the history of the game: "I have studied about it. And I think that it's some kindly of a contest where they see which bunch-full of them men can take that punkin and run from one end of that cow pasture ta 'tothern without either gettin' knocked down ... or steppin' in sumpin."

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Banana Bread

Then, there was the day that Claudette told me how to make banana bread. It was an adventure.

My wife has always been slow to eat the last banana in the bunch, so most times it would go past the point of looking yellow – just barely edible. Eeeewww! But, that's when she'd whip out the box of muffin mix and make banana bread.

A few years ago she began having problems standing for any great length of time and she fell on a couple of occasions. That's when most of the cooking fell on my shoulders. She still wasn't happy eating the last banana, even if it was handed to her! One day she suggested that I make banana bread.

I went to the pantry and retrieved a box of muffin mix – she likes Krusteaz Banana Nut Supreme Muffin Mix because you can make 24 Mini Muffins, a dozen Standard Muffins or a standard-size Loaf of Bread with it.

The instructions are simple – even for a guy like me!

First, turn the oven on to *Bake* and pre-heat it to 350° while you mix the wet ingredients together in a medium-size bowl - three large eggs, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of cooking oil and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of water. (The recipe calls for $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water, but Claudette reduced the amount to compensate for the banana.)

Once the eggs, water and oil are mixed, remove the peel and slice a banana into the mix and moosh it with a fork, making a sorta lumpy basic liquid. That done, slowly mix in the dry contents from the bag that came in the muffin box. Keep on mixing until it's nice and smooth.

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Grease an 8½x4½x2½-inch loaf pan with butter or cooking spray (Claudette likes PAM), pour the mix into it and smooth.

Place the pan in the oven and let it cook for up to 50 minutes. At 45 minutes, stick a clean toothpick into the loaf and remove it slowly. If it comes out with any stuff on it, let the loaf cook for another five minutes. Again, poke it with a clean toothpick. If it comes out clean, the cooking is done ... shut the oven off but don't take the pan out. Let the loaf cool for five or ten minutes and then remove it from the oven. Now, let it rest and cool to room temperature.

Using a dinner knife, release the loaf from the pan. You can leave the loaf in the pan or turn it out onto a serving plate.

This Banana Nut bread is good sliced just like sandwich bread, all by itself ... or you can slather it with butter. Yummy!

Cottage Eggs

When I was a kid, Christmas was special. Everything about the Thayer family Christmas tradition was special ... and it took lots of work ... for the cook!

While we kids attacked and unwrapped one present each, Mom would put a pound of bacon in a big cast iron frying pan and place it on the stove to fry while she busied herself cutting three grapefruit in halves. There were five of us (what with Mom, Dad, Sister Mandy, Brother Bill and me) so saving the sixth half was a good thing for somebody's snack later on in the day.

Then she would grab a candy cane off the Christmas Tree, take a meat tenderizer out of the kitchen drawer and use it to beat the candy cane to smithereens! The remains of the candy

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cane were sprinkled over the grapefruit halves, which were plated and delivered to the dining table. About that time she'd open a can of peach halves and pour the contents into a small pot and put it on the stove to simmer. Then it was time!

It didn't take any coaxing to get Pop and us kids to the table! Mom picked at her grapefruit half while checking every now and then on the progress of the bacon - it had to be just so ... not too limp, yet not overly crisp. About the time everyone was done with their grapefruit, the bacon would be ready. It was laid out on a paper towel to drain, the grease was poured into the bacon grease container, and the frying pan was wiped clean.

Then it was time for the presents. Pop would hand them out, picking through the pile under the tree to make sure each kid got a present before him or mom. He made sure mom got all of her presents before he did, so she could get the rest of breakfast ready while us offspring toiled over the presents and he collected and disposed of the discarded wrapping paper.

I don't recall exactly when mom stopped making cinnamon rolls by hand, but I know that they were all ready to bake right out of the fridge right after she had opened her last present. She began "popping" a tube of Pillsbury Cinnamon Rolls for Christmas breakfast shortly after they came on the market in the early '50s. While the rolls were baking, mom whipped up the Cottage Eggs – literally! The ingredients were plopped into a big mixing bowl and unceremoniously whisked into a smooth liquid.

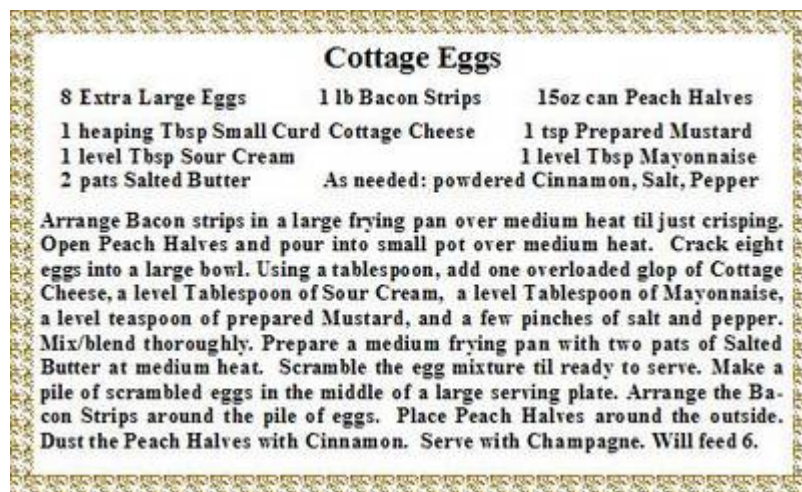
Next came the melting of two pats of butter – at a time most of the rest of the country was still hand mixing their Nucoa, a non-dairy spread that came out in 1937, just before the USA got involved in World War II.

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Vegetable-based Nucoa oleo-margerine replaced butter during WWII when rationing made the dairy product too expensive for most folks. It came with a separately-packaged orange powder that was mixed with the normally white product to make it resemble the color of butter. Kids across the country were pressed into service by their moms to perform this chore by squeezing and squishing the oleo and powder together between their fingers! Eventually, the powder was replaced by orange goo from a separate bubble-pack. Claudette reminisced that her mom sometimes forgot about the mix (which was just fine as far the kids were concerned) and they had white butter instead! “That’s when we got the cow,” she said. “It was fun watching real butter happen for a change.”

Now, where were we? Oh, yeah! Melting two pats of butter in the frying pan. That done, the cottage egg mix was poured into the pan and scrambled eggs happened. As soon as the eggs were ready, they were plated on a big platter with the bacon and hot peach halves dusted with cinnamon. Just in time! The Cinnamon Rolls were ready and placed on their own platter.

So ... here is the recipe for the Thayers’ Christmas breakfast:



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Chemistry at work!

My neighbor was having a tizzy with his 1998 Ford pick-up truck. He and the local auto-parts store were doing battle over a problem that wouldn't go away. Being a 76 year old experienced mechanic since my days in the Marine Corps, I stepped in to help out. Boy, did I get a surprise!

My friend David had determined that his alternator was bad. After driving along for a half-hour or so, he'd notice the voltage meter on the dash start to slowly drop toward zero. The warning lights and beeper all came on as they were supposed to do. So, he'd pull over, turn off the engine and wait a while, then re-start and be on his way like nothing ever happened.

He asked a few people about the problem and they all said it was the alternator. So he pulled it off and took it to the local parts house (not Rock Auto, unfortunately). They tested the thing and said it was just fine. So he reinstalled it and the trouble continued.

Next he pulled the battery. Same thing - nothing wrong with the battery.

More chewing the fat with friends. Collectively, they deduced that the only other thing it could possibly be was the regulator. The alternator on a 1998 Ford pick-up with V-8 power plant has its regulator mounted onboard. So, he removed the alternator, removed the regulator from it and bought a new one at the store. After it was reinstalled, guess what. You got it, Toyota. No dice!

He told the store about the problem and they said it must be the battery. So, he took the core battery in and bought a new one. You already got it. It made no difference. Trouble was

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that every time he made a change he had to wait a half-an-hour or so to see if it would quit again!

By this time David was fit-to-be-tied. He knew that I was an experienced mechanic, so he asked for my help. After reviewing what had been done, we used a voltmeter to check each connection at the battery, the mega-fuse, the alternator, the field coils and the regulator. Everything checked good. Then we ran the engine for about a half an hour, until the warnings came on. A check with the voltmeter again showed that there was no current coming from the alternator. There was no voltage at the alternator-side of the mega-fuse and none at the battery connection on the alternator. Bingo!

Must be the alternator - even though the store said it was ok. Electronics sometimes develops intermittent problems, so if both the regulator and battery had been replaced, that left the alternator itself as the culprit.

I stepped in as the intermediary and asked for a replacement alternator. The store said no. So I tried another tack. Since there was obviously nothing wrong with the battery and regulator to begin with, maybe they could return the old ones for credit toward a new alternator. Nope!

That's when I turned up to full burner mode. This required a chat with the head dog! I sent an email to the CEO of the national parts chain explaining the problem and asking for help. It was about a half-hour later when a call came in from the regional manager of the chain. After we chatted for a few minutes, he said there would be a new alternator for us at the store and there would be no need to swap out the regulator and battery. (This is one of the signs of a great business - even if it wasn't Rock Auto!)

The new alternator was installed in jig-time. And guess what. It, too, died. This was a real head-scratcher. Where did I foul up? The answer turned out to be basic automotive chemistry!

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The cable from the battery is split into a pair of mega-fuses rated at 175 amps. The output of one fuse goes to power up the electrical system. The other provides power to the field coils on the alternator and allows power from the alternator to keep the battery charged while the regulator keeps the voltage in the 14 volt range. There is a 20 amp mini-fuse in the line feeding the field coil. It was good, but there was no juice on it or the alternator end of the mega-fuse. Never before in over a half-century had I seen an intermittent fuse of any sort. But that's what it had to be - an intermittent fuse! A little tidying up and a new 175 amp mega-fuse did the trick.

Oh, that's not all. With the new mega-fuze, the alternator worked again ... but only for about a half-an-hour! More trouble-shooting. Nothing was wrong in the power circuits served by the second mega-fuze, even though it looked like a problem with a relay. The electrical system was set up to work via a relay that would open if there wasn't enough juice! After about a half-an-hour there wasn't enough juice, so the relay opened, killing the ignition, the lights, the radio – everything! Based on the deal with the alternator, the solution was easy: replace the second mega-fuze. Bingo!

But why were the relays intermittent? Chemistry. The ends of the mega-fuses are made of copper, other than gold, one of the best electrical conductors there is. The studs and bolts it mounts on are made of steel, creating a bi-metallic differential between the two parts, which creates corrosion over time, which heats the connection, eventually creating sort of a "cold-solder" connection. When the connection has been in use for a while (about 30 minutes in this case) it breaks down and power doesn't get to the field coils so the alternator stops producing power. Same deal with the power relay – not enough juice ... it quits!

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So, the next time you think the intermittent problem is the alternator, be sure to check the wiring and the fuses first, even if they seem to be just fine. It could just be chemistry at work!

The Black Door

Claudette and I were pretty liberal, in a conservative sorta way, in Tucson back in the '70s. We took in many different kinds of entertainment in our 30s and enjoyed many friends from a wide variety of backgrounds.

We attended the movies at the **Loft Theatre** on East 6th street at Fremont Ave. near the UofA. That's when we first saw *The Little Shop of Horrors* (Feed me, Seymour!) That's also where we attended a live showing of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (in which the audience is admonished to brandish their toast when the time comes.) The theatre has since become **The Loft Cinema** and moved its digs to the 3200 block of Speedway Blvd in the Old Pueblo.

I made a new friend the evening I visited a neighborhood where it was reported that a race riot was happening. This was Tucson, Arizona, for cryin' out loud! Race riot? I didn't think so. I pulled up in front of a house where a couple of dozen young black and Mexican kids were hanging out. Some of them came over to my pick-up truck and I asked them if this was where the race riot was happening. They all laughed and one said, "Yeah, at least that's what the cops are thinking." In reality, they were having a block party that got a little out of hand so the police were called to quiet things down a little and move them out of the street. Tucson Police had stopped through-traffic at each end of the block. The black kid who first approached me introduced himself as Olian Underwood – Oly for short.

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Oly and I got acquainted that evening and he invited me to come to his house and meet his mom. I swear, she looked just like Aunt Jemima! And she was just as sweet. Since we had moved to Tucson only a year earlier, Oly asked if I had gone on the tour of the town. I said no, so he invited me to take “the tour” with him on Friday evening. It was a date.

I arrived at Oly’s house Friday night about six-thirty. It was just turning dark. We piled into the pick-up and Oly directed the tour.

The first stop was a night club somewhere north of 22nd street and east of Columbus Blvd. I couldn’t tell you what the name of the place was, but from the parking lot we could hear down-home blues music coming from inside. Oly held the door as I entered. The lighting was subdued, but it was easy to see that everyone in the place was black. Oly spirited me across the dance floor and introduced a friend. He informed the guy that he was giving me “the tour.” We sat down. I got over the very uncomfortable feeling of being the only white guy there, had a beer, watched the people dance and listened to the blues band playing great music. It turned out to be a super experience. After about a half-an-hour, Oly said we had better get going because we had two more places to go.

The second stop was a biker bar near Speedway and Swan. This was no normal biker bar it was a topless biker bar! It was a lot like the night club we had just come from ... the feeling of being out of place was pretty much overwhelming for a minute – until I was introduced to one of the guys dressed in his black riding leathers. It seemed like everybody in the place was covered in tattoos and riding leathers except us! A topless biker bar means there are topless dancers and lots of beer. There was no band, just a DJ with a really great sound system playing rock music for the dancers. Topless dancers in a biker bar don’t have to be very good-looking. They just have to

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dance really well. To put it bluntly, these were unbelievably un-lovely women that did pole dances, table dances and lap dances to the cheers of the assembled bikers who showered them with tips. We spent about a half-hour taking in a completely different experience.

Our last stop was at a triangular building on the north-west corner of the intersection at Arizona and East Toole Avenues downtown. The building had been painted all flat black, except the entrance, which was shiny black. Above the entrance was a red neon sign *The Black Door*. Again, the lighting was subdued, but I could tell this was going to be another really interesting experience because everybody was dressed in vibrant colors. Something else: This was a gay bar! This was the late '60s and you didn't see many limp-wristed folks in those days – especially in Tucson, Arizona! Well, just as we entered somebody gave a shout and a clutch of folks came running over and were oohing and cooing all over Oly. He introduced me and then I was whisked by a person of questionable gender up to the stage and introduced to the crowd of around fifty people. Apparently they liked rock 'n' roll and many listened to my radio show. As at the night club and the biker bar, I felt out of place for a while. Just about everybody there was sorta "swishy" and effeminate except a few women who were so butch and manly you could swear they shaved. Everybody there was dancing and laughing and just having a wonderful time. And they used the language, openly addressing each other as queers and faggots, and all the while having a gay time, so to speak. After a while I began to feel comfortable with these people because they welcomed me and Oly, both of us straight guys, to join the party. It was a birthday party. They had one every Friday night at The Black Door. They had a live band on Friday nights and cake! Most gay people that I had ever known were artists of some sort. Dancers, painters, musicians – artists. It was a three-piece band consisting of a drummer, a bassist and a singer who also

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played guitar. They were great! And swishy! And fun! Well, Oly and I ate birthday cake and drank beer and chatted with all the gay folks and really enjoyed the band. When we were about to leave, one of the revelers asked if we'd be back. I told him/her that I'd like to bring my wife back the next Friday. I also asked if I could bring anything, since it was a birthday party, and was told no, that bringing my wife along would be just fine. After another bunch of oohing and cooing we made our escape. It was an interesting tour.

A week later, Claudette and I visited The Black Door to attend the Friday birthday party. At first she was a little apprehensive, never having been around a crowd of gays. One of the people recognized me from the visit with Oly. He was a very swishy guy who minced across the room and we traded introductions. He may have been effeminate, but he was the perfect gentleman and Claudette warmed up to him quickly. The band had an additional instrument – a saxophone – and the guy, a black man, played very well. We had gotten there just in time because when the band stopped the Birthday Boy was paraded up to the stage and made fun of. He laughed along with the crowd and they sang Happy Birthday to him. Then he stepped down and it was time for cake. The blue and white sheet cake was large enough that everybody got a piece. There was also red Kool-Aid in little paper cups, also enough for everybody.

Claudette, who is one who is not big on meeting new people, was having a great time. She had opened up and conversed easily with whoever was standing close by. We danced when the band started playing again. The stage was tiny ... barely twelve feet on a side, but the band fit on it just fine. All of a sudden the beat changed and the sax player went at it to the cheers of the partygoers. It was a nice evening among a group of very different but very nice people. After we left, Claudette

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said she really had a good time. We found out that Gay people are just like everybody else, except they have a lot more fun!

Impersonators in the Bathroom

When we lived in Tucson, Claudette and I pretty much had something going on in the way of entertainment every week! We kept the local baby-sitters busy when we weren't entertaining at home.

I remember going to one of the topless bars close to our neighborhood back in the late '70s. Usually, they had topless burlesque dancers from about noon to closing time at 1:00am.

The Arizona Legislature moved closing time to 2:00am in 2004. The state had one of the earliest "last calls" in the United States before Governor Janet Napolitano signed the bill into law.

One night, Claudette and I went to this topless bar because they had billed a group of Female Impersonators for several evenings and we had heard they were pretty good. There was a lot of chatter among the regulars that these people were a Vegas class act.

Initially, Claudette was a little leery of topless bars – oh, you know – the sleaze factor and all. But she came to understand that these were just folks trying to make a living the best way they knew how. Some were single moms, working to support kids the best they could, making better tips than waiting tables at Johnny's down the street. Some, on the other hand, were actual artists with real talent. Class acts, got it?

Topless dancers were one thing; female impersonators? Oh, my goodness! My dear wife was really unsure of this. But, she

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was a trooper - and went along because it was like the rest of our life, something different!

Well, we found our seats and got a beer and sat down to wait for the show. (There were actually topless dancers entertaining that night until the main attraction came up.) It was fun and loud and friendly and then came the big pause ... time for the show!

Now, I had been a radio announcer (DJ) for years, and I had announced the Doors' concert at Hi Corbett Field, but I had never been the barker for Female Impersonators! This was a full-blown trip! Out on the stage came this guy ... looked something like Louie from Da Bronx ... sounded like him, too! He cranks up the juice and says, "Ladies and Gentlemen, here they are, the gals you been waitin' for ..." And, I forget what the girls billed themselves as, but here they came!

It was one helluva show! There was Marilyn Monroe, Totie Fields, Zsa Zsa Gabor, a comedienne and a fan dancer. They were great! It was fun!

When the show ended Claudette headed for the Powder Room for a quick break. She came back giggling. She said all those guys were in there tidying up and touching up their make-up and they acted just like girls!

Petaluma Chicken Stuff

When I was in the Second Grade we lived in Petaluma, the Egg Basket of the World. Heck of a history in that little Northern California town.

There was this Canadian inventor, Lyman Byce, who moved to Petaluma in 1878 and managed to figure out how to make a

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stable egg incubator that would maintain a temperature of 103 degrees F. Using his invention he was able to create the largest Chicken Ranch in the world! According to **Atlas Obscura**, “By 1915 the town was producing an estimated 10 million eggs a year [at 30¢ a dozen]. With Petaluma being located next to a river and a railroad, the fragile eggs could be easily and safely shipped across the country. By 1918 the town was proclaimed ‘Egg Basket of the World’ and a National Egg Day was held, with a parade led by the Egg Queen and attendant chicks. For nearly two decades there was more money on deposit in Petaluma banks, per capita, than any other town on Earth.”

Well, where you’ve got chickens you’ve got a problem. They poop. A lot! There is always some saving grace ... chicken poop is one of the best fertilizers on the face of the earth - some say second only to bat guano. It grows dark green grass, bright red-orange tomatoes, luscious green grapes, gorgeous roses and healthy foliage.

My dad was the Recreation Director of Petaluma. His offices were at the town park, which was comprised of two picnic areas with swings, slides, and merry-go-rounds and a field located just outside the front door. It was a very large field with room for football or soccer and a baseball diamond. Across the field from dad’s offices was City Hall. Most of the park was dusty – devoid of any growth other than weeds scattered hither and thither and a few hedges defining the perimeter and separating the playgrounds from the field.

One of the first meetings he attended was with the Mayor and Council. They welcomed him and thanked him for his service in the Navy. He had retired as a Lieutenant Commander. World War II was finished just a few years before and elected officials appreciated people who had fought in it. The first thing they wanted to discuss was the condition of the town’s

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parks. There were several and they all had the same run-down condition from lack of maintenance and use. By the time the meeting was over, the Council had agreed that the Department would employ a “Park Counselor” at each of the parks. The Counselors’ full-time jobs were to keep order, maintain the playground equipment, and keep the area clean. In the Summer they supervised “day camps” at the town’s playgrounds.

Another thing that my dad and the Council agreed upon were called “Green Spaces” – perennial grass on the play field and all the parks where there was no playground equipment. They wanted residents to be proud of their parks and put them to good use for sports, play and family outings. Pop asked for and got funding for a watering system, grass seed, fertilizer and city maintenance employees and equipment to do the project.

First chore was to break up and prepare places where there was no turf. They used a harrow, such as might be found on a farm to prepare the ground prior to planting a crop. I think my dad borrowed it from one of the neighboring chicken ranches. With the ground broken up, they installed a sprinkler system at each park and the fields. That part of the project was completed just as the seed was delivered. All that remained at that point was to seed and fertilize. Pop had lined up a dump-truck and accompanied its driver to one of the chicken ranches where the rancher used his skip-loader to fill the bed with chicken guano. At that point things began to go sour, so to speak.

If you’ve never been to a chicken ranch, you have never experienced the extraordinary eau’de’poo those little egg-layers provide! Well, they spread the seed on all that prepared land in Petaluma and they followed it with a layer of chicken fertilizer. There was no problem until they turned the

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sprinklers on. That first day it was sorta stinky. The second day, the guano had begun its work and the neighbors around the park began to complain. So did the folks who worked in City Hall. After three days the Mayor came to see my dad. It was the smell. He and the Council members were taking heat from the neighbors and they wanted to know how the problem was going to get fixed. The local newspaper publisher got wind of it, so to speak, and wrote a front-page story about it.

Dad said they only had to put up with it for about a week or so and then they would be calling to find out when the parks would be open to the public. The grass was going to be bright green and soft to the touch, great for playing ball and tag and for having a picnic. It actually turned out that way. The people of Petaluma, California who had put up with the smell of wet chicken poop for almost three weeks were finally happy campers, proud of their new parks and the sacrifices they had made to get their show pieces at the Egg Basket of the World!

Can You Fly?

For most of my life I have rejoiced in my ability to fly!

Seriously. I have this ability to leave my surroundings and fly like some kind of bird! And I know there are people out in the ether that have the same ability. It's difficult to describe this experience to the profane.

It started one night when I was about fourteen - a sophomore in High School. I was a member of the Monterey, CA High School Swim Team. I also did lifeguard duties when needed by private parties at the pool at Aslomar and at the Monterey Beach for the City Recreation Department.

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Friends would accompany me on late-in-the-day summer jaunts to swim unsupervised at the High School pool. Because there was no easy way to enter through the gym, we had to climb some six or eight feet up a concrete wall on the north side of the pool and then descend some twelve feet to the cool-deck below. I don't remember accurately, but it seems like we figured out how to use our beach towels to get down. And, I remember thinking it would be cool to just jump and slow my fall by hovering. At any rate we boys would go swim for an hour or so before suppertime and then exit the pool area through a door to the outside in the concrete bleachers at the west end of the pool.

The first time I ever flew was on a summer night after an over-the-wall swim. I had gone to bed and was beginning to doze off in that foggy twilight you get before sleep descends. Somehow, I made my way to the swimming pool, scaled the concrete wall and jumped off. Just as I had imagined, I was able to slow my descent by concentrating and holding my hands out horizontally next to my hips. That soft landing was like stepping off a single stair. How cool! That got me to thinking ... could I push myself up off the cool-deck and into a hover, actually lifting off? Wow! I'm a little hazy here, but I think I just walked home.

They call this phenomenon *astral projection*. According to **Wikipedia**, "Astral projection (or astral travel) is a term used in esotericism to describe a willful out-of-body experience (OBE), a supposed form of telepathy, that assumes the existence of a soul or consciousness called an 'astral body' that is separate from the physical body and capable of travelling outside of it ..."

That summer I practiced my jump-starting at the pool and one evening finally succeeded in lifting off and hovering about two feet off the cool deck. What a trip! The pool quickly

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became the mechanism for flight practice, rather than swimming. Eventually, I got over the trepidation of falling and made it up and over the wall. It was hairy, but I flew home. Now, that was something! The view of Monterey's neighborhoods on a moonlit evening just above the treetops is nothing short of breath taking. Never having flown any significant distance before, it was difficult to keep track of where I was in relation to the walk home ... so I located the road I used on the way from school and followed it up the hill to my street to the left and onward to the back yard, where I quietly set down in the patio.

Maybe you're wondering how I held myself in flight. It wasn't like Superman with his cape flapping in the wind; not with one leg up like a can-opener and arms extended forward; rather, my legs followed along buoyed by the airflow and my hands seemed to be an extension of the force, pushing down to rise, arms slanting forward, backwards or sideways for axial and lateral control, with the majority of the force centered on my armpits. Imagine doing push-ups on parallel bars in the sky. Sorta like getting up out of a La-Z-Boy® Recliner. I hope that's vivid enough.

Eventually, I flew out to Seaside and Del Rey Oaks and even to Carmel and back, each time climbing a little higher in the sky. Initially, it wasn't a fast trip ... I worried about running into flying bugs, bats and birds, much less some itinerant airplane! After a while, flying became comfortable and seemed natural at around twenty-five miles an hour a couple-of-hundred feet above the ground. It was fun!

There was a time when I was visiting a friend in his second-story bedroom. The window was open and another friend was standing on the ground outside. He hollered at us to come out and play. My friend took the stairs and was outside when I slid onto the windowsill. Just had to try this thing in the daylight.

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Pressing down hard, I gritted my teeth and pushed off. It wasn't much different from dropping off the wall at the swimming pool. There was about a two-foot drop before I gained control and slowly eased down to the ground. My buddies were flabbergasted!

That's when I attempted a cold lift-off, rising up and landing on one of the branches in the big tree in my friend's front yard. There I was ... sitting in a tree about ten feet off the ground ... wondering if I could repeat what I did out the window. Yep. Pulled it off, and the guys were totally jazzed! They wanted to know how to do it and I showed them, but neither one of them could get airborne. We agreed to never tell anyone about this incident, even in confidence ... because nobody would believe it anyway. (At this point in time, it appears that I lied!)

Since those days so long ago, I've flown regularly, almost always in the late afternoon or evening and sometimes late at night when there is adequate moonlight. I found a railroad grade in the mountains nearby. It's a refreshing flight, following the tracks. My astral flights are always joyful, breath taking - not scary, but fun and relaxing.

One thing: I wouldn't recommend jumping off some high place to try this. If you actually want to fly via astral projection, try parallel bar push-ups in your mind as you enter the twilight before a nap or a good night's sleep.

And, good luck to ya!

Bring Me Your Levis!

Back in the day - my dad would take me and my brother to a clothing store in downtown Monterey, California where we would load up on back-to-school clothes. We got everything

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we'd be needing ... at least 'til Christmas. White underpants, socks and t-shirts, dress and casual shirts, slacks, corduroy pants and Levis. Levis? Yes! Those were the pants of choice for school and after-school. When the Levis went in the wash, "cords" were what to wear.

The thing about Levis was you could wear them for weeks before your mom would demand they be washed. The trick was to wear the same pair of Levis until they'd stand up by themselves!

The guys in Auto Shop class set the standard by wearing a brand-new pair of Levis until they couldn't touch them without getting their hands dirty. Usually, about that time, somebody's mom would have a hissy-fit and wash them. That just ruined a perfectly good pair of jeans. No longer were they Levis. They were no longer the right color. Where the cuff had been tucked under there was a very visible white or light blue line. (Yes, we tucked the cuff under on the central California coast in the '50s - not outside like the kids on the east coast.) That pair of Levis was completely ruined! Then they were just jeans.

I didn't take Auto Shop but I was subjected to the same foul treatment by my mom when my Levis would finally stand in the corner by themselves. Fortunately, I was able to wear the same pair until Thanksgiving. Everything in the house had to be spotless for Thanksgiving, especially our clothing.

I can hear it now, "Teddy! Teddy! Bring me your Levis."

"Aw, mom, they're just broke in."

"Teddy! I need those pants right now!"

"Aw, jeeze, mom."

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"John Edward Thayer, you bring me those Levis right this minute. You don't want me to come after them, do you?"

Every year between Thanksgiving and Christmas I had to wear cords or those pesky ruined jeans!

But then, somehow, just in the nick of time, Santa arrived with two pairs of brand-new Levis! Those pretty much made it all the way 'til school was out at the end of May.

By then nobody cared about wearing ruined Levis - after all it was Summer!

Eeek! It moved!

My wife Claudette was a killer Cosmetologist (hair-dresser) but she was also an impressive commercial window dresser. When we lived to Oregon she worked for The Hub, a clothing store for women. She hired on in Coos Bay for Christmas as a cashier. The head cashier decided to quit after Christmas. The store wanted Claudette to be the all-around Suzie, doing pretty much anything that needed to be done. One day, the gal who did the window dressing decided she'd had enough and she quit. The store asked Claudette if she'd like to take the window-dressing job. It was a match made in heaven!

Claudette's adventures in the windows were world-class! The head honchos at The Hub loved her inventiveness. She had no experience at window-dressing so she wasn't hampered by pre-conceived notions. Plus, she was in an autonomous position, with no-one to boss her around. It was an ideal job!

Then we moved to Salem. There was a Hub there, too. They asked her if she would mind traveling. There were stores (or affiliates) all over the state and they really liked her work. "No

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dice,” she said. It was a three-and-a-half hour drive between Salem and Coos Bay alone! So she stayed in Salem and decorated like crazy! I was the morning man at KBZY so she would take me to work at the radio station at about a quarter to 6:00am and then go to the store. They had given her a key to be able to get in and do her stuff.

She only had to work one morning a week. One time, a little before nine o'clock, a group of people gathered in front of the store, waiting for it to open. Claudette was busy quietly tidying up the little frills and tucks on her mannequins. She didn't move much when she was doing that, so the folks out on the sidewalk didn't notice her. When she was finished with one mannequin's face and make-up, she bent over to work on the lower part of the thing. Her sudden move startled the group outside the window. They thought she was a mannequin so they freaked! And she laughed. It's one of my wife's great memories from the mid-'60s.

Feelings

So far, we've covered four stories about our human senses - hearing, seeing, smelling and tasting. That leaves one more: Feeling or touch.

Feeling can be broken into two parts - that which one feels with the heart, gut, or mind ... and that which one feels with one's body, skin, muscles or bones.

First, let's deal with the body. It's unlikely that you recall the difference between the comfort of your mother's womb and the cold, bright, loud delivery room. Those had to be some kinda scary feelings! But, I can remember the touch of my mama's lips on the nape of my neck when I was little. Can

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you? Remember getting the bottom of your little feet tickled?
How 'bout the first time you stubbed your toe? Wow!

How many of us remember when mom said, "Don't touch that burner - it will hurt you." How many of us just HAD to put our little fingers on that burner? Remember the feeling? Yowww! It hurt! It burnt! And it broke your mama's heart. Maybe those were some of your first feelings. (Well, the ones you can remember, anyway.)

Three things: I stepped on a board with a rusty nail in it. That hurt. Squeezed the picture wound to make it bleed. That hurt, too. Went to the doctor, who checked it out, treated it, put a band-aid on it and gave me a Tetanus Shot. Ouch! And, that Tetanus Shot ached for what seemed like a week. You've probably been there and done that ...

I have three scars on me from lacerations. One on my left arm from playing with a razor-blade, one on my right arm from playing with an axe, and one on my left shin, just above the ankle, from tripping over barbed wire. None was as gruesome as it may sound! I recall that none of them hurt as much as cutting one's finger with a kitchen knife. Instead, each of the lacerations was clean and just stung - yes, stung like an insect bite. Just lucky, I guess.

Next, let's work on the other feelings - hearbreak, fear, panic, loathing, joy, love, ecstasy, gut feelings and premonitions.

Heartbreak - usually involves loss ... you and your lover break up, your pet dies, or you loose a family member to age and infirmity. Maybe you witness a car or airplane crash where nobody survives. Heartbreaking.

The crashes or pending disasters like that create ***fear*** in everyone. Fear is what makes people want to turn away or run.

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Many people go into full-out *panic* mode when disaster hits. Panic usually results when it seems there is no way out of a situation. It creates a kind of paralysis of both mind and body.

One of the worst human feelings is *loathing*. This is hatred so deep that a person could actually fly into a rage and actually take the life of another living thing.

Just the opposite is *joy*! I call it abject happiness - glee, if you will. It's the feeling that something has happened or is happening that makes you feel all warm and giggly and wonderful all over.

Love is such a special feeling that poets have written volumes on it and have scarcely scratched the surface. I guess love is a feeling of attachment, or of belonging or of preference. I love my wife and family. And I love chocolate-mint ice-cream!

Now, *ecstasy* is an order of magnitude greater than joy! Ecstasy is the feeling of being completely overcome with joy and happiness.

All of us have had *gut feelings* before. Gut feelings are almost like *premonitions*, but not quite as strange. Your car has almost bald tires and you have to drive across town some six or eight miles. You have this gut feeling that you're gonna have a flat before you get home. Different is the premonition that you're gonna have a flat just before you get to your destination across town, and sure enough - as you're pulling into that parking lot - BAM! Your gut feeling was telling you that it might be a good idea to get new tires on the way across town. The premonition was a view into the future that predicted the outcome.

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Feelings set us humans apart from each other and from the animals. I wonder what kind of feelings nature's creatures experience. Your pets, I'm pretty sure, experience love and happiness and fear and trepidation. But what about that little Praying Mantis lurking out there on the porch? And what about that fly he's stalking? I'd rather not go there either!

And then there was *Feelings* , **Morris Albert's** monster hit from 2006 that was nominated for **Grammy Award** Song of the Year. Copy this to your browser:

<https://youtu.be/CyBcHUe4WeQ> Then, click and enjoy!

Buck Loved Lunch

My wife Claudette was remembering her youth and the antics of the family dog. His name was Buck and he used to accompany Claudette and her brother John to school. Buck would sit quietly in the middle of the playground after he was sure everybody was safe.

When the bell rang and the kids left the playground, Buck would slowly explore the grounds looking for lunch-bags that kids inevitably leave behind. He'd check them out, one at a time, and then choose the "best" ones, pick them up and take them away.

Claudette said that her mom told her about his love for lunch. Buck was a Norwegian Elk Hound, a large breed that looked very much like a police dog. There were times when he would get home with three or four lunch bags in his mouth! He'd spit them out and carefully open them, one at a time, and eat the contents, after which he'd stretch out and take a nap.

Sometimes, Claudette said, he'd make it back to school to escort the kids home and sometimes he needed another nap!

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The Landlady Hates Snakes

I went to pay the rent the other day and got to chatting with the landlady. Somehow we got off on the subject of snakes. She said she hates snakes. I asked why and she said she just does. I reminded her that snakes won't hurt you unless they feel threatened. That's when they will strike, poisonous or not.

I told her about my encounter with a Western Diamondback Rattler in the hills above Big Sur, California.

And I told her about my encounter with a small king snake the cat brought into the house.

She told me about the time her husband brought the Bull snake in the house, wrapped it in a towel and put it in the bathtub.

I found out long ago that snakes will run away if they're not surprised. That's what happened in Big Sur. Damned near stepped on that puppy. He buzzed (like they do) and then quietly slithered away.

The cat brought a little black and white ball into the house through his kitty door and spit it out on the living room floor. It looked like a miniature soccer ball, but about the size of a tennis ball! I picked it up and instantly recognized what it was. The poor little guy was all rolled up into a ball, protecting itself from the fangs of that big ol' puddy! I recognized him by his beady little eyes peering out from the edge of that little soccer ball! I found his tail and slowly un-wound him. He was such a pretty animal. Well, I took him out to the front yard and turned him loose under the Bird of Paradise Bushes and he promptly found a special spot to hang out.

It's been a few years, but I haven't seen him and still remember.

Guarding His Porch

I was sitting in my rocker staring out into the morning when I caught a glimpse of the family's porch lizard. Actually, he's a juvenile **Western Fence Lizard**, also known as the **Blue-belly** because of the blue stripes on his underside. He (it?) is only about six inches long - tail and all. Successful Fence Lizards grow to be about as big as a large mouse, fitting comfortably in one's palm with little feet and tail hangin' over the edges. Before we had the big Cottonwood tree brought down (it was falling apart) there was a big one like that living in its branches. He was great at avoiding the cats!

Actually, he got caught one day by our since-passed Murray kitty. The cat was jammin' around in his favorite monster Cottonwood tree, doin' kitty stuff like scratchin' and sharpening claws, when he and that big ol' lizard came eye-to-eye. Murray managed to grab that big, fat Fence Lizard around its middle, hauled it down the tree and through the kitty door into the living room, where he unceremoniously spit the thing out on the carpet. The Lizard was not phased! Murray tried to pick it up and put it in his food dish, but it wouldn't cooperate! Full-grown Western Fence Lizards are not very palatable because of their scales, which are pointy and not very comfortable for kitty lips! Well, I reached over and picked it up, took it outside and put it back on the tree. It clung to the tree trunk and then, all of a sudden, started doing push-ups!

I recall seeing our current little guy for the first time some months ago. Since then he has grown a lot. He has plenty to eat including little cockroaches and brown long-legged spiders and plenty of sugar ants. There are also lots of yummy flies in the immediate neighborhood. And he's great at gobbling up both red and black ants while standing in the middle of the entrance to their nests in the ground. Needless to say, we do not have bug problems in the house thanks to him.

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Photo Credit: Las Pilitas Nursery www.laspilitas.com

Instead of living on and around our fence - as Fence Lizards are wont to do - this little guy hangs out around our porch. Somehow he manages to avoid the cats, of which there are three. There is Cinnamon, our yellow and white **Domestic Shorthair** Tabby; a nameless black long-hair kitty with white socks, white paws and a white vest; and our neighbor's **Tortiseshell Calico** aptly named Terror. Our Fence Lizard is a crafty little dude. He climbs the screens and the banisters and guards the whole place almost all the time, all the while avoiding the kitties.

So, there I was, sitting in my rocker, watching out the sliding glass doors in the living room. I noticed when the little guy crept around one of the posts that hold the banisters on the porch. He climbed on to the middle banister and assumed his guard position - flat as a pancake, stretched out as far as he could go, lookin' large! All of a sudden one of our Humming birds appeared a mere six inches away, buzzing like a huge bumble-bee! We have a Humming Bird feeder hanging off the

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porch rafters. This Hummer was obviously doing its level-best to protect its feeder.

Buzz, buzz, went the tiny bird, just inches away from the lizard, when all of a sudden our scaly little guy started doing his "This is MY porch" dance. Well, more like push-ups. Push-ups are a signal that all lizards use (like the big one that used to live in our Cottonwood tree) to show adversaries who is boss and to claim territory! Apparently, he convinced the Hummer because it flew back up to the feeder and got back to pigging out!

Next time you run into a lizard that isn't afraid of you, try dropping and givin' it ten! He'll probably return the insult with eight or ten of his own!

That Kitty Sound

Before we get started on kitties, I need to mention the quiet breath of my lovely wife in the night. It's home to me.

But, for some reason there is no sound more comforting than a kitty next to my ear with its motor going. I read somewhere a while back that they haven't figured out how cats make their purring sounds. But that's malarkey!

According to the Mother Nature Network (MNN.com), a cat's purr begins in its brain. A repetitive neural oscillator sends messages to the laryngeal muscles, causing them to twitch at a rate of 25 to 150 vibrations per second (Hz). This causes the vocal cords to separate when the cat inhales and exhales, producing a purr.

Scientists like Elizabeth von Muggenthaler, a bioacoustics researcher, believe that cats also purr to heal themselves.

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She says that frequencies between 24-140 Hz are therapeutic for bone growth, pain relief and wound healing. She recorded a variety of cat purrs, including those of domestic cats, ocelots, cheetahs and pumas, and discovered the animals' purrs all fit in the range for bone regeneration.

In addition to repairing bones, there's also evidence that the series of vibrations caused by purring can repair muscles and tendons, ease breathing, and reduce pain and swelling.

This research supports the parallel fact that the human body responds to electrical nerve stimulation for pain control in the upper range of these frequencies (80-120 Hz). By the same token, intense pain can be induced at the middle frequencies (50-70 Hz) which feel very much like when a part of the body, such as a hand or foot, goes to sleep! The lower frequencies (35-50 Hz) can be used for muscle stimulation and the lowest (2-10 Hz) are reserved for treatment of chronic pain by "exercising" the affected muscles.

Purring isn't just good for cats though - it's also healthy for cat owners. Studies show that cats do a better job of relieving stress and lowering blood pressure than other pets. In fact, a 10-year study at the University of Minnesota found that cat owners were 40 percent less likely to have heart attacks than non-cat owners - and purring might play a role in that.

To reiterate ... there is no sound more comforting than a kitty with its motor going. Now you know why.

Not in 92 Years!

I was shopping for bananas for Claudette the other day. I found just the right thing at Fry's – they were sorta greenish, a

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sure sign that they would last at least four days – four bananas, four days – that’s how it works in the Summer.

As I walked out of the supermarket I spied an old guy that I last laid eyes on about eight or ten years ago. He looked great! He was on his way in and I was on my way out so I walked right up to him, extended my right hand in fellowship and asked how the dickens he was doing.

Well, the usual small talk followed. He’s been doing fine. So I told him I throw myself out of bed every morning and if it hurts when I hit the floor I know I’m still alive!

At the time I was 77 and said as much ... and continued with the key question, “How old are you now, my friend?”

He said, “I haven’t missed a meal in 92 years!”

“Oh, my God,” I thought, “Is that the answer to longevity?”

WOW! This ol’ guy was upright, a little thin but walking tall and strong, with no assistance, unlike many of his peers still alive. No walker, mind you. No wheelchair. No thumb-stick or cane. No dottering, either. As Chicago Cubbies announcer Harry Carey used to shout, “Holy cow!”

Haven’t missed a meal in 92 years. Maybe the secret of life?

It’s MY Cake!

We were watching one of those cake shows on the Cooking Channel when a working Carousel was created for a little girl’s first birthday. When it was rolled out the kid was just delighted! And then they showed it being cut up and shared with the rest of the partygoers. The little girl was un-fazed ...

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unlike my wife Claudette, who said that the same situation happened to her when she turned One.

She was living with her Grandmother in San Francisco when it came time for her birthday. Grandma took her along to pick up an angel-food cake at the nearby Safeway. It was a plain angel-food cake with no frills. It was 1938.

Grandma was generous to a fault. On the way back from the store all the neighborhood kids came out of their houses to holler “Hi, Claudette!” Grandma invited all the kids to come over for birthday cake! Mind you, Claudette was just One year old and new to this neighborhood all filled with strangers!

She says she doesn’t remember if there were presents – or games – or ice cream. But she does remember how angry she got when Grandma began cutting up her cake and giving it away. She implored many times, “That’s MY cake!” She says she cried and her Uncle Kenny picked her up and comforted her, saying it was alright and that he had set aside a piece of cake just special for her. She says she doesn’t remember eating the cake, but she sure loved her Uncle Kenny!

They call this sorta thing a character-building experience.

The Closet

I like to play poker - Texas Hold-em - so, on the way to and from my September 2018 60-year high school class reunion in Monterey, California, I played it in card-rooms in Bakersfield, Parker and Chandler.

We saw the Rich Little comedy show in Las Vegas on the way to Monterey but didn't have time for poker in Vegas.

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On our way home to Globe, Arizona, we stayed overnight at the Wild Horse Pass Hotel and Casino across the I-10 from the Phoenix Raceway complex. I Played Texas Hold-em there and had a wonderful time.

On the way back to our room on the ninth floor (great view) I went looking for the ice machine so I could reload. It wasn't anywhere to be found, so I asked an employee where it was.

In a thick Gila River Indian Community accent the woman said *"Oh, see dat open spot ober dere? Just open dat closet and dere's Ice and Cokes in dere."*

Now, if you know your Southwest Native Americans, you know that San Carlos Apaches are pranksters of the first water. It appeared to me that an Apache must have had a hand in the design of this hotel/casino because who else would have put the ice machine in a closet?

Still Kickin'

It appears that Claudette and I have survived the 2018 mid-term elections relatively intact. I mean we're still alive and uninjured by those raging mobs of activist crazies whipped into frenzies by the likes of the California 43rd Congressional District's Maxine Waters or former Obama Attorney General Eric Holder. We weren't even chased out of any restaurants this time around!

The thing that set the 2018 mid-term apart was its nastiness. There is no memory here, in over 77 years on this planet, of a period devoted to such nasty, negative campaign rhetoric. Everybody was nasty! Our US presidents – both Obama and Trump – were nasty. Everybody's crazy uncle Joe Biden even got in on the action. And then, of course, there was Chuck

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Schumer, the Senate Minority Leader who was almost as nasty as his predecessor “Dirty Harry” Reid. Not one to be left in the dust was House Minority Leader “Nasty Nancy” Pelosi.

Reid, you may remember, was responsible for throwing the Mitt Romney Presidential bid under the bus with a simple claim that Romney hadn’t “paid his taxes for years.” After the election that Barack Obama won, Reid was asked whether his claim was true. He answered, “No, but it worked didn’t it?”

It seemed like contests to determine who possessed the sharpest wit have gone by the wayside, leaving the option of who could rip his opponent to shreds without shouting obscenities. Lies and uncorroborated fables were fair game across the political landscape this time around. It didn’t help that the mainstream media busied itself reporting “fake news.”

Perhaps the worst of the whole thing was the threats, intimidation and outright physical violence across the country. Worse yet was the fact that there were politicians egging the perpetrators on to hound candidates and public servants in public places like airports, restaurants and sidewalks. Antifa (the antifascist fascist group) was recruited to bring their special kind of violence to the streets as far apart as Portland and Washington DC.

Whether unsafe and uncivil campaigning will continue to accelerate into the future or calm down remains to be seen.

Fall Is In The Air

After Thanksgiving, as Winter approaches, there is a crispness in the morning air. And there is the snap of leaves’ stems breaking just split seconds before they fall to the ground. This is the time when annual plants like Bermuda grass begin to turn from green to dirty blonde as they slowly go dormant.

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This is the time of year when one must think ahead about whether to take a coat or sweater along on a junket to the grocery store.

Crawdads in Kansas

My daughter Janet lived for a while in Kansas. She had a number of adventures, including dealing with the mud-bugs! I never knew they had crawdads in Kansas! OMG!

White Ant Colony

Back in the day ... say the early '70s ... my son, John, used to squat on the sidewalk in front of the house and kill ants. Yes! He delighted in smashing black ants with his geology pick.

His sister, Janet, wasn't fond of watching him wreaking mayhem on innocent little members of God's creation. So, one day, she decided to abscond with the rock hammer while John was busy doing something else. (John had done her wrong by grabbing one of Janet's favorite dolls, Mrs. Beasley, and created a great rip across her back and belly.)

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Mas Historias de un Hombre Viejo
(More Old Man's Stories)



By J E Ted Thayer