

MELIKAPHKHAZ #66 --- a fanzine by Lon Atkins, 9942 Voyager Circle, Huntington Beach, CA 92646. September 1978. A Zugzwang Pub.

\*\* The second half of my trip report runs in this, together with very little else. I'm working harder than ever. Kathy has a job now as a cost accountant for IIT Cannon Electric. She's happy even though hard worked. They're into the inventory and closing cycle and that means many extra hours. As a result, the household is running close to the brink of disaster. Especially since Dawn has a new kitten and Rachel has two new pet rats. I'm confident that we'll survive all this, though I don't quite see how at the moment.

We co-hoisted the Petards with Ed Cox a couple of weeks ago. 'Twas a mighty success, to judge from the parting comments. I have a new toy, which I put to good use in the entertainment arena. It's a Polaroid "One Step" camera. This uses SX70 film -- the kind that develops before your very eyes. It's a cheap but reliable device.

For Petards, I put up a poster board with the caption "Foto Caption Contest." The rules were explained. I would take fotos of guests over the course of the evening. These pictures would be numbered and placed on the caption board.

Below the caption board was a stack of 3x5 cards and a collection box. Anyone was free to caption any picture (and identify it by number). EdCo and I were to judge the entries for humor and appropriateness. The top three winners would receive prizes.

This innocent idea attracted a lot of attention. Petards are famous for their fannish geniality and devastating wit. While the old saw may be applied -- that the latter is honored more in the breech than the observance -- this nite was a true Petards session, replete with corruscating wit.

I give the three winners in this, even though I can't reproduce the fotos. A verbal description of salient point will be supplied. The third place winner was Jackie Causgrove, who decided to write a caption on her own photo. The picture showed Jackie with Winnie the Pooh encircled by her left arm as she sat in an arm chair and read THE JOY OF SEX. The look Jackie is bestowing on Winnie is at once sexy and solicitous. The caption: "...and now for the part that evil stepmother didn't get to..."

This rather ingroupish caption earned Jackie a bottle of T.J. Swann "Easy Nights" vino. Jackie plans to mix it with Pepsi Lite and Southern Comfort.

Second place was captured by Mike Glicksohm, who choose that very same photo upon which to base his idea. One could almost hear Jackie's voice: "Are you sure you've had a vasectomy?" Mike's inspiration earned him a bottle of burgundy.

First position belonged, as expected by everyone, to Dean Grennell. Dean had 1178 entries in the contest, a prodigious effort which left him only minimum time for drinking and flirting. The top caption went with a photo of Chris Goodfellow offering a drink of Madeira to our kitten. Dean essayed: "Only a dogwood / Give a catatonic." The judges were so smashed by this time they cackled themselves silly over this weird humor and handed Deano a bottle of Zinfandel (or maybe it was Cabernet...). SPPA would enjoy UC Petards...

Overleaf, the second half of the Paris-Versailles trip report continues. Be consoled: although I'm going again in September, I promise not to write another report.....

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SPECIAL INTERRUPTION: Yes, I'm stopping the narrative temporarily to deliver a special message. I don't ordinarily approve of this, it being a crime to disturb the lucid flow of such splendiferous prose. But I consider a threat on my life to be sufficient reason.

It was an innocent Friday night. Philippe and Michele had brought Jacky Loos over (to see what Americans do on Friday night). Dave and Marcia Hulan joined the conspiracy and the festivities were ready.

Not wishing to disappoint Jacky, I had put away the prayer rugs, hidden the unleavened bread and returned the I CHING to its shelf -- thus effectively secreting our normal Friday night activities. Instead, I had anticipated the needs of our guests. For Michele, a bottle of vintage Perrier. For Philippe and Jacky, five bottles of good American wine. For Dave and Marcia, a half-gallon of Beefeaters (this being Friday).

The meal was to be one of those combo-cook efforts we do so well with the Hulans -- sauteed boned chicken breasts, orange Hollandaise sauce a la Lon, spinach souffle, tomato aspic, sourdough bread prepared Marcia style. It was after this repast, as I was occupied trying to keep Philippe and Marcia out of the liquor cabinet, that Michele found my trip report.....

"You have no spelled my name right!" she informed me, sparks of angry French fire glowing in her brown eyes. "What is the American for 'I will kill you'?"

I gulped nervously, not wanting blood to soil sweet Michelle's hands. "How is your name spelled, Michelle?" I inquired.

"Only with one 'ell,' cochan!" Her fluency amazed me.

"Hah hah. Two 'ells' is the American version, Mechele. When in Rome..." She described what could be done with my American version. Incredible command of the language!

And so I promised that for the remainder of the report, "Mischele" would be spelled with one "ell" only. I value my life.....

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So there we sat at a street cafe table in Pigalle (or is that "Pigale"?) drinking our German beer and watching the funny-looking people exit from the play house next door. (Uhhh, that's "theatre" not "play house"...). Tourist buses were parked in the street to cart off flocks of the species. Pigalle was slowing down. It was time to return to Versailles.

On our way back to the car we bought sandwiches and fries. Those greasy fries, so awful looking before they were dumped into the hot oil, proved absolutely delicious (though still awful looking) when cooked. We all munched them as Joe piloted the car back, staying a low altitude to avoid attracting the flics.

## 6.0 SUNDAY MORNING

I regret to report that Sunday morning insisted on observing its schedule. When I arose, it had departed without a trace.

(VERY THOUGHTLESS OF IT!)

## 7.0 CRAZY HORSE EVENING

Sunday afternoon, sitting at a table belonging to that sidewalk cafe I'd frequented during my 1971 visit, Philippe and Joe and I discussed plans for that evening. It was a patchy sky, threatening more rain. To anticipate such weather, we would drive early into Paris and see new sights before parking near the Crazy Horse Saloon. It would also be possible to snack before entering the show, where everything is expensive.

Thus we passed the Renault factory on schedule and proceeded along the Seine to the Place de la Concorde. From here we wove into the maze of Parisian streets until we were able to park, precisely in front of the Crazy Horse.

A stroll down the boulevard would lead us to food. Along the way, we passed quaint little shops. ("What a nice dress for only 4,000 Francs!") ("Here's one without designer initials for a mere 3,000.") ("What a pity I've already completed my gift shopping.")

The sandwich shoppe had won national attention by capturing first place in last spring's competition to see how little meat could be included in a ham sandwich which still qualified for that title. I'm certain I was served one of the original sandwiches from that competition. Couple these sandwiches with drag-foot service and an outstandingly mediocre wine and you have the perfect setting to make Michele angry.

"Bah! This bread!" she exclaimed, beating her sandwich on the table top. "It is too hard! It is terrible!"

We were all abandoning our sandwiches, tossing them onto the table. The waiter, noticing and suddenly in fear that the table top might be dented, shuffled over. We paid the man and departed, into the first drops of evening rain, bound for the Crazy Horse, a notorious tourist trap and immoral establishment.

Our table was in the second row, against the wall right of the stage. The Crazy Horse would secure first place in a people-packing contest, were a formal one to be held. The density of humanity jammed into that saloon was depressing. I had no chair, but was forced to balance on a narrow bench attached to the wall by "L" shaped supports. The roar of conversation and the pall of smoke made both conversation and vision difficult. We ordered champagne, lit up, and shouted in self defense.

The program gave us the names of the girls: Lova Moor, Rhoda Decorum, Miss Volupta, Moony Trafalgar, Victoria Rodeo, Cosma Fantastic, Brandy Proforma, Vanilla Banana, Trucula Bonbon..... etc. Performing, they were precision athletes. Their bare feet curved like those of ballerinas as they danced. It was a remarkable show. For all that bare womanflesh, it was more of a precision exhibition than an arousing sex show. So exactly choreographed were the girls, even to the expressions shown on their faces, that I felt the loss of that spontaneity one observes often in the nude dancers of California clubs.

Puppets, cartoons, magic and burlesque were interspersed between exhibitions. The routines were ancient, classic, still funny. English was the official language of the notices and many patrons. German was spoken much by the clientele. The French, I am told, prefer the Lido.

We made our escape past a cabbie offering hot addresses for five Francs each. Up the Avenue George V we drove until we came to the Arc du Triomphe. That night was a celebration of the anniversary of Charles de Gaulle invading the

Netherlands or sacking Berlin or something. Red and blue klieg lights were playing on the structure. We drove around the circle in admiration for the beautiful display, as Joe moaned about not having his camera and Philippe told us how he had served in a commando unit under de Gaulle when they invaded Transylvania.

Starvation was upon us, so we stopped at a Paris pizza house owned by an Italian from New York City. The food revived us to clowning and wine, though I was sinking fast. ("Ka-boom! Ka-boom!" went the blood vessels in my temples.) After coffee, we capped the evening by missing the freeway back to Versailles and using winding surface streets through suburbs and villages.

## 8.0 WORK

As it was work that brought me to France, it's only fair to mention the topic in this report. Though a mention is all it will get. The project review consumed four days, was quite successful and hopefully will lead to a repeat in September. The French were kind and cooperative. They made every effort to take me to good restaurants for lunch. I was pleased.

## 9.0 DINNER AT THE BERGER'S

Monday night Joe and I were invited to dinner at Philippe and Michele's apartment. Michele's mother was to prepare escargot. Snails had been a topic of conversation among the four of us from that first night on Montmartre, when we had almost ordered them, but chose the oysters instead. The same snails which are protected by law in France have cousins in America which ravage gardens and proliferate despite chemical warfare. When we missed escargot at La Marmite du Roy (they were out that night) Michele promised us some before we left France.

The Berger's have a nice apartment on the fourth floor of a building in the great Velizy apartment complex, a highly modern area not far from historic Versailles. From the balcony, one looks right onto concrete plazas, play grounds and stores. To the left, a vast wild wood prevails. This is where the dog is walked every morning. (The dog, alas, is already in residence at a nearby kennel, in anticipation of the Berger's trip to California.)

Saturday Night Fever was on the stereo when we arrived. With a Bee Gees background we explored the apartment, sipped white wine, smoked French cigarettes (Gitanes) and read Picasou. Picasou is the French version of Uncle Scrooge. His adventures have been adapted into the French culture with success, and I found it delightful to encounter an old friend so unexpectedly.

Suddenly Michele was pulling a sweater over her blouse. We were to go to the home of Michele's mother to pick up the escargot!

As if to demonstrate that our reckless efforts at French driving were mere child's play, Philippe gunned his machine to speeds in excess of 150 kilos per hour as we accelerated and decelerated through the twisty residential streets. Escaping collisions by a snail's eyebrow, Philippe delivered us safely into escargot territory.

Michele led us to the stairwell. "We must climb. The building has no elevator."

"That's great!" I said, radiating health and lack of hangover. "In America we climb stairs often by preference, for the exercise."

"My parents have a nice apartment on the seventeenth floor," added Michele. I probably imagined that she grinned.

"Of course, Joe should lead the way and set the pace, seeing as he is the senior person present," I continued smoothly.

At the top of the stairs we were in fine shape. None of us were puffing from the exertion, probably because Michele had been wrong about the seventeenth floor. Or it may have had something to do with Philippe's statement that "Michele's father will probably insist on serving champagne." We knocked and were admitted to a lovely eighteenth floor apartment.

Michele's father Jacques is a fine French gentleman and his wife Colette is a pretty lady and gracious hostess. Champagne and conversation bubbled freely, although Philippe soon discovered himself to be our only translator. Eventually he called a halt, declaring that he was doing too much translating to be about to speak his own thoughts. Joe and I resisted the cheap shot and listened to the lively conversations in French which ensued as Michele's parents learned of our exploits in Paris. Colorful embroidered accounts, I'm afraid, and not the objective factual reporting I offer in this paper.

As we were preparing to depart, Michele's brother Robert arrived. He drives racing cars for a hobby and wants a pair of cowboy boots, solid black, as a souvenir from America.

Back at the Berger's apartment, we had a leisurely marvelous meal and listened to a variety of albums. The relaxed pace of the evening led up to the midnight hour without warning. Our intentions to get a long night's sleep were yet again undermined by the pleasures of France.

## 10.0 LA MARMITE DU ROY - II

Tuesday after work I am left to my own devices. Joe has departed for Geneva. The Bergers prepare for their trip to America. A mild weariness grips me and I fall into a catnap. When I awake it is eight o'clock. I am revived, hungry as a famished tiger, and inclined towards a fine local restaurant.

There are few patrons in La Marmite du Roy at this hour. The lady of the restaurant seats me at a corner table, facing across the room to the bar. The window on my right shows me a quiet narrow street and high stone walls rising for several stories. Barred windows near the top of the first story have neglected shattered panes behind the bars. Pidgeons nest in holes in the wall.

The ambience is all I could ask. My napkin is folded in my wine glass as shown to the right above. Plant boxes are placed inside the windows, hosting a variety of greenery. The bar looks great -- wooden construction in a classic style, a lamp in the shape of a chess knight on it, mirrors behind reflecting stacked wine glasses and snifters. The paintings and watercolors on the wall are well chosen. I am taken by a watercolor of an owl.

Still, there is no gigot. I accept a recommendation and order a fish called "lotte." For starters I will have the fish soup (so replete with garlic!) and cream (so fresh!). The wine will be a Sancerre.

At an adjoining tables three Frenchmen tell American stories as they dine. I cannot understand the language, but I gather occasional words and I know the human way of telling anecdotes. They are mellow fellows, obviously amusing each other to pass time. Now they order Calvados and shift to tales of Italian



women. Universal hand gestures underline claims of physical attributes. It would seem that certain cities are favored above others. I wonder how large a sample space is represented by this informal poll.

Until now there has been no sign that I am recognized by the owners as one of the crazy Americans who dined here last Saturday night. Whether this means well or ill, I am determined to obtain the postal address of La Marmite du Roy, for I already know that I'll be writing this report and the owners of this excellent establishment should receive a copy.

Aided by Larousse's French-English Dictionary, I faced the task at hand. Marmite's smiling lady endured my frantic pointing at entries under "postal" and "address" -- I used a technique of alternating rapidly between the two entries, which required skillful page flipping, and muttering "postal address," "letter," "mail delivery," and "postman" in a mellifluous incantation that must certainly be a pop hit if ever recorded by the Bee Gees.

Suddenly she smiled and wrote out the restaurant's address on the paper I proffered. I declared myself fluent in French. Those of you who may be lucky enough to visit Versailles are obligated to enjoy a meal here...

LA MARMITE DU ROY  
7 RUE DES RECOLLETS  
78000 VERSAILLES

The children of Marmite had emerged for their evening meal, dining very quietly at a table across the room. I commented appreciatively on this to the lady and soon I was being introduced to Jérôme (15 years old), Marie (14), Ivan (12) and Angèle (11). I proudly displayed my family photos (the wallet variety) and received compliments on the brood. Then I was identifying myself as Lon (though it was the Alonzo that stuck) and meeting Francoise and Frank on first name terms.

All other customers had departed, happy and filled with good food. I joined Frank and Francoise in conversation, such as our limited foreign vocabularies and the dictionary would permit, and a round of super Calvados. We talked of the encroachment of steak and potatoe restaurants, the declining pride of craft in our two countries, the wine country and other things. In the street, a "hot car" passed with roaring engine. Soccer is a rising sport in America. Perhaps in a few years we will have a team in the World Cup. The Argentines are crazy this year.

It is midnight. I conclude my description of the ingredients in Texas-style chili and make my farewells. The lights in the government offices high on that stone face across the street are still burning as I start my Opel and head back to the Trianon Palace Hotel.

11.0 LA MARMITE DU ROY - III

Wednesday was to be my last night in France. The review was going quite well and should conclude on Thursday. What possibilities that last night held out. Perhaps I would go to the Lido, sit in the front row and be discovered by the chorus girls. Perhaps I would go to Paris and set a new record for consecutive laps around the Place de la Concorde. Perhaps I would close down Pigalle. Or perhaps I would go to the best restaurant I knew and enjoy a last fabulous meal concluded with Calvados....

I arrived at La Marmite du Roy about eight o'clock. Frank and Francoise are both out front, so I stop at the bar to chat and have a glass of Glen Fiddich. I spy a top hat on a shelf, but Frank demonstrates that it is a champagne

bucket. It is a much better trick, I think, to make champagne appear from a top hat than it is to materialize rabbits from the same.

When Frank vanishes into the kitchen (he is the chef responsible for this culinary magic), I choose a table and sit facing the door. My note pad is at hand, as is my dictionary. In the street outside, two soldiers pass, then a young couple. The pigeons are busy surveying the scene from their holes.

Francoise has provided me with a menu, but when she comes for my order I write her a note with the aid of my trusty dictionary:

S'IL VOUS PLAÎT  
CHOIX DU CHEF  
MERCÎ

The chef is inspired tonight. His first course is smoked salmon steak, more than an inch thick and juicy! A flower of sculpted butter graces the plate, together with lettuce and radish garnishment in flower cut. Tarragon is sprinkled atop the salmon. The wine is a Cote du Rhône -- Vacquetras. I enjoy this feast with true delight.

A passing cat pauses and peers in the door. Is there food for cats here? We stare at each other, the cat and I. He is a curious beast, a hungry-looking fellow. I am too jealous to share my salmon. This shows in my eyes, or else the creature thinks I fancy cat stew for a second course. The cat departs with an independent flick of his tail. I reflect: in France, all dogs are on leashes and all cats run free. The cats have it better, if hungrier.

For the second course, the chef offers veal in a Calvados cream sauce. Green beans with a few flavorful onion bits complete the dish. I taste this marvel and conclude that the sauce surpasses the beans and veal together. Frank's strongest point, from my limited observation, is his skill with sauces. He infuses such a unique and delicious flavor into each of them that mere meat can't compete. The dish must be taken together in any evaluation. I envy this skill in particular, because I strive for fine sauces in my own cooking.

At the adjoining table a couple, young -- early twenties, I estimate, is holding hands. He murmurs soft musical French phrases. She gazes into his eyes as he speaks.

In the street is a sudden clatter of tin can. Children are kicking it merrily along. Francoise goes to the door and admonishes them about the noise. They are her children, the children of Marmite, and she feels they disturb the quiet atmosphere of this calm old street. Ah, so they do! But I smile to myself. The things which fascinate children are the same our world around. And this also for lovers.

Now comes a garden salad with delicious dressing -- vinegar, oil, mustard, tarragon. I enjoy it in this unAmerican sequence, following the entree. Frank goes out thru the side door and passes the restaurant front as he strides down the street with a smoky cigaret. I know about the side door because it exits off the alcove which hosts the stairs up to the toilet. I know about Frank's break at a strategic point in the meal preparation because he has now done it two nights running. Good man, to know when a break is appropriate.

Francoise serves the fromage. I choose three kinds of chevre, goat cheese. This and Calvados are two culinary discoveries which I can pursue in America. For desert, there is sherbert. Very pleasant. Then Calvados -- yes?? And in my expansive mood I order the same for the couple next door. Perhaps they will thank me and spread a little of their magic my mellow way.

Climb up one level and you'll find a secret. It's an opening secret, not a closing-out one. Try sailing into a new situation with uninhibited but well-mannered charm. Try being what you feel.

The lovers both spoke English. They were pleased and not unwilling to share their happiness in idle conversation with a crazy foreigner. Thus he readily admits to human status; he is an engineer; he is flattered that he is 25, but he's an old man of 30 (almost 31). She is a secretary, 22 glorious years of age, proud and free. Proud himself, and proud of her, he tells me that she insists on paying for this evening at a fine restaurant. They are "considering" each other. A young 35, I know that the decision has already been made; only the formalities remain.

Talk flows on, inconsequentials and confidential exchanges of eternal verities. I sense the right time to withdraw. They allow this gracefully, engaging each other's eyes exclusively. Their bill is soon paid. As they depart, I notice how close she manages to walk to him without touching.

Frank has returned and takes a Calvados. Francoise has an alka-seltzer in a wine glass. There is no doubt that I have my Calvados glass refilled. We sit at the back table which seems to belong to the Sérés. No other patrons but I remain, but I feel less a patron than a friend. No pretense remains, as of customer and owners. We are just three people.

Frank paints. Many of the watercolors and paintings on the wall are his. Francoise says that when he gets weary of the daily grind, and angry at it, he goes away to paint. Much of work concerns game birds. In a back room, closed to the public, he has many fine canvases.

Francoise is a woman who understands people. She raises her children, and I have seen their proper courteous behaviour and their strong spirit for life. She nourishes the restaurant in multiple ways, supplementing Frank's magic of cooking. I didn't discover her creative hobby -- I suspect the plants and ambience of the restaurant were hers.

The kitchen is small, but filled with utensils. Copper-bottom pots and pans. The tools of a master. From this cramped kitchen emerge masterpieces of artful cooking. The pots and pans are left behind to be washed by the chef's helpers, or by the chef if such are not available. Back in the dining room, the guests eat with gusto. They give no thought to the preparation of the feast and its kitchen aftermath.

In some ways I feel this way about my trip to France. In I came, a guest, to enjoy the country. So much I took; so little I returned.

It's time to wrap up this report. That night as I left La Marmite du Roy, saying good-bye to Frank and Francoise, I was content and happy. Tonight, concluding this report, I am filled with pleasant memories of France. I wish that I could personally thank all the good people who made the visit such a success. Just writing this goes a little bit in that direction.

ALONZO