

# PENSEROSO



NO.10

JANUARY 1986

## Guns, Gunners, and Me

On a damp and chilly afternoon in late November I attended the gun show of the California Historical Arms association at the fairgrounds in Vallejo, along with Dave Rike and two of his friends, Shasta and Terry Greene. I made a few notes on the reverse side of several flyers I picked up there. I have deciphered a few of those scribbles, as follows:

It's a big barnlike exhibit hall, with lots of people buying, selling, trading lots of lethal weapons. I figure there's enough weaponry on exhibit to arm everybody in the place to the teeth with at least a rifle apiece, plus two pistols, and three or four "edged weapons," as a flyer refers to them (Bowie knife, dagger, saber, Samurai sword, bayonet). A whole arsenal of antiques, originals and reproductions, as well as modern firearms.

Amidst this incredible imbroglio I'm looking for old western guns, Frontier Colts, ancient Winchesters, Sharps, Springfields. Not to buy or sell or trade, although I'm member of the Brandon Dump Shooters association. Just to look at. The stuff of romance in novels by Zane Grey, Ernest Haycox, Luke Short. I finger a few examples nostalgically ("Do Not Touch," the signs say) that probably shot down badmen and Indians in their day. I've fired a Springfield or two myself (the 1903 model rather than the 1873), but not at redskins. They make a big bang, like birth of universe. Have a satisfying kick, I remember. They knock you down and tromp on you. Boom! as John Madden says.

Dave says that besides state and federal undercover men in the crowd about a third of people manning tables are off-duty police officers. They look amiable enough. Guess it's a good thing I didn't wear my Mao cap with red star pinned on the front. In such a macho gathering Stetsons ought to be the preferred headgear, like at horse auctions. But visored baseball caps (with a bewildering variety of monograms) outnumber cowboy hats five to one. I wore my camouflage baseball cap. Somebody asks me how duck hunting is this season. I explain I don't hunt. I quote Wimpy: "Come over to my house for a duck dinner. You bring the duck." Sounding a little offended, other guy says I look like I've been out hunting.

Lots of other things displayed besides weapons and ammo. Indian turquoise jewelry. Clocks fitted into decorative hunks of wood. Military clothing (uniform I wore in world war 2 is already a "collectible," making me feel antique myself). Helmets. Books. Western paperbacks, well-thumbed and dogeared, selling for 25¢

each, except Louis L'Amour, costing a buck apiece. Law enforcement badges ("Don't need no stinkin' badges," I muttered to myself). Even some coins. Looked for Walter Breen, but he wasn't there. Also looked for Dean A. Grennell, who wasn't there too. Saw stack of back issue gun magazines and rifled through it to discover June 1985 Gun World, with DAG mentioned on front cover. Put it atop stack. Two reproductions of the painting "Custer's Last Fight." "I can't figure out what that guy is doing," somebody said to somebody else, pointing at a cavalryman in the painting. Couldn't tell which figure he meant. Looked at painting and decided every man in uniform seemed to be dying, that's what they were doing.

Found table of collector named Col. William O. Mueller devoted to Tom Mix exhibit and made some notes for Jim Harmon. Learned about the sixth annual Tom Mix festival at DuBois Pennsylvania, 11-15 September 1985. The display had three 8x10 glossies of Tom Mix, one the photo of him in ten gallon hat that Ralston sent to Straight Shooters in exchange for boxtop. One of Mix on movie location, it seems to be. One of Mix and Olive Stokes Mix in Montana in 1909. Mix looked less handsome, less glamorous, than his screen self, but a lot rougher, tougher. Never saw that photo before. Center of the display: a badge, Special Deputy, Oklahoma, 1907-1909, and a revolver labeled The Tom Mix Colt, serial number 225084, caliber 32-20, with 5½ inch barrel, which (a placard says) was shipped from Colt factory on 19 April 1902. Reached out and put finger on both badge and revolver so I could tell Jim I had.

Couple of kids asleep under a display table. Kid about ten years old lounging sulkily behind table offering various belligerent bumper stickers for sale. Sat up and eyed me suspiciously as I noted down the messages on the stickers: MY SOCIAL SECURITY NO. IS .357. ME AND MY .45 WILL SURVIVE. JUST ME, SMITH & WESSON. STAMP OUT RAPE -- BUY A .38. TRUST IN GOD -- AND CARRY A ROD. PREVENT LEAD POISONING -- LEAVE ME ALONE. I looked around rather nervously, but nobody looked like Rambo, naked to the waist, with cartridge belts draped over shoulders. Everybody looked plumb peaceful, appearing almost professional in their knowledge of firearms, even though it's a blue collar crowd.

Still jumpy I wandered over to table sagging under weight of dangerous-looking pistols. Saw an elderly grey-haired woman peacefully knitting behind the display. Studied her narrowly but decided she wasn't Madame Defarge. Behind another table a young woman was leafing through a magazine. Worried that it was Soldier of Fortune magazine, but then figured it couldn't be -- unless that magazine has begun printing articles about baking Christmas



cookies. Still another young woman, with long hair parted in middle, minding another table, studied a page of sheet music. Didn't seem to be "Horst Wessel Song." Quite a number of women attended gun show, nearly all there with men. No other reason they'd be there, I suppose.

Little black dog with a white ruff lay under table of Kalispell Gun shop. Looked sad and disconsolate. "Goodby, doggie!" woman said to him as she walked in direction of door. Dog stirred uneasily. Probably wanted to go along. I sympathized. She was pretty. Kalispell gun expert (who may or may not be from Montana) trying industriously to unscrew a part of a fierce-looking old pistol. "Better not do that, Yokum," the gun owner said nervously. Yokum threw down screwdriver, looking relieved. "Shit, why didn't you say so!" he said. "That screw hasn't been bugged since about 1903. Where'd you say you got this ol' piece?" He was smoking generic cigarets. Lots of smoking going on at gun show. Made me feel pleased and nostalgic. I like tobacco fumes. Don't smoke myself, but have spent lots of time with people who did, like in the air force.

While I was admiring a Navy Colt -- maybe it had belonged to Jesse James, who knows? -- Dave came along. Dragged me over to see tableful of colorful T-shirts at far side of room. The one he wanted me to see said "The Originators of Gun Control," this message displayed above and below depiction of Nazi flag, with swastika. Said it was wonderful put-on. Would enrage both gun-control people and gun nuts about equally, he said. Urged me to buy it. I rubbed my nose, which hasn't been busted since boyhood, and decided to think a while before squandering money on such a purchase.

#### A Letter from Jean

Animal Fair, 10/26/85

It is "unseasonably mild." I was planning to go to Iowa City this weekend but it's a bad time for the people I'd visit so I don't go. I have lots and lots of work to do, on calendars and cards, on a birthday present for Dan, on wood and cleaning up. Paul's last two designs for Dark Geometries come in the mail. I take them along with some other stuff into town to copy. I debate going down to Yellow River Forest, but it's really too late in the day. I drop off the drawings, hoping Dan will shade them (he's in Minneapolis visiting his sister and brother-in-law and buying books and albums and so on). I decide to go get ice cream at Taco Bill's. It's an enormous amount of ice cream. I'm not so anxious to get home for supper any more. I decide to stop at Springwater Village, a sort of intentional community ("ex-hippie housing development") and get another gift certificate towards some print or painting from Carl Homstad, whose work Dan admires. I talk with another Springwater person who is a sound-and-electronics consultant and designer and engineer. We reminisce about early days at Springwater in the early '70s when they called themselves "Cowfreaks." We sit on the front steps and watch a warm, smoky October sunset through the bare oaks.

When I get home I "pick wood" in the gathering dusk, collecting small chips and little chunks in two five-gallon plastic pails. I take the wood in and get a cup of coffee and a "reduced for quick sale" croissant and go back out and sit under the biggest spruce, the one by the garage, on the stump by where I have a burning-place. I share my croissant with Cody, because I'm glad he came back. The windmill tower looks like an ink drawing against pale glass. Perhaps it was drawn by Paul. I watch the lights moving along the ridge to the east where my neighbor is combining corn while the weather holds, under a golden rising moon.

I go back in the house and shade my three pictures and listen to tapes. It is 10:15 p.m. I finally make supper: pork chops, cauliflower, sliced tomato, grape-

apple sauce on the chop, coffee, a bran muffin, and even a little bit of cream sherry that was left in the bottle I got three weekends ago. I read a "Dr Who" while I eat. I wash the dishes. The moon is high and it is still pretty mild, though a breeze has picked up from the north.

I get the wastebasket from the bathroom and the kitchen matches and go outside with the dogs, and start a fire under the spruce tree, burning the paper trash. I add some sticks and it looks like it will catch, so I take the wastebasket back in (matches too) and get another cup of coffee and come back out by my fire. Little Girl and Cody have run off. I drink my coffee and poke at my fire, staring at yellow-gold flames and vermilion coals. When I look up at the moon through a gap in the branches of the spruce tree, it looks as blue-white as a welding arc. I alternate looking at the fire and at the moon.

I hear the wind in the spruces and in the cornfield on the north side of the lane. The flames crackle a bit, and smoke winds around my ankles. There is a bigger crackling, like a bigger log than there is on my fire, or like a spruce bough snapping, or something moving through a cornfield, and I feel a big black presence. Sure enough, a cold nose is stuck under my arm. I'm glad Cody's back again, but I don't have any croissants this time.

We watch the fire together for a while, but Cody is anxious to go back in now, because Little Girl is back and hovering on the doorstep. So we do. The fire is still burning when I shut the front door and look out through its window. As I take the last six steps into the house, the fire seems to recede a thousand miles and become the idea of a fire. There are reflections in the glass of the two doors, inner and outer. Inner and Outer. I sit down here at the desk to write you, but I'm not sure where I am. It seems very strange that the fire should be burning out there all alone, without me. It doesn't seem fair -- to make a fire and then leave it before it's done.

-- jY

### An Essay on History

History consists of doing all the wrong things. But it's not a comedy. Not unless you can laugh at the wars, the pillage, the murders, at My Lai, Dachau, Tule Lake, Hiroshima, Wounded Knee, the Korean jet liner flight 007, at the lynchings, the bombings, the hijackings, the terrorism, the napalm, the bayonets and the billy-clubs. We're doing all the wrong things, like the bumlbers and bad apples in a TV sitcom, but it's not a comedy, remember.

But it is funny, heaven knows. We resemble a trapped fly buzzing at the windowpane while the door stands open nearby. The self-delusion, the dreaming, the ignorance. We raise monuments to nonexistent gods, we worship according to a mis-translated text, we cast horoscopes according to inaccurate star charts. The black man, himself a victim, hands out antisemitic leaflets. The Playmate of the Month joins the cult of guru Da John Free. A famous astronaut goes on an expedition to seek Noah's Ark, and a noted botanist is a fervent Creationist and believes in God. It's all so funny, and it goes on all the time. All this folly is called History.

PENSEROSO is published occasionally for the Spectator Amateur Press society by Redd Boggs, P. O. Box 1111, Berkeley, California 94701. This is issue #10, January 1986, and is intended for SAPS mailing #154. Heading by Lee Hoffman. Illustration, page 2, by Dave Rike, who was technical advisor for the "gun" article. THE GAFIA PRESS