

Wandering & Wondering



John Maybury

COMCAUSTIC

You wonder why the economy sucks? Maybe it is our wasteful, inefficient business practices. The other day I decided to use Comcast's Live Chat feature to request a current cable TV channel lineup card. First, I waited 30 minutes to reach the top of the queue. (Don't worry, multitaskers, I made good use of the wait time to work on other desktop projects.) When the obviously nonnative-English-speaking "Analyst" came online with me from somewhere two time zones away, we went back and forth for 20 minutes establishing my identity, account status, etc. At the end of this folderol, "Raymond" dutifully informed me that he had documented my request and would submit it to some other entity, which I would have to contact in a day or two to complete the request. Then he emailed me the transcript of this totally useless so-called customer service. And I still don't have a new channel guide. I think I will just try the Comcast office in Pacifica, but I am almost afraid to hear what kinds of torture they have in mind for me. Good luck, America.



PIONEER SURFERS

"The Surfer's Journal" (Fall 2001) profiled the famous Keating clan of Pedro Point, and told the story of how Dick "King Joy" Keating, an Ocean Beach lifeguard and Aquacades swimmer, learned to surf in Hawaii while trying out for the U.S. Olympic swim team. Apparently, too much partying cost him a spot on the team, but he came home to the Bay Area and took his brother Bob down the coast from San Francisco looking for good surfing spots. They discovered the cove at Pedro Point and pioneered surfing here back in 1940. The magazine piece has lots of juicy details about Pedro Mountain Surf Club and Artichoke Valley (later known as Linda Mar). You can order this and other back issues from thesurfersjournal.com. (Thanks for the lead, Rudy!)

CREATIVE TRAVEL WRITING

Pacifica's own John Flinn, executive editor of the San Francisco Chronicle travel section, recently reviewed Rolf Potts' new book, "Marco Polo Didn't Go There." Flinn interviewed the travel writer about the difference (if any) between tourists and travelers, the true meaning (if any) of "authentic," and why Potts included a "special commentary track" (essentially outtakes) at the

end of each chapter of his book, confessing all the ugly little secrets about the writing process: the exaggerations, the omissions, the poetic license, the creative stretches. "I wanted to show how the laws of nature and the laws of storytelling are separate entities," Potts told Flinn. This book sounds like an adventure in travel writing, with a detour into philosophy and ethics, just the thing for lovers of side trips. Buy the book locally from Florey's Books on Palmetto; if it is out of stock, they can usually order it for you fairly quickly.

SITSEER

- Ever wonder where expressions such as "bat out of hell" and "one sandwich short of a picnic" come from? Find answers to these and other silly questions: phrases.org.uk
- Check out this instant jukebox; just punch in a song title or musician's name, and it plays your tune right on your computer: theradio.com



SKINNY COW

A biotechnology company in New Zealand has bred a cow that produces low-fat milk. ViaLactia says it has identified a "skimmed milk" gene and implanted it in a

dairy cow. Just say moo! (Earthweek.com)

OCEANA FREAKOUT

There is nothing stranger than walking into an empty locker room and hearing a cell phone ring inside a locker. I'm thinking of sending this idea to Stephen King.

INNER EDIROT

Halloween leftover: "Flying Pen. It Appears To The Life While Write." (display card for scary-looking ballpoint pen with bat wings on the cap, made in Taiwan)

EAT SMART

During the holidays, it is always a challenge to keep weight off while still celebrating and having a good time with family and friends. Here is a quick list of winning strategies from USA Today's nutrition columnist Jean Carper: Spice up your food; add apple cider vinegar; eat nuts; avoid buffets; eat five or six small meals a day; choose fats carefully; eat lean and low-fat protein; fill up on high-fiber, low-calorie food; eat at home more often; hot tea and soup before a meal can help make you feel full without overeating. (jeancarper.com)

SWAMI SEZ

"At a fast-food restaurant with a self-service soft drink dispenser, why pay for more than the smallest size?" (Edward Catalano, Coconut Creek, Florida)

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