

The MAE STRELKOV

TRIP REPORT





INTRODUCTION

This is not a Mae Strelkov *Festschrift*, put out by myself and Ned Brooks. It is Mae's own zine, the story of her travels in North America under the auspices of the Mae Strelkov Fan Fund in the fall of 1974, that just happens to have been stenciled on my typer and run off on Ned's mimeo. For its lateness in appearing--it has been a year and a half since Mae was here, and an unconscionably long time since she sent me the manuscript--I am solely to blame. I have no excuse. I trust, tho, that her, and my, fannish friends are sufficiently well acquainted with fannish procrastination that they will understand and not censure me too strongly for not getting this zine into print earlier.

I have followed Mae's manuscript and subsequent letters very closely. The only "editorial" elements that I have allowed to intrude are the run-on paragraphing style and the use of italics where Mae had underlined. I also evened up some of the punctuation and typos, but in general I left them, and the spelling (a mixture of British and American orthography) alone. [One small point, tho: the "beluga" is really the beluga, or white whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*).] Apart from the little map on the last page, there is no artwork in this zine. This follows Mae's own custom: her own zines have no interior art. Her own words are picture enough. I also take responsibility for any shortcomings in the typography.

Read, then, and enjoy Mae's trip report. To those who, like myself, were able to meet her and talk with her--and (lucky!) be her host--as well as to those who know her only by mail or thru fanzines, I hope this zine will bring pleasure and pleasure and pleasant memories of a really remarkable woman and fan.

Sam Long IIII76

Sorry this has taken so long to complete. It has been run off for more than a month, but I was hoping to be able to include more photos. I finally had to settle for the one on the cover, shamelessly lifted from Leigh Edmonds' EMU TRACKS OVER AMERICA and enlarged. This is one of the best photos of Mae that I have seen, and was taken by Valma Brown. Lest Mae send a zombie after me, I should explain that her chin isn't really quite that sharp - a bit of her cheek is lost in the photo because it was behind Leigh's coatsleeve.

There are 100 copies of the Trip Report on assorted colored papers, and 100 on white paper. All have the same cover, and all have one of Mae's hecto paintings glued to the inside of the cover.

Pages 1-17-25-31 are on Sloan's Topsham Blue, pages 3-33 on TwillTone Gold, pages 5-9-23 on A B Dick Mimeotone Blue, pages 11-13-21 on TwillTex Lime, pages 7-15-19-27 on Sloan's Topsham Bittersweet, page 29 on A B Dick's Mimeotone Mandarin, and page 35 on TwillTex Gold, in the colored paper edition.

Copies of the colored paper edition will be mailed to everyone we have listed as having contributed to the Fund. The remaining copies will be sold for 50¢, or 75¢ if I have to mail it. Stamps are acceptable.

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Ned Brooks June 1976
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TRIP REPORT

by
Mae Strelkov

I've told the story already a good many times...quite a few of you who'll be getting this will recognize incidents already told you privately in letters written you from here since I got back. There is also a fuller version jotted down by me soon after my return, not to forget it all. But it turned out so long, it ended up almost a complete "novel", in size, at least. I've decided to tell the story from memory anew, with occasional glances to check details, in my notes, perhaps. It was so very kind of Sam Long and Ned Brooks to offer to put it up there, since publishing it here is growing harder and harder. I'd planned to keep on giving those vignettes I already started including in my little letter-zine, but how long would that have taken to finish the whole story?

For it really was a great adventure--the greatest in my life, and I've faced all kinds of things and seen all sorts of scenes. But this topped them all.

And yet I confess I was very scared to go North, last year, scared that you'd all be disappointed and wonder what crazy idea was this, inviting me as you did? Hiding down here in these mountains, and being in touch just by letters and zines, I was never in danger of being a pest. In person I feared I might become one, for you all, you see.

And then again, you had your worries, as I later learned. What if I succumbed to "Cultural Shock", for example? What if I ended up anew in some loony bin. (Well, nobody worried about that, to my knowledge, but it was always a possibility.)

And likewise, my age was dissimilar to that of most of you! I wouldn't want to invite an old grannie I didn't even know to South America just because we were friends through the mails. It would be such a responsibility, and I know you must have felt it too.

However, it was done. The hour of departure drew inexorably nearer. No lightning struck to bar my way. (As a matter of fact, some of you later told me you thought I'd find an excuse not to come.)

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Well, getting to Buenos Aires was but the first stage of the journey--an overnight trip from these central Cordoban Hills by bus. After that, problems piled up galore to which I've alluded in my zine and in private letters, and will skip detailing again also. Also, the very fancy flu going the rounds hit me hard. I'd lost my immunity, it seems, up in the clean high mountains for the past fourteen years.

Well, Vadim helped me get over the flu and catch the Braniff jet--he is the real hero of this saga, all the way through.

And up we went and over the Andes by night, and it was all just miraculous to a country hick like myself. Landing in Washington's Dulles Airport was the crowning miracle of that journey. Before talking about that, however, I must remind you I've lived for so long I vividly remember arguments in English-language magazines proving that breaking the sound-barrier would be difficult and dangerous, if we wanted to have jets. That was back when the little DC-3's spanned the distance (taking some two days in the flight) between the States and here. Vadim made such a trip, in a DC-6, at that time, (back when we still had but three small sons), and he loved it. He was sent by his entomological firm, manufacturing those "sinful" but marvelous insecticides that were all the rage back then!

What really got me at Dulles Airport was that mobile lounge into which we stepped from our jet--right in. It just got me! Cultural Shock Number One

Blinking back my reverent tears (for it was just ASTONISHING) and feeling like Mrs Rip Van Winkle suddenly transported in a Time-Travelling vehicle from the Middle Ages to what was surely the twenty-fifth century, we sped on, and me sitting prim and proper aboard this astonishing, enormous lounge with its glass walls on all four sides, giving us such a view!

We zoomed right up to the terrace where the Gillilands and Sheryl Birkhead awaited me. And do you know--the wretches thought at first I might bet the pretty young girl who trotted off the mobile lounge just before me? They looked at her hopefully. She walked right past. Then Grandma Mae came apologetically forward saying, "Er, here I am!" Or words to that effect. The incredulity that I am what I always said I was (a real Gran'maw) was politely dispelled and we had a good laugh over it, then took photos, in which I looked even fatter than I am, for I had several pairs of slacks and pullovers on to be peeled off soon, since I had left Buenos Aires on the coldest day of winter! And here it was a lovely blazing hot summer day, overnight!

You fans go in for hoaxes just too much. You thought I'd turn out yet a[nother] hoax, it seems--that type of pretty young gal already described, pretending to be just an old Grandmaw. (What a hope!)

Cultural Shocks continued to fall thick and fast. I kept a poker-face, determined you'd never know anything was knocking me for a spin. I'm told I smiled and smiled so much that nobody could believe it was the same old Mae who stormed so fiercely all the way from Argentina in her local! Well, I had no intention to storm at you dears in the States, when you'd all been so friendly and warm-hearted. Besides, could you blame me for grinning from ear to ear, fascinated like a native from Borneo by all the pageantry you take for granted in your U.S.A.?

The first two weeks in Washington, D.C., enjoying the hospitality of Alexix and Dolly Gilliland and their charming little son, passed like a dream ...just whizzing by, and lo and behold it was time for the Con, all too suddenly. The things we saw and did meanwhile...the places we visited before that...fill many, many pages in the "novel" version of this story, but I'll have to skip them here, to get on with the present tale. We saw the wonderful Luray Caverns and I thought that great organ using the stalactites was just a marvelous example of the so-scorned-now "American genius". I loved it. I haven't enough words to praise it all!

It was just as wonderful visiting the Smithsonian buildings and their zoo. Those were delirious moments for me. I'd been away all too long from this sort of thing, out in the sticks on the estancia, year in and year out. And then the sea! Well, the Outer Banks of North Carolina where we went for a week, were...will the word "idyllic" do? It will not. I have no word to describe the enchantment there...

Things I enjoyed at the Gillilands include Doll playing for me one afternoon on her concert piano (and she is a concert pianist) all the old songs I hadn't heard for years. It got me. Nostalgia was almost too much to take for things long forgotten and friends long dead, back in Shanghai. Dolly has such a repertoire it's unbelievable, by the way.

Susan Wood and Joan Bowers were also present when Doll played, and it was a very tender moment for me, because I felt the sympathy they all showed, as they saw me, by that music, suddenly plunged back in time again, that way. Who needs Time-Traveling machines? I didn't, that day, either!

Well, and I also found fascinating the meeting of the WSFA at the Gillilands one evening. So many fascinating young people with such original ideas! I had a nice talk with one of them for quite a while on my pet theme, old languages. (Thanks, Mike Shoemaker, for lending-me-an-ear! I never know when to stop if somebody only listens on that theme!)

And then the Con was upon us, and the Gillilands--so thick in the tasks of getting it all organized throughout--took me in advance of the actual Con to see how things were going at the Sheraton. I was awed. What was

this monstrously big building? A labyrinth indeed! I don't remember ever having been in quite such a big building in all my life before it! And I have been around....

Groping my way down the enormous halls, I peeked into a little room thronged with busy young fans. Terrified by such a lot of people, I retreated as hastily. Mike Glicksohn said, "I think that's Mae," and Sheryl [Birkhead] jumped up and ran looking for me. I was cowering in the N3F room, at the end of a long corridor, at its dead end, in the sanctuary of those peaceable, friendly folk. I found myself in due course chatting with the luminaries there, as calmly as though we were about to settle down for a quiet cup of tea, shortly, next.

Then in came Sheryl, as precious a luminary in the N3F as any other, and she showed me the album she'd made of fans. There I was in it, cowering, (yes, I cover more than you will ever guess, inside myself), behind the hind end of a horse on our front porch in South America. I'd sent it to let her see the sort of horses we have here. Unfortunately, I showed a bit to its rear, and I wasn't meant to be seen. I had on "any-old-thing"!

These little details are silly to relate, but I do want to present excuses now for my possible seeming "misbehaviour", if I walked around looking a little stunned, at times, while at the Con. I was still that country-hick in the photo, at the horse's--er--backside!

I am not being humble, either, Jackie Franke. (Jackie always used to say in her locs to my hectored zine last year [1974] or in 1973, I was more humble about it than I should be--the zine was "fine". But self-derision is not humility. It is laughing at ourselves all the way through, myself included, see?)

I do find humans so pathetically ridiculous, so loveable in that very pathos, and so marvelous in our courage to live till we must die!

When the Con really began, that was another matter. There were so many people I was put in mind of the big railway station of Buenos Aires where I used to catch my train home from work each evening, running mad races with all the other commuters, each determined to reach the train first. (Some got under it and never came out. Such haste!)

Well, there wasn't quite that same haste at the Con, but there were certainly just as many people going every-which-way. And a lot of folks did indeed seem to be rushing for a train, trying to catch some friend before that friend rushed off to catch some other friend still in the interim. Everybody was trying to see everybody else--only chance, often, in a year or in a couple of years, for some! And when there are over 4,000 present, it's easier to hunt needles in haystacks, I'm quite sure.

I tried it a bit. I tried phoning the rooms of friends who'd asked me to phone them, or whom I wanted to see, but never were they in when I'd phone and I'm sure it was the experience of us all.

Talk about the "Brownian Motion". That occurred to us all, there at the Con, as we circulated, and re-circulated, round and around, in those vast halls and labyrinthine ways of the Sheraton. (More! How a top floor of one building blends into the bottom floor of the next amazes me, but it does, there!)

I have learned more about the Con since returning, and by studying all the Con reports in fanzines reaching me, than I could ever grasp while right there. Still, I met a lot of you, chatted pleasantly, and those with whom I had a chance to chat remain vividly engraved on my mind.

It was so wonderful, also, when Susan Wood won the Hugo! That was the greatest personal thrill and a source of tremendous satisfaction to us all!

Bill Bowers has mentioned in OUTWORLDS that I visited with him and Joan subsequently. I loved the days spent there, getting to know them so well--as well as I shall ever

get to know a fellow-human in this life or the next, I'm sure, and how I valued the chance. But I already felt I knew them very well years ago, through the fanzine, and still more so now, through spending a good deal of time with them also at the Con.

The pageantry of the Masquerade (Highland pipers and those bagpipes) was a real good touch. I've read the actual masquerade took "too long", but for me it didn't. It was all so vivid and colorful and new and fortunately Dolly Gilliland took a whole roll of color photos of the participants in their costumes, (using the camera and film, kindness of Dick Eney), which I now have, and show to our family and friends. They are really impressed, too!

I feel now guilty to have so little really to say about the Con. If you are watching a Grand Spectacle on Cinerama, do you remember every detail? To me it was all so new, I just watched and watched, trying to take it all in. I was a bit stunned by the party in the Aussies' room...I'm afraid I kissed everybody near and far who welcomed me so humorously, and I was just delighted by the funny surprise. And those Aussie, all! My but haven't they got CHARM! I'm sure the World Con there this year is going to be a tremendous success, uproarious, for they are real fun! And capable of organizing it well!

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I haven't said a single nasty thing yet, now, have I? And if I had something nasty to say, I would not air it, in any case now. I think that private things should be kept private, and if I had an argument or two with one or two fans here and there, rather heatedly, it is not to be reported from the housetops now by me. At least, few would guess it, would you? It seems I even "disappointed" some of my old friends, because I went around looking so beatific and tame all the time, like an already halo-encrusted saint! Well, it wasn't so. I never felt that way, for my self-derision has always been my "daemon", and I had a few good laughs at myself for many a faux-pas which if you didn't notice I'll not mention now.

I also would have kicked myself once or twice, had I only been more acrobatic. (As I watch our youngest practicing Karate now, I know, "Not in this life will I manage that!") (Self-inflicted kicks and twists!)

Oh, I mustn't forget how impressed I was in the Art Room and in the Hucksters Room too. I was especially awed to find myself face-to-face with the Kelly Freas and his works. He happens to be my favorite pro artist, and his DAW covers in their glowing co or delight our whole family down here. I also met the Wollheims several times, once being when I stood reverently gazing at Kelly-Freas-and-his-wife-in-the-flesh!

Oh, and I also blissfully shook hands with the John Brunner at the start of the Con, and confessed we all at home love his works. "Oh, what did you read?" he inquired, and I stammered, "Well, for instance, *The Squares of the City!*" "Oh, that's one of the older books," was his seemingly disappointed reply.

Then I was introduced to Paul Anderson, and as I didn't catch his name at once (or got it muddled with the other fan in Australia with a similar name), I must have shocked him very much with my look of ignorance--when we love his novels too.

Ah, now we're speaking of reverence before pros, wasn't Isaac Asimov absolutely loveable in his humorous exchange with Harlan Ellison? And the latter, what stature he can display on a podium, joking back! He's a cute little peanut, the table certainly added in a lively way to his height. I never had the courage to go up to either of them and breathe my "Ohs" and "Ahs", but hung around admiring them both from afar, watching other fans swarm up near, clustering!

There's so much, now the memories pour back to the forefront of my mind. The "lady" (not to say "women") s-f-writers, too, with Susan interrogating them, was another item on the program I wouldn't have missed for anything.

Not to forget the delightful parody of "2001" by Alexis Gilliland, music by Doll at the piano, and all the WSFA players really belting out the songs and dancing with a seeming professional aplomb! That was one of my greatest moments of delight, for I love being in an audience, that way, everybody having fun!

Oh, and can I forget the Ranquet? At my favorite eating-place, one of so many throughout the country, a McDonalds. I refuse to sneer. I think they're just marvelous and posh! Yes, I do. Remember, I'm your country-hick!

And here's another *mea culpa*. I likewise failed to sneer at your laundromats at every corner, and the way every "rich" and medium-rich and "poor" yankee is therefore so scrupulously clean and fair in looks. Wish we had a laundromat near. Meanwhile, I do my own washing, and while you may find that romantic, and "getting-back-to-our-roots", I'll exchange those roots for your "decadent ways", believe me! Any chance I get, too....

Oh, and I loved your astonishingly pristine public bathrooms everywhere, with air to dry the hands, paper to wipe them (plentifully available) and paper for every need. This amases all our friends who've made the journey to your land, too. They all say the same thing....

I've never heard of any laundromats available at this end. Sure, I live in the ~~sticks~~ wilds and miss a lot. For instance, your beer cans. I'd never seen the like--I was wondering what those "rings" were, lying about on the beaches, up there, till I found out they're from beer cans. (On returning, we could--as I discovered--begin buying beer in the same style of cans here too, which proves we aren't behind-the-times.) But who but you yanks would think to collect those rings from the cans and make fancy garments out of them for masquerades as I'm told is done up there!

I also enjoyed ice-cold drinking fountains wherever I went. (I hadn't seen the like, previously, though of course we have mountain streams in these oligarchal hills, but not for the rabble, naturally, just for the lucky ones in the vicinity, like ourselves, our bosses, and our peones.)

Indeed, I made it a practice to dash for the nearest drinking-fountain every time we stepped out of a car or bus anywhere, simply to check on the flavor of the water available. You may have recycled sewage, but I didn't taste it anywhere. Only in one island of the Outer Banks did I not like the water--it was salty, from the nearby sea!

I was very curious, and though my eyesight was never of the best, I didn't miss much. And I kept asking, "What's that?" and "Why?" of everybody in my vicinity, so I learned a lot, like "what-crops-grow-where" along the highways, and how the harvest was coming along everywhere. Few could tell me, however, the names of all the new kinds of trees! (Don't either ask me the names of all the trees here, please.) During the Greyhound journeys I encouraged all the passengers near enough to lure into conversation to chat about themselves, so I also got a real image from all of them of Life in the States. (Like how big truckers do detest show-off little cars and teach them lessons by hemming them in and keeping them hemmed in with the aid of walkie-talkies. When I repeated that story to the next little old lady to take a seat beside me, she was horrified. "It's not true at all! Who's been telling you such a thing? Both my sons are truckers and they'd never do that. Truckers are flawlessly polite on all the highways. I hope you didn't believe it, did you?" I was so charmed and touched!) Well, little incidents like that are so many I could take the rest of my life just telling you all of them....

If any of you expected me to arrive like a Prophetess of Doom and wear a placard, "The End is Near", as I marched through your most smoggy streets (like Pittsburgh which *did* horrify me when the bus went through), I'm sorry. We have the same smog here in areas shockingly widening, so I won't throw stones in such quarters. Rather I applaud your wish to find solutions and hope we'll decide to start worrying down here one day too, maybe.... Set an example, why don't you! We always follow your fashions, at last.

Yes, I just hope I haven't disappointed you with my bland behaviour, as I seem to have disappointed a few. It is a legend in fandom that fans who on paper blow noisy and loud are timid little shrimps when you meet them face-to-face. I bet you expected a timid little shrimp. At least, ha, ha, I didn't fit that bill. I got described by one fan along the route as "big and rawboned". She'd expected a petite little lady like herself, and ran all around the Greyhound Bus-station looking for her. She came up to me, looked way up into my face, recoiled, and returned to the urgent search for "Ma". With pity and reluctance at last, and with a sad sigh, I had to disillusion her--this new man with a picture I couldn't possibly fit.

Big and rawboned, that's

me!

(How I chuckled. Oh, I've had laughs upon laughs, every time by chance I remember that little scene.)

Here, let me mention, I've dryly titled this manuscript TRIP REPORT. People in fandom have a nasty habit of changing my dry little titles. Sam Long threatens to call this my ODD-yssey. Ned Brooks thinks we might call it THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MAE. Now, you hear me, Sam and Ned? Your humor is the type I like--gloriously dry and funny. But you're to keep my dry old title, to be foisted on unsuspecting, innocent fan! [Yassum!--sl/cwb]

Well, we were up to the part where I was expected to parade like a sandwich-man between boards announcing to all you polluting sinners that God's just about to strike you all dead. Well, He isn't, and if He ever tries it, He'll have to reckon with me. I love you and your land.

Joking aside, I

do love you, I do. (Ben Indick caught on to it when he told me that my first fanzine of this year--back in March, 1975, was a Love Letter to All Fandom.)

And if you gasp,

"But HOW? The Average American is so HATEFUL! Graham Greene said so in a book, once, didn't he?" I'll answer: "Well, damn it, you're so very vulnerable and human, all of you, you warmed my heart. And so real!" Even if I didn't find words to say it at the time, being verbally a little shy...

"But we aren't real!" you may argue. "Alvin Toffler says we're all crazy in his book, Future Shock!"

Well, do you believe all the gossip everywhere? Besides, he wanted to write something that might sell, and it always works to call you sinners to repentance, right back to the old Revival Times. You always did file up to the front pews beating your breasts to be "saved". It's just another bad old habit of Christendom, I guess. Don't let it worry you, me-sweets!

(( That bit was THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MAE. Now to get on with our ODDyssey!))

I am

not going to call you to repentance at all. Stay with your Laundromats and Washing-Machines and MacDonalds and fancier eating-places I also got to see (and drool in, joyously). I may not envy you but I approve. If I'm Paleolithic by nature and through my research, It doesn't mean I want to drag you all back with me to some ancient cave or hole. I wish you all the best--joyous passage to the Moon and Planets and to the Stars when that time comes also, D.V. (D.V., to those who don't recognize this abbreviation, is Latin for "God Willing" [Deo volente]. A fan or two took it to mean my version of DNQ!)

Now, really, the ODDyssey!

To continue....

The last day of the Con was a sad one for all. People dribbled away. The vast foyer was empty, echoingly so. I was still there because Sheryl was going to pick me up as soon as she could get away from her work, so I relaxed there in a big, comfortable sofa, deep in it, with fanzines given me at the Con, and pretended to be deeply entranced but discreetly tried a bit of dozing.

The WSFA crowd worked hard rushing up and down and back and forth tidying up after all you throngs. I report this, because few fans

get to see this. I was especially privileged.

Every now and then one of those sweet WSTA folk would come up to me anxiously and ask, "Are you all right!"

With my deady smile, (the fatal grin that dismayed everybody, alas), I would wake urgently up from my subtle doze and beam my heartiest reassurance, then gratefully doze again when my angel of mercy had returned to his or her tidying tasks.

It was raining outside. Otherwise, I might have strolled around, for it's a real pretty landscaping job they did in front of the Sheraton!

Sheryl just rushed in, the moment she was free, looking so terribly worried about "Poor Mae" waiting for her, and I could see her scepticism when I assured her I'd had a marvelous time studying fanzines and--"relaxing". We grandmas are cautious to acknowledge we doze at the drop of a hat. But we do! I think I shocked the Gillilands by that gift, freely displayed during my fortnight in their company, at times, like in the car on long trips. When the Con first started they so anxiously made sure I'd be able to take a daily nap...Joan [Bowers] promised to see I could have it regularly in her room. Actually, I didn't waste time during the Con on any more snatches of sleep than did you all, of course!

((Actually, moreover, it is because I can doze even standing if I wish, (I merely deliberately switch to what you folks call the "alpha brain rhythm), that I didn't get at all really exhausted on the trip everywhere, though I reckon I spent at least fifteen nights of it either on buses or waiting for buses in Greyhound depots!))

This knowledge of different brain rhythms which interests you yanks experimentally, I think is well worth researching. Since I got back, moreover, fans tell me about other Cons since the one at Sheraton. Trina King, for instance, told me about one with Kirilian photography and biofeedback and even some talking robots. (It was at Boskone, if you're wondering--or was it Balticon?) Now wasn't that a tremendous idea for a s-f-con? Well! you can't have everything at every Con and there are so many of them!

Anyway, Sheryl now drove me out and into the lovely countryside to the farm where she lives with her mother. I cannot praise enough Mrs. Birkhead. I felt so at home both with her and our Sheryl, and passed a most lovely week--or wasn't it quite a week? It seemed a moment outside of time, with the gentle rain at times falling and the great old trees whispering outside, and the big dog and the wise, friendly cat keeping us company, like equals, comprehending us and our minds silently.

And I got to see Snappy--ah, what a character she is. She was at the place where the best Arab horses are bred not too far away from the Birkhead farm, and it was an experience I wished our daughters, Sylvia and Alice (crazy over horses and now studying to be vets), could have shared. We visited also a museum of these Arab horses. Anyway, there we got a card and wrote a hello to Vadim and the kids!

Sheryl also drove me to a park in Maryland, occupying the highest elevation of the region, beautifully wooded and with lovely drives winding up to the peak. The view to me was just stunning--all peaceful farms and houses in the distance, the greens and soft blue-greys.

"It isn't like the Andes!" said Sheryl a bit apologetically.

"My goodness," I said, "It's lovelier. It makes me feel at home!"

Mind you, I can't see the Andes from here. I just see Sierra Grande to our west if I climb high enough, this range of Sierra Chica where we live, on its eastern flank.

You people beat your breasts on another topic also. You're all so apologetic re your love for pets. ("Dog-lovers" used to be a scornful word used by prelates for women who didn't have sixteen children!) Well, I think that those who are kind to "mere animals" are kind to real children too, so this is another facet in the States that quite charmed me. With Sheryl, for instance, we saw a person with a pet racoon at a milk-bar, where we dropped in for hamburgers once. Now isn't that nice?

I was down on my knees at once making overtures, with the sympathetic pet-lovers present all encouraging me. But that racoon was a canny old Yankee racoon, and wasn't taking kindly to aliens from South America, seemingly. I smelled still all "wrong". After a month or two, my smell evidently improved and Yankee animals no longer sniffed suspiciously at my alien flesh! I was barked at shamelessly in the Outer Banks once, too, when trying to steal down the sands to watch the sunrise. A big black dog chased me right back to starting-place, to my tremendous humiliation--I who am fearless among wild curs and tame them with a "Hah!" ((Hah, you also shout, don't you, when about to perform a Karate leap. Well, I don't.))

((Here, I pause to visualize myself performing a Karate leap in the presence of that Yankee black dog, and collapse with giggles at its probable astonishment--and my own!)) ((I know what Karate looks like by now, for each weekend our youngest performs each new movement he's learned in his class of Karate at the foot of these hills, each week. He is so graceful, like a ballet dancer, when he does the moves. I visualize myself, regretfully, copying him and believe me don't even try!))

Well...I was surely sorry when it was time to tear myself away from Sheryl and her mother, but...it was time to go. The Gillilands had provided us with a huge road-map of all the USA and Canada. Now I must shamefully confess to you, I never even dreamed the country is so huge--five days and nights to cross it by bus, it can take, frequently. I'd imagined it might take two days at most, formerly, but Loren MacGregor, (whose delightful story of his five-day-and-night trip by bus cross-country to the convention, you may have read in a recent fanzine), initiated us into these solemn truths, so I was warned!

Sheryl had helped me go through my address book and figure out some sort of an itinerary. Bravely she had spanned the great distances with a series of lines, circling the towns where fans would be awaiting me. I was game.

She then drove me to Silver Spring, where I became the proud possessor of a two-month Greyhound Pass, after having displayed my Passport, to reassure them. (Almost never did anybody want to see any document of mine, all along the way. Just then, and once or twice more which incidents I may get around yet to mentioning, if I reach page 100 or so!)

This impressed me. It is even dangerous to travel without documents (even just to town to work or to school each day) down here. They might take you for an enemy of the country and give you short shrift.

Once on the Greyhound, we rolled away into the Unknown.

Okay, okay, it's not the Great Unknown to you, I suppose. But it was for me, and if you come this way to visit us, our boring spots will be the Great Unknown to you, so we're quits!

I was very thrilled to find that we were soon in the hills again which seem to have various names. Let me try to remember some. The Smokies? Am I right? The Blue Ridge? Well, they were beautifully blue and hazy, indeed, that day. We'd crossed them already to and fro with the Gillilands, going to the Luray Caverns, but they were just as lovely by this different route the bus took now.

This was sheer magic, and I felt on such familiar territory, like coming home still. The sensation was increasing in me. Well, and my mother's ancestors were old-timers in all these parts...Massachusetts, Ohio, and so on. All over....

Coming out on the other side (after thundering through a long tunnel or two), we stopped at a nice rest-station, big and airy. For the first time, I must find my very own way around. Nobody to tell me which button to punch, which knob to turn, to get a Coca-cola or a sandwich. I watched the accustomed passengers each grabbing a tray and forming a line, so they could select their own dishes as they pushed along a bar towards a cashier. I pawed furtively through my bag hunting small change, stealthily glanced at printed prices, did some figuring, then bravely joined the parade with a tray. Gazing desperately at a glass as we poured forward, then facing with total puzzlement a self-service Coca-Cola fountain, I said, "Er, how does this work?" to my nearest neighbor.

"You push!" said she demonstrating.

I pushed. The beverage gushed forth, like Moses striking the fabulous Rock for water. At once my glass brimmed and I furtively stopped this "pushing" and slunk away leaving quite a big splash in the drain, in my wake. Coca-cola sluicing away wastefully.

Well, I paid my whatever, (prices throughout the land change for cokes, but I suppose it was twenty-five cents, or maybe less--one forgets), and went away to sip, and then throw away the container with poignant regret (for it was a disposable glass, and a lovely one I'd have been proud to take back home with me. Incidentally, the plastic glasses at the Con-ying around for disposal were for me a great, enormous temptation. Had I not held myself in check I'd have prowled around snatching at all discarded samples, and with a dozen or two saved, would I have been proud to show them off down here!)

And then we were back on the bus, on and on...the distances were endless, and if you don't mind another pat-on-the-back (when you do so prefer breast-beating, or is it really breast-thumping gorilla-like despite what some alledge?) Anyway, I was impressed by the first-rate roads, the lack of macho-furies in your skilled, cautious drivers, and the smoothness of these long trips, everywhere, as a result. Nobody racing his fellow all the time. How we stay alive on the roads down here I don't know. Some poor souls don't! Regularly, we find swift exits to the Better World along our highways. But then you lack the Crusading spirit, nor do you care to practice knightly jousting in your cars. I forgive you. You can't all be machos on Earth! And I'm too old to care....

Going through Hagerstown was a great temptation. Had I not already made an appointment by phone thanks to Sheryl that the Bowers would expect me there late that evening, I might have slipped off the bus in that quaint little town with the delightful old architecture along its main streets, and its charming circle of hills beyond, and gone in search of our Harry Warner. (He writes now he's sorry I didn't follow the impulse! Me too!)

But we went on...the chance was left behind me. Hagerstown was no more within my ken. The scenery grew flatter. What? No more lovely hills? But the plains had their charm-- the planted fields with half-grown crops struggling up, despite a bad harvest in some grains that year, as folk remarked. It rained too much at the start, and then there had been drought.

These agricultural details interest me. Here, we also live in an agricultural and cattle-rearing region, you see! I'd be able to talk about it also with Vadim and the kids and the folk here, all of them!

"What's that crop?" I'd ask my yankee neighbor pointing, as we rolled smoothly along.

"Er? Could it be peanuts? No, it must be cotton, or perhaps soya."

"I suppose!" I agreed each time, not knowing myself. I mean, I am dumb about it all, being city-reared in Shanghai, and it doesn't shake off easy, even after fourteen years as a hick in the hills! (Well, I can tell growing oats...it's a lovely bluish-green, that's why!)

(It would have embarrassed me if I'd had a farmer alongside, able to explain everything we

sighted. I'd have seemed awfully ignorant alongside such a one!) (But of course one can wear a worshipful dumb expression in such cases and gain total absolution at once from all sins.)

It was night when the bus reached the suburb of Akron where the Bowers's house was. There was Bill awaiting me, and as we already knew each other from being at the Con, there was no strain at all. He took my big old leather bag (what a heavy "white elephant" it was) and packed me into his car.

Later, the next day, Joan showed me her favorite places, lovely sites. You folks to have lovely parks, and so many of them, don't you! I could have stayed there forever, with them both, but...one has to go on. What day is there for us without an ending? Not one!

Bill insists in his fanzine that I made him do a lot of self-appraisal, somehow. I didn't mean to do that...but I have this flaw, that I hold up mirrors to everyone I meet. (I do it just so they'll forget to study me, and see themselves reflected.) (It's that I am fascinated with all you who are my fellows, and a bit bored just with my own company in comparison, so you are my "fun" as well as my delight, you see.)

Joan then drove me to Akron itself to catch my bus at last, and I do hate these last moments when we always have to say goodbye. I flet so close to her, like an elder sister.

Back on the bus again, (another journey of more hours,) I reached that same night Gary, Indiana, where Martha Beck and a friend of hers awaited me at the little bus-stop there.

Again I had the most lovely time at Martha's and felt tremendously at home. Her husband has a hobby of shaping stones...the semiprecious type, and setting them in rings and the like, and he showed me many examples. It was all so new to me. I had never seen, for instance, a "cat's-eye" stone, until we saw a display at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. And here again, I could study same up close. (Martha and her husband very much wanted to give me one, but I've a superstition about "owning things", and am shy of ever adding to my possessions, barring books, for which I am always grateful and depleted my friends' libraries willingly, till my bag could hold no more! From Railee Bothman, in due course, for instance, I got the book I'd been longing for for years: Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. It filled in details I really needed in my language research.)

Everybody was so generous, I had to call a halt to it, time and again!

Well, let me telescope the continuing adventures, to get on with this story that is fast becoming a book once again. We met the Chicago fans, many of them, had lunch with some marvelous "fem-fans" in a very historic old place, visited them in their homes, were driven by Jackie Franke for endless miles (poor girl), ended up at the [Gene] Wolfes' where I stayed a few days ...Rosemary, though not a fan, is one of the loveliest humans you could ever hope to meet!

I got a chance to see a Nebula award ( how pretty it is) and read *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, there. Gene sure writes well!

And then back on the bus, and my plans were now to descend--bag and baggage next--upon poor, unsuspecting Ed Connor!

And I did!

He endured my siege right manfully too, and beat me in four games of chess, but at least--for the honor of God, my country (which?) and our family, and my youngest who loves chess and teaches me the game's tricks--I did beat Ed once, and don't you deny it, Ed!

He then Phoned up Philip José Farmer for me and we had a real nice chat, but I had already phoned ahead to Railee Bothman that I was coming, so regretfully had to refuse his kind invitation to "drop by".

Indeed, I'm sorry how many invitations I failed to take advantage of, because I didn't at first feel confident enough to take side trips "into the blue". And so I failed to see the Miesels, the Haldemans, and Bob Tucker, and several more I would have loved to visit, en route.

At Railee's it was really great fun. She has such clever, vivacious daughters too, she can be proud of them all. We had some lovely long chats, she and I, and she took me to places like the Kirkwood Fair which I found delightful. (I could talk a lot about the charming arts and crafts on display.) And, while strolling down a path in that open-air fair in the park, eating spun-candy, (first time in my life!), we heard a stranger behind us inquire, "Who is this lady from Argentina?"

Feeling that I must have a brand on my back, "Fabricada in Argentina", maybe, perhaps on my blouse for all I knew, (did the texture give the origin away?) I spun around in horror gasping, and there was Donn Brazier and his charming wife.

It was great!

Later we met all the St Louis fans including the Couches--real nice people all--at Railee's home. And then, early the next morning I was off again for another long trip, to arrive only by midnight in Plano, Texas, next.

One of the things that really impressed me throughout the States was color T-V and the marvelously funny programs on it. True, some are not funny but tug at the heartstrings instead. At Railee's I sat weeping silently and helplessly throughout *Fiddler on the Roof*! I never was so moved as by that film, given over T-V, fortunately for me, that night.

§§§§ I spent two weeks in Plano with Rosemary Hickey and her two little sons and husband Richard--(and how they did welcome me into the family as though I truly belonged)--but to tell the whole story of my "becoming a real Texan" would be rather endless. Anyway, I'll leave it for the morrow--I've written this so far in a burst of enthusiasm in one sitting and my fingers hurt. (I hammer the keys so fast and hard when I type). Hope I can feel as blithe tomorrow still, when I go on with the tale.... For just telling it so far has made me live it through again, with all the emotions returning, and an ability to laugh thanks to hindsight, doubly.

(Next morning.)

Apparently "becoming a Texan" is something that happens to everybody who goes to live in that state. I played at being a Texan in my turn too and even went "shopping" with Rosemary, playing a game of pretence to "choose my house when Vadim and I shall retire and come to live in wonderful Texas". Imagine! The place has got no hills...pitiful little hillocks are glorified with Nature Walks to compensate for the lack. All you have in that part of Texas, at any event, are those endless spaces reaching away across to the distant skies that condescend to meet the horizon as though long-horned cattle still wandered freely everywhere without any fences or bars, and Indians and cattlemen and cowboys had arguments over the territory. Oh, the new buildings had mushroomed up...a totally glass-house many stories high with a golden glow in the tinted window-panes hypnotized me every time I drove by. I loved it and the way that skyscraper mirrored the whole world beyond on all sides, magically, as I would like to mirror all I see too. (In short, I could identify!)

Do mountains really cramp the soul instead of elevate it? Is that why Texans laugh so hearty and long and unafraid? Because they're not hemmed in but their only true walls are the sky on every side, reaching down, down, down, around them all?

And the funny thing is the Texans loved me back as heartily. We all laughed uproariously together, whenever we chanced to meet, Rosemary steering me in all directions to get the feel of it...to her University, to Mensa meetings in all sorts of Texas-style

ranch-homes...on a Nature Walk on a little knoll when she donned a special sort of blouse, as she is really a sort of Park Ranger at that place. It was all such fun. We played a game even there, when we struggled through the hot sunshine up the whitish shale (or whatever the type of rock in that knoll), and had to look at the birds and the trees and bushes, like you have to do in any of those delightful Nature Walks throughout your America. I gurgled with contentment, puffing away. (Even if I can walk straight up a steep hill without puffing, when down here in Sierra Chica, normally.)

When she once mentioned "garage sales" and I asked, "What are they?" she took me to all types...another bit of intimate Americana I found fun. It was all very revealing and by the time I'd been there all those two weeks, my Texan drawl was coming nicely along. As we had already boned-up back in Argentina on about a hundred Wildwest paperbacks discarded by some English-speaking neighbors who had moved away, I really knew Texas, and upon meeting a sheriff, my tendency to cry Oh a and Ah really delighted him so he insisted I must have a look at all the trappings --completely gen-u-wyne! (More, later he gave Rosemary a star to make me Deputy Sheriff of that county, here in South America--didn't that flatter me!)

Don't laugh at me abandoning s-f (having run out of books of that genre at my home) to study Wild West tales I found I loved too, and re-read. As a result of such assiduous reading, all the places the bus went through down there seemed already intimately familiar to me (even though no forebears of mine had sojourned there for long, to my knowledge. But here Cowboy Jim had run his cattle through a blockade, and there Rancher Joe had holed up during the most awful blizzard when he lost a thousand long-horns. Scorn such tales as you wish, but they are undoubtedly for the most part historically accurate, (you Yanks take seriously such details, don't you?) and I really knew those places in advance, thanks to those books! (Some were old Ace Doubles too, so I wasn't wasn't that far from S-F!)

What else did we do? Oh, a million things...like eating in a Mexican restaurant where all the Texans go. What fascinated me was the legend: "All you can eat for --" (was it 68 cents? I forget). And the throngs were all so noisy and merry and the waitresses--real Mexican-like in their dress and perhaps even background--danced around like girls on skates with their tray-loads. We later watched them cooking...in an enormous vat of boiling oil electrically heated, a fellow was tossing in and then ladling out anew "the makings" of those hot Mexican tamales or the like. (I forget all the names!) I should, of course, have performed the trip like a proper reporter, notebook in hand, shouldn't I? But I was too busy letting people talk and answering questions all the time without a break everywhere, save when Rosemary would be doing her lessons for the next class at the University and she got me to experimenting with these new paints--acrylics--out in the sunny garden with its horizon miles away beyond some green little rise in the plains.

There were a lot of things I know I should have done, thanks to my hindsight. I should have had a big sketchbook with me and drawn in all the people also I met everywhere, with their names and addresses, so they would populate my World of True Things for aye. When you don't fix a face and a name in the head, it fades away, and that's the worst thing that can happen, when we lose touch with loveable folk everywhere, that way. And you return them to their own isolations also if you don't watch out!

I attended one class with Rosemary at her University, having been first introduced around. I sat still-as-a-mouse and just as attentive, and at the end I could crow: "Why! I understood it!" (Technical though the material happened to be, on sociology somehow, with diagrams to do calculations.)

And I said to Rosemary, "When we come to live in Texas, I'll start going back to that University too, like you!" (She's got the new degree by now she was working at, incidentally.)

What else did we do? Spend a day with her teenaged-eldest (mad over fishing) on a fishing-

barge on an artificial lake, so silently, while I wrote it up for her COGNATE, and she studied, and I stole around outside to hear the slapping water and feel my "sea legs" return, with the gale raising the waves. It was all so hushed and reverent inside the quonset hut--its "altar" (focus of attention) a big hole in the center where men and boys fished in the quiet brown water, with an electric bulb or two lighting the little wavelets so morosely trapped below.

And there were little minnows also, awaiting execution on the ends of fishing lines, meanwhile in their pails of water, here and there, humbly...

As we all wait...bait for eternity that we be, all of us. (OK, it's purple prose there, but I had fun saying it!)

§§§§§

Oh, we played crazy make-believe--humoring me! Rosemary insisted I must see their swankiest store--in a beautiful shopping mall. We marched right through it and I joked away to the salesgirls' consternation and perhaps alarm. We couldn't stop laughing softly together when I announced: "Ah, that's the golden dress I'll wear when I win the Nobel Prize."

What a hope. They're going to give me the Nobel Prize yet for my language research? Haw and Haw!

But Texans THINK BIG! I forgive now every little or bigger mistake Lyndon Johnson did or permitted. He was a Texan. So were we, selecting golden dresses for a future more likely to occur when we shall don halos and flimsy vestments to chant before the Great White Throne in the Future By-and-By.

I'm afraid, folks, your Mae grinned and/or gaped more ferociously than ever--till top-jaw and lower-jaw forever parted company (almost), while there. The hilarity, the poignant "pretend-world", took my fancy totally! I nearly bought a broken thermos at a garage sale for my future trip. Luckily I saw in time it was cracked.

But things like that were such fun!

And supermarkets! You know, I nearly also bought at one a surplus forest outfit such as your soldiers might have worn if forests were icy enough, for it was not only in a leafy pattern but padded to boot. (just the right thing for a son going hunting down here, it would have been). I was horribly tempted, once again, but my New England background rescued me from needing another bag to stuff it into, as my leather one was bulging like a bag carried by an old Santa Claus each summer solstice for you (not us...we have--er, I've got it mixed. We have the summer solstice each Xmas, you've the Winter One to match, don't you.)

Yes, my bag was bulging. We'd picked it up in a tourist store just before I left Buenos Aires, when I realized my canvas duffel-bag wasn't going to make the trip successfully and I wanted a bag of that shape. Nobody else had seemingly ever wanted a bag of such a shape, for the leather bag in question in the tourist shop was disconsolately abandoned in a trash-heap of "bargains for sale" and delightfully marked-down. So I got it; Vadim was delighted with the texture of the leather, which he said he'd polish blissfully and we'd later use it for exploring the wilds of Bolivia (when we retire! How we'll do it while living in that Texan ranch-house--or perhaps just in a "mobile trailer" parked somewhere in your wonderful Northwest Rockies, is your worry, not mine. I worry? Me and Alfred Neuman never do!)

(Books don't look good sticking out from all the sides in a lumpy disarray, in a bag of soft, ductile leather! It looks like I'm carrying around gold bars, and it feels that way too. (They were so sure, back in Argentina, later, when I wrestled with porters everywhere over that same bag, that it was stuffed with gold bars worth acquiring by them if I could only be made to let go. And all my protests that there were "just books inside" failed to convince them, till I insisted on paying them off with a mere 500 "old pesos" instead of 500 US bucks as they'd hoped I would in ransom.))

Life is funny. Sometimes I laugh not to cry over us all!

Well, and what else did we do? Oh, I mustn't forget a real Three-Ringed Circus that had five rings at least going all the time, and I with only two eyes in my head, squinting desperately in all directions not to miss a trick! The Shriners were putting the show on, and they are a magnificent bunch of real-good-fellows, I tell you! I paused worshipfully before every one of them while poor Rosemary and Richard kept saying in advance of me, "Mae, come on! This is the way we have to go!"

I saw each Shriner as though he were Isaac Asimov and Harlan Ellison rolled into one. Just imagine how they'd have looked in the Shriners' glorious red and sequined uniforms, with fezes aglitter with gold. (See? Gold is on our brains, down in Texas. It infected even me. Not the gold hidden away in banks or exchange shops, but magical big nuggets still awaiting us at the foot of rainbows or in every stream--though I suppose the streams by now run through big drainage tubes underground.)

Oh, and when real gold is missing, plastic gold is best. Tinsel glitters nicely too, down here, you see. The spangled outfits of the acrobats in the Circus put even the Shriners in due course, to shame, eclipsed them totall. Indeed, the spotlights were soon switched away from a similarly glorious Shriners' Band trumpeting and drumming and tooting with gusto (and a delightful ringing-of-our-ears as a result). Have I used "delightful" once too much, ye purists? Find other words to match for me, then....

Yes, once the Circus started and balloons soared and swooped and clowns tumbled and every imaginable miracle was performed seemingly effortlessly, I swayed away to new depths of wonder.

My only circus had been years ago in a real big tent in a suburb of Buenos Aires (and I was all the time fearful it might catch fire or at least collapse and trap us all in, it looked that precarious somehow). It did have a real elephant to trot round and around in the sawdust, to be sure.

Mind you, that was years ago. I presume I've missed some Three Ring Circuses in Buenos Aires lately, while sojourning in our feudal estancia, so posh and proud.

Maybe you envy me for my memory of a "grass-roots"-type little circus? By all means do! And let me envy you for what you have! It's not just that I learned to THINK BIG while in Texas. It's that you do have a big population and it would be silly if you still preferred little shaky tents with just one sawdust ring inside, to cram your millions in. (You'd need sf-authors to help enlarge the space by hyper-dimensional means).

It was a huge, huge place, that night, with all the children of Plano, and every other suburb, and Dallas also, crowded into it--I suppose it was an indoor football field, perhaps.

And the beautiful airy acrobats spun and flew and the chimpanzees, elephants, horses, performing bears and whatnot tried to compete for attention, and a hundred top-rate performers did matching tricks together in their separate rings, and everybody howled with delight, me to!

And at last it was all over and my rump hurt. I'd sat through those hours of delight unaware of anything but what we were seeing, all of us!

There were many more things we did in Texas. Another: we visited the local Plano newspaper and the printer showed me all the new electronic devices and what I suppose is "ticker tape" with news pouring constantly in, and then printed all in this magical new way. In my "mind's ear" at once I heard again the heavy thunder of enormous printing machines shaking the former old building of the Buenos Aires Herland in Buenos Aires, when I used to dash in there of an evening to leave a bit of copy with lovely, white-headed Mr Muir, and earn a bit extra in that way, all in fun (though the money was also useful, very much so indeed, back then, when we had all those kids growing up around us, being as we both were convinced--then--of the "sin of birth-control".)

I don't know that I can 100% praise this system of getting canned news from beyond the local precincts so easily. It is very useful, but does not stimulate local genius in reporting as did the old system where there were all those blank columns waiting desperately to be filled so a free-lance reporter with a racy style was welcomed with open arms. (As I was, between babies, back then, in Buenos Aires.)

However, I did meet an "old-style reporter" elsewhere also...at the luncheon of fem-fans planning the Chicago Combat (er, I mean con). A darling local lady popped in, took photos, tried to grasp the gist of what we tried to explain, thanked us gratefully, and sped away to inform that little village of our recent presence. (I still wait in vain for that issue of that particular little newspaper.) ((I'm not crumbling, mind you. The mails are slow. A zine from Jerry Lapidus to me recently, took two years by boat somehow to arrive.))

And here's still another WONDER OF THE WORLD, to me...

Let me talk about your telephones.

I join with you in bemoaning some foreign activities recently publicized by the researchers into the doings of I.T.&T. Oh, yes, I don't applaud, be my grin wider than the skies in your view. Death grins too...

But the A.T.&T., mind you, is awfully nice. (My cousin works for it, so I'd not put him on my private black-list, in any sense, just because your phones struck me as sheer "miracle.")

I'd already realized it when I dialed my way across miles of space to say Hello to David Shank--he in Boston (or near it), I in the Sheraton in Washington, D.C. And then at Sheryl Birkhead's, she squandered any amount phoning all our friends to let them say hello to me. (Try to stop her doing it? I couldn't. I also totally failed to subvert or prevent her from filling my bag with goodies for the trip. When I even tried, her mother turned sternly to me and said, "You will have to let Sheryl put those in. If you do not, I shall put them into your bag myself!" Or words to that effect. I became mighty submissive and quiet, even if she is a lot younger than me, but hers was the voice of authority in my ears and I dared not stage a silly, useless scene!)

Well, what struck me with your phones is that I could hear as well as though the other party were not 5-day's-journey-by-bus-across-country away from me, but right in the next room. It reminded me of "playing telephone" as a tiny tot in Shanghai. Two topless tin cans were punctured in their bottoms (er, lower parts), and the knotted ends of a long string inserted in each. Then one child went into the next room not even bothering to close the door, and--in the style of bygone phones that had a sort of tube for speaking in and another for the ear--we trumpeted hellos to each other with were "miraculously" easy to hear!

And thus did we trumpet hellos anew across a Continent. "Hello, Rose!" Yes, it's really me, Mae. Yes, I'm coming." "Hello, Dorothy! But of course I'll come. Didn't I promise you I would even last year?"

"How do you like the States?" they anxiously asked.

"Geeeeeee!" a shrill squeal of glee shivered the wires between us as I squealed incoherently.

Shame on me?

And you expected me to say DOWN WITH POLLUTION?

But of course I do.

DOWN WITH POLLUTION EVERYWHERE, MENTAL, MORAL, SPIRITUAL, and LITERAL AS WELL! Let's tackle it, by all means, and RIGHT NOW! (Pass me the sandwich boards, please, and I'll walk along any main street for you proclaiming all this and more!) (I just somehow didn't get around to it last time. I should first have gone to spend two weeks in Pittsburgh, but our good fan Jeff Schalles of Pittsburgh was away on his bicycle tour of the entire Rocky Mountains, and in due course I missed seeing him by just a day in Seattle, when we both passed through that town in our different routes.)

Well, you can't get away from the telephone at all in America. This may sound to you either very good or very bad, depending on whether the phone is on or off the hook when you're seeking a "bit of quiet". At any rate, the phone kept after me wherever I went, and it was an extra delight. For instance, when drinking in *Fiddler on the Roof* at the Bothmans it jangled and I couldn't believe it was for me but it was. It was Dolly saying, "Hey, Mae, we've been chasing you half-across the country! How you do rush around. We've heard from Vadim and he wants to say hello to you by radio-phone. Now here are the instructions--got a pencil and paper?"

Yes...

Vadim yet, using your wonderful phones.

Well, that chat at least didn't come off. The skies militated against it, something to do with "low ceilings" that bounce radio waves where they shouldn't go and not where they should.

I was to wait to hear from Vadim in Plano, Texas. Rosemary was to find some radio-operator around there who'd receive the message and hook it onto Rosemary's phone so we could chat. In Jesus Maria, Argentina, Vadim had a charming lady ham-operator already lined up. (Now don't you go getting ideas. She was also a whiz, she'd made contacts with the Antarctic and Japan and Israel and everywhere, and it was her Pandom, like we have ours, with ham-fans sending each other little souvenirs from places as remote as Timbuctoo, having met by magic in mid-air by sheer chance when diddling the dials like we diddle mimeos!)

Well, to find a ham operator in Texas, we went to visit the local police. Oh, they were so nice. Rosemary insists I looked scared as heck, and suggests it is because when you try to chat with the police "down south" they point machine-guns cautiously at your belly, "just in case", with all those dumb but furious guerilleros around. (These folk I shan't discuss right here for they are an enigma the very Pope can't solve, and fiats have not yet been forthcoming on what to do with them all!)

Anyway, through these handsome, homely police (and you couldn't see them as "dangerous", for they were such cozy, chatty, friendly types, I was disarmed--not that I had any hidden weapons on me!), we were introduced to the local head of Civil Defense, who collects rare coins and showed us his collection. But as I say, the ceiling just wasn't cooperating, for Heaven never lets you have things easy, I guess.

Only after I left Plano, did a call come through. Some other ham operator in a nearby county had picked up the call from Jesus Maria, asked Rosemary by phone if she'd take it, and channelled it through. So Vadim told Rosemary to tell me to keep right on my trip, he was much better though he had been quite ill, as his letters had informed me which had me thinking of cutting the trip short the moment I'd said hello to Dorothy and Rose and the Busbys on the West Coast, whom I'd faithfully promised to reach. I never dreamed as yet just how ill Vadim was! Only when I got a letter in Washington, D.C., upon my return, and read between the lines--due to the shakiness of his handwriting--did I panic and break into tears and cry, "Get me, please, a seat on any southbound jet today!" (And they did, the dear Gillilands.) But this story should be told further on...

As Gary

Grady now just remarks in his aerogram that reached me the other day,

"So Vadim was trying to get you to continue your trip despite his illness? That is really nice. I am always delighted to hear about nice people." He went on to mention other cases:

"During the gas crisis here when people would line up for blocks to get gas hours before the service stations were even open, a woman in Philadelphia was awakened every morning by the cars lining up down her block to get to the service station on the corner. Rather than being upset with not being able to sleep, she started going to bed earlier, bought a bunch of styrofoam cups, and started serving free coffee to the people! (For this she was recognized by national TV coverage on our largest network.)"

I like it. I like it on several counts. She was just being herself, a nice, "every-day" human being, never dreaming there'd be publicity. I like it that the T-V channel found it newsworthy. I like it that people care to hear about such acts, still. "Only in America...." (Or perhaps there are other lands as outgoing? I hope so! England?)

Anyway, the final day when I must stop "being a Texan" was drawing very near. I'd talked about Argentina to the class at school of Rosemary's younger son, showing some slides (I mean Kodachromes) that would amuse them. It was really fun. All the kids were laughing and shouting questions, and in the very front row were the most engaging black lads asking the brightest and shrewdest questions of all. They all asked permission to visit us down here and write to us. I hope one day they do!

I ought to talk about that school--it is the "open" type--no inner walls separating the various grades, so children really focus their attention on their teachers and learn to ignore things going on simultaneously elsewhere. It works in Texas, anyway, under their open skies. Real bright children, those were!

On the last morning, I had a similar chat for the teenagers of the class of the Hickey's older boy, at the Unitarian Church. No sooner over, than we dashed to catch my bus to take me West.

(But first we went back to Dallas, in that bus, and there I changed for another that crossed the northeast border of Oklahoma where our Pickle-King Ed Cagle dwells. I'd chatted by phone with him at Rosemary's. He has a deep, lovely voice, makes ladies swoon, tho I didn't quite...but nearly.

(Marvelous telephones indeed!)

Now my jaunt was really beginning on the Grey Hound! (Yes, I thought of the term in two separate words rather than "Greyhound".)

Lots of old folk had the same Greyhound Pass I sported wherever I went. In all I went through some four books of those passes, for they use up four or more tickets if you are making changes of buses en route, as you go. Being an "oldster" myself, I got on splendidly with these nice "Senior Citizens" on holiday, along with me. They told me stories. One concerned a real hero, a man who had to get about only with a wheelchair. But he too got himself a Greyhound Bass and stored the chair inside the bus's enormous vitals, wherever he went. He even reached Alaska.

Now I call that spunk. I'm proud to have heard of him and met many like him besides. James Tiptree in a very charming piece in Jeff Smith's zine described some of these dear old people crowding the edges of glaciers, in summer, in Canada, and he sounded just a bit exasperated, I guess he isn't old enough to find them sweet and poignant and utterly loveable in consequence as I did. More, in Decatur, Georgia, I stayed in Wesley Towers with my aunt for several days, eventually, and met such a lot of spunky old folk, I went away proud of the Elder Citizenry of the States, indeed, and eager to match up to them one day. The oldest I met was 104, and spunky. Boy, was she! Though kept to her own room due to physical frailty, we did have a lovely chat, and my aunt told me what a terror the lady was in her youth. (A stenographer in New York all on the side of the Suffragettes and so on!)

[In later notes, Mae tells us some more about her stay at the Towers...] My aunt insisted on telling all my cousins and their families how I'd solved even that little problem [of keeping clean] en route. I'd change in a WC at a station, sponge, somehow, change all the undergarments, wash them in a basin or sink (without any hurry, for there are lots of sinks and not many people around usually in any bathroom), then put the wet clothes well wrung out in pockets of my canvas raincoat to dry somewhat, then the next evening whether or not still wet, I could change again, and not offend everybody thus with the dread sin of BO (Twonk's Disease, I mean of course!). Also, my aunt sneaked gifts of garments she just made me wear, not to wear the "shocking slacks to breakfast to shock all the dear old people there". Well, she didn't say it but she thought it. So I found

myself stockinged, modestly garbed in a loose nylon-silk print dress, and looking quite acceptable among the dear old folk, age 60 and up to say 100, thronging about. They mentioned me too in their fanzine, in due course, (sure, everybody has "house-organs" these days up there), and here it is: TOWERS TALK (December 1974)...(Page 14) GUEST FROM ARGENTINA: An interesting visitor to the Towers in late October was Mrs Beulah Mae Strelkov from Cordoba, Argentina, who is the niece and namesake of Mrs E. G. Mackay. Due to her long absence from the U.S., and wanting to see as much as possible of it, she was taking the lengthy Greyhound 'Ameripass' round trip from East to West and making brief stop-overs at numerous points to see friends or special points of interest. She completed this tour by renewing her ties with the Mackay family in Atlanta, her aunt and cousins, Mr Ed and James Mackay, and Mrs Frank Asbury, and with cousins in Florida and North Carolina. Mrs Mackay has had word of her safe return by jet to her far-away home. Her engaging personality made her coming a very special event to all her kinfolds.

[Now back to the Report proper...] You folk with your Women's Rights have heroines aplenty if you just should go shopping-around for same, as did I! Lovely, lovely old ladies everywhere in your U.S.A., very willing to tell you such stories as you've never heard. I longed to stay and write that lady's biography, believe me! (Or my own aunt's. Just as fantatstic, it would seem to us all!)

Here now I will get out the earlier manuscript to include some details jotted down right after I got back. But first, a confession, re "Dawn in Albuquerque" (say around 5 A.M., when the bus dumped us at a little Mexican-style eating place to go off and fix its own innards.

Now, here's a question: "Would you dare to phone Roy Tackett in Albuquerque at 5 a.m., if you were Mae?"

Years ago we had some tiffs about the Brothers from Space (UFOs to you) "led by Jesus", if you please. (Ask the Wollheims, they will recall the excitement I was facing down here back in 1964 and 1965, before I got out of the hoo-haw, fed up and disgruntled by the nuttiness. Don once thought of doing a book with me using the crazy LoCs all about it that I sent him around then. He nearly did, but went and wrote that book on SF instead.) To trace the whole story, you'd have to look up old CRYs of about that period, maybe even a bit earlier. Also Art Hayes went and pubbed a translation I made purporting to be a MESSAGE FROM THE MASTER circulating here right then. It must have been pithy. A local lady of the Catholic persuasion when she read my translation was so furious, she cried, "Why, you should be burned at the stake for circulating this!" (And she meant it. Only years later did she start loving me again, a bit. I won her back to friendliness by sending her some hectoed illos, you see.)

Now it so happens Roy suffered from my UFOlic phase, and when I lately unearthed some stuff on Myths I'd written about that time (rewriting it, now, to send Tony Cvetko of DIEHARD), Roy's subsequent loc therein sounds not very happy.

He had pubbed long ago in his zine (had Roy) my defenses of the existence then of UFOs down here, accepted as real even by the pious president of the time, here. Well, they "existed" then, if not now, and were so visible to all and sundry in due course a brilliant Jesuit announced he believed in them to. (An astronomer called Padre Reina.) But then later anew, another Jesuit over T-V has since deplored all this True Believership of our populace. In Argentine magazines (in a piece I saved), he explained that when we see saucers it's just the ectoplasmic projection of the viewing crowd. Do Virgins also develop from such ectoplasm? (When viewed by multitudes of the Faithful?)

Anyway, it's all old stuff, water under the bridges crossing back to All Our Yesterdays, so forget it. The point is, I DID NOT DARE PHONE ROY TACKETT SO I DID NOT PHONE HIM AT ALL, but kinda skulked in the eating place very quietly. I might have phoned Mike Kring, but he's at the airbase, and I didn't know if they'd either approve of rousing him at 5 in the morning.

Our bus left Albuquerque around 7 a.m., in due course....

I slipped away like a ghost in the shadows, from there. Sorry. I should have dropped by and wrestled mightily with Roy over UFOs, shouldn't I?

Shouldn't I, Roy, hey?

(Silence! Very disapprovingly....)

But now, to quote a bit quietly, docilely, sensibly, solemnly, from my earlier MS, when I was feeling that way, a bit...

Well, here's a piece from the older book-length account dashed off soon after my return. (Chapter Seven of it, titled DOWN THE OLD TRAILS). Very seriously it runs:

...Perhaps Americans cannot boast of having a "Conquistadorial Highway" full of traditions, with monuments of Jesuit Baroque along it all over the place. But you Yankees do have the equivalent in the famous Missions of the South and West and elsewhere. These I would not take time off to visit, as they were not on the route mapped out for me which would take me to the homes of many fans, while I sketched thus a great figure-eight all over the North American continent, crossing my own trail at St Louis to and fro, seeing twice that fine simple Gateway to the West, looming high with the sunset behind it as I went westward, and a pale sky of Eastern Industry behind it when I traveled back east!

Nonetheless, I was following your old trails now too, across the States, aboard this air-conditioned bus I found so comfortable. I was no longer sitting crouched in a covered wagon fearful of rustlers and bandits, to be sure, but the adventure was as real as it ever was. To me still, it was all "The Great Unknown" I was entering, passing through. (True, I'd been in the States as a baby, till the age of four, in California, and again at the age of ten for a year, visiting friends and relations with my folks, so I wasn't totally a stranger. But things sure had changed!)

In the older MS I'm glancing at now, I see I quoted from Jeffrey D. Smith's PHANTASMICON II, what Chelsea Quinn Yarbro wrote:

"By the time you get to be sixty (I think) the brain is a place of incredible resonances. It's packed full of life, histories, processes, patterns, half-glimpsed analogies between a myriad levels--a Ballard crystal world place. One reason old people reply so slowly is because every word and cue makes a thousand references."

Very perceptively said. What you expect from fans. Young folk, so aware, all of you!

I noticed this about more than one delightful oldster I met on the trails, highways and byways of your America! I hope it develops in me, at last, this slowness to say anything. (Not much hope, but one can wish it, and I'll try when I'm sixty two years hence,)

Sixty, of course, to most of you seems far, far away. A dear young girl in our African APA confessed in her contribution to one mailing, that she doesn't want to live long, when she's sixty she will dutifully put an end to her suddenly useless existence.

(I might put it off till sixty-one, personally.... How I chuckled when I read her declaration. I'd have agreed in my time with her, were I younger. I often wondered about the "uselessness of the old" when I was very, very young. I don't include in it my beloved own grandmaw, that is to say, I didn't. But there were some awful oldsters we had to cope with, to be sure. Totally uncopable.

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Beyond Albuquerque westwards the scenery was hauntingly strange. I had never seen quite such views before. You'd never believe Albuquerque itself is 5,000 feet above sea-level, surrounded in the distance by those bleak, ghostly hills further away. I recall saying in a loc once to Roy Tackett's eternal DYNATRON, "Writing to you here, 5,000 feet nearer heaven than you are," upon which he gloated that he was that high up near heaven there too!

But as we rolled on and on through those ghostly spaces in that early grey dawn, the entire scenery on every hand--dry, shadowy, bleak--was not at all like the Albuquerque I had imagined when I used to visualize the Taketts there, years ago. I'd "seen" them in bright sunshine with Mission style architecture around, and brilliantly-hued gardens and fountains and the like.

Of course, I didn't get to explore the city of Albuquerque itself. I was just another ghost passing through it in the night, or as dawn lent her pearly-greys to increase illusions.

After a while, I dozed a bit and missed very likely some spectacular desert scenery, but it couldn't be helped. The whole bus was full of sleeping beauties like myself right then, but the driver stayed no doubt awake since here I still am! (Occasionally drivers do doze, and I am sure I saved us once in the Canadian Rockies from crashing, by charming a driver back awake with my--er--smiles! Well, that's another story I may reach perhaps, even yet, in this tale!)

Around this time in the trip, and oppressed with worry about Vadim, I began to get a strange feeling I hadn't had at the start. The Orphic myth began to haunt me where Eurydice must wander through a Shadow Land of Hades and could not go back to Orpheus, and I thought of the Grey Hounds that guide the Dead in old myths. The strange wild scenes beyond our windows enhanced it for me. And inside the bus, the icy calm of the air-conditioned interior seemed almost lifeless to match, as though I were in a catafalque in frozen slumber, with the other old folks sleeping there with me.

It was an impression that struck me more right at this spot than anywhere else during the journey. (That comes from going in for myths and symbols till they haunt you back at last, I guess!)

Right then, it did seem like the journeying would be never-ending. How many hours by bus was it from Plano to my next stop--Flagstaff? I'm trying to remember. A day and a half? Let me see...I left Dallas around noon. I got into Flagstaff late the next afternoon, say around five. Not quite a day-and-a-half but it felt longer, believe me!

I began to wonder if I had it in me to to travel thus endlessly and everywhere....

It takes a while, I guess, to get one's "second wind"!

By noon that same day the scenery had totally transfigured itself, as we reached near the top of the Divide. You didn't have any startling climbing to do, (not like the Blue Ridge, for example), just a slow and almost imperceptible heightening going on all the time. Here and there in the now blazing sunshine with the clearest blue sky within reach I have ever seen, I'd see signboards announcing places to turn aside, to visit Indian ruins, "the painted desert", "petrified forests", and the like. How I longed to stop off to see them all. I envied youth, free to hitchhike in any direction, with a pack-on-the-back in the most ancient way. (Pak! See my 19 pages already mimeographed on THE GREAT GODS DANCED re that old term.)

When the sun was right over us, (almost within touching distance--just a bright, hot little sphere like a toy), we stopped at a gas-station for coffee or the like. I got an ice and licked it in the bliss of reverting to my second-childhood, outside, walking up and down and "pretending"... "If I could live here always, I'd like it a lot, in this wild, free, open place!" Indian-featured young people were working nearby. They looked great to me! I thought I saw an Indian-style hamlet in the distance....

A gentleman came up to me and asked, "Did I hear you say in the bus you're from China?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever hear of George Mason there?"

"Yes, he was my grandfather!" (I was excited, you bet.)

"Well, there's a book about him

him the Baptists are publishing now."

"Oh, I'd like a copy."

He promised to get me one. Mails permitting, it too may reach me in a year or two...

Mind you, I wouldn't fit the ideals maybe of the Baptists even now, though I think they've evolved since "Back Then", haven't they? I remember saying to Dolly, after meeting a funny dear Baptist or two at the beach, "Oh, they're so sweet! I could drop out-of-sight in all the dear little towns of America visiting around with these darling True Believers like her and like him, and get lost totally for several years."

(Poor Dolly-- for an instant, she almost looked alarmed!)

Another thing those Greyhound buses, after you've ridden them for days, weeks, endlessly. They get to feel like home in a Strange Land. When they dump you at some wayside station temporarily, all the passengers cluster forlornly around sipping soft-drinks or coffee out of disposable containers, studying their watches earnestly, then the clock on the wall, then their watches again, then they peer reproachfully out because the bus still hasn't returned, and this goes on for half an hour or so, while I in such cases step nimbly to the ice-water fountain, pretending I have as much calm and unhurried contentment as the leaping waterfalls of the mountains afar, forever rushing, forever staying still in their place!

You know, during the trip it soon dawned on me that if I didn't open my mouth and display my English accent, (some insist it's more Irish, and of course by now I do talk in an "Anglo-Argentine" way set by the many Irish people in this country), I could pass as just another typical American, belonging just as everybody does, in the States, who learns the ropes. (Which button to punch, which lever to pull, and so on, to get coca-colas and sandwiches wherever you go!)

Talking about buttons to punch, my last act in your country was to "Make-a-Crocodile" in Miami by punching the right button and watching the melted plastic run into a little form. The result (that burned my fingers when it popped into its allotted slot for me) now stands humbly before a silver Buddha from China, with Lao-Tze on the other side facing him, on his buffalo, on our mantelpiece over the front-room's grate.

I'm very fond of my Yankee Crocodile, I made "all by myself!" It is a symbol of the country and grins even wider than do I! Don't get offended. You are not all crocodiles by any means. Neither am I. This is all just a figure of speech! Frown, and you won't be mistaken for one.

There, at the top of America, licking my ice, I also said to a fellow-traveler (in the harmless sense of that term, to be sure), "If, I'd like to live here always!"

She gasped, "Good gracious. But there's nothing here to do!"

I did not try to explain but looked lovingly out at the bright red hills, dry and sandy, at the Indians, at the Wilds, the Wilds you have too, as much as do we here. What makes you think only in the Andes are there any remaining Wilds in this World?

Back on the bus it was so bright outside, I dozed again. From the burning, lovely heat, back into the refrigeration! Who could fight off the sleepiness that stole over us as a result of such a change?

But I learned to sleep two winks then peep out one, and sleep another two. That way, I caught every hundred yards another glimpse of the scene! I don't think I really missed seeing very much. To be sure, I registered most of it at a subconscious level, as a result.

And between sleeping, when my fellow passengers awoke, we all began chattering like happy hens and cocks in a coop, anew!

Behind, some young folks groaned.

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The reason I got off the bus at Flagstaff was that I'd faithfully promised Dolly Gilleland not to miss seeing the Grand Canyon, no matter what else I didn't get to see. I assured her I'd do that "unless it's raining."

It was so bright and clear there was scarcely a cloudlet in the sky. So I got off and prowled through the bus-station in the wake of a lot of Important Visitors to the Canyon from Germany and every land imaginable who had materialized with me. (Well, there had been another bus or two from here and there, stopping around the time we arrived too.)

The Germans were so very German, with their portmanteaus, mackintoshes, and whatever they carry on long journeys, anywhere. I may not use the right terms, but they had them under their arms, in their fists, and over their shoulders, all these adjuncts to being a Proper Traveler.

I dragged along on my rear behind me my own very-heavy-Argentine-leather-bag, much too loaded by now even to lift, and stood to the rear of them all to listen and learn what next I should do.

"Haw, haw," came the cultured voices before me. "We haf reserved in the Hotel (so-and-so) two rooms. Veel you check by phone to make shoer we are expected?"

When they all had said their say, I came up to the counter in my turn without a Haw, haw, and inquired, "What are they charging out there for a room?" (Because I had thoroughly made up my mind I was NOT going to pay 15 dollars a night, even for just one night. It seemed exorbitant. I'd already been warned you couldn't get a room for less, out there).

"Fifteen dollars a night, ma'am."

"Oh!"

said I. "Nothing cheaper?"

They gave me a dirty look.

As I continued to look appealingly down at the little man behind the counter and wouldn't go away, he muttered, "Well, you could sleep out under the stars."

I must have looked as though I thought it a good idea. "Can you?" I asked rather hopefully.

"Well, young folk camp, but--" he studied me very doubtfully.

"Can I go there and return the same day?"

"Yes. There is a bus leaving right now, and it turns around and comes back after half-an-hour's stay."

"I'll take it."

"That'll be another---(whatever)---, ma'am."

"But isn't it included in my pass?"

"No, ma'am."

"Okay, I'll pay it" (It may have been two dollars. I forget. But I wasn't going to waste money left and right shamelessly, knowing what sacrifices my friends--all of you--had made to contribute to the Fund. I was going to spend it getting about visiting fans, that was what. But the Grand Canyon could scarcely be called a Fan!)

"May I see your pass-port?" said he, as though I might very likely be another undesirable alien about to hole up in those wilds, somehow.

I showed it. He looked disappointed but duly noted down its number somewhere, gave me my ticket, and waved me along to the bus, waiting outside.

The German tourists were already installed in it, looking ready to take in all the beautiful scenery very proficiently. So was I.

The trouble was the altitude, I guess. Before we knew it (and there wasn't even refrigeration in that bus, by chance), I noticed my good Germans nodding their heads. Delightedly, I realized, "Why, they're asleep!"

I stayed watching the scenery.

It took another five minutes (or more even) before I joined them in Slumber-land. Though not as deeply, for I'd perfected the technique of "sleep two winks, then wake and peep then doze anew two more winks."

And thus we rode into the golden sunset of those heights, those golden forests of early autumn, the golden wilds.

Behind me I heard Spanish spoken and two forlorn little people peered timidly out, wide awake. I also heard some Japanese further back. It was an International Convention, but nobody chatted with his or her unknown fellow passenger on that bus, anyway.

As for the two little Spanish-speaking people, (an elderly man and his wife), I met them again later at the Canyon and talked with them in their tongue, and they hugged me like a long-lost friend, but we avoided exchanging names, "just in case". They were from Argentina, too!

Well, since it hadn't rained to keep me from the Grand Canyon, I now put a new proviso up as to whether I'd stay the night or now. For ten dollars I'd take a room. Not a penny more. Yes, even if, as everybody assured me, "Fifteen is the very cheapest there."

So we reached the place at last and stopped before the swankiest hotel firstly. German tourists poured off, and were met by bowing uniformed porters, helping them in.

We then rode on to a less majestic place, "The Bright Angel Lodge". Everybody trooped in to get their rooms. I lurked behind till they were all given their room keys, then went up and said firmly, "Got any rooms for ten bucks?"

"No!" said the clerk. "But we have some for fifteen."

"Oh, then! I guess I'll go right back with the bus."

"Oh, er, wait. You alone?"

"Sure I'm alone!" said

I defiantly. (*Make something of it, was my attitude.*)

He beamed. He reached for some more ledgers and papers, ruffled them, looked surprised. "Why! I do believe we have a room for ten."

"Well, I'll take it," and I wrote him a traveler's check.

Then I went out in the mystical evening light and discovered I'd have been an absolute IDIOT to have gone back when the same bus did.

Those pastel hues! The full moon was rising at one end, the sun setting at the other, above that Canyon, and every voice was stilled. Tourists tiptoed and whispered, as they gazed. I slipped by them all unseen...

Chipmunks (or were they squirrels?), there, are so tame, they pose for German tourists: "Hans feeding squirrel from hand", such photos would duly be labeled back in Germany at last, I'm sure. (Maybe with an added, "Grand Canyon in Background".)

I have somewhere in the debris I brought back with me (as memories!) among the travel-folders, maps and papers and zines, sketches I made with wax crayons at the Canyon. I mean to hecto them one day (when I find them again.) (Real soon now!)

The next morning I breakfasted on a delicious icecream cone or two. (Who needs more in America? Where else can you get good icecream?) I'd given up my room-key at sunrise to enjoy a full day outdoors, and left my Wondrously-Bulging-Bag at the desk for them to keep for me. (They loved me for giving up the room that early, be sure!)

Off I went for a stroll along the Rim, towards the Havasupai house promised us (in the notices along the way) to exist at the end of that long and lovely trail.

At one spot, the height was given at over 7000 feet (I don't remember exactly, and I've lost whatever notes I must have made, I'm sure.) You zoomed up--your feet not quite touching the pathway--along the curling inclines with a thousand (ten thousand?) feet of precipice to your left, so near you felt like clutching at a gnarled old pine as you peered over, cautiously, here and there! The pines were all beaten into fantastic shapes, no doubt the winds in winter there must be terrific! But it was the start of fall then...actually it was Monday, October the 1st, of 1974. (I have the date in my older account, done upon my return here last year.)

With one of the canyons I even wrote while there, this bit of "poetic" exultation (for it really gets us all!)...

"At Bright Angel Lodge's Terrace, above the Grand Canyon. We are here over 7000 feet high, yet higher soar the great birds that plunge into the chasms, while above us jets fly constantly and sketch their broad vapor trails crisscrossed in mystic-seeming patterns one feels one ought to comprehend but can't. They are of the future, but the Canyon is of the past.

"On the bright rim-walks and terraces every world-language is spoken...brisk German tourists lure squirrels to photograph them; anxious Latins stroll timidly by. I can always recognize them! Indians watch us all, meanwhile, from the terraced rock gardens where they work silently--they, the true denizens of these splendors, not we!

"The Canyon yawns before us with all its dainty hues. Its vastness engulfs us...we are dwarfed: German, Latin, American, all! And it takes hold of us; we do not want to go away. Yet when it first struck our retinas, the wish to flee such grandeur was strong and I for one hardly dared remain. I felt so stranded and alone. But I am alone no longer--now I have the Canyon forever as a friend!"

Thinking it over now, I'd rather be a tiny midget at the edge of the Grand Canyon, than a mighty giant at the edge of a tiny crack in the earth, somewhere. And I'd rather be a twentieth-century child at the edge of a Universe too vast for our comprehension, than a medieval True Believer back when the Sun and Planets obediently circled our little globe! I'm more at home...

I spent all that bright day outside. I even went down a trail (with mule-droppings fresh upon it for the mule-train had taken tourists downwards earlier still that day), and I kept going lower and lower knowing it wouldn't be hard for me to make the same speed up again (despite warnings in print on metal plaques that it takes twice as long to come back up than it takes to go down). Then I settled down to do some sketching and watch the tourists trotting by. The downward crowd went whizzing along. The return convoys of peoples crawled and puffed. One young couple was real stalwart, however, with a two-year-old child on the dad's back in a carrying-sling. (Yanks!) I saw them trotting downwards early in the morning. Three hours or so later they were climbing up as nonchalantly and swift. "You didn't reach the bottom?" I cried.

"Sure, we did!" they grinned, proud as could be.

They'd certainly kept themselves in trim!

I then went into one of the tourist shops clinging precariously to a rock jutting over the brink, to buy a postcard and also a stamp in those fancy stamp-vending machines, which card I wanted to post right there to Dolly in proof that I was here in the flesh indeed!

As I went outside again to write the message, the Argentine couple on a bench nearby gazed wistfully at me. They'd already seen me sketching so I let them have a look at the results and talked in Spanish. How they loved me after that! I let them have a stamp too, for them to send a postcard to their son "somewhere in the U.S.A.", and they gave me a dime in return, and we discussed the stamp-vending machine that shortchanged you. (Well, it is a business deal of the shop in question and perfectly legitimate, as I explained to them.)

Poor dears, it seems they'd had a perfectly wretched time wherever they went, and when I assured them I was having the time of my life, they told me sorrowfully in Spanish, "It's because you belong."

How sad... Can't everybody belong everywhere? Feel at home and welcomed just everywhere on Earth?

When will that time be?

I met the couple again in the Flagstaff bus-station, when we'd left the Canyon forever in our wake and must go on to our separate destinations in the U.S.A., after which we would separately return to our Argentina--each to a different type of place here too, never to meet again. (Though they did tell me that if I ever went to such-and-such a town in the Argentine northwest, in the curio-shop facing the biggest plaza I must ask their son who owned the store for his parents and he would take me to visit them. But they still didn't give their names, cautiously.)

Can you beat it? Did you ever have an experience of the sort with a fellow-yank? I never did, believe me. They all wanted to give me their names and addresses, till in self-defence I gave them first my name and address instead and told them to write me first. (And some did.)

More! Later, on the jet going south (to Miami, then changing jets, on another going direct to Buenos Aires), I had another little old Argentine lady as my traveling companion, and she also didn't give me her name, though she clung to me each time the jet seemed about to plunge too recklessly down to the nearest airport, at least in her view. She told me also such sad stories, I felt my heart bleed for them all--all her class, so good and afraid of Life on this World, and of Eternal Life or Death in the next--where, if you don't watch out, you don't even die but burn and burn and burn!

And this too is the difference between the Twin Americas, never so realistically faced by me till then....

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My own bus came in only around two in the morning, and was already so packed I had to sit in the very back seat with the wall of the W.C. to the rear. (Not that I complain about WC's on most all of your buses. We could do with more on ours...)

Anyway, beside me settled a youngish chap, big and burly and with a voice I'm sure Ed Cagle has too. (Very alluring indeed, and deep in the chest!) I'm afraid I was desperately sleepy and failed to appreciate such a stroke of good luck, but I let him talk while I secretly dozed, while deceiving him with my Ohs and Ahs at the right pauses in the conversation's flow.

Anyway, I remember most of the story and was charmed. It seems he'd worked his way through college, (yes, of course, another typical Yank!), and he'd done this by taking on part-time jobs in rolling-mills, shoveling red-hot steel plates out of the furnace, from below them somehow. I couldn't quite visualize it, though, remembering color photos in magazines of rolling-mill technology helped. He assured me nobody could stand that fierce heat for more than ten minutes at a time and so he had worked the shift with another young fellow, so one could haul the other out, if need be, from the heat.

As he spoke, my light'dreams were scattered with visions of flaming furnaces and the dark was ablaze with their fierly light. But I didn't realize when he suddenly was

"gone" (He had to change buses along the way as he was en route to "Barslow" while I was bound instead for "Bakersfield", next.) But, as I say, the blaze he had kindled in my imagination evoked anew the haunting sensation I'd gotten in Albuquerque, of being another Eurydice alone in a subterranean Alternate World somehow, where only with the Hound of Ghostly Legends, silvery-gray like a ghost itself, was one safe!

And so I slept till the morning....

Next in the manuscript written last year right after I got back, is the chapter "Heath Flickering Tree-Shadows", about Bakersfield and the lovely time spent there with Dorothy Jones--a whole week of restful hours of enjoying T-V, going for drives, going out for visits, going to lots of places and getting the feel just as I'd done in Texas too, but the highlight was that night I've already included in my March 1975 zine, and that everybody's mentioned they loved reading about.

I will copy out the version from the zine for you, now... (I was afraid it might seem too sentimental but nobody complained of that!) ...Dorothy took me by car one evening to an outdoor Philharmonic Concert, beyond or near Lake Ming, outside of Bakersfield, California, and it is something I shall not soon forget. True, by now that memory has dimmed to a soft glow of Jack-o-lanterns on picnic tables, but my own lantern the wind blew out and we did not light it again. Many a family was present there when we arrived in the park, waiting for the concert to begin. Dear old ladies, and young mothers and children; grandfathers, spouses, friends; everyone! It was a real family gathering of an entire big community.

And between the picnic tables in the cool evening, strolled the young girl who serenaded us with their violins...they played my favorite tunes from *Fiddler on the Roof* that added to the sweetness of the occasion for me. (Since I'd just seen the move over color T-V at Bailee Bothman's and loved it!)

The girls passed us now with dreaming expressions, and a peaceful look that made them seem angels in disguise. They wore long gowns in pastel hues of the same cut and pattern, in pinks, blues, creams...each differently colored. And these girls were Japanese, Philipino, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Black, blond and what have you...all so friendly, united, and playing these perfectly marvelous brave tunes. And I wanted to hug all of them, but had to blink back tears as they passed. And I wanted to hug all those sweet little old ladies with their children and grandchildren beside them, enjoying it with me. And Dorothy, too, so generous, so sweet-spirited!

"These are my people!" The wind made me remember as it whispered to me anew...my people, your people ...ours!

And I thought in return, "Mother, keep them safe!" For who but Earth Herself can protect Her people in these dangerous, cruel days?

And my joy mounted with the high, sweet voices of the violins in the night, and I knew that my grandmother was also somewhere there in the shadows with me, delighted that her "Beulah Mae" was home again and having such a lovely time. She too, with the Wind, was trying to say to me, "Here you belong!"

Silently, furtively, in the flickering tree-shadows, I began to cry. And it was not the sullen grief of resenting our own mortality that had me in its thrall, but rather the sweet high cry of a violin plucking at the heart to remind us all, "But we must go...and we know not where. Yet Love speaks to reassure us, and we return to the Heart of Things, wherever we go..."

And indeed but Grandma was very near me in the shadows, and my Jack-o-Lantern got blown out by the eddies of her passing. No other lantern went out, that night, anywhere...

Well...that was the story as I told it and Dorothy will confirm that it is all perfectly true. We even argued as to whether to bother to relight our Jack-o-lantern again or let it be, and decided against it.

And why did I select that little vignette out of all the happenings while I was in the U.S.A. to start off with in my zine? I don't know.... Do you? Perhaps because I'm just "bloody-sentimental", in a English way.

I had other lovely times at Dorothy's, but this story is getting too long. I might have stayed another week but I was getting more and more worried over Vadim's health, despite the fact the letters from him I found awaiting me at Dorothy's assured me he was again fine, but I know him and couldn't be sure.

So I hurried on...this time Southward to Huntington Beach to visit the Hogues, Rose and Bill and their three children, really very old friends. I mean, I've known Rose as long as Ed Connor's been pubbing his former MOEBIUS TRIP and we got acquainted through having mutually written lots to that zine! (How long ago was that?)

That's a terrific route the bus took us along, through a great arid canyon, up and up firstly we traveled into the clouds, then down the other side steeply, where we could look upon a beautiful artificial lake, and still further down and into hazy fertile valleys full of Californians living in their perennially sunny (or perhaps it may be sometimes smoggy?) lives. But they stay there because they love it, obviously. Try to tell a Californian "Texas is nicer." I didn't. I wouldn't. I don't actually think so anyway. Everywhere's just as nice, wherever I stayed...

I'd have liked to spend a full week also with the Hogues--I felt tremendously at home, as I'd felt also elsewhere. So much so at Dorothy's, for instance, even her dogs were sorry to see me go, I was quite sure. And her husband, in, for a day or two from the rig--for he's in oil--said politely, on leave-taking, "Come again!" That really delighted Dorothy. "He doesn't usually say that," she said. He's a marvelous person, by the way, of the type of Yankee I really do admire; very dependable, serious, kind, dignified, and rather reserved. You have so many types, to be sure.

Bill Hogue is still another type of Yankee who has my hearty admiration. I cannot praise him enough. Not that I didn't also feel that Rose herself is even more wonderful in real life than she is in her much-valued and enjoyed letters and lots we all like to get. But Bill truly went out of his way to make me feel at home, cooked up a real American supper with muffins even at the end, told me a lot of things I wanted to know about life in America, answering carefully every question I could think to pose, and my summing-up is, "If every American was like Bill Hogue, it would just be the best place in the world." (Lots are like him, and so it is already a very fine land.)

He has a tremendous sense of personal responsibility, feels his duty to his job, to his wife, his children, to his country, and thinks it all out carefully, planning ahead to achieve the best he can for everyone. Really, if that is the WASP-type "work-conscience", why not develop it everywhere? I have somewhat of that type of background on my mother's side, so understand! A conscience almost "super-sensitive"!

§§§§§

Rose took me to the school where she works freely to help the teachers. She loves that task and I see why she loves it! The schools I've seen in the States here and there awakened my admiration. What's so disastrous about your schooling system anyway? Or have I yet to see the examples I ought to deplore. (I'm no School Inspector, and my visits here and there were merely by chance.)

Naturally, my criterions are not yours. I don't measure your worst against our best. I measure your "averages" against ours.

I was sure sorry to have to leave Rose and her family so soon, but my feeling that I must hurry, hurry, was growing stronger, I couldn't tell why.

So she took me to the Greyhound Station--I think it was at Long Beach--and off I went again.

Long Beach looked awfully unfamiliar. I'd waded in its breakers when I was ten, a long time ago. It had been wild and open then with just a few nice bungalows along the shores. We loved (my parents and I) to stroll along the sandy highways for hours at a time, up and down between the plots, and admire all the carefree architecture. I suppose those old homes are still there, but so sandwiched between taller new buildings, I didn't glimpse a single one. Or maybe they're gone, more likely, torn down for bigger new homes.

And then the "South Sea Islands" off-shore, with palm-trees and resort-looking buildings, (disguised oil-rigs!) The Isle of St. Brandon, (or Borondon in Spanish legends, phantom--appearing and vanishing--wouldn't, couldn't, have surprised me more!

I'd selected for my bus the one taking the costal route. Unfortunately it was foggy. Or smoggy. I don't know which. It was a blindingly bright curtain hanging over the sea, in any case. The Valley of Ten-Thousand Smokes was surely smoking....

When we went through Los Angeles and its suburbs, the hair on the nape of my neck rose. My goodness, of all the haunting things to occur! Here I was back, and familiar landmarks reminded me of a girl nearly fifty years younger, who had walked between her parents here...going to Glendale, going to hear Aimee Semple MacPherson (which was no triumph for that Faith, for my parents disapproved when they watched); going to a nearby park to go boating.

I saw the hills, their outlines, and knew them as I'd known them in the way they'd appeared to the eye of my childish former self. But what were all these skyscrapers? And the fantastic sky-roads we rode, the winding bridges, the cloverleaf "crossings", and all? As our bus found its rightful route, curving up and up between stately pillars, and I saw--was it five levels of curving roadways above me and below--I thought: "I'M IN THE FUTURE NOW!" And I wondered... "where can I get a photo of this?"

I have it engraved, of course, in my mind's eye.

But I'd really like a photo, if someone can snap it while hurtling upwards, in a steadily-flowing stream of cars!

All the fashionable beaches of California lay to my left as we rode northwards now. The breakers were just as I remembered them--huge! The sands as inviting and nice. I watched swimmers carrying surfboards in. They all seemed so carefree and casual. Life is more relaxed even if you feel more its tensions than when I was there, so long before!

All day we rode, and I stayed awake watching till night fell. I suppose then I dozed, though every now and then I'd glance out and imagine I glimpsed a redwood right by the road. (I hope so.)

It was midnight when we reached the huge old bus-depot of San Francisco, which rather alarmed me because it wasn't like all the other bus-depots I'd found so homey and nice. This was more like the barns I knew down south, passing for train depots. (Oh, we do have some new bus depots, too. But--well--different. You feel like a sore thumb, sticking out, with no way to hide the alien quality in yourself. I guess I feel down here in our new crowded places the way those Argentine tourists felt in the States. Yet the bygone Argentina I could cope with easily. Perhaps it's just I'm growing old, maybe?)

Actually, the difference here between "Now" and "Then", (as any oldster will say is the difference also in the U.S.A.) is that the population is a million times bigger, more rushing, more crowded and desperate, than when I was young, in any public place. Just that! And we're not so good at pushing past everyone, as we used to be, when necessary! We're a bunch of over-fertile rats in a maze and God peers in with his Eye, (speaking anthropomorphically). The Sun...the Moon...either! That's what primitives, anyway, used to suppose!

Anyway, I was glad to change buses and get out of the San Francisco bus-station as quickly as I could. The other bus-stations might have seemed like "home".

Not that one. And the folks there scared me a bit too, I have to confess. Just there. Not elsewhere, somehow.....I felt my age that night.

We even had a bit of a scare on our bus over the loss of a Pass suffered by some oldster, but it was soon over, and I merely had to leave my signature on a form assuring the bus company that as a witness I considered the driver guiltless of whatever had occurred, and I did. (Poor fellow! He was so upset, and trying yet to jolly us along till the case could be solved, quickly.)

After that I slept.

But I did get to see the incredible constellations of lights in the black darkness, that must have been Berkeley, I suppose. Or maybe San Francisco itself?

We reached Redding just before the dawn, and I was given my choice of two routes I could select for continuing my journey. There was a local bus that would potter along endlessly, or an express that would cut through the territory of Mount Shasta which they said I'd like the best for sure. So I agreed and am I glad!

You enter the Shasta region through a sort of natural gate of rocks that in the dawn-light glowed with almost human expressions, like old Indian deities smiling a welcome as we rode right in.

What views! I've never seen anything like it, in its way. And with Fall coming on, the trees were all ablaze with every color--vermillion predominating right then! We had a very friendly driver who obviously loved the scenery and would quietly point out all the wonders and keep glancing himself appreciatively at same too. The lake, for instance, formed by a dam--another of the many such I'd already seen on my journeying. And Mount Shasta itself with a sprinkling of snow and the pink of sunrise still upon it. It looked easy to climb. It didn't look harder than our hill in front of our house here, which I've sometimes included in hecto-paintings. But of course, I'm quite sure it was a deception and it must be a real rugged mountain when you tackle it. (Similarly, from above, in the jet going back south, how miniature and "toylike" were the volcanos of Ecuador.)

I just hated it when we had to leave that region behind, though the smiling plains and farmlands and lower hills beyond were worth seeing also. But the mountains could not be matched!

I reached Seattle by ten that night, so missed seeing the last portions of scenery due to the dark. (I'm really sorry about that.) My companion on the bus had been a Canadian lady going "home" and she was trying her best to convince me to stay on board and enter Canada with her right away. (Well, she would have to change buses at Seattle, and suffer a bit of a wait, to be sure.)

I answered, "I'll see. First I'll phone my friends, and give them a chance to postpone my coming, in case they're not able to put me up just yet, since I didn't warn them by phone I'm on my way."

So I phoned the Busby's.

"We'll be there in ten minutes! Can you wait? Do you mind?"

I was stunned.

I told the Canadian lady, "Sorry!" We exchanged addresses, and then I went outdoors to wait.

At once the Busbys appeared in their car!

I certainly had a topping time with them! Remember, we're friends by correspondence since the CRY-days back in 1962 or 3!

Seattle's Fall was less vivid than Mount Shasta's, but it too had its golden browns, yellows and oranges here and there. They took me to see their favorite places--Buz and Eleanor did, knowing me. On one lofty promontory above the bay we feasted on blackberries and admired the view and I took off my shoes and socks to feel the luciousness of the clean white sandy spots on that height.

But I think the most poignant detail was the way Buz and Elinor know so intimately all the waterfowl inhabiting Greenlake Park, in Seattle itself. Each distinct and individual bird has its own story. They pointed out each personality present to me, with its background attached. And I got to walk right around the entire lake--some three miles, briskly--and found I could keep up with Buz easily! Sitting endlessly in Greyhound buses hadn't turned me into a softy yet! (Let Grandmaw boast!)

We had fish-and-chip lunches in town and I loved it. With the smell of the sea so near, it was "just right". And beer! How I love the Busbys' fannish choice in that--bheer! I drank it while reading Buz's published novels, happy to have a chance to see them all at last. I told him, "They're real stories for reading with beer."

"I had a glass of beer at my side when I wrote them also!" he grinned. They were glad I wasn't a teetotaller (though my mother was, to be sure, being of Baptist extract!) "I'm glad it's not a coca-cola story!" he added.

In Seattle, I didn't once get to see Mount Ranier, however. It was smoggy. Just after I left, I read in a Canadian newspaper, they had a "Smog Alert--First in Several Years--in Seattle". Too bad...such a lovely place. I'd have liked to live in one of the high hills there, in the type of house you see there built to endure real rainy seasons, yes, I'd have liked living there too always.

§§§§§

"Where are you going next?" Elinor asked me, as she drove me to the bus-station in the early morning, on her way to work. (I stoutly though really regretfully refused their insistent invitation to stay longer, but I felt the need to hurry strongly, still.)

"It depends," said I. "I'll shop for the nicest route back, when I'm there. If I can go via Canada, so as to see Susan again, I'll have a try!"

At the ticket-counter I was told, "Why, of course, you can go that way. There's an express leaving soon for Vancouver. Shall we mark your ticket for that place next? From thence you can get a Canadian Greyhound further on!"

I agreed!

So almost at once I was back on a Greyhound (not quite so icily-cooled, fortunately), rolling Vancouverwards at a regulation speed of just 55 miles per hour. But you should have seen the pace change once we'd crossed the border. (No problem for me with my British passport, of course!) We absolutely HURTTLED! We got to Vancouver in no time at all!

I had a whole afternoon to myself in Vancouver, on a bright warm day. Office workers were pouring out of the city buildings in light garments, girls often wearing backless blouses optimistically, even though to folks from farther south, it wasn't such a hot day at all!

I caught a trolley which would take me to the aquarium. (Vancouver, Susan, is surely a lovely town and how happy I am for you that you have this lovely teaching job in this top-flight university right there!)

Here, I think I'll copy out an episode from a letter sent privately to a fannish friend (Ned!), who had a good laugh over it, apparently. It concerns "Me and the Baluga Whale"...

Reaching the park, I shot along its various shady paths, in search of the Aquarium, and accosted various tramps in the process to ask them the way, but they only looked at me calculatingly and rather meanly, spat, and said they didn't know.

Well, I got there at last, both trotting and practically running, (not to miss my bus and still have time to spend endlessly watching dolphins and whales--for I'd never seen any in any aquarium).

Reaching the building, I found you had to pay quite a lot to get in unless you were a senior citizen, in which case just a few pence was requested. So I went up and asked engagingly, "Can I pass as a senior citizen?"

She took one look at me and said, "Yes".

(I don't know whether I should have felt pleased or sad. Actually, I felt pleased, saving all that money!)

So in I skipped and hastened toward the pool where the dolphins and orcas are said to leap for their meals.

Soon they did. It was fun to watch but nothing in comparison with my discovery that in another pool dwelt two baluga whales, the white ones of the Arctic. The orcas are supposedly their deadly enemies, hence the caste system used at the Aquarium, keeping them in separate pools. Funnily, dolphins and orcas share the same pool and cooperate in leaping fancily to show off to the public for their meals of fish.

You could study the balugas through a glass window granting you an underwater view. At that same window one of the two balugas was as interestedly studying us humans, who passed by.

I don't know which of us was the more curious--the baluga, possibly! Anyway, I tried communicating, like I do with all our animals back home, (but failed so shamefully in the U.S.A. with the big black dog and the racoon, if you recall.)

Well, I quietly told the baluga when no humans were around, that I could open my mouth much, much wider than could he or she. The creature looked skeptical, then opened its mouth to a tremendous wideness in proof. I was startled, for it next roared so loudly the glass rattled. (or I suspect it did. Supersonically!)

Not to be outdone, I next informed the baluga, "Oh, sure, you're just showing off. But I bet you, as things are now, I could chop you up in little pieces and eat you all up, too."

It looked at me simply horrified. Surely I was only joking? It swam sideways next so as to fix its tiny beady eye the better against the thick pane to take a really good new look at me. I was laughing at it triumphantly, then heard a lot of grunts and gasps. Glancing behind me, I found a huge audience of two-legged creatures had collected. Silently I slunk away, my heart a captive of that baluga whale till now...

That was my GREAT ROMANCE in North America last year....

§§§§§

I got back to the bus-station in plenty of time to board the bus setting off for a night journey all the way to Calgary, to which place my ticket was now made out. (From thence I'd have to change buses to continue on to Regina and Susan.)

But I wasn't dressed in Canadian "cold-proof" clothes, naturally. I had the summery garments with me, I'd started off with, in Washington. (Indeed, I had brought from Argentina no winter clothes, rather, departing from that frigid winter in many layers of summer-clothes as I've said, so very practically. Remember, my mother is of New England pioneering ancestry, and we're practical to the very backbone in our tendencies to thrift!)

But everybody was staring at me, of course. They really were, and these folks with their British accents (or more British than American) did not quite approve of the goose in their midst, when they all were swans. (Or more like furry bears, the way they looked.)

Still, I wasn't going to give up so easily....

I paid no attention as my fellow passengers described the frost and cold and glaciers awaiting me right ahead! I sat tight.

The bus-conductor put the heating on. "I hope you're warm enough?" he asked us all. "The heating system needs to be overhauled on this bus."

I snuggled under my canvas raincoat, as though it were a blanket, tucked my blue plastic Greyhound pillow into my neck, and went to sleep. Here I must mention that I was no longer lugging that awful leather bag with me. I'd sent it back to Washington, D.C., via Greyhound, and my worldly possessions were now stuffed into the "pocket" in the inflatable plastic "pillow-bag".

There weren't any extra pullovers within!

But I still meant to keep right on a bit more.... and see!

I mean, I'd become an old hand at traipsing along all over the place, totally unafraid as long as Greyhounds could be caught and Greyhound Bus-Stations remained open to shelter the weary traveler! They were my "home-bases" saving me from any further assaults of "Cultural Shock", I presume.

And besides, if old gentlemen with wheel-chairs could even reach Alaska on this Greyhound Pass, I ought to be able to reach even Alaska too if I so wished. (Not this time, however. I must hurry, hurry, hurry...the wheels took up the rhythm as I dozed.)

As we climbed the heights in the blackness of that velvety northern night, at a ripping pace, rounding curves right merrily in a way that proved the gradients must be steep, (and my ears clicked to confirm the message), I really regretted we weren't making this journey by daylight instead, and not aboard this "night express", but I'd had no choice.

The little towns looked so jewellike far below us, now and then when they'd flash into view, and as suddenly be blanked out by more black cliffs, as we climbed ever higher, going northeast.

At that moment a nice little Canadian lady sat beside me. She was taking a big bag of goodies to the wedding of a son. I am sorry to say when she changed buses further ahead, and I woke up and found her gone, I discovered the bag of goodies still at my feet. With a cry of anguish I told the bus-driver, "Oh, she's left her bag behind," and he answered firmly, "I can't do anything about it, lady!"

"Then what am I to do with the bag?"

"Put it up on the rack. That's all you can do."

How it hurt me. I thought of her reaching the wedding-festivities and wondering where the goodies had gone. I hope she traced them and found them, how I do!

Anyway, between dozing, I had looked out while she was still with me, and cried, "What's that? Searchlights?"

"Wh-wh-why--I don't--I--can't--" she sounded astonished. "It can't be. Why would there be searchlights here?"

"Could it--" I whispered reverently. "Could it be the Aurora Borealis?"

"It has to be. But I've never seen it this far south, especially not at this time of the year."

Again the mean black cliffs blotted out the view, but I was singing within myself, "Even that, even that! Not just baluga whales but the Aurora Borealis said hello to me. Thank you, Ma!" A lump was in my throat, I was so moved.

Gee, I felt happy that night.

When that dear old lady was gone, I got a new companion, a big burly mining engineer returning to Alaska to the mines to recoup a vanished bank-account. (Apparently gambling was his ruin, if I'm to judge by his life history told me also with the encouragement of my appropriate ohs and ahs as I dozed and listened subconsciously.) (It's nice to switch to alpha and be "all at peace".)

He was truly gloomy. His marriage was a ruin, his children had been taken from him and were being brought up as Jehovah's Witnesses by his estranged wife, though he continued supporting them all. He was so bitter it could break your heart, (though personally I find Witnesses awfully sweet, in South America at least. Sort of forlorn and lonely!)

He kept pointing out sites where we could be covered any moment by an avalanche. He sounded very hopeful and refused to be cheered. He talked "avalanches" at me till I fell so deeply asleep I failed to hear him depart, when he too left to catch another bus. But just as that other fellow going to Barslow peopled my night with fiery hells describing those rolling-mills, this poor guy had filled my new night's visions with their icy counterpart, also once called "Hel" in Northern myths of the Indo-Europeans.

I hope things brightened for him. I read in a paper a plane going to Alaska right after that crashed and the men were all killed. His last lap of the trip was to be by plane. I hope he didn't wish for it so bad it happened...

Poor guy...

By early morning my courage had altogether deserted me. I was frozen to the bone. I knew I must not go on. They told me blizzards were already raging beyond Calgary. On the way to Regina, who could say what it would be like by the time our bus got that far.

I gave up. I got off at a tiny station called Nelson, in a little town between steep hills. Outdoors, it was bright and sunny, but the wind was so icy I stayed inside the tiny depot. I waited there, bored as I'd never been, for the folks weren't even entertaining when I tried to lure them into speech, and only at noon was I saved, by the arrival of the southbound bus, a Maple-leaf combining with the Greyhound Symbol, as though tempering my image of Grey Hound mysteries, at last. (Well, the other Night Express towards Calgary had had the Maple Leaf also on it too, of course.)

My soul was now burdened forever, with the stories of all the shadow-people I had listened to on journeys here and there by night, on "Charon's boat", as it sometimes did seem. Timeless, this meeting of strangers in the night, when faces were hidden in the bus's gloom and voices and souls alone spoke from the raw material of each heart. Why? I don't know. Why do we treat one another as though in a confessional on such journeys? Or is it me triggering this? I think it happens to us all in circumstances of this sort, surely?

That poor mining engineer going back towards the Yukon, for instance. He'd "talked avalanches" so much at me, I was sure to run into one sooner or later and indeed I did. I'll mention it, further along.

§§§§§

My destination now was Spokane where the World Fair was entering its closing period. The bus that took us southward from Nelson was almost empty. Just an old lady or two, myself, (another), and the driver--conductor--I forget the name, oh, yes, "operator" is the proper term used in North America.

We went through such ravishing passes. Never--NEVER--have I seen anything to match. Not anywhere. And the driver mentioned places along the way where he'd been caught in a blizzard and how awful it had been at such times. It made the golden sunshine, the blue bright haze, the incredible heights and chasms, the fiery and golden treeclad hills, (so steep!) suddenly seem like an illusion while his snow and ice heaped up around me in my mind, everywhere. He brought it back from his past for me. Time was indeed an illusion throughout that strange trip, all the months by Greyhound, spent traveling...

He asked me about the Andes. Could he get a job driving a bus up there? He longed for real adventure, challenge! I assured him he was better off right here; to forget the Andes and South America unless he'd studied Spanish till he'd lose his accent and not

be an alien down here. It's not good to be a mere *extranjero* here today, believe me... He was a bit sad to hear that. Sutyding Spanish seems not to have been his forte! He then told me he bought bonds regularly in the Greyhound Company because it really was a very fine company, and he loved his job here, anyway. (Putting the wild dream of the remote Andes reluctantly out of his head, having listened-to-Grandmaw! Did I do wrong? Please say NO!)

He left us at one of the stops along the way and another operator took over and on we went. (Perhaps we also changed buses. Little details I by now don't recall.) We stopped at a place called Yak, Yalk, or Yalik. I bet Yalik is the proper Indian term. Yak would also be "proper", for in old terms throughout men's old languages, a middle L is so often optional, in such cases.

It was night when we reached Spokane, too late to visit the fair. I settled down for another night of "waiting-for-it-to-pass"--the long, cold hours till my next bus might be arriving. I had quite a few of these nights, spent yawning in bus-stations, or strolling from water-fountain to "sandwich case" (where you put in a coin then do some fancy pulling and punching to select which type of biscuit or sandwich you prefer. The lottery is fun! The first time I tried it, and nothing dropped into any slot, I felt I'd been "cheated", and walked sadly away. Only later I learned you have to slide open a little glass door to get the coveted delicacy, finally, as your last strategic "move".)

These were my games. More sophisticated young Yankees played electronic games of baseball, or drove fighter planes, instead, on other whatever-they're-called (gadgets? Doodads? My greatest triumph in the States, however, was just the crocodile already mentioned, for 25 cents, as my parting splurge, most tender memory, being the "last" on the shores of North America for me.)

Once I even tried out one of those private T-V things with the seat for the viewer, you know. It even worked and I saw somebody producing a concert with a lot of sweat, waving a baton at me. That was also nice....

(I felt so cultured, too, that time!)

I did by then start trying to make a few notes--scrawling on scraps of paper little happenings. Hence, one tiny scrawl informs me:

"Thursday, 17th October. Last night aboard the bus, on the way to Spokane, between Cordelaine near Kellogs and Wallace," (here, I was quoting information gotten from my fellow passengers), "a landslide pitted the bus's windshield. The slide was probably caused by blasting nearby, people say."

As for the bullet-like indentation in the windshield, some folks insisted it could only have been caused by a bit of gravel along the road thrown back at us by a truck right in front (and not by the last bit of the avalanche that now barred our way right ahead, delaying us for several hours there in the darkness, till a way could be cleared for traffic.)

Anyway, I slept through most of it, and in my sleep supposed we'd just stopped at another bus-station for more coffee to keep us awake. *Who needed it? Not me,* thought I. (And ignoring all the bustle and excitement I slept right on, peacefully. "Where there's a will there's a way.")

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Well, people. It's been an awfully long story. (Trust Grandmaws to be loquacious and never stop talking once they start.) Still, this is as far as the older manuscript got--"Up to Spokane". The rest of the cross-country journey has only been "written up" by me in little bits in letters, of which I do have carbons. (A new resolve made since I got back, since mail is sometimes uncertain but this way I have proof of the letters I did too write, and even mail!)

The rest of the adventure would take just as long or longer to tell, if I ever got down to it. But I saw no more fans, regretfully. I just rushed from bus to bus, feeling my way gropingly, for even at the bus-stations they were so vague as to "how long will it take from here to there?" It all depended on so many things, and thus I went feeling my way from bus-depot to bus-depot, asking "Which bus leaves next?" and so found my way after many days, (perhaps four more or was it five?) traveling constantly save when haunting bus-stations in the night frequently, till I suddenly found myself one Sunday morning in Atlanta, Georgia, and could have a real good sleep in a proper bed at my Aunt's.

It was a treat.

Nothing like a nice soft bed to stretch in, and shake out the cramp in the legs that develops after days and nights of never doing anything but sit, stand or walk around.

I had a marvelous time seeing my aunt and my cousins, but all too soon I was rushing northwards in another bus through the incredibly rosy hills and autumnal woods of North and South Carolina (what gracious pastoral and village scenes I glimpsed, what nice company I had with me!) And late one evening I was again in Washington, D.C., though my ticket was made out for continuing on, in the same bus to New York and perhaps still further, duly, to Boston.

But first I phoned the Gillilands and they told me a stack of letters from Vadim awaited me. Of course I must first see them! Alexis fetched me, and--once more with my big, leather bag--I went "home", for indeed their home is like my own, as I do feel. It was festively lit with two splendid huge jack-o-lanterns cut out artistically by Alexis from the biggest pumpkins I ever did see. The candles within burned brightly for me to see when I came in. Dolly met me delighted, at the front door. We hugged each other. I had a million things to recount. But when it was done, when I opened the letters and read them, I knew--"this is the end of the journey. I must rush back today!" (for already the morrow had come.) The rest you probably know, the Gillilands booked a place for me on an Eastern airlines jet to Miami and from thence on a Braniff once again. (I love the Braniff! I just loved the trip both ways with them.) As for the views en route, the company I had, the people I took into myself by observation, catching, till they became part of me in the Clifford Simak way, (remember his story of the "mind-changes" an alien shared with a human?), this must be another tale some day, not now. I love you all, all the more since I met you. Thank you all, again, a million times...



