

December 3, 2005

Note to readers of this column: I'm not sure where the following came from, but it suits me to a T so I am passing it on to you. Thanks for reading. Really, it just appeared on my computer one day, unexpectedly.

For quite a few years, I've been toiling at the same task and recycling the same old product – words. The craft is called writing and I can't imagine having more fun doing anything else. (That gives you a clue to the level of excitement that fills my waking hours, but I make no apology for it. I also make no pretense of having mastered the art, or even arriving at an understanding of it.) You've read in this space previously that I love words. I know many of you share this passion. Studying the derivation of words, admiring their symmetry and poetry, their ability to motivate and challenge, to provoke unashamed tears, silent smiles or audible laughter, their peculiarities, the relationship between English and the Romance languages, even the inconsistencies in rules of grammar that make our native tongue so difficult for others to grasp ... all of these fascinate me.

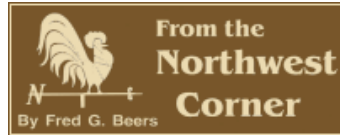
It is pure pleasure to read lines that seem to flow like a fresh water brooklet from those who have the gift. Writers, the good ones, can bring us to their point of view with masterful expositions of fact and logic. Some of the most accessible examples are found in the essays and syndicated columns printed on the editorial pages of many newspapers. Of course, there are many more forms of the art. Some of the masters take us on voyages to exotic lands, or open a window to peer through sheer veils where shadowy images weave stories of murky intrigue, or into tales of fragile romance that move us as voyeurs sharing tender moments with folks we really care about, even if they don't really exist. The very good writers, those who have mastered the art of literature, make the short hair on the back of my neck tingle with joy and/or anticipation. Those are wonderful experiences, meant to be savored.

I admire and envy those who manage to avoid even the occasional misspelled word; those whose meticulous work eschews improper grammar; those who never fail to use commas, apostrophes and other correct punctuation; and those who seem to select exactly the one word or the most colorful phrase for a particular need. Lapses in any of those categories bother me like a nail screeching across a blackboard. My own sins are well known to me. It saddens me when I discover that I have erred, that my humble output is riddled with misdemeanors. But all that is about the down side, and that's not where the joy comes from.

I have this irrational, Quixote-like fetish to totally eradicate split infinitives (such as you see in this very statement) and other broken rules and replace them with perfection. This has propelled me into a lifelong crusade to stamp out missteps. Semantics provide a topic that never seems to be exhausted, so I plunge ahead, fascinated each day by the subject matter. Just the mention or suggestion of the word "word" sets my mind in motion. Listening to the dialogue in a play, in the cinema or on a tiny TV screen is often sidetracked by mental detours and roadblocks that I set up. I find myself repeating the players' lines and trying to picture how those words looked on the typewritten or computer-generated pages of a manuscript. These deterrents have the unfortunate effect of destroying my concentration on the action, be it comedic or dramatic, unfolding before me, and thus removing any clear understanding of the story, but I accept that. Just do not ask me to describe the plot at some later time.

I guess that of all the forms with which I am familiar, letter writing has been my personal favorite for the longest time, but that is rapidly becoming a lost art. Fax machines and e-mail, that instantaneous medium of communication in cyberspace, are taking the place of formal letters. We find ourselves "staying in touch" with friends and family by dashing off breezy, truncated notes in a sort of shorthand, laced with jargon intended to make them conversational but with no

real styles, and sometimes no substance. Writing or receiving a real letter is becoming a rare occurrence. Junk mail and periodicals clog the postal system. How sad for the mailman and us. Letters used to provide an opportunity to tell the recipient something about the character and the emotional state of the writer. Not so with email. Bring back the good old days of three-cent stamps and twice daily deliveries by the postman! Maybe then we can restore some of what we have lost.



December 7, 2005

Some folks seem to believe it's too late to be thinking about World War II, but that does not include the men who were swept up in that maelstrom. For them, the war will never end, and its beginning will never be forgotten. Thank goodness, all of those memories are not grim, and it's true that at least a few of them have been spruced up with grim humor and some have even been spiced with a bit of comic exaggeration. It just was not a fun time and you must forgive those guys who now look back with a jaundiced view of what happened to them and to the world in that time frame. Tom Brokaw calls them The Greatest Generation, and he has made millions by retelling their stories. Who can argue with success like that?

Most of us like to tell our friends and others who will take time to listen -- again -- exactly what it was like, 'way back there on December 7, 1941, when the mean little guys who copied everything this country made, then suddenly became our arch enemies. They did not know they also would have to fight John Wayne and a bunch of other guys they never heard of, or knew only as actors on the silver screen. Most of us around here thought the war with Japan would last only a couple of months, but we did not realize that our enemy had taken the precaution of sinking most of our Navy and the sailors who knew how to handle those ships. Turned out the engagement did not stop until we unleashed the first atomic bombs late in the summer of 1945.

But I know you are all dying to hear where I was when I heard the first bad news about Pearl Harbor. On a sunny Sunday morning, three of my friends invited me to join them at a Cokefest in Brownie's Drug Store, on the west side of the square. Donald Laird, who was in charge of the fountain there that day, was tuned to an NBC radio station. The announcer broke into a Glenn Miller music festival to announce that the Island Paradise in the Pacific had been unexpectedly attacked and casualties were going to be pretty high. I had just taken a reporting job with this newspaper a few months earlier, so I finished the Coke and hurried home for a roast beef dinner before reporting to Francis Thetford, the PDJ managing editor, for whatever he wanted me to do. It was a sorry day in every way, but I remember it all, clearly. The war was not good for anyone. Especially the young men and women who perished in it.



December 10, 2005

Seems to me the cigarette manufacturers are still doing all they legally can to encourage young folks to smoke their products, even though it has been conclusively shown to cause cancer, one of the worst kind. Remember those cigarette ads we used to see in the Sunday newspapers, magazines, and on TV and on the radio? Those have all disappeared, as

ordered by the dear old U.S. government, but we still see and hear reminders of how great cigarettes taste, to some people. Young people are being wooed because they are the smokers of the future. If you have relatives or friends, or just passing acquaintances, who may be tempted to take up the filthy habit, tell them what you have learned the hard way and urge them not to take up the habit. Some cigarette manufacturers have chosen to become warning beacons themselves, but they leave me wondering why they urge boys and girls not to take up the habit but they continue to make their killing product, almost flaunting it. Wish I had a nickel back for every pack of cigarettes I have smoked.

My personal experience may be of some interest. One December afternoon, I came home, exhausted from accompanying several family members on a Christmas shopping expedition. I had been a smoker for at least 25 years and had reached a level of two packs per day, plus an occasional pipe with aromatic tobacco which I really enjoyed. I had a light cold, or an allergy—something that made me sneeze and cough quite a bit. I reached for another cigarette when all of a sudden I wondered to myself, "Why am I doing this?" I thought I could quit anytime I was ready, and my two little daughters, my wife and my mother thought it was time for me to quit. I knew we had a church wedding to attend that weekend, plus Sunday school and church, then NFL football games to watch, and desk work at the PDJ coming up. So I thought I could stop for at least those two days. One thing led to another, and I abstained for ten days, without telling anyone. I ate Delicious Apples in the interim.

So it went each day. Finally, after convincing myself that a habit of 25 years was ended, I told the family and we all enjoyed a success story like that. I am advocating a complete stoppage, cold turkey. It's still working, 40 years later, and I am at least partially indebted to Pam Malzahn and David Sewell for having their wedding in a church, where I could not reach for another cigarette. Makes me sick to think about it now. But, here's wishing a happy anniversary to Pam and David. I remember it each year.



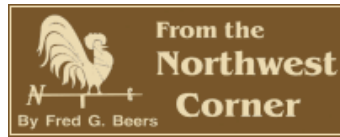
December 14, 2005

We spent a few hours during recent weeks putting together a program tentatively entitled "A Conversation With...", planning the content and going over some of the questions to be asked. As you might guess, this is a trial balloon, to see if the public is at all interested, and as it happens, your faithful correspondent here will be the first subject to undergo scrutiny. Gary Lawson, a longtime friend from the Ditch Witch® and Stagecoach Community Theatre days, was the inquisitor, and LB was included to help round out some of the stories. The subject matter was my time with the military newspaper, *The Stars & Stripes*, during World War II. It was an interesting period, if I do say so, and I was most willing to be a participant.

The completed version eventually will be shown on our own cable network, P.I.N. channel 19, at a time to be announced. The cameraman was Jack Roads, filling in temporarily (he insists) for Mickey Brown, who has resigned after getting the information network up and rolling. Jack's wife, Darlene, another long-time buddy, was sort of producer and production assistant. We all had a good time, setting this new show up and trying to guess at just what would be the most interest to viewers. I have not seen the final cut, but from what I've heard it should be of interest. Stay tuned for more details.

One of the principal reasons I took part in the initial taping was to tell a little bit about the edition I worked on, the Pacific Ocean edition, published during World War II in Honolulu and distributed throughout the Pacific Ocean area. The

newspaper was created in Bloomfield, Missouri, during the U. S. Civil War, and a museum/ library has been established there to tell the story of this war-time creation. Money is needed to keep the founding organization's work going forward. You can send contributions to The *Stars and Stripes* Military Association, Inc. at Bloomfield Missouri. That is where the newspaper was created on November 9, 1861. And watch for our upcoming P.I.N. program.



December 17, 2005

A few nights ago, Perry's largest industry held its annual Christmas party for employees at the Lazy E Ranch near Guthrie. Aside from the food, special seasonal music and a variety of other entertainment features, one of the outstanding features was a parody of "Twas the Night Before Christmas."

The familiar old poem was adapted by the company's CEO, Tiffany Sewell-Howard, for this particular evening, and it was met with great delight by the audience of several hundred Ditch Witch employees, their spouses or friends, retirees and other guests. I thought you would enjoy it, too, so here it is, on this Christmas eve as delivered by Tiffany at the company party.

*Twas the Night Before Christmas*¹

Tiffany Sewell-Howard

Twas the night before Christmas when all through the shop,
I searched for Ed's Segway®2 because it was lost.
The inventory was organized and the aisles swept clear,
in hopes that Ed might soon be there.

The employees were all home just killing time
while visions of SAP tormented their minds.
I walked by Ed's door and turned off the lights,
to head home once more a little tired from the fight.

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I ran from the door to see what was the matter.
And what to my wondering eyes should appear,
but a mini skid steer with ten cases of beer.

With a little old operator, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment, Ed was no longer sick.
He whistled and shouted and stood on his head
and eight restless managers arrived in good stead.

"Now Sewell! now, Williamson! now, Pollman and Andrews!
On Stevens! on Johnson! on, Kirtley and Kiner!"

"There's orange iron everywhere, behind every wall.
Now let's ship! Let's ship! Let's ship it all!"

So quickly they departed and to the docks they flew,
with smiles on their faces and a cold beer or two.

And then, in a moment, I heard a loud pop
there was grinding and pounding – it came from the shop!
I observed the commotion looking all around,
when suddenly from Shipping came the Segway –no sound.

He was dressed in all orange, from his head to his toe.
His shoes were scuffed up, with red clay and with snow.
A crate full of parts he had tied to his back,
bound and determined to get things on track.
With his brand new cell phone clenched in his fist,
he looked back quickly--was there something he missed?

With a wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
to me it was clear there was nothing to dread.

He was skinny and slight, barely larger than me.
Had he turned sideways there'd be nothing to see.
His eyes--how they twinkled! His hair, tousled white!
Crumbs all over his shirt--my what a sight.

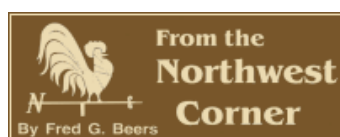
He leaned forward slightly, going straight to the docks,
"Finish loading the flatbeds! we've got plenty of stock."
And then nodding his head as if taking a nap,
He tightened the ratchet, putting on the last strap.

He sprang in the truck, to his team gave a laugh.
He turned right on Fir and gave it the gas.
But I heard him exclaim before he hit 35,

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

1The poem, "A Visit from Santa Clause," written by Clement Clarke Moore in 1822 was adapted by Tiffany Sewell-Howard for the 2005 Charles Machine Works Christmas party.

2The Segway® is a self-balancing, personal transportation device given to Ed Malzahn as a Christmas gift in 2004 by the employees of The Charles Machine Works, Inc.



December 21, 2005

Today we continue with more funny business from a regular reader in another state. She formerly lived here and keeps posted on local happenings by reading this newspaper. What follows is totally her contribution. Hope you enjoy it.

My husband and I fought constantly,
Why I married him, I'll never know.
For all those miserable years I said,
My Hubby's got to go!

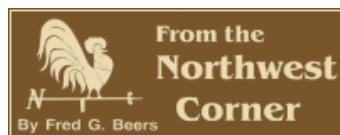
Tried poisoning cakes,
Stripping his brakes,
Salting his pork chops with lime.
Wiring his chair, igniting his hair,
Even though arson's a crime.

But I failed at each plot
'till I suddenly thought
Of a way that would set me free!
I got rid of him for good and, know what?
They couldn't do a thing to me!

I took him back to Wal-Mart!
They'll take anything back you know!
They said they couldn't recall selling him,
But they must have if I said so!

They just credited him to my Visa and said,
"Ya'll come back now, ya hear?"
They were so nice, polite, pleasant and insistent,
I'll take back his mother next year!

They'll take anything back at Wal-Mart,
Though it's broken or rotten or sweet.
And know what else? This time of year
You don't even need a receipt!



December 24, 2005

Our friends over at the American Heritage, that fine magazine dealing mostly in U. S. history, have produced their annual collection of "the most overrated" things and "the most underrated," which always gives us a springboard for agreeing or disagreeing. This year, I thought, it might be fun to list some personal preferences or disagreements.

So, here's a partial compendium of how we think their choices stacked up against our own. You don't have to join our chorus, but maybe you would like to enter your own preferences. Feel free to be in harmony or opposition to what the magazine says, or what we hold to be true. Our column cannot argue with all their choices. They have more space than we do. Nevertheless, here we go, such as it is.

"Most overrated Celebrity Trial." They give the nod to the Charles Sccope "monkey trial" in the 1920s. I say, the title belongs to the Michael Jackson trial last summer.

In another category, which translates in English to "best movie," they selected Orson Welles' portrayal of a fictional media giant, name of Citizen Kane, while I personally felt "Gone With the Wind" was superior. If you want to carry it out a little more, I would rank "Best Years of Our Lives," No. 2; and a passel of others waiting for their choice. There were a lot of good ones in the late 1930s, including the Andy Hardy series and others.

As I said, there were many good ones to choose from and I'd like to do more of this, but space makes that impossible so I will leave you with this sampling of possibilities. The writers on that magazine differ from mine in many of their choices. How about yours?



December 28, 2005

While searching through some old PDJ files at the Carnegie Library the other day, I came across some of the finely crafted columns of our former managing editor, Miss Jane Schneider. I was so captivated by the find that I decided to share at least a few thoughts from her typewriter, so what follows is one of those. It's from her column, Perry Parings, and it originally appeared on page two of this newspaper, in 1945. She signed her columns simply "Jane of the Journal," but we all knew who she was. I still hear from Jane, now in her advanced years, living in retirement in San Francisco but enjoying life to the fullest. Perhaps the following will revive some memories for you. Here's part of the Perry Parings for that particular day:

We're about to get used to shortages. . . Down the line with true American spirit, we've accepted everything NEW the powers that be, in Washington, have had to DEAL out, or maybe not had.

We've gulped, between gripings, our one cup of sugarless Java. We've walked the chalk with our three pairs per, provided we couldn't do Junior out of his stamp 18, and we've coasted through gasoline rationing without a murmur . . . that is if we were able to trade the home place for an extra coupon.

But the dear public is totally unprepared for an unprecedented shortage of columnists.

Well, Jane's gone on her vacation...with an overstuffed lunch box, packed by her mama, and admonitions from the gang not to speak to any strange men on the train, and with instructions from the boss (surely given in a weak moment) to have a good time and stay as long as she liked.

So now the boss is writing society. . . you want to watch that page for something startling . . . he'll probably let his hair down . . . The service manager is taking United Press news off the wire with his two-finger typewriter technique, and the assistant to the service manager has been given the dubious honor of pinch hitting for J. of the J. Dubious is used advisably because it's very possibly a subtle sentence saved for ad people who wish out loud that they could try their hand at writing a column.

SPEECH OF THE WEEK: (last week) was the short but stirring address given before the Broke & Bankrupt Order of Poor Boys by Banker, Bondsalesman Ora Hall. Chairman Hall, in his usual dignified manner, was prepared to tell in

detail the advantages to be gained by Backing the Attack but was met with such overwhelming applause that according to ear witness accounts, the only words clearly distinguished were 'but' . . . 'but' . . . and 'buy bonds.'

Thus wandered the mind of our friend, Jane. Hope these random thoughts helped bring back some memories for you.



December 31, 2005

My friend of many years keeps finding these things in miscellaneous places, and he shares them with you in hopes they might bring a chuckle. Same thoughts here. That's a good way to start the New Year, so smile if you think it's worth the effort, and have a "Happy New Year."

Henry Kissinger – There can't be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full.

Definition of a diplomat: A man who can convince his wife that a fur coat will make her look fat.

Benjamin Franklin – A spoonful of honey will catch more flies than a spoonful of vinegar.

Cordell Hull – Never insult an alligator 'till after you have crossed the river.

Will Rogers – Diplomats are just as essential to starting a war as soldiers are to finishing it. You take diplomacy out of war and the thing would fall flat in a week.

Will Rogers – No matter what we do, we are wrong. If we help a nation, we are wrong; if we don't help 'em, we are wrong. There just ain't any such animal as International Good Will. It just lasts 'till the money we lent 'em runs out.

Frost – A diplomat is a man who always remembers a woman's birthday, but never remembers her age.

The UN was started so everybody would act like friends. Right now they are acting more like relatives.

As some call the UN – The Tower of Babble.

Isaac Goldberg (writer) – Diplomacy is to do and say the nastiest things in the nicest way.

All the other countries tell us the same story: Go home and leave us a loan.

A few more allies and we'll go completely broke.

Frederick Sawyer (politician) – A diplomat is a man who thinks twice before saying nothing.

Will Rogers – All of Europe wants to be our partners. That's one good thing about European nations. They can't hate you so badly they wouldn't use you.

Harold Macmillan (Engl. prime minister) – Diplomacy is forever poised between a cliché and an indiscretion.

Will Rogers – Peace is like a beautiful woman it's wonderful, but has been known to bear watching.

Will Rogers – Now, there is nothing that makes a nation or an individuals as mad as to have somebody say, "Now, this is really none of my business, but I am just advising you.

If I sleep with a gun under my pillow, I don't want somebody from across the street to "advise" me that I don't need it.

Will Rogers – Our Secretary of State Kellogg's peace treaty – a lot of people don't seem so enthusiastic about it. I also have a scheme for stopping war. It's this, no nation is allowed to enter a war 'till they have paid for the last one.

Adlai Stevenson – A diplomat's life is made up of three ingredients: protocol, Geritol, and alcohol.

Visitor: Where is the capitol of the USA?

Native: Our capital is spread all over the world.

Will Rogers – A diplomat is a man that tells you what he don't believe himself, and the man he is telling it to don't believe it any more than he does.