

The Communicator

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In this issue:

- ❖ Rio Huallaga – Part III
- ❖ Africa and Elephants
- ❖ No Fixed Address – a book review
- ❖ Chinese Customs
- ❖ Courier work is dirty work
- ❖ Keith Jones – a profile
- ❖ Jim's clock

Editors Ramble

By David Smith

Time flies. As of today, Christmas will be upon us in 10 short weeks and then 2005 will arrive. Nine months into the year will be our CM reunion Oh-Five and September will be here before we know it. I encourage all of you to mark the date on your calendars (Sept 23/24,) as this will be an occasion not to be missed. The hall is booked, the menu is selected and now the detail work must be done.

Notwithstanding all the planning and preparations, the whole point of the exercise is to provide an opportunity for all of us to get together. A number of us have been retired for some years and this will be a time for renewing old acquaintances with former colleagues and friends.

Keep your eye on the website, the forum board and of course this newsletter for updates. I'm still soliciting historical photos which I know are out there. Contact me at drdee@sympatico.ca

And keep those stories coming. I know they're out there!

Happy reading.



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Rio Huallaga- Peru – 1967 - Part III

By Merv McBride

Upon arrival on the beach of Bellavista we were met by more than the usual contingent of well wishers and curiosity seekers – many were there to greet the returning Mayor as well as to meet the new visitors. One thing you learn really quickly is how fast news spreads down the river of important events, of which our arrival was apparently one of those.

We had been invited to the Mayor's house for lunch but before that we went to our hotel to get settled in and drop of our few possessions. Our hotel is definitely worth the \$1.35 a night that we were charged. It was on the 2nd floor of a quite substantial wooden building, which also housed the only "restaurant" in the village. Our room consisted of a large area with 4 cots (quite comfortable). A table with a water pitcher and a water basin occupied the middle of the room with a few rattan type chairs beside the beds. Under the cot was our chamber pot for night time use. (Otherwise we were expected to use the lavatory on the main floor.

We finally made it up the hill to the Mayor's house which was quite plain but very comfortable. A nice bungalow with a tin roof. We were met at the door by the Mayor, his wife and his 14 year old daughter. After the usual greetings and salutations we were led into the dining room which was set for the six of us and loaded with different foods and fruits. For bread we were offered the usual plantains, both plain and heated. The main course turned out to be a bit of a shocker as it was 'monkey'. Being good guests it was impossible to refuse this fare as apparently it was quite a tasty treat for the villagers. Actually once you got past the fact that it looked rather indecent on your plate and got to the point of tasting it, it was quite good. We won't get into any discussions of the philosophy or animal rights or anything that our society that would definitely look down upon the eating of a species that was almost akin to cannibalism – which naturally crossed our minds at the time.

That night was a night to relax so Father Mac and I gathered up a six pack of beer and, after asking if it was safe to sit at the river's edge at night. And having been told that it was quite safe as long as the lights were on, we headed down to the river. The generator was turned on from 6 pm to 9 pm every night. The advice we had been given was that when the warning flicker of the lights was given we were to head for the Zocolo. This warning was to give us a ten minute area of which should be amble time to get our bottles gathered up and on our way. So, we sat, drinking our beer

and drinking in the atmosphere of the jungle and just plain marvelling at the experiences we were having. The lights flickered, we gathered up our bottles and THE LIGHTS WENT OUT!!

My God it was dark! We could hardly see each other in the darkness as our eyes were taking a long time to adjust – but our minds were going a mile a minute. We knew that this could not be good, two novice's out in the jungle in the complete darkness, we were ripe (I mean ripe) for the eating by any predator that loves to hunt at night. I think that Mac and I would have beat Donavon Bailey that night as we did the 100 yard dash up the jungle path and into the village. Of course every little noise and branch fluttering the still night was an animal of some sort just getting ready to bounce. Upon arrival in the village, completely out of breath, we were met by one of the elders of the village who looked at us as if we were totally demented. He, very matter of factly, informed us that it wasn't wise to be out of town at night. He then went on to tell us of a farmer and his son who were negligent in coming back from across the river one night and were never seen again. What a pleasant thought.

On that note we headed to our very comfortable hotel room and bunked in for the rest of the night. I forgot to mention that the reason we were drinking beer was that it was much too dangerous to drink the water and the only alternatives were Fanta Orange or Beer! Now I ask you, what would you prefer?

The next day was the beginning of a huge learning experience on my part about people and customs. While Father Ed and Father Mac went about their business I was left on my own to explore and discover. I was never alone, however, as I had a crowd of a minimum of 10 children following me everywhere. For most of them I was the first brown haired, blue eyed gringo they had ever met. I also must have seemed to be somewhat of a giant to them as the majority of the river men were about 5 ft. give or take an inch or two.

I visited the few shops that surrounded the Zocolo and purchased myself a rope hat to help keep off the dampness and a ugly looking machete. These crude knives were carried by most of the villagers and, believe it or not, a lot of the children. They used them to keep their path to their schoolhouse clear. As the day wore on my Spanish became better and better. It was pure and unadulterated immersion.

End of Part III

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Africa and Elephants

By Peter Bawden

While living in Nairobi, we had some friends visiting us from Brussels. The wife was American, the husband Belgian. We took them for a drive to a game park. The rains had just stopped, but the grass was taller than the car. We were on a road which was only a single path, wide enough for one car only. It came to a sharp 180 degree turn, and up a steep hill with a pot hole in the middle of it.

As soon as we hit the top of the hill, 20 yards in front of us (yes, I measured it) there was a huge bull elephant facing right at us. Everyone got all excited and started screaming "Get his picture". I remember shouting "For gosh sakes, sit still". Then they all started saying "He is used to people, he won't bother us". "I know he is used to people, and isn't afraid, that's my whole point. Suppose he was to charge. How fast can you drive a V.W. in reverse, especially around a sharp turn with a pot hole in it, downhill?" Anyway, he turned and walked into the grass. Then, and I admit this was rather foolish, I got out of the car and measured the distance it was to where he had been standing. 20 Yards! I got back in the car and we got out of there toot sweet. I don't think I like elephants anymore.

Have a good day. The answer to that is "Don't tell me what sort of a day to have. This is my day and I will have any sort I want. If I want to have a rotten day, I will do it".

No Fixed Address – a book review

By Eleanor Ryan

NO FIXED ADDRESS, Life in the Foreign Service, written by Christine Hantel-Fraser is, in my view, one of the "must read" books to get a true picture of rotational life with External Affairs. Thanks to Rita de Raspe who loaned me her copy, I found it a very interesting book covering many facets of life in the Foreign Service. It was intriguing trying to detect who was the clerk, administrator, communicator, technician, FSO, or secretary, when the author

described their experiences. It was not hard to identify who the real 'Neill Lancaster' was as the courier.

The paperback edition (1993) at 350 pages took me several weeks to read but it is well written with each chapter covering one aspect of rotational life in DEA. She has also done much research covering the foreign services of other countries.

Robert A. D. Ford's comments on the back covers reads in part, "*It is indeed a fascinating book which should become essential reading for anyone interested in how our diplomatic service works*". I agree, it could have helped many who had difficulties and stresses while serving abroad and at home.

This book can be available at any branch of the Ottawa Public Library and perhaps at other libraries across Canada.

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Chinese Customs

By John Kruithof

An article in the Ottawa Citizen: 'King of Shock' raises eyebrows, but for unexpected reasons, Jan. 19 Alana's account of lunching out with Jack Layton was very entertaining and informative.

A sentence in her column about tapping the tips of fingers to thank the one who pours tea brought back memories of my introduction to the custom a few years ago, in Guangzhou, China. The Canadian Consul, a resident in the city, had ordered in Cantonese a meal for our table. As a preliminary, the waiter was busily filling the ubiquitous tea cups. When it came to

the Consul's turn, she discreetly tapped the tips of her index and middle fingers at the edge of the table.

I enquired about the significance of the signal, which I at first assumed was to indicate that enough tea had been poured. She rendered a very colourful background to the custom.

At one time during China's turbulent history, an emperor had been deposed and was fleeing for his life. He disguised himself as a waiter. A diner recognized him. To indicate he would not betray the emperor, the diner gave a secret signal, the tapping of the fingers.

Being a secret signal, it had to be executed with great circumspect, visible to the emperor only. Hence, the tapping was done at the very edge of the table, next to a cup or bowl, under the rim of plates, or by the strategic placing of one's other hand to hide the manoeuvre. By this method, throughout the land, the emperor knew who his friends were, assisting him in organizing a resistance movement. Whether he was successful or not is lost in the annals of history.

But to this day the signal is given, to indicate to the waiter that we know he really is an emperor in disguise, but not to worry, we will keep the knowledge to ourselves.

* * *

Courier Work is Dirty Work

By T. (Buck) Arbuckle

Before I enter into a discourse on the subject matter, I should like to take you to the Omaha Zoo. There, an orang-utan named Fu Manchu astonished his keepers with his intelligence and expertise. Fu Manchu repeatedly escaped from his enclosure, which dumbfounded his keepers. How did he do it? Finally they installed cameras and discovered Fu had a short piece of wire with which he picked his cage lock. He hid this piece of wire between his gum and lower lip so the tool was not found until after observing the camera evidence. I mention this to demonstrate how clever some animals really are and as a lead-in to the following story.

It all began when the courier completed his check-in procedure at a prominent European airport. He escorted his twenty bags of mail through the terminal and traversed the tarmac to the waiting aircraft. The baggage crew then took over. They loaded a hold compartment with a large cage full of monkeys and packed our government mail in beside the cage. The hold was closed and the courier, always the last to board, made himself comfortable. Nothing to do but sit back and enjoy the flight.

Meanwhile, down in the hold the monkeys refused to sit back and relax. Now most airlines and aircraft manufacturers cater to the passengers' hygienic requirements by providing washroom facilities but they did not provide anything for the hold riders. There was no washroom. Animals prefer not to foul their accommodation and this held true for the monkeys. They had to go. Like Fu Manchu in the Omaha Zoo, they showed great prowess, doing all the right things and somehow broke out of their cage. Then they headed for the diplomatic bags. They defecated all over the mail, and so they could

find their way back if need be, they scented the whole pile with urine. What a mess.

When the aircraft landed and the hold was opened, the monkeys were in their comparatively clean but open cage. The courier just stared and smelled. The stench was overpowering. He had to ignore the dirt and aroma, supervise the unloading, count the bags and escort the mail with seals intact to the Embassy. His loaded cart was pushed through the crowded terminal where airport officials and general public alike looked on askance. It was obvious they thought the courier was to blame for the ambiance but none of our couriers ever generated such a repulsive atmosphere. Even the Embassy meet was reluctant to load this stinking mess into the official station wagon. But rules are rules and as security was involved the rules were inviolable. The bags were delivered with seals intact. At the Embassy they were emptied, the bags were burned, the station wagon was sent out to be professionally cleaned, the courier showered and life returned to normal.

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Where are they now – a profile of Keith Jones **From an email submitted by Keith**

Since retirement in '87, we have lived in Ridgetown, my wife Anna's quiet home town of 3300. After working for a cable company in Chatham for 2 years I was let go at the compulsory retirement age of 65. Cable had just come to this area. Next I worked at Mac's milk, but I didn't enjoy the permanent midnight shift. I had enough of that for a lifetime. Next venture was being talked into running for local council by the Mayor. Won my seat on council and learned a bit about town politics for the next 3 years. This became the last local council. Under amalgamation we became the Municipality of Chatham-Kent. This resulted in the entire county being run by one council in Chatham.

I have since been completely retired except for coaching the Youth Bowling Council bowlers at the local alley. The kids are great, from pre-schoolers to the upper teens. Anna works with the senior centre in their craft shop and keeps busy with knitting and sewing.

In '97 Anna had a triple bypass, a trying time but she came through it with flying colours but this has certainly slowed her down. A couple of years after this I discovered I was diabetic. This was quite a shock at the time but all is under control and except for watching my diet and taking insulin twice a day I am getting along normally.

We are also busy with the seniors trips, travel all over Ontario to plays and sporting events. Son Garry is in Milton and Karen nursing in Port Coquitlam BC. With everyone on e-mail we keep in touch often.

Getting late again, time won't stand still, so I will say good night.



Keith and Anna Jones

As an answer to the previous newsletter mystery photo, Rockex machines never die – they just become clocks!



This beauty was made by Lou Berube and presented to Jim Rodgers on his retirement. Well done to both of you .