

THE VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE TO BRING BACK THE PING BAR

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EDITED BY REDD BOGGS

Not Three Thousand Years! but Thirty Anyway

I first joined SAPS when SAPS began in 1947. Then I think I must have dropped out for a while. At any rate, I didn't publish anything in the mailings till mailing #10, January 1950, when Art Rapp became the official editor for the first time. The first issue of my publication, Hurkle, was mimeographed by none other than Art himself, although I published the later issues. The title came from Theodore Sturgeon's story "The Hurkle is a Happy Beast" in the first issue of The Magazine of Fantasy (later called F&SF), Fall 1949.

Afterward I was active in SAPS for three years. The last issue of Hurkle was (illegally) postmailed in March 1953, along with a half-sheet of which the title is self-explanatory: So Long!

1947: that was a long, long time ago. It was the year of the Taft-Hartley labor act and the start of the Marshall plan. It was the year that Jackie Robinson of the then-Brooklyn Dodgers became the first black baseball player in the big leagues. In 1947 hardly anybody had ever heard of Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro, or Joe McCarthy, let alone Richard M. Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, or even John F. Kennedy. It was ten years before Sputnik was launched into orbit and 22 years before the first man on the moon. Hardly anybody had a television set, and the Radio Shack didn't sell a single home computer or even a pocket calculator that year. You couldn't even find a Radio Shack. John Lennon was only seven years old in 1947. John Belushi, Cheryl Ladd, and Hank Williams Jr hadn't even been born.

After 1953, when I dropped out of SAPS, nearly 20 years passed. For SAPS' hundredth mailing I wrote a reminiscence of the apa at the invitation of Tom Collins, then a member. It appeared in his fanzine Is #5 in that anniversary mailing.

Another 11 years passed. One afternoon in May 1983 I extracted the mail from P. O. Box 1111 and found a postal card from Art Rapp. I leaned on one of those high stand-up tables they have in the post office lobby and read the card with amazement. In it Art had written, in part: "I am once again OE of SAPS, and there are vacancies on the roster, so why don't you come home to SAPS again?" For a moment I felt dizzy, as 30 years whirled through my mind like a speeded-up movie film. Then I said to myself, "Why not," putting both a question mark and a couple of exclamation points after those two words. There didn't seem to be any other good answer or response to Art's query, so I pocketed his postal card and hurried home to start publishing this fanzine.

Happy Landings on the Chocolate Bar

When I read, a while back -- it must have been some years ago, by now -- that Mars, Inc., the candy manufacturer, had brought back the Forever Yours candy bar I was both pleased and impressed. I always preferred that bar above all others on the candy counter and it was good to have it back. If the bar was not in fact ours forever, it was ours once more. I was impressed because -- so their publicity releases claimed -- Forever Yours was returned to the marketplace due to public demand.

I couldn't imagine, however, what shape that demand may have taken. An intense letter-writing campaign such as the one that once saved the TV series "Star Trek"? A picket line in the drenching rain at the gates of the Hackettstown, New Jersey, plant, marching up and down, brandishing signs that read "Give us back Forever Yours!" "Forever Forever Yours!" and "Up Forever Yours!"? Was there a threat of legislative action, a measure requiring the candy bar's return that was duly deposited in the hopper of the House?

The truth, as usual, is probably a lot more prosaic. I suppose the Mars sales people sat down and looked glumly at the latest sales figures and decided to revive Forever Yours on a trial basis as a means of improving things over the next quarter.

Apparently it was only a trial, for the candy bar seems to have disappeared again, ours no longer. While it was still around again I bought it whenever I bought candy, but evidently not too many others did. Forever Yours was a pretty basic, no-nonsense bar, as contrasted with, say, Mounds or Baby Ruth from other companies. These days, Mars, Inc., and other manufacturers are pushing gimmicky, more cheaply made things like Summit and Twix, which are labelled "cookie bars," not being honest-to-god candy bars at all.

Whenever I sat down and ingurgitated a Forever Yours I found myself wondering why they didn't also bring back the Ping bar. Hardly a man, or woman, is now alive who remembers the Ping bar, I suppose, but Mars, Inc., must know about it. They must have all the information about the Ping bar in their Hackettstown files. Why don't they give the Ping bar another shot, after all these years.

Sometime early in World War 2 -- I must do some research on the matter to learn the facts precisely -- the candy makers were hit with wartime restrictions on the use of sugar, chocolate, and so on, as well as severe shortages of cocoanut, pecans, and the like. Rather than put out an inferior product and run the risk of alienating their old and valued customers who had been enjoying 3 Musketeers and Snickers for years and years, Mars, Inc., decided to make a new candy bar for the duration. Admittedly a poor, wartime expedient, the bar would be discontinued after the war when supplies of sugar, chocolate, and nuts had returned to normal and the old bars could be made again with their former prewar quality.

This wartime stand-in for Milky Way and Mars was dubbed the Ping bar. I ate hundreds of them in the years from 1943 to 1945. During World War 2 overseas troops of the American armed forces were issued

weekly ration cards for the PX. These cards gave you a regular allotment of candy, gum, and cigarets, as well as soap, shaving cream, and other essentials. Because I didn't smoke I always traded my ration of Lucky Strikes and Chesterfields (only five or seven packs per week, as I recall) to GIs who did smoke, in exchange for their candy. By this means I ended up with about a dozen candy bars each week. Usually they were Ping bars.

If Forever Yours was the basic candy bar, Ping bars were the prototype of the modern ersatz bar. It was made of some arid and lackluster ingredient, some sort of plastic, no doubt. It gave your jaws a workout but had little effect on your taste buds. It was neither crisp nor chewy, neither sweet nor bitter. It seemed to have a vague flavor of vanilla, but it was hard to say. There weren't any nuts, caramel, or coconut in it. I don't think there was even any chocolate in it, although it had a dark outer coating that contrasted with a dull white interior. In those days candy makers were not required to list ingredients on the wrapper, but I'm sure that the Ping bar came direct from the chemical lab, not from the fields and the orchards. Just like the candy bars of today. At least such candy probably didn't rot your teeth or cause your skin to break out in splotches.

In recent times the candy companies haven't worried much about debasing their products and alienating their customers. They have cold-bloodedly cheapened and ensmallled their candy bars while raising the price by about 600 percent. Yet I suppose customer loyalty hasn't been changed materially. Being full of artificial flavors and chemical ingredients candy bars aren't as good as they were, back in the days when they cost only a nickel, but people still devour a lot of them. Who knows, despite all the substitutes they used, necessitated by wartime conditions, maybe the Ping bar was actually superior to the corrupted products of today.

As I say, I ate scads of Ping bars during World War 2, especially while I was overseas with the Eighth Air force, and despite everything I rather liked them. Maybe it's with candy as with sex: even when it's bad it's good. Ping bars were bland, almost tasteless, but so are boiled potatoes, cottage cheese, and steamed rice, and I like them too. Maybe in the midst of wartime stress it was calming and reassuring to eat something as unexceptionable as the Ping bar. It was one thing in life that wasn't full of terror, uncertainty, and suspense.

Anyway, I would like to eat a Ping bar again. I would like to don my suntans again (if I could get into them), ride in a jolting GI truck, fire an M-1 rifle, and -- well, I don't think I would enjoy close-order drill or an obstacle course any more. But nostalgia has got me by the ear, and I wish I could buy a Ping bar again.

That's why I have organized the Volunteer Committee to Bring Back the Ping Bar. I hope you will all join my campaign and deluge Mars, Inc. with letters demanding the Ping bar's return. As our campaign progresses no doubt we will have bumper stickers printed. T-shirts with slogans. Billboards. TV commercials featuring John Madden. But that's for the future. Right now let's each sit down at the typewriter and write that letter! I'm going to write a letter myself. Sure I am. Real Soon Now.

Ping

The word "Ping" is found in the Oxford English dictionary, where it is defined as "an abrupt ringing sound, such as that made by a rifle bullet in flying through the air, by a mosquito, the ringing of an electric bell, etc." The OED could not, of course, know that perhaps the commonest use of the term in the twentieth century would be to describe the sound of an automobile motor in need of a tuneup (or, as the ads said, even as long ago as 1941, a motor in need of a gasoline like Fire Chief or Red Crown).

But "Ping" as the name of a candy bar around 1942-45 probably stemmed from something else entirely. About that time there was a big publicity campaign for a movie actress who was dubbed and promoted by her press agent as the Ping Girl. What "Ping" meant in this context is a little uncertain, but I suppose it was intended to convey the sense of a sparkly personality, blithe, vivacious, high-spirited. Mariette Hartley has ping.

Unfortunately the subject of such a publicity campaign -- the nearest equivalent in recent times was one for Bo Derek of "10" -- seldom achieves lasting fame. The durability of a stardom like Katharine Hepburn's, for example, is based on real, not synthetic ping: great talent, and a unique and appealing personality. I am not sure any more who the Ping Girl was. Carole Landis? If it was she, I am sorry to say that I don't remember a single movie that she made, but I seem to recall that she died, poor woman, in an accident when she was quite young.

In any case, if I am right, she did achieve one distinction, although unwittingly: that of giving the name "Ping" to a candy bar. If she had never existed, the candy bar might have been called Wow! or Big Delight or U-Betcha. Or in the tradition of Baby Ruth and, much later, Reggie! maybe it would have been called DiMag!

The Streets of Berkeley

A fan in another city is writing a book which he generously showed me a piece of. It describes the streets of that city, tells their names and how they got them. It's an interesting glimpse into local history that stirred my antiquarian blood. I would gladly reveal the fan's identity, but his treatise is not finished and perhaps he desires no publicity at this time. I mention the matter only to say that a long time ago I planned a similar project, this one on the streets of this city: Berkeley, California.

I was inspired to write a book (or at least a long essay) similar to the one of the fan I mentioned, only about Berkeley streets and their names, when I perused an old street map of Berkeley. It was drawn in the 1870s or early 1880s, I believe. It was on display in one of the vessels tied up in the bay at the San Francisco Maritime museum. One of the ferries it was, I suppose, a last relic of the fleet that plied the bay before the bridges were built and even afterward.

At any rate, this antique map of Berkeley showed a good many familiar streets, for much of the city was platted early. It showed some

unfamiliar streets, too, for streets like Choate and Fowler have gone out of existence in the past hundred years. Much-traveled streets of today weren't even laid out when the map was drawn. Even a main artery such as Ashby avenue was not cut through and completed till sometime in the 1890s. There were open areas in Berkeley then, labelled Matthew's tract and McGee tract and the like. One empty space was identified only as "No. 61." Another was called "No. 58."

I did only a little independent research on the subject before I discovered that someone, inevitably, had anticipated me. There's a book published in 1962 (prepared in 1955) called Street Names of the City of Berkeley by Fred C. Hutchinson, who was once the city attorney. The city library also possesses a scrapbook of articles by the Berkeley antiquarian William Warren Ferrier called Berkeley Street Nomenclature, compiled in 1924.

Before I abandoned the project I learned that the street I lived on then -- and where Marion Zimmer Bradley lives now -- which is Prince street, was named for a horse belonging to Mr Woolsey, one of the early squires of the town. Woolsey also bestowed his own name on the parallel street directly south of Prince, on the border of the city of Oakland.

On the various old maps I looked at, such as one from 1888, Prince street was not cut through. Instead, it ended in the blank space that indicated the Newbury tract, just short of Shattuck avenue. Therefore, the stretch of Prince street that Gretchen and I lived on had not been built then. Neither had the cross-street directly east of us, Wheeler, been laid out as yet. When it was constructed Wheeler continued south beyond Prince to intersect, and end, at Woolsey street. The street sign at that corner, only a stone's throw from our home at 2132-A Prince, fascinated Bill Blackbeard when we showed it to him: "Wheeler and Woolsey!" he said, chuckling.

I suspect a touch of whimsey on the part of whoever it was who arranged the intersection of streets with such names. The conjunction of two such aptly named streets surely did not occur by chance. The thought came to me that perhaps there were other whimsical intersections of streets in Berkeley. Laurel and Hardy, perhaps, Burns and Allen, or Gallagher and Sheehan. I had high hopes of discovering another example of the street-planner's whimsicality. Laurel, after all, is a common street name in cities all over the country, and I remembered one in Berkeley. Burns, well, Berkeley has other streets with literary names: Chaucer, Addison, Browning, and others. Why not one named for Robert Burns? It turns out, however, that no other examples exist. There is a Hardy street in Oakland, just off Claremont, but it is a goodly distance from Laurel in Berkeley, near Codornices park, or any of the other streets, avenues, and roads named Laurel in the East Bay. There's a Burns court, in El Cerrito, but no street at all named Allen, or Gallagher or Sheehan, either. The nearest street juxtaposition in Berkeley that has a touch of whimsey, perhaps, is one near the intersection of Alcatraz and San Pablo: one little street is named Boise, the next one over, not much longer, is named Idaho.

But actually -- as I started to say in paragraph one of this article before I got diverted -- the streets-of-Berkeley project I wanted to

describe entailed, not writing, but walking. I hasten to add that it has nothing to do with the profession of street-walking. Berkeley is supposed to be a "clean" city, free of prostitution. A booklet published by the Chamber of Commerce back in 1931 boasts of this in particular, among other civic virtues. Things have changed, though, in the past 50 years. Street-walkers are seen from time to time along University avenue. Usually they have congregated along lower University west of San Pablo avenue, but sometimes they have lounged, sinuous and inviting, on fire hydrants as far east as McGee or even Milvia.

No, I speak of the project Gretchen and I once embarked upon of walking every street and every block in Berkeley. We were inspired by word of a similar, but incomparably bigger, project that Elmer Perdue has been carrying on for years involving the streets of Los Angeles. However, I have used up enough space on the subject for one issue. I will have to return to the streets of Berkeley some other time.

The Tin Woodman

I was walking along
the Yellow Brick Road
the other afternoon
a little drunk on sunshine
looking for

Dorothy, the Scarecrow,
the Tin Woodman, and the
Cowardly Lion, but it seemed
they'd all stopped somewhere
for a hotdog.

At last I saw a woman
a long way down the Road.
She looked pretty familiar.
"Hey, you must be Dorothy!"
I shouted.

"No," she said, looking sad,
"and not the Scarecrow either,
if you'll bother to look at me,
and not the Cowardly Lion
for heaven sake!"

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