

goofing off at work from women's eyes, that women are no longer mystified by athletics, that far too many families have learned to live without them, and that they now, when they should be at home watching heavyweight wrestling, they find themselves in the dangerous aisles of the Kroger looking for anything that will microwave.

The victory, however Pyrrhic, is won. That is the way things are. That is the way things will be. The war between the sexes is over. Until the day somewhere, perhaps in the far reaches of provincial China, or the steamy Brazilian jungle, a woman, exasperated by a man, will pick up a hatpin and she will see the possibilities.

BUDGET

December 21, 1998

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A Wee Dram of Uisge Beatha

As the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry slipped through the early morning fog, Port Ellen was hardly visible from the mists rising from the warm waters of the Sound of Jura. Yet we had unmistakably arrived at our destination, the isle of Islay, southernmost of the Hebrides.

Some visit this wild, wind-blown Scottish outpost because it is one of the great Atlantic flyways, home to 220 species of bird life. A few come to view the historic remains of the Middle Ages because it served as the fortress of the Macdonald clan for three centuries when they were the lords of the Isles, holding forth from Loch Finlaggan to rule the western portion of present day Scotland.

But we were attracted to this remote place by a vice visited upon me by my daughters, both of whom were graduate students at St. Andrews University. In the course of visiting them over several years and listening to the innkeeper of the Russell Hotel, Gordon deVries, I was introduced to the delights of single malts. They are the devils who made me do it.

Now we were at Islay because, thus corrupted, I was led on a voyage of discovery to the presumed birthplace of Scotch whisky. Islay lies a scant 23 miles across the Irish Sea from Northern Ireland and on a clear day one can see the glens of Antrum in the distance. Tradition has it that it was from there, sometime in the late 1400s, that the skill of distilling uisge beatha in copper pots was brought to Scotland, the self-same path that Christianity itself followed centuries earlier when it made its way from Ireland to another Hebridean outpost, the island of Iona.

Uisge beatha is Scottish Gaelic for agua vitae, the water of life, abbreviated in the 17th Century to "uisge" and in 1815 corrupted to "whiskie."

Even through the morning mist, found the ferry arriving at Islay one catches sight at water's edge of the distinctive white buildings first of Ardbeg, and then in quick succession of the Lagavulin and the Laphroaig distilleries. They are among the eight whisky makers on this small island. Thus, for many single malt lovers, Islay is the mecca, standing first among the five principal regions in Scotland recognized for the manufacture of the whisky that is the country's landmark.

For many years in this century, most Scotch spirits from their way into blended whisky, the Johnny Walkers and the Dewars that are made of a mongrel mixture of cereal grains to be further diluted by ice and the ubiquitous dash of soda. But since the 1960s the single malts have attracted a growing following. They are the malted barley products of a given year from a single distillery, often from a single batch, and considered by many to be the finest whiskies made anywhere in the world today, comparable in taste even to the very best cognacs.

All single malts are made of the same three ingredients - barley, peat and water. Yet no fewer than 132 distinctive brands have emerged into today's market, leading one connoisseur to call Scotland "the Aladdin's cave of alcohols." They are all different with an endlessly fascinating range of color and character, assertiveness and elegance, boldness and subtlety. A truly expert nose can, in a blind test, not only identify the malt's region of origin but also the very distillery of its birth, so distinctive are the tastes. At one place in the Scottish Highlands, two distilleries are separated only by a road and they use the same water supply, yet their single malts are markedly different.

A visit to the Laphroaig distillery, a short distance from the Port Ellen ferry landing, quickly lends clues as to why this is so. Laphroaig is called "the salty dog, the ancient mariner" of malts, carrying strong suggestions of the seaweed and smoky peat flavors of Islay. So challenging is its taste that one encounters few in-between opinions about this amber mead, even among aficionados of single malts. Yet if I were marooned on that proverbial island with only one bottle to choose, I suspect it would be a 15-year-old Laphroaig.

The visitor has only to step into the malt house to discover how the brand's distinctive signature comes to be. The first step in making Scotch whisky is malting, the process by which golden, nutty grains of barley, after having been soaked in water, are spread across a perforated metal floor, allowed to partially germinate and then gradually dried over a low peat fire

in the course of seven days. This is the first stage in extracting fermentable sugars from the grains of barley. The process takes place in a large kiln with a pagoda-style roof that is the architectural landmark of the modern Scottish distillery. In the kiln the germinating barley absorbs the aroma of the burning peat, known as peat reek. The craft of the maltster is to control this process precisely. Picking up a handful of the grains from the maltings floor, one can immediately identify the characteristic flavor of the smoky Islays.

Not only the way the fire burns but the peat itself plays a significant role in creating the whisky's taste. Not all decayed vegetation in peat bogs is created equal. The bogs on Islay contain fewer rotted leaves, due to the relative absence of trees on the barren island, and over them runs water saturated with salt spray. A different flavor is thus imparted than, say, by the peat and soft water of Speyside in the eastern region of Scotland, an area famed for its delicate lighter malts.

The Scots speak in a reverential way about the quality of water used in the distilling process. Varying tastes will be produced by water from a mineral-laden stream or from a heather-covered moorland. Some water is believed to take hundreds of years to filter through mountainous rocks before becoming part of the whisky-making process. In fact, the oldest rock formation of any whisky region in Scotland supplies the Bowmore distillery on Islay; it was formed an estimated 600-800 million years ago.

The malted barley goes to a mill where it is carefully crushed so as not to make flour. The grist is mixed with hot water to extract the sugars. The resulting sweet liquor, or wort, is drained off after several hours, cooled and passed to the tun room, where distiller's yeast is added. Thus begins the fermentation process, which takes 44 hours in a large vessel called a washback, in which rotating arms constantly stir the frothing, bubbling liquid, converting the sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide. This is called the wash. At Laphroaig, stainless steel

washbacks are used although other distillers swear by wooden ones made of Oregon pine.

The fermented wort is now pumped into the distilling room, which at Laphroaig is made up of two different types of pot stills. These are large copper kettles with uniquely designed narrow necks leading to a condenser. The shape, size and surface of these stills differ from distillery to distillery and they play a mysterious role in how the resulting whisky will taste. The first stage aims to separate the alcohol from the wash. It is the stillman's job to know precisely when and how much heat to add. Because alcohol boils more rapidly than water, the spirit escapes up the neck of the still as a vapor and is then collected as it condenses back to what are called the "low wines." They are the first product of the distilling process and make up roughly one-third of the original wash.

Now the mixture passes into the other kettle called the spirit still, there to undergo a second distillation to remove remaining impurities. Hundreds of organic chemicals are present in the whisky at this point, all of them affecting the flavor one way or another. Modern chemistry and ancient craft meet in this most delicate stage. Again heat is applied and the stillman draws off the so-called foreshots as the temperature climbs. When it reaches a critical point, he begins saving the pure middle part of the distillate. Also emerging are the so-called "feints," a family of aromatics which begin pleasantly enough but deteriorate quickly into sweaty, noxious aromas. The stillman has to know how many flavorful feints to save before stopping the collection.

When finished with this second distillation, he has reduced the feints and spirits by half but what he has finally collected is the object of this complicated process - malt whisky. It is then pumped to the spirit store where - at something like 70% alcohol by volume - it is placed in casks and stored in warehouses. Before it can be officially classified as Scotch whisky, it must be aged at least three years but single malts are kept much longer, generally from 10 to 20 years.

There is a saying in Scotland that "the wood makes the whisky." Standing in the yard at Laphroaig outside the spirit store, I was taken aback to see workers stacking barrels with the Jack Daniels label burnished on them. "Aye, laddie," the guide answered, "we call America our cask preparation area."

That's because single malts are aged in charred oak casks that have originally held either bourbon or sherry for four years. The alchemists at Laphroaig have decided the sippin' whiskey barrels from Lynchburg, Tennessee make the perfect mellowing chambers. The choice is of vital importance because it is believed that maturation can account for well over half of the whisky's final flavor.

There are an estimated 17 million oak barrels in use in Scotland, more than nine in 10 of them having first been used to store bourbon. They are cheaper than sherry casks, but can't be reused as many times for aging whisky.

As the whisky now settles in for its long winter's nap, climate and type of warehouse begin to play their respective roles in the final outcome. In the resulting subtle interplay between spirit and wood, malt whisky literally breathes through its cask — 2% of the volume being lost each year to the so-called "angel's share."

The distillers at Laphroaig grow cagey when the questioning turns to what happens when the whisky is finally judged ready for bottling and the nectar is extracted from the barrels. Although single malts do come from only one distillery, they seldom originate from a single cask but usually contain a vatting of several production runs from the still. Tight lips and knowing smiles greet inquiries about how a uniform taste is achieved. Centuries-old secrets are kept, and rightly so, I suppose.

After all, as we raise our wee drams in toast to this holiday season, our senses focus on experiencing the pleasures that a great single malt brings. One taster calls it "a crescendo, followed by a series of echoes."

Tasting itself has been raised to a fine science. The purists wouldn't dream of using ice but they do advise several drops of distilled water to unleash the many complex aromas and flavors that leap upon the palate with each sip exposing some new element.

The professional tasters can grow florid in describing the experience. Sometimes they even create doubt about whether one really wants to try a particular find. A recent note from the Scotch Malt Whisky Society describing a cask, for example, said the contents were reminiscent of "a well-dubbined boot" with "a smell of wet towels, burnt embers (and) . . . a whiff of silage."

As for me, I think I'll stick with the Islay malts because with every wonderful sip they recollect the bracing, windswept landscape of their birth.

Sources:

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Special thanks to Ian Henderson and the Laphroaig Distillery staff, Port Ellen, Islay, Argyll, Scotland.

William R. Burleigh

Druids in the Desert

He awoke to the silence of the empty condominium. Christmas morning, 1997. This was Tom Blakeley's first Christmas in Santa Fe. Some of you will remember Tom as one of the few - perhaps only - non-member of The Literary Club to have presented a paper to this august group. Back in the early part of 1998, I read Tom's paper, The Crown Jewels of Central Europe to you, unable to come up with my own topic.

Tom took my appropriation as less than the flattery it was in part intended to be. This caused a rupture in our relationship that I am glad to report has since been mended. But how Tom and I came to be reconciled is the subject of another paper to be read in due course.

Tonight's rendition is my work alone, based on some conversations with Tom, and my own surmise as to how last Christmas in Santa Fe must have been for him. Tom awoke to the silence of the empty condominium. There is no silence quite like the silence of a house once filled with the sounds of a family that has vanished. As you recall, Tom's wife, Grace, had died some time before Tom abruptly decamped from Cincinnati, selling his insurance agency and moving, as it turned out, to Santa Fe. The dwelling was new, but the silence was the same as before. A hollow aching silence, textured by the knowledge that each movement and sound you make reverberates against no living flesh, but simply dies away in the empty air.

Tom's one son lives in New York City, his daughter in Idaho. He would call them later in the morning, exchanging holiday pleasantries and catching up on the events of the weeks since they had last talked. No one had thought to invite him for Christmas, and he had not thought to ask for an invitation or invite anyone there. Tom got out of bed tired. He had gone to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, an unusual event for him, and while he had enjoyed the luminaria, incense, and excited hubbub of the late night service, it had

left him unfulfilled. The choir had even sung his favorite Christmas carol, the Celtic hymn: "When blossoms flowered amid the snows/Upon a winter's night/Was born the Child, the Christmas Rose/The King of Love and Light. ." that he had enjoyed since the days when he was an altar boy. But as he tried to join the choir in song and later pray, the words struck in his throat. His thoughts trailed along the ground.

Tom was invited out later today. The trick was to fill the time until he had someplace to go. He donned his running gear and jogged out, through the asphalt parking lot of his sublet onto Artists' Road. It was cold and cloudy, with just a light dusting of falling snow. The flakes did not adhere but swept along in the gusty air like wind trails on the sea, scattered by the rare passing of car or truck. Tom ran easily down Artists' Road to Washington Street and toward the square, turning right by the bilious pink Masonic Temple at the corner of Washington and Pasco de Peralta, and then on out to Magers Fields, the rec center. For some reason he loved the rec center, deserted generally and this morning of mornings, entirely empty except for one van, a Dead Head relic of the sixties. After several circles of the track, feeling looser, his muscles unkinked, shoulder blades sweaty and his free floating anxiety quelled for the moment, he headed back toward his condo, past the earthy browns and yellows of the office buildings and private houses.

The little city was beginning to awake. The lights in the houses along the way seemed abnormally warm and bright. The smell of burning pinon and the occasional aroma of bacon or frying cakes made his mouth water. Back at the condo, he poured himself a breakfast of Grape Nuts and coffee, and quickly disposed of the Albuquerque newspaper. He fiddled with the television. With half an eye, he watched Katie Couric, Matt Lauer, Ann Curry and Al Roker celebrate an ersatz Christmas morning on the set. A show obviously taped days before. The familiar personnel of the Today show, faithfully there every week day, were of course home with their families this morning.

Tom began to feel anew the vertigo that had first afflicted him when he left Cincinnati. You may wonder why I call it vertigo. Tom felt that he was on a high wire, working without a net. Leaving Cincinnati and his predictable, orderly life made him feel painfully alone, in danger of falling into nothingness. Not when he sold the business or shut down his house, but as he drove West, even before he got to St. Louis, he felt himself giving way to an overpowering anxiety. He could hardly drive, and it was only an act of will that kept him from doing a u-turn right in the middle of I-64, and heading back to the security of safe, stodgy, familiar Cincinnati. That night, in a motel near Springfield, Missouri, he stood sleepless at the window of his room, staring out at the parking lot glowing in the mercury vapor lamps, and further out at the anonymous thread of interstate. He had made his life nothing. The insurance agency, the family, the social life he had enjoyed, even without Grace, all were gone. What had he been thinking about when he chose to turn the remnants of his life upside down at the age of 52 and start all over?

The anxiety followed him all the way to Santa Fe, and it was only in recent weeks that he had felt it was almost under control. When it had overwhelmed him, he had taken a break from job hunting or his other daily activities and simply done something physical-painting, installing bookshelves in his study, working on the car, jogging. After a while, the anxiety would start to subside.

He loved Santa Fe, even if he had nothing real to do, knew no one, and had to fight the vertigo. He knew he was too old for the bar scene although he had tried it once or twice, more out of sheer boredom and exasperation than anything else. Looking for more uplifting activity, he had seen an ad in the local alternative newspaper. The Sierra Club sponsored hikes twice a week. He called, found that the groups reconnoitered in the parking lot next to the state capitol, and went on one the following Saturday.

He became interested in one of his fellow hikers almost immediately. Sally was a woman in her late forties, well proportioned, with a quick smile, sense

of humor and ingratiating manner. She took an almost motherly interest in Tom when she saw him in his tennis shoes and without a water bottle or food. She shared her water and trail mix and they started to talk. While the Sierra Club hikes were mostly for newcomers, she liked to go on them when they were set in interesting venues. Sally was recently divorced from a lawyer, a member of the New Mexico legislature whose all consuming ambition had ruined their marriage.

Tom and Sally saw each other frequently after that first meeting. Tom's loss and Sally's divorce gave them lots to talk about. They hiked occasionally, saw movies, and went out to dinner. Tom was amazed at the other interests they shared. They both liked to read. They loved such novels as the almost unknown posthumous masterpiece, G.B. Edwards' The Book of Ebenezer Le Page. They thought that Iris Murdoch was the best novelist writing in English. [Editor's note: The kind of woman we would want in our club?] They liked art films, and would drive all the way to Albuquerque to see them at the University of New Mexico.

Some weeks into the relationship, Tom committed what he too late admitted to himself was an incredible but all too typical blunder. One day on a hike to look at Indian pictographs at Bandolier National Monument Sally started to tease Tom about his tennis shoes. Tom, the kind of guy who makes a fetish out of never taking lessons and getting along on a bare minimum of equipment, had made a big deal out of not needing hiking boots, and delivered tiresome monologues about how westerners were too much into equipment. When he slipped and fell on his backside on a wet patch of trail, Sally giggled and poked fun at him and his useless tennis shoes intermittently for the next mile. It was only when she noticed that he was sulking and not responding to anything she said that she laid off. They finished the hike in silence, and after Sally mistakenly tried to tease him back into a talking mood on the ride home, Tom did not call her again. He missed her terribly, even though he could not pick up the phone.

A week before Christmas they had run into each other at the Albertson's in the shopping center. After

an awkward pause, Sally asked him how he was doing, and Tom reciprocated. Sally must have divined his loneliness. She invited him over to her house late Christmas afternoon, once her ex had finished visiting his two children. They would drive up to Taos to a Christmas night party thrown by some of her friends.

He fought off the Christmas Day vertigo with fitful reading, fooling around on his computer, phone calls to his children, and a couple of heavy Christmas Wild Turkeys on the rocks. He felt as if he were wrapped in cotton wool, numb and insensate, except for the pain caused by the inexorable crawl of the minute hand around the dial of the kitchen clock. Three p.m. Finally time to go to Sally's house out on the south side. At first things were awkward. Sally seemed distracted, red-eyed. The two children were obviously upset about Christmas without their father. The girl, about seventeen or so, looked Tom over with an appraising eye, appreciative yet critical, and before leaving with friends gave her mother strict instructions in a stage voice about when to be home that night. The boy was more superficially friendly. He seemed genuinely to enjoy Tom's foray into discussion of U of New Mexico basketball and the upcoming bowl games, but beat a quick retreat as well.

After the kids left, Sally still seemed uncomfortable. Tom asked her whether she'd prefer just to stay home. She said there was nothing she'd rather do than take the drive to Taos. They talked about the movies they had missed seeing together; about a mountain lion Tom had seen on a solitary hike the week before. It was time to leave. Sally asked him to wait a minute. She had a present for him. Tom was totally embarrassed at the size of the box. The perfume he had gotten her, nice though it was, looked totally inadequate next to the large, heavy rectangular box, artfully wrapped in tastefully co-ordinated ribbon and paper. His present for her had been wrapped at the store.

She said she liked the perfume. He was floored at her gift to him. It was a pair of gorgeous hiking boots, just the right size. She insisted that he keep

them on, and Tom suggested they had better take off for Taos before it got dark.

Sally needed to get one more thing, and Tom waited at the door. When she came back into the entry way, Tom, usually fairly oblivious of the physical world around him, could not help but notice that this woman, normally quite composed, was blushing fire engine red. His gaze finally rested on her footwear – hiking boots, twins to his own. He raised an eyebrow and she responded simply, "I needed some new boots."

A response was neither necessary, nor possible. They said nothing as they went out to the car port. She suggested that they take her car, a Volvo wagon, of course. She asked him to drive. Going north on Highway 285, they gradually settled back into the easy rhythm that they had begun to experience those weeks before. They talked about Alice Munro, and Ethan Canin. Raymond Carver's short stories, which were good, but not so good as Chekhov's. The movies they had seen and not seen. Fellini and Truffaut. They both liked Meryl Streep and could not stand the Demi Moores and other over endowed stars of the day. Aside from Bill Richardson, they had nothing but scorn for most of the political figures they knew – from crooked Newt to the much too clever President with his long suffering virago wife, and back again.

At the turn off for Espanola they started up the high road to Taos, off to the right. As they zipped through the funky northern New Mexico towns, Chimayo, Truchas, Trampas, Peñasco, Tom felt truly at ease for the first time in many months. Ahead a world of possibilities, situations and experiences yet to know. Beside him a woman who accepted his stony, enigmatic and self-absorbed heart with alacrity and good humor and who incomprehensibly seemed to understand him better than he knew himself.

He could not fathom why he had been so blessed. As night fell over the New Mexican highlands and they drove higher into the mountains, Tom noticed fires off in the distance, scattered here and there. Brush fires started by the local farmers or ranchers? Some arcane Indian or Hispanic tradition fused with the Christian

rites of Christmas? Misplaced Druids from prehistoric Britain? Only time would tell. These and other questions you would surely like answered – did Tom and Sally observe her daughter's curfew? Did the matching boots find their way to the sides of the same bed? This last especially – we will pass over in silence, mindful of the holy night we are observing.

For the present, it is enough to know that it was cozy in the car; that the dashboard underlit Sally's lovely and pleasant face; that their conversation was easy and communal. The Druidical, if that is what they were, forces summoned by the fire infused the air around them. As the Volvo wagon sturdily took the turns of the high road, the clouds of the day had long since lifted. In the dry cold of the winter's night, the faint light of a million stars poured down on Tom and Sally. A blossom flowered amid the snows.

Anthony G. Covatta

Brevity

Having been involved in our club's Christmas shenanigans for better than a dozen years and having delivered papers sentimental, historical, scholarly, flippant and reverential, I have learned the secret of success: Brevity!

After the booze, the shrimp, and various other comestibles, the Senior Trustee's paper is best appreciated and better digested if it is brief, short, succinct.

Cognizant of that immutable fact, I shall adhere to this principle. Come to think of it, not a bad title for the paper. I'll call it Brevity.

Urbino beckons, the Via Veneto entices and I long to explore the digs of Odysseus or backtrack and split for Split. Istanbul is a joy and there the dancers are spicier than the Spice Market.

Far from the malls and sprawls of Cincinnati, far from the Redcaps and fauce white beards of the Queen City, the bells are ringing.

For the moment, forget impeachment. Forget the tawdry. Think of stars, spelled with one "r." Let every soul cast aside the lugubrious and embrace the salubrious.

Thank you and Merry Christmas to you all!

Martin B. Macht

SUICIDE REVISITED

January 4, 1999

Frank J. Address

This is a true story. It began in 1938. It ended here at the Literary Club in April 1992 when Alan Vogeler presented his Paper entitled "A Hoosier Lawyer". Coincidentally, I was here only because I was Alan's guest that night.

Alan related the story of a young legal colleague of his whom at age 25 committed suicide. Alan referred to him as "Tom" and identified him as growing up in Brookville Ind. And attending Brookville HS. Alan did that to disguise Tom's true identity for reasons, which will become apparent as this suicide, mystery unfolds.

Tom was not his real name. I know his real name because he and I attended Walnut Hills High School together. However, it is preferable to retain the