

The Cafe - Former

Official Organ of The Society for the Defense of Tradition in Pyrotechny

I.: O.: O.: J.:

"Magna est Veritas et prævalebit." — I. Esdras, iii: 41.

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No. 1

AVANT-PROPOS

The staff of the *Case Former* had prepared a lengthy editorial for this space, garnished like an elaborate multi-break shell with flashes of wit, thunders of indignation, a parachute beacon of illuminating truth, and a final heavy report of amiable curmudgeonry, when we realized that we lacked a site to display it: column inches were at a premium, and paper is expensive. The editorial was to have dealt (again) with "political correctness" and those who have taken offense at words we have published in these pages. Our readers will probably be relieved to know the show has only been postponed and not cancelled.

With this issue of the *Case Former* we welcome our Chirurgeon-General, Scoppietto Dulcamara, late of the celebrated medical faculty of Salerno, to our pages, with the first of what we hope to be a regular series of columns advising our Companions on questions of health care. Also, the "Sympathetic Detonations" feature has been expanded. Complaints continue to roll in about the high-handed conduct of Mr. B***e B**m (note the *Case Former's* new editorial policy of not printing offensive words). Re-elected, we are told, by a majority of only 21 votes, despite his egregious campaigning as early as the Western Winter Blast, Mr. B**m now seems to act as if he rules by divine right. The reason we do not anoint politicians in this country, as they do the crowned heads of Europe, is that our leaders are slippery enough already. One of the Letters to the Editor is a real first, a communication from one who is not a Companion. This letter arrived here without a return address, but since it speaks with obvious inside knowledge and great discernment about one of the significant controversies now swirling, as such things are wont to do, in the P.G.I.I., we thought it might have much interest for our readership.

PASQUINO DEI FUGISTI

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae.

VIRGIL, *Aeneid* IV, xxij.

Rivers Country Day is a small prep school nestled in a spacious, private corner of Weston, Massachusetts. The campus spreads across richly wooded low hills that finally yield to Lake Nonesuch. It's a fine place for the semi-riche to send their brilliant brats prior to Harvard or Princeton, or alternately to get their troublesome rabble whipped into shape prior to parental breakdown. I'm afraid the first category eluded me. I was sent packing to Rivers to atone for my lowly B's and C's in public school, not to mention my constant misbehavior.

My first impressions of Rivers were those of the damned touring hell: jackets and ties, regulation haircuts, dawn to dusk study, endless homework, mandatory sports, and not a skirt to be seen. I must pick a major, I was told. What happened to Majorettes? This was a dark day indeed. I was inconsolable as I surveyed my predicament, plodding grimly along my tour, locked in a death struggle with my tie. After visiting the gymnasium I began plotting my escape. I was to play football and wrestle, I was told. Wonderful. At six feet and one hundred and forty pounds, I'd be a natural. What a gallant figure I'd cut playing football; a hatrack wearing a uniform and helmet.

Next was the science building, and there I found my purpose at Rivers. Visions of greenstick fractures and stretcher rides evaporated as I entered the chemistry lab. There my eyes beheld stainless steel and glassware, a spotless expanse of gadgetry surrounded by cabinet after glass-doored cabinet of dark brown bottles, solemn and quiescent. I walked down a row in reverent awe, my eyes sampling the names. Some of the chemicals I'd heard of, most of them I had not. But of this I was certain: they all spelled mischief. Ah, the room was redolent

with the sweet smell of trouble. Most of the cabinets weren't even locked. And those that were, why, with a bobby pin and length of tempered spring steel...

"Ahem, Mr. Tellerini," Mr. Prince said, breaking my trance, "would you like to join us at the administration building, or should we just leave you here?"

I reluctantly shuffled out, glancing over my shoulder. Well, so much for picking a major.

The Autumn of 1970 was a splendid one. Warm, dry air nurtured a sustained Indian summer, and the great oaks and maples rioted briefly in the blazing hues that New England is renowned for. I had adapted well enough to Rivers. I didn't like it, but I could survive it, and my grades surprised one and all. And I'd made friends. Scott Stoegel, a geeky, ebullient sort, and Jack Gosselin, a fellow exiled hoodlum, were my usual companions. We were all freshmen, and comparing notes helped us evade the constant hazing that all plebes must endure.

Chemistry was going surprisingly well too. I had finished the semester with an A-. Stranger still, I hadn't begun seriously to abuse the chem lab. Well, except for that time I stole some zinc, magnesium, and some sort of acid. I mixed them all up in a Dixie cup on the ping pong table in the basement. When nothing happened immediately, I got bored and forgot about it. When I remembered it several days later, I knew something evil had happened from the smell when I opened the basement door. Whatever it was, it burned up the Dixie cup and left an ugly pothole in the table. I figured I'd better learn some more before I tried that again.

Autumn retreated before a determined winter. To the chagrin of all, our White Christmas died prematurely at the whim of a warm seabreeze. So began our winter vacation. Jack, Scott, and I were detailed to stay after school to clean up the chem lab on that December afternoon, due to a disciplinary indiscretion. It was the first time we'd been left alone in the lab, and while we worked we explored and plotted, each of us hatching dreadful ideas. Stinkbombs, smokebombs, bomb-bombs, or super-duper-eat-anything-to-hell acid.

I had a dark idea, one that I hadn't planned to share with anyone. And I knew where all the stuff was. Oh yes, I'd peeked about and located the aqua fortis, the oil of vitriol, and the glycerin. And I knew the procedure all too well, thanks to the immortal text of Dr. Tenney L. Davis. If there's an afterlife, I have no doubt that Dr. D. is out there somewhere, in an obscure corner of eternity, roaming his little library and collecting newspaper clippings attributable to his teachings. He rocks back in his chair behind his desk, laughing thunderously at his erstwhile students blown to smithereens for forgetting a subtlety of procedure. His tattered scrapbook bulges with acetylene explosions and

dropped trays of azide. He leans back and bellows laughter...

I thought I'd mention it just to see what they said. "Hey guys, as long as we're here, why don't we brew up a little nitro?" I asked lightly.

Stoegel tittered, thinking I was joking. Gosselin knew better and he regarded me carefully, his face first troubled, then pensive, finally growing a dark grin.

"Oh no. OH NO!" Stoegel cried, looking alternately at me, then Jack.

"Take it easy, Scott," I said soothingly, "Mostly I was just joking. But it really is pretty safe and simple," I reassured.

Professor Tellerini then launched into his lecture/sales pitch, voice calm and confident. I gave them the short form of the procedure; no point in alarming them with what could go wrong.

Jack was sold. Scott was aghast. "You guys are nuts! You'll blow the place to bits! Goddam meshuggener Goyim!" he shrieked, then lapsed into Yiddish.

Jack and I shrugged and gathered up the stuff. All we needed was a big beaker, a tray to cool it in, and a syringe to lift the nitroglycerin out with. We knew how to mix the acids to the amount of glycerin for complete nitration, and we measured it out. Jack was brooding over the Davis text, which I'd fetched from my locker.

"Hey Eddie, it says here the stuff gets pretty hot," Jack said skeptically. "And it'll explode if we don't cool it."

Scott was pacing about anxiously, muttering in Hebrew or choking, I couldn't tell which. Poor Scott was just too high-strung, and now he had a problem. There was no place else he could go. It was raining and cold outside, and the rest of the campus was locked and empty. It was just 1:30, and our ride didn't arrive until 4:00. Until then he was stuck with the nutty goyim.

"Hey Scott, shut up and make yourself useful." Jack said. "See if Bio is unlocked and grab a tray of dry ice." Stoegel came dutifully back a few minutes later studying a vaporous tray of dry ice. It seemed to calm him a bit.

We mixed the acid, the beaker in the tray of dry ice, and it did indeed get hot. We relaxed afterward, satisfied with ourselves for surviving thus far. Stoegel worried me. He was quiet, which wasn't like him and his blue eyes were huge, moonish orbs of terror behind those coke-bottle glasses. His mouth opened to form a perfect "O" so as to mimic his eyes as his gazed at the beaker, transfixed.

Next it was time to add the glycerin. "Scotty, Jack will watch the temp and ice, I'll stir, and you add the glycerin when I say, O.K.?" I said.

"Ah yeah, yeah, when you say," Stoegel stammered. I looked at him again, concerned. He wasn't tracking well.

His hand had begun to tremble, and he'd pushed his glasses off his nose twenty times in the last minute.

Jack nodded at me, and I began to stir, saying, "Now, Scott. Slowly."

Stoegel's eyes went wide, he picked up the glycerin, hesitated, and croaked, "N-N-N-Now?" It came out soprano.

"Yes, now!" I shot back. I shouldn't have yelled at him. He lurched up, and before we could stop him, Scott poured the entire 100 c.c. graduated cylinder of glycerin into the mixed acid.

Jack and I look up in horror. Our mouths had instantly gone dry. I felt lightheaded as I said, "Scott, it was supposed to be drop by drop." We all turned back to the beaker, which had now started to effervesce ominously, wearing identical expressions of hopeless doom - a timeless, gape-jawed gawk unchanged from the first neanderthal to fall off a cliff to the engineers at Chernobyl. Jack had begun to pile dry ice around the beaker furiously. It wasn't quite panic time, but close. The beaker and tray were enshrouded by a rolling cloud of CO₂, coming off the dry ice.

Jack approached the renegade reaction, fanning away fumes, and moaned, "It's too hot! It's thirty-five degrees!" We stood there, paralyzed with terror, watching the spewing, foaming cauldron.

"Scott, more ice!" Jack yelled.

Stoegel vanished, only to return a moment later, empty handed. "The door locked behind me when I closed it," he said, seemingly resigned.

We all knew each other's thoughts. "Trio killed in grisly lab explosion," the headline would read, and ol' Tenney Davis would cut it out for his scrapbook, shaking his head and chuckling merrily.

Well, maybe it wouldn't come to that. It was cold outside, and our only hope was to dump the damned thing in the swamp. I donned rubber gloves and picked the whole tray up whimpering and pleading for somebody to open the door for me. Jack did, Scott having again reverted to Yiddish, then run out to the courtyard, where he was hopping around frantically and railing in that peculiar, grating tongue.

The drizzle had turned to snow as I emerged from the lab, and I walked out into the big, fluffy flakes. I moved with convalescent care across the lawn towards the lake. The light breeze carried the vapor away long enough for me to get a look at the nitro. Red fumes had begun to issue forth, and the temperature was now thirty-nine degrees. The dry ice was almost gone and the red fumes meant the reaction was running amok. The liquid had stratified, and I saw with grim satisfaction that we had indeed succeeded in making nitroglycerin.

At the edge of the lake was Nonesuch Swamp,

and built over that was a rickety pier of sorts, more like a walkway, from which the biology guys collected their primordial ooze and tadpoles and amoebas. The many planks that had fallen off had been replaced with tree limbs, taped in place or tied there with shoelaces. I headed for the end of the pier looking like a psychotic Alfalfa, wild eyed and face so dreadfully pale and lunatic.

As I mounted the pier I saw a big, lazy snowflake sail remorselessly towards the beaker, which was pouring red fumes now. I closed my eyes and turned away, expecting to die when it hit. My heart pounded as I opened my eyes and took step after step, suffering each snowflake that tormented my trip.

I teetered my way across the Styx, and finally set the beaker, tray and thermometer down at pier's end, backing away in prayer. Oh Lord, givest me just a few steps from this thing and I promise I'll never maketh nitro again. As I turned toward Jack and Scott I broke into a trot. When I'd cleared the pier I tore into a screaming sprint that would have won any track meet Rivers could throw at me.

I stopped fifty yards away, hugging the flagpole. I was wringing wet and sick with adrenaline. I fell shakily to my knees and threw up, retching on empty. Perhaps I passed out briefly, I really don't recall. Jack and Scott helped me up, and Scott cracked a joke about my hairballs. Very funny, I thought, wiping the vomit from my chin.

We all stood in the snow watching the little pier, silently at first. After fifteen minutes the fumes had abated and we returned to the lab, already planning the cover-up.

Clearly, we couldn't just leave things as they were. What if someone came along and picked up the infernal beaker? I lived closest to Rivers, and this whole mess was my idea, so I was elected to come back and deal with it. After what I'd been through, approaching or moving the nitro was quite out of the question. I'd rather have had a game of Russian roulette. I'd bring my BB rifle back and shoot it, either setting it off or breaking it.

On the first day of vacation I donned winter gear and trudged the three miles to Rivers in the freshly fallen snow. The heavy blanket stuck to everything, and the countryside sparkled pristinely in the anemic winter sun. It was a fine day that I'll always remember. I was alive, you see, and I had no right to be. I wish I could generate that sort of gratitude without almost blowing myself up. But perhaps I'd stumbled onto something. Perhaps God intended that we maketh nitro each Sabbath, so that we could properly appreciate His works.

Rivers was deserted. Nobody had even plowed yet. I trudged to the pier, not knowing what to expect. It was still there, and on the end was a low pile of snow that covered the tray and beaker

of nitro. I loaded my BB gun and began plinking away at it. Periodically I'd hear a muffled "klink," but no explosion. After I'd run out of BBs I plodded home, nonplussed and cold. There was nothing else to be done.

It wasn't a merry Christmas. My mind tormented endlessly on that damned beaker, generating ghastly worst case scenarios. Two toddlers would find it, I was certain. Their scraps would decorate the swamp nicely. Oh, I could see it all in my mind. My appetite left me, then sleep, a tic finally visiting my left eye. I scurried to watch local news broadcasts and pored over each newspaper.

Nothing could have prepared me for what I found upon my return to Rivers in early January. I wanted to avoid approaching the swamp directly in favor of studying it from the windows, but my first glance in that direction dashed my plans. From one hundred feet it was obvious that there had been an explosion. Broken and splintered planks and pilings lay scattered about and jutted crazily from the snow. My heart leapt in my chest as I saw a dozen people gathered at the swamp, shrugging, scratching their heads, and stomping their feet for warmth. A wave of nausea washed over me as I approached, only to find Scott Stoegel, pale and obviously terrified, standing beside me. We exchanged conspiratorial glances and pressed forward to investigate.

What was left of the pier had collapsed and listed drunkenly to one side. The outer end had been shortened by fifteen feet, and the farthest extremity looked like it had been bitten off by some impossible Leviathan arisen from the swamp. The snow-covered ice was littered with shattered pier parts. But thankfully there were no footprints in the snow leading to the pier's remains. No dismembered toddlers. Jack, Scott and I breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The mystery remained the subject of considerable speculation around campus. It was quite obviously an explosion, but its origin perplexed all but its perpetrators. And Mr. Smith.

Mr. Smith, our chemistry teacher, had put it together. Although he never blew the whistle on us, Jack, Scott and I all noticed his coolness towards us, and the way he badgered us in class.

After a week or so of this, as Jack and I were leaving class, Mr. Smith blocked the doorway, casually leaning against it, fixing us with a crooked smile.

"So, what did you make it out of?" he asked benignly, his blue eyes merry above that twisted grin.

Jack and I glanced at each other, searching for a response.

"Make what out of?" I said, trying to look innocent. Mr. Smith just gazed at us, implacable and quiet.

I withered under it, battling against the grin spreading inexorably across my face. Jack nodded at me, and we told Mr. Smith the whole story. He blanched as we related it to him, shaking his head, moaning and sighing, obviously struggling for control.

"I oughta' have you idiots expelled for this," he said finally. He was mad, all right, but we could see him trying not to laugh. At long last he gave up, chuckled, and to our astonishment explained to us, point by point, what we'd done wrong. Mr. Smith was the coolest teacher I've ever known.

"If you clowns ever do anything like this again," he said, pausing for effect, "run it past me first. You'll live longer."

We discussed little projects of similar vein with Mr. Smith but never again tried anything more strenuous than nitrating cotton, which he helped us with. Twenty-five years have passed since that Christmas, and I've yet to make more nitroglycerin. Deranged as I am, that incident made a life-long impression. In troubled dreams I sometimes think I'm in a dorm room, with fuming red vapors all around, and I can't find the doorknob to run. And I hear the roaring laughter of Dr. Tenney L. Davis...

EDUARDO TELLERINI

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SYMPATHETIC DETONATIONS

News Notes From All Around

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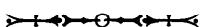
The management would like to announce the World Premiere of *The Kosanko*, a Musical Tragi-Comedy in four acts with lyrics by da Giro and music by Sir Arthur Sullivan. Performances will feature an intermezzo with Blombo lo Piombo and the Squirrel.

Alternating by weeks will be presented the recently re-discovered Grand Opera, *Blombo, re di Blefuscu, tiranno ed usurpatore*. The Libretto, by Metastasio da Ponte da Giro, was discovered in old family archives by the Librettist's great grand-nephew, Paolo, along with music by Gioacchino Rossini. Revised and made ready for the stage by the younger da Giro, this is truly a Great Performance.

Coming in 1995: *I'm with the Pyros: A Groupie's Tale*. This sensitive rendition of our own Blombo lo Piombo's life story has been set for the theatre in a manner not seen since the demise of Puccini's collaborator Tosti. The leading librettist of the post-Tosti era, Paolo da Giro, apologizes for teaming up on this production with Andrew Lloyd Webber, but he needed the money.

Not until 1996, at least: *La liberazione meravigliose; ossia, Blefuscu dopo Blombo*.

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AURORA CONSURGENS, OR THE LAKE

For the better part of a year the author had been encouraged, admittedly not without a few hints on his part, to visit eastern Minnesota during the ides of July. The subject was discussed so casually that in our naïvété we thought we might simply drive out, spend a few quiet days and drive back, killing time by shopping at a few towns along the way. What a difference there is between idle daydreaming and receiving a formal invitation from Imbibo Bourbonini, originator and sponsor of the Lake Display! From the moment his envelope was opened the excitement began to build; thoughts of the event recurred weekly, then daily, then hourly, until there would have been no use in staying home if one had needed to. The invitation was "B.Y.O.B", so the author made it a point to save a few items which would otherwise have been consumed on the Fourth of July.

Heart medication was thoughtfully packed and workshop clothing was supplemented with worsted trousers and cotton shirts — after all, we weren't going to Iowa.

There was really no reason for the author to push his aging automobile nearly 800 miles the first day, but by this time side trips (even to gun shops!) were utterly forgotten. By lunchtime on the second day, the delicatessen clerk informed him that one of his destinations was right around the corner.

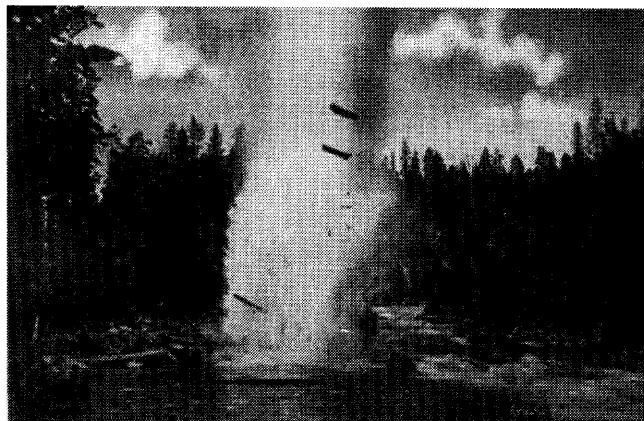
Almost by accident, then, the first odyssey was at the complex where the *Case Former* is printed! A dazzling array of complicated and costly machines, some of whose very names seem foreign to the outsider, clatters and churns in mysterious harmony to produce books, pamphlets and posters. (The only gadgets not in evidence were automated infinitive splitters and sentence fragmentators, which certain large publishers appear to have developed.) From the printing house it was only a brief journey through the countryside to the headquarters for our stay, where it quickly became apparent that this was no ordinary trip. The author has never been an enthusiastic traveller, partly because travel is expensive, but also because he is easily disappointed by grandly promoted tourist attractions. On the banks of the St. Croix the only problem was that it was not humanly possible to give all the attractions due attention. The library of the Institute would have demanded months by itself; even with a photocopier we soon gave up in favor of other pursuits. The manse is a repository of wonders too numerous to list here, but the shooting range and the main manufacturing building came to occupy most of the available time.

Some idea of the preparations being made can be gleaned from the fact that a twelve-inch, 47-pound cylinder shell, containing eighty crossettes

and a bucketful of barium chlorate stars, was assembled almost as an afterthought and finished at the last possible moment. Another, even more massive twelve and an eight-incher containing two breaks of "high tech" hummers had already been completed, while a drying table creaked and groaned under the weight of eight (yes, eight) eight-inch married comet shells. Not to be overlooked was the old favorite five-break crossette, the established tenure of which did not detract from its exotic nature. One or two of the best commercial firms, really rough and rugged competitors, might make such a shell on special order. At the Institute it is actually a stock item and is seen every year; each detail down to the finishing wrap holds inspiration for the man of science and beckons to the connoisseur of beauty.

The neighboring towns were pleasant enough, their shops and restaurants a cut above average; in fact one of the latter which Imbibo insisted we try was a true gourmet restaurant with a nationwide reputation. Even the women in the area looked a trifle cuddlier than usual, although modernity had worked its usual magic and none of them stood out as essential guests for the Lake. Comp. DaGiro offered to introduce a spirited redhead who had been featured in *Penthouse* magazine, apparently some sort of architectural journal, and although the author has never had much interest in career women, he was doing his best to keep an open mind. Paolo assured him she was neither a tomboy nor politically correct. The Director of the Institute, however, observed that it might be awkward adjusting to her big-city ways, that she might prove a distraction and even that the heart medicine might be required. He suggested in a firm but polite manner that the meeting be postponed.

July 16th, as press releases indicated, was a day of cosmic significance, when myriads of blazing comets filled the sky as if to foretell doom, and tremendous explosions shivered the hills. Apparently there was a similar happening on planet Jupiter, but for comfort and pleasantry the Lake was the place to be! As Eduardo said, such a display is better experienced than described or even photographed, since the subtle changes and the sheer size of the shell bursts cannot be done justice on film. We must mention however, for the sake of posterity, Eduardo's own spider volley, DaGiro's ground effects and practically everybody's multi-breaks. Herr Pfantodt's married comets (each shell different and with a contrasting center) burst with such marvelous symmetry that experienced fireworks people on the other side of the firing line were mistaking them for double-petaled chrysanthemums. "How did you put that report in a ball shell?", they would ask. The graceful curves and lacy frills of the crossettes appeared on cue, prompting admiring females to bestow hugs and kisses on the



Effects of the Glonoïn Rocket

man responsible. Imbibo's shells-of-shells (also a favorite project of this author) were of prodigious size and often featured four or five rings of inserts. Each ring opened in perfect unison – at least the ones which did not spread so wide that a hapless observer could not have vouchsed for all of them! Electrically fired material by Boomer Fireworks of nearby Zimmerschutz was also of fine quality; indeed even the Oriental imports were superb, having been carefully selected by the Committee. In short, the Lake Display and the whole trip to see it not only did not disappoint this sometimes finicky observer; it exceeded his expectations. Bad gasoline in one vehicle and a flat tire on the other were passing inconveniences, nothing more.

After the Lake there were still things to be done, including lunch at the University Club in the city, more shooting with all manner of weaponry, and a trip to the fireworks plant in Zimmerschutz, a surprisingly large operation. The same firm put on a public display, which we could hardly believe was production material; it contained zinc stars, shimmer-mag ball shells, and exploding cavity comets, and its bottom shots had the full four-ounce charge permitted by the N.F.P.A. (judging by the noise).

While searching out other I.O.O.J. members to view this display, we had to wander through an old run-down business district which was not very appealing at night. Fine brick buildings of the 1920s were now deserted and strange voices emanated from the dark alleys. Fortunately Officers Merwin and Hulbert of the St. George police force offered us an escort, assuring us we would come to no harm, and we soon located the other members at the river, already sipping Jack Daniel's.

Once again we must thank Dame Pfantodt for her hospitality, and Herr Pfantodt Senior for his psychological analysis of a Clinton voter in the newspaper. Likewise the Bourboninis, who have informed us that the Lake Display may be small or even nonexistent for a few years. Season's greetings to all, and keep your powder dry.

T. BABINGTON BRIMSTONE

...AND THE CONVENTION

It was suggested to me by one learned member that the *Case Former* might provide an appropriate source of solace and peace of mind after my recent experiences at the P.G.I.I. Convention. I trust the following reflections and retrospectives might find sympathy among the readership.

I was looking forward to an enjoyable week at the convention in the company of like-minded devotees of the pyrotechnic art and craft. The first indications that some aspect of convention planning might be flawed came in the form of a thirty mile drive between the hotel and convention site. Certainly this was somewhat longer the the "few blocks out of town" which is how the official travel agency had described the journey. Overlooking this minor impediment the journey was put down as a necessary inconvenience – surely it would all be worth it?

Following some minor confusions the convention site was finally chanced upon and stretched out before us was a splendid vista of some five hundred acres of rural Pennsylvania replete, its appeared, with a few thousand merry-making souls. Indeed, one could readily be forgiven for mistaking the convention for a carnival or jamboree, such was the party atmosphere. Amidst this intensity doubts started to form in my mind. Why, I thought, did I recognize so few name badges or faces, and curiously inconspicuous was conversation about shell construction or star formulation. From all appearances this was clearly not a gathering of fireworks scholars and practitioners. Further investigation revealed the principal focus of this mêlée to be the "Class C" vending area where a brisk business was taking place pandering to the eager demands of the fuse lighter majority. These gleeful souls sped off, frequently astride a golf cart, to display their sundry novelties under the attentive supervision of the second most dominant group at this gathering, the orange-vested safety committee members.

The opening display was found to be quite enjoyable although the crowd, or rather a significant proportion of its members proved to be a detraction. At a supposed international gathering of the firework *literati* I would have expected rather a more constructive criticism and appreciation of the various effects than the frenzied shouts and gasps that were heard about us. At this point the remarks in Lancaster about the reaction of the experienced worker to a display came to mind. This experience bore more resemblance to being among a regular display crowd and it was evident that we were in the company of *les ignorants*. From this moment on it was sadly obvious that the true pyrotechnists, the seasoned enthusiasts and the serious amateurs were vastly outnumbered by the le-

gions of fuse lighters and display spectators. Seeking out those truly dedicated to the art among this crowd of thousands was going to be a task demanding considerable fortitude. If one of the tenets of the Guild is the sharing of knowledge then why should those precious individuals with knowledge to share be drowned out by this ebb and flow of mediocrity?

One of the major attractions of the convention for me from the outset was the high level aerial competition to which I had been looking forward with some anticipation. Imagine my frustration when the scheduling of the "product demonstrations" was placed ahead of the competitions. This planning was in accord with the general commercialized theme of the convention and the need to appeal to the bulk of attendees with no acquaintance of practical pyrotechny. Curiously, many of this majority departed after the commercial shows – for singly fired competition shells, no matter how intricate, clearly held little attraction for them.

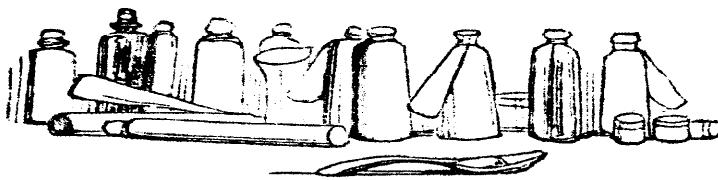
Some respite was found at the seminars presented by the more learned and experienced members of the Guild and on a few occasions it was evident that the material presented came as a bit of a shock for some puzzled audience members. One absolute gem overheard at one seminar on shell construction was "wow – does he really spend all that time making just one shell?" This followed a query from another audience member asking "what is polverone?"

Thursday evening saw my first run-in with the safety fakers. Upon firing some shells at the class B line I was constantly accosted and bawled at in a most offensive manner by some crude imbecile of a man whom, from all appearances, was in a state of extreme mental torment as if suffering from shell shock trauma. Upon examining the labeling of one shell at a distance of around thirty feet from the unused mortar line I was greeted with one of the more memorable lines of safety fakery – "gentlemen, you cannot do that here, it is too dangerous." I could only come away wondering as to the criteria which the P.G.I. applies to the selection of such unfortunate individuals.

And so came the final evening and the promises of the record breaking superstring, the pyrotechnic birthday cake, whatever that might be, and the huge public display amidst a gallimaufry of other amusements. The P.G.I advertising campaign had done its job and the public turned up in droves at \$20.00 a head as the convention plunged into ever deeper levels of hype and tastelessness. To my mind the public display failed to come remotely close to expectations and was certainly outdone by the much smaller Rozzi show on the previous evening. Overlooking the inevitable delays at the

(Continued on Page 10)

halinitropyromedica



APOLOGIA

At first glance it seems peculiar, if not positively counterproductive, for the subject of "health care" to intrude upon the congenial and free-spirited atmosphere of fireworks. The toxicity of firework ingredients, often presented in a scaremongering fashion, is already a common theme in common pyrotechnic journals. Safety-fakers, bureaucrats and ambulance-chasers have laid long-standing siege to medicine, leaving few vestiges of the individualism and respect for tradition which once characterized that field. Perhaps as result, organized medicine has become directly hostile to pyrotechny. In the 1920s and '30s the AMA-sponsored health magazine *Hygeia*, which later became *Today's Health*, carried on a venomous crusade against firework sales; perhaps this inspired the left-leaning physicians who endorse gun laws as a "public health issue".

Why then include a medical column in *The Case Former?* The horrors described above are products of the twentieth century, and in our happier moments we classify the twentieth century as a self-limited disease. "The past is another country," and in that salubrious clime one encounters many curious connections between pyrotechnics and medicine, intellectual byways and sometimes mere overgrown trails which are instructive and amusing. Both subjects depend heavily on practical chemistry, so that for centuries a deep and abiding interest in one guaranteed at least a passing acquaintance with the other. Mankind's "inborn craving for medicine," as Osler termed it, has meant that substances as diverse as nitroglycerin and white phosphorus were seized upon for therapeutic use almost before their discoverers could wash the glassware. Even today all three ingredients of black powder may be found in some drugstores. In the days when pharmacists carried large inventories of chemicals it was not terribly unusual for them to mix colored fire compositions! The *Scientific American Cyclopedic* of 1903 offered recipes taken from *Western Druggist* magazine while *Corner Druggist*, a collection of memoirs published in the 1940s, confirms that this was actually done. Today, of course, if an accidental ignition spread to the piles of insurance papers and welfare coupons, the resulting inferno would be so

enormous that nobody would escape alive.

Aside from its philosophical value, some of this forgotten lore has practical applications in our own turbulent age. Modern institutional medicine doesn't always have the best answer, even if one can afford to ask the question, and worse than its professional arrogance is the professional ignorance of the socialists' putative reforms. Should Federal health dictatorship actually come to pass, there will be some who refuse all contact with organized medicine, and who will need contingency plans. A few of our members have already increased their cultivation of botanical drugs, in the project aptly dubbed the Clinton Victory Garden, but not every ailment can be conquered with plant extracts. To be truly self-sufficient one must also study the classical mineral drugs, and even a smattering of synthetics. It is here that hobby pyrotechny assumes an expanded role, as a positive benefit to health.



Chlorate of potash was officially recognized in the *materia medica* by the early nineteenth century, and might well have been employed in the eighteenth. Apparently it was first administered under the erroneous notion that it would release oxygen in the blood, revitalizing the tissues of persons with poor circulation or wasting disease. Such efforts failed, for small quantities of chlorate are excreted unchanged in the saliva and urine, where the drug may have useful localized effects. Excessive serum concentrations attack haemoglobin and destroy erythrocytes, so that paradoxically, persons poisoned by this powerful oxidizing agent may die from lack of oxygen. Kidney damage, induced by the millions of defunct and dying red cells, adds another dimension to an already unhappy ending. Fatal chlorate toxicity is rare and has occurred mainly in cattle, where sodium chlorate herbicides appeal to the unfortunate beasts' craving for salt.

The potassium salt may be given internally in doses ranging from three to twenty grains, or according to the earlier editions of the *Dispensatory*, as

much as thirty grains. Alas, the dosing interval is not specified, but because salts are rapidly excreted one may assume a regimen of three or four times daily, especially with the smaller doses. Practically speaking it is best to use the drug as a local application, where it apparently does liberate oxygen in contact with diseased tissue. This virtue is manifest in stomatitis and pharyngitis, vulgarly known as mouth ulcers and various types of sore throat. For such purposes it may be incorporated into troches or lozenges, or more expediently, employed as a gargle in 2% to 4% aqueous solution. Herr Pfantodt himself has testified to the value of this simple preparation, and shocking though it may sound, he does not even bother to procure the N.F. grade, but merely dips the chlorate from one of his hundred-pound drums. The compound may be characterized as a useful, though not essential, addition to one's medicine chest; since it is already a household item a trial is well worth the minimal effort and expenditure involved.

Because potassium chlorate was commonly stocked in pharmacies for more than a century, medical references carried warnings about its vigorous oxidizing properties; in fact the *U.S. Pharmacopoeia* still has its entry. Great care was doubtless needed in a setting where elixir of vitriol and hypophosphite salts were kept on the shelves, and where solid ingredients were routinely pounded and triturated in porcelain mortars. Chlorate throat lozenges naturally contained sugar, and sometimes tannic acid as well, and were not the sort of project to be entrusted to a green drugstore apprentice. Unfortunately some caveats were woefully imprecise, suggesting for example that mere contact with sulphur or clothing fibers could cause ignition, and failing to acknowledge critical differences between wet and dry mixtures. It is not improbable that chemistry courses tailored for medical personnel augmented chlorate mythology, that bane of our existence which has already been decried in *The Case Former*. The mysterious fascination of explosions extends to persons of all walks of life and levels of intelligence, so that half-truths about them bear charmed lives and may actually gather strength in the telling. The bold pronouncements of "experts" sometimes clear the air, but sometimes merely fix the ill-formed images already lurking the collective psyche of the public. What garbled facts, what fantastic scenes and what vague shadowy fears may flicker through the dark corners of the mind, especially when the mind is already disturbed?

The famous British Order in Council, prohibiting any contact of chlorate with sulphur, was issued in 1894. It is perhaps only coincidence that in 1895 there was a clerk, aged twenty-five, whom family troubles has rendered desperate and who determined to seek death as a relief from his misery. Reviewing the various methods of committing

suicide he found nothing to his taste, and resolved on something new. Being familiar with the constituents of explosives, he resolved to convert his body into a bomb, load it with explosives, and thus blow himself to pieces. He procured some powdered sulphur and potassium chlorate, and placing each in a separate wafer he swallowed both with the aid of water. He then lay down on his bed, expecting that as soon as the two explosive materials came into contact he would burst like a bomb and his troubles would be over. Instead of the anticipated results the most violent colicky pains ensued, which finally became so great that he had to summon his neighbors, who took him to the hospital, where, after vigorous application with the stomach-pump, it was hoped that his life would be saved.

SCOPPIETTO DULCAMARA, I.O.O.J.,
B.M., B.Cb., B. Pharm., PG.I., etc.

Mogdon, Manton, & Nock, Ltd. GUN AND RIFLE-MAKERS



in view of the recent election

Beg to inform their Customers that they are ready to fill orders of all sorts.

 Small bores of the Rook class from .297 to .380 are especially well-suited for the night-flying *Escroqueria politica*, vars. *raisotaxa*, *regulatoria*, and *welfarensis*. These may also be shot with the Paradox gun; shot may sometimes do, but balls are occasionally necessary.

 Medium calibres are advisable against the man-eating feminazia, and may also be used for putting tired old jackasses out of their misery.

 Heavy rifles from .577 to 4-bore are necessary in taking on the hairy *Mammothabureaucratica*. They are also useful in despatching rogue elephants that stray from the right-hand path.

U.S. AGENTS — A. BURR & CO.,
WEEHAWKEN, N.J.

(...AND THE CONVENTION *continued from pg. 7*)

beginning I would like to ask which genius was responsible for spreading the show out for such a long period and frankly I could not believe my ears when an intermission was announced. Surely, the most basic rule of displaying fireworks in a presentation of any size is to maintain continuity and ensure interest. This was hopelessly protracted and I have witnessed far more impressive shows on a much smaller scale and budget.

Dear reader, you have probably gathered that the New Castle convention was not a pyrotechnic event for which I shall hold the fondest of memories. Certainly it was too large, remote, and ambitious. More controversially for some, it was too commercialized and ludicrously populist in approach, the P.G.I. has opted to attract the lowest common denominator element, the fuse lighters, the ground bombers and the "mega bucks" display spectators whilst relegating the serious amateur enthusiasts to their own forgotten niche. In many respects this event owed more to pantomime and showmanship than pyrotechnic endeavor. More seasoned members tell me that it used not to be this way before the Guild took the populist and sensationalist trail it would now appear to have departed upon. To my mind the result was a vast market place for money making and a parade ground opportunity for a certain type of authority-seeking individual taking on the safety-faker mantle. What hope is there for a scholarly and serious convention for the real enthusiasts and not this mass of lurid pleasure seekers? The Guild would never be where it is now without its great pyrotechnic craftsmen and innovators – let them not be forgotten. ♫

TRUENOS DE BERTHOLLET



PAUL VERONNE RIDES AGAIN

One of my pet peeves in life is the person we refer to as a safety-faker. Although there are a few good orange-vested people and some decent security people, the ones I'm describing are a menace to us all in ways that set them apart from the rest. Why can't the PGI have these people fill out applications like the rest of us who want a job, and then select the most qualified for that job? Instead, the more inexperienced people get to order the more knowledgeable people around. The same can be said about the public display inspection team. I'm all for having people around to help, but I draw the line when they get in the way of my job. Bianco told me a better name for the P.D.I.T. They should be called the public display *assistance* team. If we need more lumber or wire or so forth, they should be the ones to help locate and deliver it, rather than giving us approval on how to shoot our

own display. As for the rest of the volunteers who do a good job, keep up the good work and we'll see you at the I.O.O.J. parties.

I've also received numerous requests to do more top ten lists, so here's another one:

TOP TEN REASONS TO THROW PEOPLE OUT OF THE P.G.I.

10. Too many clowns in the Guild
9. Nothing better to do when we run out of fireworks and beer.
8. A pair of "boobs" of another sort will be more enjoyable.
7. We can have our own golf cart instead of stealing theirs.
6. No more Mickey Mouse mortars.
5. Frauds of the P.G.I., not welcome.
4. It's time we deploy the expert expulsion committee.
3. Talking and writing about these people wastes too much of our time.
2. We would be doing the D.E.A. a big favor.
1. Because we can! Read it! It's in the bylaws!

Good day (?)



PAUL VERONNE



DYNAMITE, FLOODS, AND SWEDES

*Water water everywhere, and all the boards did shrink.
Water water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.*

COLERIDGE, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Spring, when a young man's fancy turns to love, and nature's fancy turns to flood. So in 1965, water everywhere; none fit to drink.

It was during this time I decided to visit my friend Geno. Geno lived right on the edge of the river in a picturesque dump of a town that was bordered by the river, railroad tracks, Pig's Eye Lake, and an oil refinery. Geno's house was an old garage built in 1912; a large room with crude running water, and a pit privy where the pit was a removable 55 gallon drum. In the corner of the privy there was a pail of lime with a scoop, used to keep the odor down, and an old hip boot with

a sign that said "USE THIS IF THE PILE GETS TOO HIGH."

When I arrived at Geno's he met me at the door with a cup of coffee, one of those big heavy white diner type cups; necessary because we were drinking "Southern Plantation Dark Roast" coffee. For those of you not familiar with this, it's what is done with burned coffee beans, mixed with chicory and ground, producing a mixture where two bad flavors combine into one that is basically worse, but tolerable. According to Geno, in the south, it's known as Coon Ass Coffee, (no offense intended to any reader of the Negro race, but it must be remembered that in 1965, *politically correct* was still a term associated with Stalinist Russia, and was considered un-American).

Geno decided we should sit by the edge of the water and watch the flood. His old barn, or rather carriage house, complete with hayloft, was surrounded by the rising waters. He wanted to tear this building down. But now with the flood waters surrounding it, burning made more sense.

Now I am not going to bore you with the details of offering the city a chance to use the barn for fire training (I always felt they hoped Geno's house would catch fire and burn to the ground during this exercise), nor with the fact that Geno and I hung old tires in the rafters of the barn along with plastic bottles full of kerosene, plus all the combustibles we could find. No, this story is about dynamite, yes *dynamite*. It will be sufficient to say the fire was spectacular, billowing clouds of black smoke only rivaled by the bonfire at the I.O.O.J. party at Fargo – but on to the next day and the dynamite.

The smoke had cleared, the embers long dead. The only remains were the smells of a fire, some charred flotsam gently bobbing in the murky flood waters in cadence with the ripples of current, and a small part of the barn itself, or rather an addition used to store firewood in the past.

The little shed stood in defiance to the forces of Vulcan and the previous eve's inferno; Geno, mumbling to himself, seemed to be thinking "well, if this Swede can't fix your wagon, maybe one named Alfred Nobel can," and he turned to me and said "Do you know how to fuse and cap dynamite?" Geno explained we could put some on the foundations of the old shed, which were under water, and the explosion would destroy the foundations, letting the shed be carried away by the flood waters. Now at the time this made sense and if it didn't, it sounded like fun.

We took off in Geno's Cadillac Miller hearse and in a while we were at a rural hardware store stocked with everything you could want, including dynamite. We explained to the clerk we wanted to blast out a stump. We were led down a flight of long old stairs; then down a cluttered aisle to a shelf deep in the bowels of the store where the wood-

en box marked DuPont was stored. The clerk with a casual flick of his hand opened a small bag and asked "How many?"

Now in present times when a person has to sign his life away and get permission from every bureaucrat in creation to buy, possess, transport or use explosives for any reason, I fondly recall that *how many*. "Oh, six will do." I said. "Better have some caps and fuse," said the clerk as he dropped the small bright tubes into another bag with the fuse, "keep these from the dynamite until you fuse it up, safer that way." We retraced our way out of the cellar to the front counter and paid. Soon we were on our way back to Geno's.

Now Geno was that kind of guy who could change; and during the trip back to his house he changed into an explosives expert. When we walked to the shed at the edge of the water he asked "What shall we do?" I suggested we attach at least a half stick to two separate poles to enable us to place them in close proximity to the foundation under the water, where because of the water's incompressibility, the explosion would work against the old concrete and shatter it.

This logic failed to impress Geno; so with a shrug of his shoulders he walked over to his scrap pile and returned with a large iron nut and some wire; "cut off about a third of that stick and fuse it" he said; I did so and he proceeded to wire the dynamite to the nut; then he lit the fuse and threw it into the space between the roof of the shed and the water's edge. "RUN" Geno cried as he found his legs; I slowly walked back about thirty feet and laid down on the grass knowing the six feet of Bickford Geno insisted we use had a little time to burn yet and running wasn't called for.

After a minute or so there was a little thump, a smallish shock felt through the ground, a burst of smoky bubbles breaking out of the murky water, and the shed only wiggled. Geno, his courage fortified by the fact the shed still stood and that his friend was still alive, returned to the shoot site. A discussion followed as I tried to explain how we only compressed water; how the explosive must be as close as possible to the concrete to be of any good effect, and his pet cats would like the carp now floating by the shed. "Well fuse up the rest of the stick and that will take care of it" Geno said; and he proceeded to make the same mistake again, thump, wiggle, bubble, but this time we got some splash. Geno, now angered, exclaimed "Fuse up a whole stick this time" (expletives deleted to avoid offending the faint of heart). When I handed him the stick, he wired it to another and wired both to a piece of scrap bar, lit the six foot fuse and threw it. It landed in the center of the roof - where else?

Now it was Milano's turn to cry out, "RUN!" We took off in the direction of Geno's house. It seemed the best thing to do at the time, actually;

leaving town was in order, and if stopped by the police we'd better deny everything and see if they had proof or witnesses.

There is no stranger feeling than waiting for an explosion you don't want to happen. There is a certain apprehension, like being alone in a bank at night. After looking out the window at least ten times and seeing the smoke from the fuse rise in the dead still air, I sat down, convinced a jail sentence awaited me.

At last the "crump" of an explosion; the windows shook, but remained unshattered. I said to Geno, "Let's go outside, play dumb, and see what happens." After what we had just done, playing the part of a fool would come naturally. What happened was that Geno's neighbor, who lived over about three vacant lots, came peeling out of his driveway, his car scattering gravel from smoking tires. About five minutes later came the faint sound of a siren; in another minute or so the squad car skidded to a dusty stop on Geno's gravel driveway. The officer leapt from the car; and over the sound of the wailing siren pointed to Geno and screamed, "If you ever fire that muzzle loading cannon of yours, except on the Fourth of July, the mayor says you're in jail for a week - got it?" He spun on his heels, got back in the car, and as Geno started loudly to protest his innocence, I began to drag Geno toward the house. When indoors, Geno was still protesting. "We could have proved we didn't fire the cannon" he screamed. "Geno, we got off lucky, drop it," I told him. I have heard it said in the Northwest, "NEVER trust a Finlander with dynamite." I can say with some certainty this applies to at least one Swede I know. By the way - no shed.

Y

MILANO GIANSLAVI



Quodlibeta

Dear Friends,

You do not know me, nor will most of you ever really get to know me. For that, I am saddened. You may never hear from me again. However, I have been watching something very loathsome develop within the P.G.I.

Just as the Democratic Congress thought they finally had gotten their rubber stamp for their socialist agenda, when Bill and Hillary were elected, so has a certain group when the Guild got your Mr. and Mrs. President. "Slick" is the operative term here for both pairs. Smooth, friendly and very, very slick.

The recent petition to eject certain members has exposed Mr. B**m's true colors. The worst of these

is violating the sanctity of his word and the trust his fellows put in that word and confidence. A man who can not be trusted at his word, or who violates the trust of his high office and his confidants, should be branded with a scarlet letter.

The officers, without doubt, have been put through a most disheartening and sleepless torment because of the petition. However, four of the six have tried to maintain a position of neutrality and fairness, regardless of their personal feelings. Putting the decision into the hands of the membership was smart and fair. Let those that have benefited or been hurt decide. The good of the many outweighs the good of the few. You decide when you have had enough.

Your President has used his office actively to try to affect the outcome of the petition, feeding bits and pieces of confidential actions and conversations to those who would print them, regardless of the intent of those confidential airings. He has used the Guild attorney as a lackey by feeding him partial and twisted information. The attorney then unethically breached client confidence by sending out a letter to selected members.

Why all the political positioning? To discredit those that have stood up to these people, to gain power, and to have continued access to, guess what, the Guild treasury. As in real politics, to find answers, *you follow the money*. While I will not pass judgment here on what our resident experts have done, I will examine this.

How do you become a credible expert in any field? Either through experience and grand success in the business of that field, or through research and experiment. Lacking success, you do the other. Research takes money. How do you get it? From other people. How do you convince them to give it to you? Convince them you are an expert. How do you do that? See step one! Just as with Congress, it helps to have one of your people at the top, so when it looks like you might be in trouble, he can whip up sympathy for you. Everyone will, someday, be accountable for his actions. You choose the path you will walk and you will be judged by your actions.

You saw some of these people's finest work last year when they went after the publisher of the Bulletin, sending out PMS (poor me syndrome) letters to whip up support and grilling him at the election. Why? The publisher wouldn't bow to their demands. In academic circles, it is known as publish or perish. What do you publish? Your research. See step one. Having failed in replacing the publisher, your co-Presidents have gone after a second officer and it will continue until they have secured controlling votes on the PGI board. Why? See step one.

What you must now do is be sure that the management of the Guild remains in the hands of pyros. Without fail and above all else, you must do this! Let the "experts" and academicians remain if

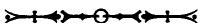
you choose, but keep the management of the Guild in the hands of real pyros. The Guild will grow in membership and political influence; that is its destiny, but let it be slow, deliberate, and without small time political games at the top. Keep the Guild in the hands of the people who will die beside you on the firing line, not discuss your demise at tea.

When you hear, "after all, they have worked so hard and done so much for the Guild," you reply "so have a lot of people, but the issue is what they have done lately?" All that research and hard work was bought and very well paid by grants from the Guild. Anyone could have done it.

When you hear this well worn out crap about "Van wouldn't have wanted it this way," you reply: "Correct, Van founded the Guild for pyros, not those who would ride on their backs for position and status." To the rumor mongers and bomb throwers that say "Who will be next?" just respond: "keep your nose clean and you don't have to worry about it!"

Heed the warning! Keep real pyros at the helm, not self-inflating gilded sheep skins.

The right buxom, and honorable,
MISS KAY RAND



Dear Mr. Tellerini:

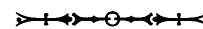
For some time now I've been meaning to drop you a line. I wanted to let you know that I purchased a copy of your "Best of the Case Former" while at the PGI convention, and I have seldom laughed so hard in my entire life. The article, "On the Forced Drying of Pyrotechnic Devices," was a classic (to abuse an already much-abused term). Your "Improved Archery Projectiles," may very well revolutionize bow-hunting, putting archery on a par with the noble game of horse-shoes (close being quite possibly good enough). "The Young Pyros vs. John Law" ought to be required reading in every high school civics class. "Chlorates and Sulphur" (and/or sulphides) are of course necessary for that finest of backyard pyrotechnics, the *globe torpedo*, and countless other sources of gratification. As my old friend Mike K. is wont to say, "Real men don't use perchlorates."

Also, before I forget, I want you to know that my late and very dear friend Brian Kelley was an enthusiastic fan of *The Case Former*, and that he promoted it within our circle of friends at every appropriate opportunity. I think it can surely be said that your publication gave him a great deal of humorous relief during his last, difficult days. When I travelled to Michigan to help with his funerary arrangements, his collection of *The Case Former*, obviously much-read, provided some comic punctuation in an otherwise wretched and stressful time.

In any case, put me down as giving a hearty "thumbs up" to your endeavor. Sorry to miss you at the convention - you were conspicuous in your apparent absence. Please do keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

A.J. SMITH



ED. NOTE: In yet another first, the Case Former has received an original poem. This, too, appears to be a reference to our stellar P.G.I. co-presidents. We are mystified by its source, but not surprised at the outpouring of sentiment.

The Buttheads are Blooming

The buttheads are blooming
around the site,
on their golf-carts with their noses
as high as a kite.

They feel that they are the king
and queen of the convention,
but they don't care. The schedule was a mess,
and the boss was a riot.

If you ever need a ride,
don't look in their eyes,
because all you'd get
was a pair of "good-byes,"
as off they rode without you.

And if you need to have something done,
and the right chairman isn't there,
just call on the buttheads -
they'll give you a scare.

They will smile at some,
and give a snub to others,
Boy, wouldn't you like
to be their brothers.

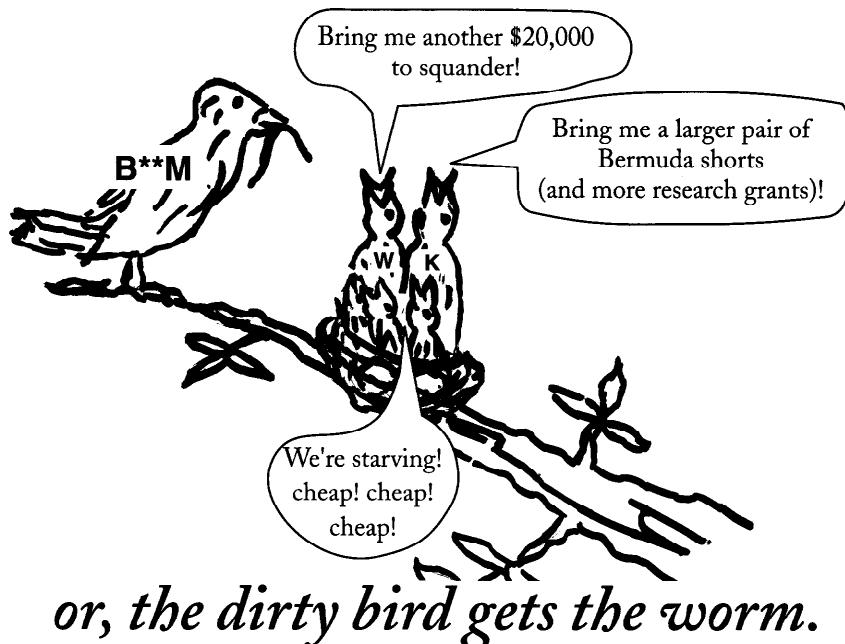
So, you had to vote, and so you did,
It was a shame the polls closed down early,
For if not, you know Jim
would have won in a hurry.

So as we stand by
for the next two years,
Better close your mouth
and open your ears;

For they're out there,
manipulating as we said.
The Buttheads are blooming -
let's put them to bed!

SKINNY MINNIE & BEANIE WEEFIE

COW-BIRD HATCHLINGS IN THE PYROTECHNIC NEST



We were forwarded a letter, received by a noted P.G.I. member from a gentleman of the press, that went into some details of Mr. B**m's performance at the New Castle convention, which may explain the sort of reaction he provokes in many people. We join the letter in mid-stream...

...This is the first year we have attended a convention and we learned a great deal. We met a lot of nice people that were a lot of help to us with all of our questions, as well as the most incredible fireworks shows we have ever seen.

The only problem that we did encounter was after taking a shell building workshop. We were asked to go to the "B" firing line to fire the shell we had just built. While going to the "B" line, B***e B**m had stopped us and was questioning the validity of our press passes (which were supplied by the PGI). Next he asked us for some additional identification and also questioned the validity of our drivers' licenses. He even alluded to the fact that they may be some kind of fake and that some people have two or three drivers' licenses. I had also supplied him with my PGI membership card. B***e then asked who had issued the press passes to us and we told him Rob Silverman had. He then proceeded to call Rob on the radio to check out our story. I understand that he needed to be very careful with security and to make sure we were on the up and up. Also, he needed to make sure we had signed the insurance waiver. The problem I had with B***e is the way we were treated. He treated us like we were some kind of criminals or counterfeiters or something. Even after Rob and Lori had corroborated our story, there was no apology, just throwing his arms up in the air and say-

ing "I'm done with this" and walking away. He also had some concerns about the purchases we had made in the class "C" tent. I was under the impression that being PGI members, we had the right to purchase items from the class "C" tent. If this is not the case, let me know.

If I was not in the fireworks business and had a love for fireworks and the PGI, I would have taken out my frustration with my pen via the newspaper. After talking with other media people that came to the convention, they felt that they were also not welcome. One camera crew was even kicked out of the "C" line while taking some footage. I don't know if you were aware of it, but the press was even kept out of the grandstands on Thursday and Friday nights. Like it or not, we need the press on our side. The Press reaches the people and the people do the voting for the lawmakers. If we don't have the people behind us soon the lawmakers will outlaw fireworks and we all will be out of business. As a fireworks organization we must be more attentive to the press if we are ever going to get any help from them. They may not deserve it but we can't treat them this way... it's like the old saying, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

With the exception of these few problems we had a good time. I hope you will give some thought to my advice...

Our response to the advice that Mr. W., who wrote this letter, so generously gave, is simple. Eliminate the source of the problem by removing him from authority. The procedures are available - see Article IV, Section 7(c), and also Article VI, Section 8 of the P.G.I.I. by-laws!

IMPEACH THE B**M

Faithful readers, I bring you not tidings of joy but wails of sadness. For I, your humble scribe, will no longer be reviewing the P.G.I. conventions. This is my final farewell, my swan song. Why, you ask? Is Paolo no longer entranced by fireworks? Have the forces of political correctness finally won? Will I not continue to point out that the emperor has no clothes?

The answer is simple and complex, like a Democratic Party tax increase. Simple – they raise taxes. Complex – what the hell do they do with the money?

Well, I sojourned to the great money-waster in the East. I have nothing but praise for our hosts, Rob and Lori. They concentrated on making the convention run smoothly and keeping everyone well-fed (I was overjoyed with this!). But the character of the Guild has changed. We are no longer just fireworks men. We have groupies, dilettantes, snobs, Barney Fife clones, and assorted morons, all presided over by the head groupie, the Great Squirrel Killer himself. We are no longer together just to enjoy fireworks – we are on an “outing” to be seen. Excuse me while I go be nauseous.

First, let me thank Rob & Co. for the job they did to make me feel at home. I really enjoyed the time I spent with you. Second, let me apologize to Bill Bahr and his Safety Committee. Though I have opined in the past that this was a group that should have been gently but firmly shot at sunrise, now I must say that, *sans* a bad apple or two, they have, like fine Burgundy, mellowed with age. They were the voice of reason that restrained the green-hatted Barney Fife clones and the golf-carting clowns of the Public Display Inspection Team.

What was great about the convention was: the Rozzi display, Don Rowe's lecture, the thirty-six inch shell, a few shells in the public display, the Comet product demo, and a few good people. Also, how good it was to have FOOD!

The rest of the convention was long and boring. Skies filled with cheap Chinese crap – I was so sick of red, green, and white. Please get a new color of shell. No, get some new fireworks – no, get a new leader.

The true fireworks people came, as always, for a good time and great fireworks. The Head Groupie was present to make sure we were strip-searched if we tried to go to class “B” shooting, to bloviate at the business meeting (only his agenda was played), to offend the Press and the members, and to drive around in his golf-cart dispersing his particularly foul ordure upon the people. Why do we continue to elect this pompous, overbearing lout who addresses us with hollow, patronizing drivel and spends our funds like a drunken sailor on a spree?

How much money *did* we lose? Wild rumors have been floating about in the absence of hard

information, abetted by the protracted delay of the usual financial reports. We have heard that expense ran as much as \$100,000.00 over budget. Due to increased attendance, revenues reportedly ran high too, but we have heard bottom-line claims ranging from a \$40,000.00 net deficit to slightly in-the-black. We have heard on one hand that unwarranted bills have been presented to the Guild, on the other that honest folk who rendered service to the Guild have been stiffed. What's the story?

We do want to emphasize that *none of this*, apparently, is the fault of our convention host. For his part he handled only a small amount of Guild funds and did not, as some previous convention hosts have done, set up any elaborate shell corporations to funnel revenues into his pocket when they should have gone to the P.G.I. We *have* heard that our President, acting without consultation with other Board members, unilaterally obligated the Guild in several situations. *His adherence to his fiduciary duty deserves searching scrutiny.*

What shall be done? Shall we have a telethon to replenish the Guild? Throw the B**m out. If I did his act, I'd quit. He has run roughshod over the by-laws, bent parliamentary procedure, and become drunk with power. So, G.S.K., why not retire. Please, don't spend any more of our money, we can't afford it. Alms for the P.G.I.!

But Paolo, why no more articles about the conventions? Because I was told by a mouldy green-headed clone, who couldn't get out of the road, that I don't know anything about fireworks.

Oh, well, I guess I could take up molesting squirrels.

PAOLO DA GIRO

To His High-Mightiness

HERR PROFESSOR DOKTOR B***E B***M

this space is obsequiously dedicated.

To his Exalted Position he has brought
the Qualities of many Celebrated Leaders:

The *Humility* of *Louis Quatorze*,
The *Even-handedness* of *Judge Jeffreys*,
The *Transparent Candour* of *Macchiavelli*,
The *Vision* of *Helen Keller*,
The *Fidelity* of *Arnold*, all surmounted by
That *kindly consideration of differing
opinion* characteristic of the late *Joe Stalin*.

Affectionately, by his devoted Servitor,
PASQUINO



Now Playing THE KOSANKO

featuring
BLOMBO LO PIOMBO
AND THE SQUIRREL

THE PATTER-SONG OF BLOMBO LO PIOMBO

This is more fun than selling
magazine subscriptions, Ken!

And it's easier than
expert witnessing,
too, Charley!

P.G.J. Puppet Theatre

Join in, boys and girls, while
we sing The Patter-Song of
Blombo Lo Piombo.

(Sung to the tune of "I am the Captain of
the Pinafore" by Sir A. Sullivan)

- Bl.* I am the president of the Guild,
Chor. And a great squirrel-killer is he.
Be is very, very good, and be it understood,
He's never made a firework,
- Bl.* I've never made a firework,
Chor. He's just a fireworks groupie.
- Bl.* I am the president of the Guild,
Completely independent – that's me!
In a free hotel-room do I hang my pants,
(and so do my sisters and my cousins and my aunts)
- Chor.* And so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts.
Oh! so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts.
- Bl.* I am the president of the Guild,
Chor. And a great squirrel-killer is he.
Be is very, very good, and be it understood,
He's never made a firework.
- Bl.* I've never made a firework,
Chor. What, never? *Bl.* No, never! *Chor.* What, never?
- Bl.* Well, hardly ever –
I just fool around with class "C".
- Chor.* He just fools around with class "C",
He's just a fireworks groupie,
(who squanders all your dues money)
Oh! just a fireworks groupie!



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