

News From Home 14

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There was a postcard in the mail today – one of those extra wide panoramic ones with a view of an African big game park – a little savannah in the background, and to the fore a watering hole in late afternoon. Elephants, gazelles, a wildebeest or two – and about one-third submerged in the mud at water's edge, partly obscured by reeds, a rather attractive and familiar Japanese lantern. In a tree in the middle distance, apparently engaged in some bestial act with a baboon, was a white bearded, red in the face, garden gnome. Postmarked Nairobi, two weeks before. I wandered out onto the lawn at the rear of the Trellises, where I knew I would find Hashimoto fastidiously snipping. I showed him the postcard, hoping for some words of Zen-like wisdom. He chuckled to himself, shook his head, and prepared to go back to his pruning. I touched his sleeve, and he must have seen the imploring look in my eyes, for he paused in mid-stride; and then he spoke, after another second's reflection –

“Foot you tofu never!”

I must have looked puzzled, so he tried again, a little slower –

“Motor show heaven!”

Still didn't get it.

“Futon hot forever!”

This wasn't really working, so he produced a pencil from behind his ear, and carefully wrote on the back of an empty seed packet –

Photoshop 7.0

I was shocked that someone who seemed so removed from the trappings of the 21st, and, God knows, even the 20th, centuries should have any knowledge of computer applications, but he explained that his grandson was a webmeister, and had bought the old man a cheapo computer to send and receive email. By the words Photoshop 7.0, I took it he meant the picture was a fake, that the garden ornament was digitally installed there on the veldt. I must say the job was convincing, all that one would expect from the latest upgrade to the industry leader. It also implied a skilled hand at the tiller, and on my mental checklist the field narrowed. It did not, however, explain exactly where the darned thing was.

All this interest recently in gay marriage puts me in mind of one of our own local institutions; the eponymous owners of Dave and Dave's Restaurant, a mere stone's throw from the Trellises. This fine eatery, based on a kind of rural Irish tradition as filtered through California Cuisine, has been a fixture here for over twenty years, and does a brisk trade. A couple of novelties exclusive, I think, to this establishment are - ten per cent discount for anyone called Dave, and if you're Dave and it's your Birthday, you eat for free! Needless to say, the place is always full of guys called Dave, with or without dates called Davina (who also qualify), and one of the amusing tricks the local kids get up to – the same kids who tie their sneakers together and throw them over telephone poles – is to put their heads around the front door and shout "Dave!" just to see the reaction. I think it courageous of Dave and Dave to call themselves Dave and Dave; I myself was once in a band with three Daves, and the only way around the confusion was to call them Peggy, Swarb and DM – so I salute our local epicureans for having the courage to tell it like it is, and confusion be damned. When I was a child, it must have been the peak of Davedom, a fine Old Testament name sounding strong, noble yet somehow in its colloquial form, accessible. Perhaps a whole generation of wartime mums was dreaming, during the conjugal act, of that loveable old smoothie David Niven, as later generations were enamoured of Jason King, or Kevin Keegan. Indeed, there was a time in the early Sixties when just about every Social Secretary at a college in Britain was called Dave; and about 30% of these stalwart fellows went on to work for agencies and record companies, compounding and disseminating confusion throughout the music industry. But I spoke of gay marriage; our restaurateurs caused something of a scandal a few years back, on what passes for the village green (central, and slightly green, but hemmed in on three sides by traffic, and it's not really a village); they performed a rather tongue-in-cheek wedding ceremony, with a full array of guests, and a local actor dressed as an archbishop; Dave was handsome in a grey morning

coat and top hat, the works; and Dave was resplendent in an ivory chiffon creation with satin trimming and eight foot train. Hundreds attended, great goodwill was generated, and the police finally came in and broke it up after complaints from local killjoys. But the sadness beneath all the fun was that the Daves would like to be legally joined, and after twenty years of steady love and devotion, how bad would that be? Speaking of Irish Cuisine, which now seems to be a reality – I was once in Belfast, playing with Fairport, and we were trying, in 1970, to get something to eat at midnight - well-nigh impossible in those days. Eventually we came upon a baked potato stall, definitely open, and selling spuds with a choice of fillings, you know, cheese, or chili, or ratatouille – one choice was a baked potato filled with fries...

Mavis stopped by the house on her way back from feeding the menagerie, and gave me a few free samples; this is a part-time venture she's getting into; her brother, who trained as a chemist, has developed a line of scented candles called 'My Old Flame', and she is doing the US distribution. The idea is – well, I'll just quote from the back of the label:

'My Old Flame – it's nostalgia all over again! One sniff will send you back to a bygone era...romantic places, exotic ages, childhood memories all come alive, thanks to our advanced scientific perfume blending system...bring the past alive, relaxing alone or with a loved one...let your imagination wander through time and space. Just close your eyes – and you're there!'

The effect of these candles is amazing! Mavis had previously demonstrated a couple of best sellers for us, and the detail in the smell is profound. The number one hit, and top of the line, is 'Casablanca'...Rick's Café, of course...in the foreground, Ilsa's perfume, something French, perhaps one of the earlier Chanel's; and Rick's after shave, a basic cologne...and the general smell of a bar, old spilt wine, fresh champagne, and a mixture of spirits, predominantly gin...a little further away, is that a touch of Sidney Greenstreet's body odour? And back further still, the general background smell of Morocco, small dashes of mint tea, hookah, and bad sewage. All quite remarkable, and selling like hot cakes. The other big hit fragrance, running a close second, is 'South Pacific'...not just Hawaii, but the movie! There's that unmistakable tang of the sea, and heavy tropical flower notes, tuberose, hibiscus, ginger, laid over a background of quietly rotting vegetation...and isn't that – yes, it must be! A very traditional American shampoo, Breck or Drene...it must be Mitzi washing that man out of her hair! Also a fair hint of aviation fuel. Of course, both of these candles are perfect for romantic couples, but I was interested in the prototypes that Mavis had brought round, and when all was quiet and the

house was empty a little later on, I lit up 'Paddington Station 1933', and sat back and closed my eyes. The soundtrack wasn't there, but after a while, the mind started to fill that in...first, the all pervasive smell of steam, and under that, layers of soot, fresh and stale, and a good rush of coal dust...a steamy mixture of tea, coffee, stale sandwich and onions coming from the snack bar, and strong but blended spike of body odour and a bit of cologne, implying the morning rather than the evening rush hour (when did they invent deodorant?) I wallowed in this for about an hour, then moved to another room to try 'School 1960'. This is one of five school-themed candles that are being tested, the others being, 'Tom Brown's Schooldays', 'Dotheboys Hall', 'School 1930', and 'School 1980'. I wouldn't say this one was pleasant, but it was effective, and I could only stand it for twenty minutes. Firstly, a strong tone of chalk dust, ink, and floor polish...under that, the insidious smell of school cabbage coming from the kitchens...that musky and slightly damp smell of old books, not unlike a second-hand bookshop...the aroma of damp wool, rain drying on school uniforms...and beneath it all, magically and skillfully evocative, the darker tones of boredom and fear. A few other upcoming titles in this extraordinary series of mood creators are:

Paris 1920

Paris Brothel 1890

Emergency Room

Commuter Flight

Camelot

Hampton Court

Saddam's Bunker

Hitler's Bunker

And a numbered series of ten called 'The Odyssey'.

Soccer games are becoming a regular circus. At last Saturday's match, the Governor turned up with no less than eight HumVs in tow. Such is the distraction level that a few opportunistic kids have realized that, if they time their run to fit with one of Arnie's pomp-and-circumstance arrivals, they can dribble through an entire team and score with zero resistance. Sadly, the Governor seems unaware that his cavalcade is causing a problem, and strides around shaking hands, slapping backs and saying "Fantastic!" His son Wolfie scored a couple of goals, but he is a selfish little tike, and I had him stay behind after the game to dismantle and store the

goals, a task strenuous even for adults– but he did it without complaining, to his credit. His father, however, is wising up to the fact that I pick on his son, and has stopped plying me with cigars. When I asked him for his position on gay marriage, he gave me a cold stare – you know, the ‘Terminator’ one, just before thirty or forty extras get their computer-enhanced come-uppance – and he said, “This will be a great opportunity to balance the books, get our kids out of debt, and give the power back to the people of California!” I wondered if he had misheard the question, but before I could re-pose, he had moved down the touchline to chat with Mr. Alphonso, who is a regular attendee at our Saturday games, where his coaching advice is tolerated, and quietly discarded. Mr. A had worked, before his last accident and retirement, on some movie of Arnold’s, presumably one involving horses – something based on Nordic Mythology rings a dull and dissonant bell somewhere; so they go back, and Mr. A is now milking it for all it is worth. At the end of the game, he gets offered a ride home in the gubernatorial HumV, something I know he’s been angling hard for, and he gives me a hearty ‘thumbs up’ as he slides into the shotgun seat. I roll my eyes at him in mock contempt, and get back to debriefing the team. I did drive a Hummer once, and was not impressed. As a road vehicle, it has no headroom, and is slow, uncomfortable, and cumbersome; its virtues, however, become apparent when one steers as the crow flies. Why bother with silly old roads, when you can just set a compass heading, or aim in a straight line for that distant church tower? Nothing will stand in your way, certainly not hedges or ditches, or fences or hills or rivers. On the other hand, a slightly used Sherman Tank will, in addition, negotiate its way through buildings, has a higher top speed, and rather better fuel consumption...it also has a gun.