

BUDGETSeptember 27, 1999

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Clippings

Just before we were to leave on vacation, the venerable Martin Macht, M.D. asked me if I would produce a short paper for the February 27th meeting. He was both flattering to make the request and considerate to give me such long notice. So off we went, without a care in the world, to romantic central New York. Following our custom, we placed a standing order at the Corner Cigar for the Syracuse and Binghamton daily papers-as well as for the Times and Journal. There is something quite different between tone and tenor of the papers of the southern tier and CNY areas and that of our papers here in the Tristate. To illustrate, would you expect to see this story in the Post or Enquirer: A mulch pile outside the country club at Camillus caught fire, wafting some smoke into the club. The fire Chief reported that there was no damage and no one was injured.

Of course, some headlines tell you all you want to know; this one is from U.S.A. Today, "Inefficiencies causing flight delays, study finds." That was all I thought I needed to know on the subject, especially as our trip was by car.

Another study, which was surely also reported in the Cincinnati papers, was headlined, "study reveals hippo is closest link to whale." This represents progress, since, according to the Associated Press, "until 1985, it was generally thought that pigs were more closely related to

whales." I can not, myself, remember what I thought about this in 1985, but almost surely I had not given the subject much thought.

This is too late for any of you, but you might be glad to know that six-string acoustic guitarists, 14 and older, were invited to audition between 6 and 9 p.m. on September 8 and 9th in the rehearsal room of Syracuse's John H. Mulloy Civic Center. The occasion is the formation of Central New York's first all-guitar orchestra. I must admit that my reaction was that Central New York has been spared a disaster and to hope no one would show up for the auditions. All-guitar orchestra indeed!

A new study reports that mosquitos select the most aromatically appealing human beings to bite. However, the news story on the study doesn't say whether the odors that attract mosquitos are the same as those we would find appealing.

Now, if you like the fullest explanation possible of a subject, here is the full text of an article which is, to say the least, self-explanatory:

Forget Turning Your Car Into a Vegetarian

Vegetarianism is gaining in popularity among humans, but the makers of Iams pet foods have a word of caution for cat owners.

"Cats are obligate carnivores," says Dr. Dan Carey, Iams' director of technical communications. "This means there are certain essential nutrients cats can get only from animal sources. In other words, they're 'obligated' to eat foods made up of animal proteins and fats."

That means cats need meat based diets for overall good health.

As I collected clippings I stuck them into a little, specialized book of quotations. Opening the book I found a quotation by Prince Charles that goes like this: "It requires all the most intense concentration and consequently, is one of the most relaxing and therapeutic exercises I know. In fact, in my case, I find it transports me into another dimension which other activities can't reach. . ." You may be sure that it was a disappointment to realize that it wasn't a tumble in

the hay with Camilla but his own painting that was being discussed.

While we're not on that subject, and returning to Central New York, while we were there another couple were vacationing not too far away, in Skaneateles. I have no clippings about either their visit or ours. The other couple were covered in fawning admiration in five pages or so each day for the Syracuse paper.

This might have made us feel slighted, except for one delightful touch. The same paper ran a poll to determine the song that reminds readers of the summer of '99. The winner was one by Limp Bizkit entitled "Nookie." How shagadilically appropriate.

In the meantime, down in Binghamton the following story was to be seen:

"Little People" Invited to Reunion

The Waterman Center, Hilton Road, Appalachin, will host a Little People Big People Reunion Mixer from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, September 11. All former Little People are invited. We'll have hiking, a craft and a snack. Fee: \$5.00 for "Little People"; friends and family free. To register call 625-2221.

Other items of note: the Quantum theory is 100 years old and Oliver Stone, the maker of films backing conspiracy theories of this and that was ordered into a rehab program after pleading guilty to drug possession and no contest to driving under the influence. A plea bargain kept him out of jail, disappointing to me. On the whole though, the item was fun to come across.

I didn't know that non-profit organizations are required to have their Form 990's available to see and must produce a copy the same day requested. Neither did the staffs at 14 of 20 non-profits visited by the Syracuse newspaper's people. There's a lot of juicy stuff in these reports that would be fun to learn about, such as salaries of officers and income from the government.

Here's a fun story: an eighty-one year old grandmother in Elmwood Park, New Jersey, who has a pace

maker, faced a demand for her car keys from a man who dove into her car. She hit the gas, stopping several hundred yards away where three men overpowered the car jacker who had been left hanging out the window.

Now note this headline: Cleveland Stinks.

Well there is more, but I can hear Bud muttering, as he reviews this, "Brevity is the goal of wit, you jerk." And so to bed.

Robert H. Allen

Primo

The bare facts of his life give little indication of Primo Levi's extraordinary sensitivity, his abilities in many fields, his humor, his suffering or his bravery.

He was born in Turin and graduated with honors in chemistry shortly before the racial laws prevented Jews from taking degrees. In 1943, he joined a partisan group in northern Italy and was subsequently arrested and deported to Auschwitz. It was his knowledge as a chemist that saved his life. His camp was liberated in 1945 and Primo Levi was then sent with other Italians to White Russia.

After his return to Italy he continued to work as a chemist until 1975, when he retired.

There are many fine scientists who will be remembered. But certainly, there are few, if any, with such reflective sweetness and with a faith that humanity, by looking horror steadily in the face, may prevail over it.

He was the author of numerous autobiographical works, the most exceptional of which he described as a "micro-history." For the purpose of relating that history, Levi employed Mendeleev's periodic table to

literary ends, with each chemical element suggesting some episode or other from his past.

In point of fact, it was not particularly surprising that Primo Levi and I were thrown together. Though we were born thousands of miles apart, our backgrounds were in many respects remarkably similar. We were both Jewish. We were both loners. We were both extremely inquisitive. We were both interested in almost everything and our introspections often drew us to the same conclusions.

When we first met, he was involved in a rather sticky wicket, of which I too was part. It happened that I was able to do him a favor which he later reciprocated. He lived his hells and I lived mine. As it turned out, we both saved each other's lives.

But let me turn to Primo's own account of his return from the prison camps and from Russia. He writes:

"After Auschwitz, there finally came a customer who wanted me as a consultant. To be a consultant is the ideal work, the sort from which you derive prestige and money without dirtying your hands or breaking your backbone. All you have to do is take off your lab coat, put on a tie and listen in attentive silence."

"You must then weigh your reply very carefully and formulate it in vague convoluted language so that the customer considers you an oracle, worthy of his faith and your rates."

"Our client was about forty, small and obese. Perfumed and pomaded, he looked like a pimp from the slums."

"The problem he posed was to formulate a cheap lipstick that would not run. A kiss-proof lipstick."

"On the way back to the lab, I dreamed of a motorbike as I pedaled my rickety old bicycle which tended to careen. I had already figured out the problem."

"Back at the lab, I determined that fine French lipstick contained a red pigment insoluble even at high temperatures. In the pimp's cheap lipstick, there was a soluble dye and it was clear that when the heat of the

woman's skin caused the fat to melt, the dye followed and it spread."

"It happens that in chemistry, as in architecture, the most "beautiful" edifices, symmetrical and simple, are the most sturdy."

"Uric acid, very scarce in the excreta of man and mammals, constitutes 50% of the excrement of birds. The fact that this alloxan destined to embellish ladies lips would come from the excrement of birds did not trouble me for a moment. Nitrogen is nitrogen!"

"I will go further: far from scandalizing me, the idea of obtaining a cosmetic from excrement that is aurum de stercore (gold from dung) amused me and warmed my heart. It was like a return to origins, when alchemists extracted phosphorous from urine."

"I informed my wife that the next day I would leave on a business trip: that is, I would get on my bike and make a tour of surrounding farms in search of chicken shit. She did not hesitate."

"A wife should follow her husband. It will be a kind of supplement to our honeymoon trip."

"As it turned out, we determined that chicken shit can, indeed, be beautiful, too."

Not very long ago, I was trudging through the hills - past graves, some hidden, some not, containing remains - some known, some not. There was silence all around.

Then in the distance, faintly but distinctly, came the call, "Primo, Primo."

Martin B. Macht

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Reprise

After one reaches the age of 80, almost everything is a reprise. Earliest childhood events, so often repeated in one way or another. Pappa, a figure of power, uncannily bright, loving, often impossible. Mamma, the prototypical mother figure, wise, surprisingly sophisticated and always in my corner.

School and a fight every day. Always fist fights. Knives and firearms were virtually unknown.

High school, known as City College. Editing the paper and yearbook. Johns Hopkins for an A.B., Ph.D., M.D., House Staff, faculty, Trustee.

Honored as one of six Distinguished Medical Alumni at Johns Hopkins' one-hundredth anniversary.

A wonderful daughter and two fine grandchildren. Still married to the same girl I eloped with sixty years ago and still full of pizzazz.

Not too bad. Not too bad at all, come to think of it.

Martin B. Macht

THE DAMNED HUMAN RACE AND OTHER MATTERS

October 4, 1999

Ernest A. Eynon II

Good evening Gentlemen and fellow members of the Literary Club.

During these past two years I have been privileged to listen, thoroughly enjoy and learn, and not worry