

Great Expectations

It was sometime in 1977 when my friend and longtime P&G associate Norm Levy first brought me to the Literary Club. It was love at first sight. After an appropriate looking-over, the possibility of my joining was broached. But I still had young children at home, and it was not yet time for me to be absent most Monday nights. Ten years would pass before the coast was clear: my children were all in college by then, and I finally joined in 1987.

From my first Monday evening I felt like a very junior member. I was greeted cordially by so many Men of Respect: men who were many years my senior, and far superior to me in wit, wisdom, scholarly knowledge, literary experience, and an understanding of what it means to be a thoughtful citizen. And the odd thing is, I still feel that way, even though I have grown somewhat in seniority. I suspect I always will feel that way. Each Monday night I am struck again with a sense of what a privilege it is to have been admitted into this brotherhood and I am thankful again for the acceptance these older and wiser men have granted me. I am well content to be their junior.

There are so many things to like about being a member in this Club. There is the fellowship of the members: doctors of every possible type and specialty, lawyers and judges, academicians and scholars of all stripes - deans, teachers, presidents and professors, artists and curators, pastors and bishops, musicians, bankers, librarians, men of letters, captains of industry and business men of every flavor... what a rich fraternity of talent! What a privilege to gather with such a crew every Monday night. My eldest son - a businessman who lives in the East - marveled after his first visit to the LC, "I had no idea that there was, anywhere, a place like this where men regularly gather to stimulate their thinking in this way!"

And beyond the membership, there is the history and lore of this institution, and this wonderful icon of a building. Standing in these rooms, surrounded by memorials, memorabilia, banners, and antique art in every nook and cranny, photographs of members as far back as 1848 looking down from the walls, and handsomely bound volumes containing our predecessors' papers dating back to 1850, it takes very little imagination to feel the presence of our past, and a sense of companionship with those who have gone before us. What a delight that we have among us an historian of John

Diehl's calibre to search out and interpret it all, and share with us the colorful, the arcane and the important in our one hundred and sixty one years!

But for me, there is something more about our Club that I particularly value, and which goes directly to the heart of our reason for being: this is the papers. I love the papers. Well, most of them. I look forward, each week, to yet another member bringing to us something I did not know, something important, something interesting, something moving or beautiful or funny, and something memorable that will open up a niche in my mind and stick with me. I want to share with you tonight some recollections of such papers that have given me great pleasure.

Now this is tricky ground. There will be only a handful of papers which I have time to mention. And there are many fine papers which have faded in my memory, which grows ever leakier with each passing year. There will be some authors whom I name, and others who remain anonymous. I ask for your indulgence in all of this.

I'd like to start by looking back with you at just a sample of the rich variety of the subjects of papers we heard in a typical ninety day interval from the year just past. If you doubted the diversity of our membership, just stop to consider the extraordinary range of subjects they have written about:

There was a fascinating look at what really killed Bonaparte on St. Helena, and the indignities that were inflicted upon him after he shuffled off this mortal coil.

Those of us have been captivated by tales of His Britannic Majesty's Navy, and of Captain Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin's adventures during the Napoleonic wars, have heard them mention the lamentable tale of Admiral Byng: but we were privileged to hear a fully detailed explanation of this poor man's extraordinary execution on the deck of his own flagship, "pour encourager les autres..." and the storm of national controversy it sparked.

We explored the greatest mystery of them all: the edge between life and death, and the intriguing possibility of crossing that line and then recrossing it.

Another member - a true man of letters - shared with us his first hand encounters with both Ezra Pound and William Faulkner, and some of the insights he gained from these remarkable men.

We were vastly entertained by the firsthand recollections of a young man in a ne'er-do-well stage of his life as he grappled with the conflict between the pleasures of not working, and the need to survive.

We heard a particularly thoughtful discussion of the formative years of the Women's Rights movement in America. (My wife and I were in Seneca Falls, the movement's birthplace, several weeks ago: this paper immeasurably enriched this experience for us both.)

Another member gave us an up-close look at his family's colorful roots in the Church of Latter Day Saints, and how he dealt with the challenges these roots represented for him.

We heard a deeply moving memory of the troubled life and death of a member's unusual brother who chose a different path through life.

Those among us who feel unsafe or insecure on Cincinnati's streets without a sidearm learned what it takes to earn the right to pack a pistol in Ohio today.

We heard the absolutely extraordinary true tale of a serial murder right here in Cincinnati: perhaps our city's most remarkable crime, but hitherto unknown to the great majority of our members. This was a formidable tale that, we were assured, could happen to any of us.

We heard a chilling tale of a great mutiny that might have happened among our disillusioned troops in Viet Nam.

We closed the year with a grand telling of how Procter & Gamble contended with the dark forces of the church of Satan.

But enough about the diversity of the subjects we write about. Bear in mind, this has been just a random sampling of what our fellow members brought before us in a period

of just three months: there was much, much more that could be told. But consider the stimulation of gathering weekly to hear tales such as these. Where else could gentlemen of our (mostly) advanced years regularly find this kind of grist for their intellectual mills?

Let me turn from the subjects of our papers to the literary styles our members choose to write in. As I look back over the range of papers I have been privileged to hear, it seems to me that just about every kind of writing has been brought to these rooms.

We have heard many memoirs - perhaps our most commonly encountered kind of writing. I have particularly enjoyed military memoirs: in recent years, an increasingly rare kind of paper. A number of these come to mind...

Who would ever have thought that Morse Johnson - one of the most refined men I have known among our members - and a man who brought to us four papers debating who really wrote Shakespeare - had been a tank commander in the fighting across France and Germany? He painted a picture that I will not forget of the fighting around a town square in the Netherlands, with the Americans, British and Canadians each dug in on a different side, and the Germans on the fourth. And the elderly Belgian gentleman wearing a Homburg hat who appeared out of nowhere, leading his Scotch terrier on his daily constitutional, right out into the midst of the battle.

Lou Prince has told of the multiple invasions in which he took part throughout World War II: one of these was highlighted in his paper "My Favorite D Day." There are so many memories Lou has brought to us: I will not soon forget his description of American troops in their first landing on North African beaches being strafed by Vichy French pilots flying American fighters they had been given by our too-generous government.

Lee Davis wrote one my most favorite of all papers in "Catch 52." Lee flew in the very squadron of which Joseph Heller wrote Catch 22, and his memories of the terrors and nightly losses as the bombers flew their suicidal missions north out of Italy are counterbalanced by truly funny black humor along the way. It is terrific writing: my son who teaches English to High School seniors, uses the paper every year his students read Heller's novel. Read this paper: it's in our archives.

As I consider these World War II reminiscences, I am struck by how much they tell us about men I thought I knew from spending our Monday nights together. And their extraordinary accomplishments in their younger years, which I might never have known and appreciated were it not for these papers.

But there have been wars since then, too. I cannot recall any papers about Korea, but Viet Nam has been sadly written into our archives by both Rick Lauf and Bill Burleigh in his splendid "We Were Soldiers," and perhaps by others. One wonders how many years will pass before tales from Iraq and Afghanistan are read from this podium.

There are many fine historians among us, and they have written excellent papers beyond counting. History papers are good! None any better than Arnie Schrier whose field of specialty is one that is little known to many of us. We have heard truly fascinating accounts of the great Chinghis Khan... and of the earliest Germanic folk hero who led the resistance against the Romans... and a wonderfully informative description of the centuries of savage fighting between the Russians and Chechnyans. Much, much closer to home than the Caucasus, historian Rick Kesterman recently gave us a fascinating look at the immediate neighborhood of our Clubhouse, one hundred years ago. Truly, history is one of our most fertile fields!

We have explored the Classics, from Joe Tomain's and Bill Friedlander's looks at the high Renaissance back to the earliest Biblical roots and sources in scholarly papers by Ted Silberstein, such as his investigations of Gilgamesh, and of the shadowy figure of Lilith.

For reasons that need no explanation, our members have generally eschewed papers dealing too obviously with the political left or right. For all that, there are among us some who would not flinch at the label "Liberal"... and none more so than the late Bishop Herb Thompson who brought us papers that told sad tales of man's inhumanity to man. These were so well written... and so well read... that we listened raptly to his discussions of prison camps in Louisiana, virtual slavery on banana boats, the need to forgive Third World debt, or why we should be paying attention to Gangster Rap rather than hastening to turn it off.

There are poets aplenty in our ranks. Papers by our Chief Hibernian Robert Smith, Rollin Workman, Norm Levy and John Brackett's splendid "Guanya Pau" come to mind.

Mystery, crime and who dunnits are well represented. Hard on the heels of The Da Vinci Code came Paul Franz's thriller which brought us very, very close to the room in which we are gathered tonight. And in the same vein, three of our sharpest wits - Tomain, Pyle and McGavran - conspired together to bring us the absolutely delightful "A Death At The Club."

Acid commentary and a journalist's cynicism have been behind a number of thought-provoking social commentaries. Albert Pyle's "Ain't Misbehavin'" took the kind of curmudgeonly look (of which he is a master) to consider how much better a place our fair city used to be in the days of crooked government. Fran Barrett gave us an insider's look which none will forget into the shady machinations of the County, the Brown family and the Bengals that lay behind Riverfront Stadium. And Kingston Fletcher fearlessly opened doors which P&G has kept under lock and key for almost a hundred years to tell of how the squeaky-clean company once deliberately undertook industrial espionage against its arch rival Lever Brothers: a lurid tale which very, very few at the Soap Factory have ever heard or would think possible if they did hear it!

And we have enjoyed many delightful evenings of fiction - which I personally think is perhaps the most difficult of all kinds of writing. Our grand master of fiction was, of course, Oliver "Muff" Gale with some twenty-five papers in this genre.

Of course, there has been humor and lots of it. Not just the mordant kind of which our honorable vice president is a past master, but out and out belly laughs, too. I first heard this kind of paper in the early 80's when Judge John Peck gave us "He Who Laughs Lasts," a delightful memory of funny incidents he had seen on his years on the bench. Particularly memorable was a paternity suit which was decided by a one liner from the defense attorney, when the facts appeared dead set against his client. A funny paper from a funny man!

I hope I have made my point: all kinds of writing about all kinds of subjects in all literary styles flourish at our Club!

Finally, I would like to close with a brief reminiscence of three personal favorite papers. These are papers that live so vividly in my memory that they well deserve a place in my hall of fame.

The first is a paper that Jim Bridgeland wrote in 1993 titled “Do We Know Who We Are?” It was, of course, a well-written paper... but what struck me most of all was its honesty and courage. In this paper, Jim was approaching the conclusion of an eminently successful career in the law, and stopped to reflect on whether it had worked out as he had hoped. He expresses misgivings with the kind of candor that many of us would think twice about before sharing them with this audience.

The second paper was written by Norman Levy some years before he started on his much admired run of “Rhymes For Our Times.” it was a masterful work in poetry titled “Brooklyn Memories.” In it, Norm shares with us vivid memories of a boyhood on the sidewalks of an immigrant neighborhood in Brooklyn. Norm and I spent many years together as a team of two traveling the world for P&G. We whiled away the airplane hours telling each other tales of our vastly different boyhoods. Norm’s always sounded so much more colorful and fun than mine. Maybe he did have a better boyhood. Maybe he is just a better storyteller. But in “Brooklyn Memories” he does it all in verse. A terrific piece of work!

Which brings me to my final favorite: a paper which I regard as extremely influential in broadening what we are prepared to write about in our Club This is Bob Norrish’s brilliant “Dear Mom - Unfinished Business.” Those of us who knew Bob will always remember him as an extraordinarily kind, sensitive and open man who held back none of his inner feelings. These qualities were apparent in all his papers, but “Dear Mom” was his first. It was an open letter to his dead mother, in which he said to her all the things that he wished he had said while she lived. He told with great sensitivity how she had raised him and his siblings through the depth of the Depression, when Bob’s family had to move in with his uncle and his father tried to earn grocery money by painstakingly cutting out intricate plywood jigsaw puzzles in his brother’s basement. Bob talked so openly about the values that were set in him during those hard years.

What Bob was also doing in this paper and those that followed was legitimizing our male membership talking openly about our emotions: something that many had not considered manly or appropriate to discuss in front of a group like this. Bob paved the way for fine sentimental papers to come, like Ted Gleason’s “Noseprints on the Kitchen Window,” and Peter Briggs’ “Loring” ... papers which I admire extravagantly. But “Dear

Mom” gets my vote for my favorite paper. I urge you to seek it out and read it anew: see Dale Flick for a copy.

Looking back at this trio of favorite papers, I see how each magically picked me up and transported me to another place: a place that was new to me... which they made very real to me... a place which in their telling mattered to me. Jim took me into his arcane world of corporate law. Norm’s took me onto the crowded, colorful, noisy sidewalks of a mixed Jewish and Italian immigrant neighborhood in the 1930’s. And Bob’s paper took me into his heart.

Let me close with the final lines from Bob’s paper, which come after the most loving review of values and lessons he learned from his mother:

“When you died I had almost a sense of relief. You had been sick for a long time, you were failing, and frankly out of it. And so that day there were no tears - and no tears at your funeral. Yes, I felt guilty. And then two weeks later a friend died. He had been an Episcopal priest and they pulled out all the stops for his funeral at Christ Church The church was packed with clergy who came down the center aisle in full regalia, the organ booming away, and the congregation singing those wonderful hallelujah hymns about triumph over death.

When my tears started I tried to hold them back. But they kept coming and coming. I let go and sobbed - the best cry I’d ever had. There I was bawling away at someone else’s funeral, but all those tears, Mom, were for you.”

And that brings me to the conclusion of this paper. I want to express my sincere compliments to all of you who have delivered a paper since I joined the Club twenty three years ago, as well as to those who are no longer with us. I end on a note of high anticipation. Because I know the papers are going to keep on coming, and I have Great Expectations! Bring ‘em on! I can’t wait ‘til next Monday!

G G Carey, President

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