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 "noc-
turnal" 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 Yorubas?) both to
cover pots and to remind their husbands — nonverbally — of proverbs which suggest
gestures or 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 gradu-
ation. 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
dangle. 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 cal-
culated 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 phenom-
emon, but in the females-over-forty cat-
egory, I was (and I say this advisedly) peer-
less.

Foundations that appear solid may col-
lapse 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
worrysome. 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 wreak your ankle on a wilder-
ness trip, make it a raft trip. I didn't have
to walk after I hurt my foot. Couch Wally,
one of the men on the trip, wrapped my
ankle in a Louisiana Heel Lock. We
proped 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 ador-
able, 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 potlids.
Imagine a little springer spaniel, curled up
and flaked out.

Reference Desk
from page 56

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, Searcrow Press' His-
torical Dictionary series often covers countries where there is
an unfilled need for a reference work. The Historical Dictio-
nary 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 bib-
ilography of sources by category like histories, bibliographies
and travel accounts as well as subject specific like literature, mi-
igration, 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 gen-
eral, the Historical Dictionary of Trinidad and Tobago is worth
considering.