



RAGTAG

by Roger Deitz

Parting Shots

ONE MORE RIVER

It was time to clean the garage, a job so daunting, I had managed to put it off for more than 25 years. During that period it was packed with discarded effects from my life. You know the drill – you covet it, you buy it, you tire of it, you discard it. People jettison possessions like snakes shed skin. Unlike snakes, however, humans find a limbo for their discard that exists somewhere between the ecdysis and the trash bin. This is usually the garage or the attic or the basement.

These seasonal sheddings are retained in the anticipation of a need that never comes. Inevitably our human slough is forgotten. I think saving junk is a way of not letting go, of holding on to the good old days, of fooling ourselves that the stuff of our lives must have some enduring value. That's my garage, a poor man's Museum of Natural History, a land of the lost.

Garage? Why I still call it a garage defies logic. The last automobile to reside therein was my father's 1953 Packard. But, I guess that, too, was in storage after its balsa wood transmission turned to sawdust circa 1962.

As I got underway, front to back, down layer upon layer of tightly wrapped bundles and carefully stacked cardboard boxes, it became evident that I was at an archaeological dig, uncovering the more recent strata first, then as I ventured deeper, I was delving into the more historic relics of my bygone life. The finds were significant to me, although granted, not on a par with Pompeii or archaeopteryx.

Curiosities came and went. Things once *au courant*, now *passee*: dial telephones, black and white televisions, a beta video recorder, a Salton bun-warmer, my college letter sweater (sure laugh, golf is rugged!). There was a typewriter. What the hell was that for? I came upon my old 8-track player and a collection of tapes: Baez, Dylan and The Byrds. Then, at the very last layer stood one final forgotten carton.

Opening it was like unearthing a time capsule. Inside was a pair of rainbow-striped, size 30, bell-bottom jeans embroidered with American flag

patches. I also found a tie-dyed shirt, a peace medallion, rose-colored granny glasses, a Nehru jacket, love beads, a McCarthy button (Eugene J., not Joseph R.), my draft registration card, a lava lamp, a black light, a few Hendrix and Grateful Dead posters purchased from a head shop on Fairfax in L.A., sandalwood incense, and – far out! – a 25-year-old stash. Was this mine? Was this me before the med school make-over transformed me into a geek for science?

Psychedelic images started to flash. I heard the faint refrains of a sitar droning in my head. Cool. Ahem. Dig it, g-h-a-r-r-r-o-o-o-o-v-e-y!!!

Within an hour the 8-track was playing Donovan and Country Joe McDonald. The black light made the posters come alive. The lava lamp danced amoebic to the music. I dressed for the occasion and smoke filled the air. Unlike Bill, I inhaled, and further, I didn't need Hillary to remind me to exhale every now and then.

The music was a reminder of what a mess the world was in when we all joined together to sing songs of social import. I could hear a faint chorus singing civil rights, feminist, antiwar, antinuclear and environmental songs – songs about the common us, not the me me me songs that prevail today. The music meant something to that distant chorus of singers. The chorus rallied to causes, the chorus protested, the chorus kicked pin-striped butt.

For a while in my time warp, IT'S THE SIXTIES AGAIN and I've rejoined the chorus!

I know the secrets of the universe ... at least until the smoke clears. Then I look at the boxes strewn all over the place and realize that I still have to clean up the mess. I'm a grown-up now.

If I don't clean up my mess, it will just remain until the onus falls on someone else.

Life is about cleaning up messes, and learning not to make them again. Where is the chorus when you really need one?

I disagree with Thomas Wolfe: You can go home again, you just won't be able to fit into your old bell-bottom jeans without getting a hernia.

Peace and love. Heavy, man.

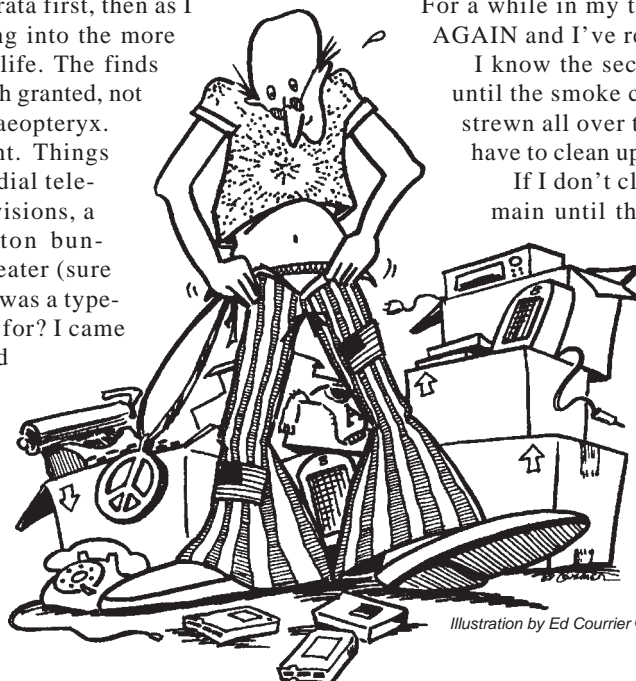


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