

Stephen Jay Gould said: "Humans are story-telling creatures preeminently. We organize the world as a set of tales." Stevenson was a preeminent teller of tales.

AMCM & THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA¹

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Many of you will recall the wonderful paper that G.G. Carey delivered about his father and the experiences which the elder Mr. Carey had while serving as a spy for the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. You will recall the sage advice given to Gibby by Mr. Carey that he was to "never trust a Rumanian."

This is a story about another sleuth known by many of you as Angela Mitchell, Angela Campbell, or more recently as Angela Meeske.

The facts and specifics of this paper must be drawn from snippets of information which have become known over the years. A spy must maintain anonymity for life. This is particularly true in the case of Angela Mitchell Campbell Meeske, AMCM, or "the Venus fly trap" as she is known in the trade, since she may again be called upon to assist the CIA or some other U.S. intelligence agency in the collection of information.

¹ The Author wishes to recognize the editorial assistance of his wife Janet Campbell and the assistance of his mother, Angela Mitchell Campbell Meeske, who has inadvertently provided snippets of information over the years, which when mixed with a dash of imagination, have provided the substance of this paper.

Most of us assume that intelligence is gathered by hard nosed male operatives who infiltrate the operations of foreign countries. Whether it be the Russian or Chinese government from whom information is sought, we assume that the source of that information is a dark-haired Bogart look alike collecting information in the dark of night. Although this may be the case at times, there are numerous other sources of intelligence. This is where we find a use for "the Venus Fly Trap" and some of her fellow operatives in "The Garden Club of America."

The Garden Club of America was formed in the 19th Century by ladies from the Northeast who had an interest in gardening and the fellowship of monthly meetings. By 1980 when this story begins, the Garden Club of America had developed participating memberships in most cities throughout the United States, including the Garden Club of Cincinnati of which Angela Campbell became a member in the 1950s.

The image of a monthly meeting of the Garden Club of Cincinnati brings to mind 30 or 40 women sitting in the den of a member's East Walnut Hills home drinking tea. One member is showing slides of her most glorious azaleas, explaining that her secret is a mixture of gin and Arkansas spring water that she applies liberally each evening during cocktail hour. Were John Warrington alive and here tonight, he would remind us that there have been energetic male contributors to the activities of the Garden Club of Cincinnati. John and his friend Bill Rowe were long time members. Nonetheless the mainstay of the membership here in Cincinnati, as is the case throughout the country, has been the women of the community. But note, the membership is made up of not just any women. The members of the chapters of the Garden club of America are active women with an interest in the out of doors, women whose husbands, brothers, sons and friends are influential members of the business, professional and political fabric of our country. These are women who can strike fear into anyone's heart with just a curt disapproving glance. Perhaps the best words to describe the membership of The Garden Club of America would be PROPER.

The characteristics listed above are only a few of the ingredients that make certain members of the Garden Club of America perfect operatives for the numerous intelligence organizations that serve our country abroad. The most significant attribute of these women is their ability to move inconspicuously throughout the world hiding behind a façade of total political indifference. Whether traveling along the Nicaraguan border of Costa Rica, through southern Turkey near Iraq to taking a picture of some rare species of lilac on the Pakistani border of India, their appearance is less likely to draw the notice of the typical members of the local constabulary, young oversexed macho males. The exceptionally high quality of cameras that they use and the detail of the pictures which include indigenous peoples, buildings and troops are universally overlooked by the local militia, police or customs officials.

The Garden Club of America is divided into regions or zones within the United States. From each of these zones come women who serve on the national board for periods of three years or more. The role of each such member appointed to the national board is to officiate at regional flower shows, to greet members from other regions as they visit and of course to attend regular meetings in New York. It is at these latter gatherings that the clandestine work of the organization takes place. Not all members of the national board are involved in this second aspect of the organization. In fact in the 1980's when the Garden Club first began in this role, participation was limited to widows over the age of sixty. These women proved to be very flexible in their travel schedule, and could move around the world without being incumbered by the conspicuous male companionship of a husband.

Angela Campbell was well suited for the role into which she was conscripted in 1983. Her husband had died only a few years before, and although just turning 60, she was particularly active and in good physical condition. Furthermore she seemed to have little capacity for fear, or perhaps it was as she put, the fact that "I never let fear interfere." She was born on Grandin Road in 1923, the third of five children. Two doors up the street lived her grandparents Mr. &

Mrs. Harry Woods, and next door her great-grandmother, Mrs. Edward Anderson. Across the street were the Longworth cousins and various other family members who had not taken flight to other parts of the country or the world. All of which is to say that her life began in a very small and secure world.

During the late 20s and throughout the 30s the situation was not as comfortable. Her parents, preoccupied with other children and finances, paid little attention to her education. As a result, when she began school her mother sent her up the street to the Summit. Thinking kindergarten a waste of time, Mary Mitchell enrolled her five-year-old daughter in the first grade with the understanding that she would spend two years at that level of introductory education. Because of a testy relationship with the first grade nun the young Mitchell girl moved on to second grade where she undertook a postgraduate year. After two years of intense study in the second grade Angela moved on the third and fourth grade before requesting a transfer to Miss Doherty's school. With the approval of her parents and the acceptance of Miss Doherty, she presented herself for school in September of 1934. What she kept from both her parents and Miss Doherty was that the reason for the requested move was to be with her friend Helen Chatfield and her cousin Dorothy Whittaker. Unfortunately the friend and cousin were going into the sixth grade and not the fifth as was Angela. Not in the least bit deterred by the challenge, and fully aware that her parents would be no less the wiser, when Miss Doherty greeted her at the door of the school on the first day of class and asked "what grade will you be going into dearie?" Angela answered with complete confidence "the sixth." As an average student in the best of circumstances, the challenges of that sixth grade year helped Angela develop the gifts of intellectual survival that would hold her in good stead in the later years. Furthermore, the gap in her education has allowed Angela the following perfect retort for all of life's many unanswerable questions: "I don't know, I skipped that grade."

After a few years at Miss Doherty's School and then Hillsdale, she moved on to boarding school at Miss

Porter's in Farmington, Connecticut. Well ahead of Jackie "O", Angela spent the first semester at Farmington learning about the ways of the world from her sophisticated roommate, Gloria Vanderbilt. Again showing the talents of survivability, she was able to withstand the rigors of and graduate from Farmington while her worldly roommate moved on after one semester to other more productive pursuits in acting and cosmetics, collecting as she went an assortment of interesting husbands.

The first brush with the world of espionage came in 1964 when Dr. & Mrs. Campbell, in the company of Dot & Lawson Reed, enjoyed a two week fishing trip into Yugoslavia. With Lawson at the wheel of his Porsche, which they had driven from the Reed's home in Switzerland, the four traveled throughout Yugoslavia fishing at various quaint secluded locations. After a week bouncing over potholed roads, the four were pleased one day to take a shortcut. Finding themselves on a deserted wide highway, Lawson revved up his 911 to a bright clip as they whistled along the countryside. In a short while the "road" ended abruptly and they found themselves in amongst a squadron of Russian Migs, parked quietly on the tarmac of what they concluded to be a secret Russian air base. Reversing direction they sped back down the runway and off into the countryside avoiding capture, or comment.

With this background Angela arrived at her first meeting of the Garden Club of America's national board in the spring of 1983. After two days of "flowers and the like" the meeting adjourned. She began to leave to catch her flight back to Cincinnati when one of the members of the board, the sister of the then Vice President of the United States and former CIA Director, asked her to help out with a special project. She immediately responded to the challenge of the request. For the next three days, ostensibly in the City on Farmington Alumnae matters, she spent the time learning about photography techniques, information gathering and espionage.

What followed were the usual trips out of town, but some of the destinations changed. In addition to her travels to the Adirondacks for fishing, and visits

with her children and grandchildren, she began taking tours of the northern Costa Rican border with Nicaragua, the mountains of Peru, southern Turkey near Iraq and India. Each trip was followed by a brief, but pleasant trip, to Washington with her friend Elsie Warrington whose son lived in Old Town Alexandria. These visits contained meetings with and "debriefings" by the Garden Club's liaison known only as "Straw Boss" and any one of the government agencies for whom the information had been gathered.

Each of these trips produced rolls of film taken and delivered, and worthwhile observations. While on duty she would stray into remote areas and report on the movement of the local population, activity on the roads and the nature of the local economy. From this the intelligence agencies could add to the patchwork of information provided by satellite, friendly locals and many other sources, to put together a full picture of the local political scene in each country as well as a complete dossier of its wildflower population.

In 1988 Angela and her friend Tina Kohnen traveled to New York for a meeting of the board of The Garden Club of America. Remaining alone in New York after the regular meeting, Angela accepted an invitation to visit the northern district of India to report on troop activities along the India and Pakistani border, an assignment which would require the cover of wildlife and windflowers. During the briefing "Straw Boss" reviewed the usual matters of safety. As the instructor droned on about the various and necessary cautionary steps to be taken, Angela made her own plans among which was the accurate calculation of the necessary ounces of gin which she would need in her flask for a trip of this length.

In order to hold Angela's attention, the Straw Boss interspersed the briefings with information about the fish and flowers that frequent the streams and mountainsides of Ladakh. She even had some rather good advice on the best dry flies for the season. There was advice about the dress code, no brand names, all clothing to be outdated and plain in color. There was also some limited advice about the geography of the region and current political considerations.

She was told that the northern part of India along the Pakistani border contains the State of Jammu and Kashmir made up of the valley or Vale of Kashmir as well as other regions to include the mountainous region of Ladakh along the very northern part of the border. The population of the State is overwhelmingly Muslim. She was reminded that in 1947 the British Indian Empire came to an end with Partition. The British divided the subcontinent into two countries based upon religious demographics. All areas predominantly Muslim became Pakistan while the non-Muslim areas became India. In Jammu and Kashmir the decision was unclear since the Maharajah who ruled the region was Hindu but the region was predominantly Muslim. The Pakistani believe that under the logic of Partition, Jammu and Kashmir ought to have gone to Pakistan. However, for a number of reasons, many political and not demographic, in 1947 Maharajah Sir Hari Singh acceded the province to India. All of this has led to two wars and continued tension between India and Pakistan.

The one thing that Angela remembered particularly clearly in the briefing was the Cold War Implications of all of this. Pakistan was at the time actively supporting the Afghan guerrillas in their fight against the Soviet backed government of Afghanistan, its western neighbor. This had caused a strengthening of the alliance between Pakistan and the United States. By contrast, India maintained strong political ties to the Soviet Union, fearing the proximity of China to the north. Thus it was particularly important that the Venus Fly Trap not take any unnecessary risks that might expose her to the Indian authorities as a U.S. spy.

Following the briefing, Angela returned to Cincinnati to plan the trip. As they evolved, these plans called for Angela to spend one week in New Delhi with her friend Carter Chatfield. Carter would then return to Cincinnati and Angela would proceed to Srinager, and on to the Ladakh range for a week in the mountains.

The first week in New Delhi was pleasant. On August 15, 1988 Angela and Carter parted company and Angela caught an early morning flight to Srinagar. At

the airport in Srinagar she first met with her guide and fishing companion. Although cordial, the guide showed a surprising lack of knowledge about fishing. Wary but not deterred, Angela set off for the high mountains by bus. The trip into the Ladakh Range can be made by bus or helicopter. Whereas the helicopter ride is a short trip over the mountains, the bus ride is a harrowing 15 hour journey over a single lane road.

Arriving on the afternoon of the 16th of August Angela settled into the camp and then set out with her guide for some fishing. In the clarity of the evening she was able to see the surrounding terrain and planned the next day's adventure. The morning of Wednesday, August 17th began much as the prior day had ended. Angela and her guide spent the dawn hours fishing high in the cold mountain water. With the morning mist rising off of the stream, while dew and morning fog slowly gave way to the rising sun, the calm of the day brought an inner peace and satisfaction.

After a mid morning meal, the Venus Fly Trap dressed in a baggy coat with big pockets and buttons, not zippers, put on a sloppy wide brimmed hat, and set out to gather information. Moving up an adjacent mountainside she sought a perch high enough to give herself a good view of the Pakistan border to the northwest. As she began her photography session that afternoon, she noticed the increasing flow of heavy vehicles heading up the valley toward the Pakistani border. As she shot pictures of the mountain flora and fauna, she also captured these movements along with the broad expanse of the terrain. In the briefing session in New York she had been told of some activity along the border but this was significantly more than had been expected. Furthermore, through the zoom lens of her camera she could see that some of the vehicles contained large artillery pieces and numbers of troops.

As she sat among the summer wildflowers taking pictures, there were a number of concerned agents in Washington watching the same developments. These men and women were privy to significant information that was unknown to the Venus Fly Trap. Only hours before, General Ziaul Haq, the leader of Pakistan's military government, and 27 other high ranking government

officials had been killed when the General's C-130 burst into flames in mid air and crashed. The dead included not only General Zia, but the Army Chief of Staff, as well as the US Ambassador to Pakistan, Arnold Raphel, and the US Military Attache, General Herbert Wassom.² Although an Indian government source immediately described as "utterly preposterous," a report that Zia's aircraft might have been hit by a missile close to the border³, the circumstances of the mysterious crash, and the location in Bahawalpur, not far from the border with India, intensified the instability between India and Pakistan. As always the tensions between the countries were manifest in an immediate increase of activity throughout the State of Jammu and Kashmir to include the Ladakh Range. Both the Indian and Pakistani militaries were put on full alert and mobilized for combat. Within hours of the crash, soldiers of the Northern India Regiments were directed to the very location where Angela Campbell sat quietly taking pictures and admiring the mountain lilacs.

Fortunately, there were two individuals who were paying particular attention to Angela's plight. One was her guide, who immediately contacted Washington for instructions. The other was the "Straw Boss" who was planning her extraction.

The first wave of Pakistani infantry had closed in and were beginning what could soon develop into a full scale military engagement with the advancing Indian Military forces. As the concentration of troops increased in the area, the sound of small arms fire began to crescendo in the vicinity of Angela. To this she appeared indifferent. Perhaps her calmness under fire was the manifestation of her resolve to complete her assignment. More likely however it could be explained by the malfunction of her hearing aid. Since a rapid descent into Halifax a decade earlier resulted

² New York Times August 18, 1988 page 1

³ London Times August 18, 1988 page 1

in the total deafness in one ear and serious hearing loss in the other, her hearing aid had become a necessary part of her personal wardrobe. Malfunctions were a common occurrence.

As the intensity grew a few things developed in rapid succession. First the Straw Boss contacted a small unit of the CIA in western Nepal to order a helicopter rescue mission. At the same time, having finished her photo session, Angela thought it wise to descend the mountain to the fishing camp along the stream below. The return trip involved the crossing of a mountain road which was now quite busy with Indian military trucks moving to the border. As she crossed the road looking as inconspicuous as possible under the circumstances, she heard a deep voice holler "stop!" She stopped immediately looking unflustered, while in fact adjusting her coat to minimize the bulge of the pocket in which she had placed her camera and its large lens. The command had been issued by an officer who fit the profile of young, oversexed and macho. He began a five minute litany of questions requiring a description of whom Angela was, what she was doing in the Ladakh Range and all the other mumblings that one would expect of a soldier establishing his authority. Angela stood on the road bearing an expression of confusion laced with the appropriate amount of concern as she listened to the threatening voice build. At just the right moment, in the middle of yet another barrage of the officer's questions, Angela asked a simple question of her own. Slowly, confidently, and with that same aplomb displayed to Miss Doherty 50 years before, she inquired in perfect Russian "BbI robopute mo pyckku?⁴ (vi gohvahreetyeh pah rooskee). The officer continued his barrage indifferent to her question. Once again she asked with a bit more desperation in her voice but still in perfect Russian, "Do you speak Russian?" With this the officer stopped and looked at her, at first in disbelief. Then, as if conducting an inspection of one of his troops, he reviewed the floppy hat, the plain coat. Timing the perfect moment for her final blow, Angela asked once

⁴ "Do you speak Russian?"

more in perfect Russian but this time with the imperious air of a Romanoff, "BbI robopute mo pyccku?" . . .END OF DISCUSSION. . . The officer looked at her one last time in disbelief and then frustration as he walked off hands in the air. Angela moved on down the mountain to the fishing camp where she treated herself to an early cocktail.

In the evening before sunset the Venus Fly Trap and her guide were back on the river, casting their flies far from any roads or military. They had located an open part of the stream where the trees had been cleared away by the spring flow giving way to a grassy field. At sunset, undetected by either advancing military force, a sleek black helicopter descended into that opening along the stream in the Ladakh Range, picked up two passengers and was gone. Ten thousand miles away the Straw Boss heaved a sigh of relief.

Although there were other missions followed by trips to Washington, available information is too limited to make a meaningful report thereon at this time. In any event, all of this has become a part of the past, as Angela was happily married to her husband Phil Meeske in 1996. Since then the two have enjoyed travel together. Nonetheless if you should hear that Angela Mitchell Campbell Meeske is in New Zealand bungee jumping again, you might correctly assume that she is back on the job.

In closing, I point out that this paper contains a "TOP SECRET" classification requiring that all distributed copies are to be read, and then destroyed. This will insure the safety of other members of the Garden Club of America who at this moment may be studying the cross fertilization techniques of the geranium species along some quiet mountainside. . .in Macedonia. This classification will also protect the author from the embarrassment of widespread distribution of this literary effort.
