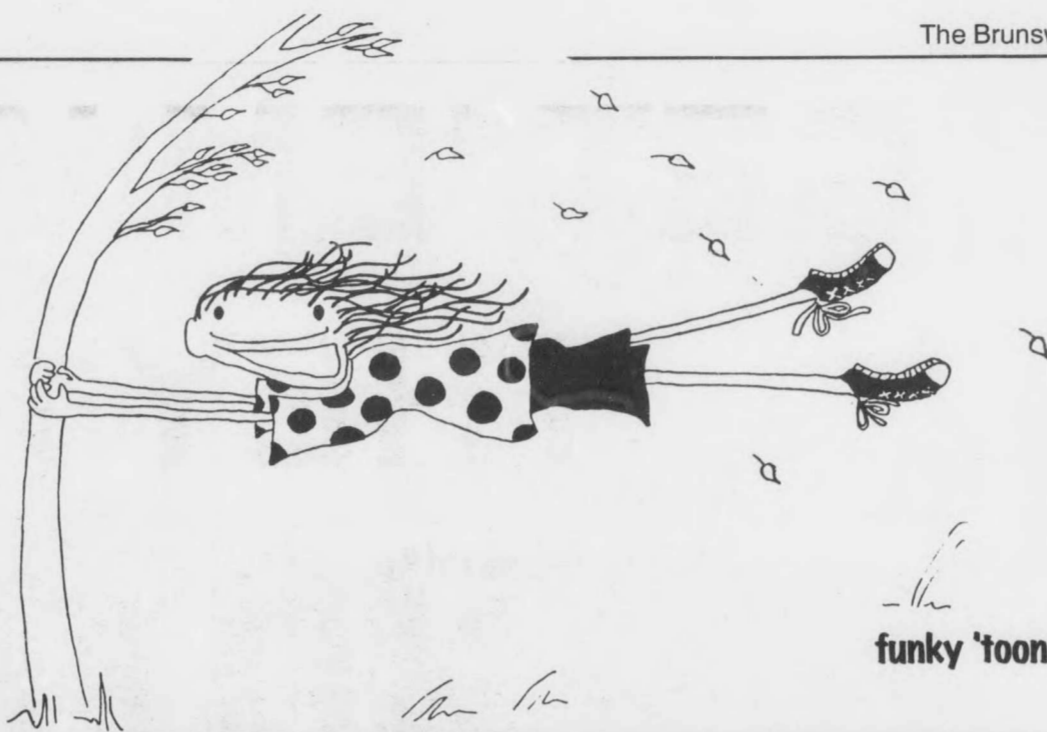


dis tract ions



funky 'toons by nina

Letter from Korea

May 21 - 26

Hi Mary,

It's getting late, but I don't want to sleep because I'm in the poetic mood and I'm working on a fairly long poem. It's longer than most of the poems I write, anyway. I have the feeling of elevation and slight instability I get from writing good poetry, but I also have some frustration on two accounts. One, of not being able to control the ideas I have so the will be of use. I want the skill to shape my thoughts into poignant, breathtaking phrases. My poems seem to fall apart at some point or another. My second source of frustration is reading T.S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath, or someone similarly brilliant, looking at my own sheets, and feeling impotent.

The pun on sheets was unintentional, but it's a little clever, do you think?

Forty sheets of this paper cost 900 won. That's about \$1.50. Ouch. I haven't seen the Korean version of Hilroy here. You know, 400 sheets for \$1.44.

I don't think my roommate likes Koreans. He keeps saying things like "Won't they ever learn?" when they do

things the Korean way and not the North American way. He says he doesn't find Asian women attractive, which is fine because there's no disputing taste, but when you add that to his comments, it makes me wonder, it's true that the things Koreans do sometimes seem inefficient or odd, but in another culture, one must have patience. I don't think he has that patience.

If I were nasty, I would say it's



he's American, but I try not to be nasty (and I'm sure it's not true anyway) so don't add that comment to the list of sly things I've said and actually meant.

I had five minutes left at the end of

my adult class tonight, so, to make some conversation, I asked what they were having for supper. Perhaps they thought I was hinting to be invited out, because a couple of them spoke for a moment in Korean and then suggested a dinner party sometimes soon. We're going out Wednesday after class.

Supper with my class was fine. We had Bulgogi (a sort of marinated fried beef). The restaurant was very nice. In the good restaurant, you sit on the floor on a mat beside a low table, the meat is cooked at the table. I had some soju, which is a clear Korean alcoholic drink. Pretty harsh. It smells like a rubbing alcohol.

Have you been talking to Mike Belyea since school finished? Are you guys hanging out at all? I sent him a postcard a while ago. I hope he writes back. I guess you know that his story "Splinters" was accepted for Fiddlehead.

Ugh. Time for class. Later, alligator.

Marcus P.S. I'm including w1000 for you, so you can see the sort of money I'm using. It's worth about \$1.40 Canadian.

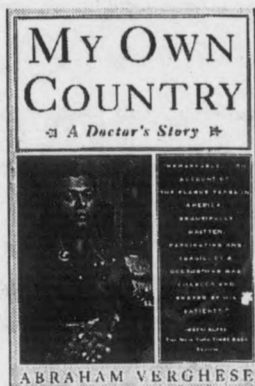


My Own Country: A Doctor's Story by Abraham Verghese

Review by Maria Paisley

Johnson City, a small southern town nestled in the Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee, had always seemed to be exempt from the anxieties of modern American life. This was to change on August 11, 1985 when the local hospital treated their first AIDS patient. It wasn't long before a crisis that had once seemed to be an "urban problem" had arrived in the town to stay.

Abraham Verghese, a young Indian doctor specializing in infectious diseases, was practising in Johnson City at the time. Simply by necessity Dr. Verghese became the local AIDS expert



and he was soon besieged by a shocking number of male and female patients whose stories came to occupy his mind, and even take over his life.

He brought a unique perspective to the community: as a medical practitioner who was unique in his abilities; as an outsider who could talk to the people who were suspicious of the local practitioners; and most importantly, as a compassionate writer who saw what was happening in this conservative community as both a medical and spiritual emergency.

My Own Country: A Doctor's Story is a moving book; sometimes startling and disturbing while at other times shows the humanity and compassion of people. It is about the effect that AIDS has on a deeply traditional, non-urban, 'country' setting in the Bible belt. At the same time it is about identity and what is considered honorable and charitable in the way that humans behave towards others.

Verghese's memoirs are inspiring and beautifully written telling the stories of his patients, their families and friends. In addition he examines with grace and honesty his own search for a place in

this world. *My Own Country* has been nominated for the National Book Critic Circle Award and is considered by many critics as one of the best of the year.

Contribute to *distractions* by submitting book reviews (free books are available for review...), cartoons, poetry, postcard stories (500 words or less), photos, or letters to *Fish Apriicat*. Questions, comments, and submissions for *distractions* should be submitted to Mary at the Bruns.

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