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The Search for a Short Stack

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Liz Chapman and Margaret Robb traveled together from Oxford (England) to Washington D.C. to attend the ALA Mid-winter meeting. Liz had attended several previous meetings of the ALA so was able to give Margaret lots of very useful advice — as well as invitations to some of the best receptions and dinners.

February 13: Personal televisions and a bottle of wine accompanied our first dinner away from home. Nine hours later we arrive in Washington D.C.

An amazing comedy of errors at the check-in desk of our hotel proves that offering patrons \$1.00 for every smile-less transaction is not enough. The staff also need to have a brain they are not afraid of using in times of emergency — as when Liz and I are trying to get our rooms sorted out. I end up with two double beds but Liz has a refrigerator and microwave. We cannot find the promised tea-making facilities so an attempt is made to use plastic cups in the microwave. A very short cup of tea emerges after 60 seconds.

Our first positive eating experience is one requiring clean hands and some dexterity. **Fasika's Restaurant**, Ethiopian in all aspects, provides us with a dinner on a single tray. Three feet by three feet, the tray is first covered in floppy pale pancakes and then dotted with little mounds of food — lentils, collard greens, couscous, meat curries and a single boiled egg. Delicious and eaten by scooping up with one's very own floppy pancake. Delirium sets in and we are sent to bed.

February 14: My friend Liz likes to come over to the USA so she can eat a short stack of pancakes with a side order of bacon. Sounds like something we should be able to get without any problem in the Capital city. Well, maybe. Feeling much better after a long sleep and a powerful shower we decide to brave the hotel restaurant. A buffet is laid on white linen but as we raise the lid of each container we

The Search for a Short Stack

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realize that our Valentine's breakfast might be rather less than perfect. The pancakes had been waiting for us for some time (2 hours?) and adhered to the container; Liz mistakes the sausage patties for thin hamburgers and the eggs have the look of dried lumpy plaster. But we must still be jet-lagged because we have some pancakes (and then they bring out the fresh ones). Typical.

Rather more cautious, we think long and hard about dinner. While we are thinking the sun is going down and the city center is having its daily transformation from streets full of busy professionals to streets full of busy homeless folks. Having gone into a department store to look at all the Valentine's gifts (and didn't we feel odd not wearing red or holding a bouquet) while the sun was setting we found ourselves trying out every exit from the store assuming that one would lead us to a restaurant. We soon realize that the store is on an island and there is no bridge over the moat so we take a taxi to Dupont Circle which, according to everything we read, is close to everything in Washington — or nothing much as we later find out. However, we do find **Zorba the Greek** and he offers us good food. Unsure of our level of hunger (and me not wanting to spend any money and Liz too tired to argue), we order various items, sweet and savory with lots of lettuce which we share while observing an ever-changing group of excited people. Some sitting near us seem to be excited about alien beings but we don't tell them Liz is an alien (most other countries use the term foreigner).

February 15: We venture out of the hotel for breakfast and find ourselves facing an eating establishment. Most promising. Three librarians are already there and two policeman come in soon afterwards. The decor is post Armageddon but the staff are friendly. There is rather a long wait but that is understandable since the

job of one of the staff is simply to stand in the wrong place at the wrong time. She could have moved the paint-stained double ladder from the kitchen but then maybe there would have been even more dirt and dust scattered around. Everything is freshly cooked so we really had no need to be so worried about the obvious lack of hygiene. Served in plastic and eaten with plastic the French toast and pancakes somehow don't taste very good. Or maybe it's because the batter for the pancakes was from the previous day. But we mustn't complain because Liz gets a discount as there is only enough batter for two pancakes (rather than the usual three). She decides to skip the coffee.

Playing it safe, we have lunch in the conference hall. A very large helping of lettuce with a scattering of chicken costs us more than lunch in a nice restaurant but then we do have the opportunity to watch hundreds of other librarians eating large mounds of lettuce.

By 4:30 we are ready for our first reception but the idea of arriving fashionably late does not seem to apply to ALA members. By 4:40 PM the trays of food have been devastated by starving librarians (it's all that lettuce) but we do manage to find a lone strawberry on the floor. We don't eat it as we have another reception to go to.

One Web demonstration later we decide to leave and as we are putting on our coats, what should appear but a huge tray of fresh fruit, including lots of strawberries. Unashamed, we help ourselves to the fruit before finally making our way to the **Tabard Inn**. Oldie worldly American style. A gentle, if slightly off-key, version of an Elvis Presley song becomes ever more noticeable as we get closer to the coat room. A woman, about our age, dressed in a pink tutu with lovely big smile efficiently takes our coat, hands us our

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A ten-year study of published book reviews indicates that most are praiseworthy if not objective, and rarely critical. Of more than 15,000 book/descriptive adjectives used in published book reviews, less than one-third of one percent were deemed to be negative or critical. The study was done by Nat Bodian for his not-yet-published book, "The Book Industry Word-Finder and Writer's Guide."

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ticket without too much interruption to her singing. But, back to the food report. Humus, fresh vegetables and pita bread with a proper bar makes for a most pleasant change. Several whiskeys later your reporter is bundled into a taxi and taken off to an Italian restaurant. Ten of us wait together huddled near the dessert trolley watching as more and more of the luscious items are finished off by the other diners. We finally sit, order, wait and consume delicious pasta. Very jolly company so we don't notice — too much — that dessert is now down to two choices.

February 16: Danish and coffee with **Chadwyck Healey** is nearly a private affair as there are very few people out so early. Mountains of bagels, Frisbee-size Danish pastries and giant muffins the size of a small cake, bear down on us as we reach for the tea and coffee.

A useful discussion under our belts (rather than a hoard of muffins), we head again for the **Tabard Inn** where we arrive in good time for brunch (and a very important meeting). The Elvis coat lady is still at home and we are forced to sort out our coats for ourselves but otherwise, the service and quality of food is as it was the night before. No pancakes but the French toast with giant sweet strawberries and hot syrup keep Liz happy while I choose scrambled eggs and a selection of miniature muffins the size of pin cushions. Yum.

Our first evening reception is in the **Swann House**, a late 19th-century private home now used for receptions or B & B accommodation. In order to distinguish it from the other homes, a large array of white paper bags with burning candles have been arranged along the driveway

and up the outside stairway. Inside we can see more candles and masses of people at the window, talking and eating (we are only 10 minutes "late" to this reception but it looks like it must have been going for hours). The taxi driver, as all those in Washington D.C. likes to drive us into the front door so we fall into the hands of our hosts — rather than into the hands of some criminal gang. A very narrow semi-circular drive and a steep staircase forces us to walk a few feet in the open air. Just as well we are outside because we nearly blow up the place. As Liz opens the door to get out she knocks over one of the lovely paper bags, which, surprisingly enough, begins to burn. Having noticed that our taxi was not in peak condition, Liz, thinks there just might be the danger of a fire. Using her body and her voice, most effectively, she manages to get the driver to pull away from the fire. But he doesn't go far (2 feet) and when he opens his door to find out what it is all about he starts another fire. By now, Liz and I are standing on the steps waiting for the explosion. People run out of the house, the fire is put out and we try to walk casually

into the house. We steer clear of the candles on every shelf and mantelpiece and try to enjoy the fresh vegetables, the circulating trays of tempura, prawns, kebabs and other freshly cooked hors-d'oeuvres. The final room we visit has tiers of chocolate-covered strawberries, lovely cakes yet another bar.

Still worried about the quantity of candles in the house, we finally decide to leave and head off to our next reception. Even though we are nearly 20 minutes "late" to this second reception, there is no one here but the view of the Capitol is lovely and there are plenty of comfortable chairs. We ignore the table covered in smoked salmon, ham, cheeses and vegetables but we do occasionally accept the offerings from yet more circulating trays. We are saving ourselves for dinner!

Soon after, we are picked up by our host for the evening and driven to the next state for a real home cooked meal. Melt-in-the-mouth roast lamb, new potatoes and vegetables is followed by apple pie and ice cream. Plus we get to visit a real American home with cathedral ceilings, lots of windows and at least one more bathroom than bedroom.

February 17: A business breakfast — hillocks of bagels, mounds of muffins (as big as ever) and lots of fresh fruit. A speech as well.

Lunch (can you believe we are still eating?!) is more than just a delicious Cobb salad, it is also a new experience. We eat on a lagoon with the sound of waterfalls mingled with the keys of a piano which floats on its own lagoon. Very soothing.

Dinner is at yet another Italian restaurant. Service is pretty poor but the food is fine. Was it pizza or was it pasta? Faint memories of large olives, or were they leftover giant muffins? I think we just might take a break from eating...

Papa Lyman Remembers from page 83

Miller Williams is the only university press director who has had the distinction of being Inaugural Poet. He is the only one of the retirees I'm writing about in this column whom I have never met. By the same token he is the only one I have ever seen on television, when along with 240 million others, I watched the Inaugural ceremony on January 20, 1997. I feel that I know him now after a pleasant telephone conversation. Miller Williams began his publishing career with **Harcourt Brace** as a college traveler back in 1950. College travelers not only sought text manuscripts — they called on professors in an effort to effect class adoptions of books already published by their houses. Mr. Williams has combined teaching English and creative writing at U.S. and Latin American colleges as well as maintaining his interest in publishing which extended

from **Louisiana State** to **Arkansas** where he has been director since 1980. After his retirement July 1, he will continue to teach one course at the University of Arkansas and will devote more time to writing books of his own rather than publishing those of others.

I will miss a fine contact at the **Association of American University Presses** with the departure of **Chris Terry** as marketing manager of the central office. I could always count on receiving the current edition of the **AAUP Directory** as soon as it was published and I could always call him for information about meetings, personnel and other u.p. newsworthy items. Chris is now in the journals end of **Elsevier** where he will be working with the distinguished **Charleston Conference** speaker and attendee, **John Tagler**.

Mention of the word "columnist" causes me to express my deep sorrow at the passing of **Mike Royko**. The **Chicago Tribune** obituary posted on the Internet

consists of seven pages. There is little praise that I can add to all which has already appeared. I'll be hard put to find suggestions of answers to nuisance telephone calls or to turn for political advice with **Slats Grobman** gone. You were the best, Mike!

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