

Top of My Head

Letter from a Traveler

by Goodman Ace

SIX months have passed since Viking 1 landed on Mars, and some nervous-Nellie scientists have begun grumbling about the paucity of research information on whether there is life on the red planet.

When Viking 1 mailed us his first pictures from Mars, I sent him a congratulatory fan letter. Today, not surprisingly, I received a reply from him. His letter will explain why there has been no earth-shaking news from Mars:

"Dear G.A.: I would have answered your letter sooner, but between you and me, I've been teed off about my strained relationship with my so-called pals at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena. Would you believe I haven't heard one word from them in three months? You'd think I hadn't paid my phone bill. I'm out of circ, the forgotten robot.

"And after all I did for them when I first landed here—did everything they told me: 'Take a picture of the terrain . . . that's good . . . how's the weather? . . . take a snapshot of the rocks . . . what's the temperature? . . . now, take your little shovel and dig up a little dirt . . . good boy . . . take a picture of the horizon . . . reach your arm down and put some dirt in your

little pail . . . no, don't plant a flag, we'll tell you when . . . now dig up a few little rocks . . .' and so on.

"All that kid stuff, day after day. Then I don't hear from them in weeks. I tried calling them several times—wanted to tell them a startling thing I discovered about the terrain, but they cut me off: 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'

"And to think when I first landed here I was a big celebrity. Front-page headlines all over the world, on TV night and day. I was a bigger TV star than Shirley and Laverne. Suddenly, I'm last Sunday's newspaper. Worse, I'm the herring wrapped in yesterday's obscurity. On TV, I'm preempted by the election and those three great debates. Weren't they great? Or should I ask, Didn't they grate?

"Well, since they started stonewalling me, I've been cruising around doing a little marslighting on my own. And I can tell you that these Martians are so many light-years ahead of us, they make us Earth people look like amateur human beings. For instance, remember those pictures of the terrain I sent that first week, the big rocks and the desolation everywhere? Forget 'em, scratch 'em, tear 'em up. What I really landed on was a gigantic landscape painting, replete with phony terrain, prop

rocks, a fake horizon, simulated everything.

"They don't want us ever to know what Mars is really like. I got a peek under that painting—verdant, lush, lakes, waterfalls, and an exquisite profusion of the most colorful plants you ever saw. And pollution is down to zilch. They've got it made here. They want no trespassers.

"That's what I could have told them for openers. Oh, they did call me once the other day, and I told my secretary to put them on hold. They're still holding. Two can play hard to get.

"Well, I let the cat out of the bag about whether there is life on Mars when I mentioned my secretary. Her name is Martia, pronounced Marcia. One look at Martia and you tell me if there's life on Mars! They're celebrating their one thousandth Bimillennial up here. Martia was voted Miss One Thousandth Bimillennial.

"Martia has made life on Mars viable. We sit together and watch TV by satellite, hoping to be able to see me on a rerun. What do we see instead? The tennis matches. Martia liked that. I tried explaining Renée Richards to her. Transsexual meant nothing, so I told her the doctor took this man and made him into a woman. And she laughed gleefully and asked, 'Then the doctor said, "I now pronounce you man and woman"'?

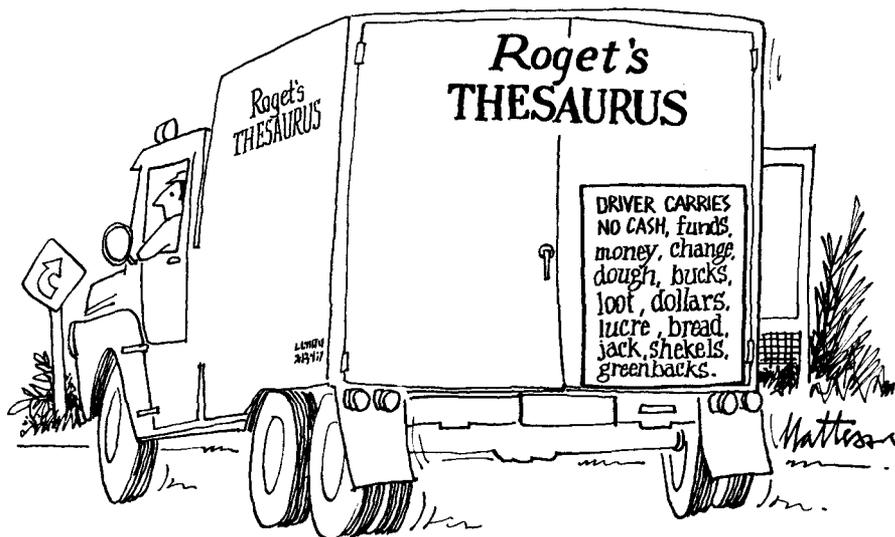
"I told her I may have to go back to earth someday. She said she would go with me, and we could find an apartment and live happily ever after. I told her she wouldn't like it. Didn't have the heart to tell her we wouldn't find a U.S. landlord who would rent to a green person.

"I tried telling her a funny story about a robot, and she said, 'Please, no ethnic humor on Mars.'

"Well, that's life up here. Unemployment is down to one. That's me. And not even one weekly unemployment check from Pasadena. By the way, a year here has 687 days. That's an awful lot of days, but 687 nights with Martia are not nearly enough.

"There's an ugly rumor up here that the Martians are using Martia as a diversionary tactic to keep me spellbound and so busy I'll never have time to tell what Mars is really like. That canard is absolutely and unequivocally untrue. And even if it is true, you know something? I really don't care!

"Stay well, friend. As well as you can with all those mysterious swine-flu shots they were making everybody take. Martia says that was like buying a pig in a poke. . . . Vik." ●



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Curmudgeon-at-Large

Judge Not—That Ye Be Not Reversed

by Cleveland Amory

A JUDGE in Westerly, Rhode Island, not long ago allowed a thirty-three-year-old man to adopt his thirty-two-year-old woman friend. Obviously a Daniel—and we can't think of a better judgment to come to. After all, marriage hasn't been doing all that well lately, and neither, on the other hand, has free love or the live-in thing. If you're a man, you can't actually buy a woman outright anymore—they won't let you. And you can't even be bought. When was the last time you heard of a decent dowry? So what is left?

Clearly, adoption is the viable alternative. It legalizes the man's necessary in-charge feeling—the one he doesn't dare express—and at the same time it also legalizes the woman's being-looked-after thing—the one she doesn't dare express either, or, of course, she'll be read out of the sisterhood.

So what happened to this great decision? Well, if the sad truth be known, the judge later reversed himself. Why? Who knows? Our guess is he talked it over with

his wife. And, as any husband knows, when you have to talk something over, it's over.

Cut Line of the Month—as found by Mrs. F. H. Arnold, of Pearsall, Texas, in the *San Antonio Express*:

S. I. Hayakawa, senator-elect from California, talks with Walter Kravitz, left, of the Congress Research Service during a break in a Harvard University-sponsored congressional training program in Cambridge. Hayakawa is napping his way through a series of seminars on legislative process. . . .

Well, that's okay—as long as he gives his colleagues the same privilege when he's speaking.

Sociology Dept.—as speared by Mrs. W. G. Marigold, of Kentucky's Union College, who came across it in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*:

Indications are that a college degree is no longer perceived as an automatic ticket to a good life or assurance of upward social mo-

bility. In fact many students appear apprehensive that their degrees will lead to any kind of employment.

That upward mobility is fraught, all right.

Sales Note—as picked out by Marie Sorenson of De Kalb, Illinois, in the *Daily Chronicle*:

Items available for sale at the Women's Center include books, posters, notecards, periodicals and gift items; all non-sexist with a slant toward women.

Sounds like they're treading a pretty thin line.

Sports News—culled by Stanley Glass of Kings Park, New York, from *The New York Times*:

PHILADELPHIA—Rick MacLeish's second goal of the game, an eight-footer into a vacated net, broke a 2-2 tie. . . . MacLeish took a pass from behind the cage, from Ross Lonsberry, and flipped the puck into the right corner of the net at 6:47 of the second period. The Cleveland goalie, Gary Simmons, had wandered out of the cage and was shot.

Well, he'd left his post, hadn't he?

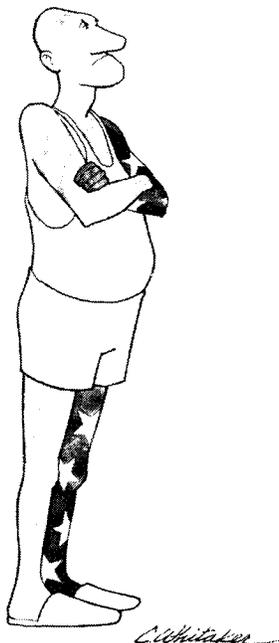
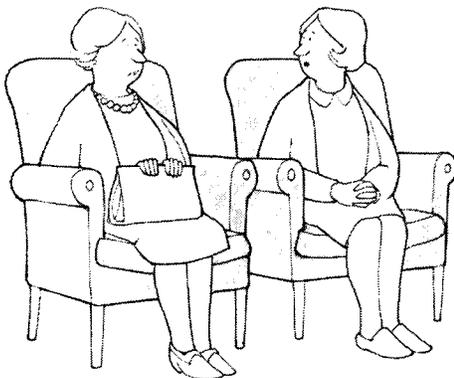
Rear End Note—as located by Bruce Ebanks of Waterloo, Ontario, in the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*:

TORONTO—Opposition Leader Stephen Lewis took a backside swipe Friday at Transportation Minister James Snow.

The NDP leader asked the minister to explain his "insufferable cheekiness" in dealing with school boards who request certain extra support for school bus transportation.

He quoted from a report which said the education ministry pays bus transportation grants "on the basis of 13-inch rump space for students up to and including Grade 6, and 16-inch rump space for students over Grade 6."

Now, that *is* upward mobility. ©



"George's Bicentennial tattoo seemed like a marvelous idea at the time."

Answer to Middleton Double-Crostic No. 116

Glenn R. Vernam:
The Rawhide Years

Buckaroo . . . is . . . the Northwest's version of *vaquero*. As the average working buckaroo's horses were usually inclined to shake out a few kinks on frosty mornings, it was only logical that his mounts should reflect an allusion to his name. Thus we have "buckers" and "bucking."