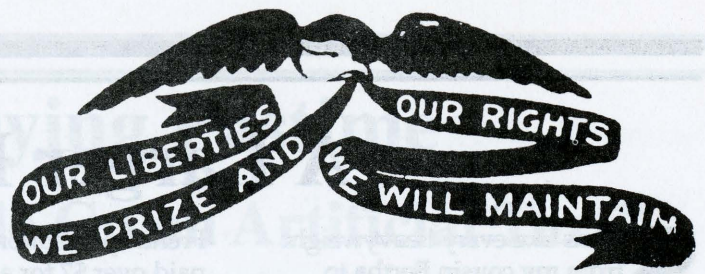


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



22

Summer 1993

## A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

### Prairie Dog's 1993 Summer Reading List

**T**his year's list emphasizes politics and sex, to feed the passions stirred by sultry Iowa summer nights. Prairie Dog recommends that these books be read beside a smoky campfire, beneath a cascade of fireworks, or by the light of a thousand fireflies.

**Like Water for Chocolate** by Laura Esquivel

Machismo takes it on the chin in this tasty saga of a dysfunctional Mexican family that finds faith, hope, and orgasm through cooking.

**Becoming a Man** by Paul Monette

A scary memoir about the torment of coming to grips with coming out. Lassie, Liz Taylor, and the Episcopal church provide comic relief.

**Bastard Out of Carolina** by Dorothy Allison

A bleak but beautiful novel of growing up poor in the fifties. The men are violent, the women stoic, but all are complex, authentic, and 100% cliché-free.

**Under Fire** by Osha Davidson

With clarity, precision, and irony, Iowa City's finest journalist explains the chasm separating public opinion and public policy on gun laws.

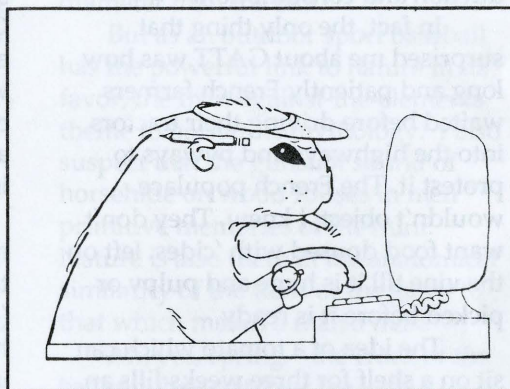
**Written on the Body** by Jeanette Winterson

The bodies of lovers are explored pore-by-pore without revealing

genders. What love would be like if we were smart enough to know.

**Hardpressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement** by Peter Rachleff

Can democratic, community-based unionism succeed where bureaucratic "company unions" have failed? The P-9 strikers lost their battle in the eighties but may have planted the seeds for labor's revival in the nineties.



**The Dreyfus Affair** by Peter Lefcourt

Baseball may be a dying pastime, but it's given new life in this tale of an all-American, all-star shortstop who falls in love with his second baseman.

**The Cartoon Guide to Statistics** by Larry Gonick & Woollcott Smith

Tired of being bamboozled by the intricacies of election polls and other numerical manipulations by your political foes? Here's the weapon you

need: an explanation of modern statistics that even fuzzy-headed liberals can understand.

**Church Farmland Ownership in Iowa** by the Church Land Project

Sponsored by PrairieFire and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, this report reveals that churches own nearly 60,000 acres of Iowa farmland, valued at over \$48 million. Praise the Lord and pass the tax breaks.

**When Hate Groups Come to Town: A Handbook of Effective Community Responses** by the Center for Democratic Renewal

Practical advice for countering cross-burners, gay-bashers, and anti-Semites in rural areas, the work-place, and on campus. Exposes the religious, legal, and political aspects of virtually every radical-right and hate-group activity.

**The Culture of Desire: Paradox and Perversity in Gay Lives Today** by Frank Browning

The best examination yet of so-called gay culture, including "queer rage," everyday life on the boundaries, and why sex is never "safe" for anyone. Get used to it.

Summer Reading, Page 4



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# A Larger Look at Fat

**S**eems like every heavyweight from my cousin Bertha to ubiquitous, obnoxious Roseanne has clambered aboard the victim bandwagon expecting sympathy for excess adipose.

Like a half-dozen other bogus victim movements, they try to con us into believing fat is caused by genes, chemicals, neuroses, and/or society. Always something beyond the individual's control. "Alcoholism is an illness." Caught in bars? From dirty drink glasses?

In most people, overweight is a condition caused by eating too much. And if you don't believe me, I challenge you to rustle me up a half-dozen fat folk in Sarajevo.

My mother, a down-to-earth poor woman of intense good sense and high moral purpose said, "Get away from the table; you've had your share." She believed that eating too much was a physical manifestation of moral weakness.

Fat is immoral in the larger sense that my mother, with her old-world, bare-bones, personal-god sense of morality knew, instinctively if not intellectually. And she taught it to us that way. Social/group obligations and self-discipline were reinforced daily, the way she expected us to live them.

While I ingested Mom's message with every mouthful till I left her house, it was years before understood how it fit into international food policy and the larger political picture.

Living in Paris in 1979, one day I bought an ice cream cone from a vendeuse des glaces. It cost over a dollar and wasn't much larger than the ones the supermarket passes out free on Saturday morning to tempt me to buy a half gallon (a quantity guaranteed to promote overeating) on sale for \$1.99 (likewise, the price).

By then, I was beginning to make the connection between food and value, which is central to the

French perception of it. I routinely paid over \$7 for a 4-inch round of Camembert cheese, \$2.50 for 500 grams of Swiss, and anywhere from 50 cents to \$1 for a leek.

For Christmas, my French friend, Sylvie, spent \$25 for 500 grams of pate de fois gras. Yes, it was tres cher, and each of us only had un petit morceau. Food is loved, respected, fussed over and seldom wasted in French culture. Meals, especially on holidays, are ceremonies of the art and practice of savoring food, not satiating hunger.

Consequently, the producers of food—farmers—have status in France. It is not surprising the French opposed GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) which is 100-proof American: it prizes excess over excellence; it rewards the agri-businessman and penalizes the small farmer; it wastes a tremendous amount of food at all levels of production and consumption.

In fact, the only thing that surprised me about GATT was how long and patiently French farmers waited before driving their tractors into the highways and byways to protest it. The French populace wouldn't object, I knew. They don't want food doused with 'cides, left on the vine till it is huge and pulpy or picked before it is ready.

The idea of a tomato which can sit on a shelf for three weeks fills an American bio-engineer with glee, a Frenchman with disgust. And hydroponic tomatoes are deemed more appropriate for pelting errant politicians than (Quelle horreur!) eating.

The people, whose food culture is the most envied and imitated in the world, are not about to let a country (U.S.) whose idea of food excellence is bigger-is-better dictate food policy to them. Worse, become dependent on the country which invented fast food and all-you-can-eat restaurants.

All-you-can-eat says it all. In fact, food—the essential element of life—reflects the personal, moral and cultural values of a society better than any other element of it.

Bill Clinton's now infamous L.A. runway haircut is quintessential American "fat" mentality, tantamount to taking all the pieces of meat. It was an act profoundly lacking in concern for anyone but self, making him the perfect representative of a people who can crank up the thermostat or air-conditioner firmly convinced it's all right to put personal comfort before your impact on the environment. This is a country which, from Bill on down, insists on an excess of cheap food though it is clearly destroying the small farmer and the small town, polluting the land and many people.

Self-interest, without compunction or twinge of conscience, is blithely accepted as the norm by sports stars, medical doctors and CEOs. Flaunting the "big is beautiful" ethic, they demand what the market will bear, scraping the public plate clean, endangering the public health and welfare, smugly not even bothering to leave scraps anymore.

Fat is emblematic of America as nothing else. If you don't believe me, tune into Rush Limbaugh for an hour (or as long as you can take it!). You'll hear the "fat" mentality translated into political philosophy and transmogrified to human form.

Curiously, the victim movements have sprouted in the middle class at a time when the U.S., traditionally the victimizer of poorer nations, has found itself on the receiving end of its trade relationship with Japan and Germany. ☞

—Keyron McDermott is the editor of *The Cascade Interpreter*.



# Free Trade or Trade Free-for-All?

**M**y husband and I had the privilege of a wonderful trip through the Southwestern U.S. in late April. Heavier than normal spring rains made the desert a mass of flowers, enhancing the usual colors and dramatic rock formations. Being early in the tourist season we often had the sights to ourselves. We soaked up as much of the beauty as we could hold.

But not everything on our trip was beautiful. As part of a five-day elderhostel in Nogales, Arizona, we were bused around the city, then driven across the border to Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, for lunch and shopping.

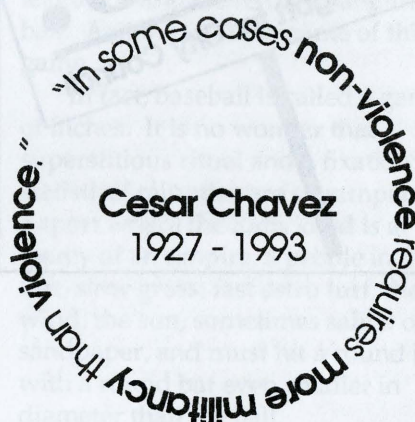
Our bus labored up the steep hills to view the wealthier section of Nogales, Arizona, which adjoined the border with Mexico. The beautiful wrought ironwork on doors and windows was not only decorative but functional, we were told, since home burglaries were the most common crime in the city. Most homes also had electronic burglar systems. Some even had high walls topped with concertina wire, reminding me of similar neighborhoods in San Salvador, where the wealthy appeared to live as prisoners inside their walled and wired enclosures to keep the poor or criminal elements from taking their valued possessions.

Nogales, AZ, has a population of approximately 25,000 and Nogales, Mexico, 250,000. Our Anglo guide pointed out the chain link fence dividing the countries. She explained that the large holes and missing sections made the border very "porous." She joked about a large opening not far from the customs office where we could cross if we didn't want to bother with customs.

Local authorities estimate that up to 3000 illegal immigrants come into the U.S. each day through these openings. If that is correct, a quick

multiplication yields 1,095,000 entries per year from just one point on the vast border. This includes those who illegally enter the U.S. and leave again each day.

Many Mexican nationals who reside on the Mexican side have work permits in the U.S. and go through customs each day to work. In the late afternoon, it was interesting to watch



Mexican nationals carrying bags of food and clothing south to their homes, while tourists lugged their bags of liquor, leathergoods, jewelry, carvings and other "bargains" north to their homes. Except for quantity limits, this exchange appeared to be a microcosm of "free trade."

Our guide, whose husband was in the produce import business, was questioned about the transport of fresh produce between countries. She showed us a port of entry and said each truck had to be unloaded, its cargo inspected and reloaded before it could cross. Drug sniffing dogs were in evidence. Our group concluded in private that it would be impossible to unload and inspect the millions of tons of produce that pass through these checkpoints. The delays and costs of doing so would

make prices of produce prohibitive. Another guide, whose husband was also in the produce business, confirmed that only spot checks were done; she thought most ports of entry closed on weekends.

The scene entering Nogales, Mexico, was depressing at best. Flapping plastic bags and junk littered eroding, barren roadsides. As far as the eye could see surrounding the city, rows of tin and cardboard shacks edged their way up the hillside. None had running water, electricity or sewers.

Juxtaposed against that scene were handsome factories with well groomed lawns. These were "maquiladoras," U.S. or international factories which offer \$5 per day, to mostly female employees, average age 17. The best maquiladoras offered some benefits, sometimes childcare on site. Understandably, these factories have a limitless pool of job applicants. As of 1992, 1739 maquiladoras operate on the border, employing 380,000 workers. Some we saw were Chamberlain (door openers for Sears), Badger electric motors, Foster Grant eyewear, and Wilson-Jones office products.

The North American Free Trade Agreement has been touted as a way to raise living standards in Mexico, help curb the flow of illegal immigrants and also boost the market for U.S. and Canadian goods as our neighbors to the south become more prosperous. It sounds like an admirable goal, but arithmetic again tells us if 1,095,000 people go through the fence each year, there need to be approximately 5000 additional maquiladoras or equivalent job suppliers in Nogales alone! How many U.S. and Canadian goods will Mexican workers earning \$5 per day be able to buy? How can NAFTA work, given the first commandment

*Free Trade?, Page 4*



## Summer Reading, continued

### **Crip Zen: A Manual for Survival** by Lorenzo Milam

Be prepared to reexamine your attitudes as you learn what it's like to live with a disability in contemporary America. Scathing essays by the most militant civil rights activists since the Black Panthers.

### **A Piece of Work: Five Writers Discuss Their Own Revisions** by Jay Woodruff

Forget the image of a Benzedrine-crazed Kerouac cranking out *On the Road* in one sitting. These interviews offer proof that inspiration has nothing to do with it (and that some writers still compose in longhand).

### **Babbitt** by Sinclair Lewis

The story is 70 years old, but the Rotarians, realtors, and assorted boosters in the town of Zenith are as fresh and as true-to-life as last night's city council meeting. ☹

— *Prairie Dog claims to have read most of these books.*

## Free Trade?, continued

of unrestricted capitalism is to Maximize Profits, low wages being one way?

Lane Kirkland, President of the AFL-CIO, charges "the financial elites pushing the current NAFTA aren't interested in uplifting living standards in Mexico or the United States, but in making a quick profit by exploiting Mexico's low wages and poor enforcement of environmental and labor laws." His recommendation is to create a North Atlantic Trade agreement which would include Common Market countries which have comparable living, environmental and labor standards. He contends Mexico would be less prone to exploitation and North Atlantic nations would be better able to effect balanced trade with Asian countries.

NAFTA not only reduces or eliminates import duties, it eradicates non-tariff barriers. Thus the potential that environmental or labor requirements by one country could be considered "restrictions of trade." Major environmental groups are divided on NAFTA. President Clinton wants supplemental agreements before Congress ratifies the treaty.

I personally hope the wheels of government turn slowly on NAFTA and that President Clinton holds out for environmental and worker protection agreements.

U.S. and Canadian businesses can already avoid duties and set up maquiladoras to take advantage of low labor costs and under-enforced environmental and labor laws in Mexico. One can only wonder what new benefits will accrue to business interests and why they are so eager to have NAFTA approved quickly. ☹

— *Bev Hannon lives near Anamosa. She was a State Senator from 1984-1992.*

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# Ode to a Dying Pastime

## Where does All the Spittle Go on Artificial Turf?

**T**he change promised by Bill Clinton is coming not in the social, but in the sports arena. While in politics the new administration is shamelessly scrambling for the center, in sports the nation is rapidly moving toward a faster paced game. Basketball is replacing baseball as the national pastime.

How did baseball stay on top so long? What does baseball have that would have caused Herbert Hoover to say it has a greater impact on the American people than anything but religion, and historian Jacques Barzun to claim that you can't know the heart and mind of America if you don't know baseball? What is it about the game that can cast a net of consent across the political spectrum? Pundits who otherwise are as far apart, from right to center to left, as a baseball outfield—from George Will to David Broder to Prairie Dog—raise their voices each spring in a common chorus of baseball-as-life metaphors.

In what ways is baseball like life? Well, for one, to get ahead you have to run in circles. For another, you're at the mercy of a higher power making instant and final judgments on every pitch. And the highest paid are seldom the best performers.

In other words, baseball, like life, is not fair. The strike zone varies from league to league. The level playing field? Ground crews traditionally doctor up their fields to the advantage of the home team.

And, since there are no standard dimensions for baseball stadiums, if there aren't enough home runs to suit the fans—what the hell, bring the fence in closer to the plate. Or manufacture a livelier ball.

What other sport allows such variance in its playing field? Golf is the only one that comes to mind, the preferred game of those most respon-

sible for turning society itself into an unlevel playing field.

Baseball mirrors life too in the high rate of failure of the players. To get a hit 30% of the time is about as good as modern players can do. Figuring in all the times he walked or struck out during his 18 years in baseball, Mickey Mantle calculated that he played 7 years in the major leagues without even touching the ball. Action is not the name of this game.

In fact, baseball is called a game of inches. It is no wonder that superstitious ritual and a fixation on statistical minutiae are so rampant in a sport where the individual is at the mercy of an umpire, a pebble in the dirt, slow grass, fast astro turf, the wind, the sun, sometimes saliva or sandpaper, and must hit a round ball with a round bat even smaller in diameter than the ball.

But as an outdoor sport baseball has the powerful link to nature in its favor, the man-against-the-elements theme to bolster its mythology. I also suspect that the gunshot sound of horsehide on wood rouses in men primitive memories of the hunt. Nature is also there in the anatomical similarity of the tools of the game to that which makes a man a man.

Ah, yes, spring—the crack of the bat and the scratch of the balls. Baseball is the spitting image of life itself.

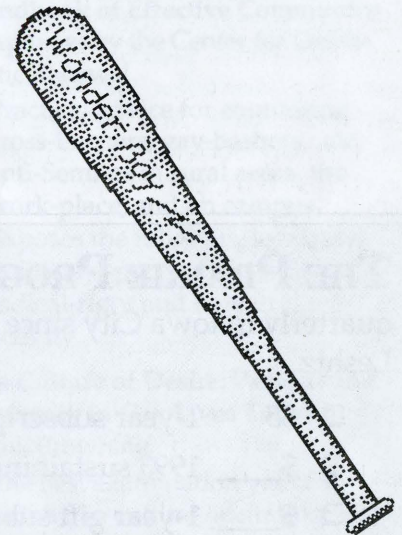
The one obvious advantage basketball has over baseball is that it's played indoors and the players can't spit. Other than that, two forces, one technological and the other natural, have joined to make basketball the new national pastime: TV and MJ. Television has so sharply reduced the national attention span as to make it ill-suited to the slow pace of baseball, and Michael Jordan,

the greatest athlete who ever lived, looks as good as he plays.

Television is as kind to basketball as it is unkind to baseball. Why would anyone watch a bunch of spitting, crotch-grabbing men not named Michael Jackson when they could be watching Air God, in slow motion?

Baseball belongs to the radio days. Basketball and television are a marriage made in corporate heaven. And basketball is the only game in town that Blacks can play without someone crying "Quotas!" It's a game that Lani Guinier, and all others weary of the tyranny of majority rule, can love.☛

— Jae Retz was a high school track star.





# Bruno Pigott for Council

Local social activists may be interested to know that veteran campaigner and former Iowa Citian Kate Head was recently in Cambodia, helping the Cambodians reintroduce democratic processes to their country. Kate got her start in politics while a student here. Many of us remember Kate from her work on the Joe Johnston congressional campaign, University divestiture, and the Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns.

May 23 marked the beginning of the first democratic elections in Cambodia in a generation. Despite threats of disruptions, assassinations, and random terrorism by the Khmer Rouge, some 80% of Cambodians voted during the week-long process.

It's easy to get disillusioned by politics in America. This summer in

Iowa City, we're having an election the city council didn't want to have, the voters don't seem to care about, and the press isn't interested in. However ungratifying our efforts

may be in the next few weeks, remember the Cambodians, who, by the millions, will have risked their very lives for the opportunity to vote. Remember that this local city council election is about fighting to bring American democracy just a little bit closer to the shining ideal the Cambodians are willing to sacrifice so much for.

I'll be voting for Bruno Pigott for city council. Keep democracy strong, make America better: VOTE.☸

— Linda Yanney

(To volunteer, contribute money, or learn more about Bruno Pigott's campaign for city council in Iowa City, call Bruno at 339-1968.)



## THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

Box 1945

Iowa City, IA 52244

"There remains a living core of socialist belief, . . . a belief that democracy remains the basis, the one indispensable foundation of all that we want. Without democracy, nothing is possible."

**Irving Howe**

1920 - 1993