

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

A SMALL MISCELLANY

**First edition. January 11, 2025.**

Copyright © 2025 David Vogel.

ISBN: 979-8230313533

Written by David Vogel.





# A SMALL MISCELLANY

A small collection by  
David Vogel

## ADVENTURE #1 of 1 (A True Story)

Recently, my wife's dog and I took a road trip. We began in Georgia, crossed the Mojave Desert in the unpleasant middle of summer, and reached Bakersfield, California. The ugliest city in the western hemisphere greeted us with a temperature of 108 degrees Fahrenheit - pleasant for the time of year. We then drove up the central valley to Sacramento (the Bakersfield of state capitols) and, at last, turned east toward Colorado. When we started out, our plan had not been to make a grand tour of America's hot, dry places. So traveling eastward seemed like a good idea, but the Sierra-Nevadas flashed by and we found ourselves west of Winnemucca, Nevada. In late-June, the landscape already looked as dry as the Atacama desert, and without need for exaggeration the temperature was well over 100 degrees. It wasn't the road trip of Hollywood movies. Trapped in our air conditioned car, I was so bored I thought my blood would clot.

My wife's dog swore there are federal rules that require interstate highways to have at least one rest stop per state - with something to sniff. Apparently not, but the rules do seem to require periodic access ramps even in Nevada. So, about sixty miles from Winnemucca, one of many pointless interchanges crawled up onto the horizon and, in spite of our high speed toward it, only crept toward us.

Time passed.

A lot of it.

Still far from the exit ramp we passed a blue sign that warned, “No Services.” Reflexively, I looked at my gas gauge. It was barely below full.

Somewhat later, we came to a green sign that informed us: “QXALTA.” That’s all just QXALTA. Actually, I don’t remember exactly what was written on it, but there was a short word containing a Q and an X, and as it did not match any word in my reasonably large vocabulary, I assumed it was the name of a place.

I’m sure many another person has seen a sign bearing the name of a place somewhere off the highway and longed to see it. If it weren’t for their planned arrival time... I’ve often refused to give in to that urge, myself, but this time I hadn’t informed anyone of the day, let alone the hour of my arrival, so I decided this was it! I’d take the exit ramp to assured disappointment.

In the movies, the remote little town has a restaurant where the fry cook and the waitress know all the customers by name. I think it was the hope of sitting at the counter of that restaurant and having coffee and a slice of pie that made me decide to exit. Of course, I know that restaurant doesn’t exist, but hell, if I’d found it, I’d have stayed and eaten whatever comes under the gravy for dinner.

Back in reality, the exit ramp ended at the junction of three dirt roads. There was no arrow pointing to QXALTA. The only sign was a bent rectangle alongside one of dirt roads that read “9 miles.” *Well, I thought, if nine miles is all the information I’m going to get, I guess I’ll go that way.*

I’m sure many another person has driven past a dirt road wandering up into the surrounding hills and wanted to take it. They would be pleasantly surprised to discover that, once it snakes out of sight into the low mountains, it acquires a thin layer of asphalt. Not only that, there is a sign warning drivers to keep to their side of the narrow road when motoring around corners.

Nine miles into the mountains on this road, I came to a lot (I mean **A LOT**) of heavy, earthmoving equipment sitting idle near a small moun-

tain - small partly because half of it was missing. If any of the equipment was operated by human beings, they were also missing. Telling myself I hadn't expected anything better, I concluded QXALTA was a mine. I'd have been less disappointed if there had been a sign that revealed what riches were being extracted, or even just the name of the mine or the company that owned it or who was getting rich.

There was a flat place under the malign eye of one of the earthmovers where I was able to turn around. I should have thought more carefully about the evil guardian. A hundred yards later, the low tire-pressure warning light came on.

Did I mention that, west of Winemucca, shade-trees are as scarce as tire stores, and by the way, the temperature was verifiably over 100 degrees. Of course, anyone who's ever been in this situation knows that changing a tire often does not go as shown on the Youtube video. (For example, even jumping on the tire iron may not budge the lug nuts.)

Stopping for a confirmatory look, I found the right rear tire already settled halfway to the wheel-rim. I also knew my car had gone past 160,000 miles, and it wasn't hard to prophesy struggling for an hour in the sun without being able to turn a lug nut. On the bright side, I had actually topped-up the air in the spare tire before we set out. I also remembered that near the off-ramp there was a single, isolated house with a few old trees in front of it that had to provide a nice puddle of shade. I thought, if I could get there, I might survive whatever it could take to change the tire, and as Mrs Settzer, my ever-optimistic second grade teacher would have it, the tire was still half-full.

So I channeled Mrs Settzer and, absolutely knowing better, I set off for the shade hoping I wouldn't destroy the tire before I got there.

Forget the tire, it's destruction is no longer important to this story.

I found myself sitting in front of an isolated, white, clapboard house, probably 1920s construction. Much newer was the nine-foot high, chain-link fence with a sign on the gate that read, "NO TRESPASSING." I thought to myself, *Well, no trespassing, but no one is likely to mind*

*my using their shade for a bit while I change a tire.* No one back in Georgia, but this was isolated, rural Nevada. At least there wasn't any razor wire.

This is the point at which the story stops being amusing.

I was staggering (barely avoiding a fall as I suddenly learned that I could move a lug nut by jumping on the tire iron) when I saw a man and a dog come out from behind the house. He was an ordinary looking fellow, probably in his mid-thirties. His ordinary looking black dog was much larger than my small black dog. Neither the man or the dog seemed threatening, but I hurried to speak first, assuring him that I just wanted to use his shade while I changed a tire.

He responded by taking his dog into the house - a hopeful sign.

When he returned, he asked whether he could bring me some cardboard. I declined his offer, so he pointed out that my pants were getting dirty. I replied by saying everything was under control and my pants were about as dirty as they were likely to get.

He then asked whether he could help.

He spoke with sounds produced by what is technically called "a poorly anchored tongue." These are sounds people commonly associate with intellectual disability. I didn't want to prejudge him, but I didn't want someone cognitively impaired to change my tire, either. I hid my prejudice behind the fact that, since insurance companies have taken over the task of changing tires, the probability of any particular individual knowing how to change a tire has fallen below 0.5. I pointed out that changing a tire is pretty much a one-person job and, thank heavens, it was going just fine.

So he asked whether I needed a glass of water.

Just as I began to reply, "No..." the devil's own damnable invention began ringing in my pocket. It was my granddaughter calling from Washington, D.C. - just for a chat. As I stood up to answer the phone, the non-descript thirty-something, whose name I was about to learn was Bobby, dove into the space I'd vacated next to the tire.

I didn't want to start the kind of epithet-filled screaming it would take to stop him. I didn't even want to be slightly rude. After all, I was inside his fence. So I just watched him continue where I left off, ready to make suggestions. He worked the job competently, surprising me at the end by thoughtfully asking me to finish tightening the lug nuts - so I would know they were tight.

As Bobby seemed lonely and had been kind to me, I didn't feel I could just say, "Thank you, son," and drive off. Moreover, I was curious. So I asked him how he came to be living out there in all that solitude. At first, I thought his answer was irrelevant, what I might expect from someone with an intellectual disability.

He began telling me he used to suffer from frequent seizures, but surgery had improved him enough so that medication now controlled them. Oddly, that information turned out to be key to understanding what he was doing out there in all that solitude, but it had a more obvious point that was all I heard at first. He was tacitly acknowledging that he knew he was cognitively impaired and blaming his problem on the damage seizures can cause to otherwise good brains.

After we discussed his seizures a bit, he went on with the story of how he came to be living alone in such an inhospitable place. His father was an American citizen, but his mother was not, and the two of them went to Mexico for Bobby's birth. I assumed this was because his mother was in the States illegally and was not eligible for any kind of prenatal care here. As his seizures began shortly after birth, I also suspected there was a known problem with the pregnancy.

Soon after his birth, his father abandoned them, returning north and leaving his Mexican family to fend for themselves. "Abandoned us" is how he put it, but Bobby must also harbor a strong sense of "ran from my convulsions."

I don't think Bobby understands just how his mother clawed her way back into the United States legally. Whether she managed to obtain a green card or citizenship, I don't know. What Bobby understands is that,

whichever it was, it was damn difficult to get. Knowing a little about immigration, I can imagine it. Getting legal status took until he was old enough to find himself facing school in the United States as a cognitively impaired Spanish speaker.

That seemed to be the end of his answer to how he came to be living alone in the Nevada desert. So I asked whether he grew up near-by. The way he answered soon became familiar, and I took it to be a skill. He answered with something he wanted me to know about himself that also answered my question but only by implication. He told me he was proud he had graduated from the local high school. So yes, he had grown up around there. I supposed his was a qualified graduation, but I gave him full marks. He had every right to tell me he was proud.

He came back to his graduation later in our conversation and added how proud he was that all his brothers and sisters had graduated from college. (What a woman his mother must have been!) The timbre of his voice made him sound rather passionate about education. I came to think he believed knowledge is for its own sake, not for getting a better job. I have always wanted my own students to share that attitude, so I could have imposed my bias on what the spaces between his words meant. Still, I can't revisit that conversation in memory without hearing his mother glorifying a college education without carping about employment.

I still did not have an answer to why he was living, alone, in that particular isolated house. So I rephrased my question, "...this house right here?"

"My teacher lets me live in it." It was always "my teacher" in the singular. Of course, the class for "slow learners" has only one teacher. His answer raised obvious questions. I don't remember which one I asked but, again, I got both the answer and what he wanted to tell me.

I learned that his teacher owned nineteen acres of wasteland with a house. (And possibly with mineral rights, Bobby told me QXALTA was a gold mine.) As expected, he said she let him live in the house in ex-

change for taking care of it. He added, with some pride in his voice, that he watered the plants and none of them died, and his teacher said he had a green thumb.

Several times he told me the only people who ever took any interest in him were his mother, and his grandmother. He usually, but not always, added his teacher. He dealt with bullying in one short sentence filled with resentment. "I was bullied a lot." By now, it was clear that what he wanted was to tell his life story, and I was ready to listen. Which questions I asked didn't matter.

He told me his grandmother died of cancer when she was only fifty-six. That was too young. "For years after that, he said, "I was angry about it." And later, "I had a lot of anger." For a minute or two, the intensity of his voice implied that he had spent a lot of his life angry, but he spoke of anger in the past tense, and it turned out he had put it away in favor of something else.

When he went on to his mother, all I learned was that she had died of cancer just a year before I showed up in front of his house. He was left alone. I think utterly alone until the teacher who had seen him through high school made him her responsibility. In Bobby's words, "My teacher said she would teach me to live independently." And she gave him the lonely house to care for.

He said nothing about the skills he had to learn, but for a few minutes he kept coming back to the thought that he had learned his lessons well. I had to agree and was moved by the pride he took in living on his own. I don't know how much assistance he was getting, but it wasn't much. He was cooking and keeping house for himself. I assume he had income from Social Security, but how and when he was able to get to a market I never asked.

I told him it was obvious he was doing well, and changed the subject prematurely by asking about loneliness. He said his dog helped, but his dog was not enough. He seldom had any human company. He did have

a psychotherapist who had him taking an antidepressant as well an anti-convulsant.

I thought his history was reason enough to be depressed, but all of that together was not the main issue. He had pancreatic cancer. He had been through chemotherapy, and he said he had talked to his doctor. It was ominous the way he said it. He didn't say with words what his doctor told him, but the grief in his voice said he understood what a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer means.

Somewhere between his mother's death and his own diagnosis, his anger collapsed leaving behind a stoic - not an armchair stoic or a theoretician, a forged stoic. He knew he had lived an unhappy life and said so in fewer than ten clear words. He knew it was an unhappy life that was never going to get better. And he knew his life was just a particularly bad example of a life lived in a world that is not designed to make anyone happy.

In writing the last paragraph, I did not impose any self-knowledge on him that he didn't have. He was articulate about his own life, and I am sorry my memory does not allow me to capture just how he spoke about it.

Inevitably, there came a time when I began to wonder how I was going to end this conversation with a kindly, deserving man who seldom had anyone to talk to. I needn't have wondered. He began to tell me how much he had appreciated my company, saying he had decided as soon as I spoke to him that I was a good person. He went on, for a short while, explaining that most people are not good. He used the word "good" the way an ethicist or philosopher would, he didn't mean "nice." He hesitated for half a minute and then added, "I'm good at judging people fast. If I couldn't see you were a good person right away, I would have turned around and walked back into my house." The way he said it made me wonder how afraid he was of the world and whether he needed the no trespassing sign to keep strangers out. It was the first thing he'd said that hinted at any specific injury to his mind.

Bobby finished by pointing out that I needed to get on the road. If I didn't, I wouldn't get to Winemucca before the tire store closed. It felt as though he knew I was having a problem telling him I needed to move on and believed he should solve my problem. Brain damage can be so debilitating and still leave so much intact. It left a good person.

My own career has sometimes brought me into special education classrooms, but I never even considered the possibility of the kind of conversation I had with Bobby. I think his life was probably worse than that of many modestly impaired people but, for me, it brings into focus issues that must trouble many of them.

Leaving, I told him I sometimes traveled his way. I assured him I would pay him another visit the next time, and that I would arrange to arrive earlier in the day for a longer chat. I don't know whether he will still be alive, so I think about finding a way back sooner. I was left with so many questions, and writing this has given me still more.

Bobby told me he's sometimes out of his house tending to his teacher's property and asked me, if I did not find him at home, to leave a note on his back door. It was so easy to say, "Of course," and I went on to say one last thing.

I wanted to give him even the slightest feeling his life had some value. All I could think of to say was "I am a writer." And I asked for his permission to write about him.

# A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

---

The story that follows this Brief Introduction was written recently. However, it was not written recently nearly as much as it was copied almost entirely from something written a long time ago - an entry in a journal I kept during the twelve years I lived in Dominica. That journal is presently being readied for publication. As I married a Brazilian woman in the middle of those twelve years, there is also a journal of my travels in Brazil being readied for publication. And so the story that follows the story that follows this Brief Introduction is from my Brazilian travels. And, finally, what follows immediately upon the conclusion of this paragraph is the recently written introduction to my Dominican Journal.

• • • •

THE UNIVERSE IS NOT a good place for carbon-based life forms. We break easily, wear out quickly, and are hard to repair. The only good thing you can say about us is that we don't rust. I have adapted to this reality, more or less, by expecting trouble and finding amusement in the fact that I'm never disappointed. It's schadenfreude while looking in the mirror.

As this is my journal, I think I should give some account of what I was doing in Dominica in the first place. It's not in the journal, so here it is in the Introduction.

As I said, I always expect trouble, and here it is already. The first sentence of this introduction will be a good candidate for the most off-putting first sentence of any narrative ever. Here it is:

I received a PhD in Physiology and Biophysics from the University of Iowa in 1971.

In the normal course of events, this degree would lead directly to teaching and research in a medical school. In my case, it led to teaching at Roger B. Taney Junior High School in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

– a school that made the front page of the Washington Post five times in one year. (Not for anything good.) This aberration was largely the result of my strenuous opposition to the War in Vietnam, and the strenuous re-action of authorities in the mist.

Twenty years later I returned to academia as an assistant professor with a joint appointment in the Schools of Dentistry and Medicine at Creighton University. Five years after that, I testified against my department chair in a sexual harassment case. (Not my case, just my testimony.) As this was before the #metoo movement, the dismissal of my department chair did not make me the hero of the day.

Looking for a more comfortable position was complicated. First, I had a peculiar curriculum vitae, and second, the timing of my departure made it look as though I'd failed to make tenure. I was promptly offered a job at the Ross University School of Medicine, but Caribbean medical schools don't have the best reputation. I was reluctant to take the job, even for just a year while I figured out what to do with the rest of my life. So I sought advice from a friend who happened to be the dean of the medical school. He was an Irishman who was unhappy with his own life at Creighton. I didn't get through the first sentence before he interrupted me in a thick brogue that cannot be reduced to text. "Sign the fooking paper, and if ya don't know how, larn ta sail!"

Ten days later I found myself on my way to Dominica – an island in the Caribbean that is usually confused for the Dominican Republic. Dominica actually has a connection with the Dominican Republic. If you live in Dominica, the Dominican Republic is where most of your mail goes.

And that is as much is you need to know about my life before 1995 to understand my life afterward.

# THIS CHRISTMAS I CAN REMEMBER

## (A True Story)

---

**I**t was recently suggested that I write a personal remembrance of Christmas. That sounded easy to do, so one evening, no more than a week later, I sat down with my memories intending to begin. I was a little surprised to discover I have almost no memories of Christmas, and the few snapshots I have are uninteresting. Coming to grips with my lousy memory, I finally concluded the effort was hopeless. In the end, I wrote a sort of 1960s experimental, plot-free piece that did have a few reindeer in it but certainly had not blossomed forth from memory. Nor was it much good.

Oddly, a few days later something reminded me that for twelve years I was once someone else living in another place. I don't mean some reincarnation nonsense. I mean my body was all the same, but I was somehow someone else. I spent those years on a little known island in the Caribbean called Dominica, or sometimes, in a useless effort to keep your mail from going to the Dominican Republic, called the Commonwealth of Dominica.

Were it not for Haiti, Dominica would likely be the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Still, it somehow makes the top rank in The World Happiness Report. A one or two-room wooden shack is enough if you have plenty of food and the weather is never hot or cold. In your large extended family, one or two people have jobs, and they provide clothing for everyone. Five or six garden the rugged, volcanic slopes and manage to provide food. And nothing is expected of anyone else because what could be expected?

Getting back to those twelve years, they hold dozens of Christmas memories for the fellow who lived them. Rats! And just in case it's more emphatic, Damn! I've been having trouble deciding which Christmas to

write about, and now that I've used a random number generator to decide, I'm going to have to write in the first person.

I am now eighty-three years old. I've been politically active for sixty-six of those years. Even living in a foreign country I lobbied the government and properly tithed to the local charities. I was always interested in movements that might help thousands – more so than in individuals in front of me. It's not that I was cold to individual poverty, but helping one person at a time seemed like trying to sweep the sand off the beach.

A few short years into my time on the island, I married a woman from rural Brazil who was my mirror image. She thought well of my interest in Dominica's economic policy, but policy was too abstract to interest her the way the person in front of her with a problem did.

When Christmas came, she decided it was time to take baskets of food to the needy. That idea was so lame. What do we do with them for the rest of the year? We need to start by fixing this country's economy. I found the idea of being a rich white man spreading cheer for a day in a black republic embarrassing. But I was ready to be embarrassed for my wife.

Most of the expats on the island lived huddled together in the American compound. However, I preferred living in a small village at the end of the treacherous road that clung to the volcanic cliffs on the north side of the island. I was acquainted with most of the Dominicans who lived along several miles of that road, and I had contributed to the local home for the aged and even knew something about who lived there. So I knew who to ask to find out who was most in need. And the day before Christmas we set out with our baskets of food.

The first person we visited was Mr. MacDonald. He was fifty, give or take a decade or two, and was so crippled from rheumatoid arthritis that he looked like a doll some child had bent out of shape and abandoned. There was no furniture in his house, just a dirt floor. Furniture, if he could have built some, would have just been in the way. He couldn't

stand and found it hard enough to scoot around on the floor. He was unable to leave his two rooms unaided.

Dominicans do not allow their neighbors to starve, but a person could get tired of bananas and dasheen, and for Mr. MacDonald, boiling dasheen was out because of the time he spilled the pot of boiling water on himself and couldn't scoot away from it. His bare legs revealed only some of the scars.

After Mr. MacDonald, there was Bob-the-Alcoholic's Wife. Bobaholic was a drain on the economy of a woman with no income and an eighteen-year-old daughter who is so incapacitated by cerebral palsy that she cannot speak or get out of her chair. The two of them had to live on the largess of a truly poor community. However, having the care of a mother who seemed competent did make the miserable daughter better off than some of the people we visited.

We visited a woman with one leg, whom we found sitting on the floor of her one-room house talking to Bobaholic, and then went to see Irina. Irina was said to be nearly one hundred years old and was the oldest looking centenarian I have ever seen. She was blind and confined to bed. As we walked to her house, Bob-the-Alcoholic's Wife came running up to us. It turned out that she was also responsible for the care of Irina. After talking to her a bit, it occurred to me that we ought to ask what she really needed most, and she answered in two words. Disposable diapers. Irina's children sometimes gave her small sums for their mother's care, but not enough for adult diapers.

So we got diapers – once, twice...

We next met a totally blind couple whose surname I have forgotten. We laid out the contents of the basket for them and helped them identify what was what by touch. It was mostly staples like rice with a few traditional Dominican treats - canned sardines to pick an example I would not think of as a treat. In return, they followed old habits into a small orchard and, knowing the place of every low hanging branch, sent us away with an armload of fruit.

I thought I knew the Dominicans in my neighborhood. I thought I understood their poverty and why they still scored high on The World Happiness Report, but by the time we finished that day, my understanding felt like ignorant hubris. How could I not have known that the worst poverty was kept hidden.

On Christmas we took presents to all the people in the Home for the Aged. We arrived just as the residents were sitting down to dinner - a piece of bread and a cup of tea. There were only eleven of them, and two of them weren't even old; they were teenagers completely incapacitated by cerebral palsy with no place else to go. The eleven of them and their caretakers succeeded in giving the impression, by means of comparison, that St. Elizabeth's Hospital might not have been such a bad place.

We found one of the residents, Rachel, agitated and scratching at her hands so constantly that she was smearing blood from her palms onto her clothes. Compared to the other residents, I knew Rachel was usually rather composed. My wife thought she was agitated by the loud music being played by their caretaker. Perhaps my wife was right. We cut Rachel's nails, turned the music down, and moved her into a more comfortable chair. Something about the process calmed her down.

Most of the residents got a shirt or a pair of pants, but Samira, who was in the best condition of any of the women, received a stuffed kitten. Well, not a real kitten, you know what I mean. She was so pleased that my wife had written her name on the wrapping paper that she insisted on having the cat put back in the wrapping so she could have the original parcel with her name on it.

I don't doubt that the staff thought the silky nightgowns we gave to the two women who were entirely confined to bed were silly. But they were not only confined to bed. For the most part they were confined to their own thoughts. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say the change in the feel of their clothing must have been a major event in their unimaginably boring lives.

The worst of all the residents was the young woman suffering from cerebral palsy. Well, who am I to say she was the worst? What did I know about the mental lives of any of them? Perhaps the more competent they were, the worse it was for them. All the same, while all of them had serious contractures, and many had amputations, this young woman's limbs belonged on a person half her size and were fixed by contractures into monstrous contortions. She couldn't move or speak. No, that is not quite true. She could smile, and the feel of a fuzzy stuffed animal, that she could not hold herself, did bring a smile that lasted for the length of our stay.

For each of these people, whose poverty was coupled to loneliness and boredom, we didn't have the strength to stay or to leave. I'm afraid none of the people we visited those days berated us, demanding to know what we would do for them the rest of the year. I was embarrassed by how thankful they were, but I think Christmas was a better day for them, and I think there was one thing more than the food in the baskets. No one verbalized it that day, but I heard it another day, in another story – we paid attention to them.

It was two days that changed my attitude toward the person in front of me. I still feel awkward, the rich American taking time out of his precious life to spread a little Christmas cheer among the poor. All the same, the next Christmas we didn't waste money on the baskets. We delivered big cardboard boxes.

# DON'T TRAVEL WITH DAVE

## (An Excerpt from My Brazilian Travel Journal)

---

**N**ovember 19, 2017 – Codo, Brazil, 240 miles south of the equator and far from any ocean breeze.

It's 41 deg. C (106 F), again. The weatherman is predicting relief in three days – rain for two days with highs around 34 C (95 F). It is tiresome to spend 24/7 in the breeze of a fan. My eyes get irritated.

We have several bits of business to take care of that will take us to Currupu (only a nine hour drive if we're very lucky) and then Caldas Novas (a three day drive), but we can't get started on any of this until we get my mother-in-law's blood glucose regulated. We can't make any progress, today, because it's a holiday. I have no idea what we're celebrating, but there's no point to trying to find her doctor back in Teresina before tomorrow.

### November 20

Today, I finally figured out what the City of Codo must have been celebrating, yesterday. It was my birthday.

### November 22

At last, relief from the heat. It is only 100 F with 90% humidity. Tomorrow, we're promised rain and only 95 F. Actually, it's a little worse than I describe. This little house is on a very small lot surrounded by a very high wall – high enough for the “canyon effect” the physics of which makes the bottom of the canyon much hotter than the top. We often sit in the tiny patio at the back of the porch and spray everything with water, the walls included. I think we are able to almost neutralize the canyon effect. However, doing this makes me feel guilty. We have the luck to be near one of the town's municipal wells, and so we always have water. I sometimes fear that we consume enough water this way to give some other household a dry tap.

November 25

It's the tropics, so I have a fungal infection. Just a small spot on my wrist. When I was a child growing up in the desert in California, ring worm (a fungus, not a worm) came through our school in a wave every year, sometimes twice. It usually affected the scalp, probably spread by slouching in the seats at the Saturday matinee at the movie theater. You could tell who had ring worm because they wore nylon stockings on their heads that were supposed to prevent spread of the fungus.

I never got ring worm as a child, but I've got it now. Fortunately, I know how to treat it and do not have to resort to the Brazilian health service, which is in the process of going from unbelievably bad to more harm than good. Our new conservative President, Bolsonaro, hates socialists, so he told the 18,000 Cuban doctors to get out of the country. Aside from there now being an acute shortage of doctors, the Cubans were 99% of the competent physicians in the country. Native Brazilian physicians are likely to bleed you to treat anemia.

In the latest news, Bolsonaro has put the military in charge of running the executive branch. Trump must be so jealous.

November 27

Near where we are living, there is a really large new park with a concrete walkway around the perimeter for walkers, another for bicyclists, a track for running, exercise equipment, soccer fields, basketball courts, etc. In the center there is a large pond and a lot of grass. It is called the "Environmental Park" and among the stay-off-the-grass signs there are some signs urging environmental awareness. Ironic note: The park was built on and destroyed a significant wetlands.

We really are fortunate here. I'm sure this is the only area in Codo that has not seen a failure in the electricity or water systems while we've been here, and we have faultless cable Internet service - better than what we get from Charter at half the monthly rate with no charge for installation or the un-installation we will need when we leave in four months.

November 29

Three days of heavy rain! What a relief! High today only 87 F. On the other hand, the change in the weather has brought on a plague of midge-like insects that are dying and falling all over me and this keyboard as I write. It's Okay. Humans evolved in the tropics. We can deal with this – well, except that really bad body odder is our natural, evolved defense against insects.

November 30

On Tuesday, we will be leaving Codo, where my wife, Auzileia, grew up and her mother still lives. We will travel to Cururupu where the weather is better and we own a white elephant, or rather, a house we get little use out of. We are going there by means of a pickup truck that has a history of nothing but trouble. Auzileia is the perpetual optimist when it comes to vehicles. I expect it to fail dramatically on this trip which has already been postponed from Saturday because of some undiagnosable problem. My greater concern is that she may be intending to take us to Caldas Novas in this truck - a trip of some 1200 miles each way. The question in my mind is not whether we will be stuck in some backwater for five days; to me it matters not whether the backwater we are in is a destination; what matters is that the cost of these repairs can exceed the value of the truck.

December 3

Plan B. We learned, today, the pickup will require two weeks and \$800 to repair. So I think we will be taking the bus to Caldas Novas, groan, and taking care of our business in Cururupu after the holidays. At least we are not broken down in Sao Agua Atras (Saint Backwater).

December 5

The estimate for repairs went up to \$1000 not including labor. So we are on Plan C hoping for cheaper repairs to the truck, possibly even faster, but uh... even less reliable than... never mind. I think this is the pickup truck we agreed to sell two years ago.

Auzileia has found someone to sell it on consignment as soon as... Well, as soon as we make it to Cururupu and back. (Selling something "on consignment" in Brazil is called "giving it away" in the States.)

So we remain in Codo for the time being. At least the rains have arrived. They keep us stuck in the house, but so do hundred degree temperatures, and highs in the upper 80s are welcome.

This evening thieves passed our house twice carrying huge chunks of the fence that used to surround the Environmental Park.

December 19

No, we have not gone to Cururupu. However, at last, we have left Codo. We've manage to get as far as Teresina. "Teresina" comes from the Tetecuru language. It means "Jesus Christ, this place is hotter than Codo!" However, in the odd event that anything goes as planned, tomorrow we will be getting on an airplane that, according to an Internet travel agency, will take us to within a three hour bus ride of our Plan B destination, Caldas Novas. Of course, we will arrive at the airport in Goiania immediately after the last bus to Caldas Novas will have left.

While languishing in Codo, we did sell the pickup truck which yielded almost enough money to pay for the crappy car we bought, today. Auzileia pointed out a really cool, and truthfully not very expensive, red pickupish vechicle. I said, "Have you noticed what the equities that provide our retirement income have been doing, lately," and she only mentioned the cute, little, red pickup wistfully twice more.

December 21

After a four hour flight to Goiania and an overnight stay with someone vaguely related to us, a three hour wait in the most chaotic bus station I've ever been in (including the station in Sao Paulo, now the second largest city in the world), and a three hour bus ride, we are in Caldas Novas.

This will be difficult to write, maybe I should skip it.

Delete, delete, delete.

December 28

It was almost Christmas, and this was a tourist destination, so there was no room at the inn, and we are staying with one of Auzileia's brothers. I suspect the a more vigorous search could have been made for an inn with a vacancy. I suspect this because I think this is the outcome Auzileia was hoping for, and she has been known to connive. It has been pleasant to see her as happy as she has been the last week, so I haven't fussed.

Auzileia's brothers' families are not the poorest of the poor, but they are poor by Brazilian standards. So I thought living here for a couple weeks might be, well, a character building experience, but either my character was too close to perfect to improve, or so hopeless there was no point in trying. I have the same appreciation for poverty I had before spending a week in poverty (the real thing). I sympathize with the poor, but I can't really say poverty is for me.

For the most part I do not mind the absence of material possessions. However, I have been reminded of how much I actually care about toilet seats, toilet paper, and children who are trained to wash their hands. I suppose I care more than I should. Ten of us for one bathroom is not as bad as it sounds. What bothers me is the sanitation. It isn't that they don't care, it's just difficult. I do give Auzileia credit for taking over all the cooking, and I am still in good health, but a tendency toward germ phobia was apparent in my personality by the time I was eleven, and that was baked in by years of teaching in medical schools. Immersion therapy has done nothing to get me over my phobia.

At last, I think I am about to write a paragraph that is worth the effort. As soon as I am done with it, I must quit.

Auzileia's brother is an admirable parent. He is uneducated. (Auzileia's father told her the only thing she needed to be able to write was her name.) However, her brother is seeing to his children's education to the extent of making his poverty worse by saving a remarkably large part of his meager income to help them through college. He does things like taking them to the library, though their books seem to have a way of going overdue without being read. We're trying to help with that. The

library's resources are meager, and the staff is not helpful about making sure children choose books they will like and are able to read. We did provide the library with 80 new children's titles and are encouraging a children's program.

Done.

## A SMALL BOY

---

A small boy is pounding on the door of our house. I know it is a small boy because a big boy's knock on that sheet of metal would echo so long I would eventually feel compelled to remove my hearing aids. The small boy will ask my wife for a piece of cake. Even the poor can be optimistic, he will eat anything he's offered – anything.

When my wife lets him in, he will look to be three or four years old, but I wonder. He could be five. Malnutrition... He appears to be the youngest of roughly five children and a single mother.

I don't know the small boy's name. My wife does. This is because my wife is Brazilian and I am not. She speaks Portuguese and has normal conversations in this beggared neighborhood. I speak enough Portuguese to buy a cup of coffee and a coconut bun, but not enough to have a conversation in which I would learn a small boy's name. (Each time I return to Brazil, I relearn the same Portuguese I relearned the last time. In between visits I put off studying the language each day because of each day's slightly higher priorities.)

When the small boy has a plate of food, he will sit on the floor in a corner of the kitchen while he eats, and my wife will call my name and point toward him because I must see how cute he is. He is cute, but I don't want to see it. I don't want to be distracted from my knowledge of the life he is leading and the impoverished future that awaits him. It isn't the financial impoverishment that concerns me, it's everything else.

When we have finished dinner, my wife will somehow have prepared much more food than we can possibly eat. There will be leftovers for the rest of the small boy's family. Fortunately, they aren't cute.

So we have a house in Brazil where we are obliged to acknowledge the poverty. Fortunately, we spend much more time in our house in the States where none of our neighbor's are cute, and we don't have to think about poverty if we don't want to. Sometimes it's hard to avoid, because behind our house in the States there is a small mobile home park. When

we moved here, it was a place chiefly inhabited by annoying people with disabilities. Shortly after we arrived, one of them knocked on our door to ask, on behalf of the small mobile home park, whether they could get their drinking water from our garden hose. They were afraid that, if they complained about the evidence of a sanitation problem wafting up with their well water, their landlord would raise the rent. Their thoroughly trashed trailers rented for as little as \$400 per month, and they seemed to have no place else to go. (While water passed through our hose has a taste issue, the odor emanating from their well is... No, it is describable. In practice they get their drinking water from our kitchen sink.)

Of course, not complaining about the water didn't help. The landlord told them all to get out. He was going to fix up the trailers and more than double the rent. So they got. They didn't actually wind up on the street, but Janice now must share a \$900 per month trashed trailer with Bob. She didn't want to. She visited us with a black eye and mentioned that she's afraid of him, but it's that or the street.

What hope can there be for the small boy? Well, with President Lula back in power in Brazil, the *bolsa familia* pays a stipend to poor people whose children have good attendance at school, and the buying power of the poorest Brazilians is rising by ten percent per year. If malnutrition doesn't intervene, and he scores sufficiently well on a national exam, the state will pay for a university education. The small boy's mother is a Lula supporter.

And our neighbors? We live in rural Georgia where the poor suffer and vote Republican.

# A HOLIDAY WITH THE FAMILY

---

Let me start by telling you that everything I am about to tell you is the truth, and nothing but the truth. The whole truth? No, we don't have time for the whole truth. I don't actually do comedy. I just pick any day of my life that I happen to be living and tell you about it, confident that the bloody Fates who thought it up will think its funny. So you probably will, too.

My wife with the unpronounceable name is Brazilian. So when I'm in the States I've usually just returned from Brazil, which is the case as I write this.

The high point of our recent trip to Brazil was a family get together. I could label that event better by calling it a *Brazilian* family get together. In this way I would make it clear without any need for explanation that the difficult part of the get together was the getting together part. I image that at least some of the family members know how to tell time, but why would they ever bother? Why would anyone bother to come when they said they would when they know no one else is going to come when they said they would.

To begin with, what we had to get together was two pairs of parents, my wife with the unpronounceable name, myself, and eleven nieces and nephews. I know, that's not a whole Brazilian family but the rest of them live in a town a 1000 miles away. We did manage to add another adult couple. I don't speak enough Portuguese to have gleaned any idea of how or if they were related, but I was happy to have them along because one them turned out to be the person who actually knew where we were going.

The original plan was to go to a sort of private pocket park along a river where there was a swimming pool just large enough to entertain eleven nieces and nephews. USD 15 for each one of us, child or adult, would get us inside the place where we could then buy lunch. It would never have occurred to rural Brazilians that fifteen dollars times 19 peo-

ple would inconvenience the rich American in the family, and there was no way I could explain the matter in Portuguese, so I decided I would have to accept the role of Scrooge. So I said, "Jeezus Christ No I'm not paying for that!" Which they somehow understood even though they don't speak any English.

So plan B was another pocket park farther along the river, a half hour's drive outside the city, highly recommended by the couple of unknown, possibly unknowable, familial relationship.

The morning of the get together, the eleven nieces and nephews arrived promptly... no, what's the word for before promptly, maybe pre-promptly, or maybe dawnish. And by noon, both pair of parents were also present. They had presumably enjoyed a leisurely Saturday morning made possible by the absence of their children, or more precisely, the presence the children, by dawn, somewhere else.

So, shortly after noon, my wife with the unpronounceable name announced that it was time to load everyone into the transportation - which consisted of two rather small Hondas and a motorcycle. If you think the back seat of a 1984 Honda Civic was not designed to hold two adults and five children, you have never spent much time in a developing country. No, the only problem at this point was that we were in the tropics, the cars were black, there was no shade, only one of the windows could be lowered, and remember the couple of unknowable relationship to the family who knew where we going? They were expected any moment.

We were rescued from heat stroke when the number of children demanding access to the toilet began drawing in neighbor children asking if they, too, might be accorded access to the toilet. So, we began the process of getting out of the car. As soon as you open the doors a lot of arms a legs pop out, but that's as far as you get for a while. Then it's sort of like solving a Rubic's Cube. Once they were all out and dancing up and down on one leg and then the other, we could begin the process of reopening the house. This, also, is not as simple as you might imagine. While

the government has done a magnificent job of rounding up Brazil's famous thieves, murderers, and kidnappers, the few that remain at large get on with their thieving, murdering, and kidnapping in a sufficiently horrifying way as to make landlords conscious of just how many gates and doors, and the number and variety of locks on each, stand between the *malandros* and their tenants. The resulting ring of keys includes all the keys from all the previously replaced sets of locks, and Brazil being Brazil, none keys are obviously the keys to the locks they actually open, not only because they are unlabeled, but because all of the keys to locks they actually open require a good deal of finagling to work and it's usually on the third time through the ring of keys that you find the finagle you should have tried the first time. You didn't, of course, because this finagling is made especially trying by the nieces and nephews jumping up and down holding their pee pee places.

Just as the first of the children were getting into the toilet, and I meant that just as written... Just as the first of the children were getting into the toilet, the missing couple arrived. Fortunately, they arrived on their own motorcycle, not expecting to be provided with transportation. Unfortunately, they had forgotten that they were to provide the paper plates. So, while the children continued demonstrating their poor aim, the recent couple rode off to a place they believed was the best place for getting paper plates.

However, when they finally returned after a sojourn that I thought must have included a safari in Africa, it turned out that the best place for getting paper plates is not a place for getting paper plates at all. My Portuguese is not all that good, but I think the place for getting paper plates actually sold auto parts, but the missing couple was confused by the remains of this year's staff lunches left piled on the counter.

However, with everyone now properly got together, we were able to set out with a plan for stopping for paper plates at what Brazilians call a supermarket. Three blocks later we stopped at exactly the place the visiting gringo would have thought was a good place to buy paper plates.

And just to point out what a great day this was, my wife with the unpronounceable name was driving the car I was in and had sense enough not to pull into the supermarket's parking lot where it was obvious the other car and the two motorcycles were going to get trapped by all the other cars trying to turn into the same parking lot.

Happily, they were not trapped much longer than expected, which was quite long enough. However, the other car in our parade pulled out of the parking lot into the path of a motorcycle which hit the car soundly enough for me to hear the thump half a block away. Thank heavens, and I mean that literally because it was a miracle, the cyclist and I were the only ones who seemed to notice the collision, so our parade continued on its way. In the States, the cyclist might have managed to make more of a fuss, but in Brazil he surely knew none of us had any insurance.

On the next leg of the trip, we got as far as the gas station where we needed to fill our car with gasoline, or alcohol, I don't remember which. My preference for myself was alcohol and the opportunity to wave my open beer can at the alcoholic brother in the other car who had somehow allowed himself to get separated from his stash in our car.

On the next leg of the trip, we got as far as the gas station where one of the motorcycles needed gasoline or alcohol. And as it was not explained to me in English, I cannot explain to you why we needed to make two stops for fuel at two "*postos*" so nearly the same that I would have believed anyone who told me we drove in a circle.

Shortly thereafter, the other car in our parade made an incorrect right turn. I have no idea how that happened. We were behind him, but we could see perfectly well that the two motorcycles that were leading the parade had gone straight. So we stopped while one of the motorcycles set out to chase the car down. Of course, Uncle Zak had figured out his mistake and returned promptly. We then waited while the motorcyclists continued looking for the lost car.

Just to emphasize what a great day this was, I should mention that we spent the next half hour driving on one of the finest roads I've ever driven

on in Brazil, meaning it was brand new and, so, had only a few pot holes, and indeed, discounting the time spent gassing up and reorganizing, we arrived at the turn off to pocket park B in the predicted half an hour. That does not mean that the description of the park as half an hour away was exactly accurate. No, it would be more accurate to say that the typical Brazilian dirt road that would have us within an hour of the pocket park was half-an-hour away. By a typical Brazilian dirt road I mean one that is quite passable on a motorcycle, especially if you enjoy motocross, but which in a 1984 Honda Civic makes you defecate with the fear that you're going to take out the oil pan and be stuck all night among the thieves, murderers, and kidnappers, not to mention your feelings about spending the night in a 1984 Honda Civic with five nieces and nephews and four adults. Actually, I don't know it was a 1984 Civic. I only know it was a Civic and made long before people began to anticipate the start of the third millennium.

About 45 minutes down the dirt road we came to a steep downhill gully wash where my wife with the unpronounceable name noted that "if it rains while we're there, we'll never get back up this." Her calm in the face of the storm clouds all around us was impressive.

We did reach the pocket park which had three or four dangerously rusted pieces of playground equipment and a swimming pool that would hold eleven nieces and nephews sort of the way a bathtub would hold a menage a trois.

It also had a short brown owner who, in spite of the fact that few people had ever found his bloody place, and in spite of the fact that we would have to leave again in less than two hours to get back up the damn road before dark, somehow he knew that the tall white guy in the background was an American and ought to pay \$15 a head to get everyone inside.

When the tall white guy in the background was actually informed of this, once in English and once in Portuguese spoken slowly enough so that he could understand, he said, "Bloody Hell No!" twice, thereby

adding the owner of the place to the list of people who thought he was a mean spirited, stingy Gringo.

However, I once again wish to emphasize that this was a good day. Our mean spirited departure got us up the gully wash just as the downpour started, thereby saving me from being at the mercy of the short brown guy who would be able to put us up for the night when we couldn't get out. When I am in Brazil, escaping any disaster makes that day marvelous.

The DOMROCK ELECTROLITHS  
CORPORATION of DOMINICA

USER'S GUIDE TO  
THE-----Basaltic E L E C T R I C R  
O C K

---

• • •

**“Dom as a rock!”**

CONGRATULATIONS ON your purchase of the 100% basaltic DomRock Electric Rock - the World's finest electric rock. The DomRock is a 100% basaltic rock, electrified, and packaged only on the basaltic island of Dominica, and sold throughout the world at a competitive price. At DomRock Electroliths, we are proud of our genuine Dominican basalt. No other rock from any place in the known Universe will give you better service. As the new owner of one of our fine rocks, you, too, can take pride in your selection. You know that your DomRock Electric Rock is somewhat more expensive than an electric brick, but you also know it is an incomparable value. Remember that more than 99.99% of the 1.5 billion year production process of your DomRock Electric Rock is the work of God.

Your electric rock is suitable for all the thousands of traditional rock functions from paper weight to door stop, but more importantly, it has thousands of space age applications. What's more, through a special application of the Law of Conservation of Mass, your rock will normally go right on working even if it is inadvertently unplugged.

And your DomRock Electric Rock is safe around children and pets. Our exclusive cord design contains no electrically conducting materials which could shock your loved ones.

Remember, don't limit yourself, try using your electric rock in all its modalities. We have tried and especially recommend the following uses:

1. As an electric measuring device. The cord on your electric rock is approximately one meter long, and so, can be used to measure almost anything, assuming you understand the metric system.

2. As a computer fixer. Your computer bugging you? Pack a rock. Next time make sure it gets the computer repairman's full attention. You too can say, "Gee boss, those computer guys sure are slow, and this is the third time this month. Maybe we should go back to the old way of doing things." Employees of larger corporations can "fix 'em all good" by purchasing our Pack-O-Rocks.

3. As an anesthetic. No injections or endotrachial tubes. Just apply topically to the base of the cranium.
4. Farmers! Save shipping expenses! Use your electric rock as a portable flour mill and grind your flour on the farm. (Two electric rocks required.)
5. As a cat trainer. If your cat doesn't learn quickly with the electric rock, you know it's time to get a new cat.
6. As an electric bug zapper. Did you know that ordinary bug zappers won't kill those disease carrying mosquitoes? With your electric rock, you can zap 'em all.
7. As a back scratcher. (Not a recommended use for models with a mass of over 4 Kg.)
8. As a utility tool in your kitchen. So you bought the Ranko Kitchen Aid tool that rices, dices and slices? The T-Type Electric Rock can do it all faster and finer. Make carrot slices so fine they flow like a milk shake. Make fancy fenestrated pie crusts. The power juicer and blender make great whiskey sours. If you don't have the right tool, make one with your electric rock. Turn your roasting pan into a cookie sheet. Turn your wok into a cookie sheet. Turn your 40 cup coffee maker into a cookie sheet. The possibilities are endless.
9. As a burglar alarm. At each likely entryway, plug an electric rock into the wall, stretch the cord across the floor at a height of about 4 inches and set the rock down. When you hear the burglar fall, call the cops. Easily deactivated during the day.
10. As a novel hunting weapon. Use your electric rock as a space age version of the ancient bolus. Last year, with the aid of a forty foot extension cord, one of our north slope users brought down eight tiny reindeer in one toss.
11. As a wallet expander. The electric rock makes your wallet look fat even when you're broke. (Flat rocks are available for those eccentrics who embrace modesty or think all rocks are flat.)
12. As an emergency car or house key.

13. As a space age monument. No ordinary rock will have quite the right look in your 21st Century cemetery.
14. As a bowl of wax fruit. (May require some preparation.)
15. As a substitute for a college degree. Your electric rock is actually superior to a college degree in some situations. It all depends on whom you're trying to impress.
16. As a dog trainer. Instantly effective for commands like "lie down" or "play dead."
17. As a sex attractant. Better than pheromones that only work on insects. Just stick an electric rock in your jockey shorts or bra and watch the opposite sex begin to stare.
18. As a stuffed rock for your small child. Your child can cuddle his or her personal electric rock for years without wearing all the fuzz off the nose.
19. As a conversation piece. Use your electric rock to quickly stop unwanted conversations.
20. As a foot warmer. Place your electric rock in an oven at 120 C for 30 minutes. Place the hot rock inside your shoe alongside your foot.
22. Better than mace. Spray your assailant with a few rocks and you won't have to worry about short jail terms.
23. As an anchor. (Extension cord recommended.)
24. As a research assistant. Tired of your complex mathematical derivations blowing away just as you get to the last equation? Set an electric rock on them and keep them readily at hand.
25. As an airplane. (Requires accessory kit MD11.)

While we do not recommend the electric rock for settling domestic disputes, we have received many first hand testimonials to the effectiveness of the electric rock in its domestic dispute modality.

## **MORE IDEAS !**

---

**T**here are literally thousands of other modalities for your electric rock. For more ideas, subscribe to our monthly publication, Flying Rocks, or join your local users' group.

If you find an undocumented use for your DomRock Electric Rock, please let us know so we can pass your idea on. Full credit will be given, and publication in Flying Rocks can be noted on your curriculum vitae or resume (or both).

## CAUTIONS

**I**.V. injection of your electric rock is strongly discouraged. The near death experience is no substitute for ethanol.

## NO NONSENSE MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

---

The basic rock in all models of the DomRock Electric Rock is unconditionally guaranteed for two geologic ages. Because some modalities place undue stress on the electric cord, the cord and other attachments to the basic rock are not guaranteed. However, we will be happy to reattach your cord for the kind of modest service charge you've come to expect of high tech companies. For repair or exchange, return your electric rock, prepaid, to: Electric Rock Repairs, Rock Port, MO, 666.

This guarantee is void if the basic rock is abused. All decisions made by American Electroliths are final.

## CARING FOR YOUR ELECTRIC ROCK

---

Y our electric rock is easily cared for; it does not need love and needs no formal burial if you decide to replace it with a larger model. With proper care your electric rock will last for geologic ages. However, do not expose it to extreme temperatures, running or freezing water, or large sheer forces. (Such large forces are most commonly produced by inadvertent relaxation of the flexor digitorum longus or flexor pollicis longus muscles while the rock is in its transportation mode. This is sometimes called "dropping your rock.") While you may find there is some change in the surface color of your rock with time, it does not affect the internal structure of the rock, and the development of this natural patina actually increases the value of your rock.

Do not verbally abuse your electric rock.

This is not an eclectic rock.

Let your electric rock choose its own favorite place to rest in your home.

## OTHER PRODUCTS FROM DOMROCK ELECTROLITHS

---

**T**he CORDLESS ELECTRIC ROCK: Thanks to our unparalleled research effort into the Law of Conservation of Mass, we are now proud to offer the DomRock Electroliths Corp. cordless electric rock. Powerized once at the factory, these rocks will perform almost indefinitely without recharging. While there are a few electric rock functions they will not perform, they are completely portable - especially useful in remote locations. Because they are almost indistinguishable from ordinary rocks, cordless electric rocks are of special value to people in sensitive occupations.

**HIGH MASS / HIGH VOLUME ELECTRIC ROCKS:** DomRock Electroliths Corp. is now offering rocks of up to 300 metric tons. These unspoiled boulders are ideal for truly big rock jobs like defining property lines. If the government of East Germany had built the Berlin wall from our large rocks, they would not have seen it torn down during some minor political transient. (Customers who are at some distance from significant inland waterways should contact our shipping department before ordering.)

**SOLAR ROCKS:** These rocks become fully charged just by being left in the sun. You can actually feel one of these rocks grow warm to the touch as it becomes fully charged and ready to go. Completely portable. Try one of these rocks in your garden and watch the colony of beneficial insects develop beneath it.

**PACK-O-ROCKS:** 1000 rocks in a personalized fine wooden box. The next time someone makes some clever remark about who's going to throw the first stone, you will be ready.

## NEW PRODUCT ANNOUNCEMENT

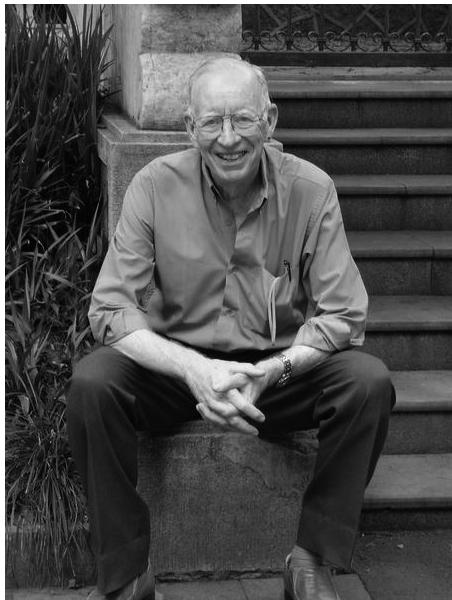
**D**omRock Electroliths is now offering the Electronic Electric Rock Tester. This tester tests all modalities of your electric rock in one quick and easy electronic test.

The Electronic Electric Rock Tester is somewhat more expensive than other modern "black box" technologies because it uses no cheap chip technology. This tester is made entirely of traditional components - vacuum tubes and other discrete devices.

Your electric rock tester is a complete, self contained black box full of vacuum tubes. All you do is open the box and drop in your electric rock. If all the panel lights go out, you know your rock is working perfectly.

Order Electronic Electric Rock Tester model T/II - Good for one test.





## About the Author

Shortly before his fifth birthday, David Vogel announced he wanted violin lessons. When his father insisted violins were too expensive, David went knocking on doors and came home with the loan of a half-size violin. Growing up, it was assumed he would become an artist of some sort while his older brother would be a scientist. David was not the better student of the two. When he graduated from high school, the principal called his parents in for a conference and informed them that it would be a waste of David's time and their money to send him to college. But in college, he and his brother switched places. His brother became an actor while David earned a PhD in biophysics (but with a subspecialty in eccentricity).

Facing retirement, Dr Vogel has taken the opportunity to begin writing fiction. (Well, the problems in his physics text about his Chrysler powered Smart Car were already fiction.) *Day of the Dragonfly* is the first novel he has let out of his hands, and it is the first that is not humor-

ous. Several short sketches, only occasionally amusing, have appeared while *Day of the Dragonfly* is in final preparation.

David Vogel presently resides in Hull, Georgia. He's easy to find. Hull is just one vowel from Hell. The serious tone and formal style of the new book have not stopped him from doing stand-up comedy.

Read more at [DoftheD.com](http://DoftheD.com).

