

I Guess That's Me (A Reflection)

Lee Frank

Writing Me

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Writing Me

The medical complications of the previous chapter didn't keep me from performing the writing assignments discussed in this chapter. Through those operations, and the death of my mother, I never failed to deliver on time. The traveling covered in previous chapters didn't interfere either. I knew how to prepare columns in advance, how to fit my work into whatever little time I had. In an inappropriate word, considering the last chapter, how to meet a deadline.

My writing didn't begin in the time frame of the last chapter, or even during the one on traveling. When did it start? Although I recently discovered some things I wrote at five, I can't claim those prehistoric works as part of my oeuvre. And while I still have that high school paper on Architecture, I can't claim it either. But soon after high school I began producing thoughts on paper, paper I saved, paper now electronic in the form of pages on my website. I will claim these, my notebooks, as my earliest writings.

Those, however, were only intended for myself; writing to help clarify my thoughts. (Perhaps posterity might be interested, but that was not my aim when I wrote them.) Writing for others, beyond the other of professor or boss, began in the eighties. I wrote articles for computer user groups, and by the late eighties I was writing a

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monthly column. (While not a audience of millions, my readership did number over a thousand.) By the early nineties, I had won a small national award.

The computer column took the form of varying persona. The first was Captain Caution. Next was Mr. GoodByte, followed by The GoodByte Gang, with its own bunch of eight or so characters. Then came Frank Comments. My last non de plume was Yet Another Computer Curmudgeon (also known by the acronym YACC, an inside computer joke). Altogether, some hundred columns. (There were other articles and many software reviews, but this is about never missing my monthly deadline.)

In 1994, I began a regular column for an regional publication on the arts. How, you wonder, did I become an art expert? I didn't. My column was about how computing, especially the emerging online world of the Web, was affecting the arts. Not too different from my other computer columns. Except for a far wider and far less computer-knowledgeable audience. And one other difference: I got paid. (In US dollars, not software.) Getting paid causes one to take oneself a bit more seriously as a writer.

Serious enough to undertake these books. I began this set of three sort of biographical books in July of 1997. Serious enough to do this writing thing every day. Every single day. Every day, yes, but for only one hour each day. After all, I'm still, as I said in the last chapter, busy. But even with an hour a day, the words accumulate; over a hundred and thirteen thousand as I write this. And ten more. And three more. And so on.

The real question is not why I turned into a writer, but why it took so long. I can think of two reasons. One is

the obvious lack of opportunity. The other is, I think, fairly rare among writers. Most people desire to see their name in print; I don't. I've never been thrilled to see my name before the public. Don't know why, just never interested me. Yet, many people are driven to write for this reason alone. I didn't understand why I felt this way until I was over thirty. Here's the note I made in '72: "My greatest barrier to publication is that I am more interested in truth than the sound of my own voice."

Now I seek publication. Or so it appears. Maybe I simply want to spread a little truth. Or truths, since I don't believe in truth with a capital T. Then, you must wonder, is this book (and its two companions) about myself supposed to be a truth? Certainly not with a capital T. It's more of an entertainment that happens to be about me. Then you must wonder, is writing about me my only way to follow the dictum to write about what you know? Why not, as most people would do, write a novel?

I believe the reason I don't write fiction is that I don't understand people. Certainly not their motivations, the reasons for their conflicts, the underlying causes of their drama. I never think about people in these terms. My interest (expressed on an earlier page) was in Experimental Psychology, not Clinical. I seek the How not the Why. Since the How rarely makes entertaining fiction, I have no plans for writing fiction. The plans I have, and I have tons of them, are exclusively non-fiction.

Which is not to say I don't have ideas for fiction. I do. I also have ideas for visual art, but I don't do that either. I have ideas for architecture, as you might expect given my past interest, but I'm not trying to get them built. I could give you the complete list of how many different fields I have ideas for, but I won't. I will say I write because I can. It fits my time (an hour a day), and my physical abilities (thanks to the computer.) This, these words, is something I can do, something I enjoy doing. Which is not

to say it's easy. Not at all. But if we did only that which is easiest, we'd probably still be hiding in the tall grass of the savannahs.

Now I guess I'm a writer, but is that all? Well, it's enough for now. And it would be enough to end this book except I've told you nothing of my appearance since my operations. I guess I should include here some kind of medical summary. Let's see . . . The total count of joints lost is nine, with one artificially replaced. I also have nine fused joints, eight in my spine (four top, four bottom) and the one in my pinkie.

The medical report is not entirely bad. The cane I mentioned some thirty or forty pages ago, is now abandoned. My constant companion for fifteen years, it's not missed. (I say *it*, but I used three or four different canes). I didn't need it to take every individual step. Far from it. I carried it because it made walking easier. I almost never leaned on it, which made for party conversation. "Why are you carrying that cane, if you don't lean on it?" And I would explain I carried it because I might need it sometimes, not because I needed it always.

I expect you're wondering why it's gone and I can only answer it must be a combination of things. Sure the nutritional supplements (name upon request) help, as does eating better. The new hip didn't hurt. Nor did those foot operations. It was mostly about relearning how to walk. Since the early seventies, I had been walking more and more on my heels. And leaning more and more on my cane. After the foot operations, I could use the ball of my foot again. Actually, the ball of my big toe, and I had to find footwear to enhance this new mechanical motion. No wonder it took four years. Slowly, along on the way, I regained my walking confidence. Then I tossed the cane.

Sometimes when you look back on a thing you thought you were doing forever, it turns out you really weren't. The cane as I said, lasted about fifteen years. Which doesn't mean it's gone for good. I know this because I gave one of my canes to my father. Now, it's his turn. Since we all travel down this road, some day it might become my turn again. I have the practice. And a couple of nice canes.

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