

Return of the Discus Diary:  
the Perils of Park-bench Green



Nick Lenz

Isn't it peculiar how hard times can lead you into an addiction of historical time while historical times can lead you out of it?

I had not even edited the former Dastardliness before I started this one, and that is because another peculiar thing happened exactly as I finished the former diary. In fact, I took a large chunk out of the former, a chunk used to explain what happens to you when you are sucked out of your body and attain alleged freedom, because the situation had become unpredictable and this sequence would make a good beginning.

It all happened this way:

Something else had come up, it was historically arcane, and brought me many hours of correspondence before the wavering screen of the word processor (this is a Brother WP-75, do not buy one the screen breaks down the moment the warranty expires). It was the reunion of our small Stanford in Germany group back on the Farm that lead me off in a different direction. I wanted to go but could not justify the expense.

What do I remember from 30 years ago? A lot, it was an exciting experience: Chalmers and I catching the pig that was running about our room, there by the grace of our Herr Director in revenge for painting his VW beetle like an LA hotrod in tempera. We put it into a gunny sack, hauling it to the bathroom of the third floor of the girl's dorm where we were promptly chased out by the whackings of a viciously accurate broom attack by our resident pacifist. Dr. Whitaker's sixth finger getting stuck in the wine cellar door at curfew. My inarticulate but brilliant roommate, Chalmers, and I falling over at a stop light in Stuttgart on my wimpy motorcycle because we were packed so high with baggage and then being harassed for half an hour by a very dumb cop who claimed it was Verboten to fall over at a stop light. I remember marching in a commie May Day parade with General Train's son, after which we got drunk and smuggled the huge banners across the border on the elevated, and then went sailing on the fiercely whitecapped Totensee still dressed in our only Sunday suits. Some cheerful passing, soul without many teeth took an excellent photograph us in our attractive prime, looking entirely Nordicised. Another time with the general's son in Venice, going frantic on Easter Eve when it collided with Easter morning and all the bells rang everywhere, of the chase across the canal bridges to find the loudest bell which was at St. Marks, which is where we wound up and where I was shoved and nudged into the lowest of pittings on the floor, pittings produced by many years of wear, from which I could see nothing but a lady's butt. The salamanders that swim in the spring, tra la, the copulating toads, of which we collected a gunny sack's worth and distributed in the secondary girl's dorm, fearing the broom wielder of the first. Of my roommate and I getting very sick in Paris after visiting Spain and the local pet store. of the house maid with her gigantic stinky armpits bending over our two groaning bodies on the bed, insisting that she had to change it while she fussed about the zebra salamanders in the sink and the

turtles in the douche - we had to leave the toilet clear for barfing. But L did not voluntarily remember spending a night on a park bench in Paris with Mark Peery.

Yet it was he who phoned me to urge my attendance at this convening of near geriatrics back on the Farm (campus), mentioning he had to see me again because the best night of his life was spent with me on that park bench. There was some flack during the reunion and I was called by the worried Slynktress who asked if she had been there on the park bench also. I thought about it for a few days, found the entire park bench sequence rather interesting, and decided to make it my hobby for the month, since it was less boring than anything else I might consider doing.

So what did I remember of park bench green.? After a while, some of it came back. The three of us sat down in a well oiled state close to our hotels. I was in Paris this time because we (two football players, two fat girls, and I, all stuffed in a VW beetle) just happened to think Paris would be a change after the bullfights in Pamplona. W ran into the other crew. After a while, the Slynktress got up and excused herself for dinner, which I also thought appropriate, but Mark insisted I stay, which, being wishy washy and easily manipulated, I did. Now I did not know Mark at all because he was a frat brat and a snobby one at that, having established a clique superior the moment our silly little student feet hit Fatherland soil. Thus I had never talked to him before, nor did again until that recent phone call, but I assume we did on park bench green. After a while, the Slynktreas returned with another bottle of booze, stayed for a while, and then went off to bed. Mark and I did not, until morning. So what did we talk about for an entire Parisian night that was so monumentously memorable to him? I haven't the foggiest.

Or at least, I hadn't the foggiest until a number of things went back and forth for a month: I got in hot correspondence with the Slynktress. What happens when you encounter someone from 30 year's ago? Are you bland, blank, and estranged, or has some degree of communication continued to build in openness since the last conversation, even if there has been no correspondence. The latter seemed the case with the Slynktress, I know the disappointments and joys of her life and she knows my absurdities. I have not had time to write her about the joys and disappointments of my life, nor do I intend to find the time, since I put them down so adequately in the Dastardly Discus Diary and am thus relieved of them, in much the same process as in Catholic confession. After a while of this, I looked at my copy of the Burg Wurd and wrote a couple other old friends: my crazy roommate, a post Germany friend, and, yes, finally Mark. I put it to him directly: what happened on park bench green, why were you such a snob, and why don't we capture it again, say in the circle of mature trees on the lava spill bluff on Hawaii, if you pay for it? I also decided to include a couple of excerpted pages from 'The Visions of Hawaii' (which none of you dear readers have been sent) to note that there is a cave and a treasure at the end. I cannot afford to fly there and check it out free of the women.

His reply was short: your letter will take a long time to digest and I don't like queers. He ventured a Haiku about a black pony dashing its rider across the universe. I wrote back that I didn't need a black pony to dash across the universe, and a lot of other curious things and then went to bed, only to have the following explanatory dream of what happened on a Parisian park bench a very long time ago:

Art unidentified companion and I were wandering up into the bleak November pasture, past the greenhouse, accompanied by my stick dog, when we casually slipped into the edge of the forest and a clearing which should not have been there. As we entered, we shed our clothing with disdainful hand motions as if flicking away so much dandruff. The clearing varied in size as I looked around from my awed stance on park bench green grass, tall and lush. The peripheral oaks took greater focus as they emerged from the wall of roiling fog around the clearing, they too were verdant green except for the branch tips that suggested tints of fall yellow. Rays of light shifted slowly from the bases of the oaks, illuminating the shadows of branches as the foci moved in. I was so delighted that I turned to any companion, who was playing stick with the rusty dog, and said: "Gee, this is truly a beautiful place".

The companion turned, and with Mark's youthful face said: "Yeah."

He then turned away and went back to stick; I turned away to wake up so that I would remember the dream which explains park bench green, now the color of my trailer in the Adirondacks.

You see, dear reader, what we said for a whole hot Parisian night is irrelevant, if, indeed, we said anything more than: pass the bottle. We sat down on one of those rarer bubbles of space/time discontinuity, lovely and unusual places where one would want to remain, even if he didn't like his companion much at all.

So my intuition had been correct. You liked the park bench?

You want to see me after 30 years? Let's pick another park bench, say, uh oh, um, in the grove of power on Hawaii. And see what I came up with? The only other bubble of space/time discontinuity I was ever stuck in for a while. Just off the top of my head, like the Diary itself. Of course, to make things more convincing, I enlisted the aid of the Slynktress and my crazy roommate: Chalmers. He isn't actually crazy at all; he just seems to be. This is because his mind is not only highly absorbent, but works approximately 732 times faster than anyone else's. Thus, when you are standing in front of him talking, his eyes are darting back and forth with a staccato as annoying as that on my word processor screen, much the same as mine did while trying to avoid focusing on the grove of power above the place of the petroglyphs when I was superactivated. Talking to him back then was difficult as he could only randomly sample the enormity of what was racing through his mind which often sounded like so much gibberish. In fact, after a short while, we created our own language which was total gibberish and communicated as well in

it as we did in English and certainly better than we did in German, It turned out that he actually did call Mark to include himself not only in the excursion, but in the subsidy plan, since his sperm sex sensing company had recently folded after he was caught smuggling giant mouse embryos tucked in ankle strapped toilet paper tubes aboard mid-western airliners.

Mark was interested. I read this on a Sunday morning during breakfast which happened to be just before Abel's token assignment to Acolyte duty at Grace. The Acolyte Mother, a smallish and skinny musician who must also teach at Smith because she always wears pants and a sweater, even in summer, had asked if Abel should be dropped from the performing roles, and I had exclaimed, well behind his back: No never. How convenient. I would conceal myself behind my favorite pillar and put it on the Lord, because suddenly, I was scared. scared because Chalmers was whooping up the notion that I knew of treasure caves full of fortified virgins while I had no idea that even an entrance did, since my view of it was just so much diarrhetic wandering.

So I made it known, as I knelt down before the prelude, that I was on the make for information.

Pre-communion meditation:

"Lord, is there a cave?\*

"Yes."

"Can I find it?"

"Yes."

"Should I?"

"No"

"Why not?"

"You would not like it."

"You would find it dangerous."

Post-communion meditation: What is in the grove? I tried to focus inward, downward, and nothing would come of it except plagues of men and boats out of focus on a distant wall, so I gave up. Then, an ugly black turd, somewhat in the form of a wolf's head, floated across the sky and puffed out into black oily clouds. I sought to descend beneath them, but there was layer upon layer of the nasty things. I sought the place of the petroglyphs and a large columnar blackness squatted upon it, like a stationary tornado, shooting out lateral badness. In apprehension, I looked up to the grove; it was instantly covered by a glop of greasy cloud.

Fine, be that way, I thought, and stopped. End of service: one kneels down after the clergy march by. I started to. The moment my hymnal hit its slot in the back of the pew before me, one occupied by a fat lady, a weight entered me and I went down quicker, reeling with grogginess. One times these things: start to kneel, insert the hymnal, start to close the eyes, and *whammo*, on this one occasion, as I hit floor, Karen hit the keys and the screen was black with a light sweep of a laser



diagonally across the screen, a laser which turned into falling water, black water, falling on a black river underground. Another view. Then a map, a high altitude one with brown land and blue water. A peninsula stuck out into the bottom water and an implied current struck it from upper right. Dirty blue sky, messy with fly specks. A jet bomber raced out of it towards me and flew overhead by inches. What the Hell? Then, as if in reinforcement, 10 more flew over. Now just land, brown land, no water, pockmarked with pocks upon pocks upon pocks, and I said: oh shit. Oily black water = oil, bombers mean George Bush, craters signify death.

I was depressed as all hell as I snuck out behind the rector who was greeting no one and didn't even hear what sounded like a roaring: "Nick." what turned me around was the woman's strident: "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...", her usual strident: "yes, yes, yes, yes, yes..."

"How are you?"

I wanted to say: "Lousy, I just saw the beginning of the Persian Gulf War," but I didn't. I just said happy spring, which was less appropriate than last time since winter hadn't even bothered to come yet. But it was none of his business anymore. And good thing, too, because, after Stop 'n Shopping, driving, unloading, cooking, eating, napping, etc., I awoke and said: "What if the map belonged to Hawaii and not to the Persian Gulf?" I looked. After a while of searching coastal profiles, I found an island with the appropriate shoreline and jutting peninsula. It is a small one where no tourists go. This is because it is a navy bombing range, sing tra, la, oh.

Turns out that this island, before the navy grabbed it, was a hangout for those wicked black sorcerers. their patron saint was Kanaloa, synonymous with the name of the island: Kahoolawe. He was a bad boy and thus cast out of heaven by Kane, the perfect golden golf ball, and is now keeper, in his pit realm, of all things poisonous. And the dead. How cute of him to look like an oily black turd. Now that I think of it, he looks just like a very healthy disco turd . . .

Now all of this, dear reader, belonged in the last diary. Aren't you glad you weren't stuck with it then? I am, because I thought, until today, that I really wanted to go back to the big island and check out the cave, find the magical treasure, and raise solid day-glow orange discus that would sell for thousands of dollars each. It did not seem useful to place the park bench green scene in the context of places serene and wonderful once you leave your body, and your demanding population of fish, as well as boring family life, but to use it as a prelude, an appropriate prelude to what might be an actual live Hawaiian adventure. But I know now that the real place is not what I am seeking.

It all happened this way:

I had a delightful time pondering and imagining over the shadows cast by Kanaloa in the dust of the pottery. I thrilled with excitement in what becomes, in December, an ever increasing close down of earth's natural machinery. While I was

lifting a slab of clay so that I could smash it down again, I said to myself: I don't want to dwell on this diseased necromancer during the last week of Advent - I want Jesus. Because I had willed it, my mind shifted from an attitude of suspenseful mystery to one of suspenseful mystery. That was the first clue.

The second arrived on Sunday, once again at Grace because the Eichhorns had come and no one wanted to go to church except the child and I. Ambivalence: Lord, I want to learn more about Jesus and Hawaii. Result: a new pagan deity, depicted in an unfolding stain glass Tiffany lamp shade style - flowers, lots of flowers, a hybrid between the water lily and a magnolia, all of them the same. A classic post card babe, her lithe body red in the sunset, her red bra and sarong combo redder in the sunset, was superimposed over the lampshade until I kicked her out for resembling Natalie Wood on set more than anyone Hawaiian. But she came back ethnic, unfolding subtly in lead frame and smoke colored glass, shedding flowers and becoming a lavender moon. Pop goes the weasel, pop goes the golden golf ball, pop went the moon, a lavender reflection of Kane who kicked the sewer god out of heaven, pop went my mind, because, as usual I had asked a question and was answered in an irregular way.

Lord, what is in that grove of power: the sun, the moon, the force of life? That which shines, that which wiggles, that which blooms? Cave? Ah, yes, a cave\_ What is in that cave, Lord? That which is ugly, that which is mean, that which rumbles and belches forth the fires or garbage of the earth. Every time. No, not new detail such as a national park road mileage marker or a Golden Princes beer can wedged in a fissure as identifying clues to the entrance of something or another – always another deity. The treasure in that grove is not temporal but spiritual. If there is a cave, it is but a symbol, like all the rest. The only thing I can suspect with reliability is that the grove of Obi's trees contains all of eternity, as does the resurrection of Christ. They are not out there waiting to pounce on us or pull us up. We are out there. They are in here waiting to be released. I have been making up the Hawaiian religion from myself. It may not be the same one the Hawaiians made up, but it is similar. I made up the resurrection from myself, but I had a lot of clues. Most preachers would be offended by it, but it certainly follows the scant text.

Some discos, such as one of the four selectees, will impress you by its possession of a gene for particular brilliance in the orange color range. No doubt, some people have a gene for increased myth making. I seem not to be receiving messages from a distant deity or a dozen, but from the mess of them within - or at least, the sense of them within. Which means that everyone is full of deity, since everyone is not much different from me. I have an awful lot of references to Christianity, most from a Mid-west past and they can be scary - Jesus is watching everything you do and will punish you... No wonder I am startled by Christian visions and back off as soon as I create one\_ But Hawaiian sewer skimmers and flower folders? What do I care of them; what have I to fear in moldy North Leverett?

They are easy to make up, especially with my ignorance on the subject. But it only works in a place of power.

Well, only a few temporal days had passed in the room of the pit for all these pages of creative pap, and since Christmas had just passed graciously, due to the same line of muttered statements of will such as: I want this to be cheerfully managed and I don't want to be grumpy, no matter how annoying it becomes, in the same way I made the switch from Kanaloa to his nemesis, Jesus, I thought I might push the discos a little to see what I could create from floating pancakes of protoplasmic grandeur. Already, there is another batch of eggs just hatched and wigglers washed into Tupperware. For Chong had just called to say that Dr. Yu, an eminent nuclear physicist, wanted some of my disco babies.

He never had a chance. You all know what a deadline is like. When does the 1st basso gigante remind you sufficiently that you are not wanted? A deadline was approaching as staunch Republicans yelled for war because war is peace. I called Al the breeder. He was interested, if still impoverished. A week went by and Mike the kid brought Albert who wanted the 4 selectees along with a tank, etc. And then, just then, everyone came down with stomach worms brought in by that Damn Lavender discus from Bob the breeder. I was determined never again to heat the room of the pit or the greenhouse. It was time, before doom struck, to rid myself of an energy burden.

I also went frantically through the unrecorded diaries, putting them on disc while rewriting them, and during the first day of the Episcopal steward's war, managed to record them all. I also got rid of the fish - all of them.

Gas, poison chlorine gas fills the room of the pit when you put a diseased system to rest. I removed the flat frog, putting him on the dining room table where he remains as a centerpiece reasonably close to the stove. But I do not know how he or the tree fern from Hawaii will do, or the discos, for that matter. I do wish them well. The fish were particularly lovely, even when freaking out in their plastic transfer bags. No breeder had better discus than mine, except for Bob with his Godzilla 'n mate. The room of the pit is not empty, but vacant. The pit is as sterilized and everything else is packed away in cardboard boxes, just in case something worth writing about should come to mind, something that requires the presence of discus fish. The spawning posts are back in the shop for sale as bonsai pots. The baster and the Tupperware are back in appropriate kitchen drawers. I finished the last tank today, the big tank, and afterwards laid down for a nap which was restless. I never fall asleep during naps but form a lot of visual images which is fine if they do not suggest the impending doom of dental appointments, flying away by USAir, or talking to in-laws. While I do this, my body is very asleep. Today, I saw only foreheads, not of distant Arabs blown apart, or of humans clutching out of cages in Israel, or of giant bassi booming a motet, but of discus, concealed, their eyes barely showing, their skull stripes yet vivid in my eyes.



After nap, by habit, I went down to check on the fish. when I opened the door slowly, and peered left cautiously, as one always needs to do, so as to avoid an exceptional volume of *kawoomps* and *kathwanks*, I was reminded that there was no one to demand caution. I turned on the light and saw that the last slight layer of water in the pit had frozen. Above it, on the counter, was a whole mess of tiny placards, neatly stacked as to category. And so I turned away, with a quick: "Thanks be to God!" falling into somewhere silent from my lips.

Well, that would have been a good ending, but I do not intend to send this out until next Christmas, which is a very long time away. In fact, it is only two weeks since the fish went away and the unfortunate Arabs began being blasted into arms and legs. It is a tense time; I even forgot about a medical appointment I didn't want to pay for. I also did not miss the discos, although, by habit, I still tiptoed in places I should not. Mark will not write, no doubt freaked out as much as the clergy I encounter, except for Lois - well, you never know, maybe I am getting into her sensibilities also. Winter is boring, but no more so than it would be with discos. I am no longer waiting. Instead, I am making maggotous bonsai pots known as the Saddam series and teaching Sunday school to three wonderful little monsters, all of whom delight at instructed interruption of choir practice, as it ours at the same time, and a loud noise from the cellar can shake the sanctuary and put the organ off pitch.

Witnessing it is called. If you do not write about the true nature of the fish, you are not witnessing. If you are intimidated by your visions of something better for people than the Bush wars in a bushless land, you are not witnessing. And if you deny the Hawaiians their marvelous godhood,, you miss the wonder of the unusual sunset, the crunch of ice breaking beneath your canoe on Earth Day, and the *kehways* of a universe of discus smashing their sweet little heads into the back walls of their respective aquaria. They all need witnessing.

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, Jesus became tired and so slipped off to a hidden spot, and of course, the boys followed after. No sooner did He sit down for a breather, than the loutish bunch pounced upon him with all sorts of questions:

Tom: "I am hungry, when do we eat?"

Judas: "Shut up."

Thad: "Whaddaya mean . . . shut up? I'm hungry too!"

Phil: "Now, guys, we have a good psychological demand going here which we should . . ."

Little Jim: "Cool it."

Big Jim: "Whaddaya mean, cool it? I think . . ."

Matt: "Cool it, he said cool it."

Bart: "Come on, guys, let's cut the . . ."

Simon: "You're all full of shit . . ."

Andy: "Come on, give me a break, give us all a break."

Pete: "Shut up, all of you!"

Johnny: "What is God like?"

Jesus: "Why, uh, God is spirit"

Johnny: "Does He love discus fish?"

Jesus: "I can't imagine why He would. Can you?"

Now released from turd duty, I started putting Saddams on my pots, and they all looked alike – caterpillars. I became astounded with what one could do with caterpillars while longing to return to Hawaii, since it was mid-winter. And then I decided to. I made a lot of long distance telephone calls and, with the protestations of the child, who would be excluded, and then with father son bonding phrases screamed at me for seven days and seven nights, decided on an arduous and probably foul smelling hiking trip for two. Why not check out the places of power, even though it was Lent? Why not quest? Reason: after knowing that I would do it, I did not want to.

Essentially I returned to Grace, not hiding, but still lurking behind my favorite pillar, as it blocked me from the lectern, which, when occupied, always put me into a gentle sleep. I had more visions, lots of them, featuring what one could do with a circle, such as design yet another cathedral or comprehend the true nature of the jack-o-lantern.

I got tired of the plastically soft Opus penguin sitting forlornly in my dresser aquarium with a large "HELP" placard wedged in his fading fake arms and so bought 4 jewel fish babies. They were sweet. Then I dewormed them and they became more cowardly and mean than any discus could imagine to be. They were also not very pretty.

I worked for a month on the "Why not Hawaii?" dilemma, became severely accused by John the holy as an heretic, was encouraged by everyone else, except the woman, who was jealous. I finally decided that visions are what you

want them to be according to the time and place. This not only started me on another phase of my religious evolution towards confusion, which meant I did not have to bother with theology anymore, which allowed me to produce religion for my three little horrors rather than absorb it, but reminded me of something I had said to Lois on the way back from Hawaii: "You know, this is really a junk state. One redwood grove in California is prettier than all these islands."

Thus, credit card in hand, calling the travel agency, booked to San Francisco.

Curious how real is the lapse of interest in old friends as one is separated in time and space. I called several to get a hint on the rental of a minimal camper/RV unit. Most of them said they didn't know and didn't care and would be busy when we came. We finally encountered the Germans - when the child and I arrived, the contract for our minimal camper was printed in German, and was, surprisingly, still quite legible after all these years. Our instructions were in broken English with apologies because this was the first time they had rented to an American. They and the rental agreement were both adamant in the way only Germans can be about the absolute necessity of returning the RVette sterile, which we did. I was somewhat surprised, after living in this nordic vehicle for two weeks, that I spoke remarkably communicative German to the woman who drove us back to the airport. She could not speak any English at all.

The in-between was a sifting of the true. The child, at 15 was a delight to travel with except on the last day when he knew he was going home to resume his role as Father antagonist. The snow drifts were sparkling amongst the groves of Sequoias, a bad but lovely place to be in tennis shoes. Once upon a time, Dick the sculptor fixed me up with a woman who also was foolish enough to want to drive to California in February, and so we set out in my yellow truck. On the way back, we drove up to Sequoia. On this particular highway which climbs gradually but steadily up to 5000 feet, we passed through one obfuscating cloud layer and then into another. We stopped at an obfuscated scenic pullout to boil hot dogs in beer, which foamed obfuscatingly. The cloud did not move, so we continued out of it, and moments after we broke through in the foggy headlight brilliance that blinds the driver's sense of perilous cliffs below, we saw the sign: "Bread-o-Heaven Lake", pulled off, and stopped for the night. In the morning, the woman complained that it was too cold to get up without heat. I started the engine which meant that the yellow monster was not in gear. While I was dressing, I noticed that the landscape was passing by the window - out of the back portal, I discerned an ever more rapidly approaching lake full of icebergs. My instinct was to leap to the driver's seat, which I did, and successfully stopped the awkward vehicle before it had moved into the impossibly steep grade down into frigidity. As I did so, I scraped my bare foot across the wood stove outlet, which, being rather sharp, left a rather deep cut. The brake pedal turned red and dripped on the floor. I made a tourniquet out of a dirty t-shirt and it turned dirtier. When the van was warm enough, the woman got dressed, ate breakfast, and complained that the floor was slippery. After that, we proceeded to one park station after another, which, by saying: "keep

going", got rid of us. In what was to become YELLOW RIBBON COUNTRY, we hit a medical clinic which sewed me up crudely for 20 bucks. But the woman never ever would let me out of the truck to look up at a single sequoia.

Abel and I looked up. Earlier, in Yosemite, we walked up the first place the sun would strike after our 7 AM departures from the congested campgrounds. We crunched upon frozen earth to a southward facing cliff. Several hours later, as we descended, we would encounter people coming up. Half of them were Germans. The other half were yuppies with the champagne bottle labels showing from their packs. This meant that the 17,533 other inhabitants of the valley on that day just stayed holed up in their RVs. Exception 1. Every morning, the old fart out our bow window stumbled out of his behemoth, rolled out an astroturf carpet, park bench green, surrounded it with a fence, and brought out an immaculate herd of scotties, who yerped at the pine cones. Exception 2. On the last night in Yosemite, a medium sized RV out the left peephole started squirting water, accompanied by a profound, if muffled sequence: "Shit, shit, shit, shit... Suddenly, a side panel lifted and a huge aquarium was ejected laterally by impossibly 1930ish mechanical arms. It was empty of water, but a profound thrashing at the bottom of the tank showed discoid forms. I refused to go out and inspect. Abel said: "Dad, let's get out of here tomorrow." We did.

We became warm for the first time in Death Valley. Our first campground was in a parking lot. The vehicle closest to us, a rusty VW, at one point erupted with a whole mess of aged hippies, all holding placards in their left pectoral fins - placards I refused to read.

In Twopecker Springs, a campground of geriatrics rejoicing in the mineral baths which to us, being male, displayed only a variety of very descended testicles, an antique RV, rather bubble shaped in the Flash Gordon style, was painted sloppily in the pattern of the eternal discoid.

But everywhere between the altitudes of one and three thousand feet, park bench green lushness was alert with tiny, gleaming blossoms. Lots of them. Whole hillsides of them. Big Basin was empty and the most beautiful - trees, real trees, very big trees, and we were alone. The cold air sighed, I sighed, grabbed another beer, and uncovered another salamander, all of whom were successfully smuggled through airport security in toilet paper tubes strapped to my legs.

Summer comes on with no particular significance, except that both the Congregationalists and the Episcopalians fade from my sense of importance. Thus, I transfer to the Methodists, officially, since I have found within the congregation not one but several individuals with whom to discuss theology in a wild way - meaning unstructured. They have become important - I have discovered that a lot of it had to do with the Persian harem tent I erected in the vast flatness of the gray cellar below the bright pseudo-colonial sanctuary. More of it had to do with the ancient black woman of our church, who, as a college student was discouraged by the white grantors of a prestigious Mid-West university from studying a course of opera because niggers would look unaesthetic on stage. But you can hear Delila in her gospel solos, now that she is well past retirement age. And I heard her footsteps coming as the child and I nailed and tacked up the vast harem tent, splendid with bargain fabric, and I broke out mischievously in Leadbelly style: "Trouble, trouble, comin' my way, she gonna fuss, she gonna bray," which is exactly what she did. "I was over there in Leverett the other day, and mentioned your name, because I don't know about you. They said you were theirs: "Oh yes, we've got him, we've got him,"" and I did not like the idea of being possessed by any church or swarm of floating pancakes and so broke a recent tradition of non-commitment. Makes sense - I do all the Methodist puppet shows, adult ones, too, and how I can make them laugh, sometimes, those Methodists, us Methodists.

I also attacked the rotten superstructure of the place, which is vastly time consuming. It always astounds/annoys me how quickly old rotten buildings sink when neglected here for a couple of years or more of emergency.

I also attacked bad bonsai form to perfect it, which is vastly time consuming. I also sold some.

November came upon us and everything got done in time -except the making of money (which you will note, does have a park bench aspect to its coloration). I lectured in Rochester and Montreal. The former's food swam in indigestible grease; the latter's was a delight. I bought a water lily in Rochester for Pilate's pond in the Adirondacks, but because the pond was dry, had to plant it in

Perfidy Pool, which I and a backhoe made in the back yard, along with a lot of other messes. It is not park bench green - it is scum colored. Since Autumn's leaves, in blowing hither and yon, all passed over the surface to be gobbled, one could walk upon that water.

The child hung out exclusively with the woman's computer, which she shunned along with anything else promising. I moped about behind the pottery making a huge roof over the kiln, grumbling profusely at the local gas inspector, a bureaucrat from Hell who had closed it down because it hadn't been sanctioned by a state regulatory board which did not exist when some other state board passed the kiln. The grungiest task of all was making a Pilgrim press cupboard with a frame of antique oak, which had been mildering in the barn for years. And it took a while, its doors sporting the dual or perhaps not dual symbolism of the cross of Jesus and the moon. The center of the moon came from my shop drawer, an old piece of wood from some exotic clime left by Leaky John years ago when I brought the woman into the household as an excuse to get rid of him and Francine the Fair, with her always worshipping herd of males, and Nancy the Hazard, who had moved her mother (a good Episcopal) into my vacant bedroom while the woman and I were both traveling to California to pursue people other than each other, skipping the Sequoias, a piece of wood so old that it had naturally colored to park bench green. With oil, it became olive drab. All of this elaborate wrist ripping carpentry was necessary to support the 70 gallon tank for the new discos - oh oh - you didn't know about that, did you?

I did once tell you about Lois's version, an accurate one, of the seven deadly sins. I now recognize discos to be the addiction I originally stated it was, but not a sin, just as the Piscies were a spiritual addiction. The old fart up the road is more complacent and charming than he ever was, now that he has recovered from his massive ecumenical heart attack. But he has gone back to beer and tobacco. The Congos, when I encounter them at the Leverett PO, no longer having a congregational demand to be nice, glower and rush off when greeted, which is their predisposition. They are addicted to exclusion.

When the child and I returned from California, from the spender of nature under death sentence, I tossed the nasty little jewel fish to the cat. An aquarium, even just one, should have something pretty in it.

So I called Al the breeder to whom I had sold everyone on day one of the oil war. He said my best disco had crossed with his best female and that he had lots of stunted babies because he did not have time to feed them. I called Bob the motorcycle man from Oklahoma, and he said he had put so much time and money into discus, that he was busy talking to a bunch of German discotypes upstairs. I called Bob the breeder who said that Godzilla, for all his size and grandeur, had produced few minnows, and that Bob from Oklahoma had stolen them all. Later, Bob from Oklahoma called to say that he had indeed not done so, but that he might have one or two, because they were in the same tank with an inferior hatch of a



different strain bashing their tiny heads against the back wall of the tank at the same time. How could one tell? I recalled church politics and opted for Al. He believes in the god of the Adirondacks.

That morning, the third of May, the woman and I wandered to Webster beneath ironclad skies that guarantee the new blossoms of spring for at least another day, since it was too cold and gloomy for them to die. What to choose? Al showed me his many new fish. His stock had improved, especially his red strain. I beheld my own babies grown and splendid, as were his red discos. Any one of them would have been the one gorgeous fish, except, when I selected it, the most gorgeous fish, he decided that this particular fish was not for sale. Thus, I opted for the unknown, the babies showing nothing but a razor sharp profile due to starvation. I always opt for the unknown, since it is not known. In that way, I learn something.

As the world of the woman, child, and bonsos heated and then cooled, I gave the fish little notice. They were no longer a quest. I did note that they grew and that they had a mysterious gill malady I could never correct. But they did survive, as did the bonsos in this, our year of yet another drought. Perhaps it was the drought that dried the pond in the Adirondacks that made me think of the Eichhorns who would surely be coming for Christmas and who had several years before given me the big tank. I thought that if I could bring it upstairs, that the room of the dead pit could be relieved of its heaviest burden and could become winter storage for those bonsos known to be thoroughly unwinterhardy. The wicked gas inspector had condemned all my furnaces and gas lines, as well as the kiln. He did this not because they were malfunctioning or unsafe, but because he is a German. An unheated greenhouse means the freezable plants must go somewhere warm, like the well insulated room of the pit, which means that the big tank must go somewhere, which meant I had to make a cupboard with crosses and moons on it. The wide boards for the doors came from Wally's dying tree and thus had some rot stains. Solution? I painted them park bench green to better differentiate the crosses. Stunning.

That also meant I had call around again, but I did not call Al, since his fish were still gasping for breath. Bob the breeder said that Godzilla was spawning many discoletts and that he had selected out the runts and deformed for sale. When I offered to buy one, he suddenly decided that none of them were for sale, because he could make much more money by offering them at auction. And so, dear reader, did I write him off the list. I would find out later that this was a good thing to do.

I found out the next day in fact, when I drove to Bob the Oklahoman's house. He had lots of discos for sale, most of them well picked over, and so I bought only four, two each of two reds strains. I was shown an unverified Godzilla baby. It was the ugliest discus I has ever seen. But the new fish I bought were fine. In the long banishment period to the room of the pit, chaotic but still functional in Fall, while I made the cupboard and the pond and put away the bonsos for the year, While I insulated this room's floor with the insulation

that used to cover the greenhouse roof I winter and while I went away to Montreal to eat impressibly bland but yummy duck, the fish wilted not, nor were they in any way diseased. This was an all-time first – no medication, no illness. Not then again, as Murphy or God process true, none of them, as they hover close to my left shoulder in this rearranged room, is a particularly gorgeous fish.

But hover they do, after only 3 days. Hanging out there, in front of the woman's sherry bottle sterilized and placed in the tank as shelter, they hang in the current watching me, without placards, for I have thrown them all away, Hovering, waiting, not yet familiar with their surroundings, sometimes spooked, but still hovering. But not far away. They dash behind the bottle, and from there, with acceptable distortion, watch me through the park bench green, which, from my left shoulder, becomes their color also.