

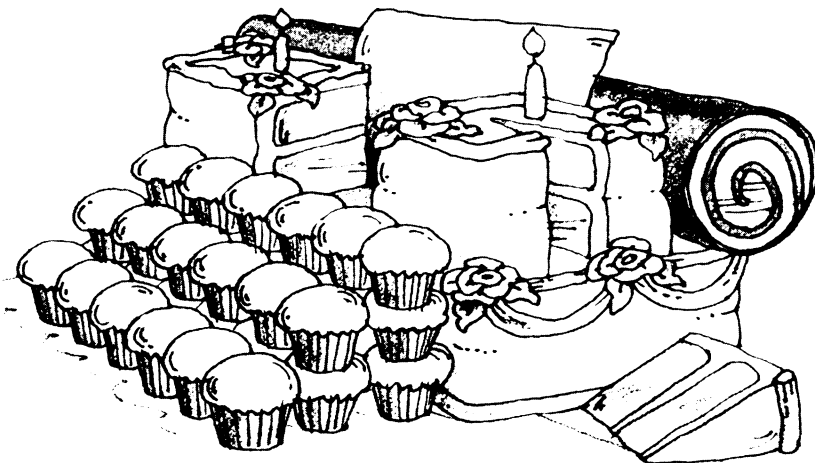
OFF THE BEAT

Who said science reporting was a piece of cake?

Last night I dreamt I was in a pastry shop with a frosting squeezer beginning to write a story: "The existence of cosmic rays has been known. . . ." In my waking life I have never written a story in cake frosting, nor can I remember using purple crayon, but almost anything else is possible.

The usual tool of this trade is a typewriter, but try to find one while traveling. Big meetings of course have press rooms equipped with typewriters, but many of the meetings we go to have never seen a reporter. They are unprepared for the advent of the press and are unequipped with press rooms, press releases, press conferences or typewriters. I have written a story in the manager's office of a hotel in Denver while his secretary was at lunch. I have borrowed a typewriter from the desk of a motor inn in Coral Gables—they thought I was an eccentric professor; anybody who attended a meeting on theoretical physics had to be at least a professor. And I have invaded the inner sanctum of the physics department at the University of Washington and borrowed the desk of a vacationing assistant professor. So maybe by some kind of physical contact transference. . . .

In the ultimate there is always writing by hand, which I was fortunate enough to learn in school. (That is not a snide remark. I once had a colleague, 10 years older than I, by the way, who had gone to a progressive school and never learned to write by hand. Banks continually made trouble over his checks because the signatures were printed.) I have done stories in holograph in the lounge car of a train going from Miami to New Orleans, and



mailed the text during a stopover in Jacksonville. (Some of our feature stories, having a week or so lead time, could be mailed.) I did another in the train from Seattle to San Francisco; and one was written on a bench in Chicago's Union Station.

Those were the days when I traveled everywhere by train. Now I fly—for a number of reasons, but one is that Amtrak took a system that was merely indifferent to passengers and made it something utterly ludicrous. I doubt that I shall ever write a story in an airport: The atmosphere is too hectic; it will sooner drive you to drink. And as for writing on airplanes—all I can do is pray.

Of course big hotels will rent you a stenographer, but all she does is take dictation, and a writer doesn't need that. At those occasional big meetings with press rooms they always have electric typewriters. I never knew a writer who liked electric typewriters. If you breathe on a key, the letter prints six times, and while you are trying to compose sentences the machine growls at you impatiently to let you know you are wantonly squandering energy and likely to wind up on President Carter's bad ol' boy list.

I have only once found the kind of installation that used to be fairly widespread: A row of typewriters with coin

slots that rent by the half-hour. It was on Polk Street in San Francisco in an office-machine shop that also sold occult books and spiritualist pamphlets. (Don't ask me why that combination; it's one of those things that happens in San Francisco. There the unexpected is commonplace.) Before I discovered that shop, I once resorted to writing a story by hand in my motel room and then practically pledged my body and soul to the telegraph clerk to get him to accept 2,000 handwritten words for transmission.

That brings up another problem. Telegraph stations. Western Union seems to want to be in every business but transmitting messages. There used to be telegraph stations scattered over major cities, and every sizable town had at least one. They are fast disappearing. There is only one left in downtown Chicago. It is hard to find, hiding as it does in the shadow of La Salle Street Station's elevated tracks. And when I found it they tried to tell me Chicago didn't have *twx* service. There is one left in San Francisco, and I don't remember ever finding one in New York. Oh well, there's always carrier pigeon.

And if that shop on Polk Street ever closes, there's always Eppler's Bakery on Geary Street. Maybe they'll let me use their cake decorator.

—Dietrick E. Thomsen

. . . LETTERS

Distorted 'science' of creationists

There is one aspect of the evolution/creationism question that is deadly serious, but of which little mention has been made.

As Robert Twiss pointed out (Letters, SN: 4/30/77), God—if He exists—could have brought us about either by an evolutionary process or by a fiat creation. The creationists, however, will not even consider that God might have used evolution; instead, they bind themselves to a literal interpretation of Genesis. Furthermore, because of their religious convictions and missionary zeal, the creationists feel the need to prove their case in a "scientific" manner in order to counteract the scientific evidence for evolution. Since, however, the creationist viewpoint has no support in scientific evidence, and since evolution *does*, the only recourse for the creationists is to misrepresent, misstate, and even to falsify the evidence in order to "disprove" evolution

and to "prove" biblical creation.

The creationists have incorporated this deceptive methodology into a large number of books, pamphlets, etc., with the result that a great many people are firmly convinced that those who believe in evolution are fools—scientists included. Because of the enormous effort by the creationists to spread their distorted arguments, and because little is being done to counteract those arguments, it would behoove scientists to work at setting the record straight. If they do not, they may find a large part of the population developing a militaristic anti-scientific attitude due to ignorance of the facts.

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In commenting on the creation vs. evolution hassle you referred to "thoughtful efforts to deal with the philosophical distinctions between such diverse points of view in a way that recognizes and maintains both the special qualities of the scientific

process and the dignity of the individual's personal convictions."

This appears to me like "eating the cake and having it too." Must we indeed respect the dignity of the individual's convictions? Which individual's? Stalin's? Hitler's? the Pope's? Rev. Moon's? Eichman's? I have no wish to be disrespectful, but as it stands, your statement is a bit wishy-washy.

Robert Twiss attempts another dichotomy. But the earth was created in six days—or not—there is no middle ground, and to avoid debate because one's opponent gets emotional does not imply that he/she has a right to that view because the opponent is in a different sphere, as it were. Why not just say it as it is—he is a superstitious person—and let him go?

Are we now to be less courageous than Galileo, Darwin and Huxley? There is no more inquisition—so why this wishy-washy circumlocution?

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