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Redd Boggs'

SPIROCHETES

TIME AT DEATH ROCK

It's a grey day at the promontory on the Sonoma coast called Death Rock. Sea-fog envelops everything on the sea and the beach. You can hear, but not see, the surf crashing on the rocks offshore. The pale light of afternoon resembles glowing darkness, seeming to come from nowhere and everywhere. It's like Cranach's landscape without the picture, for the clammy mist cramming every inch of air makes night of day or day of night. The sea is unperturbed and sways as usual. Dimly seen, three sandpipers walk and run on the beach in the running edge of the giant ocean you can hear roaring somewhere out there.

They're afoot, but not out of touch, in the final twitch of mid-ocean violence. They go back and forth like the cuckoos of a mantel clock or the pendulum of a grandfather clock -- back and forth, anyway, back and forth as the ocean tilts and rights itself. Tirelessly the sandpipers run to catch up.

The tide runs out too slow to see, and without shadows moving as the sun moves, the day remains where it is, glowing dully like a watch dial. At Death Rock we stand still in life. But how like oblivion it is. The sea is grey, the air is grey, even the sand is grey. Only the sandpipers make the clock move as they snatch at moments tumbling in the shallows, forever dashing in and out on such a grey day.

MY WHIPPET DAYS

I suppose the national fad for running or jogging (if there is a technical difference between the two, don't bother me with it, please) has gone on for a dozen years or more by now. These days even Gregg Calkins writes, rather casually, that he has "started running more or less seriously," and had entered a ten kilometer race this past June, and another in August. But I still get a little worried when I see someone loping grimly along the street. I even feel the impulse to pull up in my car and offer to drive them to the nearest police station or the fire department. I always have the notion that some terrible emergency back along the road has caused the person to break into a run.

In earlier times an emergency was about the only reason that anyone would be seen running in public on a highway or byway. Otherwise cool reason and propriety dictated a more moderate pace. As the old saying goes, "Fools are aye fond a' flittin' and wise men o' sittin'." A glimpse of somebody legging it lickety-split was enough to cause a panic, as James Thurber depicts it in "The Day the Dam Broke." The wild rumor, in March 1913, that Columbus, Ohio was about to be engulfed by flood waters was caused, Thurber theorizes, by the sight of someone breaking into a run on Broad street. A grown man actually running on the main drag was unusual enough to cause onlookers to suppose something was wrong and some of them to break into an uneasy trot too. Soon everybody was running, and the wild rumor of the dam breaking started to spread all over town. Such an event is not likely to happen any more, which is one small guerdon of the current jogging/running fad.

I remember some famous writer, I think it was Howells, remarking that at his age he was finding that walking on level ground was a little too much uphill. He

was about 80 years old then, I believe, and I have not yet reached that antiquity or that condition. But people who see me slouching along these days with my hands in my pockets probably can't picture me as a runner. The runners that wheeze by me with contorted faces probably look at me as they would at Mr John Pontifex in his knee-breeches and worsted stockings hobbling along the streets of Paleham in the year 1807. "Fools! For I also had my hour; one far fierce hour and sweet." When I was a kid I ran all the time. Of course kids run a lot, but I ran more than most.

I was tall and skinny. Scrawny is probably the best word for it. In grade school I was so underweight, according to standard charts, that the school arbitrarily put me on their free milk program. To my surprise and puzzlement I was given a half-pint of milk every school day at recess on the theory that I was going half-starved at home. I wasn't; I always had enough to eat, and plenty of milk to drink. I was the tallest boy in my class till about the seventh grade, when others began to catch up and surpass me. I made my move, such as it was, earlier than the rest, and fast growth left me built along the emaciated lines of a whippet, slender and speedy, and I took advantage of this condition. I had no preconceptions or theories about the value of running, although my favorite Greek hero was Phidippides, and one of my favorite books was The Forest Runners by Joseph Altsheler. I ran for the sheer hell of it. One memorable night under a full moon, when I was about 11 or 12, I ran full tilt through the woods by the river, howling like a werewolf. I am glad that some nearby farmer didn't have a blunderbuss handy, loaded with silver balls.

I didn't realize fully how much I ran till one noontime when I was going home from school for lunch. As I did every day I cut through the edge of the railroad yards. Just then I heard a shout, and looked around to see the engineer of a Great Northern switch engine leaning out of the cab and pointing at me with a ham sandwich. The locomotive, unmoving on a side track, was steaming gently, like a teapot steeping, and the crew was eating lunch. "Look at that goddam little redheaded bastard!" the engineer shouted to the fireman, who was peering over his shoulder. Choking with amazement and glee, he added, "I've seen him coming across the tracks every day since school began and this is the first time I ever saw him walking! Hey kid," he yelled after me, "what's the matter? Why ain't you running? You sick or something? Did you hurt your laig?"

In high school I suppose I must have slowed down a trifle. As I say, jogging wasn't fashionable in those days, and I was getting too old to be seen galloping along the street to school. But one day in P.E., I remember, I had a chance to run. The instructor, a man named Whitlock -- I rejoice in this belated opportunity of remarking (though it has nothing to do with the subject at hand) that he was the poorest excuse for a high school teacher I ever encountered: a stupid, ignorant slob -- told us to run the length of a football field and back as the climax of our afternoon activity. I suppose we were doing wind sprints. I sped away quite happily, and within a few strides found myself leading the pack. I don't suppose the rest of the students were exerting themselves, but then I heard footsteps, very rapid footsteps, behind me. As a result of being challenged, I shifted into high gear and at the end of the field circled the goal posts without slowing down. I caught a glimpse

A PORTRAIT

A small
woman
with a
small face,

dark eye
brows arching
over dark
rimmed glasses,

deep eyes
locking
secrets deep
within,

a nose
just so
for piquancy,
slim cheeks

held up
by a small
but very
stubborn chin.

The mouth
is very straight,
straight and
very serious.

And topping all
and all around
long dark
chestnut hair.

of the fellow scampering behind me: a thin, long-legged youth built like an ostrich -- I think his knees even bent backward instead of forward -- with an intense look on his face. He kept at my heels all the way back, but I was running for the sheer love of running, and didn't allow him to catch up.

As I slowed down and stopped at last the young man wobbled over to me, rather out of breath, and hissed, "What do you think you're doing?" H. C. Koenig isn't here to argue that such a sentence can't be hissed, and I certify that it can be, and was, like the challenge of a cobra. I looked after him in complete befuddlement as he stomped away, and said to someone standing nearby, "What's eating him? Who the hell is he?" The other person chortled happily. "That," he said, "is Lob Larsen, the school dash champ." Well, I wasn't clear, then or now, what a "dash" was -- "a short fast race," says the dictionary, not helping much -- and also wasn't aware that the school even had a dash champion. Instead of supposing he had lost face (I realized later) the young man ought to have thought of me as merely setting the pace for him. It's too bad somebody wasn't standing there holding a stopwatch. Trying to catch me, ol' Lob Larsen probably bettered his own mark that afternoon.

During my years in the armed forces fighting world war 2 I must have had the opportunity of running on many occasions, especially during basic training at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, but the only time I remember clearly just now was in Belgium. It was during the lull between Germany's surrender and the redeployment of our troops either back to the States or to the Pacific theater of operations. At the time (June 1945) I was stuck at a repple depple, though only a few days later I was in Reims, newly assigned to the Redeployment Command. The main concern just then was keeping us busy when there was really nothing urgent to do. We burned up a lot of ammunition in target practice with M-1s, bazookas, mortars, and BARs. Then one day we went on a long leisurely hike along the Belgian country roads. We didn't carry packs or weapons. We didn't march, but only strolled along in the sunshine. Then, after half an hour or so, the staff sergeant in charge ordered us to start running.

Hardly anybody ran very hard or long on such a golden afternoon, but I was glad for the chance of stretching my gronkles (as Gretchen would have said) and without straining very much I soon caught up and passed nearly everybody who had been ahead of me. I ran on and on, although I soon learned that cobblestone roads, especially those left unrepaired since the start of the war, were not the easiest surfaces to run on, and that clumsy hightop G.I. shoes were not very comfortable footgear for running. That was a long time before Adidas and Nike.

At last, with only a few soldiers ahead of me or alongside, I puffed to a stop at the top of a gentle rise. I looked back along the winding road and saw hundreds of G.I.s strung out for miles behind me. Some were still jogging, some were sauntering, most were standing in small clusters or sitting in the ditches. I could see a long way in the sunshine. With difficulty I hoisted myself to the top of a stone wall that looked as if it had been there, waiting for me, since the reign of Charles the Fat, and rested a while. Another G.I. came over to me, sweating and blowing, and panted, "Say, do you know where we are?" For a moment I thought he meant that we were lost. Then I knew it couldn't be, for I could still see the road rolling

back to familiar territory, with all our fellow servicemen swarming lazily upon it, like bees on a honeysuckle vine. I realized that he meant something else, and said, "No, where are we?"

"We're in Germany!" he said triumphantly. I looked at the sun, and decided that we had been running east and north in the general direction, I knew, of Aachen. Nevertheless things looked about the same as they did where we had started out, which was indubitably Belgium. I hadn't noticed our passing any fence or gateway, and the few civilians in sight resembled the Belgians. I wasn't so naive as to suppose that the color of a country changes when you cross a border, as in Oz or on a map, but I wasn't too sure that one could move unobstructedly from one European country to another. I had read Remarque (Flotsam) and Ambler (Background to Danger) and knew that some people had found it very difficult. However, because of the late war it was possible that all the frontiers were open and unguarded just now. I didn't know. Suddenly I hoped that we were in Germany. Now the Germans were really defeated if I had set foot in their territory! And if this was Germany it was the first -- and last -- time I ever ran from one country all the way into another. I'm used to the great spaces of the United States, and the thought of running from Belgium to Germany struck me as magnificent a deed as that of running all the way from, say, Phoenix to Blythe. And then I remembered that they had brought the Good News across these very same miles of Europe. Dirck, Joris, and me!

The last time I ever ran to amount to anything was in 1963 when I outraced Peggy Rae, dashing headlong downhill to Bill Blackbeard's at 192 Mountainview in Los Angeles, but this glorious deed has already been told in song and story (or at least in a fanzine article). A few years earlier, in Minneapolis, I legged it on a far less legendary occasion. I had to work one Sunday afternoon, and there was no bus service on the weekend where I lived. Having no car I had to walk several miles to the nearest operating bus line. I started late, and shortly realized that unless I hurried I was going to punch in late for work. Thereupon I started to jog rather desperately along Reservoir boulevard. It was a cool spring afternoon, and since I had been working strenuously in recent months I thought of myself as being in good physical shape. But after I had pelted along a while I realized that I was dripping sweat and gasping for breath. "My god," I said to myself in amazement as I slogged heavily to a dragging walk, "I must be getting old." That was 28 years ago.

THE CAPTURED CROSS-SECTION

JEAN YOUNG

Animal Fair, RR #4, Box 47
Decorah, Iowa 52101

"On the BART Train" (Spirochete #34) was just wonderful. Years ago in Boston I used to go through much the same thing riding the subway/el. I rode the el a bit in Chicago while visiting Paul and Julie, and got much the same feeling, and was more depressed than ever,

On hekto: My parents, when I was a tiny child, had one of those inventions of the devil. My mom made the script copies for all the church plays they put on (mostly written by my dad, who was very good at it), and assorted other, mostly church-related, Stuff. She did not swear, curse, or kick, but she did, always, get angry when using the infernal thing. It was not a good time to ask her for favors.

Have I told you, back in Ivory Birdbath days, that our first mimeo was a Speed-O-Print Model L, bought second-hand at (I think) the A. B. Dick store in Boston? We may have commiserated mutually (any other way?) at the time, say 1956-59. Exactly all the things you complain of are the things I remember driving me crazy, so it wasn't just me, or my machine. A lot of my artwork got run off on that machine, my famous, Too-Arty-For-Fandom mimeoart folios.

Even things I don't like about women I like about women.
