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The Year in Review — Personal Lessons of 1997

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All in all, 1997 was an instructive year for me. Early in the year, I gleaned two choice tidbits at an exhibit on *The Animal Figure in African Art*. First, I learned what “crepuscular” means. (For those who have wondered, “crepuscular” is similar to “nocturnal” or “diurnal” and means “active primarily at dawn and dusk.” I’m hoping someday to use it in a sentence other than: Water buffalo are crepuscular.) Second, I found out about pictographic potlids.

Imagine a wooden lid (as for a cooking pot) on which is carved a tiny cart with a goat harnessed to either end. The goats strain to pull the cart in opposite directions. Pictographic potlids are used by the wives of an African tribe (the Yoruba?) both to cover pots and to remind their husbands — nonverbally — of proverbs which suggest solutions to marital discord. (The exhibit did not relate whether the husbands generally take the hint.) I don’t know what marital strife is exemplified by, “If you harness goats to both ends of your cart, you won’t get anywhere,” but if pictographic potlids were part of my culture, I would find out.

Pictographic potlids intrigued me. I fantasized briefly about quitting my job and opening a pictographic potlid atelier. I am free of artistic talent, but the marketing sounded easy: Marriages are in peril in America! Men are visual, women are verbal! Get your pictographic potlids here!

The atelier fantasy must have been symptomatic. In July, I did leave my job of 19-plus years, having been offered a position with another vendor. The new job would start in September, on the first day of school. I had eight weeks off.

Eight weeks off! My last long vacation was twenty years ago, after college graduation. Without an assured job awaiting me in the fall, though, I spent that summer

worrying, mailing out resumes, and suffering unsuccessful interviews. I feared I was heading from graduation to the gutter. It wasn’t a carefree time.

This time, I had the chance to pursue large, worthy goals: painting the house, or re-reading *Moby Dick*. I had the chance, but not the inclination. Instead, I goofed off. I strung beads. I went to the beach. And now, in the spirit of the ’90s, an era filled with books on “life’s little lessons,” I offer the following Zen-like insights from my sabbatical:

On my deathbed, I won’t say, “I wish I had scrubbed the tub more.” I did scrub the tub, the morning of my first day off. It looked good. I was admiring it when the horror struck: What was I doing? Was I going to fritter my summer away cleaning house?! I went out and signed up for a class I had long wanted to take.

Recreation is a metaphor for life. The class was Trapeze for Adults. (When I was a new mother, I tried to teach myself to juggle. I reasoned I was already juggling work, home, and friends, so how hard would it be to keep three bean bags in the air? Harder than it looked, as it happened.) Trapeze seemed a good metaphor for swinging into the unknown, letting go of safety (my long-time job), taking a calculated risk.

The question is: Compared to what? (I knew from past Book Pricing columns that data is but data, while data-plus-analysis can be enlightening.) Consider: The other adults in Trapeze fell into two groups — muscular young men, and strong, supple young women. I was not a trapeze phenomenon, but in the females-over-forty category, I was (and I say this advisedly) peerless.

Foundations that appear solid may collapse under you. The week after Trapeze

ended, my daughter and I embarked on our adventure of the summer, a raft trip down the Salmon and Snake Rivers in Idaho. I anticipated white-water thrills, but nothing worrisome. On the second day of the six-day trip, in the middle of rapids, our large, sturdy cargo raft buckled. My foot was in the fold, and my toes bent back toward my shin. There was a noise I would not have guessed a human joint could make.

If you wreck your ankle on a wilderness trip, make it a raft trip. I didn’t have to walk after I hurt my foot. Coach Wally, one of the men on the trip, wrapped my ankle in a Louisiana Heel Lock. We propped it up on the front of the raft, kept it cold, and floated out. I lounged like Cleopatra on her barge. When we got home, I got my cast.

If you have a summer off, others may envy you. If, however, you *start work in a cast, they will envy you less.* My ankle is nearly all better. My new job is great. And our family just got a puppy. He is adorable, but he chews constantly, both things he should and things he shouldn’t. The only time we don’t have to watch him is when he is asleep.

Let sleeping dogs lie. Right now, he’s asleep under the desk. While I have the chance, I’m going to work on my potlid. Imagine a little springer spaniel, curled up and flaked out. 🐕

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annuals will have to decide whether the convenience is worth the cost. However, other libraries with the need for reader’s advisory bibliographies in fantasy and western literature will be well-served by these books.

Although some librarians feel that a number of these titles are more appropriate for circulating collections, Scarecrow Press’ *Historical Dictionary series* often covers countries where there is an unfiled need for a reference work. *The Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago* (1997, 0-8108-3173-2, \$84) is a case in point. There are not that many background references which focus on Trinidad and Tobago. The most recent *Area Hand-*

book was done in 1976 and many of the more useful histories are equally dated.

In his book, author Michael Anthony treats both the historic events as well as the major, and some minor, players in this island nation’s history. There are 630 pages of brief, factual entries which help define the history of Trinidad and Tobago followed by a bibliography of sources by category like histories, bibliographies and travel accounts as well as subject specific like literature, migration, sociology and women and the family. Unfortunately there is no index or table of contents; access to the information is strictly alphabetical by entry. However there are “see” references which help to link related articles. For those libraries with a need for information on Trinidad and Tobago, or the Caribbean in general, the *Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago* is worth considering. 🐕