

OTTER
may be Ross Chamberlain's fanzine
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and that was enough to frighten me awake.

Children can be frightened by something that's supposed to appeal to them. At about the same time in my life, on a trip to Asheville (home of the original Thomas Wolfe and Manley Wade Wellman, but I knew nothing of that then, of course), being taken to see Santa Claus in a department store window. I think it was a mechanical Santa, with an amplified voice—I'm not sure, the details are dim, now—this was, after all, 50+ years ago. But he scared the heck out of me, and it took some comforting from my mother to assuage the tears. It may have been my first disappointment with a presumably positive authority figure...

There was a similar scene (or at least I always associated it) in the movie, *The Human Comedy*, based on a book by William Saroyan, in which a boy (Mickey Rooney, I think) is frightened by a mime in metallic makeup who is doing a robot-like act, promoting something. The mime breaks out of character to go "boo!" or something of the sort, and Mickey runs hollering home...

More recently, in Cleveland, Joy-Lynd and I and a friend with a small child went to a Bob's Big Boy for lunch. Actually, it wasn't "Bob's" there; someone else's name appeared in front of Big Boy in the name; I've forgotten now. But the big statue was out front, and on this occasion, Big Boy himself was wandering around the

3 Suppose that there are a lot of things that have scared me over the years. Some of them are things that you wouldn't ordinarily think of as being scary.

When I was four or five, when we lived in western North Carolina, I had some recurring nightmares about road graders—those long, yellow, insect-like earth moving machines. I don't remember the incident that must have triggered them, but I can still recall the dream-images of the forward end of the machine grumbling out from around the corner of the house (a little like some of Terry Gilliam's animations for Monty Python, where buses or houses lurk behind trees and office buildings) or crossing a field. It was never directly menacing me, moving toward me—it was just there,

restaurant... somebody dressed up in the costume, with a plastic head about the size of your average refrigerator. Okay, maybe a washing machine, or somewhere in between. Big. Mary's little girl, about 3, I think, or maybe 4, saw "Big Boy" across the room, and looked interested; a waitress noticed, and said something to him and he came over. Well, what was (semi-cute) from a distance turned out to be way too big and overwhelming up close and as that big plastic face loomed over her the kid burst into tears. I'm sure the person inside was mortified, and in any case he/she retreated hastily.

Disney' people apparently do well—or learn quickly!—in dealing with that kind of thing, I should imagine.

My main scary thing, I guess, outside of some things that generally enprickle the napes of most of us, has to do with acrophobia, the fear of high places—or, more accurately, the fear of proximity to long falls! (If you think about it, that's not quite identical. I, for instance, can pretty well deal with standing *next to* a tall building or precipice, okay?) That proximity is pretty much an in-the-mind thing, too—I generally have no problem looking out a 20th story or 80th story window (though the latter's a thrill!) or flying—in fact, I prefer the window seats.

But open the window—even a third-story window—and my solar plexus does a nice plunge. At the Grand Canyon last August, the experience somehow overwhelmed the fear response, so that I could stand at the edge without trepidation. Behind railings, yes—I wouldn't climb over—or on— them! Neither my good sense nor my otherwise assuaged acrophobia would allow that!

Thinking about scary stuff, it seems like scary stories are losing their purpose in life. We become inured, and jaded, and seek out greater thrills. This not a good thing.

We are generally taught from childhood to enjoy scary stories in order to enable us to deal with frightening situations in adulthood. This also sensitizes us to what our society considers frightening and not-so-bad. Ideally, this should also serve to enhance our continued awareness of where reality and fantasy divide (i.e., one's sensitivity to the bandwidth where they overlap!) —but that aspect of it needs support from other

areas of life.

The accuracy of knowledge probably drives more dreamers and artists than realists and pragmatists and dullards, who have settled for sharp borders for all their concepts. —I'm not equating realists and pragmatists with dullards, incidentally! There can be dull dreamers (and even artists), as well.

The concept, then, if not necessarily a conscious one, is to prepare us *emotionally* via a variety of scenarios in which the real elements are so candy-coated they lose their threat. The wider the variety of such conflicts we are desensitized to (of the fear response) the better we can deal with them —up to a point. General desensitization is not a good thing, as is both obvious and already mentioned.

It is a scary thing.

Well, I blather. Let's see if I can get to some mailing comments...

Cover cartoon • Bill Kunkel

My first response to this— well, no, I lied, it was more like my most *recent* response to it—switched tracks, and considered Shakespeare's Bottom. Er, being anxious not to suggest a kinky obsession, I refer of course to the hapless would-be thespian of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* who woke up with the head of an ass—between his shoulders, but, briefly, the love of Titania, due to Oberon's spells. (Speaking of Mickey Rooney—and I did, back on page 1—I have forever considered his portrayal of Puck, in the 1930s Hollywood version of the play, as definitive.)

Off the Cuff • guest star Gunnar Ingram

Kurt Who? Never heard of 'im. Aww, gee, sorry, man...

Doodles • Laurie Yates

Unquestionably, the last few years in

your life have continued the lessons that academia frequently overlooks. It should be true of all of us. However, I've been trying, not too successfully, to come up with a proverb or axiom that counters "What cannot be cured must be endured." There's gotta be one; there always is. Like "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" and "Out of sight, out of mind."

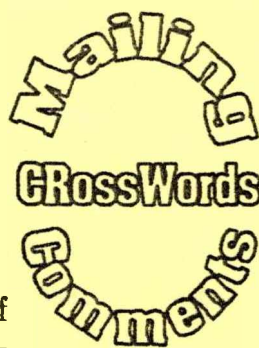
PowWow #11 • Joyce Katz

I did a cartoon strip once for JJ Pierce, involving a frog that became overambitious. I wish I could find it to respond in part to your excellent fable.

Somehow, until I read this, I hadn't been aware of the River Crimea's defection. It is now a thing of legend, ay?...

Implosion • Arnie Katz

I still get school anxiety dreams, frequently involving my having been held



over for years and years, and having gotten in the habit of fluffing off some courses so that I'm beyond all hope of ever catching up. Oddly enough, I also frequently get them regarding the stage, wherein I'm shortly due to go out there and perform... it's usually a part for which I've seen the script, once, but lost it, and never learned my lines. Sometimes it's a singing role (I had one of those in a school play once), and I'm neither sure I'm in good voice for it nor if I remember all the words.

Life has been my Big Test and Stage Presentation, and sometimes I still feel unprepared, which is Not Good at my age.

Carpe Diem • Marc Cram

Damn, Sam... Nope. Impossible. Nothing I think of matches the flurry of possible rhyming names you have already considered loading on your poor unsuspecting potential child...if its potentiality has not been severely diminished as a result of this article.

The first time I saw Rita at the Rio, in the lobby, I was somewhat offput by her failure to resemble the one who appears on the commercials (not the Conga commercials). But then there's this Ronald McDonald that appears in a series of commercials, talking to a kid, in a short frame loop, who is definitely not the same as the one that appears in the national McDonalds burger commercials with all those fuzzy live cartoon characters and does magic tricks with them. That one used to worry me a lot, I can tell you!

Encumbrance • Karl Kreder

"...the funny thing about knowledge— you never know what's useful and what isn't." Yeah, I remember, in school, wondering about what use I'd ever have for algebra or history...

I should have been a history fan, I think,

but that's hindsight and it's way too late, now—not really to be a history fan, so much as to have the inclination to be, if you know what I mean. I hated math in school, but enjoy it now and wish I'd learned more. I swear it was the teachers... because when I finally did have a teacher who was able to communicate his love for the subject, my interest took seed. Not flowered, unfortunately. I was already too entrenched in bad habits by my junior year in high school.

Apa-tizer • Ken Forman

In College Station, Texas, our high school team was the Tigers, and our colors, like Texas A&M, were maroon and white. I won a poster contest prior to one of the football games, against the Bears of some other high school which I've completely forgotten, and got my picture in the college paper, *The Battalion*. The drawing/painting, in color, was of a Tiger's head and forelimbs merging into a cloud of smoke; he wore a turban and the smoke was pouring out of an Arabian Nights lamp. The legend was, "Tiger-Genie's Going to Get a New Bear Rug!" Okay, so it wasn't all that sophisticated...

Chuckles #1 • Joy-Lynd Chamberlain

You were taught that *all* of man's ideas were intelligent? Really! So that's where you got your early cynicism...

I'm glad I was of help with your schooling, at least until I took the job in New York. I remember putting you to sleep with my soporific voice from time to time. During that period I also learned a lot (in the academic sense), reading books and other things I never thought I would.

I don't think I ever understood until much later the effect my returning to New York had on your self-confidence, and I'm eternally grateful that you were able to find yourself in that period after I left.

Bye, everyone, for now... *Ross*