Against the Grain

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Editor's Note: Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to *Against the Grain's* attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

OBITS OF NOTE

Ella Brennan (1925-2018) added Creole pizzazz to a dull menu at the family Vieux Carré restaurant on Bourbon Street. A family feud shoved her out for a dormant 40 years.

Then, in 1969, she bought a run-down Commander's Palace and "Hurricane Ella" won six **James Beard Awards**. Her secret? Well, she herself didn't cook. But she groomed an astounding series of chefs: **Paul Prudhomme**, **Emeril Lagasse**, **Jamie Shannon**.

See — "Obituaries," *The Week*, June 15, 2018, p.35.

Shinobu Hashimoto (1918-2018) was a big deal screen writer who called the world's attention to Japanese cinema. His long collaboration with **Akira Kurosawa** gave us *Ikiru* (1952), *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Throne of Blood* (1957).

George Lucas said *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) was an inspiration for *Star Wars*. And *Rashomon* (1950), a tale of a rape and murder from four different perspectives added the "Rashomon effect" to the language of cinema.

See — "Obituaries," *The Week*, Aug. 3, 2018, p.39.

John Calder (1927-2018) was born into a wealthy establishment family of Scots but went bohemian, publishing controversial authors by his company **Calder & Boyars**. **Samuel Beckett**, **Henry Miller**, **William Burroughs**, **Marguerite Duras** type authors.

He won the obscenity lawsuit over **Hubert Selby's** *Last Exit to Brooklyn*.

A serious opera buff, he claimed to have seen 900 different ones.

See — **James Hagerty**, "Publisher's Books Defied Censors in '60s," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 25-26, 2018, p.A9.

BATS IN THE STACKS

In Portugal, the **University of Coimbra** has the magnificent 300-year old **Joanina Library** with hand-illustrated Bibles and centuries-old world atlases. And a dozen bats that come out at night and eat glue-loving moths and beetles.

The library was built in 1728 with opulent lacquered shelves, wood carvings and portraits. It's a UNESCO World Heritage site that drew 500,000 visitors last year.

But it seems the tourists are mainly interested in the bats. And the staff is truly fed-up with answering visitor questions about the 1-1/2 inch species called pipistrelle.

See — **Patricia Kowsmann**, "The Bats Help Preserve Old Books, But They Drive Librarians, Well ..." *The Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2018, p.A1.

THE KING OF FRUITS

In an age of pineapple on Hawaiian pizza, we've lost sight of how the fruit was once a rarity. **Columbus** brought back a stack of them, but only one survived the voyage. **King Ferdinand** was enchanted by its flavor.

At that time, sweets made from cane sugar were virtually nonexistent and orchard fruits came only in season. Pineapple became a royal rage. The spiky crown helped with the symbolism to make it a manifestation of the divine right of kings.

The Dutch set to growing them in greenhouses in 1682, and the Brits followed suit. Mountains of coal were burned to keep the houses hot, and the expense was so high the fruit was only used as table ornaments. Pineapple rentals sprang up.

Wedgwood began using pineapple themes in China. Stone pineapples were carved into architecture and sculpted for country house gardens. They figured in paintings, adorned carriages, a symbol of good taste and wealth.

Then came steamships and the then abundant fruit became blah.

See — "How the Pineapple Became so Popular," *The Week*, July 27, 2018, p.36 (Originally published in *The Paris Review*).

RICH FROM HORROR

R.L. Stine was a poverty-stricken, anxiety-ridden nerd growing up. He liked "Vault of Horror" type comics, but his mother wouldn't let him bring them in the house. With an old Remington typewriter he began writing humorous comics for his HS classmates.

After Ohio State, he got a job at **Scholastic** launching *Bananas*, a humor magazine for kids. It folded. He was reduced to writing Bazoooka Bubble Gum jokes for \$25 each.

Then he wrote *Blind Date* (1986), a scary book for teens. It shot to No. 1 children's best seller. Likewise *Twisted*.

His wife **Jane** founded **Parachute Publishing** and did the Fear Street series starting with *The New Girl* (1989). **Jane** urged him to add horror and *Goosebumps* was born starting with *Welcome to Dead House* (1992).

He's now 74, has sold more than 400 million books and is rich. Upper West Side Manhattan apartment and house in Sag Harbor.

See — **Marc Myers**, "A Lifetime of Goosebumps and Laughs," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 17, 2018, p.M12.

LITERARY REAL ESTATE

A Georgian five-bedroom exquisite is on the market for £1.75 in the English village of Box in leafy Wiltshire. It was the childhood home of the **Reverend Wilbert Awdry** who was inspired to write the *Thomas the Tank Engine* stories when his young son was in bed with measles.

He sold copyright to the first book for £37 12 shillings. Then he wrote 25 more. **Reginald Dalby** did the bright artwork.

Awdry's son **Christopher** (measles boy) took over in 1983, and one year later sold the rights to television. **Beatles** drummer **Ringo Starr** narrated them. *Thomas* related merchandise ranging from pasta shapes to slippers sold massively.

See — **Rod Ardehali**, "Beautiful five-bedroom home where *Thomas the Tank Engine* creator **Reverend W. Awdry** developed his interest in trains goes on sale," *Daily Mail*, Aug. 17, 2018.