

ANTIC ANTILLEANA

C.K. Starr's newsletter to family and friends
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WE ALL GOTTA ANSWER TO SOMEBODY (OR OTHER)

A student sent me a set of snoopy, personal questions over the wire a while back. Having no respect for anyone's privacy, including my own, I didn't mind answering them, and I don't mind passing them along to you now. Whether you mind reading them is another matter.

LIVING ARRANGEMENT?

I own my house -- well, actually, the bank owns it, but not for long -- near the head of the Caura Valley in Trinidad. It's a small house, named Obronikrom, just fine for one or two people, and it is coming along nicely.

WHAT BOOK(S) ARE YOU READING NOW?

Now, I could be cute and say "I'm not reading any book, I'm answering a wily-ass questionnaire", but I know what you mean. Three that I've started and expect to finish before too long:

Heinrich Kramer & Jakob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, the classic textbook against witchcraft first published in 1486; Martin Glaberman & Seymour Faber, *Working for Wages*; and Günther Grass, *The Tin Drum*.

WHAT'S ON YOUR MOUSE PAD?

Nothing. It's plain. How could anyone possibly care about this?

FAVOURITE GAME?

Chuckle-Belly. It's even more fun than Pass the Bod, because you can arrange a game with people who have no idea how it's played, yet it still

happens as it should.

Here's how it works. One person lies on the floor. Then another lies down perpendicular to the first, with her/his head on the other's tummy. A third person lies perpendicular to the second, head on tummy as before, head pointed in the opposite way to the first person's. Finally, a fourth person lies down to complete the square. The first person has to lift her/his head in order for the fourth to slide in with her/his tummy underneath.

Then the four people just lie there. Nobody does anything, and no one watching does anything to disturb the game. Before too long, one of the four players will be impressed by the absurdity of the situation, and she/he will start to chuckle. Now, it's a really hilarious sensation to lie with your head on the tummy of someone who is chuckling, and this second person will very quickly get to laughing too. This sets up a positive-feedback cycle, and soon the whole crowd is just howling. And this prime-quality entertainment doesn't cost one single cent.

FAVOURITE MAGAZINES?

Maledicta, the scholarly journal for the study of insults and cussing. At once a erudite and a real panic.

The Onion, an electronic weekly humour magazine.

FAVOURITE SMELLS?

Newly-mown hay, not so much for itself as its evocations. When I was five

or six, during haying season my father brought home a baby skunk that he had found in a field. It was the darlingest pet I had ever had, and I had great fun with it until it died of unknown causes. Ever since, the smell of newly-mown hay is a blast from the past.

On the purely sensory level, the smell of any market in Grenada is extremely agreeable, especially if one is near the spices section.

LEAST FAVOURITE SMELLS?

The excreta of cats. Really penetrating, and there's something truly soul-battering about it.

FAVOURITE SOUND?

My favouritest sound of all is the saxophone laugh, which is the exclusive property of black women. The third Mrs Starr had exactly two laughs, the tinkling brook laugh and the saxophone laugh. The first was delightful enough, but hardly a day goes by that I don't miss the second one. If we had been legally married, I would positively have sued for custody of the saxophone laugh. After all, she could always have grown another one.

If that is unavailable, I'll take the sound of far-off bagpipes, a nearby saxophone, or a tokay gecko at intermediate remove.

WORST FEELING IN THE WORLD?

I don't know. It hasn't happened to me yet. Probably something to do with utter helplessness.

FAVOURITE COLOUR?

Red. This is a very basic, almost visceral response. My first major disillusionment with humanity occurred in my first year of school. The teacher

asked us all our favourite colour, which I thought was a rather pointless question. After all, red was patently the most colourful colour, the queen of the visible spectrum. It simply hadn't occurred to me that some people with eyes might not see it that way, and I was shocked when most of my classmates answered "Blue." This is no exaggeration. I was truly shocked, and I'm not sure I have entirely recovered from that day.

In second place, green, although it's a distant second. After all, green isn't nearly as red as red is.

HOW MANY RINGS BEFORE YOU ANSWER THE PHONE?

What makes you think I answer the phone? It's there for me to call other people, not for them to call me.

FUTURE CHILD'S NAME?

Well, my surgeon says I'm not having any more, and there's not much room for debate on that topic with Dr Edward Shapiro of Riverside Drive in Ottawa. Still, I have some names up my sleeve, just in case I (and any future Mrs Starr) should care to adopt. If a boy, either Smokestack Lightning or Jumping Jack Flash. If a girl, Ruby Tuesday or Motorcycle Irene.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE?

Love, bugs and revolution.

WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING?

Something like "Holy smoke, I'm still alive! Hot damn!" One day I will wake up to find that I'm dead, which will be a major disappointment. In the very distant future, if I have anything to say about it.

FAVOURITE FOODS?

I'm supposed to be a vegetarian and a civilized man, but is for true responses only. My favourite meal is a sandwich made of lean raw ground beef on a whole-wheat bun with a slice or two of onion and beaucoup of real mustard. And a Guinness. Notice that I did not say "steak tartare", which is for sissies. I said raw ground beef, and I meant it.

CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA?

Chocolate. You don't have to be Dr Freud to see that this question isn't about ice cream.

DO YOU LIKE TO DRIVE FAST?

No, and I mostly think that those who do are twits. This is especially so in the dinky little fly-speck island where I live. Trinidadians seem intent on driving fast and overtaking. It's a reflect, the sort of thing that arises in the absence of thought. No matter how fast you drive, you can't go very far before you reach the ocean and have to turn back.

On the other hand, I am very much concerned to drive elegantly.

DO YOU SLEEP WITH A STUFFED ANIMAL?

No. Your editor is much too arrogant to admit it -- to himself; he doesn't much care what you think -- if he needs comfort. I'm not saying he does, mind you, just that he wouldn't admit it if he did.

STORMS -- COOL OR SCARY?

Storms are a gas. I've been in three hurricanes, and my great regret is that I slept through each of them. I didn't know that a storm was supposed to be on its way, and I didn't think much of the rain and gusty winds in the nighttime, but when I walked out int he morning

the landscape had been transformed. So, when Hurricane Bret was headed this way around 1992, I determined to stay up and experience him first hand. I stood out in the yard, and every now and then some green-black clouds would come rolling over the top of the Northern Range in our direction, and I would call out to the second Mrs Starr -- who, unaccountably, preferred to interpose walls between herself and Brother Bret -- "It's happening." But I was mistaken, and I finally had to go to bed. The news the next day indicated that Bret had gone down the strait between Tobago and Trinidad, touching neither island ant taking it out on the poor, long-suffering Venezuelans. I'm still looking for my hurricane.

WHAT TYPE WAS YOUR FIRST CAR?

I don't recall. Something very ordinary, and I gave it up before very long. The greatest car I ever had was a Volkswagen minibus named Waddell. The name came to me in a summer-afternoon revery. If you're really good, I may someday tell you the story of Waddell and me and Butch and the fire in Tupelo, Mississippi. Right now I have an almost-black jeep named Pearl and my white motorcycle, the Unity of Theory & Practice.

IF YOU COULD MEET ONE PERSON DEAD OR ALIVE?

There are plenty of people I'd like to see dead, but I'm trying to be charitable, so let's put a positive spin on this question. I very much regret that I never made the effort to meet Malcolm X, or at least to go and hear him. I did have some good conversation with Sun Ra, which partly compensates. I'm still kicking myself that, when I was stuck in

England for a week last year, I didn't think to take the opportunity to go looking for Wilson Harris. But he lives on, and I expect I'll be in England again one day. If I had been born a century earlier I would have been very pleased to make Frederick Douglass's acquaintance.

FAVOURITE ALCOHOLIC DRINK?

Guinness extra stout. I used to favour another fine product of Ireland, Bushmill's 9-year-old whiskey, but I no longer drink anything stronger than I am. Someday when we have nothing better to do, I may tell you the story of Bushmill's and Dylan Thomas. Better yet, ask Al Starbuck to tell it.

ZODIAC SIGN?

Do Not Disturb (with idiotic questions like this).

DO YOU EAT THE STEMS OF BROCCOLI?

I sure do. One broccolo at a time, if I'm not in a hurry. You got a problem with dat, buddy?

IF YOU COULD HAVE ANY JOB OR PROFESSION YOU WANTED?

Human cannonball. Even better than being at the top of a squash pyramid.

WOULD YOU DYE YOUR HAIR ANY COLOUR?

I don't have to. It's already any colour.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN LOVE?

Always.

IF THE GLASS HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL?

Yes. This is not a joke, it's my answer to the question. It's about as zen

as I get.

FAVOURITE MOVIES?

My standard fare is British feature films, especially of the Merchant & Ivory style. Also very partial to Kenneth Branagh's Shakespeare movies. My other staple is spaghetti westerns. Ever since seeing *High Plains Drifter*, I find it hard to take seriously any western that isn't at least a bit spaghetti.

DO YOU TYPE WITH YOUR FINGERS ON THE RIGHT KEYS?

Yes. I took typing class in my second year of high school and have always been glad I did. I was under the inspiration of watching my distant cousin, Al Starbuck, one day as he sat and looked out the window, tapping away on an old manual. It looked so free and easy, tapping as he gazed out the window at Ohio, not looking at the page and certainly not watching his fingers. It's the only time I've seen him look Buddhist.

WHAT'S UNDER YOUR BED?

I suppose the real import of this question is "Do you know what's under your bed?" Well, I do know. There's a certain amount of lizard and spider doo-doo, as Obronikrom is a lizard and spider sanctuary, and charming little geckos walk right past my ear in the nighttime, snarfing down little bugs that come to the lights. There's also some dust, and there is a nice supply of books. After all, the world is full of books I haven't read, and I'm not about to let good insomnia go to waste. There may also be a troll or two, but I haven't inquired closely into the darker corners under there.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE?

If the question were posed in the past, I would say Starr Elms, the ancestral farm north of Toronto. But it's not there anymore. Of the places that are still there, I would most like to return to Palawan, the highlands of northern Luzon, and just about anywhere in the Andes. Of those that I have not visited, Socotra and the Dulit Range of Sarawak are high on my list. But then, as Sun Ra has pointed out to those with ears to hear, space is the place.

FAVOURITE SPORT TO WATCH?

This question reveals a certain moral weakness in the compiler of the questionnaire. It's okay to ask about watching, but this should be preceded by an inquiry into what sport(s) one most likes to play. There's often a difference. For example, baseball is great fun to play, but you will notice that the people in the stands are mostly doing other things while they idly watch the game, even if it's just listening to another game on the transistor radio. I find basketball a great game to watch, but confusing to play.

American football televises well, and it's constant fun to play, too. I've never played the full version, with pads and all. As kids, we played tackle football without pads, but when we got to be about 10 or 11 we became too heavy to do it safely and had to stop. I've only played tackle ball once since then. One undergraduate winter there was a game in the snow between the student newspaper and the Students' Council. I think I played for the newspaper. The beauty of it was that in snow about a foot deep no one could get up much speed, and when one went

down it was into all that snow, so that no one could get hurt, no matter how hard we played. Besides, this was Ottawa in the winter, so we were all bundled up. That was more fun than any of the many games of touch football I've played as an adult.

There are two great and fulfilling moments in touch football. On offense, the big thrill is to go long and catch the long bomb in the end zone. On defense, it's to penetrate the line and make the quarterback eat the ball.

WHAT IS THE BEST BOOK EVER WRITTEN?

Yes, that's how the question came to me. I agree, it's crude, so let's improve it to "Name three or four truly great books." Here they are:

The plays of Euripides.

Mezz Mezzrow, *Really the Blues*, the most satisfying book I have read about music.

Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, the best book I have read about vodou.

Just about anything by Wilson Harris, especially *Palace of the Peacock*.

SAY ONE NICE THING ABOUT THE PERSON WHO SENT THIS TO YOU.

She makes a funny face seem positively glamorous.

FROM THE PEOPLE TO WHOM YOU SENT THIS, WHO IS THE MOST LIKELY NOT TO RESPOND?

Cousin Roguer won't even read it.

Floyd will read it, but then his attention will, you know, like ... wander.

Howard will read it and start to answer, but then he'll come to question no. 16 and lose his nerve.

AND WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO RESPOND?

Presh will positively tell me everything about herself. I have my heart set on this, and you know how

hard it is to re-set your heart.

SuperNova Yerakina will provide full and insightful answers to uplift the spirit of each and every one of us.

BEING A THROCKMORTON

Your editor has never lacked for family. Aside from my original extended family, I have at various times been adopted into four others. As an exchange student in Germany in the mid-1960s, my host family was Annelise Hahn, whose son Ulrich was at the same time attending my high school in Ohio.

About 20 years later I was effectively adopted into the Arce family of Sorsogon province in the Philippines. Nothing as formal as with the Hahns, but I realized that I was regarded as a member of the family on a return visit to the village, when my "sister-in-law" mentioned to me that the young men had worn out their basketball, and would I please send them a new one when I returned to Manila? In other words, I was a gainfully-employed member of the family, so it was understood that I would chip in as needed.

Then, about three years ago, I became a Rada. The Rada Community in Belmont, Trinidad preserves a traditional religion from Benin (formerly Dahomey) that is substantially one with haitian vodou. It is still known as Vodou in Benin, where it enjoys official recognition and a major national holiday. At the time I became friendly with the Rada Community, its high priest was the magisterial Sedley Antoine. He has since joined the ancestors, but not

before he surprised me by announcing at a festival that I was to be regarded as his son. He didn't ask my permission. He didn't have to, and neither I nor any of the other Radas would have thought to question his decision.

The fourth adoption is the present topic. Robert J. Throckmorton of Las Vegas is a retired educator and a leading light in the Amici Linguarum international linguistics society. The Amici Linguarum comprise both professional and amateur linguists, and I am of course among the amateurs. As a result of a spinal injury many years ago, Dr Throckmorton doesn't travel as much as he would like, although he is otherwise in good health and active.

The Throckmorton family of Britain sent a number of emigrant propagules to the eastern USA some centuries ago. This very extended family has occasional reunions, including one in Williamsburg, Virginia last month. It was not a casual affair. The organizing committee approached it as if it were a convention, with bulletins, organized events, and forward registration. Robert J. wanted to make the scene, but he knew he was unlikely to do so in person, so he had the bright idea of designating me to represent him. That suited me very well, as I was to be in nearby Washington at the time, so he had a proper certificate of credentials made up and mailed to me, and I got in touch

with the organizers. Far from regarding me as an interloper, Caroline Lewin, Lynn Sherman and Nula Throckmorton thought this was a dandy idea and welcomed me as an instant cousin.

The reunion extended over several days, but I could only take one day away from work, so I chose Monday 17 June as the best day to be there. I took the bus to Williamsburg and arrived at the reunion site in time for the walking tour of Colonial Williamsburg. Nyla was right there in the lobby, carrying my registration package, so just like that I was set. She had even assigned me to a tour group.

It's a good tour, intelligently put together, with plenty of interesting content. The high point of the regular schedule was a visit to the House of Burgesses, with good commentary by a knowledgeable guide. However, for our group there was a special, unplanned opportunity as we came out to the street. An actor who does the role of George Washington was strolling and was introduced by our guide. He told us the year was 1774, and the House of Burgesses would meet that day to reach a position to take to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. It was noted that Virginia, being the richest of the 13 colonies, would bring special weight to the congress's deliberations.

Taking the opportunity, I posed a series of questions to Colonel Washington. His most interesting -- and wonderfully arid -- response was to my last question.

"Colonel, I understand that Mr Jefferson is not entirely comfortable with the institution of chattel slavery.

What is your own view? Are you comfortable with it?"

"Of course I am not comfortable with it. It is a manifestly unjust system. But what are we to do? We cannot manage without it, and we are now facing a crisis. If you can suggest an alternative, Sir, you have my attention."

It was a fine role, and I would have been happy to talk with Washington for another couple of hours, but lunch was waiting in a tavern established in 1707.

They take their colonial history seriously in Williamsburg. In the Visitors' Center bookstore I found 24 biographies and interpretations of Jefferson and a similar number of books on Washington.

That evening was the banquet. Not an ordinary little cook-out but a real banquet. We Throckmortons take our reunions seriously. Among other things, I got to meet Clare Throckmorton, the grand old lady of the clan and keeper of the ancestral manor in England. To my regret, my bus was leaving too early for me to hear her feature address.

However, I was there to receive a fine certificate of status as an Honorary Throckmorton and to present my credentials as Robert J.'s representative to the family archive.

The organizing committee had prepared good-looking name tags for all of us. In addition to name and place of residence, each indicated the original immigrant from which the bearer was descended. To judge by what I saw, John of Rhode Island must have been quite a guy. There was of course no progenitor listed on my name tag. I'm adopted.

THE DAD AWARDS
by Francis A. Starr

On Friday June 28, 2002 my sister & dad & I went down to Easton, Maryland to my dad's good buddy Edward Simonoff. The next day we me 3 other good buddies of his, Eric Dashiell, Harold Cooper & Peter Reid. I call Harold Huraldo.

I wondered out of these 5 nominees which would make the best dad. I asked each one 7 questions. I pre-ranked each question from 0 to 4. 0 is the worst answer, and 4 is the best. Afterwards, I added up the preranks to reach an official score. The ranks were Top Dad, Runner-Up Dad, Center Dad, Almost Nightmare Dad & Nightmare Dad. Here are the questions & preranks:

1. How much allowance would I get? Da=4 Ed=1 Er=3 Hu=0 Pe=2
2. How often can I have a donut? Da=0 Ed=3 Er=2 Hu=2 Pe=4
3. Can we move to Los Angeles? Da=0 Ed=3 Er=2 Hu=2 Pe=4
4. Nova's opinion. Da=2 Ed=1 Hu=0 Er=4 Pe=3
5. What do you think of KFC? Da=1 Ed=2

CHEESES OF FRANCE
by Francis A. Starr

[The following are Francis's reactions to various native cheeses sampled during a swing through southern France. He seems somehow to have taken Mozzarella as the ideal to which cheese should aspire to conform. The cheeses are ranked from best to worst.]

Saint-Nectar

It almost tastes like Mozzarella, but not quite. It's the best so far.

Er=4 Hu=0 Pe=3

6. Can I have a dog? Da=4 Ed=0 Er=3 Hu=2 Pe=1

7. How often do you lie per year? Da=4 Ed=3 Er=2 Hu=0 Pe=1.

Now, I'll show you their results. The # before the = sign means the prerank. The # after the = sign is the amount of times the nominee got that prerank. The 7-digit # is the order the preranks happened.

Daddy: 4=3 3=0 2=1 1=1 0=2 4002144
Total=15

Ranked 3rd, awarded Center Dad
Edward: 4=0 3=2 2=2 1=2 0=1 1231203
Total=12

Ranked 4th, awarded Almost
Nightmare Dad
Eric: 4=2 3=3 2=2 1=0 0=0 3324432
Total=21

Ranked 1st, awarded Top Dad
Huraldo: 4=0 3=0 2=2 1=1 0=4 Total=5

Ranked last, awarded Nightmare
Dad

Peter: 4=2 3=2 2=1 1=2 0=0 total=18
Ranked 2nd, awarded Runner-Up
Dad

Tomme de Brébis

It's close to Mozzarella, but not quite.

Port Salut

It's not so bad. It had only a tiny bit of sourness.

Emmental

It has a sour taste. I wouldn't eat it voluntarily, but if I had to I'd just get on with it.

Pont Montier

Bad in smell and taste.

Petit Pont l'Evêque

Bad in smell and taste.

Camembert

It tastes awful, but it's not as bad as onions.

Munster

It smells like 99% poop and 1% cheese. I think's a good poison for mice. It's as bad as onion. On a scale from 0 to 10, it would be placed at -2.

Roquefort

[So dreadful that he spat it out right away and declined all comment.]

Cultural Conjectures

ON HUMOUR AND WHY WE LAUGH. OR DO WE?

I recall well the group of joke-telling boys with whom I associated at age 8-12. For some reason, I don't remember any of the jokes, although they were certainly of the traveling-salesman genre. In the fourth grade at Hopewell Avenue Public School, we occasionally had a most amazing substitute teacher, one Mrs Johnson, who seemed to spend most of the class time telling long, breath-taking stories in her english accent. I don't believe we got anything out of her convoluted jokes except the conviction that they and she absolutely came from the moon. I well recall the stunned reaction to one of her long-anticipated punch lines: "It's a long way to Tipperary." None of us had any idea what Tipperary was, except that it was evidently deep. Years later, someone explained it to me, but it wasn't the same.

The earliest joke I can recall was told by my own father. One day the lifeguard at the country club took one of the regulars aside and discreetly informed him that some members had been complaining that he was peeing in the pool. "But I thought everyone did it"

exclaimed the abashed micturator. "Well, yes, they do" admitted the lifeguard, "but not from the diving board." I was forcefully reminded of this some years ago at the pool with my kids. Three-year-old Francis was standing on the edge while I dove, and I surfaced to find him with his shorts down, gravely pouring a mighty stream into the pool. The assembled bathers got raucous as I shouted at him to stop and then hustled him off to the loo. I expect their amusement at my consternation prevented any from being pissed off at my lapse in parenting.

The Diving Board also ranks as one of the funniest I have heard. Even larger in my personal legend is the Boilsucker Joke, which I heard from David Roguer Stanley in 1962. It was been one of my staples every since and was intimately involved in the process by which I chose Henry Hermann as my thesis supervisor at Georgia. However, I believe my all-time favourite was told by our seventh-grade teacher, Mrs Stevenson. With good intonation and timing, it is a real crowd pleaser. I happened to tell it to a couple of students one day, and word got around, so that shortly afterwards I was prevailed upon to regale a much larger group of students at a party. Here it is:

There was once a man with a big fierce bulldog, which he took out walking every day. One day as they were walking their accustomed route, the man with the big fierce bulldog espied, approaching in the distance, a man walking a long low yellow dog. Not being of a confrontational temper, the man with the big fierce bulldog called out "You, sir, with the long low yellow dog. I respectfully suggest that you cross over and pass by on the other side of the street, because my big fierce bulldog is mighty aggressive." Well, the man with the long low yellow dog tipped his hat and responded "I thank you, sir, for your gracious expression of neighbourly concern. But I believe my long low yellow dog can take care of himself."

"Well", thought the man with the big fierce bulldog, "if he can't take a friendly suggestion, there's nothing more I can do." And the two stubborn men approached each other along the block. The two dogs saw each other and got to bristling and snarling, growling at each other and straining at their leashes until, just as they were about nose to nose, they both snapped their leashes and launched themselves at each other in unslaked blood lust.

The street rang furiously with their barks and howls, and the air became a fine mist of hair and blood as they whirled about each other in battle fury. In time, the contest was decided, the street became silent again, the mist settled and one could see that, sure enough, that big fierce bulldog had come out second best.

And the man with the big fierce bulldog turned to the man with the long low yellow dog and asked "What kind of a dog is that, anyway?" At this, the man

with the long low yellow dog tipped his hat most courteously and replied "Well, sir, before I cut off his tail and painted him yellow, he was an alligator."

Here, in modified (i.e. improved) form, is one sent to me last year by Robert J. Throckmorton of Last Vegas:

A couple was playing golf on a course lined with million-dollar houses. The husband pointed them out to his wife with the warning "Honey be very careful when you drive. If you knock out one of those windows, it'll cost a fortune to fix."

And, sure enough, on the next tee she put the ball right through the big front window of the biggest house along the course. The husband winced and said "Oh dear. Well, I guess we had better go up and apologize and find out how much this is going to cost." So, they rang the doorbell and heard a voice say "Come in." They walked into the living room, where there was broken glass all over and a broken bottle lying in the middle of the floor. Lounging on a sofa was a man who asked "Are you the people who broke the window?"

"Uh, yes" said the husband, "and we're mighty sorry about it."

"Not at all" said the man. "In fact, I want to thank you. You see, I'm a genie that was trapped for a thousand years in that bottle over there, and you've just released me. I'm allowed to grant three wishes, so I'll give you each one wish and keep the last for myself. What do you say to that?"

"Wow, that's great" said the husband. "What'll you have, Honey?" The wife right away decided on a house in every country in Europe and two in the USA. "Consider it done" said the genie. "And you, sir?" The husband

simply wanted a million dollars a year for the rest of his life. "No problem" said the genie. "It's the least I can do."

"And what about your own wish?" the husband asked.

"Well now" said the genie, "I've been kept bottled up all those centuries and even seen a woman in all that time. My wish is to make love with your wife. Would that be okay?"

"Well" answered the husband, "we did get tons of money and all those houses, so I guess I wouldn't mind. Is it okay with you, Honey?" In fact, this was a mighty handsome genie, and wife was more than willing, but she discreetly muted her enthusiasm and just said okay.

So the two of them went upstairs, where they ravished each other for two hours. Afterward, as they lay there, he turned to her and asked "How old is your husband?"

"Thirty-four" she replied.

"No kidding? And he still believes in genies?"

This is on the same theme as the joke Al Starbuck told me almost 40 years ago, in which the dreadful old hag ends by exclaiming to the handsome young gent "You mean you believed me?"

A Reader's Notes

WHAT SHALL WE MAKE OF QUAKER ABOLITIONISM?

I look forward to the day when the time of chattel slavery will be a matter of no greater immediate relevance to our time than, for example, the Meiji Restoration, when slavery will be taught in school as just one of many topics of historical interest. That day's time has

You have undoubtedly noticed that the sense of what is funny varies a great deal not only between people but between peoples. As a high-school student in Germany, I regaled by classmates with american shaggy-dog stories. I well recall their appetite for these and the look of astonishment after each one. "Wow. Incredible. Americans think that's funny? How about that."

Almost 20 years later, while giving a dinner party in the Philippines, I figured I should lighten the atmosphere with a classic howler. Picking up a banana, I got their attention and gave them an old standard.

"Uh, excuse me. You have a banana in your ear."

"I can't hear you. I have a banana in my ear."

And nobody laughed. I figured there might be a bit of a language problem, so I was prepared. Picking up the banana again:

"Taim pa, dunay saging sa imong dunggang."

"Sorry, di ko kadungog, kay na'ay saging sa akong dunggang."

Still, nobody laughed. It wasn't a language barrier, after all.

not come, but I think we need to get serious about beginning to set the time of slavery aside, so that it will soon loom small in our legend.

In the past, when the discussion of this period got personal, I was at pains to point out that my ancestors were not slave holders and that some appear to have been active abolitionists, but no more. It's not a militant statement, more like an apology. Regardless of my

ancestors, I am no more complicit with the institution than is Khafra Kambon. The identity and deeds of the ancestors are irrelevant, while what one makes of oneself is everything. Yeah, that's more like it. It almost makes me wish I could claim that my ancestors were in the slave business.

A paragraph in Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery* jumped out and surprised me. I might as well quote it in full:

"Quaker nonformity did not extend to the slave trade. In 1756 there were eighty-four Quakers listed as members of the Company trading to Africa, among them the Barclay and Barin families. Slave dealing was one of the most lucrative investments of English, as of American Quakers, and the name of a slaver, *The Willing Quaker*, reported

from Boston at Sierra Leone in 1793, symbolizes the approval with which the slave trade was regarded in Quaker circles. The Quaker opposition to the slave trade came first and largely not from England but from America, and there from the small rural communities of the North, independent of slave labor. 'It is difficult,' writes Dr Gary, 'to avoid the assumption that opposition to the slave system was at first confined to a group who gained no direct advantage from it, and consequently possessed an objective attitude.'"

I suspect that Williams's view of the Quakers is somewhat facile -- he couldn't very well be expected to go very far into the attitudes and practices of this particular segment of English society -- but it is entirely consistent with his overall thesis, which is widely accepted.

GOOD GUIDANCE FOR DAILY LIFE

Some of you may have wondered if your editor has a personal philosophy of life. As a matter of fact, I do. It consists of a set of canonical precepts that I call the Five Nevers.

1. Never eat anything of unknown composition.

If they're trying to hide something from you, there's a reason for it.

2. Never trust a black man in a necktie.

He's not on the level. He wants something from you.

3. Never get into an elevator when you have to pee.

One time in 167, on average, the elevator will get stuck, and then where will be you be? As with the first Never, this is to be understood in its broad metaphorical sense, but don't neglect the literal sense.

4. Never sleep with anyone whose troubles are worse than your own.

Of course, if everyone followed this rule we'd be in a real fix, wouldn't we?

5. Never let nobody mess with your mojo.