

THE NEVER-ENDING NEWS

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Disney World. Already at Universal Studios we were hearing the senior citizens' comically querulous or hammily plaintive query: "Are we having fun yet?" Well, yeah, after a fashion. My greatest fun, I'll tell you truly, was watching the little kids, all of them, without exaggeration, almost as cute as our darling grandchildren. At Epcot Center, outside the Kodak show "Imagination" (once thought to be pure and simple), where no expense was spared to assure that nothing was left to it, I saw a butterfly. The stunningly beautiful little thing kept circling around me, refusing to flutter away until sure that I had got its message: "You, there, strange, errant-faced and -footed stranger, look at me, look at me! Not for one heartbeat not one bit of this commercialized, contrived, colossally costly canned recreation can compare with me!" Amen. Amen, sister or brother butterfly. Hmm, let us appeal to Spanish to resolve this question of gender, linguistically at least. Generally speaking, o signifies masculine in Spanish and a feminine, which is somewhat confusing inasmuch as both "oh" and "ah," beyond the cradle, obviously are more applicable to the latter. My butterfly was a "mariposa." Oh.... Ah.... What a liltingly lovely name! Mari: from Maria, Mary. Posa: from posar, to alight--on a delicate, dazzling, fragrant blossom, doubling and tripling our delight. Why Mary? Perhaps to turn our thoughts toward the Messiah's wondrously beautiful mother, whom all generations shall call blessed. I rejoice to do so now, thrilled to help fulfill this prophecy over and over.

On camera. Approaching the end of the "Imagination" ride, each car of about 6 passengers unexpectedly appears in a frozen video shot on a large screen. Merrill and I were in front. I had my chin on my elbow--or was it my clenched hand? Oh, yeah, my elbow was on my knee, and I looked so totally bored it was disgusting. Everybody busted out laughing at me. And then a lady behind us patted me on the back and reassuringly affirmed, "I'm with you." Can you laugh at kidstuff? That telling question was asked by Marvin O. Ashton, member of the presiding bishopric in my youth and my favorite speaker. Yes, I can laugh at myself, though it's more like groaning than pure, crystal, hygienic laughter. As for authentic kidstuff, there's nothing more marvelous in the world, and if laughing at it, I take care to avoid the slightest note of derision, which in any case I do not never feel. What turns me off is pretentious, boiler-plated adult ideas of kidstuff. Why one little tot shows more imagination in a split second than these arteriosclerotic-brained mercenaries do in a year. There's little 5-yr.-old John Melvin Brooks, for example. He first sketches his projects in crayon (some kind of color-coding, it seems) but in execution--his unbounded imagination still bounding--his finished articles ends up quite different. His favorite thing is wood, crates, and cartons. To his mother's proud chagrin, he is not too slowly transferring the big scrap pile left over from constructing our cabin to 3015 Cherokee Lane, Provo UT.

Great Bahama Cattle Drive. Embarking on and disembarking from the Discovery I, capacity about 1200, and going through immigration and customs, both in Fort Lauderdale and Freeport, made us feel like cows herded into cramped corrals and prodded through crowded chutes to be milked by the great automatic tourist-milking machine. Prices are really high for those who buy, but we didn't buy it. Instead of costly tours, we just took the local buses @ 75 cents a ride and we found a restaurant, the "world-famous" Japanese Steak House, where a good entree with salad bar included was relatively inexpensive. The guy in charge, apparently the owner, was a German. "Zahlen, bitte." No waiting around to get

the waiter's attention or the check, which we liked. An automatic 10% tip was included. (You cannot leave such crucial things to chance.) In fancier places, of course, a more gratifying gratuity was expected. Sad part for all the poorer people scrambling for the tourist dollar is that they have to pay the same high prices, according to what we were told by the natives, almost all of whom are blacks. Same as with the tourists, almost everything has to be imported, except for some arts and crafts, etc., though who knows if they come from Taiwan? Our main informant, a bus driver, said that no fruits or vegetables are grown on the islands (700 of them, most of which are very tiny). It seems that the major product of the isles is the conch (pronounced "conk"), a kind of mollusk or snail (We got no clear answers on this, so it could be something more disgusting), served either cooked or raw. Goes down the gullet like stringy gizzard. Well, gall blad!--I mean gol, dad!--you all know how John always asks for the neck and I take the gizzard, and there are those who poke fun at us, though I haven't heard them complaining. You bet! I found conch quite tasty. Uh cudda et ut tull Uh conched out.

Bahama mamas. The traditional Bahama mama is quite colorful, voluminous, and voluble. The younger girls tend to be quite svelte, like Merrill felt. You-know-who felt like a pune. "Bahama mama" is also the name of a beverage made with rum. Our hostess at the Windward Palms Hotel, a vivacious young black, announced to our group that it acts as a strong aphrodisiac, which, curiously, elicited laughter from those present, mainly seniorish. I, be it said, am not that at all, no way, not a bit of it. I am señorish. As a linguist, I easily noted that she had roguishly pronounced it "afrodisiac," a delicate nuance undetectable on the part of laypersons. Returning to volubility, it is not only the Bahama mamas. The Bahamians are great talkers and love to holler to each other a block or so or a whole market place apart. They enjoy noise and the steel drum (oil barrel) is their favorite instrument. They are voluble and volumal. I had been with Caribbeans before--St. Thomas (Virgin Islands) on my way to Argentina, 1946, and Port-of-Spain (Trinidad) returning, 1949. Also in the pages of James Michener's Caribbean, another of his very interesting books. In Trinidad I particularly enjoyed the botanical gardens, with their incredibly lush vegetation, venus flytraps, etc. Yes, I actually saw carnivorous plants consume insects. You have my word on it that they enjoy all kinds of carne (meat). Next time around, have a close look at the middle finger of my left hand. Grand Bahama (our island) also has a botanical garden, but with two days of sun we waited till it was raining hard and didn't see it. Pity! We did wander about in the rain a bit that day, though. For a long time after my heart attack (1983), I had to take it slow or answer for it with angina pectoris (chest pains). Merrill always had to slow down to my pace. But as she hobbled along on her somewhat mended ankle with its screwed-up fracture, I supported her, matching her steps with mine. Actually, you know, at a limited level of forward impetus, I tend to topple over, and what would people think? Se le pasó la mano con la Bahama mama. He had a little too much... (Also open to another interpretation in Spanish: He got fresh with...) That tricky old Afroid beverage! I still get angina, by the way, most often if I forget and go up the stairs too fast, but I feel very blessed. Who would have thought I could have finished off the shell of a cabin, lifting heavy boards, etc. True, as Merrill has pointed out more than once, if I had got paid by the hour we would be wickedly rich--the which is inimical to noble character.

Next stop Casper, WY. According to Teresa, the ladies couldn't get a general authority to speak at their R.S. dinner so they invited me. Teresa the Teaser!

Love, M + W