

Annual Foolishness was on a 4-way fold paper with the cover above.

A timely storm has deflected me from my appointed rounds. I'm nowhere near as stalwart as the postmen of yore, nor as my Youthful Self. So I'll start this letter snug at home with paper-grading Ron and 3 slothful felines, admittedly without an open fire or chestnuts roasting, but grateful not to be on the TCH (TransCanadaHighway) en route to a library be meeting in a Sparcely Inhabited Place. Last week I made this activity more fun by telling stories to children on Ramea, an island 9 miles out in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and in Burgeo, a remote community on the south shore (made famous in Farley Mowatt's *A Whale for the Killing*). I needed something to do while waiting to meet with library boards or to catch the M.V. Gallipoli, the perky, but infrequent, little ferry that replaced the notorious rusty tub, the Maid of Islay, which always guaranteed nausea within 5 minutes of embarkation. Now, I survive nicely by remaining prone for the entire hour and 10 minutes, except on very calm, very warm days (rare) when the trip past hundreds of tiny, unpeopled islands is exquisite.



Slothful feline: "Tom" was added to the menagerie last January. We have been unable to make anything more esoteric than "Tom" adhere to this animal. He is not esoteric. Note the serrated ears.

GENERAL CONTRARINESS OF THE WORLD

What kind of a year have we had here, far away from Desert Storm, the fractious republics of Mikhail and Boris, and the horrors of emerging nationalisms, or not so far? I wonder

how our fearless leaders will react when the rest of the world leaps as quickly to recognize a sovereign Quebec as quickly as we recognized the Ukraine? Tune in this time next year. And we weren't so far from. Desert Storm. Due to the third world economic status of Newfoundland, a disproportionate number of Newfoundlanders serve in our armed forces and yellow ribbons hung from almost every tree on the Port au Port Peninsula. Two of my staff members had family members in the Gulf. At least we didn't have too close a look at the puffery of the "victory" parades, to which I give one of my "Bad Taste of the Year" awards.



In March, my dear friend Emile Benoit, the fiddler, was diagnosed with cancer, and he stays with us now and then when he is in town for tests. His observations on life and his humour in the face of all this are one of the greater treasures that I have been given this year. The doctors gave him 18 months to live, but he is certain that he will make it until March 1993, when he will be 80, so he can have a grand birthday celebration at the Arts and Culture Centre, just like the one held for our other grand old fiddler, Rufus Guinchard, on his 90th birthday.

MADNESS

In May, more than one hundred librarians gathered in Corner Brook for the annual conference of the Atlantic Provinces Library Association, and our year of planning reached fever pitch. If I do say so myself, it was quite a success, although we 6 organizers really didn't get to very many of the sessions, and we have all taken a vow that we will never agree to organize another one of these until we are retired. One of the social events was a reading by Patrick Galvin from Ireland: poet, playwright, bon vivant and inspiration. He read from his autobiography a chapter about his "mad" Aunt Brigit, who at 40 something, gave up being sensible and began to wander the streets dressed in men's boots and a billowy skirt, telling stories to children. I already have the boots and billowy skirts, and even the 40 years. If you ever hear of my taking leave of my senses, you'll know who to blame. [How prophetic - but I was 54 when I did it.]

HOW WE SPENT OUR SUMMER VACATION

We drove to Toronto via New England, pausing for one pleasant evening in St. Andrews, N.B., another with the Carroll's, friends of our family in Bucksport, Maine, and lunch with Ron's cousin, Jean and her husband, Arthur, both retired librarians living in a fine spot near Wiscasset, with books, cats, dogs and water birds nearby. We indulged in the latest Canadian Olympic Sport - cross-border shopping - at the factory outlets in Freeport, before going on to visit high school friend, Joan Beskenis, and her husband, Allan Bing in Sudbury, Mass. We drove to the Alewife Station in

Cambridge, *parked the cah*, and took the subway into Boston to do touristy things like the trolley tour and the Fine Arts Museum. We really enjoyed an exhibit on "La Belle Epoque in Paris", complete with matching lunch in the very good museum restaurant. On the weekend, Tamsen and Miguel Hernandez drove up from New York. We ate, drank and spent a day motoring down the Piscataqua River bringing Joanie and Allan's sailboat from its winter mooring upstream to its summer home in Kittery. An enchanting day for us! Alas, for Joanie and Allan it was more stressful, as they were in the middle of selling their Sudbury house, and negotiating for a house in Kittery, instead of the land on which they had originally planned to build, and had already hired an architect and all. Someday, I hope they will sail over to visit us. We drove through Massachusetts and the Berkshires, stopping for lunch at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, and drove past the parking lot of Tanglewood, where all sorts of wonderful concerts were going on. We visited the Hancock Shaker Village, where I was mesmerized by the carpenter's demonstration of dovetail joint construction and we both enjoyed the Cooks' Tour of the kitchen. We spent a night with Mike Doraby, a friend from my days at Rockland Community College, who lives outside Schenectady, N.Y. with his wife, Georgette, 3 children, many chickens, some of which lay green eggs (really!), and 2 pigs. It was wonderful to see him again. We went to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, a real shrine, not like some! Then it was back to Canada with all our cross-border loot from L.L. Bean and Filene's Basement, etc, etc, via Watertown, N.Y., where I easily located the house where we lived in 1960, when we first moved to "the States". We stopped two nights in Lansdowne, Ont to visit Ron's brother, Robert, his wife, Donna and nieces, Hillary and Laura, before heading to Toronto, where I was to attend a Storytelling Workshop and spend 2 days buying children's books at the McLean Hunter warehouse in Malton.

Can you imagine a group of 20 grownups sitting in a hot church hall for 4 days telling each other fairy tales! Would you believe it was a spiritual experience? No? Well, it was! Our group leaders were Marilyn Peringer, Aubrey Smith and Lorne Brown, all movers and shakers behind The Storytellers School of Toronto, and all generous spirits and talented people. Part of the course included taking in the weekly "Thousand and One Friday Nights of Storytelling" which takes place in the church hall of St. George the Martyr. There wasn't much time for looking up friends, but we did get out to Burlington one evening to see Judith and Dwayne Wanner, friends from my library school days.

Back in Corner Brook, we had company - Randi Cherry a friend from my belly-dancing days in Ottawa. She came with friends to see Newfoundland, and was especially pleased that her visit coincided with the visit of the Gaia, the Viking ship replica that was sailing about celebrating the 1,000 year anniversary the Norse in North America, as she has a Norwegian background.

Robert [Ron's brother] Donna, Hillary and Laura made their first visit to Newfoundland, though Hillary didn't see too as she is currently "into" B abysitters Club books The scenery of Gros Morne was a mere impediment to exploring the further adventures of the babysitters. I recall times like those. We all travelled together to Cape Breton to vist Ron's Cape Breton clan before heading to the Warren [Ron's mother's clan] family union in P.E.I. Here, Hillary and Laura found two cousins their own ages, Amy and Katie, which made the scenery of Cape Breton much more enchanting.

Now we come to the "Serendipitous Connection of the year" story. Because Ron went to visit his Uncle Keith and Aunt Mary in Oakville while I was at the Storytelling workshop, because they told another Warren relative, Lois Thurgood, about this, and because she has a son, Ranald, and new daughter-in-law, Katherine Grier, who do storytelling, she thought it would be appropriate entertainment for the gathering, so she invited me to tell a story. Because she told me Ranald and Katherine were moving to St. John's so Ranald could a folkore degree at Memorial University, and because I called them and was invited to dinner and a truly "lyrical" evening, I finally ! got the recipe for Grasmere Gingerbread, for which I had been lusting, lo these many years, ever since the days when I was typing steamship timetables at Thomas Cook's in London, took a trip to the Lake District, and tasted them in Grasmere itself. Even our interlibrary loan system had failed to provide this recipe. (Send a pre-paid, self-addressed envelope if you want the recipe too). [Ah! Life before Google, eh?]

Another amazing coincidence was that Ranald had grown up in Wallace, N.S. and remembered ill-fated Dutch Mill Restaurant and Motel, in which my Aunt Ella's husband, Roy, had embroiled her and assorted relations back in the '50's. We children were Sat helpers at this venture - going into the motel units to open the individual soaps and unwrapping ttle packets of crackers.



Hillary and Laura do Anne of Green Gables.

Back to the Family Reunion. Ron and I and his parents, Robert, Donna and the girls, and Keith and Mary and cousin, Nancy, occupied 3 cottages in Victoria-by-the-sea on the Northumberland Strait. We took in a play, and celebrated my father-in-law, Lloyd's, 77th birthday with dinner and concert by the Cape Breton Symphony (they're a gang of fiddlers!) at the Victoria Playhouse and drove in to Charlottetown to see the Anne of Green Gables musical. You haven't seen it properly, if you haven't seen it with two kindred spirits like Hillary and Laura. Much was made of Laura in her "Anne" hat with red yarn braids, that her parents bought

at the theatre. The following night, Hillary and Laura gave us their own version of the show at our cottage. Great fun!

Ron and I and his parents also drove to Halifax, where we had another clan gathering of my relatives the Dartmouth Golf Club. We were celebrating my mother-in-law, Marjorie's, 80th birthday and my cousin, Marilyn's visit home from England with her youngest child, Kathryn, who is stable after a serious kidney illness last year. The prognosis is positive, but right now, heavy medications are a part of life. Ron and I drove Marilyn and Kathryn to Chester and Peggy's Cove so that she could see some of her mother's youthful haunts and the church Peggy's Cove, where her parents were married.

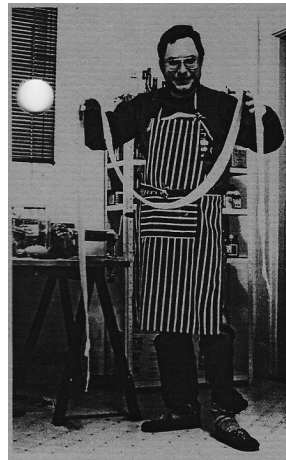
OTHER COMPANY

In the spring, there was a steady stream of mathematicians seeking, or avoiding, employment at Grenfell College, or the Department Headship on the main campus in St. John's. In spite of Ron's culinary pyrotechnics, it took awhile to convince one of these to take a position. A second had to be hired by phone. We thought these interviews (and my minor surgery) might interfere with our vacation plans, but all worked out for the best.)

In September, I invited a group called the Four Wind Gypsy Troupe to visit 4 of our libraries with program of stories, music and dance. Turned out they had a genuine belly dancer. Imagine her amazement to be cheered on with my genuine Algerian war whoop at the Stephenville Crossing Library. The Belly Dancing Sisterhood is powerful. We talked nonstop for 2 days. Dr. Madeline Daniels, the director of the Troupe and also of the sponsoring agency (Spectrum Cross-Cultural Institute for Youth, based in New Hampshire) is a formidable talent: storyteller, anthropologist, psychologist, organizer and double PhD. I had great time playing my Egyptian drum along with the "gypsies" and dressing all baubly and bangly. At one point during their visit, Ron asked nervously, "You aren't going to run away with the gypsies, are you?" "No, I don't think so, but I will day-dream for couple of days, if you don't mind." The first time ran away with the gypsies, I ended up in San Francisco learning to dance. The second time, ended up typing steamship timetables at Thomas Cook in London. Best not to risk it a third time. I can always run away to Ramea for a day or two.

Also, in September, we had a fictional character here for Theatre Newfoundland and Labrador's production of Amadeus. Antonio Salieri - alias Kevin Hare, a talented and hard-working young sort. Watch for him. He's got it in the blood. A few weeks ago I heard his mother in a radio drama on the CBC. I forgot to mention visiting Carolyn Heatherington, another veteran of TNL and Stephenville Festival, at her wonderful home in Kingston. Last week, TNL did fine production of "Shirley Valentine". We do all right out here, you know.

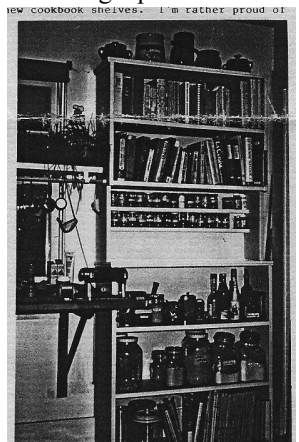
In November, our Children's Book Week Guest was Ian Wallace, and we had dinner for him and our local children's book community of Shawn and John Steffler and Alice Bartels and her husband, Dennis. We all enjoy these little "networking events". Now, here's my networking coup of the year. Are you aware that Robert Munsch is Canada's best-selling author? Now you are. He was our Book Week guest 3 years ago, and I stayed in touch after a 2 hour conversation on the topic of "Life after Communes". He called to see if I knew a Newfoundland illustrator to do the story I first told in our library at Rocky Harbour. "Do you know an illustrator???!!!!" (And us with 6 of her paintings on our walls, including our wedding present, "Venetian Cat House".) I sent him 4 of Shawn's previous books, and struggled to keep my secret. He liked her work. Doubleday liked it. She got the contract. The book is now finished. Do feel smug? Yes!!



Chef Alfredo demonstrates his pasta wizardry in the "before" kitchen with its back-breaking baking "table" on sawhorses. His cookbooks are in the dining room.

And Ron is feeling smug about having created yet another quintessential Italian dinner for a fund-raising auction for the Stephenville Theatre Festival. Of course, it's more fun when people you know buy these things and we knew 4 of our 6 guests.

Do I have anything else to feel smug about this year? Not really, except for my latest carpentry projects in the kitchen: In the "after" kitchen, the saw horses have gone to the basement and been replaced with 2 heavy iron brackets I had custom-made at the local foundry. I wish you could see the tile counter on the new cookbook shelves. I'm rather proud of that, but I'll admit that Polyfilla is just terrific stuff - hides a multitude of sins. Wish there was a sewing equivalent



The "after" kitchen: Saw horses replaced by 2 heavy iron brackets I had custom made at the foundry. I wish you could see the tile counter on top of the cookbook shelves.

And here is the "tong rack" which I built because Ron was always complaining that he could never find the tongs. Everything hangs quite neatly on S-hooks from a length of copper pipe. Can you spot the tongs?



I won't go into details about the dreariness of work these days. A lot of zip has gone out of my job with staff cut-backs, meagre resources and library boards who just will not make hard decisions to keep some semblance of decent service operating in fewer libraries. Ron, too, struggles along with meagre resources, but the one bright light is the new college principal, Dr. Katie Bindon, a youngish (well, our age) woman of incredible energy. She's a military historian, a single Mum, and serving on some kind of "Gender Integration" committee for the Department of National Defense. Right now, she's crossing the Atlantic on a military ship, but vows she'll be back for the college dinner dance on Friday. She opens up The Principal's House, where she lives, for Happy Hours on Friday nights and this seems to have raised collegiality considerably. It's a far cry from the elitist "Old Boy" atmosphere that prevailed for 10 years. More power to her as she takes on the "Old Boys" in St. Johns. She's quite something. [We revised our opinion later.]

I've been flailing about in the kitchen trying to make the Christmas cookies that I have been making since I was 4, but it does not feel as much like the labour of love it once was, and my first batch of Turkish Delight failed miserably, oozing about the kitchen like some rose-watered flavoured version of "The Blob". The second batch looks a little more successful. I guess I just don't have the right genes. In less than 2 weeks (yipes!), Ron and I will be en route to spend Christmas in Calgary with his parents and other brother, David. I have never been to Calgary, so that is something to look forward to (and the hot springs, I hope). Mum and Dad and Dad's sister, Joyce, will be leaving for Florida to spend Christmas with his other sister, Shirley, on Dec. 12, so we shall be quite far flung this year.

I'll close this now, by wishing you a Happy Holiday season, whether you are far or near flung. And A Happy New Year from me, Ron, Catatonia, C.S. "Fats" and Tom at 59 Bast Valley Rd, Corner Brook, NF A2H 2L4 where all visitors are welcome.

