

sparsely populated countryside is Scandinavian in feel and the motels are timbered, ski-lodge affairs, with log fires blazing in your bedroom.

At Pucon we were, apart from one peripatetic Englishman, the only guests at the Antumalal lodge perched over the long Villarrica lake. The manager was genuinely puzzled by our request for a key to our room; there was none. We had entered the almost forgotten world of total trust.

The excursions around Pucon could be delightfully Swiss or Bavarian at will, with the nearby national park presided over by an active volcano (high drama at night). Twenty-five kilometers down a country track, Lake Caburga was lovely, the returning motorist rewarded by a glorious open-air steep in a steaming mountainside thermal bath at Huife. No one about but for the concierge of the simple establishment and her two chubby, rose-cheeked children.

From Pucon it is a day's drive down to Nilque on the south shore of Lake Puyehue, another lake fisherman's paradise. More rustic stone thermal baths here and a more ambitious lakeside motel, popular in season with skiers making for the justly celebrated Antillanca slopes. After visiting a few invigorating waterfalls, or *saltos*, and generally hiking the mountainsides, we struck further south to find the gem of the district at the end of the line, that is unless you intend to investigate Antarctica.

From pretty lakeside Ensenada a cinder or volcanic-lava track runs a gritty 30 kilometers down the Reloncavi estuary to Ralun, ostensibly no more than a scatter of farmers' and fishermen's shacks. The tidal lake, on which excursions may be taken, is ringed by the ice-cream cone of the Osorno volcano, the spiky Mount Calbuco, and the great grave Argentinian Tronador, or thunderer, in the distance. The untouched wooded slopes and lakeside walks under the snowline are idyllic. We spent one crisp morning alone by the lovely falls of Petrohué, with acres of broom in golden bloom, plus butterflies that would have sent Nabokov crazy, until a busload of giggling uniformed school-girls debouched from a bus and cascaded all over my wife with questions about America. How boring it must be

to travel by the liberal Baedeker, and miss scenes like these.

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Letter From Boyhood

by John W. Aldridge
Candy Store Dreams

Boyhood was once a distinct and definable stage in the life cycle of the American male. It was also by the standards of today almost unbelievably innocent. At least it was in the small Midwestern city where I grew up just before the Depression. There was no available sex or television. Drugs were unknown; racial conflict did not exist (if only because everybody seemed white); and crime was a phenomenon you were thrilled to hear about on forbidden radio mystery programs late at night, after parents had gone to bed. The result was that we had to compensate for these deprivations as best we could through the ferocity of our play and the limited fertility of our imaginations.

I remember that in the summers after school was out, we always went barefoot and did dangerous things. We would climb up on the roofs of garages and jump off, pretending we were crashing airplanes. At the ages of eight or 10, aviation and record-setting flights across the Atlantic were much on our

minds, and we would swing in the swings in the park playing Charles A. Lindbergh or Post and Gatty until we were going high and fast. Then we would leap off the seats and see who could jump the farthest. Sometimes because of some disagreement or just for fun we would form into warring gangs and pelt one another with stones and clods of dirt.

On the Fourth of July, which was excitingly lethal before the enactment of all the safety laws, we had fireworks of great variety and explosive power. They were the small round torpedoes that had an oddly flaky, parchment-like surface and went off with a fair bang when thrown against something. We threw them at one another or set them on the streetcar tracks. When the car came and they exploded, the motorman would always open the door and step down to the street and stand shaking his fist at the world. If this happened when it was sufficiently dark, one of us might sneak up to the rear of the car and yank the trolley wheel off the overhead wire. This would stop the motor and cause all the lights in the car to go out and send the motorman into a bellowing fit of apoplexy.

Then there were the small ladyfingers that came tied together in a packet and sounded like a machine gun when they exploded. If we had the money, we bought large firecrackers that could be as long as 10 inches and had the blast of a shotgun. We buried them up to their fuses in the dirt and set them under tin cans or in the hollow legs of iron fences so that they went off with a louder bang

BOOKS IN BRIEF

U.S.-Soviet Summits by Gordon Wehmler and Dusko Doder, Lanham, MD: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy/University Press of America; 230 pp. This is useful reference to the 10 major U.S./USSR summits of 1955-85. It covers the background and outcome of each meeting, the most recent being the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in Geneva in November 1985. In addition to thoughtful analysis of every summit, a factual summary of each includes their published agreements and communiqués.

Promise or Peril: The Strategic Defense Initiative, edited by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Washington, DC: Ethics & Public Policy Center; 480 pp. *Promise or Peril* is a comprehensive collection of 36 short articles on historical, political, technical, and moral dimensions of SDI. It contains Soviet and American perspectives as well as views from Western Europe, arms control documents, chronology, and glossary. It is an excellent reference for what has become a central issue in arms control discussions.

Religious Prisoners in the USSR, edited by Michael Rowe, Keston, UK: Greenfire/Keston College; 160 pp. With a foreword by the émigré poetess Irina Ratushinskaya, this dense book contains documentation of the latest Soviet laws on religion as well as hundreds of cases of persecuted religious believers, along with their addresses.

or threw up a shower of dirt or sent the cans tumbling high in the air.

Our main source of supply for fireworks was a candy store located just down the street from the park. The store was a magical, even a holy place where every imaginable good thing could be bought for a nickel, dime, or quarter. In the rear was a soda fountain with wire chairs that had bluish gray cloth slipcovers pulled over their backs. Along one wall near the entrance was a large glass-fronted case containing candy bars of every known variety—Baby Ruths, Milky Ways, Snickers, Mounds, Hersheys, O’Henrys, Mr. Goodbars, Clark bars, Mars bars, cream- and jelly-filled chocolates, whole cherries covered with meringue, marzipan, and chocolate—and there were other brands that were wonderfully exotic but too expensive for us. In the large bay windows facing the street was the fireworks display—skyrockets shaped like arrows with cones for heads, Roman candles, enormous sparklers, enough firecrackers of all sizes and degrees of lethality to blow up half the neighborhood.

Along the wall opposite the candy case was a big rack holding a vast number of magazines, most of them pulps: *Operator-5*, *Spider*, *Doc Savage*, *The Shadow*, *Argosy*, *Marvel Tales*, *G-8 and His Battle Aces*, all of which I bought and read with the most intense concentration. Then there were the science-fiction magazines—*Astounding Stories*, *Amazing Stories*, *Wonder Stories*—which I took even more seriously because I had firm plans to grow up to be either a chemist or an astronomer and was already a regular mail-order customer of the Chemkit Chemical Company of Hagerstown, Maryland, which supplied me with test tubes, flasks, beakers, and little wooden kegs of various concoctions for my basement laboratory. I took science-fiction so seriously that I developed an addiction to it that lasted from about the age of nine until around 16, when it seemed to me that the quality of the writing had suddenly declined.

The covers of some of these magazines were miracles of lurid erotic suggestiveness. A typical scene (and there were a thousand variations) might offer up a gorgeous flaxen-haired girl clad in a pair of provocative-

ly ripped black-lace panties and clutching a torn piece of some other intimate garment to her perfectly globular breasts—all this while she is thrashing in the embrace of a dragon-faced space fiend who has long red fangs dripping with lust and who holds in one clawed hand a huge ray gun that is shooting a molten stream of radioactive deadliness at a space-suited figure hanging weightless in the gray cosmic distance.

All these magazines had abundant front and back matter devoted to advertisements, and these provided us with a somewhat subtler kind of titillation and instruction. They appealed not just to our nascent sexual potency but to our sense of complete impotence in all other spheres of human endeavor. In nearly every issue of the pulps Charles Atlas had a full-page ad in which he confessed that he too was once a 97-pound weakling with stringy muscles and a scrawny chest. He illustrated his former helplessness with a cartoon showing a 97-pound weakling being humiliated at the beach by a burly thug who delighted in kicking sand into the poor devil’s face. But then Atlas told about his discovery of a miraculous exercise technique known as “Dynamic Tension” that enabled him to develop the beautiful bulging physique shown in the accompanying photograph of himself standing with gleaming spread legs and massive flexed biceps. After that achievement the beach bully never again dared to harass him, and the gorgeous girls in bathing suits couldn’t keep their hands off his body.

Then there was the ad that promised to send by return mail a new kind of X-ray telescope that made one capable of seeing through bedroom walls and girls’ dresses and that had us pop-eyed with visions of possibility. Other ads offered instruction by an oracular-looking, goateed gentleman named Sherwin Cody in how to improve one’s spoken English until one could be completely at ease in dinner conversation with the highest levels of society. Or there were courses that could be taken at home in *Your Spare Time* that would train one to become an expert radio technician or to play a musical instrument, *As Easy As ABC*. Still others assured us of similar quick ascendencies to various forms of luxury, social prominence, good health, and

power. One could buy Beautiful Life-like Photo Rings (Be the First on Your Block to Own One); reading glasses that would make you look like a movie star for \$2.95; enough insurance to cover the entire family for just \$1.00 a month (Think of the Peace of Mind); Page’s Pile Tablets that would do for one’s bowel movements what the Rosicrucians and their Mysteries of Life could do for one’s soul.

In short, at a tender age we were given a complete education in the very best promises of the American Dream. The magazine covers provided us with magnificent images of what sex was going to be like if we ever became old enough to have any, while the ads assured us that on the no less erotic plane of solid American technology and know-how we need have no fear of the future because when we grew up, if only we applied ourselves, we could all become Charles Atlases, learn a rewarding trade, speak properly, and even play an instrument proficiently, at those gatherings where people began by laughing when you sat down at the piano.

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Letter From Albion

by Andrei Navrozov

In Defense of Conspicuous Consumption

After my March letter, “Three Days in Sodom, Two in Gomorrah,” readers of this magazine have written to ask why I am so down on conspicuous consumption. I want to go on record here: I am not. But even a gourmand should disapprove of gluttony, since pleasure exists only insofar as it is subject to will. If you think about it, this applies to all human activity of which conspicuous consumption is the fruit: “Labor not for the meat which perisheth,” we read in John 6:27, “but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” The scientific advances in refrigeration, the spread of vegetarianism, and the art of *nouvelle cuisine* change nothing.