

## News From Home 16

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I return to the Trellises after a long absence, to find things subtly changed. The weather is all one would expect, the air shimmering as the sun climbs over the yardarm; the neighbourhood looking chocolate-box as usual, with the unfortunate exception of Mr. Alphonso's hideous paint job on the house next door; but wander these leafy suburban streets for a spell, and you might imagine you have slipped through a crack in the time/space continuum, and into another century. I don't know if it started with Madonna's latest look, but it was in full flow at Keanu and Brandi's party, and now everyone between the ages of 10 and 30 are sporting clothes loosely based on the fashions of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Talk about connected to the zeitgeist – I was only dreaming the other day of an ultraviolet-resistant wig, and lo! It has appeared. Not the scratchy old thing Dr. Johnson used to sweat under, but a lightweight, polyweave, pre-powdered masterpiece of wiggery, SPF 50 and recommended by dermatologists. This is, of course, nothing to do with the strange animal that perches on top of the insecure bald gentleman like a sedate Pekingese; this is the glorious wig of history, as worn by Washington, Pepys, Moliere, and hanging judges through the ages. Wig emporia have sprung up all over town. Our local skate shop, 'Skatz 'n' Boardz', where Honourable Number Three Son can be found spending his paltry argent de poche, is now renamed 'Wigz, Skatz 'n' Boardz', and features a fine selection

of headgear, including the 'Jefferson' the 'King Louis' and the 'Marie Antoinette'. Our own beloved niece, Brandi, has quit her job in Dental Hygiene, and is coining it hand over fist in her new shop, 'Assumed Mane', just off the High Street. Other local outlets, (and I must stress that this really is a local phenomenon, probably restricted to a five mile radius) include:

Wigz 'r' Us

Wigz 'n' Thingz

Hair Apparent

Ye Olde Village Wiggerie

Keep Your Hair On! (Wig Support Products)

Knee britches are now the norm for young gentlemen, but oddly not often worn with hose and buckled shoes, bare calves and sneakers being a more practical alternative. Frock coats make an occasional appearance, along with frilly shirts and snuff boxes. For women, the impracticality of 17 layers of petticoats means the full look is rarely employed at the beach, but is popular as evening wear, or as an après-swim cover-up. Fans are hugely in vogue, and since nobody smokes any more, it gives the girls something expressive to do with their hands. One excellent knock-on effect of all this has been the closure of our local Starbucks, to be replaced by 'Ye Drury Lane Coffee Shoppe', where folk with an Eighteenth Century bent can gather to discuss the affairs of the day, read a little poetry to each other, and delight in a cup of beverage. Here, the smoking ban means that the clay pipe is more of a fashion accessory, and some smart local entrepreneur is manufacturing them out of soybean, licorice, or rocky road flavours for later consumption. Indeed, the language itself seems to be changing – a common greeting between young folk is a hearty 'Good Morrow!' or 'Good day to you Sir!' with an inquiry of 'What ails thee, Jack?' or "What o'clock is it?" not seeming out of place.

Back to the more mundane world of the soccer field...yes, mundane, for I and all the boys are now completely blasé about the presence of the State Governor as our assistant coach, and his Pomp-Rock-style coming and going now causes no more than a flutter and yawn from the team – we are playing well, and have made it to the finals. Arnie has told me in no uncertain terms that a win next Saturday is essential – indeed, failure will not be countenanced, and our best guarantee of success is to play Wolfgang as lone striker. He emphasized the need to be more economical in defence. I asked him if, on the subject of economy, he would consider selling off a few of his fleet of eight HUMVs, in these times of soaring fuel costs, and all, just as an example to the constituents. He said he would certainly consider it.

I'm worried about Witherstock. She has now taken to making doom-laden pronouncements, often at inopportune moments, and is casting a pall over the happiness of the household. I can't fault her tidiness and work rate, but her mutterings are scaring the kids. "It will all end in tears", she'll say, or "It's like there's a curse on us all!" while staring through an unseen portal into the future. Why, just the other day, I asked her if she wouldn't mind putting the vegetable scraps that were no good for animal feed onto the compost heap in the back corner of the garden. "I cannot go to that God-forsaken spot!" she exclaimed, giving a theatrical shudder and turning back to her ironing. And when Honourable Number Two Son came in with another scraped elbow from falling off his skateboard, Witherstock remarked that it was as if Fate had marked him out for special punishment. I told her scarred knees and elbows were really very par for the course in Southern California, but when she gets that distant look in her eyes, words just don't seem to get through. I'm sorry now that I borrowed Cedric's cricket bat; I should have guessed that a forty-year-old Gun and Moore County Special would probably be a bit brittle in the glue department – the handle disengaged with the very first square cut I attempted off the bowling of Honourable Number One Son, and the bat portion went flying over the fence into next door. They are away at Club Med for two weeks, so I must remember to

retrieve the bits, and glue it all back together, and try to return it with nonchalance.

I ran into Georgio at the Barracuda club, and after discussing various topics, I told him about the latest chapter in the disappearing Japanese statue saga. To my amazement, he winked, and said, "Georgio fix. All taken care of." Before I could ask him to elaborate, he spotted a chum from the old country, and disappeared for twenty minutes. When I finally got him back, he told me that he had been rummaging around in the summerhouse, looking for the spare hose, and had stumbled upon the lantern. Thinking that I had hidden it there, with a view to disposing of it later, without Mrs. RT spotting it, he had decided to undertake the job himself. "You are best friend to Georgio" he said, "I repay tiny tiny bit, all kindness from you. Georgio throw off bridge, this time very deep. Nobody find. In Slovakia we say, sometime bull cover cow fifty time before sperm reach egg." I was temporarily thrown by his colourful analogy, but it made more sense than most of his earthy sayings. What could I do but thank him, and I was left to ponder whether I wanted the thing back or not, and if I wanted it, was there hope of recovery?

Over a pleasant evening game of Canasta, Mr. Alphonso shocked me by declaring that he was taking Viagra, and that it was proving to be a great success, "A success with whom?" I ventured. Who was the fellow beneficiary of the wonder drug, beloved of ageing magazine entrepreneurs? I should have guessed the answer would be Anita, his housekeeper. I had suspected them of some amorous past, but had assumed all physical expressions of this would have ended with Mr., A's last riding accident. Although he had sustained partial damage to spine and hip, some lower parts were obviously still capable of functioning, and he delighted in telling me of his great success in the male inferior position. I tried to put the mental pictures out of my head – after all, how old was Mr. A? Certainly in his seventies, possibly eighties, an age when one could be expected to hang up one's condoms and move on to more spiritual

contemplations. As for Anita, she positively bounced in with the tea tray, and gave a girlish giggle when Mr. A slapped her appreciatively on the rump. The old shouting matches seem to have subsided, for a while anyway...

Restaurant aficionados will remember that that fascinating eatery, 'Gridlock', formally located in the mall; they will recall the décor, basically a clever rendering of a freeway with bumper-to-bumper traffic. Customers sat in the vehicle of their choice (many classics to choose from), and ate reasonable food at more than reasonable prices. Fans were disappointed when it closed its doors, but will be excited to learn that it has reopened, thanks to new legislation, and a few well-spotted loopholes in the hygiene laws, on the freeway itself! So predictable is the rush hour congestion at the intersection of the 10 and 405 freeways, that there is time to attach a tray with tablecloth, flowers and condiments, serve a three course meal chosen from a narrow but exemplary French bistro menu, and have the bill paid all within 120 feet. The food is cooked in a long, low art deco building at the top of the embankment, and a system of belts ferries the food and retrieves the dirty plates. The owners are ecstatic at the success of the scheme; especially gratifying is the high profit margin; normally a restaurant loses about 5% through dishonesty – customers doing a runner – squeezing out through the toilet window, popping outside to take a cell phone call, racing around the block to settle a bet and disappearing, etc. The chances of evading payment at "Gridlock" are, of course, nil. They will come and find you fifty yards up the road if there is a question over that dodgy cheque, or even a few foreign coins in the waiter's tip. In extreme circumstances, they just radio ahead to the Highway Patrol, which has now opened a similar roadside 'Crime Boutique' a few hundred yards further along, where they leisurely write tickets, arrest long-sought criminals, and recruit new officers.