

Dither

may be Ross Chamberlain's fanzine
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HERE WAS A HOTEL in New York called the Americana; it was built in the years I lived in NYC but renamed to something else (Something Marriott, or Hyatt Something...like that) toward the end of that era. I was in it a few times for various industry conventions related to the frozen foods business and maybe once or twice otherwise. It occupied half the block between 52nd and 53rd Streets, facing 7th Avenue. The New York Hilton takes up most of the block north of it, but faces east onto the Avenue of the Americas (6th Ave.). In the years when the National Frozen Food Brokers Association held its annual convention in New York, they essentially took up both hotels. Or was that the International Association of Refrigerated Warehouses? What-

ever. As Arnie can tell you, these and other frozen foods-related organizations were very much a part of my life for many years—but I'm letting them slip away from my consciousness now that frozen foods are only something to put in the fridge.

Americana. The word itself conjures up late 19th century (and early 20th) imagery: picnics and bandshells, straw hats and suspenders, long skirts and veils, baseball players with handlebar moustaches and armbands. Summer rowboating/winter ice skating on the lake/pond/river. Watching freight trains pass; kids waving at the engineer. I used to do that in the '40s...

It also evokes bucolic images of farmlands and backwoods or mountain life. The ol' fishin' hole or swimmin' hole. Handmade crafts and homemade foods. Crossing the urban/rustic line: Norman Rockwell. Mom's apple pie. Certain recreational foods: hot dogs, ice cream cones, candy bars.

Somehow heavy industry, industrialized entertainment (television, Hollywood, Nashville/Capitol City, Silicon Valley) and demographic marketing don't fit the image, though I suppose they really belong to things that are American—if no longer uniquely so.

Some of what I chose to list above as things that connote Americana are things that many of us consider nostalgic even though we may not have personally experienced them. Hollywood and TV have perpetuated this sense, I think. Early Hollywood films reflected what was still really out there, of course (and there are still ol' swimmin' holes and rowboats on lakes here and there about the country). The movie *East of Eden* (James Dean, Julie Harris, Raymond Massey) captured a sense of 1918 America very powerfully; for me, more so than many

other films laid in the same period—And no, I wasn't around yet, but as I grew up my maternal grandparents lived with us, and Grandpa was among other things a photographer. He talked a lot about his times, and I remember looking at his photo albums. Actually everybody in my family took a lot of snapshots of their lives and preserved them in albums. I got acquainted with my family's lives and surroundings in the decades before I showed up (albeit in a kind of static way). What they preserved were mainly scenes of the areas of Vermont they lived in and where my parents grew up, and then, in

subsequent years, my very peripatetic parents (joined eventually by my older brother and sister and, at last, me) lived in various spots all over the U.S.

While *East of Eden* took place in Salinas, California, the look of things was not all

that different from a perspective of only 30-to-40 years (including two world wars) later. Many of the people who made the film would be old enough to remember it as it was. It's striking to me to realize that to my parents, when they were children, the Civil War was as recent in their past as World War II is to today's children. My father was a soldier in WWI, though he never left U.S. soil, and that was less than 20 years before I was born...sort of like Viet Nam might be to kids born today. Scary. Ah...the continuity of time!

And, speaking of continuity, maybe I can get to some mailing comments before I run out of paper, here...

Far Out, Skipper

The Denver brothers, John and Bob,
Different as they can be—
One prefers the mountains,
While the other went to sea.

PowWow - Joyce I've seen great congregations of birds collect in trees from time to time over the years, even swamping small copses, but never the sky-darkening phenomenon you describe. I've heard the stories of passenger pigeons darkening the skies in years gone by, and of course, on the other side of the coin of your story, the onslaught of locusts. Isn't there a famous story about... what was it, seagulls?...that rescued an area being devastated by locusts? I associate it with Utah, whose state bird is (otherwise unaccountably) the seagull. Keep watching the skies...

Implosion - Arnie In College Station, I lived two blocks from a small shopping center, called South Gate: a supermarket, a drug store, a barber shop and a dry-cleaners, plus possibly a couple of other establishments of no lasting interest to a teenager. The drug store was The Source for Comic Books and occasionally other magazines, as well as toys and things that on rare occasions came within my meagre budget. I remember when Mickey Mouse watches were put on sale. They were not expensive, but just out of my range, and since at the time I wasn't all that sanguine about wearing (or carrying) a watch, I didn't make any special effort to acquire one. If I'd known then...

Across town, past the A&M campus, was the West Gate area, where stood the Campus Theater (the only dedicated movie theatre in town; it was fairly new when we arrived in 1945). It had red plush seats, and the aisles swept in a curve from steepish near the entrance to flat—or perhaps a slight rise—near the screen. This was where, in summer, kids congregated Saturdays to watch a morning full of cartoons and short subjects and a segment of amateur-hour programming (kids) that was broadcast on the Bryan radio station, KORA (“Sweetheart of the Airways”). There was a campus station, WTAW, but I'm pretty sure that it didn't stoop to such programming options. They also ran movies in Guion Hall, closer to home and next door to Kyle Field; these were also open to the public. That's where I saw Howard Hawks' version of *The Thing*—It was very popular, and I remember

standing in a long line outside the building and hearing the screams from inside...

Oh, back to the point. Just up the block from the Campus Theater was a newsstand/soda counter where one could get the best ice cream sodas around and which carried such fascinating publications as *Sunshine & Health* and *Cavalier* and *Sexology* (disappointing, to say the least)...and the operator allowed some of us adolescent pups to purchase them. (I'd place the wicked ones under a couple of regular comic books, and they'd pretend they didn't notice.)

A friend of mine, Thomas Schwartz, went to Korea. I cut up most of those copies of *Sunshine & Health* and mailed pages to him (I regretted this in later times). He came back okay, but we lost touch after that.

Apa-Tizer - Ken Your experiences on the river were fun to read about, but even when I was much younger I don't think I would ever have been adventurous enough to start out with you (or a likely group like you guys) on such a trip. That's notwithstanding my one-time dreams of hiking the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. Hah! But hiking was always more my inclination than canoeing, anyway. I was never keen on water...

Roll of the Dice - Peggy I “discovered” Clive Cussler about a decade or so ago, perhaps longer, with his *Raise the Titanic* novel—my introduction to Dirk Pitt and friends. I always thought of Pitt as a viable successor to Bond—James Bond. More viable by far than the attempts by some idiot to keep writing about Bond himself that showed up around the same time, I think.

My favored “reading spot” as a teen and pre-teen was a storage room in back of the house, with a Morris chair that just fit my sprawl, and light from a back door that was rarely used. It, like your room, was perhaps cooler than other options at the time, but it was more importantly a hideaway spot. Later my folks expanded that storeroom and it became my bedroom, but the Morris chair went elsewhere. I “graduated” to SF from Oz and comics in that chair... starting with the pulps. Only much later did I find Heinlein's (and others') juveniles.



Untitled - Ben As I remarked to Ken a paragraph or two back, I've never been too keen on water, meaning swimming. I was willing and interested enough as a youngster, but when I started to take swimming lessons, I had to take them in the college gym at Texas A&M. It was summertime, we were out of school, and here I was having to deal with a gym-teacher type—I was supposed to be *free* of all that classroom type stuff, man! We had to take communal showers before *and* after swimming in the pool. The water was chock full of chlorine, and the pool was in one of those big, echoing type places with high windows and tile walls... The atmosphere was—I dunno, just too academic, too restrictive, too un-fun! So, right or wrong, I lost any appetite for swimming I might have started out with.

Sercon-Navigation - Tom Good, you brought up one positive element of summer I'd overlooked. Three months (or so) without those blankety-blank 15 mph school-zones. There're still a couple of year-round school zones where speed limits are supposed to drop to 25 mph in the daytime— One of them's not too far away from where I live, on Flamingo, or is it Spring Mountain? But just last fall they (the bloody 'They' of story and song) stuck one of those verdammt 25-mph intersection zones on my block (complete with crossing guard), and for a while I was running through a variety of sabotage scenarios every time I drove to work in the morning.

John re - JoHn Oddly enough, while I do have some recollections that of necessity have to be from age two or three, none are specifically season-related... save to the extent that a couple were outdoors, without snow. (We did have occasional snow in the mountains of North Carolina.) One, indoors, but just inside the open front door, was of playing with and examining our old Eureka upright vacuum cleaner, fascinated with the sparks that could be seen inside the motor housing, and wondering why I had been admonished not to stick my fingers in the holes.

Another was while we lived in another house, a place named John Rock after a near by feature of the landscape. The house was a hunting cabin built by John Jacob Astor in what was, by the time we lived

there, the Pisgah National Forest. There was a CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp not too far away, and my father, who was with the National Fish & Wildlife Service, took me there one day. That wasn't where he worked; there was also a fish hatchery a little deeper into the forest where he had an office. My recollection of that visit is very dim, but what I do recall was going down to visit him on another day... when he wasn't there. There was some building resembling an army barracks from the outside, but like a classroom on the inside, and I walked up some steps to the front door, opened it and saw the people inside. They said "Hey!"— which is or was simply a greeting in that part of the world, so I said "Hey!" back, and asked for my father. Several times, as I recall, because it didn't seem like I was getting any response...

My folks (not Dad) came to get me not long thereafter, but I don't remember that. I learned later that it was with some consternation that they learned I was there, because the CCC camp was not simply down the path but also across a narrow, railless bridge and a fairly frequently traveled road...

There are some other, fuzzier memories, but those stand out.

Enjoy the Season - Marcy When I went to my one session at summer camp, at Camp Greenville, a YMCA camp near Greenville, SC, in 1952, they initially had me slated for the wrong cabin—one intended for the youngest set. I was 15, at their top limit for going as just a camper, and the other kids in the cabin thought I was going to be their counsellor. They moved me quickly enough when they figured out I was a bit big for the bunk space, but I gather it took some finagling.

My recollections are relatively few but, considering my dislike for any regimented atmosphere, mostly pleasant. The sharpest memories are of hiking (one longish hike on a hot summer afternoon that found us cotton-mouthed and knocking on strangers' doors in the search for natural springs) and taking a couple of trips to nearby places of interest, such as the town of Cherokee and taking a speedboat ride on a lake in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Great fun...

That's enough for now. I'm running late, again...

