

d'AUTREMONT - HELMS & ASSOCIATES

CONSULTING MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

6311 N. FIGUEROA STREET LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90042

255-7121

Bernice & Jack McGee
4612 Merida
Fort Worth, Texas 76115

8 April 68
(Enroute to Reno via United Air Lines)

Dear Bernice & Jack,

I presume that by the time you receive this epistle you will have returned from the Big Bend Country. If you are a "motor-mouth" as you say, I am both awed and impressed with the "mouthings" as having read your 5 April 68 letter at least thrice I find within me the sensations of an old War-horse, that is, ready to go!

Fly down! You say. Hell yes! We'll fly down or drive down some other time. That's a Hell-u-va way to treat a buddy! First you give me a big buildup of all the exciting explorations you have in mind, then describe how the pooped female corrals her family into various modes of transportation for the spring trek and if ol' Hughie can fly down, that's perfectly OK. You are truly a deceitful female! You know perfectly well that such an event must be planned far in advance including dates, grub, equipment and transportation. Jack autta take a switch to ya!

Should you and Jack decide to try it next spring (assuming that you haven't discovered everything of importance) or even some other wild area, and can stand the likes of Hugh and Mary for a week or two, just get with it in plenty of time so we can make the necessary plans. I can always rent a 2-seated Hondo and give Mary a thrill. As of now, we are overly committed this summer and can't fit anything in. Just try us next spring!

In sympathy with your book I have been reading up on my Vikings. Books I have pursued include "Testimony of the Spade" and "The Viking" published by C.A. Watts & Co. LTD, London. The latter belongs to a friend who received it from a brother in England. I find it a truly beautiful manuscript and loaded with drawings. Until now I had never realized the extent of the Vikings wanderings and plunderings so deep within the heartland of France. These Viking ships rowed over a hundred miles up the French river systems to plunder villages that till then never had heard of the Northmen. Map is attached. With such new understanding I look much more favorably upon your basic thesis that they performed similar feats in the New World. Floating down the Ohio-Mississippi would be a cinch. They would camp nightly on Islands to minimize Indian attacks. Locating and entering the mouth of the Mississippi don't seem probable.

River systems in Russia (particularly the Volga and Don) have also known considerable Viking travel from the Swedish area undoubtedly explaining the heavy findings of Byzantine coins in Swedish graves.

11 April 68 (Los Angeles)

Strange but the d'Autremont tribe are originally from Normandy. The old chateau is

Bernice & Jack McGee

50 miles from Cherbourg. For years people have suggested my French ancestors must have been raped by Vikings judging by my stature. In haste I assure them that my French female ancestry were more than likely quite willing! Dennis inherited my frame while Bill has the shorter powerful frame of the Bakers. In any case, blood lines are too mixed at this date to do other than surmise.

In retrospect, I find hidden away in a minute corner of an unworked brain cell a strange urge! Somehow I find myself understanding the idea of unrestricted looting, plundering and rape in Viking Style. The wild explorations in a primitive age appeal even more.

Also, I find myself regretting that the Vikings failed to sustain a Colony in the New World. Suppose they had succeeded, how history would have read! Can you imagine Columbus being met by a Viking in a small boat with a summons to exhibit his passport---and to deodorize before coming ashore? Therein lies the opportunity for a fiction writer to come up with a Hell-u-va yarn.

Enough of that and back to future plans. From some of your earlier correspondence I recall that you have been exposed to plants in nature. Mary can lead be my the nose here as she teaches the subject in Descanso Gardens. If we ever get off in the wilds we can make her earn her keep. My contribution will be a strong back and camp fire stories. I am sure you can find use for both of us and particularly Mary as she is an experienced camper and an exceptionally friendly person. She's even smart enough to let me think I'm smarter but I'm smart enough to know better!

There's a very good chance I'll be in San Antonio this fall to work out some details with an architectural firm that are doing work in Nevada. If I fly in I'll let you know in time so we can get together and kick the thing around.

How about getting a copy of your "Church Hollow" story to me? Do you think I have the time to take or read magazines? Never ever heard of the ones you get published in!

12 April 68

This is getting to be somewhat of a diary. No matter, I write when I have the moments. You won't be back from Big Bend for awhile anyway.

Of interest to you I am sure is an attached copy of a letter written by my son, Bill, with whom we are very close. See if you don't agree that he writes exceptionally well. And while I am at it, I enclose some other correspondence, mostly Man talk for Jack's pursual who I believe concurs in most of my views.

I am not always so serious as these letters would seem to indicate and much prefer a jolly evening around a desert camp fire.

Am looking forward to an eventual report on the Big Bend Safari.

Your buddy,

Hugh



● = SITES OF HISTORICALLY RECORDED VIKING RAIDS IN FRANCE

GHENT

Scheldt

ABBEVILLE

AMIENS

ROUEN

Oise

Marne

Meuse

NORMANDY

PARIS

Seine

ORLÉANS

ANGERS

TOURS

POITIERS

LYON

BORDEAUX

Garonne

Rhône

ARLES

TOULOUSE

d'AUTREMONT - HELMS & ASSOCIATES

CONSULTING MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

6311 N. FIGUEROA STREET LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90042

255-7121

22 Apr 68

P.F.C. E-3 William A. d'Autremont - RA 18851339
Co. B., Special Forces Training Center (Abn)
Fort Bragg, North Carolina 28307

Dear Bill,

Had a rare experience in Pinto Basin and found ideal weather. Our expedition consisted of Jack Jones, Frank Binch, Dale Au, Roger Moore and I. Friday (12 Apr) was spent at Barry Storm's Jade mine who now owns a house trailer and uses his mine drift for shelter during hot weather only. We awakened him at midnight which was quite difficult. His delay was due to an assumption we were thoughtless rock hounds with nothing but questions.

Our "Kern River" water changed his mind real quick (you should have seen his eyes sparkle!) and by 2:30 AM we had consumed a quart. By this time my four friends had the full and invigorating experience of two old Superstition Mountains explorers rehashing old trails. Stormy made quite an impression as usual. He's now a little on the heavy side and is troubled with minor arthritis. Still sells Black Jade at \$5.00 a pound. Starlight and Green Jade is \$2.00 as well as Jadite. In another few years he'll be charging 25¢ an autograph like old Jack Meek or Death Valley Scotty. All he needs for atmosphere is a long white beard which, with his high pitched cackle, will sell suckers in droves!

Pinto Basin is as wild, lonesome and raw as ever. Ochatellos, Palo Verde and Smoke trees were bursting with swelling greenery and springtime blossoms. This, with wild flowers in great abundances on the high slopes, left me with a keen sense of compatibility in nature.

From Storm's claims we backtrailed the 10 miles to 4-Points to take the sandy trail thru the Basin---you recall the route. From the O.K. mine to the L.A.-Brooklyn mine on the Zulu Queen trail was a slow and dangerous drive. Winter cloudbursts had deposited countless boulders over the road and sandy washes which my 4 argonauts tossed aside while I crawled slowly along in the Oldsmobile. My heart jumped each time the oil pan dragged bottom.

We set up base camp at the Gold Queen Mine sleeping quarters. Ancient mattresses lay about and the area was in good condition for rough camping. We were short of water, particularly after Dale and Roger guzzled a quart apiece. (That evening we had to take our whiskey straight.)

We were all excited over a promising afternoon which was to map out the fabulous (notorious? ancient? decrepit? unsafe?) Los Angeles - Brooklyn Gold Mine which, due to litigation, has not been in full operation since about 1922. In 1937 Jess Baker and I had a lease on the 4th level. A glance at the attached mine map will explain to you why your Uncle Jess and I were more interested in the 1st. and 3rd. levels in lieu of the 4th. level which lacked the higher values.

To tell you this full story is a challenge almost beyond my descriptive powers at this time.

22 Apr 68

William A. d'Autremont

Today it all seems difficult for me to understand. In fact, it is incomprehensible to any I know, other than you, simply because conditions are now so radically different. I think what I am trying to say is that it was so utterly primitive which, combined with hard manual labor, was a matter of survival in a hostile environment while at the same time being under financed.

The approach to the L.A.-Brooklyn proved more than the Olds could achieve so we hiked the half-mile uphill to Shaft No. 1 then followed the old road to Shaft No. 2 which we descended hand-over-hand on the ancient creaky ladders while armed with flashlights.

For hours we explored the old workings as you can see by the attached mine sketch. We saw literally a million dollars in sight---were gold to jump to \$100 an ounce! Along with gold, these ores are heavily impregnated with copper chlorides and iron pyrites. The silicas sparkle like millions of diamonds under our flashlights.

Dale Au (that heathen Chinese!) has switched to Geology at Occidental College and helped me in pacing as well as determining the dip angles with his instruments. It was an excellent experience for Dale and his first in a real gold mine as well as for the other three.

I don't have to tell you how we spent the evening---particularly with Frank Binch along! Frank graduates from UCLA in June with his degree in Psychiatry. Jack Jones and I had one of those rare evenings that can never be repeated in this lifetime where trying to catch up with your generation. Roger will spend the coming summer in Sweden on a student-exchange. He is reading my Viking books for conversation material and is well armed with the Bernice McGee theories.

Your brother desired so much to go with us but something came up---probably his studies. I never see him as much as I desire---probably even less this coming summer as he is considering working on a farm in New Jersey. He put me on the spot recently when I asked him to work in the office this summer.

"What would you do if you were 18?", he grinned.

"Work for the Forest Service," I answered---which answer was too quick and left me with a trapped feeling of insufficient explanation and analysis.

I still think he should study dramatics. He'd make one Hell-u-va good John Wayne! I believe Denny is one of the few that could go the Hollywood route and still retain his balance and perspective.

We had the feeling after your telephone call Sunday you may have experienced a few pangs of lonesomeness. If so, I have been thru it myself. A good cure is letter writing in which it is not necessary to limit your words to adventures in the Service for the simple reason you will run out of them in the daily grind of Military sameness. If nothing else, try a book report or a review of the personalities in your daily contacts. It will teach you judgement, a handy tool in the Service.

Love from all,

Dad
Dad

d'AUTREMONT - HELMS & ASSOCIATES

CONSULTING MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

6311 NO. FIGUEROA STREET LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90042

255-7121

3 July 68

Bernice & Jack McGee
4612 Merida
Fort Worth, Texas 76115

Hi! Buddies,

Figured I'd better get my letter writin' done this week on accounta I'm goin' soldiering for the next two weeks, won't be back until July 20. I hear that 110° at Fort Irwin is cooler than normal, something like Pinto Basin and in fact it's actually 70 miles north of it as the crow flies only there aint any crows in that country! My duty will be as a Controller for FTX designed to test the California National Guard. (40th Brigade)

Now wouldn't you know they couldn't give that job to a California Reserve Unit? Yep! You're right! They're bringing in a Texas Command to do the testing to which I am attached as an advisor. Can't stir up any jealousys within our State, you know!

Now like the feller says, "The more you talk, the less people remember what you say." He must have meant that for the run-of-the-mill talkers, not some I've heard.

I'm beginning to find out that it is the same thing in writing. It isn't how much you write, it's how you write. Take that story you fellers wrote about Church Hollow Treasure. By pure accident you fell upon a simple plot and evolved it around a time-proven theme-Gold!

Naturally you had research which has to be struggled thru to come up with an original. Then the two picture glyph's (which you probably filled with chalk so they would photograph) to give the final touch to the story and which guides the interest. I'd like to find that gold myself. It would be worth a hell-u-va lot more than it's weight to coin collectors!

Incidentally, if I wanted to bury gold it wouldn't be in any yard or within sight of any neighborhood kids, even at night, or even if I had acres of ground.

I'd put it in the saddle bag of my trusty mule or in an iron pot hidden under straw on a buckboard or such and wander slowly on normal business in to the neighboring wilderness in broad daylight so I could watch my backtrail. Then I'd cover it up in a pre-dug hole near a permanent landmark (like a rock) then scatter dead leaves over the fresh earth. Then I'd get on a high point and watch the country for the rest of the day while under cover. This hole would be on high ground and not subject to floor or erosion.

So this is the story your editor chopped up on you? Join the club once again. Funny how I don't miss anything not knowing what was deleted but it sure gets to the heart strings of a writer. It's a fine story as it is!

Now you take ol' Hughie. Here I am getting callouses on my writin' fingers again, the ones I eat with (not like the Arab) still trying to develop a style and to learn when to put in and when to leave out!

3 July 68

Bernice & Jack McGee

Take some of those short stories I wrote a few months ago. Now that I read them again I can see a lot of detail that is important to me but not necessarily to the reader. You once inferred that I should put my own thoughts into them more than I do so mabby that's what's wrong.

On the other hand, consider "Pinto Gold." Do you want me to come right out and say that I was thinking like a buccaneer? Likely I was but I violated no laws--just skimmed the edge and avoided the problem of a State-reported payroll.

Your last letter indicated that it is a miracle I'm alive although I've never written anything that desperate as yet. Sometimes I think it's all a matter of luck anyway.

However, that remark triggered me into writing another story "Island Unknown" which is enclosed. This was my first real brush with death over which I had little control. I have held off writing this story and others for a long time hoping to gain the skills required to do it correctly on the first attempt.

There is one heck of a lot of detail and incidents that occurred which I deliberately left out. Just don't know how far to go with the thing but I don't want it to look like a diary which I suspect "Typhoon Waters" and "Lost Platoon" resemble. Still haven't researched this campaign to see how Hughie actually fit in.

My problem is I have so much natural material in my background to write about that it seems it would take years to do the job.

I think what I must do is to take a simple incident or plot and learn to write a good story around something that lasted, say, two days. I think one problem is, I'm still in the habit of writing a book.

As an example: In "Rails North" when I was bit by a rattlesnake. I gave that incident one paragraph but I expect (to an expert writer) the incident was worth a full short story if treated correctly to include all of the suspense, fear and innermost feelings.

Anyway, Clyde Lewis (Alaska) wants "Island Unknown" in Anchorage for a newspaper. Feels it will have great interest there as it effected their destiny and few Alaskans know much about the Attu invasion today. Clyde passed thru L.A. and we had dinner with him Sunday. He's been "striking a blow for freedom" on a weekly TV show (15 minutes) in Anchorage.

So the 'Dove' is getting Hawkish? Wow! I'll say you are! It did my heart good and I could have laughed were it not for the desperate example you used of the dead children and the raped mother. Glad to see you shook up!

Know why we don't have anymore Watts riots here! Bullets - not words! Ever since the 41st Armored knocked off 38 of these monkeys 3 summers ago, there has been no "Burn! Baby, Burn!" The patty-patty played by the politicians has nothing to do with the facts of the matter but they sure take the credit.

Just to show you how it goes, McNamara dissolved the 41st Armored and we now have the 40th Infantry Brigade, not even a Division for a State of 20 million people to enforce the law! Now, how do you like that as a reward for Guardsmen that did their job!

3 July 68

Bernice & Jack McGee

The money they save is probably given to "Poor Peoples" marches or to Africa.

This is the thing I have been trying to get thru in my stories: The answer to progress is sweat!...not alms! There are huge numbers of people, all colors, that are satisfied with a very low standard of living providing they don't have to work and will never perform while on welfare. They have nothing but time on their hands to become even further dissolutioned with their lot in life and worse, become sucker bait for a trained agitator in revolutionary tactics or become involved in crime.

If we give them more than food, why should they even finish school?, let alone work! I was poor (plenty poor) and so were countless others. But we didn't STAY poor and neither need they, other than the handicapped.

Got a telephone call from our son, Bill, who is just entering his final FTX. He advises that he will definitely be assigned to Viet-Nam which was what he desired. His 30 day leave should begin the latter part of July or early August. Needless to say we await him eagerly and plan a few days with him in some mountain area-some place I can pan gold from a stream bed instead of finding it in iron pots. I carry a pan with me as religiously as tire tools.

Tell ol' Jack to knock it off about the 'Mickey Free' article (or whoever suggested it) as my library is filled with the same data. Example: Read 'Apacheria', "I fought with Geronomo," etc. Less than 10% of Mickey Free is new material although it was put well together. That's the difference between your story and Griffith's. Nothing wrong with this method though, it still sells.

About that Encenada affair, it's mighty important where you eat. We took one meal the last evening in a Fish and Chip Mexican joint and I had the GI's for a week! So you see, Jack is just as well off.

Love from all the d'Autremonts,

Hugh
Hugh

d'AUTREMONT - HELMS & ASSOCIATES

CONSULTING MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

6311 NO. FIGUEROA STREET LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90042

255-7121

20 Dec 68

Bernice & Jack McGee
4612 Merida
Fort Worth, Texas 76115

Hi Buddies!

You were quite right, you did owe us a letter and when it arrived, wow! About 6 pages outlining your recent wanderings in Texas which, of course, should be 5 states! I thermofaxed the letter and sent the copy to Bill who, like any soldier in remote lands, dearly loves his mail.

We were fascinated by your recent adventures and Mary had to research the Lechugilla. Don't believe we would like to eat one - let alone Sotol!

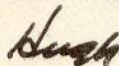
I do have knowledge of the area you traveled, from books, that is, plus flying over it. My best book source is "The Great River", by Paul Hargan. The Big Bend country is just one of the many places I would like to spend some time in. In fact, I don't see how I can live long enough to do everything I would like to do unless the medics come up with some kind of a pill which can add 40 or so years to a life span. And why not? They seem to have a pill for everything else!

This is the first time I ever had an explanation of Candelaria in that it is used for wax. I am surprised that your dozen Pancho Villa types collecting the stuff at such picayune wages have not got the word, that is, to go on welfare! That way they could receive twice as much for doing nothing at all! You Texans are out of date...don't even have riots in your schools. I'll bet that your Boards of Education or principals even select the teachers instead of the students!

Regarding the hem 'in hawin' Ranger, do you seriously think that the by-ways are for the use of the great unwashed? When you stop to think about it, what benefit accrues to future generations if this generation desecrates the trees, destroys wildlife and scatters their trash and beer bottles about. You got to sell yourself, mam! You asked why, so this is why. Not that he was worried about you but the word might get about, resulting in even further encroachment into an area they must be planning to convert to natural wilderness.

I want a copy of "Runestones and Tombstones" as soon as you get it in print. We've been so busy the past few months that Kathy has been unable to complete the second half of "Rails North" and my agent has apparently given me up as a lost cause. Funny how the first law of nature (hunger) keeps my nose in business when I would rather write. This must be the origin of the saying "Ya gotta be hungry ta write!" To write good, that is.

X-mas is due with it's time consuming mailing, gifts, etc., especially so for a women. You may hardly have time to read this letter. The best way to bring you up to date on my personal recent wanderings is to enclose some of my correspondance with Bill. You already have some intermediate letters. I admit that it is a lazy way to write to you but I think it will at least afford perspective and keep you in tune with Viet-Nam. -- A Merry Christmas to both you and Jack.


HUGH