



The

ROSE BYTER

Next Meeting

Mar. 18, 7 PM
American Legion Hall
406 SE Oak Ave

Agenda

1. Meeting starts at 7 P.M.
2. Intro's of members and guests
3. Old business
4. New biz
5. Program: What's next?
6. Questions & (maybe)Answers

Sins of the Gooseflesh Confessions of a Young Boy Trapped In an Elderly Man's Body

by Dave Archer <dave@davearcher.com>

My father was a police officer for a couple of years; therefore, the "proud" owner of a actual murder weapon he kept in his sock drawer, in the lid of a shoe box along with other magical objects such as loaded dice, "boxing gloves" for fighting cocks, and one peek-a-boo nudie-scope of a grinning woman with huge bazookas, along other treasures irresistible to any child's eye and imagination.

Most compelling was the weapon, a switchblade with a maroon and white marbled handle, including a brownish stain on the blade Dad said was the blood of the actual murder victim. He explained how the killer, an intoxicated man, had thrust the knife into another man's heart, between his ribs, quickly killing him. In San Luis Obispo in the early 40's, he brought the grisly souvenir home with him from work one day. Never allowed to touch it unless in Dad's company, I found this constraint unbearable. His well intentioned taboo simply overwhelmed my curiosity to hold it in my hand. When my parents were gone I would carefully memorize it's position in the drawer, then remove the forbidden object and ... snap! Who'd been killed? Was it a fight over a woman, money, gambling gone bad, or all three? It lay there for years, calling to me like some bizarre monkey paw on

Manuel Noriega's Santaria altar must have attracted the imagination of CIA agents who might have just set up the dictator's house for a BS Time Magazine photo-op. Let's never forget that "Operation Just Cause" killed three hundred men, women and children to get one idiot, (we created in the first place) then buried them in a mass D-8 bulldozer grave and denied it all until a "troublesome" documentary blew the lid off.

How my father was allowed to keep the knife I never learned, assuming as I must, it was exhibit "A" in a murder trial. I'm sure he would never have stolen it. My brother and I couldn't even get him to stop the car and explore deserted buildings, even when there was no fence or signs.

"No! That's private property. That barn belongs to someone!"

"There's no 'Keep Out' sign," we'd chime.

"I said no! We have no right enter another man's property!"

Dad got his policeman's job during WWII by simply walking in and asking for it. There was no test or training. He simply asked them one day, and walked out a cop. I vaguely remember his uniform. Mom says he was required to supply that himself, along with a pistol. He also



Dale, Me, Mom & Dad
Circa 1945

The **Apple Blossom Computer Club** (ABCC) is an Apple Computer Inc., registered Macintosh and Apple][family user group. The ABCC publishes *The RoseByter* newsletter monthly which is posted to each paid up member and reciprocating user groups. ABCC participates in user group newsletter content exchange. The ABCC also maintains a WWW site at:

<http://www.abccmug.org>

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taught himself to ride a black and white Harley Davidson motorcycle. And so the family story goes, his first on the job action got him in hot water. Ten minutes out the door of the police station Dad wrote a ticket for a prominent woman who always parked her car illegally. She complained and he was called on the carpet by the Chief.

Dad almost never talked about his days as a cop – only rare tales. One I remember well, because he thought it was funny and therefore related it to visitors sometimes, concerned a legless man raising hell in a downtown bar. “On” the bar actually, roaring up and down the length of it, “walking” on his hands, stopping to throw ashtrays and bottles. The guy made his living selling pencils on the street from on a wheeled platform — precursor to the skateboard — using antique flat irons to propel himself around town, and even out. Dad said he’d seen the guy pushing himself along the edge of the highway at times, heading up Cuesta Grade, a seven percent grade, on his way to Santa Maria, thirty miles away. Understandably, he could have taken out Samson’s pillars.

Partner on one side of the bar, Dad on the other, they grabbed the legless man between them by the forearms. Immediately he began flipping completely over, then over again, all the way down the bar, then out the door, flipping like a circus performer, and all the way into the car. They couldn’t put him down, or let go of one arm, so someone helped them open the car and when they finally got the irate ape locked inside, which wasn’t easy, he proceeded to break the windows out with his fists.

My father hated being a policeman and quit after two years. When my brother and I would pump him for stories he would always say, “No, boys ... I don’t like to talk about the seamy side of life.”

Dad had three jobs in San Luis Obispo. He came from Chowchilla in

his early twenties to be a bell-hop at the Wineman Hotel, then delivered milk for the Golden State Creamery before he was a cop.

He was twenty two when his milk route included our local red light district. Sycamore Street had five or six houses in each block; fifteen or more in all. My mother, a hometown native, says that although the street was very near downtown, “decent” people never used it. Sycamore was never paved and therefore riddled with bad chuck-holes which made it difficult to maneuver the milk truck. If it wasn’t for my mother who recently related these stories, I would know nothing of them because our father would never have told his sons. Dad told Mom the working girls bought lots of cream. And prostitutes were not extended credit. They had to pay cash at each delivery. Dad could carry five empty milk bottles in each hand, one on each finger, and one day leaving a house with both hands loaded, got to the inside of the front door and couldn’t open it. A working girl said, “Now that I’ve got you here like this, I think I’ll just keep you”.

Dad said, “I’m a married man”.

She said, “If it wasn’t for married men honey, we’d ‘a been out of business long ago”.

Another time a woman in a bathrobe was sitting in an open front window on the second floor smoking a cigarette. Dad called up to her, “Need any milk today?” She pulled open her robe and answered, “Now why would I need any milk when I’ve got these”.

Mom worked at a ladies apparel store at the time called the Ru-Mae Shop. One day a “girl” was having her hair done next door while a companion killed time looking around the shop. Mother was shy and wouldn’t talk with her, but a coworker, Beth, was fascinated and proceeded to pry. The woman told Beth she always accompanied her to the beauty shop so her friend could find her way back. Since Sycamore Street was only a few **3 -->**

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<—Confessions

blocks away, Mom never forgot that.

At the Ru-Mae Shop, “Dear Kiss Sashay Powder” was kept on the counter to be sprinkled in the bottom of boxes used for sold items. The same woman asked, “is this for customers?” When told “yes”, she picked up the container, pulled out the top of her dress and shook some powder down her front.

It took decades for me to see my father as more than his anger. He was, of course, much more than that.

It was with my father that I first made things. We spent hours working on projects together. He was a rock-hound and many nights I joined him as he cut and polished stones we found on trips to the desert. We also worked with an acetylene torch making silver jewelry. He built me a darkroom in one corner of his shop and for years I developed my own film and used an enlarger to make prints.

And it was Palmer Nelson, in the careful way he took photographs, with strong emphasis on what he called “arty composition” that gave me the basis of what, to this day, remains the most personally satisfying aspect of painting. My father never took “snap shots.” He always “composed” his picture in the viewfinder, like postcards. He would wander off by himself for hours shooting wildflowers and the subsequent slide shows were always laced with comments concerning composition. How a particular piece of gnarled wood set off an Indian paintbrush flower, or how his placing of an outcropping of rock had balanced the photo perfectly.

Dad spoke Norwegian as a boy, but only remembered a nursery rhyme and a few words by the time he was married. As a young boy I often curled up in the safety of his lap as he sat in his favorite overstuffed chair reading the newspaper. When he shifted positions I sensed his strength, asking frequently for him to flex his biceps

which were hard as rocks. I’ve heard it said that the strongest, most exemplary tree trunks grow in the most difficult conditions. Such was my father. His wiry muscles held me like the tightly coiled ropes and cables stowed on the Union Oil dock at Avila Beach, where he worked as a tugboat pilot, docking oil tankers.

I was in awe of his nautical skill. The tugboat he piloted looked like a perfect cartoon illustration from a children’s book. But my father was anything but cartoonish standing tall behind the wheel. I have a photograph of him operating the tug during a dangerous fire on the wharf. Pictured there, he is nothing short of heroic, calling out orders with a cigarette in the corner his mouth and an aura about him of complete command.

Palmer Nelson was a lean laborer with an iron back and the same wonderful workman’s hands you see on bronzes by Rodin. He was handsomely featured, but due to poor diet and scarlet fever as a youth lost all his teeth in his twenties. He loved to flip his upper plate out at children, so that the teeth stuck out an inch or so like some ghastly bumper of Chiclets. This never failed to frighten the wits out of any kid he did it to, often sending them screeching away. It was awful, but he thought it was damn funny and would laugh and laugh, and talk about it later.

Some of the warmest memories I have of him are sitting in his lap, holding one of his huge thumbs in my hands, intensely studying the thick tuft of hairs and especially the broad flat nail. His special finger was the middle finger on his right hand. Beneath the skin there lay the spear of a palm tree needle, encapsulated from youth. For some reason the large sticker had been allowed to stay. At least the lump seemed large to my boy’s touch and I simply could not believe that it didn’t bother him. Dad never seemed to mind how much I manipulated it, rolling the alien intruder back and forth over the bone.

“Doesn’t that hurt?” I’d nag.

“No,” he’d reassure me time and again, “not really.”

I longed to “fix” his finger somehow, “Could a doctor take it out?”

“Oh ... I suppose.”

“Why not have it done then?”

“Well ... it’s been there so long, I hardly notice. It just doesn’t bother me or I guess I would.”

One of my earliest “vivid memories” is from around age three, of my father nude, except for a t-shirt, using the bathroom mirror for shaving without the slightest idea I was standing under the sink inspecting his willy wonka. I could not figure out what in the heck it was. So, like you do, Michaelangelo’s Creator reached out and attempted to insert the tip of his index finger into what seemed to me a rather large hole in the end of something like a balloon. To say Dad hit the ceiling is an understatement. He cleared the john for sure. Not only that, he was shaving at the Moment with a straight razor and could have pulled an unintentional Van Gogh. Barking like a bulldog then, Dad scooted me out the bathroom and slammed he door behind me. I must have thought, “Whoa, now that’s some kind of something there”.

Nearing Easter, I nailed a creek frog to the back fence. Sorry. Believe me, you will never know how sorry. Froggus Crucifixus. A ghastly boyhood deed and rebellion of sorts. I was angry at God for watching me all the time, even in the bathroom. It drove me crazy because Mom said Jesus watched everything I did. To insure secrecy from family, neighbors and friends I performed this Bad Friday rite on the outside boards of our backyard fence, a direct challenge to God, which, on reflection, frightened the wits out of me. Would he strike me dead for this blasphemy?

Alas, on the third day, Froggy had not risen. The sun however had, which dehydrated the creature until it

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My attention was snagged by a bit of data in an article about how the chip manufacturing environment was shaping up for the future. The claim was that most manufacturers today were “fabless:” meaning that they did not really build the chips but “simply” designed them. The reason: the cost of building and running a “fab” capable of modern chip creation is enormous and even that is undergoing rapid change requiring even more capital. I knew all that and have for some years. What caught my eye was the statement that **new “fabs” are moving to 450 millimeter wafers.** That’s almost 18 inches – a foot and a half. Lest this seem no real difficulty, let me explain a bit about what this means. Wafers are sawn from silicon crystal boules made by the Czochralski process. This is essentially a very large rock of almost pure silicon with a carefully controlled smidgen of “dopants” – elements added to provide different electrical behaviors. Raw wafers are as thin as 0.2 millimeters. That’s about the thickness of a sheet of paper. Just handling something like that is difficult. Actually sawing them from boules seems a nearly impossible task and that’s merely the first thing that wafers go through before they are even introduced to a “fab.”

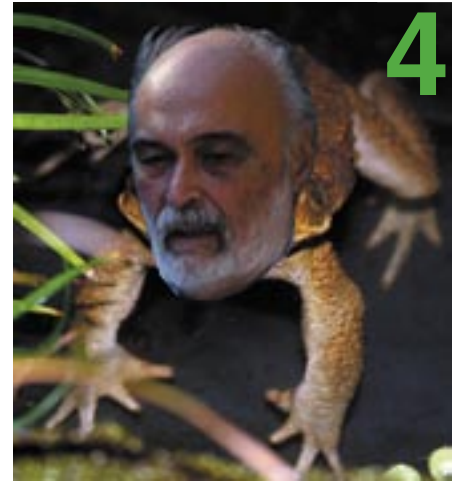
There’s something being referred to simply as “the grid” that is now being touted as “the last great network” after the Internet. But “the grid” is not about data, though it’s almost always referred to as “smart.” It’s about power. **Like most of the things we humans are prone to do, what “the grid” actually will be is nebulous at best.** This doesn’t keep politicians and governments from proceeding to spend large sums of money on projects touted as parts of “the grid.” We’re supposed to get improvements in energy availability, better treatment of the environment, increased efficiency, etc. by converting our current electrical power distribution system to “the grid.” The

Croak of the MUGwump

Any trace of organization in these paragraphs is entirely coincidental

real motive behind the hoopla escapes me as I fail to see how the transmission media is going to produce all these wonders. I can see such things as a means of moving power from where it’s more available to where it brings higher prices. I can even see it as an excuse for demanding higher prices for energy, which will push prices of almost everything else up as well.

Unlike a lot of people, I’m not particularly put off by most of the needles used in modern medicine. Partly it’s just my nature and partly it’s the experience I’ve had being poked many, many times for diagnosis and treatment of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma for something like a decade. Now I can’t relate that every puncture has been sublime. Indeed, **a few have been down right excruciating ... which makes the normal stuff “oh, so nice”** by comparison. There’s no question that there’s a knack to doing it well. It’s my opinion that the knack is not really all that common. I did run across one fellow at a local testing facility who did it very well ... at least once. It might not have been mere happenstance as he used a very small butterfly needle. It was much smaller than the typical ones I’ve been stabbed with and had a flexible tube to carry the blood to the point where the sample jugs get attached. This is an arrangement that doesn’t jar the needle in the vein when the sample jars are changed. It must be more expensive or something because I’ve not had it used on me anywhere else.



Early on, I didn’t let the rough stuff bother me. My blood still “worked.” But gorging on a smorgasbord rat poisons, or something, changed that. I no longer make platelets in anything like normal numbers, which means that I tend to bleed a lot more than most when cut and bruise readily – quite the opposite of the behavior I grew up abusing. So what? Well, I just watched a TV “nurse” give a guy an injection of tranquilizer. If it had been a real injection, the poor guy would have been bleeding like the proverbial stuck pig. As she pushed the needle in, she rotated the body of the syringe from 30° to 90°. Then she operated the plunger, injecting about 10cc in about the time it takes to blink. That must have been one very fast acting tranquilizer! He was numb before it was injected! Fortunately, TV syringes have dull retractable needles and don’t inject anything.

I just heard a commercial from an attorney organization say that if you’ve attempted to commit or **committed suicide** as a result of taking some drug, you should give them a call. Something tells me they’re unlikely to get a lot of calls from the second group.

“Remove AltiVec vector declaration compiler compatibility macros. The original problem was that FSF and Apple gcc used a different syntax for vector declarations, i.e. {} vs. (). Nowadays Apple gcc versions support the standard 5 -->

<--MUGwump

{ } syntax and versions that support { } are available on all relevant Mac OS X versions. Thus the greater compatibility is no longer worth cluttering the code with macros.” What is that, you ask? Ah. Well, it’s a comment in a change document to an open source program – not the sort of thing most of us are likely to read as we go about our lives. Were I not **attempting to compile the program on a Mac which predates “nowadays,”** I would not have happened upon it at all. Even so, I read it only by chance. So what, you ask? I spent over a week, on and off, mucking about with this code, attempting to get it to work on my “old” Mac. Lest you think this completely insane, let me point out that the program(s) in question once worked quite well on systems such as mine. The above is a direct statement that such systems are of no value. It’s also a statement that there’s no reason to bother with long term compatibility. The statement was not made by Apple ... but it might as well have been. Apple’s approach to Mac OS X has made a habit of obviating previous versions of things with each new incarnation of the operating system. It’s less than obvious to most users. They only notice it when they’re forced to “update” programs when they get a new computer or install a new OS. It’s now far too late to fix the problem. We will continue to change the way things work whether they need fixing or not and dispense with previous methods, despite their demonstrated efficacy. I think we call it “progress.”

I can see Ronald Reagan grinning from his grave. It seems **it’s once again politically correct enough to classify a tomato based sauce as a vegetable,** though now it’s not a matter of national policy. It’s just a commercial statement designed to justify not

servicing vegetables to children, many of whom throw tantrums at the very notion of having to ingest such horrible fare. Yes, Mom, you can serve Ragu on boiled noodles and feel good about how well you’re feeding your children. And thus avoid the headache of trying to stuff a slice of carrot or leaf of spinach or even a hunk of string bean through the whining and screaming teeth of sweat little Johnny or cute little Suzy. I was no different as a very young boy. But I was made to eat my vegetables. Oddly enough, it was not all that long until I came to like vegetables. And it’s much better as an adult as I’ve been blessed with a wife who prepares vegetables very well. It’s really pretty simple to do – one needn’t get fancy – though it takes a bit of attention because over cooking is the most common ruination of good vegetables. One is rarely served well prepared vegetables at restaurants for just that reason. Perhaps if Ragu’s approach is generally accepted, we won’t be able to readily get good vegetables. Instead, we’ll have cans and plastic jars of puréed plant matter complete with artificial flavor and color, each serving enriched with a daily dose of vitamins and an overdose of salt and aspartame. Sort of like fruit flavored V8 “juice.”

Just in case you think that being an electronics engineer is easy, consider this statement in a recent ad from an electronics component distributor: **over 30,000 new products added in the last 90 days!** Mind you, this is not because they just started and it’s some sort of initial inventory. They’ve been in business for decades. I even happen to know the owner personally. Once upon a time, when I was employed seriously as an electronics engineer, more or less, I kept up with most of the parts being produced. Then along came different process families, which brought a number of important new characteristics into play. Still, the products in each family were logically patterned after the parts that preceded them and

given designations that made their relationship easy to discern. Then along came the LSI **5** (Large Scale Integration) in which major subsystems were packed onto single chips. At that point, the world went crazy with an ever burgeoning glut of stuff, each requiring 600 page manuals to describe their function. This process is still going on; accelerating actually. One used to believe that specialization was the way to earning a living. But that doesn’t work any more as the lifetime of a specialty in electronics is far too short. It may well be beside the point in the not too distant future – electronics may well be designing and building its own replacements autonomously.

According to the News-Review this evening, Oregon’s lawmakers are crafting laws to make it difficult for them to segue from elective office to “high-paying jobs in state agencies.” This seems like not only a waste of time and effort but a grand waste of money. After, why are there any highly paid jobs in state agencies? Do we really need to maintain a wealth class structure in government? I know the old saw argument: government can’t attract good people if the pay isn’t up to industry standards ... to which I say B.S. I’m not against decent pay. On the other hand, I also see no reason to pay far more to someone who has a lofty title than to someone who does real work. One might argue that without the chiefs doing expert politics their agencies would not be well funded. In our world, this is probably mostly true. After all, we are our own worst enemies.

The difference between BBC World News and American standard network news programs is surprising if you’re not familiar with it. This evening there was a report about Microsoft taking control over a botnet to stop spam email from it. A gentleman spent a great deal of time “explaining” how Microsoft was able to take the botnet away from those who managed it. My mental alarms went off right **6 -->**

<--MUGWump

away when this report started. Why? Well, botnets are not things you can simply shutdown by pulling a plug or flipping a switch: they are composed of individual computers scattered all over the world, connected by a wide diversity of physical networks. The program's explanation of events was not quite accurate. Microsoft filed a complaint ("Microsoft Corporation v. John Does 1-27, et. al.", Civil action number 1:10CV156) in the U.S. District Court of Eastern Virginia, where a federal judge granted a temporary restraining order cutting off 277 Internet domains believed to be run by criminals as **the Waledac bot**. This action doesn't necessarily fix anything, a priori, and there are some weasel words about that on "The Official Microsoft® Blog" to that effect. They say there that their action "...has effectively shut down connections to the vast majority of Waledac-infected computers..." which is perhaps a bit of an optimistic take on the situation. At least Microsoft stopped short of using their knowledge of how to break into Windows to actually fix the computers that make up the leaves of the botnet, which is what I was expecting they'd done from the tenor of the report. In other words, Microsoft stopped short of doing to their users what the controllers of the botnet did to create the botnet in the first place. Something tells me that the primary reason for this is that Micro\$hapht would prefer not to remove all doubt that they can do it.

In 2009, Micro\$hapht reportedly was awarded 2,906 patents by the USPTO – the third largest number granted to a single organization. Such numbers concern me. It's not that some company should not be able to patent their innovative real technology – I do have some issues with that concept but it's long been an accepted phenomena that we're not likely to discard any time real soon now. What concerns me is what Micro\$hapht has to patent. After

all, they're a software company, by and large. Now I have no idea what it is that Micro\$hapht is actually patenting. Perhaps none of them have anything to do with software. Somehow, I find that a difficult surmise to swallow. Thus, one is lead to the notion that Micro\$hapht is patenting sequences of characters that can be processed into programs that may perform some data transformations in computers. Or, they're patenting algorithms: sets of instructions in some form, perhaps narrative, that describe how to transform some set of data into other sets of data. Once upon a time, such things were not patentable ... period. If Micro\$hapht is indeed patenting such things, **they're undoubtedly treading all over prior art**.

Sadly, it costs a great deal of money to fight against such gratuitous patents. Considering Micro\$hapht's war chest, they'll probably be wildly successful at treading on people as well, doing their best to stifle real innovation.

Since we're on a Micro\$haphtian roll here, there's the recent saga of **cryptome.org**. For reasons that escape me, Microsoft reportedly convinced cryptom's registrar, that bastion of all that's holy in cyberspace, the quixotically named, Network Solutions LLC – they seldom provide anything like solutions and most definitely hide behind the barrier Limited Liability – to pull Cryptome's domain registration. The net effect was to kill access to Cyp tome. I found out about Cryptome while reading email from a list I follow. The first data about Cryptome I saw was that they had some generally-not-made-public data about Micro\$hapht's Windows 7. So, I tried accessing the site. It failed. I kept on reading. It seems that shortly after the post that had me go look a the site, there were posts that pointing out that **Micro\$hapht took their heavy hammer to Cryptome**. Ah. No wonder my attempt failed. Then this morning, I got an email via another list that pointed out that the hammer had

apparently been lifted. So, I took another look and, sure enough, Cryptome was dot-org'ing once again. So, I downloaded the 20MB of Micro\$hapht Mystery PDFs to see what all the fuss was about. Wow! What a let down... It was a set of PDFs with over arty presentations of stuff that should be available to any Windows 7 user so they could use their computers. After all, isn't it nice to have some idea what the buzzwords are supposed to mean? Apparently not if you're merely a Micro\$hapht customer and not some law enforcement agent. I'm having a hard time trying to decide whether this is a continuation of The Emperor's New Clothes or The Boy Who Cried Wolf.

I find it interesting that we're paying for "Trusted Internet services" to keep our governments on-line. Now, I don't know what "Trusted Internet services" are, unless you take the words literally: Internet connections that one trusts. Ah. That must be it. **We pay for extra for it, so it must be good**. Yeah, that's the way to make technology work well. Somehow we seem to have created a bunch of properly educated and certified technical people who're either afraid to tell the political jackasses who vote to pay their salaries the truth or they're morons themselves. But that is the result of the main thesis of The Peter Principle, which is alive and well all about us. I can feel the waves of cyber-safety cleansing the very bits that bring this message to you already.

This morning my email contained a notice of a class action suit against Earthlink. You may have gotten one as well. The subject is fees charged for early termination of service. I hope they get fried in court. The real benefit of success against such practices by Earthlink might be the message to the rip-off geniuses of other major companies that such schemes are dangerous to the scammer.



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became little more than an emaciated husk of skin stretched between three nails. I visited the site each day, several times, feeling more guilty each time. Attempting to destroy the evidence of my croaker Calvary I pulled the parchment body away from the nails, and as I did, it's brittle skin produced a guilty crackling sound that seemed to settle in my bones and teeth. Like some budding Bundy, I even dumped the body and nails in separate bushes.

And oh sound and feel in my finger tips that spurred a terrible guilt in my soul for which I paid ... and paid mightily. For years I could not chew any food that crunched. One snap and the entire surface of my skin, from scalp to feet, would flash over with what can only be described as "terminal guilt-bumps." Soon the mania branched out, until I was hypersensitive to anything that even reminded me vaguely of that poor frog. I was the only kid who sucked his potato chips. I had to let my cereal sit in the milk until it was completely soggy. My favorite food became mush, no lumps. I avoided Grapenuts for decades. Every time I entered the isle of the cereal section in the supermarket I would think: "no Kermit nuts for me today thank you." And those lowlife stuffed frogs from Tijuana, with those little guitars and drums? They're all my fault too.

Along with goosebumps I was tormented by what can only be called a demonic gag-reflex. Getting a hunk of pot roast down my throat, was like force feeding a boa constrictor in a zoo. It would lodge in the back of my throat and come up again and again. I would sit chewing, staring straight ahead, hoping no one noticed how long I was chewing, desperately rehearsing ways to hide the mess in my napkin. After minutes of this, the meat of course would turn to gruel.

7 I'd gulp milk to wash it down, which sometimes backfired, causing me to shoot milky

meat-gruel out of my nose, while my father simply went as crazy as the night Erik the Red caught Brunhilda in a compromising Viking Moment.

The worst gooseflesh always came after bathing, when my fingertips were wrinkled from soaking. In that condition nearly everything got to me, especially clean sheets. I could not sleep on clean sheets unless I dressed like Buzz Aldrin prepared for a shuttle launch. My mother hung everything to dry on a clothesline in the backyard where the sun turned bed sheets into evil panels of stiff frog skin. Just the thought of touching them drove me mad with anxiety. I had to wear socks and tuck the legs of my pajamas into the tops of the socks, along with fur-lined gloves into which I tucked my pajama sleeves. A knit cap pulled over my ears completed the irritating picture. Then I would carefully pull myself into bed, lying perfectly still on my back, arms at my sides like a body awaiting Mortisha. And there I'd be, the face in the bedding, frozen in time, Judas on a tortilla, sinking toward Hell, waiting for God to kill me over that poor frog.

Cereal boxes were double doom. I had to pick them up with my thumb and middle finger only. To my father, this fussiness was unimaginably feminine as my little finger of course, went up like Percy Dovetonsils sipping tea. Cereal boxes in those days had two different kinds of ink used in the printing process. One was smooth, therefore I could touch it. The other ink was "unfriendly" to say the least. It was slightly raised and to me, rough as a cob. It was essential therefore, that I pick up the box only while touching the "good" ink, which meant finding a spot for my thumb on one side, then looking around and finding a middle finger on the other, then attempting to shake cereal out of the box without slipping and touching any of a condemned boy's "frog skin" ink. There was no way to explain any of this to my father. I knew from gut instinct I should never try. I also knew I had

committed a heinous crime and had been sentenced to suffer for it for the rest of what seemed to be would surely be a long brutal life.

Any slip of the cereal box though, and gooseflesh simply immobilized me. Then I'd have to wait for the shivers to subside. During the first few seconds of any goosebump attack I was immobilized, barely able to speak. Dad would scowl, "What?"

"Goosebumps," I'd whine.

Some of the looks my father shot at me at those times could have jump-started a locomotive. Looking back, I think he was simply internalizing every blue collar man's worst nightmare, "Oh god Marge, I think we got us a nancy boy here."

I have made amends to the frog kingdom over the better part of 69 years now by taking on a duly sincere and overly kind worldwide attitude toward all amphibians, well except when I come across a giant salamander consuming a banana slug. When ever I see a frog, I always pause in my busy schedule and say, "Hello little frog. I surely hope with all my heart you never get acne and become a toad, and if you do, I will always love you anyway. Now eat a nice fat tasty water bug and sail on my little friend, sail on."

Is it any wonder then, that when I was older and Dale would take me anywhere, but especially to his "Okie stomps," that is, country western dance parties in his cowboy friend's houses, he would always open the door, stick his head in and shout over Hank Williams, "This here is my little brother David. He's weird. I had to bring him."

Directly off the dining room was the kitchen, the floor of which was covered in street-sign yellow linoleum. Mom chose it I think, to make a cheerful note in that particular room. Nevertheless, our kitchen remained the least cheerful room in our house. The reason being of course, we ATE there, and Viking dinners can **8 -->**

<— Confessions

get rough. Breakfast and lunch were usually calm. Dinner however, with Eric the Red, tired from sword fighting Conan the Barbarian all day, could cause somewhat of a rumpus. In junior high Dale wanted to be a rodeo cowboy when he grew up, “like Casey Tibbs,” he’d boast. Dad wouldn’t hear of it and would spend the entire meal roaring about what a dumb idea he thought it was. Dad’s steady drum beat was, that if we didn’t figure out a way to go to college and “get that piece of paper,” we would end up like him, a laborer, “digging ditch!” (even though he was a tugboat pilot).

Mom was our Presbyterian referee. I’d go silent, using any distraction to hide food I shunned, which was pretty much anything.

Dale would say, “Casey Tibbs makes twenty thousand dollars a year Dad.”

“Yea, and the man has broken every bone in his body about seventeen times! Do you know what his hospital bills must be!”

“Now Palmer,” Mom would say, never quite scolding. Sometimes Dad listened to her, realizing he’d profaned God or something. He could behave like a force of nature; a real Thor storm. Now, he truly loved us mutts. He did. And he knew in his heart we were ill prepared for life as he saw it. Of course, he had struggled through the Great Depression and WWII, and he knew we did not understand life the way he did, and knowing that drove the poor man crazy. He would yell, “You don’t know what it’s like to go hungry!” And, we didn’t. After all, Dad did everything in his power to make sure we never went hungry, so it wasn’t exactly fair we figured, to yell at us about it. Sometimes sometimes he lurched over the verbal line into fairly frightening displays of alpha male snapping and growling, sometimes ending in a blow or two. Our father scared all sometimes, even



himself. He never hit, or even raised his voice to Mom – just

us. I love my Dad today, because I realize how much he loved us. He was doing his best to instill in us, the idea of the “safety net” to fall back on. Ten thousand times he said, “I can’t go any farther in the Union Oil company boys, than a tugboat. There are men half my age coming in with college degrees, who know less than I do, and make twice as much money! What does that tell you?!”

At the table, four years younger than Dale, I wasn’t expected to be declaring my future quite yet, therefore, Dad and I fought over food issues, in amazing psychic wars of frazzled will. I did not like food much at all, attempting to live on candy. Dad grew up hungry and never let anyone forget it. We were expected to eat all the food on our plates, whether or not we liked it, without complaint, because we “didn’t know how fortunate we were.” Now, I love my mother with all my heart, but I am not the first to say, that a good deal of her cooking was not all that boy friendly. I’m trying to be civil here, okay. Mom could have opened a terrific eatery, say, in the: Late Paleozoic Era. Back then folks loved eating fresh tongue of wild beast, you know, roasted by lightening. I do not know much in this world, but I know one thing: intense brother rivalry segued into complete camaraderie — he’s not heavy, he’s my brother — when Dad began hacking hunks of beef tongue for his unappreciative sons. Just the sight of a steaming tongue, quite alone on a serving platter in the center of the table and both our boy throats slammed shut tighter than trapdoor spider holes as we gazed into each other’s eyes through the steam in sweet brotherhood.

See, if Dad cut the tapered tip of the tongue it wouldn’t be a true Viking serving. Oh no. Therefore, ever thoughtful of our dietary needs, our Norwegian tugboat pilot would toot, toot, the knife five inches or so down from the tip of the tongue and cut -- with of course, a 50/50 chance of ending up on my plate, looking for all

the world like the severed tongue of a human corpse. I simply could not bear cutting it, let alone chewing something that had “taste buds” and looked like he had been ripped from the throat of an opera diva. Inserting a ghastly piece into my mouth was worse than if I were made to eat a live potato bug. I couldn’t tell if I was chewing it, or ... it was chewing me. How can a boy ever be expected to actually swallow a piece of human tongue? And how does he know if he swallowed or not? I saw a television documentary once about a Caucasian woman and a Chinese man who were very much in love and got married, then journeyed to China to meet the groom’s family. As is the Chinese custom — to honor their son’s return and welcome their new daughter-in-law — his mother, sisters, aunts and cousins spent weeks preparing a feast. Among the special dishes: Monkey Head, Bear’s Paw, and Moose Nose.

I thought of Mom.

Especially, moose nose, no garnish. That’s probably an old Norwegian dish too. I know one thing, our loving “Erik the Head” would have eaten moose nose, if only he could have gotten it. Just ask Dale.



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