

No. 67

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Redd Boggs'
SPIROCHETES

A SONOMA IDYL

"Sunbeams, shadows, butterflies, and birds" -- Wordsworth

"It's such a beautiful morning," I said to myself, "that I think I'll take a book and pack a larch and go over and sit in the park." Yes, I said *larch*, and in carrying out my plan I prepared a couple of chicken sandwiches which I put in a paper sack along with a can of Coke, and with this *larch* and a book I sauntered forth. It was sunny and breezy, white clouds scudding overhead, shadows flitting across the mountains to the west, and the California poppies goldenly ablaze everywhere along the road and in the weedy edges of the park, as many, surely, as Wordsworth's ten thousand daffodils. Brightest February in Sonoma.

I crossed the vast unenclosed tract of the park that I call Egdon Heath, although I don't suppose anybody else does, and found the picnic area on the far side completely empty on this sunny morning. Perhaps it was too early in the day for a picnic. A few kids supervised by their alert and attentive mothers, the latter pleasantly clad in shorts, climbed like monkeys on the playground equipment some distance away, but I was alone with my book and *larch*. I sat at a picnic table under the huge gnarly mossy oak trees that must have been there since long before the first "white" (sic) "men" (sic) arrived in Sonoma. A grey squirrel scampered here and there, eyeing me resentfully for intruding upon its territory. It refused a crumb of my sandwich and went nimbly up a tree and off into the dark foliage. A crow complained mournfully somewhere in the woods, as lonesome as I was, and a white butterfly fluttered by, making uncertain progress against the wind.

I read/reread some of the wonderful sketches in the book I had brought, Joseph Mitchell's *Up in the Old Hotel*, while the spring wind ruffled the pages, more impatient than I was to reach the end. I like to savor each word and phrase of a masterful writer like Mitchell. But at length my thoughts turned to a word I myself used in making the resolve to come forth, bringing with me (besides "a heart that watches and receives") a book and some *larch*.

On just such a morning as this, long ago, in the early 1930s, my brother Jerry and I were playing around in the backyard of 229 Eighth Street South, Breckenridge, Minnesota, and my sister Claire was around, too, some distance away, while my father worked on the car in the driveway by the garage. A shabbily dressed and whiskery man trudged up from the river bottoms and greeted my father politely, removing his battered hat and smiling a gap-toothed smile. His advent was not in the least frightening. Every freight train that rattled through town had its load of hoboes in the empty boxcars. "Old Jim Hill's a friend of mine / And that's why I'm riding down Jim Hill's main line," as the old hobo song of the era went, James J. Hill being the robber baron who established the Great Northern, the railroad that ran through the center of town. They begged for a handout from the housewives all over town, but they were not dangerous. Nobody was ever assaulted or murdered by these homeless wanderers, so far as I know. We paid little attention to the man till my father called to my little sister Claire, who was close by, and told her to go inside and ask Mother for something the hobo needed, my sister couldn't quite understand what. There was no arguing with my father, however. Later, we learned what happened when my little sister went into the kitchen.

"Daddy says to give that man some larch," my little sister announced. Mother looked out of the window and saw the ragged hobo conversing with my dad. We always tried to help any

unfortunate person who came asking for a handout, not out of religious principles but out of simple humanitarianism, but this was something new. "Larch?" my mother asked. "What do you mean, *larch*?" "Larch! Larch!" my sister insisted. "Daddy said to give the man some larch!" "He must have said *lunch*," my mother decided. "All right, I'll fix him some lunch." She made some sandwiches and put them in a paper sack and sent them forth borne by my sister.

My father and the hobo inspected the contents of the bag with puzzlement. My father excused himself and went into the house. "The man wants some *lard*," he explained to my mother impatiently. "He didn't ask for sandwiches. He caught a fish in the river and wants to fry it but needs lard for the frying-pan. For heaven's sake, why give him some sandwiches?" My mother began to laugh incredulously. "Why, Claire came in and asked for some *larch* for the poor man. She didn't understand what you said. She thought you said 'larch,' and I thought she meant *lunch*. Outside of the tree of that name, I don't know what a larch is. Larch, lunch, lard! What a crazy misunderstanding!"

The lard was quickly provided, and the man went on his way with grease to fry his fish and a couple of unexpected sandwiches as well. Ever since then, in our family, lunch — but curiously, not lard — was always called *larch*. "I'll be back in time for larch," one of us would say, and we knew what he meant. The incident of the hobo and his fish came back to me in vivid recollection after 60 years and more, as I sat at a picnic table in Sonoma and nibbled my chicken sandwiches under the ancient oaktrees. It was a tasty and delightful larch.

A pickup truck drove up and stopped a short distance away on the park road. A woman, a park employee, got out and began to sweep up candy wrappers, cans, and cigaret butts from the picnic area. She was not exactly a "solitary Highland lass," which are in short supply in this neighborhood, but I welcomed her arrival. I commiserated with her for having to work on Saturday. "Tomorrow, too," she said cheerfully, "but I don't mind. I work alone, and nobody hassels me. It's an easy job, and I get paid." The nameless hobo of long ago vanished from my mind as I chatted with the stocky pretty young woman. This was only a momentary encounter, like the other one, but if I live another 60 years I will remember this one too: the sun, the breeze, the golden poppies, the birds and squirrel, and the woman.

She tossed her plastic bag of trash into the truck, got in, and drove slowly past. I know women well enough to look up as she went by, and I saw her twiddle her fingers at me in farewell. I waved back, and watched the truck trundle slowly down the road and out of sight.

RUMPELSTILTZKIN, I PRESUME

"And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof...."

Genesis II:19

Now go on with the story:

"I can see that this will take a while," Adam said, looking out at the assemblage of beasts and fowls that were shaping out of the dust. "There must be a couple dozen species here, at least, and possibly more."

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THE GAFIA PRESS.

"Take all the time you need," God said generously. "I've got all eternity to kill, you know. Sit down on this mossy bank, and let's do it. Where are you going to start?"

Adam reached down and picked up a small furry animal that had been rubbing against his leg. He scratched its belly and it began to purr. "I'll call this one Rhinoceros," he said.

God looked a little surprised, but nodded dubiously. "How about this big creature with a horn on its nose?"

"Let's call it Elizabethbarrettbrowning," Adam said, after some thought.

God watched as Elizabethbarrettbrowning went snorting off into the bushes. He pawed his beard and sighed heavily. "How about this one, Adam?" He indicated a scaly, reptilian creature with sharp teeth, snoozing in the warm waters of the lake. "Let me give you a hint: It's *not* a gazelle."

"I don't know whether to call him Hulkhogan or Goldengatebridge," Adam said. "Maybe he's an Otisspunkmeyer. Hey, how about this? -- *Tonyaharding!* I've got so many good names in mind. But he looks like he might be Man's Best Friend. I'll bet he can bark and wag his tail. I'll call him Frank. I've always wanted a Man's Best Friend named Frank. If there's ever anybody else in this forsaken Paradise, they may want a Frank too."

A species named Frank! God shuddered at that, making the stars tremble, but considering the alternatives, he felt strangely grateful. He dabbed his warm forehead with a piece of sky. "I'm afraid you aren't very good at this, Adam," he said regretfully. "Why don't you go and walk in the Garden a while? I'll see you later. Oh, by the way, the creature you'll find wandering around in the Garden: you may think it's a Buttafuoco or an Algernoncharlesswinburne, or even a Bjorn or Mervin or Larry, but I'll tell you now: it's a Snake!"

TALL STORY

In a dream I found myself on a San Francisco cable car that was (of course!) climbing a steep hill: California street, perhaps, or Nob hill, I don't know. We were about a quarter of the way to the stars when a bevy of eight or ten ravishing young women got on. Who knows what I imagined them to be -- sightseers from out of town, perhaps -- or where they were going. They sat in a group nearby, chattering and giggling merrily (the most heavenly music in the world!), making a dazzling constellation of blondes and brunettes, but they left too soon. Womanlike they did not forget to tell the cable car operator how much they enjoyed the ride, and then they descended from the car swiftly and gracefully, in a radiant waterfall of femininity, long hair and purses flying in the descent. One would suppose they, of all the creatures on earth, were most perfectly adapted to conditions on the planet. But plunk them down on Jupiter, and they would function just as well, I suppose. This was my dream, after all.

A man sitting next to me growled "Women!" (I thought they were goddesses.) He added some remarks to indicate that "Women!" was not intended as a compliment, but I had a more pertinent observation to make. "Do you realize," I said, "that every one of those women was *taller than I am!*"

LITERARY CATEGORIES

Epic Poetry · Type A
Novels · Type B
Short Stories · Type C
Drama · Type D
Travel Narrative · Type E

THE MANUSCRIPT of this minor Melvillian *Jeu-d'esprit*, never before published, is undated. There are a few clues to its age. It is scribbled in handwriting that I can recognize as my own from ancient days, but handwriting evolves slowly over the years and it's not easy to date precisely a small specimen. It's in pencil, and I haven't written in pencil since grudgingly accepting the ballpoint pen circa 1955. The most obvious clue is that it's written on a half-sheet of paper with one typed line remaining on the back thereof, apparently part of the draft of a letter. It says, "letter in the next *Sky Hook*, out in about six weeks. You'll get a copy of course. Sincerely," I have no idea for whom this letter was intended, and I am unable to identify the issue of *Sky Hook* referred to, but the evidence indicates that this small item was written about 40 years ago, in 1952 or 1953.

It's not strange that I dreamed such a thing, for I have often noticed on visits to the University of California campus that the female students are all lean and rangy, lithe and self-assured, but above all, tall. Most of the students now on campus weren't born for ten or a dozen years after Gretchen and I first visited the campus in 1964, and I think the new generation of women may be taller than the women of 30 years ago. I myself am of only average height (or "height," as so many people absurdly mispronounce it these days, presumably construing it as analogous to "width" and "depth"). My ID card from the Eighth Air Force in World War 2 says I was 5 feet 10½ inches tall, and perhaps I have shrunk a little since then. When I was a schoolboy, believe it or not, I was usually the tallest kid in my class wherever I was. Despite this early start, I didn't hold that advantage after junior high when other boys started to outgrow me. Even my two brothers, both younger than me, eventually topped me by half a foot or so. In the earlier years, in any case, I towered over nearly every young woman in sight. They were always five foot two, eyes of blue. When did they start to out-tall me?

In the years since womens liberation took hold, women have made impressive gains in many fields, but it's only a start. I am sure that the twenty-first century will be the Century of the Woman in which women get a chance to prove everywhere how smart and capable they are. Anything a woman can do at all she can do well, although women seldom mention the fact. Perhaps they don't even realize it. Blacks and gays start out demanding equality, and rightfully so, but end up proclaiming superiority. Women, who have good reason to do so, haven't reached that point as yet. Liv Ullmann, talking about her debut as a movie director, remarked that "As a woman I had to prove that I have a brain and am a human being" -- very minimal goals, I should think. Women are very good at being women, but this must be difficult, for only a little more than half the human race ever manages it. Women accomplish a lot of other things too, which is incredible. Just being a woman must be a fulltime occupation.

But it looks like women in the future will be, not only smarter, but bigger, stronger, and taller than we imagined they would be. I wish I could be around to see them come into their own.

THE CAPTURED CROSS-SECTION

BOB SILVERBERG, Box 13160 Station E, Oakland, California 94661

You do pretty good Silverberg, actually ["Something Golden from Silverberg," *Spirochete* #65]. The unvaried sequence of short sentences at the opening of the paragraph is not my rhythm, but after that it gets pretty convincing. I have dreamed whole Silverberg novels -- spent hours reading newly finished manuscripts in my sleep, with high approval of the text -- only to awaken and find nothing but a memory of having reading my new manuscript. (Or, in one case, the vivid memory of a bold-face passage in triumphantly underlined gibberish.) A funny story. Thanks.

BOB BLOCH, 2111 Sunset Crest drive, Los Angeles, California 90046

Many thanks for an interesting issue [*Spirochete* #66]. Those names on your list are mostly unrecognizable to me, alas. But I do know that King Gillette was the safety-razor father of Gillette blades, that Braxton Bragg was a Confederate general who never used them, and that Judah P. Benjamin was the vice-president of the Confederacy. Others are completely unknown, though I'd guess that William Simon U'ren might have invented a familiar medical test.

GEORGE C. WILLICK, 514 East street, Madison, Indiana 47250

Gee, it's only been 30 years since I received a fanzine in the mails. Haven't grown up yet, huh?

In *Spirochete* #66 you made out a list of names and asked who they were. I assume you may be testing the general knowledge of America here. So in that spirit, I answer. Without cheating and looking up the names, I know only two: Griffin Bell, of course, who was Jimmy Carter's attorney general, and the hapless Braxton Bragg, Confederate general of the western forces (I've done a lot of Civil War research for the local county).

You mean fans have really quit wearing beanies? Surely not. Trekkies everywhere, I'll bet. I shouldn't talk as I record the series myself, faithfully. Some habits are hard to starch, as the nuns say.

Me? Not much. Became a decent photographer, noted in ragtime areas, and capable player piano rebuilder. Make a living working in a motor manufacturing plant, Reliance Electric. Had six daughters and now five grandchildren, too. Still receive free SF books in the mail to review. The multith I pubbed *Parsection* on is in the closet, about five feet away. Don't know why.

Anyway, an interesting turn of faith, you sending had sending a fanzine to a 30-year-old address. I'm four blocks down the street now, but the postman found me anyway. Madison is a small town, after all.

I Remember Lemuria: Dejà Mu.
