

Vintage Jim Culpepper

Jim on sharing wisdom:

The reason I am telling you and Pria all this rather recondite stuff is I'm 56 years old, and I can't promise I will be around to do the things I think can be done to further the interests of the College Terrace neighborhood. But I can convey the experience I have had and point out the general direction of the field in which the truffles are buried. After that, you guys are on your own!



At 59, I feel myself getting considerably older than sin itself. I'm very willing to share my accumulated wisdom, but my adult children start laughing even before I attempt to open my mouth. I'm reduced to writing them emails, which I'm quite sure they don't read, unless they contain a promise to give them money.



On CTRA governance:

The CTRA is a guerrilla organization. It has a long string of spectacular successes, including the barrier system, Peter Coutts Hill (4 acres), downzoning the R-3 area between Wellesley & El Camino, and the reservation of the College Terrace Library. None of this is due to any particular individual--it was a group effort.

So, I have feelings of hesitation about trying to codify anything as subtle or effective as the CTRA. My feeling has always been, if somebody in the neighborhood wants to lead, for heaven's sake, give them a chance!



What a delight to me to see the amount of energetic political leadership the College Terrace neighborhood continually produces! Having lived

continually in College Terrace since 1964, I have never seen the neighborhood fail to produce a leader, when the neighborhood's difficulties required a leader. In general, we've always been about 20 years ahead of the rest of the city. We've always been the canary in the mine. If the city has a problem, it always appears first in College Terrace.



On CT traffic:

This report is doubly useful, because it reminds me that Carl Stoffel has been analyzing traffic with what is now the Transportation Division of the Planning Department since before the most recent Ice Age. He started out counting woolly mammoths, then gradually worked his way up to buffaloes, Conestoga wagons, horses, race horses, horseless carriages, and in more recent years, SUVs.

Carl was hoary with age when Ted Noguchi was Traffic Engineer, and probably is the only official left in city government who ever heard of the 1971 College Terrace Traffic Study, or might be able actually to locate it in the vast pit under the City Hall garage to which staff reports are consigned on Tuesday mornings. The official name for the pit is the "Circumlocution Office," but if you try to ask anyone on the staff where it is located, they immediately change the subject.



Do you remember Corinne Brazier? She was actually the "mother" of the College Terrace traffic barrier system. I was impressed with her achievement of shutting down Park Boulevard to through traffic (after cars had hit several kids).

So I went to Corinne to find out how she had accomplished this considerable political stunt. She told me, and I followed her advice.

The results are fairly evident! The city closed every street in College Terrace (10 in all) in an effort to get me to shut up. Otherwise, the Council would never be able to proceed to the truly important matters on their agenda.

Enid Pearson and Al Henderson designed the final plan, which will stand forever as a monument to their perspicacity.



Other kinds of "traffic":

P.S. In September and October the tarantulas in Foothills Park start walking around all over the place, including the roads. You have to drive very carefully to avoid running over them.

As far as I can tell, these arachnids are utterly harmless to human adults. I have picked them up in my hands many times, and have never noticed the slightest interest on the part of the spider of injecting me with venom.



Jim always supported renters... and watched Stanford's policies:

Surrounding Stanford University as we do, we all have a heavy responsibility to ensure that the university's land use planning is "up to snuff," as it were. As a graduate of the Law School, I consider my responsibilities in this area to be Draconian.

Seriously, my main concern in this election is to support candidates who demonstrate concern for the 43% of Palo Alto's population (and that of College Terrace) who are renters. This is the toughest political and practical challenge any of us will ever encounter. Which is precisely why we need to confront it, preferably with teeth bared.



On defeating the enemy:

As regards what stance the Residents' Association should take Monday night, trying to discredit the [opposition] is unnecessary. They have already discredited themselves.

....

What we want to do is build our own credibility with the Council and the general public by being softspoken and reasonable in the face of outrageous provocation. I can remember leaning over to Pria during all the ranting and raving against the moratorium back in September of 1996. I knew the opponents were blasting themselves into political oblivion with their own rhetoric.

So I leaned over and whispered to Pria, "You couldn't wish for better opponents!" I think that cheered her up a little, and she made her usual reasonable presentation, pretty much ignoring the opposition. I did my usual "courtly, slightly daft, Southern gentleman," act, with the usual lack of discernable effect.



The following letter rambles its way through the history of one of Jim's abiding passions:

As my Leon High classmates know, I love to tell a tale, so I am going to tell you the improbable story of Gulf Specimen Marine Labs, Inc. For Jack Rudloe, and myself as well, it all began at St. Teresa Beach.

My late father, Jack Culpepper, a building contractor, bought the old Culpepper place in 1942, the year of my birth. My earliest memories are of tidepools and of the mazes of tracks of a prickly creature I loved to scoop up and watch flip itself over. I created my first saltwater aquarium in high school, and its first occupants were a baby horseshoe crab, a couple of sea horses, a plumed worm, and a scallop.

Jack Rudloe was a year behind me at Leon. My father, concluding that I was of no practical use to his construction business, shipped me off to Harvard so that at least I was out of his way. Jack Rudloe later went to Harvard as well, but having no money for tuition, he spent his time learning what was to become his life's work at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, which was free to visitors.

At Harvard I studied philosophy, but I never did learn the answer to the question I came to college in the first place to find out: What is Life? Not having found answers in Massachusetts, I migrated to California, which at least had a milder climate in which to speculate.

In California I discovered the same question had interested John Steinbeck, America's greatest writer, long ago as a Stanford student studying at Hopkins Marine Station in Monterey. Steinbeck learned that life began in the sea, and he spent the rest of his days studying how it "progressed" from the trilobite to the dinosaurs

to the walking bag of seawater known as Homo sapiens.

Steinbeck was by calling a marine biologist. He wrote his novels to support his real passion, including Cannery Row, set in Monterey, one of his best. He was a patron from the first of Ed "Doc" Ricketts, the Monterey author of the classic Pacific coast beachcomber's guide, Between Pacific Tides. His other protege was Jack Rudloe, with whom he corresponded regularly at Rudloe's home in Panacea, Florida.

A train killed Ricketts in 1948, but not before he coauthored with Steinbeck the most fascinating book of the sea since Moby Dick, the massive Sea of Cortez. Steinbeck gave Rudloe the original drawings from Sea of Cortez to aid him with his work in Panacea, went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, then died of heart problems in 1968. But he left a long shadow in Panacea.

Jack Rudloe spent his youth working on shrimpboats out of Carrabelle and poking into tidepools at St. Teresa Beach. He examined his own finds first at Wilson's Beach Cottages, where he rented a place to stay, then later at his lab in Panacea, which was set up in much the same way as Ricketts' in Monterey. At twenty-eight, Rudloe authored the classic Florida beachcomber's guide, The Erotic Ocean, which made him the "Doc" Ricketts of the Florida coast, and a hero to Florida conservationists.

Of these three legendary friends, Ricketts, Steinbeck, and Rudloe, the last is still alive, though somewhat incrustated with barnacles. The Culpeppers invited Jack and Anne Rudloe to visit us at our Palo Alto, California home a couple of years ago, and Jack and myself got together at the Fish Market (a restaurant) with Virginia

Scardigli. Virginia was a friend of both Ricketts and Steinbeck, and full of memories of both. Jack and Virginia went on to visit Ricketts' lab on Cannery Row, and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, where Jack lectured to the senior staff on jellies.

Last October the Rudloes gathered with my family and friends at SeaScape, the Culpeppers' Florida beach house at St. Teresa, to celebrate the 400 millionth birthday of *Limulus polyphemus*, the mysterious creature who still appears regularly in my dreams of childhood. Anne gave a brief talk to the kids on her specialty as a marine biologist. What is a horseshoe crab? We now know it is a living fossil, a visitor from the Cambrian period, stranger than a flying saucer. Horseshoe Crab larva appear identical to trilobites, one of the earliest lifeforms preserved as fossils in the Burgess Shale.

The approach of the Millennium has brought us another special anniversary, the 35th birthday of the Gulf Specimen Marine Lab of Panacea. As one of the Lab's trustees, I extend to you a cordial invitation to visit us, to use the enclosed card and envelope to become an aquarium member and subscriber to our bimonthly newsletter, and to think about what the Lab's collection of 400 million years of living history means as we approach another of time's landmarks. Does it enrich your experience of St. Teresa Beach to have the lab available as a living encyclopedia of the earth's biological history? Did you know that a walk down St. Teresa Beach is literally a walk through time, if only we "knew" what we were seeing?

The Lab is that rarest of animals, a nonprofit corporation which actually supports itself, mainly by the sale of marine specimens for educational purposes. As I have explained, it has a long and interesting history behind it. But to enlarge and expand its educational mission, we need a supportive membership committed to continuing its existence as a community institution for our

children and grandchildren. We are asking you to join us, and contribute your ideas to a project which continues to evolve to serve the needs our children.

But surely you didn't need me to tell you that everything about life's ancient history can be learned in Panacea--and in a presentation far more accessible to the needs of children than the huge Monterey Bay Aquarium. So welcome to the renovated Gulf Specimen Marine Aquarium! Come by and say "Hello" to the Rudloes, a couple of incredibly tenacious human beings. And say "Hello" to a collection of creatures stranger than any you saw in the movie, "Jurassic Park," including a 10' 10" hammerhead which Kay and I recently donated.