

Top of My Head

Goodman Ace

Readers Are Always Right

THE READERS ALWAYS WRITE. About everything, from an infinitive that a hapless columnist happened to haplessly split, to an incorrect forename attached to a famous man.

From mail piled up to here, it is now fairly well established, even in my mind, that Robert Morse did not invent the telegraph. It was Samuel Finley Breese Morse. Thanks for writing. Yes, sir, it was Samuel Finley Breese Morse. . . . Yes, ma'am, you are correct—it was Samuel Finley Breese Morse. . . . Yes, sir, I sure am what you said. It was Samuel Finley Breese Morse. . . . Oh, sir, you don't have to go that far! It was Samuel Finley Breese Morse, but canceling your subscription! . . . Yes, I know, little ten-and-a-half-year-old girl, it was Samuel Finley Breese Morse. But I don't have a blackboard; will this do?

Yes, Mr. Walton D. Clarke of Kent University, in Kent, Ohio. It was Samuel Finley Breese Morse who tapped out the first telegraphed message,

"What hath God wrought?" What's that, Mr. Clarke? I should not have put a question mark after the quote? Oh, I see, an exclamation point! A phrase from the Bible, Numbers 23:23—"What hath God wrought!" Yes, I'll remember that, Mr. Clarke. Imagine! The Bible knew Samuel Finley Breese Morse was going to invent the telegraph!

Before we leave Mr. Morse, it might be parenthetically interesting to note that some of these letters are addressed to Mr. Ace Goodman.

Now, what's this? From Marilyn Venable, San Francisco: "In your column of April 5, didn't you mean as old as 'Methuselah'?" Oh, I remember. That was when my wife asked me how I felt on my birthday, and I replied, "Old." She said, "You make it sound as if you're older than Macushla."

Mrs. Venable writes, "Macushla was an Irish lass whose demise occurred at an early age." Yes, Mrs. Venable, I know. Do you want to take time out to explain malapropisms to my wife? You want to tell her about Macushla

and Methuselah? It will be interesting to learn how you make out.

And now we come to a stack of mail concerning a column dealing with forced retirement at age sixty-five [TOP OF MY HEAD, Apr. 19]. Most of the letters are sympathetic to a man's becoming "surplus" on his sixty-fifth birthday. But there are also some heated and impatient writers who reject the poignancy of a man who suddenly has no office to go to. And who do you think these cold-hearted people are? Women!

One letter, for instance, is from Mrs. Janet Braide, of Montreal, who says: "I have just read your heart-rending column about all those poor guys who retire at sixty-five. . . . I am not saddened. I am not outraged. I am not upset. I am a woman and I was retired the day I was married. Male sixty-fives have had sixty-five years to work things out, and if they didn't make plans for the day when they are old, gray, and retired—tough apples! Try being a member of the other sex. From the time you are old enough to notice, it is: 'work hard, darling,' 'study hard, darling,' 'do whatever it is and be a success.' Suddenly you marry and whang, there you are in deadsville."

I go far out of my way to do research for these columns, Mrs. Braide, but "try being a member of the other sex" is too far out. So, I pass quickly to the next letter. This one from Ellen Komarek, Brooklyn: "I have run into too many people who have been at their jobs too long. . . . Too many men in charge think that this is the year 1930. . . . Any number of corporations operate under 1930 conditions."

I have another theory, Mrs. Komarek, that it's not the number of years in employment that cost the sixty-fives their jobs, it's the titles they have worked themselves up to. A man who at sixty-five is "First Vice President and General Manager of International Sales and Merchandising" is more apt to be retired by a nervous corporation than is a man whose title is an innocuous "Sales" or "Merchandising."

Making titles more palatable is the new thing in government. The anti-ballistic missile is now affectionately known as "Safeguard." Who would not be in favor of guarding our safety? ("You walked away from your family and left them defenseless?") The House Committee on Un-American Activities is now more pleasantly known as "The Committee for National Security."

So, since nobody is doing anything to protect the sixty-fives, it may ensure their security if they consider this rule: "The bigger your title on the door, the quicker they throw you off the floor."



"Tell it to your Ombudsman."



It looks beautiful because Volkswagen doesn't build it.

Ask Volkswagen to build a small economy car. Fine.

Ask Volkswagen to build a big practical station wagon. Very good.

But ask Volkswagen to build a beautiful sports car?

Well, not even Volkswagen would ask Volkswagen to do that.

So we asked the Ghia Studios of Turin, Italy to design the body of our sports car, and the Karmann Coach-

works of Osnabrück, Germany to build it.

The Karmann people attack our sports car the way they've been attacking things for the past hundred years: slowly and carefully.

The fenders are welded and shaped and sanded and burnished by hand.

And once the body is formed, they give the Karmann Ghia four coats of paint, including a rust-proofing zinc

undercoat and a hand sprayed enamel color coat.

If it all sounds very complicated, it is.

But we can't afford to take any chances:

When we tried to build a sedan, it ended up looking like a beetle.

We didn't want to make the same mistake twice.



Trade Winds

Jerome Beatty, Jr.

A terrible crisis occurred in Milwaukee when the sheriff's office found itself with 1,700 dirty books on hand. The books had been seized to satisfy claims against two bookstores, and they would have to be sold at auction. Auctioning furniture, a house, and stuff like that is all right, but sexy books? Thank goodness, Judge Spracker settled the problem with a court order forbidding the public sale. His landmark decision stated, "it is not the sheriff's function . . . to pump poison into the community's arteries." Judge Spracker said that the sheriff must have the respect of the people. He declared: "The right of this respect would be dealt a severe blow if the sheriff . . . were to stand before the public and ask the public, 'What am I bid for this copy of *I Am a Lesbian*, or this copy of *Tender Was My Flesh*?'"

A Charleston, South Carolina, firearms dealer's store was burglarized. He inserted the following advertisement in the papers: "Will the persons who removed thirteen rifles, shotguns, and pistols from our shop after we were closed please come by and fill out Federal Form 4473 to comply with the Gun Control Act of 1968? All guns *must* be signed for and proper identification given."

When I was pretty small my father took me to New York and to the top of the tallest building in the world. It was the Woolworth Building, sixty stories, not bad for something put up in 1913. It is still the eighth tallest in New York City, I think. In those days, of course, you could see something besides smog from up there. Another thing—you could drive to New York City and pull up to the curb and park when you wanted to. Fifth Avenue had big towers in the middle of the street every fourth block. Policemen in the towers regulated the traffic lights. For many years there were traffic lights only on a few corners throughout the city. But when you were driving, you looked ahead and stopped at an intersection even though the red light was a few blocks away.

What brought me to this thought was Woolworth's Five and Ten. The chain is celebrating its 90th anniversary this week in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Frank Woolworth opened the first Five and Ten. On one side of the store everything was 5 cents, on the other 10 cents. In 1932 items went

to 20 cents. Now you can spend \$100 on one item in one of the 3,381 stores. They say that the first customer in 1879 bought a fire shovel for a nickel. Woolworth's is trying to get away from the Five and Ten appellation. But I spent a lot of time in the Five and Ten, and that's what I'll remember. Those *were* the good old days.

The advice in *Male Manners: The Young Man's Guide* (McKay) covers a lot of ground, from how to apply for college or a job to how to eat Jello with a spoon. The section on getting a girl to kiss you is long enough, but I'm not sure it's foolproof. The authors, Kay Corinth and Mary Sargent, write, "Never ask for a kiss. Learn to maneuver it subtly without words. When the big moment comes, put your arm around her, pull her toward you, and kiss her on the lips."

True, there are some specific hints, like not to close your eyes too soon, and how to steer her by holding her chin, and when to remove your glasses. But there isn't anything more about recognizing "the big moment." As for not asking for a kiss, I think that's for the chickenhearted, not for today's youth. Maneuvering a kiss "subtly without words" is too much to expect of our boys, who have learned that all sorts of romantic talk precedes "the big moment." And from the books and movies they've been looking at these days, they've probably got the message from the adults about what "the big moment" really is, which isn't going to make it any easier to be subtle.

Sharps and Flats: In *On Borrowed Time: How World War II Began* (Random), Leonard Mosely maintains that the war could have been averted. That would mean, I suppose, that Hitler would now be the elder statesman of Germany. He would be demanding more arms and aid from us in return for letting us keep our military bases there. We would placate him.

► The Universal C.I.T. Credit Corporation has financed installment purchasing of autos, homes, farm equipment, and things like that. Recently for the first time the firm lent money to a lady to buy a rock. It was a 5¾-ton piece of green marble. The lady is Rosemary Dumas, a California sculptress, who will chisel \$150,000 worth of little sculptures from it, Universal C.I.T. hopes.

► The Universities Committee Against ABM, Professor Frank Collins, chairman, ran an ad in the *Washington Post* decrying "its enormous cost."

► Whatever happened to napkin rings?

► I have yet to see one of those three-minute hourglasses that measures exactly three minutes.

► Harry Pesin's forthcoming novel, *Why Is A Crooked Letter*, will be the first work of fiction to include an index, states the author. I haven't seen the book, but I've seen the index, and it will be quite helpful, giving pages for such topics as "aspirin," "fornication," and "Xerox."

► The word *cohort* is always misused.

► Some movie critics are now writing for posterity, instead of helping us decide whether to go or not. Here's what Vincent Canby said in *The New York Times* about *Where Eagles Dare*: "This kind of awareness can be enriching when the methodology is so classic, representing, as it does, a direct line of descent from Méliès."

► There are so many sporting events now that there is a shortage of verbs. I heard a radio announcer on a sports round-up go through them all—defeated, beat, downed, blanked, clobbered, trounced, etc.—until finally he was forced to say that the Red Sox had edged Washington 10-0.

► Oh, here's a delightful typo from the *Boston Herald-Traveler*. At a White House luncheon given by Mrs. Nixon, the President "popped in between the creeps and the fruit to joke with the guests."

► I notice that Shirley Temple's fortieth birthday passed without much comment.

► From Paris, Phoebe Leavitt reports hearing an American tourist on a golf course yelling, "Quatre!"

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
KINGSLEY DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 1832)

BUDDY HACKETT:
(The) **TRUTH ABOUT GOLF**

I forgot it was Passover week and went down to the edge to see if I could hit the ball. I touched the water with my club and naturally, it parted. I walked in, played the shot, walked through, and the Egyptian caddy following me was drowned.

Playing during Passover, you got to be careful.