

Mormons - Unitarians - - Profs

Social Notes from Salt Lake City

I am being molested by a red-headed widow.

Her Hair is the color of Flaming Gorge Canyon. She is soft and bosomy. She gushes and she squishes and when she envelops you it's like quicksand--you sink deeper. She first caught me in the elevator as I was going down from Apartment 703. She was in crutches. One foot was bandaged and her tootsies (her terminology) were peeping out.

"You must be the nice man who sublet the W's apartment. Mrs. W. told me about you."

I allowed as how I was the nice man.

"Do you ski?"

I replied negatively.

"Well, we'll soon get you into a pair."

By this time, the elevator had reached my des-

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tination. The redhead continued down to the garage in the basement. I wondered whether her crutches were the result of an athletic contretemps on the slopes. It turned out this was the case.

If she had asked me "Have I ever skied?" instead of "Do I ski?", I would have answered "Yes". I always tell the truth, but I push truth to the brink. The matter stands thus with respect to my skiing. I have been on skis once in my life, and that once in Hanover, New Hampshire at the age of ten. My older brother found me a pair and said "Here, go skiing." I put on a pair of overshoes and slipped them through the leather ski straps. I skied the whole afternoon on a very gentle slope with lots of soft snow.

Since that time a half century ago I have not skied. It is not a matter of principle, it is just that I have gone my way and skis have gone theirs. Time has altered us both. As I understand it from my friends in Salt Lake, one cannot go skiing these days unless one has invested a minimum of two thousand dollars in equipment. Now Salt Lake is one of the great skiing centers of the world, so I speak advisedly. In the literal sense, one can ski for less. In the literal sense one can listen to the Kreutzer Sonata played on a 1928 portable wind-

Map 3

up phonograph bought in a garage sale for fifty cents.

The skiing industry is now in the hands of design engineers and hoteliers. I have been informed that a decade ago an aircraft engineer made some kind of breakthrough in ski design that makes it easy to turn the ski. They were called "cheaters" until the whole skiing world adopted them. The modern ski-boot is not a boot at all; it is a prosthetic device with foams, gels, stiffeners, air bladders, aimed at facilitating turns by providing perfect rapport between the foot and the ski and by moving the location of the average injury from the ankle to the hip and the shoulder. It's only a matter of weeks before the skier will carry a small computer under his parka and is plugged in, on line, to the fibreglass and the powder. Neither programmers or redheads can get me into a pair. But it is not, as I said, a matter of principle.

My next encounter with the redhead was on the morning of February 14. Recall that February 14 is Valentine's Day. As I went out to the hallway to take out the trash, I found a large book "Photogenic Utah" lying by my door. A Valentine was inserted:

Mup 4

"Hello Friend:

Thought you would like to see what our State really looks like. Am sure you're going to enjoy the W's lovely apartment.

I'm Mormon, but am going to a Unitarian social tonite. Want to come?

Sally Richfield

Apt. 891 "

She is laying siege to me, I thought, like the medieval knights laid siege to a castle.

A week later, I found a little plant outside my door. A note was attached.

"Hello Friend:

Water me and I'll put Springtime into your heart. S.R."

I met her in the elevator again. Her tootsies were still peeping out. She asked me to go to a "Smörgasbord Lunch at the Officers' Club (she was an Army widow). I begged off.

A few days later, I thought that a decent time had elapsed and that I had better return "Photogenic Utah". Without calling her up, I presented myself at Apt. 891 and rang the buzzer. She came to the door and was flustered to see me. I told her that hers was a

Mup 5

Lovely Book and a Lovely State. Lurking in her apartment, behind the arras, I spied a man. I faired my quick adieux and went back downstairs. Sally has a Lover, I thought. Ha! What a relief!

Three days later, more siege. I found a large brown grocery bag at my door. I shoved it aside till I got back from work. It was full of pamphlets and magazines. "This Week in Salt Lake", "What to Do and Where to Go in Utah", "The Hogle Zoo and What it Means to You", A menu from Le Parisien. Another from "The Homestead". "For a Day of Fun and Scenery, Ride the Heeber Creeper". A street map of downtown Ogden. Ditto for Brigham City. A price card for the ski lifts at Snowbird. A coupon entitling me to 15¢ off on a bottle of Zingg (if presented before March 15, 1980). Finally, a mimeographed sheet informing me that the following meetings were held at the Americana Motel: the Wasatch County Veterinarians, the Intermountain Sector of the Association of Burlap Bag Salesmen, the Soroptimists, and, if this were not a full cup, the Hinkley-Smith and the Richards-Freely wedding receptions took place in the "Silver Overflow Room".

For all this, and much more, I called Sally up and thanked her profusely, telling her that the contents

Map 6

of The Bag really put me in touch with the potentialities of the city. Thinking, then, to deflect her flowing hospitality, to fight fire with fire, as it were, I invited her down to tea the next afternoon in my apartment. She replied that "her card was full" that week.

Another decent interval elapsed and I went up to Apt. 891 to return The Bag. More flustering at the door. It was evening then. A candelabrum lit and sitting on top of the TV illuminated an enormous corkboard stuck with Reminder Slips. From behind the arras, additional shapes hovered spectrally. Sally has two Lovers, I thought to myself. Fail-safe for me.

One day, quite out of the blue, she called me up and started talking about herself. How she was of Swedish-German descent. How, on the Swedish side, she was related to Bernadotte, the French General whom Napoleon set up as King of Sweden, while on the German side, she was a von Schornhost. "Eine gute Familie, nicht wahr?" She'd been all over the world as an Army Wife and spoke many languages. I listened, saying little. Then I invited her to tea again. She declined with the (to me) feeble excuse that "Bill was flying in from Tuscon."

Mup 7

Bill indeed. Perhaps it's the tea that's doing it, I thought. Perhaps what she wants is something a bit stronger than tea. A wee doch and dorris, as one says North of the Border and East of the Divide.

Five minutes later she was on the phone again. "You've got to come to a Pot Luck Supper on Sunday. You'll love it. I've invited Professor X from Department Y and Professor Y from Department Z. But it's really for Unitarians. I'm Mormon, but I love the Unitarians so much."

I said "O.K., I'll show up."

On Saturday Afternoon, Sally plastered the mail room and the elevator with signs.

Come one ! Come All !

Mormans - Unitarians - Profs.

Skiers - Guitarists

Pot Luck

6:30 P.M.

Apt. Wreck Room

The apartment house maintained a largish common room on the second floor that was available to the tenants on a sign up basis. I showed up there fairly early, not the first, there were ten or so already milling about, but I was there before the food arrived.

Mup 8

Sally was fluttering with introductions. She introduced me to a piano tuner, "a scientific fellow," she said, and he talked to me about beats. She introduced me to Reena Bridger, the first lady legislator in the State of Utah.

Myself: Sally says you're the first woman to have been elected to the Utah State Legislature.

R.B. : Yes. But the Republicans robbed me of my seat.

Myself: When was this?

R.B. : I don't remember. I'll have to ask my husband.

Myself: Did the Mormons approve of women in politics.

R.B. : Oh yes. I'm a Unitarian, myself.

Sally stuck name tags on our front. A little girl stuck unknown name tags on our backs. Later we were to play the game "What character am I?".

I was introduced to a retired surveyor. I was introduced to Bill, who flew in from Tuscon. He was, in his own words, "an entrepreneur in a mixed line. Everything from gambling to uranium." I was introduced to a silver-blonde real estate agent.

Myself: You a native?

Mup 9

S.B. : I'm from Pocatello. I came to Salt Lake right after I got my divorce.

Myself: Sally told me that the divorce rate in Marin County, California is 80%.

S.B. : What else is new? Where you from?

Myself : I'm from Rhode Island.

S.B. : You like it here?

Myself: Well, it's different.

S.B.: I'll say it is. You have a funny name on your back.

Myself: So do you. Shall I try to guess mine?

Is it a real person or is it fictional?

S.B. : Fictional.

Myself: Then it must be Robinson Crusoe.

S.B. : That's incredible! How did you know?

Myself: Little children can see through character.

A bar was unveiled. In deference to Mormon sensibilities who are teetotalers in principle, it was tentative and meager. I fixed myself and the Silver Blonde a Seagram's and Ginger Ale. The bar disappeared early.

More people came in; there must have been thirty by now. Introductions all around. "Four lovely visitors from Hong Kong."

Mup 10

Then arrived, like the Kings from the East, the Ladies bearing the Food. Baked ham, chicken casserole, Beans and Hot Dogs, Cole Slaw, Potato Salad, Jello. Well, hello jello.

Sally continued to flutter. She was now Arranging Things. My lap and mouth were full of food, and before I was aware of it, I had been arranged into a carpool with Bill, Reena Bridger and the piano tuner to go to Theatre 138 to see a play about how Queen Christina of Sweden seduced Cardinal Ottaviani in 1650.

Slowly, slowly, like the Heeber Creeper hauling coal up the slopes of Timpanogos, I began to realize what was happening to me. I had been caught like an innocent fish ,squirming and flipping, in the net of one of the most insistent, persistent, selfless, cheerful women in the whole of Salt Lake. I had been caught like an onion in the pot of the biggest Kochloffel, the biggest Organizer in The West, for whom the whole world was a lover, and if I wasn't careful, I would soon find myself up Cottonwood Creek on skis.