

PRECIOUS DAYS
(Travels With Marty)



With the eternal mountains watching;
And the timeless Skok' below;
Mr. Webb did build a house here;
Echoes still the hammer's blow.
How few years 'til it was leaning;
And how soon it came to fall!
Let in this there be a lesson;
Let us everyone recall;
That our days on Earth are numbered;
And so soon the number's small.
Let us each then come to ponder;
Life's days are precious each and all!!

Preface

TRAVELS WITH MARTY

The allusion to Steinbeck is obvious. Travels with Charley was my favorite. It was his last book while this is my first.

I also am a great fan of James Thurber and take comfort and delight in The Unicorn in the Garden.

I am a manic depressive and much of my demeanor while in the manic phase confuses and even frightens my loved ones. They don't realize that this phase is "normal" for me albeit a difficult phase for those around me.

This is when I write. Much of what I write is acceptable--sometimes commendable. But like the Duke in Doonesbury sometimes I become too stimulated and write trash. This eventuality is becoming less frequent with the help of good mental health care professionals, and my good friends.

May my words give encouragement to my manic depressive counterparts, of which I find there are strikingly many. I dedicate this book to the caring people who helped to stop my jumping from peak to peak and gently led me down to a beautiful plateau upon which I can live a fulfilled and useful life.

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Cover photo by Doug Swank

Paul Smith

I met Paul Smith on the 5:00 a.m. ferry out of Bremerton. He admired my toy samples, but commented that he had no money. I couldn't sell my samples at any rate. We chatted a bit and I observed that we are striving to keep our prices down so that all children can have quality toys. I also observed that the Santa Claus in me gives away a lot of toys.

Since I have a bad habit of spending my return ferry fare, I asked to purchase a commuter ticket. He gave it to me for what I do for kids. I accepted on behalf of Santa Claus.

As we were leaving, I observed that my lucky charm was working. He said my attitude is my lucky charm. Thank you, Paul Smith.

Specialists Are in Demand

Perhaps it's too late for me. I've come to realize that my career direction may have become too general in nature. After all, microprocessor programming at the firmware level, specializing in capturing inputs from the echo input/physio process in response to every seventh interrupt during the steady state phase of the fourteenth optional configuration of one of ten new product lines under development is just too general and unstructured for me. I have decided to specialize.

I hope to retrain myself in the field of anthropology. I plan to study anthropologists. That is, I aspire to becoming a renowned anthropologistologist.

The most fascinating anthropologist that I have ever ment is named J.O. Cramer. Dr. and Mrs. Cramer, without a doubt, sit high in the cathedral of admiration of their friends. John has one dominant characteristic. He has it nearly figured out. I saw him devote 4,000 hours of fully prepaid military/industrial complex systems engineering time to his especial pursuits of True Happiness! The definition of which, it was concluded, requires further study of course!

"You've Got Yours Baby, I've Got Mine"

Artis was my neighbor;
He is a poet too.
I've listened to him formally;
And one time at his flue.

He made me think;
When with a wink;
He said, "This poem's true;
I hope somehow it touches you!"

What touches me a great deal more;
Is that he won't stand still;
And take in just my smallest verse.
He never has. I hope he will!

And then he said;
The day he read;
"I've got mine baby, you've got yours":

When Boeing tests a jumbo jet;
They don't get Iacocca.
They want instead an airplane vet;
To look the whole thing over!!!

Attitudes

Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.

-- Albert Einstein

I had a T-shirt with the above message as a caption under an unmistakable picture of Einstein given to me by the son of a dear friend of mine. My benefactor was a University of Washington student and owned his own printing business. I was flattered by the gift.

I didn't wear the shirt very often in this area because it tended to elicit hostility--even in total strangers. My son next had the shirt. He wore it to school. Everybody tried to snatch it.

Bankers

Under the Old Order, bankers were cruel and ruthless. Women who overdrew their accounts had a big red "0" painted on their foreheads, were paraded through town, and stocked and pilloried in the public square. Others threw offal at them.

The people rose up and overthrew those bankers. Under the New Order, women who overdraw their accounts are allowed to pay a modest penalty, and correct their monetary mischief without any shame coming on their family. Women feel much more secure in their monetary matters under the New Order.

Wimps

Today the United States Navy took Seattle. Not a single vessel came out to oppose the invasion. Not a single beer can or Gallo bottle was thrown in her defense. What a city of slothful, sodden wimps! Some war heroes!

Gramps

Gramps was a great and gentle man. His given name was Martin John Weiss, the same as mine. That and because I was the baby of seven children may have had something to do with the special attention he paid to me. I can remember on the day of my Confirmation, a Lutheran religious rite, that Gramps took me aside and said he was very proud of me for having excelled in the attendant examination. Probably the most exciting incident that I remember involved Gramps' fiery tember and somewhat over-enthusiastic driving on my part. Since his last horse had died, I had become horse and buggy to him. This was accomplished with a farm tractor and trailer and later with my brother's Model A pickup. I had just learned to drive and was feeling my oats. I misjudged the distance to a corner and was forced to execute a four-wheel drift to avoid going into the ditch at the corner just this side of our destination. As it was, we went halfway into the ditch and back out again. I was too busy to be scared, but Gramps was terrified and infuriated. When we arrived, I knew I was in for a beating with his cane. I jumped out of the truck and beat it into the woods. An hour later I finally braved a return and we discussed the matter over a beer. I was a young man of twelve years old. He was my grandfather.

Gramps' mild aversion to automobiles stemmed from his experience as a younger man. He was taking his brand new Maxwell for his first spin when he rounded a blind corner and encountered some horse and buggy traffic. Naturally, he leaned to the right, pulled back on the steering wheel and said "whoa". Into a tree and a total wreck! Luckily, Gramps and all else were unhurt. He never drove a car again, yet he loved to tell this story on himself with a little help from Grandma.

I remember that he always invented little chores with which he needed help so that he could continue my training. I used to hate this when I would rather be playing ball with the neighbor boy, or be hunting sparrows or something. To paraphrase another author, all I ever needed to know I learned from my grandfather. When he died, he received an unheard of quarter-page obituary in the neighboring city's newspaper. Then I knew. I was fourteen. I remember!

To Boom Boom

I couldn't find the tea pot.
My head felt like a stone.
You helped me with my tea and sat.
I felt no more alone.
That was the way I met you,
With an early morning groan.
If it seems that I'm again alone,
I'll think once more of you,
Of all the good times we have had,
And your heart so kind and true,
How the brusqueness of your hide
Covers up your gentle side.
It's the tenderness I'll remember
Until the moon has turned to blue.

Count Your Blessings

The lump in the sleeping bag of early the previous evening had been transformed into a tall thin man tending his camp stove next to what I had perceived to be a 1963 Dodge Dart. I had remarked that a man who owned a '63 Dodge Dart and slept under a magnificent maple tree could ask little more of life. He allowed that it was a 1965 Dart, it wouldn't hold the tent, and he wished he had someone cook his breakfast. I guess some men don't know when they're well off.

The Horse Who Hunted Golf Balls

I told Weaver that my dog Kip used to point golf balls, but in the absence of informed encouragement on my part he lost interest. Weaver then told me about his niece's horse. She routinely rode her horse near a golf course. Whenever he spotted a golf ball, the horse would stop and refuse to move until she found and picked up the ball. She had to have a bag along when she went riding. One day when Weaver was visiting, she came home fuming with fifty golf balls in her bag and only a ten minute ride to show for after having been gone for two hours.

Controlled by Tape

The unfathomable genius of Walt Disney first struck me at the World's Fair at Queens, New York in 1963. The State of Illinois Pavillion consisted of a dimly-lit auditorium with a stage, toward the back of which was seated a likeness of Abraham Lincoln. This being rose, walked to the front of the stage, and delivered some of Lincoln's unmistakable rhetoric. At the conclusion he turned, walked to his chair, and sat down. I was very much taken by this. (Actually, I had first met both Mr. Disney and Mr. Lincoln as a beginning reader aged six or seven.)

The discipline involved with the Illinois Pavillion has come to be known as animatronics. Simply stated, this consists of robots, controlled by computers, animated so as to portray living things.

Much more recently, I have noticed a rash of very convincing robots walking around on the street, riding Metro buses, sitting at computer consoles, and most interestingly, roller-skating at Green Lake. The apparent control devices are remarkably compact. They appear strikingly similar to the well-known "Walkman" device. I'm wondering what kind of tape would induce one of these lovely automatons to follow me home, clean my apartment, do my laundry, cook for me, and perhaps see to other of my creature comforts. I invite assistance in this matter.

Tiffany

Tiffany's family was fishing for squid at the Hoodsport Marina in the middle of the night. Tiffany looked to be about three. Tiffany's mother, Diane, seemed "wired". She said it was due to a combination of sleep deprivation at her job at Valley General Hospital and the consumption of beer. She shared with me the agony of her sister's unsuccessfully-treated manic depressive condition. She sees a woman's psychiatrist, whatever the hell that is.

In order to gentle things out, I recited my Blue Heron poem. As I walked away, I heard Tiffany say, "He's a nice man." Later on, she brought me a present of two selected pieces of broken oyster shells. I carried them in my pocket until one night when they returned to their home at the seashore.

Folderol and Doggerel

Folderol and doggerel;
Are two high-magnum words;
I swear to God I'll only use;
Twixt "well's" and "oh's" from nerds.

Florabunda

Your smiles are florabunda,
Exuberant and profuse!
I wonder if your children
Would consent to turn you loose!

Demimondes

Demimondes, like fernplant fronds,
Look fetching through smoked glass,
But oft, alas, they're burned out grass,
Or reed stalks in duck ponds.

Incredible

First she turns her back on me.
That's genuine anomaly!
Then she picks a siren chaser
O'er yet another fine fun raiser!

Martha Comes to Paint

We had a "working date."
She was two hours late.
I called her on the phone.
Strange voice said she's still snorin'!
My pique it started up.
I said "I'm Dad" please wake her.
Had I been there I'd a shake her.
We met at the Food Giant.
I had a brand new client.
Space Shuttle--price not pliant.
She'd pay me fifty bucks.
A price that's not "aw shucks."
I'd give to Martha most of all.
No business deal.
My partner would appall.
But me I am her dad.
To help her I am glad.
We showed--but first she ate.
No parent gets irate.
When kids need food they get.
It's an absolute sure bet.
But then she crashed on sofa.
My blood was boiling over.
I pried her out at five.
Four hours late--no jive.
She finally painted some.
The quality ho-hum.
But could the job she finish.
Her zest it did diminish.
She had to see her love.
To miss him was too tough.
We loaded up the stuff.
To her apartment fast and rough.
She didn't seal the can.
Paint spilled all o'er the van.
I'm pissed--I coulda hollered.
They'd hear me in Sand Dollar.
Out next to Ocean Shores.
That's Martha, she's my saint.
An artist who can paint.
If ever she would try.
Instead of "Party", cry!!!

The Winslow Zoo

The judge was in his chambers,
shooting up on glue.
The fuzz were on the outside talking
derring-do.
Then Janet said, "Please all stand up. Hi, welcome!
Say what's new?"
That's how it was the thirteenth time
I toured the Winslow zoo.

If

If I brought some HARP to the party,
Do you think they'd ask me to stay?
It would likely be a full keg,
Or one at least halfway.
We'd toss it down in short time,
And then start wondering who?
Will hike down to the tavern
To resupply our brew?

Heavenly Theatre

If there is a heavenly theater,
And I think it's really true,
Then Janet Schneider will get the box
With the very finest view!

Little Flame

It was a chilly morning at Raccoon Beach.
Your note made a pretty little flame.
The Sunday Times made it grow. Without added
fuel it went out. Lasting warmth needs larger
fires. I prefer a sunnier climate. The incoming
tide will wash away the ashes. I walked up to
Dave's for a cup of coffee. Thank you for the
little flame. You are my inspiration.

Melting

Thank you for helping melt away the anger and hurt
in me. Your care will do much to bring me back to
being the loving builder I was born to be.

Pelting

I thought my heart was melting.
I thought hope sprang anew!
But then I took a pelting.
Look, hailstones in the dew!

Teasing

If it's a game of love you play,
My heart will take a mighty leap!
But if you're bent on other prey,
You are the National Champion Creep!

Home all Deranged

Yes, you'll go--
Home, home, all deranged,
When the job pressure's gotten to you!
Dr. Smith says, "Oh heck,
You're a full nervous wreck!
Poor old Davey, his cork finally blew!"

Ben Dozer

Ben Dozer is a gentleman.
His sidekick is a grump.
Ben chuckles at my silly verse.
Red snaps, "Shut up, you chump!"

Florabunda

Your smiles are Florabunda
Exuberant and profuse!
I wonder how I wonder
Why men must turn you loose!

Tubbin'

Rub a dub dub;
You and me in the tub;
With a platter of cheese;
And our favorite wine jug!

Promises

I wonder where that fellow went,
The one who ran for President.
Oh--Gary Rice--no Donnie Hart.
I guess his campaign split apart.
Why? I suppose it's promises too smart;
In every bed a fresh new tart.

Drones

Sycophants and dilletantes,
Those bums with Ph.D.'s;
We wonder how the crop would out,
Without the worker bees!
Those mumbling bumbling working dregs!
Those utter mindless clones!
How would the Queen get fertile eggs,
Without the flight of drones?

Dusty Strings

Dusty Strings, he ain't no country singer,
A warblin' to his guitar.
Dusty Strings is a group of people,
Selling lutes, harps and sitar.

Ecology

There ain't no strike in Union,
Yet the loggers don't fell trees,
'Cause the misbeguided street freaks
Say that small bird needs big trees.
Now take Redford and Merrill Streep,
Both legitimate screen stars.
Neither one could ring an old sow,
File a chain or play guitar.
So why don't they stick their noses
In screen scripts where at home they are?

Morning

This morning as I walked out the door it struck me that each new day is a precious gift of God that often we don't pay the slightest note. Since yesterday was such a wonderful time and today holds promise of the same, I've paused to give this small thank you.

Eerie Feeling

The other night, while I drank Sprite
I got an eerie feeling.
It seemed that after fourteen cans,
The room it wasn't reeling.
I never saw it happen so
When I consumed the brew.
My God, what could be happening now?
I've discovered something new!

If I brought some "Sharp" to the party,
Do you think they'd ask me to stay?
They'd all be bombed on Millers,
All swinging and a-sway.
I'd keep my head from spinning,
And last 'til dawn new day.

To Dave Fauver

You're absolutely right, Dave. Of all the people we will meet in our lifetime, the only one that will never leave is oneself. For this reason, it is highly desirable, as much as is possible, to depend only on yourself. That is not to say that we should become self-centered or reclusive. Great satisfaction can come from doing things with and for others. On the other hand, with the exception of parenthood, I know of nothing of real importance that can't be done alone as well as with others. All that we need is the energy and the spirit to fend for ourselves.

Men and Women

Women in their feathered nests
Hold children to their breasts.
Men go out at risk afar
With outcomes, some bizarre.
If men were women and women were men,
Confused as things now are,
There'd be no babies at the breasts
And soon no men to char.

Yodelers, Stein-Clinkers and Sausage-Munchers

Twenty years ago, I met an impetuous romantic fool named Helmuth Von Mittler. He told me of the Austrian tradition of the Edelweiss. This is a beautiful white flower that grows in the high Alpine peaks. To prove his love, a young man climbs and fetches a flower for his lady.

The first time Von Mittler returned from the high country, his true love had taken up with a transient yodeler. Bitter tears drowned the pretty flower. He was sixteen. That fall, he went off to a neighboring city to study. Shortly he fell headlong in love with a young artist of French descent. She was a beauty and he an impetuous romantic fool. Their love, although tempestuous, flourished. He fetched her many flowers. They prospered together. She gained eminence as a nurturer of young musical talent. He became notorious as a climber of the peaks of technology. But unfortunately, they grew apart. When she needed him, he was often off on some peak or digging himself out of a mudslide. His recklessness terrified her. When she wanted to enjoy chamber music, he would be out in the kitchen with a group of raucous scoundrels and wenches, yodeling, clinking beer steins, and munching on sausages. She feared for the dignity of her children. After much soul-searching, she considered banishing the knave from the castle. He was heart-broken when he sensed this and took to lusting after tavern wenches. His health and spirit faltered. But the Alps' call was irresistible. Once more he climbed. Tragically, he was more reckless than ever. An avalanche nearly ended his climbs forever. His woman had had her fill of this reckless fool and threw him out for the safety of the children. His friends mourned with him.

The last time I saw Von Mittler, he was organizing a mountain climb. He had regained his strength and his spirit. I believe the romantic impetuous fool has fallen in love with the mountains.

It is understood that the Alps will live at least a million years. God bless mountaineers.

Blue Heron

number seen Blue Heron is:

usually less than "1000."

on average when take a stroll.

at night when walk.

Hirohito's Ghost

Yesterday when I watched the Mighty Mo dock at Pier 66, I saw the ghost of MacArthur talking to the ghost of Emperor Hirohito. MacArthur's ghost said, "I was wrong in being so generous and so lenient in your reconstruction. You have taken excessive advantage. If your people do not cease their economic aggression, surrender Hawaii, and stop destroying the oceans, we will unleash your natural enemies the Chinese on you and you will be enslaved for countless centuries. You have little time before you again awaken a sleeping giant."

Hirohito's ghost's eyes were both sad and terrified!

Calling Kip on the Phone

(I was assured that dogs do answer the phone.)

I used to think this was just a nutty experience induced by too much grape.

The Rev and I were enjoying our afternoon "tea" at the Sandpiper outside area. My family had just moved our cats "Bootsie" and "Silbie" as well as the great dog "Kip" from Florida by air freight. Silbie and Kip were okay, but Bootsie didn't travel well. Bootsie had taken off and had been gone for days. He had done this after our move to Florida, but eventually returned. We loved Bootsie and I was worried about him.

Suddenly it occurred to me that I should call my dog Kip on the telephone and ask about Bootsie. Then I realized that Kip didn't have a key to the house and couldn't get to the phone anyway.

At any rate, I went home earlier than usual that evening.

Looking Glass of Love

You are the looking glass of love that I'm lost without.
Please glisten in the sunshine of my life!
I need to find you again!

Loose

I have been to Hawaii three times. I mentioned the first trip previously. That was the year Matt was born.

The second visit to Hawaii was equally enjoyable, but of a much shorter duration. I had been to San Francisco on business and decided to take a few days on Maui to tend to some loose ends, left over from our stay on Maui two years previous. Unfortunately, I got side-tracked. A friend of a friend of mine lived in San Francisco. I called Tammy to see whether she wanted to go out on the town. She was delighted to hear from Dianne and Mike. She is a fan of Glenn Yarbrough, ex of the Limelighters. Glenn was in concert at the Hungry I. We attended the concert. There was a great milling about in the lobby outside the theatre. I chanced to strike up a conversation with a gentleman and his companion while waiting for Tammy to rejoin me. He allowed that he was also a midwesterner having been born and raised in Milwaukee. His wife was from Detroit. They seemed like a very nice couple. I didn't catch their names. After the band had played its lead in, out walks the gentleman from Milwaukee and starts singing. I had just met a nice, unassuming guy named Glenn Yarbrough. The concert was an unusual one in that Ed Sullivan Productions was filming a TV special. There were frequent breaks. During one of these breaks, Mrs. Yarbrough introduced me to her daughter. In the course of the conversation, I learned that during the next week, the group would be filming on Maui. I mentioned that I was going there. They invited me to come to a beach party as their guest and to be an extra in the production. Not only did we have a great party, but the urge to be in entertainment was reimplanted in me at that time. I felt perfectly at home in front of the cameras. Someday I will give professional acting a try.

It's in my blood. Needless to say, the loose ends stayed loose. So have I.

Jerry Mader

Jerry Mader couldn't believe I beat him at arm wrestling. Jerry was the starting defensive end on the Michigan 1964 Rose Bowl Champs -- Michigan 35, USC 9. That's ancient history.

We met later when we worked together at a consulting firm. When we traveled on business, it was like Mutt and Jeff. He stands six feet five inches tall, weighs 230 pounds, has dark hair, and attracts bevy's of beauties. We always had the unwritten agreement that he would have the pick of the flock, as long as he would also pick up the tab.

He married the "sweetheart of Sigma Chi". It saddened me to learn that they are divorced. Both of them are beautiful. They have a son named Brian. His namesake Brian Patchen and Tom Cecchini were all big ten linebackers on that same team. After I beat Jerry at arm wrestling, he had a big Macho Attack. So he bet me a pitcher of beer that if we lined up -- me with a football on the 5-yard line and he on the goal line, midway between the sidelines, that I couldn't get into the end zone without his touching me. I gave him a head fake to the left and scored. It was then that I told him that I played hockey. A really tough sport.

We trained for two weeks and then beat Patchen and Cecchini 7 touchdowns to 0 in a two-man touch football game. After that, Jerry and I knew we were an unbeatable team. He now heads his own research firm. He and Dottie seemed made for one another. Life is a puzzlement.

Peter, the Discoverer of Planeness

It will take many volumes to encompass Peter. Peter and I have worked together in the manufacture of high quality wooden toys. The exact relationship is in a constant state of flux. We are both designers. At this point one could say that I design the functional prototypes with his advice, which he modifies for manufacturability and he designs the manufacturing process and builds the first several batches. We could say that I am research and development and he is production. However, our roles are complementary and I hope this remains so.

After he had produced the first batch of the first design he accepted for production he said it had "planeness." It was a "model" of a DeHavilland Beaver which I had sketched and produced from having seen many of them fly over and having been in one. Actually I built the first one for my youngest grandson, Donald. What is planeness? As best I can grasp it, planeness is a cosmic entity that first manifested itself in Da Vinci's work. The most commonly known proof was by the Wright brothers. The only proof that I have witnessed was by Peter. He was enthralled by the manifestation of planeness at his hands. I was immensely pleased to have been a part of this. Then Peter said, "We must discover other 'nesses' that are not yet known to man." This is a tremendous challenge. I welcome it. Peter has reawakened my mind.

Pinked

This morning as the sun came up,
And pinked up Mount Rainier,
I thought a rush of many things,
But mostly of you, dear;
Of all those lovely things we've done.
Let's more in future near.
And also that the time to start
Is surely now and here!

A Gray Morning at Potlatch

This morning came a gray day
With serenity and peace.
If each one would blaze in glory
Our appreciation might cease.
Well, I used to order prime rib
Every time that we ate out,
Then I finally oversated,
Switched to links and sauerkraut.
Take your favorite song and play it
Over, over, in and out;
You'll eventually come to hate it,
Grab the tape and pitch it out.
Everyone needs some variety,
Boredom bears a subtle clout.
Part of what's wrong with our society
Is what people don't try out.

Pops

I hadn't seen Pops for about ten years. He hasn't aged a bit. When I commented on this, he replied that he can't do things that he used to do. I said, "Neither can I." It seems to be a universal problem. On the other hand, Pops has just finished a correspondence course in VCR and television repair. He said he had always wanted to know about this. What a remarkable 81-year-old man.

Precious Days

With the eternal mountains watching;
And the timeless Skok' below;
Mr. Webb did build a house here;
Echoes still the hammer's blow.
How few years 'til it was leaning;
And how soon it came to fall!
Let in this there be a lesson;
Let us everyone recall;
That our days on Earth are numbered;
And so soon the number's small;
Let us each then come to ponder;
Life's days are precious each and all!!

Margaret and her Rats

I am one of Margaret's rats. She brought me clean clothes even though she was very angry at me. The details of this need not be written down. Suffice it to say that Margaret is an immensely caring person whom I treasure now and hopefully will for many years.

The other rats were captured while they were stealing dog food. They are her pets. She had pet rats as a youngster. Most people would have poisoned the rats. These are a strange variety that I have never seen before. They're kind of cute really. I'm a softie too. I trapped only those which got into the house.

Reverse in the Fast Lane

The Model A pickup convertible suffered abuse at my hands--a fourteen-year-old driver. If I broke it, I fixed it. My 21-year-old brother Elmer had bought it from the Gugel's for four pigs--They were fine pigs and it was a fair deal. After I ripped up the transmission Elmer bought a junk yard replacement and I installed it. Later the differential went out because we had let it run dry. I fixed it and made a serious mistake, installing the ring gear on the wrong side of the pinion gear. Thus we had one slow forward speed and a slow reverse, a medium speed reverse, and a top speed of 75 miles an hour in reverse. Elmer drove it this way for several months. Mario Andretti couldn't have pulled that off!

Riches

A wiser man than I once said that a man with just one good friend is wealthy indeed. Rosalie observed that I have the gift of making friendships easily. This I have done wherever I have wandered. Although I am virtually penniless, I am in actuality richer than Bill Gates, Jr. However, a banker would have difficulty relating to my collateral. This, to me, would seem to be the banker's problem, not mine.

I need no locked vault to protect my riches. No Brinks truck hauls them around. My treasures are protected by God.

Rusting

We'll look up from the rusting iron bridge;
At the cathedral our forebears built;
Standing tall near the river on a ridge;
It's of stone and brick and timber;
Not for centuries will it wilt.
We'll walk through the ringing chambers;
And out to the trees in groves,
Where those whose bodies crumbled;
Lie asleep their trials strove;
But take comfort that there still lives;
A God who watches from above,
Who'll be there forever and ever,
And this God is named Love.

Slugs in the Dahlias and the Goat

The Rev, Weaver and I were taking after work refreshment at Rolling Hills Country Club.

As the evening wore on, Doug wanted to go home. He had been clearing blackberry bushes from his lot. We had suggested he should enlist the assistance of a goat. His excuse upon departing was "I have to get the slugs out of the Dahlias." This is one of his many famous quotes.

The Rev and I redoubled our efforts to find a goat, checking the bulletin boards in nearly every tavern in Bremerton. Finally in our desperation we came to the conclusion that under special circumstances an old sofa is equivalent to an old goat; I had one of those at my home that I needed to haul. Off to Pops' place to borrow the Ford station wagon, then on to Bainbridge Island. My family was away at music camp or something.

Well, the sofa wouldn't fit in the car, so we quit for the night and bedded down. After a good snooze and some breakfast, we decided to gather the clan: Boom Boom, Weaver, Cramer, and of course the Rev and I. We feasted, but eventually ran out of beer. Boom Boom owned a Chevy van. We heaved the old sofa into the van and made an ostensible beer run. Weaver was so busy talking to Cramer, another world class conversationalist, that he noticed nothing.

The "goat" was "tethered" in Weaver's blackberry patch. We bought some beer and returned to finish the evening.

The next morning (Monday) at work I braced myself. Nothing. The same thing the next day.

On Wednesday I was scheduled to go to Florida to attend my nephew's wedding. I had just made a token appearance at the office.

Weaver exploded into my area. He had finally discovered the "goat." His threats were far-ranging and convincing. I was worried, but I had to leave to go to Florida for a week.

The Rev and Willy the Wobbly rescued me. I was rid of the sofa at no expense to me.

The capper was when Mr. Methodical produced a beautiful mock dictionary definition of a ruminant complete with a picture of an old sofa. I've lost this treasure, but it remains in my memory forever.

So do many fun times with the Rev, Boom, Weaver, Methodical, Willy the Wobbly, Cramer, Two Lots, Rosalie and all the others. The Keyport bunch will come later. There is much to be written. I will write it as it comes to me.

You'll probably not believe that these writings were inspired by the gift of a bible, New Testament, from a member of the Jewish faith to a Christian. There is a God. He is alive.

Solitude

So much has been made of the pain of loneliness and deprivation. What of the joy of solitude and self-reliance?

Why not walk barefaced into the breeze-blown mist to an abandoned orchard and share an apple or two with the deer and the ring-necked pheasant?

A Father's Lament

I love you Martha,
You're the greatest.
Please tell me 'bout your trip.
The one you took from here to Mars
On your mind's rocket ship.
The pilot it was Acid--
Old Coke flew in right seat.
The trip was quick and neat.
It was your choice
We heard your voice.
Thank God you're safely home.
Please stay awhile
We love your style.
Don't leave us here alone.
Please quit that shit.
Take your last hit.
Remember Andy Wood.
He thought he could
It got him good.
Now daisies sing his songs.

God has Spared Me--Three Times

I was deeply depressed. My college friend had hired me out of an unpleasant position into a nearly impossible (or at least very challenging one). I was to start a new data processing department with no help--bootstrap operation. My immediate supervisor and I were nearly spitting images--two stubborn Germans. His name is Karl Bartscht. We were and are friends. He has become eminently successful. We clashed like two Big Horn sheep in rutting season. I went manic, then depressive. I thought my college friend was playing games with my life.

My despair reached such depth that I tried to commit suicide by "accidental electrocution" while fixing a clock alarm which supposedly then fell into a water-filled twin tub. I got a tremendous electric shock right through my heart, but lived. God spared me. I shall never attempt to play God with my life again. I went on lithium carbonate medication a few months later. This has been a miraculous help to me.

Earlier, as a late teen-ager, I once "came to" while driving my car miles beyond where I should have made my turn to home, along a winding dangerous road. I at first didn't know where I was. I had not been drinking but had been operating on too little sleep for weeks. During my "blackout" I had passed several extremely dangerous intersections with heavy cross traffic and stop signs on the road I was on. I was jolted into full wakefulness. God had spared me.

About ten years ago, I nearly drowned when a small boat I was in sank while I was trying to board a fishing boat by climbing up the anchor rope. I didn't have the strength to make it and panicked. I was alone. After nearly exhausting myself, I prayed, gathered my wits, rested, and calmly made my way to a Zodiac (inflatable boat) tied nearby but I still couldn't get on board. I am not a survival-trained swimmer. More prayer, no more panic. I rested, calmly worked my way around to the stern of the Zodiac and easily got on board by standing on a flange of the outboard drive and swinging my legs and then my body into the Zodiac. I was not trained to do this. God had spared me a third time.

I do not fear death. I am in God's hands. There must be a purpose for my life, and I shall live until I die.

However, I no longer take foolish risks. Amen.

A Female Henry Aaron

Spook was about five feet, two inches tall and weighed about 120 pounds--rock solid. When she came to bat in the family ballgames, the outfielders moved back. Just like ole Henry, she could get a hold of a low outside pitch and hit it over the old tool shed. Outsiders couldn't believe it. I remember playing ball every day. Seven of us made a decent game.

I think we were typical of country families. I believe that is why so many good ballplayers are country born.

Stanley Stearman

I'm glad you mentioned Dusty Miller Geraniums. This reminded me of my friend Chuck Neuchterlein, who once bought a crop duster. Chuck and I have been lifelong friends. He is happily married to my childhood sweetheart Judy, who jilted me for a teenaged disk jockey from Royal Oak while she was summering at Houghton Lake, Michigan. Chuck and I were roommates at the University of Michigan. At any rate, after a five-year career as a Navy pilot, Chuck took a job with American Airlines. His present position is instructor pilot on South American destinations. One of my fondest memories is of the morning when Chuck sat at our table with our preschool children perched on either knee and read to them Jonathan Livingston Seagull. He had discovered this beautiful book and had bought it for us. This was years before the book became a best-seller. He always shared his literary findings with us. This wonderful experience inspired me to write a bedtime story for my children called Stanley Stearman. A Stearman is a World War II vintage biplane. Chuck had just bought one.

Stanley Stearman was very sad. He almost wished he could die. As a youngster fresh out of the Stearman Airplane Company in Kansas, Stanley had a very important job teaching young men to fly.

This was at a time when our country desperately needed well-trained pilots. Stanley loved his job and felt very good about himself. He was helping the world free itself from imprisonment by evil war lords. After the war was over, Stanley and his friends took it a little easier, but still had lots of fun flying in air shows and on other jobs, principally of a recreational nature. But changing times caught up with Stanley. He began to have a hard time earning his gas, oil, tune-ups, and a snug overnight hangar. He heard of work in California and managed to work his way there and took a job as a crop duster.

This was hot, dusty, back-breaking work. Stanley's new employers were not as kind as they might have been. He felt himself being used up. He developed a bad cough and finally was no longer strong enough to fly. He was left next to the end of the runway, standing in the tumbleweeds with his control surfaces flapping in the hot, dusty winds. He was humiliated and wanted to be scrapped. He felt that there was no hope. This is how Captain Charley found him. Charley lovingly nursed Stanley back to strength. Then they flew to Connecticut.

It took over a year of tender loving care before Stanley completely recovered. But now he is as good as new. He again loves his work. He is teaching young pilots how to fly aerobatics. The romance with the grand old teachers of flying continues. Stanley has been reborn.

The First Annual Doug Swank Invitational Golf Tournament

The game of golf to me is interesting only when there is a truly worthy opponent. Weaver is such a one. He is an excellent golfer. We were playing at my home course one day, when just before I approached my putt, he asked me whether I ever noticed those beautiful blue eyes looking up at me from the ball when I stroked my putt. I missed the putt, of course. However, I told him I was going to teach him a lesson about psyching an opponent. That is when I decided to hold the first annual Doug Swank Invitational. This I did with great hoopla. I don't believe in doing things halfway. I reserved the course--I lived on the course, and was a dues paying member in good standing.

I rigged the tournament so that the two best players among the others, Doug and I were in the first flight playing match play.

Other flights were arranged as best I could and played medal play.

Prizes were gallons and half gallons of like-new, top-line golf balls. I had about 5,000 golf balls that I had collected in my dog-walking strolls around the course. Most of the regular members were complete hackers and lost hundreds of golf balls daily. I found most of them.

Back to the tournament. The idea was that the other two guys in the first flight would hold Doug off until I made my move. I started out with an unusual bag of clubs, my little boy's baby driver, an ax, and a shovel. Doug was slightly distracted. After three holes, we would pass my house, where I would pick up my regular clubs. This was within the rules of golf. My strategy worked perfectly.

On the first hole using my real clubs, I shot a birdie and won the hole. I was one up. The next hole was tied. Following that came a long par 5. Doug and I both hit excellent tee shots. I outdrove him slightly, so he had to hit first. As we were approaching his ball, I asked him about the cream of asparagus soup recipe he had spoken of. He hit a beautiful high fairway wood, which, just before dropping onto the green, took a left turn and went about 100 yards out of bounds. I hit my shot onto the green and birdied the hole. I was now two up with three holes left. I almost let up too soon, but my flight mates saved me.

Doug will be very careful about psyching me in the future. He is a great friend and a truly fine golf opponent.

Union Country Store

'Twas at the Union Country Store;
They thought ole Jer was dead.
My throat choked up;
I shed a tear;
My eyes turned all a-red.
Then Sheila, bless her, called Seabeck,
And found out it was wrong!
Dear Jerry he is living still,
May he live well and long.

Wavy Drake

"Wavy Drake, you are the prize flower of a family of blooming idiots," he several times quoted his schoolteacher as having said. I met Wavy Drake at the Fleetwood Diner in Ann Arbor. He was a regular customer. A militant leftist, he was the union steward of the janitors at University Hospital. His favorite cause was breaking the stranglehold of the .6% that control 99.8% of the wealth in this country. He went on and on about this. Several others used to bait him.

Michael and I had it set up to have a conversation next to Wavy in which Michael, a law student, would espouse the consolidation of many big businesses so that they would be more powerful and could better compete internationally. We decided not to do this because we were afraid of being charged with wrongful death by cardiovascular explosion. Wavy was not known to maintain control.

The White Dog's Best Friend

James Thurber would have reveled in this situation. One Sunday we took a hike to a beautiful, unpublicized new state park near North Bend, called Twin Falls State Park. Apparently, this park is the exclusive domain of North Bend insiders. We had a third-hand North Bend connection. We found the park after some difficulty and began our hike. There were only a few cars parked at the trailhead. It was a glorious Sunday morning. The time was about 9:00 a.m. We began our delightful hike without any fuss, and soon reached the first point of interest, with spirited coaching from descending fellow hikers. There is a strong camaraderie among outdoors people. We reached the apex of our relatively easy climb and enjoyed ourselves to the utmost. Then it happened. It was as if the North Bend Kennel Club had scheduled a dog show at the top of this trail. We were suddenly surrounded by dogs of every known ilk and coloration. There appeared to be more dogs on the trail than there were people. An Airedale wrapped his leash around my legs. Had I been a small child or a frail person, afraid of large dogs, a very nasty scene could have ensued. As is, I am unafraid of dogs. I grew up with huge dogs and know them. The Airedale knew this, of course.

As it was, I marveled at the sight of all these dogs. Most breeds known to me were exhibited. However, what absolutely stopped me cold in my tracks was, during our descent was the sudden appearance before us of a 105-pound, blackhaired woman carrying a 75-pound, pure white, fuzzy dog up the steep incline. I had a camera, but it was as useless as if a flying saucer had suddenly appeared. Behind the woman glowered a man with slightly graying hair. I made some comment about now having seen everything. The woman made some reply, which I missed. The man's glower intensified. I am at a loss to explain any of this. I would, however, venture to guess who is that white dog's best friend and who is sleeping in the dog house tonight.

As to all of those other dogs, I invite the interpretation of a greater sage than I. Has the area gone completely to the dogs?

Old Leghorns at Work

Last month I attended a City Council meeting.

This reminded me of my childhood days, when it was my job to gather the eggs in the semi-retired leghorn coop. It was the small coop out behind the production facility where we put those hens that had been very productive and deserved continuing occupation.

Usually we included a placid gray rooster, whose job it was to calm the flock, and an aggressive younger hen to establish and maintain the pecking order. One day, a banty rooster flew over the fence. You should have seen the commotion. The lead hen stopped scratching for worms. Her followers scattered. The fuss was awful. Finally, the old rooster, having trouble sleeping in the sun, ambled over and asked the banty rooster to leave. He knew that as soon as the farmer noticed the declining egg production, he would turn the coop over to the banty and his flock.

The banty thanked the gray rooster for his cooperation. They would continue to get along.

No need to fuss.

War is Hell

The other evening, I chanced to meet the Hospital Ship Walla Walla returning casualties of the trench warfare of commerce in Seattle. I can't recall seeing a more pitiable lot. Worst was a pair of realtors grievously disfigured by an exploding land deal.

I recoiled at the sight of the blood-spattered, bullet-riddled J. C. Penney flak vest worn by the top-administrator of the Washington State Ferry System. He was sharing an ambulance with the head chef of the ferry food service who had made the nearly fatal mistake of personally checking the quality of the onboard food. He groaned something about a stomach pump. Next came the bodies of a group of minor underlings trapped in a cave-in at Sea First.

I took pity on a battered and bruised young lieutenant from the Corps of Engineers who had been trampled when his division retreated in terror at the prospect of five consecutive days of honest work.

He single-handedly held the position until a miraculous change in direction of the contract allowed him to return to the main body of troops. I helped him to his quarters and revived him with pain killer. We philosophized about the more profound implications of the war.

The sorry rabble I had mentioned included Kingdome Stranglers, Pac-Man Pushers, Rainier Addicts and Martini Swills of the future.

War is hell!

Felix's Fantastic WasserWunder

Felix doesn't work on boats,
He's of a professorial bent,
An ichthy-(sort of)-ologist,
On projects for the government.

He putters 'round in tidal pools,
Or up in Steamboat Slough.
The days on which he won't get soaked
Are far between and few.

But he's held back by store-bought tools
And cheap equipment.
He just can't find what's right to buy,
Or even good for rent.

To solve this irk at cost whatever,
He cobbled a machine quite clever.
Word can't describe it, drawings might,
But when it functions, what a sight!

The locomotion comes part way
From undulating cillia.
Two worm-gearred augers, fore and aft
At lowered speed propel the craft.
Sidewise control, depth and descent
Adjust to split-haired increment.

From Halfmoon Bay to North St. Cloud,
When Felix works he draws a crowd.
He's famed to even Perth, down under,
As father of the WasserWunder.

A Very Merry Christmas

The situation was impossible. My wife had rejected me for her job and another woman. Yet we still resided in the same house. My work situation was untenable. I had personal responsibility for the "maintenance" of about 100 production data processing systems that ran at night. This meant that I got frequent emergency maintenance calls between midnight and morning. I had to respond within two hours. Furthermore, I had supervisory responsibility for eight underqualified, quarrelsome programmers from nine to five. This situation began to wear me down. I began to drink heavily and seek other comforts from whence they came.

The work situation worsened to the point where I delivered an ultimatum to the boss. He did nothing except fire me three days before Christmas. The next day, my wife served me with divorce papers. On the day before Christmas Eve, I was shooting pool with Cramer at a venerable tavern in Silverdale called "The Stables". This is where I met a Bavarian woman named Waltreaud, Trudy for short. She sensed my pain. We spent the day of Christmas Eve visiting her old friends. She comforted me. There is absolutely no truth to the phrase "cold German", which I so frequently heard during our marriage.

Yom Kippur

It was Yom Kippur. Joyce Siegel was having a party at the clubhouse of the apartment complex in which she lived. I had agreed to bring the chili. I make a decent pot of it. For some reason I had walked over to Joyce's place during the afternoon when I came upon a beautiful stray husky/mixed breed puppy. I tied him up in a conspicuous place and left some water for him. I thought that the owner would find him there. Later in the day, when I returned to attend the party, the pup was still there, yipping away as one would imagine. I refilled his water dish and went to the party. When he was still there at 2:30 a.m. when I left the party, I took him home with me and locked him in the bathroom, which had a tile floor. Early in the morning, my kids discovered him. He was now ours. We named him "Yom Kippur" or "Kip" for short. He grew into an eminent dog.

