



Life in the other

LANE

I've decided to make good on that idle threat to spend part of this winter getting organized. The MASS is in dry dock, the pro-rally schedule is on hold until the Chinook blows. With the basement at Chateau Walrich beginning to resemble a racetrack flea market and the office the holding pen for everything else, the time is ripe to eliminate.

So far I've devised a new filing system (this year we'll go back to front), banished a box of RI's from long forgotten TSD events to recycling and took a stab at our tax return. This has since been forwarded to one fluent in Esperanto. All that took the better part of January. Now here it is March (even in a leap year February is too short to count) and I've progressed to purging all those once impotent (sic) bytes from the compatible. The whole process has been very cleansing and, at the same time, revealing. Is it truly possible that I've been writing this column for a year now?

I can think of no better way to celebrate this milestone than pay homage to that person I've been semi-plagiarizing all this time. He who is to the frozen tundra of the Arctic what I am to the shifting sand of Jones Beach. He who gets paid bulging bags of wampum for weekly forays into the sacrosanct world of perambulation. He who reminisces about a place called Sandy's; explains tire chain installation like a nanny would describe diapering and tattletales on old friends who have perpetrated unspeakable misdemeanors in, on and about his rides. He whose name rhymes with "Natch."

We have much in common, ole Natch and I. He writes, I write. I won't press my luck by forging that comparison any further. He writes about car things from his past, the present and his fantasy. I've spent months elucidating MASS reincarnation for you. He has his leggy stock broker, I have my TH (OK since this was initially written she has become the Lady In Red, but I've still got my TH).

He gets to go to Yurruop occasionally. I get to go to Fort Apache every day. He competes yearly in the Alcan 5000. I compete daily on the Long Island Expressway. See, the similarities are endless!

It's important to an amateur scribe like me to have idols, especially when the salary earned for this gibberish is any multiple of zero. You see, Natch is doing exactly what I would like to be doing if I wasn't so busy doing what I presently do. (I defy anyone to diagram that sentence.) There is this teensy

bit of pale green jealousy that overcomes me every Saturday when the weekly edition of his rag arrives. I know he will have a unique story to tell, constructed of declarative brick, mortared with hyperbole. He will ferret out some wee idiosyncrasy and raise it to the level of nuclear destruction just so we all understand. His is self effacing and enjoys being second banana to a tow rope. He even admits being bamboozled but never departs without a solution. And he does it week in, week out with disconcerting rhythm.

After his weekly lesson, there are two courses of action available to me. One is to sit down with my dog eared copy of Struck and White's "Elements of Style" or sit down with the Dewar's. This is not a simple decision. I am able to find some comfort with the thought that if Natch realized the devastating impact his column had on me, he would repent by producing a dog. Sober reflection makes that unlikely when one considers the imposing competition from the Three D's, (Dutch, Damon, Denise). I am then forced to appease myself with the thought that he must be terribly older than I to have experienced so much. This generally does the trick.

It is my firm contention that a reasonable measure of the quality of one's life is the percentage of time spent doing exactly what one wants to do. While it's highly unlikely that we'll ever meet so I can confirm this hypothesis, It seems that ole Natch is hovering at about the 92% range. Deducting 4% for the annual reorganization of his garage only to unearth a pesky oil leak seems about right. The other 4% can reasonably be attributed to equally pesky deadlines.

For the time being, I'll be here trying to beef up my own numbers, content with the knowledge that I have chosen to semi-plagiarize only the best...Natch-urly!