

# PHILOSOPHERS ON HOLIDAY

*Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday--LW*

Volume II, no. 2 Autumn 1998



## THOREAU'S SNOWSHOES

*Lisa writes:* one of the many merits of philosophical sightseeing is that one tends to set one's expectations extremely low, thereby enabling one to be pleasantly surprised on a regular basis--or at least to avoid being bitterly disappointed. Just such minimal expectations, for example, enabled us to kvell over our discovery of a large, somewhat tatty reproduction of a postage stamp bearing John Dewey's likeness, hanging in a building at the University of Vermont--and to be positively ecstatic when we found the site at which his ashes had been scattered. Our dim hopes turned to positive raptures when we met someone who grew up with someone whose father had rented Wittgenstein his cottage in Ireland for six months. Heck, we were even thrilled when we found a store called "Plato Off-Sale Liquors."

So imagine our delight when we stumbled upon Henry David Thoreau's *snowshoes*--and his *writing* desk, *and* some of his rock collection--all when we thought we were simply going to see the place Louisa May Alcott had spent six miserable months of her girlhood.

Okay, I'm being slightly disingenuous here. When Peg and I set off with her parents, (the excellent sports Jack and Ann) to see the Fruitlands museum in Harvard, Massachusetts, I knew that Fruitlands was the site of a (very) short-lived utopian community founded by Winona's--oops, I mean Louisa's--father, Bronson Alcott, and fellow traveler Charles Lane. I

See Thoreau p.4

## From the Editors

See? We told you the Autumn issue would be out before you knew it. Here it is already, and you didn't even remember to send in your answers to last issue's puzzles.

The autumn in Minnesota has been long and beautiful; we didn't even pull out the tomato vines until late October, our first frost didn't come until November 1, it hit 58 on Thanksgiving Day, and on December 1, we hit a record-smashing 67. One particularly gorgeous day, Lisa remarked to some colleagues out enjoying the sun, "We're going to have to pay for this at some point."

They looked at her as if she were mad. "We've *already* paid for this! For years to come!" If only weather could be paid for in advance; one tornado oughta be worth several hundred years of spectacular autumns.

In this issue, you'll find keen philosophical insights on everything from Thoreau's snowshoes to Wittgenstein's tweed jacket. And how could the fall issue of *POH* be complete without Peg's musing on the election that brought a pro wrestler to the governor's mansion in St. Paul?

We're thrilled to welcome two new contributors to these pages. **Bruce Norelius** of Blue Hill, Maine takes us on a journey to the peaks of the Sierra Mountains--and the innermost reaches of his very being. Recent St. Peterite (she arrived just in time for the tornado) **Sharon Stevenson's** incredible "Where's St. Cholester" puzzle is just the thing to get you in the mood to celebrate everyone's favorite saint. (See volume I, number 3, for the lowdown on St. C.) Remember, *Phil on Hol* always welcomes your submissions!

### About the motto

The name of our 'zine is borrowed from the quotation from *Philosophical Investigations* that serves as our motto. *PI*, as it is known to insiders, is arguably the most important text written by Ludwig Wittgenstein (or L.W., as he called himself), one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. (You can see that Lisa has written this bit of text; if it were Peg at the keyboard, it would say something hyperbolic like, "the greatest philosopher ever to tread this earth.")

In the passage we borrow, Wittgenstein suggests that philosophical problems are a consequence of our forgetting how words function in ordinary circumstances. We *create* our own thorny, knotty problems--and then proceed to chew on them for a thousand years or so.

We've adapted that little observation to suit our own purposes. When philosophers *go* on holiday, we can, with very little effort, thrum up thorny little problems that keep us worrying all the way across Montana. Philosophers, unleashed in the ordinary world, are *dangerous*--or, at the very least, highly amusing. (*You've* all seen the cartoon of the guy standing in the middle of a monsoon, asking himself "Is it raining?" That guy is a philosopher.) Sometimes, though, on a good day, we can be rather insightful--paying way too much attention to the ordinary *can* produce real wisdom, every once in awhile.

*Philosophers On Holiday* attempts to bring all things philosophical together in one place; the danger, the amusement, the bumbling, and, yes, the occasional pearl of wisdom.

## Philosophers on Holiday

**Published** when we have the free time

**Editors** Peg O'Connor  
Lisa Heldke

**Staff Columnist** Abby Wilkerson

**Consultant** Barb Heldke

**Graphics** Cindy Herb  
Mark IV Printing

**Submissions** Always welcome

**Subscriptions** If you want to be on our mailing list, send us a message.

**Direct all correspondence to**

1002 Riverview Hills South

St. Peter, MN 56082

507-931-4296

heldke@gac.edu

poconnor@gac.edu

## TRAVEL NOTES

The "Just because you're in the car doesn't make it a holiday" Department

*Brita DeRemee dashed off this "early morning thought of the day from a comatose mother of three boys under the age of five":*

I find I am midway on an arctic expedition ...and I had this impression that I was just going to drive to Duluth.



Just exactly why *do* philosophers oppose holidays so much, anyway?

Seems Wittgenstein wasn't the only philosopher who worried about the dangerous side effects of holidays. **Ramblin Rene Descartes** also warned readers of his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* that "Wherefore as we wish here to be particularly careful lest our reason should go on holiday while we are examining the truth of any matter, we...look out for those aides by which our thought may be kept attentive...."



**Bad Marketing Advice Department**

New Paltz Philosopher **Verone Lawton** regrets to inform us that her favorite "inappositely named restaurant" closed before she could snap a photo of it. "The poor soul called his place 'Prime Ribs Plus...A Touch of Greece.'" Hmmm, I wonder why it closed.



## Philosopher Needed to Write Ad Copy

*Peg writes:* Well, I realize that if I leave philosophy, I could land a very cushy job writing advertisement copy. For some reason, Lisa and I received the most recent catalogue (oops, I mean Owner's Manual--I kid you not) from the J. Peterman Company.\* We don't really know anything about the company except what little bits we learned from watching a stray episode or two of *Seinfeld* (Elaine worked there and invented the urban sombrero). Now what we also know from browsing through the catalogue is that J. Peterman is willing to mine the philosophical tradition for advertising icons.

As I was looking at this catalogue, I found myself confronted by a very familiar picture of Wittgenstein. Wait a minute! What was he doing in the middle of a catalogue--I thought this was an ad for Harris Tweed! Wittgenstein was being used to advertise a jacket? Like television commercials that splice out famous actors from famous films and make them hawk products and do stupid things (dancing with a vacuum cleaner, of all things), Wittgenstein's image is being used to sell goods.

Given that this is a scholarly publication and I am engaged in intellectual analysis, I do believe it is correct to quote from the ad. Warning: reading this butchery and trivilization of Wittgenstein can be hazardous to your health. Read at your own risk.

The best proof that Bertie Russell was a smart cookie is that he thought Ludwig Wittgenstein was smarter. Wittgenstein. He was the one who said that the really important things in life can't be said, only shown. Is it just an accident that when Wittgenstein showed himself to the world, he almost invariably showed himself in tweed? Harris tweed, to be exact. He gave away all his money but he didn't give away the tweed. It was tweed in Vienna and tweed in Cambridge and on the blustery west coast of Ireland, working hard at

philosophy and trying to keep warm. Wittgenstein furrows his brow at the slightly hairy cuff of his faithful tweed jacket, so many colors in there... "Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent." Harris Tweed Sports Jacket: an inexpressibly good hand-woven fabric, substantial and handsome...

Yes, Harris Tweed jackets and ethics, religious belief, and aesthetics all equally belong in the category of the ineluctable and the inexpressible. I wonder why he himself did not include this in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*?

What's next for J. Peterman?

What's next for the rest of us? The Jean-Jacques Rousseau line of rugged outdoor-wear for the noble savage in all of us? \*\*

\* Lisa has another J. Peterman catalogue with the title, "Booty, Spoils, and Plunder." I think its subtitle should be "Celebrating Our History of Colonialism and Imperialism."

\*\* Readers' Contest: What products would your favorite philosophers be hawking? Send entries to POH, attention Cheap Ploys Division.



**Thoreau, cont.**

knew that Bronson, in addition to being the father of a future famous author, was also quite a guy in his own right--part of a gang of Transcendentalists, pacifists and vegetarians who collectively made the nineteenth century an incredibly interesting time to be alive. I also knew that ol' Fishing Pond Hank (as we philosophers call the author of *Walden*) had counted among their number. But I hadn't realized just how close the acquaintance had been

between Bronson and Henry, until we stepped into an upstairs bedroom at Fruitlands and found, amidst the phrenology skulls and linen tunics, the aforementioned snowshoes.

The story of Fruitlands is a story of idealistic visions, lofty intentions, and brave hopes. Surprisingly, it is not the story of Thoreau. When Bronson packed off his wife and four daughters to establish the first-ever vegetarian commune--a "new Eden"--Henry David declined, thanks just the same. A wise move, as it turns out; the community's strict commitment to take no animal's life, and to expend no animal labor in the maintenance of humans' lives, meant the residents harnessed *each other* to plow their meager fields (no manure), and those linen tunics served as both summer *and* winter wear. (Some other commitment is no doubt responsible for the fact that the Alcotts began each day with a plunge in the river. At Fruitlands, a page from the young but already treachy Louisa May's diary waxes rhapsodic about the joys of a cold water bathe.)

As with most utopian communities, there seems to have been a gap between theory and practice; the "theorizers" (the men philosophers) were often off lecturing, or sitting under apple trees thinking, while the few women and children (mainly Mrs. Alcott and her girls, after the only other woman in the group was dismissed for possession of an animal product--either cheese or fish, it's not clear) were left to do the astonishingly hard work of growing food and managing the household.

Somewhere around January, the chilblains and near starvation got to Mrs. A, who announced "I'm going home (to Concord), and I'm taking the furniture with me." Thus ended the brief, unsuccessful, but intriguing life of Fruitlands.

The snowshoes? They appear to have been a Fruitlands museum bonus--the sort of philosophical fillip to which we've become accustomed here at *PonH*.



## Atlas Shrug

**Bruce Norelius** writes: The maps had never arrived. That was the simple, awful fact. I had called the store several weeks ago, ordered the topo maps, and was promised quick arrival. But here it was the night before I left for my Sierra Club backpacking trip, and I was mapless. Normally I would have found this out doing my final final checklist review while packing a full month before leaving. But it was a hectic summer at work, and I was busy. And these days, I must admit, I think my ability for avoidance is running neck and neck with fading youthful compulsiveness.

I envisioned the scene at the trailhead, and it frightened me. There was the trip leader and her assistant, making us each, in turn, take all of the contents out of our backpacks for review. There I'd be, bent over my pack, the tail of my favorite cotton (strictly forbidden) t-shirt sticking out from under my too-new Patagonia pullover. I'd be trying to prove that I did have enough plastic baggies (each sealed with the recommended drop of bleach), to pack out all my dirty toilet paper for a week. My pack was already three pounds heavier than the maximum weight allowed, even though I had eliminated the smart Calvin Klein khaki shorts that were the foundation of my 1998 summer wardrobe. I could just see the sneers as they paced past me, hands clasped behind their backs, soil crunching under their unstylish but beautifully weathered boots. "No maps? What do you think this is? Club Med?"

Even on my own terms, it was a disaster. I love maps. I eat my cereal every morning with a road atlas in front of me, examining things like alternate routes through northern New Mexico. Maps are promising, alluring and mysterious.

The actual scene at the trailhead was fairly chaotic. Some people were a bit carsick from the winding road up the valley. Mostly people—including the trip leaders—were trying to stuff unreasonable numbers of things into backpacks that were already full, assuming that, if they could get it all in, they could also lift and carry it. It turned out that I, as usual, had read my instructions better than most and was typically high on the rule-following scale.

The maps were never mentioned. Some people had them, some didn't. But here's the thing. I didn't miss them one bit. There was no adjustment period, no remorse. When I saw someone pulling out a map on the first day, I thought, "Why bother?" The scenery was astonishing, the views seemed infinite; we were following two women who knew where they were going. For the first time, I didn't care what the name of the mountains were or how far I was from the continental divide. I was in a magical place, and I didn't care what its relation was to other places where I wasn't.

The best part of the whole trip was a "camp" day we had well into the week. I was tired and sore from carrying my gigantic backpack, and I swore to have no agenda for the day. Others went off to climb a ridge to see a lake they had seen on their fancy maps. I read and napped in the sun. My first view when I woke up was of a mountain directly in back of our campsite. It had a spine that beckoned and promised great views on each side. I thought I'd go up a ways to see the view. Two hours later, I found myself at the top without ever having intended to go so far. It was such an exhilarating feeling to climb with no goal in mind. I didn't know the name of the mountain (in fact, it turned out to be a nameless shoulder of a bigger mountain). I didn't know its elevation, didn't know if it could be climbed from my direction, didn't care. I just climbed, feeling my heart beat, hearing my

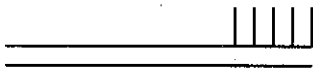
breathing, looking at the route ahead. Every moment was on my terms, and was pure experience.

It was a simple lesson, one that many people have learned in many different ways long before me. I was late at learning to ride a bike, too.

That's my Sierra travelogue. After backpacking, I headed to Death Valley in my rented Thunderbird. I wondered if the road parallel to the one I was on was even more dramatic. According to the scale on the map it was 70 miles north so probably was higher and had more panoramic views. It also noted a full service campground rather than just a campground. I bet it had a really beautiful pool.

*Bruce Norelius, who has been Lisa's friend for a number of years that neither of them can quite believe, is an architect in Blue Hill, Maine. One of his most fabulous projects ever (says me) is a house in St. Peter, at 1002 Riverview Hills South. He is, by the way, nothing at all like Howard Rourke.\**

\*Readers' Contest: Who's Howard Rourke and why are we talking about him anyway? Send your answer on a piece of drafting paper, and you could win a fabulous prize! Previous winners, sit on your hands.



## Contest Results!!

*Herewith, the results of the puzzle competition in the summer issue:*

### Who Was Yar?

Four people—Sharon Stevenson and Kristi Reinholtzen of St. Peter, Mary Beth Henderson of Minneapolis, and Alex Stotts of Eugene, Oregon—all correctly identified Katharine Hepburn, playing Tracy Ford in *Philadelphia Story*, as the source of the line "My she was yar!" (See "On Traversing the Shortest Distance, vol. II, no.1.) Okay, Mary Beth actually thought it was Stacy Lord, but we won't quibble.

### Where Were You Last Night?

We feared that no one would guess the origin of the line "Last night I dreamed I went to Rosro Cottage" and we'd be forced to rerun the contest a second issue. (See the piece by that title in vol. II, no.1.) But an eleventh-hour entry from Verone Lawton saved us. Verone knew that the actual line, "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley," came from Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.

Each winner will take her next trip with confidence, knowing that her dental health is in the excellent care of her new, convenient travel toothbrush, packaged to go in a clever watertight pouch (a.k.a. a zipper-seal bag). Congratulations to all--and don't forget to floss!

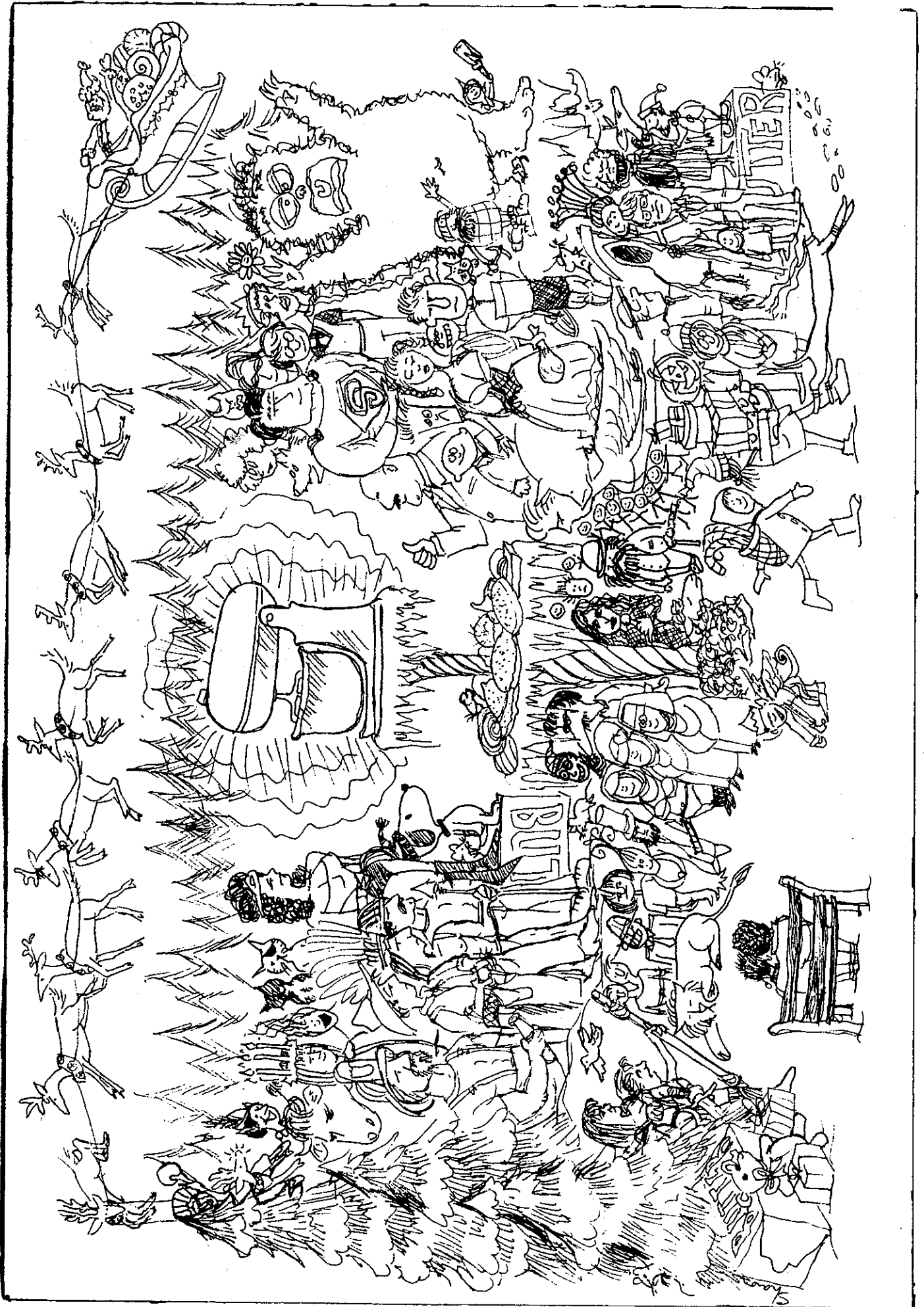


## barb's briefs

*A two-fer from the fastest movie reviewer in the East. But can we expect more paragraph-long reviews in future issues? Watch this space!*

*The Sweet Hereafter*, Atom Egoyan:  
Not as depressing as advertised. The carwash MUST mean something!

We watched *The English Patient* on Encore last weekend - more to see how bad it was than anything. In that "great expectations" way that things usually occur, I found it less terrible than I expected (which is not to say I liked it). I even stayed awake. I was amazed that I had no idea what it was really about. And just what is that Fiennes guy's first name? It looks like RALPH on the typed version, but I've heard him called "rayf" too many times to think this is correct. I'd decided it must be RAIPH but I checked carefully and it isn't.

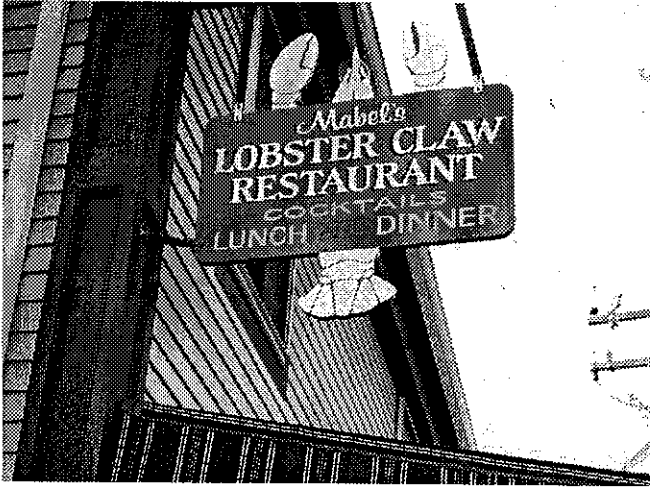


Where is St. Cholester? Who else can be found?



# Pantheon Gastronomique

## Celebrity Dining



*We normally reserve this column for reports of restaurants that no one has ever heard of; the famous ones get plenty of free publicity without us. But in this issue, we just have to tell you about two places that are famous, either for their food or for their clientele: Mabel's Lobster Claw, in Kennebunkport, Maine, and Greens, in San Francisco.*

Mabel's, located a scant two miles down the road from the Bush multi-plex, is a local favorite of Kennebunkporters. Of course this includes George and Bar; several pictures of them adorn the entryway to this tiny wood-paneled restaurant. George apparently often stops by to pick up takeout on his way through town. Now, we don't agree with George Bush about a lot of things, but we have to agree that the man has excellent taste. If you like fresh seafood, prepared in familiar ways, you won't go wrong at Mabel's--and you won't spend a fortune, either. Even the apple pie is good. No broccoli though.

Greens is an organic vegetarian restaurant overlooking a beautiful marina in the old Fort Madison district of San Francisco. Let's just say that the only thing that would have made our meal better would have been if a sea lion had swum by during dessert--oops, there it went! Peg's dessert (one of the highlights of the meal) was a

"sorbet sandwich" of fresh raspberry sorbet between two fresh ginger cookies, and drizzled with a caramel made of fruit juices. Then there were the lemon pots de crème....

But we didn't just have dessert. Abby ("World") Wilkerson had the winning entrée--soft tacos filled with a melange of lightly-sautéed vegetables, like winter squash and corn. We also greatly enjoyed a cabbage and walnut salad with warm dressing; you actually *noticed* the walnuts, they were so fresh and flavorful.

Best of all, Greens is the sort of place that makes food you think you might be able to make yourself, at home. Maybe not tonight, and certainly not every night, but sometimes, in the heart of the summer, when the tomatoes are ripe and the potatoes are *just* big enough to dig....

## From the recipe box

*Regular readers of this 'zine know our favorite holiday is the Feast of St. Cholestera, the patron saint of cookies. This year's feast day is December 12. As a service to readers who would like to celebrate this feast day in their homes, we offer the following recipe, courtesy of Lisa's mom, Carol, who has been making these cookies at Christmas for forty years now. (No wonder you're sick of it, Mom!) Don't be fooled by their similarity to other pinwheel cookies; these are **nothing** like those.*

### Peanut Butter Pinwheels

1/2 c. butter	2 T. milk
1/2 c. peanut butter	1/2 t. salt
1/2 c. sugar	1 t. soda
1 egg	1 1/4 c. flour

Cream butter, peanut butter and sugar. Beat in egg and milk. Add dry ingredients. Chill dough till firm. Divide dough into two balls. Working with half the dough at a time, roll it out between two sheets of wax paper, to a long, thin sheet. Melt 6 oz. Chocolate chips; spread half the chips on the surface of the dough. Roll up jelly roll fashion. Refrigerate till firm. Repeat with the other half. Slice thinly with a very sharp knife. Bake at 375 for 8-10 minutes.





## Forged Signatures

P'C: I don't often cook, but when I do, I impress the socks off people. This is because I have a repertoire of signature dishes--dishes which I have made mine, through experimentation and development.

L'K: Oh, that is richer than heavy cream. Experimentation and development, my rolling pin. Your definition of "experiment and develop" amounts to "make the recipe more than once." Most recently, I noticed, you have decided that raspberry-blackberry pie is "your" signature dish, because you've made it twice. And don't even get me started on that gorgonzola and pear salad.....

P'C: By nature, I am very precise, some might even say anal retentive, when it comes to following recipes. With respect to my--my--two dishes mentioned above, my precision has resulted in these dishes having transcended their rather humble origins and become truly sublime.

L'K: "Humble", dear reader, means that I used to make them, and I tend to be a bit more carefree and creative in the kitchen when it comes to things like measurement. For instance, I do not find it necessary to set a timer when I make Kraft macaroni and cheese.

P'C: I take umbrage at your implication that I am not creative in the kitchen.

L'K: Take all the umbrage you want! Take seconds! It's true.

P'C: Imagine, if you will, a cucumber salad with, oh, a sesame oil and rice vinegar marinade, accompanied by perfectly toasted sesame seeds. As your taste buds tingle, imagine *that* salad embellished with red and yellow bell pepper strips. Still say I lack creativity?

L'K: Oh, it's the cucumber salad story again. Beginner's luck. So one time you added something to a recipe. Big deal. What I want to know is, where do you get

off *owning* these recipes I made for years and years?

P'C: You didn't make that cucumber recipe!!! You've never made that cucumber recipe!!! And it comes from *Cook's Illustrated*, which was a gracious gift from me to you for your birthday!

L'K: I rest my case. You stole *that* recipe from Christopher Kimball. It doesn't become "your" recipe just because you make it. Signature dishes are original--that's why they're called *signature* dishes. We all know the difference between a real signature and those machine-generated things that come in the mail from Ed McMahon's prize patrol.

P'C: People do not ask for a machine generated cucumber salad! They ask *me* to bring *my* salad to potlucks. They want *me*.

L'K: I can see now that I created a monster when I bought you those commercial quality bread pans.

P'C: You say you created a monster, but I create works of art.



Wilkerson's World

...is on holiday this issue.

### Vicarious, cont. from p. 11.

in Jerusalem gave us the current time and we quickly "synchronized watches" and got on with the scheduling. Technology, well-integrated, can be useful. Wittgenstein might have used it himself to solve some of his language difficulties.

I surely miss my pal Pete - whom I may never meet, but seems like a good friend now.

## **RINGSIDE SEATS AVAILABLE AT CAPITOL**

*Peg writes:* Yes, it is true some citizens of Minnesota elected a former member of the World Wrestling Federation--Jesse "The Body" Ventura--to be our governor for *four years*. Yes, it is true that his signature wrestling costume was a feather boa. And yes, we have heard just about every joke out there. Our governor can beat up yours. Ha ha. Friends emailed us from all over the country; we could read the smirks through cyberspace. Those of us who voted for the other candidates (Hubert "Skip" Humphrey III and Norm Coleman), along with all the political spin doctors are trying to figure out how someone who articulated no policies managed to pull off this upset. Spin Doctor Peg will offer an explanation.

Newspapers report that a wide cross-section of the Minnesota population voted for Jesse Ventura. In a state steeped in the populist tradition, he came across as the outsider to a political system that had produced both Skip Humphrey (Attorney General and son of *that* Hubert Humphrey) and Norm Coleman (Republican mayor of St. Paul and former Democrat who worked under Skip in the Attorney General's office). In contrast to their slick campaigns and highly polished images, Ventura was the "real people" candidate who regularly appeared wearing jeans and sweatshirts (no feather boas). He often repeated to crowds of people that he was just one of them.

Fiscally, Ventura is quite conservative. His mantra was that taxes are too high, and that any budget surplus must be returned to The People. Ventura claimed that he, along with the rest of us, were the victims of high taxes--indeed, he entered the race because he was angry when a budget surplus wasn't returned to *taxpayers in its entirety*. Like the rest of us working Joes and Janes, Ventura is a victim of the machinery of government and its business as usual.

But that's all old news. What I find most interesting, and most disturbing, is the conjunction of hypermasculinity and victimization in the person of Jesse Ventura. One is victimized *because* one is a man, *because* one is masculine. Part of what it means to be masculine in some circles is to claim that one may be the victim of a discriminatory system. The parallels to Affirmative Action are quite interesting here. White men can now be portrayed and constructed as victims of unfair treatment that has been codified in our legal system. The individual white men who are not admitted to a school or who do not receive a job or promotion are victims of a system that privileges white women and people of color over them. Part of what it means to be masculine is that one can be a victim. Rather than victimization counting against one's masculinity, it is now proof of one's masculinity.

Jesse Ventura's campaign was successful because his masculinity and his perceived victimhood coalesced perfectly. And further, he did something about it. Like Rambo and the Terminator, Ventura fought back. He was the good man/wronged man fighting the entire system and all its minions. The decks are always stacked in those movies. Americans love nothing better than those stories in which all odds are overcome and justice prevails. The election was like a chance to participate in one of those butt-kicking movies. And that is just what 37 per cent of those who voted did.

What the future holds is not clear. The day after Ventura was elected, when pressed for some definitive policy statements, the Ventura staff asked for a few days to think some up. What little bit we've heard is frightening. Government programs, particularly supplemental health care programs, aid to working families in the form of day care subsidies, and financial support for higher education will most likely be cut.

*For more Jesse fun, find him on p. 7!*

GEOGRAPHY LESSONS FROM THE VICARIOUS  
TRAVELER, OR:  
WHAT TIME IS IT IN HAIFA ANYWAY?

*Barb (the Brief) Heldke writes:* I went to France and England this fall--in my mind. As you may recall from my earlier articles, I don't care for normal traveling, so this was ideal. No suitcases to pack. No strange beds or bathrooms or funny food.

I do installation planning for "very large supercomputers" and this fall I participated in a big project with our brethren across the pond in England. What started out as a normal, difficult, aggravating work project turned into an "international incident" as four countries (US, UK, France and Israel) collaborated to bring a new machine to a "sorta secret" customer in England.

As we progressed through the normal difficulty of communicating via interminable conference calls with bad connections, and struggles with our language differences, we learned that among the most interesting communication challenge was that between US-English and UK-English--right down to the never-ending wait for the right kind of keyboard (with \$ and English-style pound sign). Wittgenstein was right! Language on holiday is problematic.

One day I said "Pete [the UK project manager] will join the call momentarily. Later, I learned that means it may be a good while before Pete shows up!

Most ubiquitous of the English Lessons was "I'll sort that" It means "I'll take care of that." Pete said that at least once on each of our daily calls--calls that went on for nearly two months. When they finally ended, we had separation anxiety.

The classic incident involved a discussion about taking three-button mouse devices from the UK team and giving them to the customer to end the matter of the delayed replacement of two-button mouse devices by the requested three-button mouse devices. It was determined by the two UK guys on the call that the available three-

buttoners were too grungy for a customer to use. One said to the other "Will, you'd have to get out your Fairy Liquid and give them a good scrub". I thought this was merely a one-shot amusing anecdote but it turned into a sociology lesson. Turns out that gay men all over America have old ads for "fairy liquid" framed on their kitchen walls. Who knew?

I'd been sharing my "English lessons" with some email pals, but finally got brave enough to discuss it with the "Englishmen" themselves. The Fairy Liquid line just HAD to be discussed. We chatted a bit (they didn't remember saying it, of course--or even why!) and I said "did you know that gay men all over America have the 50s ad for Fairy Liquid on their kitchen walls?" They did not.

The means of travel from France where the machine was "born" to England where it would be "raised" had been a point of some curiosity for me as I knew the Chunnel was on the path. Got out the fat folder of National Geographic maps and studied--more geography lessons than I ever passed in school. They swore it wouldn't travel that way (single point of failure and all that) but in the end it did! And do you suppose I could get any of the Brits to drive down and take a picture of this event? Not on your life.

I didn't even need map work to take on the English fellow who challenged my facts when I claimed that Haifa is in Israel, not Egypt (hard to believe anyone knows less geography than ME!).

The weekend we covered a "crisis period" with support personnel from our Haifa team was a real information age challenge. It fell on the weekend we in the Eastern US switched away from daylight savings time (what the Europeans call "summer time"). But how to determine whether that affected England or Israel? We surfed the various Web pages but even Jeeves couldn't tell us for sure about Haifa. Then the latest CNN update from some crisis

See Vicarious, p. 9