

# distractions



I was introduced to Travel Literature last year by Professor Cockburn of the English department (in a course I would 'strongly agree' to recommend to Consumer Guide enthusiasts and students of lit-rab-chab at this fine institution of higher learning), so when a friend of mine decided to go abroad for the year, I jumped at the opportunity to try out some travel writing on our audience. Marcus Peddle, a graduate of Memorial University and UNBSJ, came to UNBF last year to complete a qualifying year before entering the creative writing graduate program. Accepted to the MA, Marcus decided to defer his graduate studies when he was offered the opportunity to teach English as a second language in South Korea.

Marcus is a stunning poet; I believe that he will someday be a famous writer --- or as famous as the contemporary poet gets, anyway. I hope to be able to include some of his work in *Distractions* this year. In the meantime, the letters he began writing the day he left Fredericton, --- and graciously, as the giving friend that he is, agreed to let me publish --- will provide entertaining and interesting insights into a journey that many of us imagine taking ourselves.

## In Transit

April 27

Hi Mary

This trip appears to be plagued by misfortune. First there was the delay in getting my visa. Also, my Scotiabank Visa card was sent to me by courier but the magnetic strip doesn't work, so I have to order a new one when I get to Korea. This morning, the plane I was supposed to leave on broke down, so I had to get on another one. Instead of following the path - Saint John -> Toronto (where I would board Korean Airlines) -> Vancouver -> Seoul, I now have the path Saint John -> Fredericton (Hi!) -> Montreal -> Vancouver (where I will connect with my original Korean Airlines flight) -> Seoul. Pretty crazy.

Speaking of crazy, Dan Kolesar told me that the reason I'm flying west to get to the far East is because the plane heads against the Earth's rotation and thus Korea comes towards us as the plane heads towards it. I don't know about that, but here's something funny - the further West I go, the more far Easterners I see!

I'm probably somewhere over Ontario or Manitoba now, I guess. There is a lot of cloud so the Earth looks like an endless white plain. It's an odd effect really, like something out of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or some science fiction movie where a plane and its passengers are transported to another plane of existence (pardon the pun). Above us, the sky is a deep blue, verging on black.

This plane has television screens for showing movies etc. *Murphy Brown* is on at the moment. I'm listening to Tchiachovsky (pardon the spelling - I feel crippled without my dictionary, which I, foolishly, left in Saint John). There are also telephones in the seats!

I felt a little nervous this morning about leaving, but I am quite comfortable now. Airplanes make me a little nervous anyway, especially at take off and landing.

The metal on the engine has turned from light grey to dark grey since we took off. Odd how the sun is not obscured up here but the metal and the sky itself are darker.

Between the "Hospitality Service" section of the plane (which used to be called "Second Class," or "Economy") and the Business Class section of the plane (which was once known as "First Class") is a curtain which blocks the sight of one to the other. When the curtain is pulled across after take off, the business people take off their masks and they are made of gold. They are served dinner on a silver and bone tray. We rub dirt on our faces and eat off plastic.

Actually, an old man who is sitting behind me and is loud, just got up and peered past the veil. Then he reported his findings to his wife.

We're over the Rocky Mountains now. I didn't imagine they would be so wide.

Well, after more hassle in Vancouver, I finally got on the flight to Seoul. The stewardess just handed out immigration and customs declarations forms. More trouble, no doubt. When I get out of customs I have to get my luggage and convince the luggage baggers I have a ticket waiting for me at the Domestic terminal. I will be happy when I am off these planes.

I am not discouraged about the Korea 'adventure', however. In fact, we had a meal of beef with peppers and sauce with rice a short time ago and it got me a little excited about getting into the country.

This plane is not as uncomfortable as the last. This one is a Boeing 747. I don't understand a word anybody is saying, but I don't feel uncomfortable. The stewardesses speak English, so maybe that's the help. I just watched one of the in-flight movies. It was *Milk Money*. Nothing inspired about it, I can tell you.

According to the flight plan, I think we're probably around the Bering Strait, near Russia. When I think of Russia and Korean airlines something uncomfortable occurs in my mind. Actually, I don't feel nervous at all, even though I'm now a foreigner and a minority.

I wonder how much of a shock it will be when I actually start working and living in Taegu? I'm probably going to get my biggest shock at customs when they ask about the shortwave radio I brought. They'll probably want to look carefully at that because North Korean spies are a reality here, I'm afraid. I guess we won't be crossing North Korean airspace on our way down the Russian coast!

April 28

Same day, but it's the 28th on this side of the ocean.

Immigration and Customs were no problem, surprisingly. I showed the guy my shortwave and he said no problem. Good. I got to the Domestic terminal no problem, either, but got sent to three ticket offices before I got something done. I don't know if it's because I'm a foreigner, or it's just airports, or just a kind of Korean habit, but line-ups seem to be a rather unbending regulation most times. A professor once told me that the Japanese didn't do line-ups very well - maybe it rubbed off during the occupation.

I was thirsty earlier on, so I went to an airport store to get something to drink. I recognised Coca-Cola, so I just said "Coca-Cola." Getting the size took a bit of sorting out, but not much problem. I gave her a 10,000 won bill and I assume she gave me back the right change. I should learn how to count before anything.

...books...books...books...books...books...books('...those damned ellipses...')books....

### The Catcher Was a Spy Nicholas Dawidoff

by Mark Savoie

The *Los Angeles Times*, in their review of Nicholas Dawidoff's *The Catcher Was a Spy*, describes the book as "meticulously researched." They are, if anything, guilty of gross understatement with this assessment. In addition to an impressively extensive newspaper search and a diligent survey of the largely uncatalogued files of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Dawidoff has conducted a truly amazing amount of interviews with people who knew his subject personally. At times the reader finds himself wondering how it is possible that so many people could be found and that they were so willing to be interviewed.

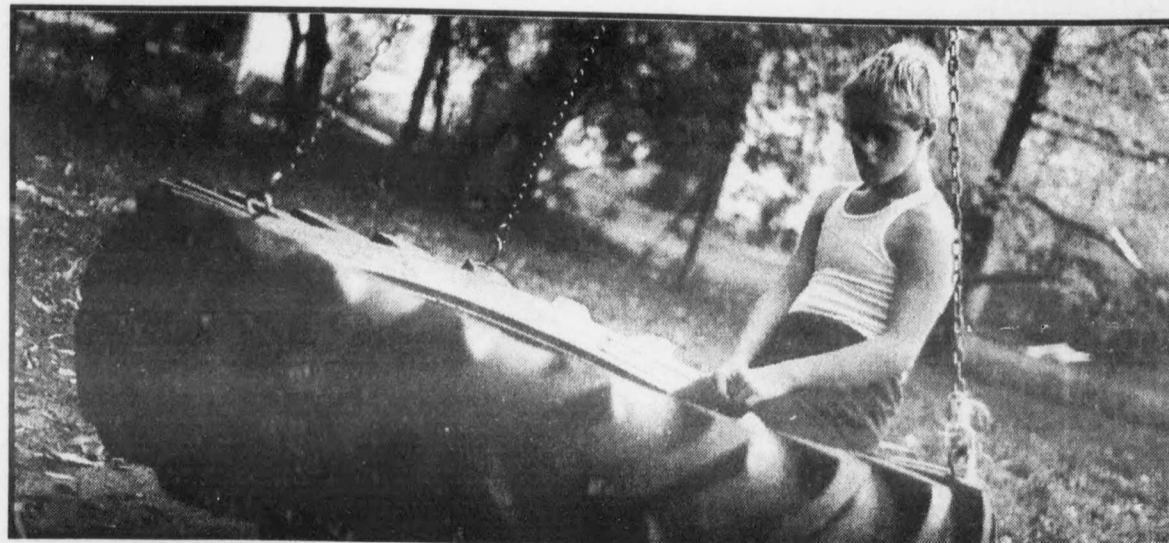
The answer to this question, however, is stunningly obvious in its simplicity and indeed stands out for the reader throughout the pages of the book. People who knew Morris (Moe) Berg were fascinated by him and were willing to talk about him with only the slightest provocation. Moe Berg was a career third string catcher with the Chicago White Sox, Washington Senators, and Boston Red Sox during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Dawidoff argues that he had the potential to be a star based upon on his 1929 performance but was waylaid by an injury which essentially destroyed his 1930 and 1931 seasons. Superficially, at least, this might appear to be true, but a closer examination of his performance reveals that

his .287 average with just seven doubles and no triples and home runs in over one hundred games played is far below average for the inflated offences of 1929. At that time he was 27 years old, so it could not be said that this season showed promise of things to come. Instead, it is probable that this season was an accurate reflection of his true ability.

Still, Moe Berg had some quality which kept him in major league ballparks for fifteen years, despite the fact that he rarely earned his paycheques by actually playing in a game. Dawidoff emphasises

that Berg was able to do this because of a charismatic charm which was able to seduce the big league managers of that less competitive age into allowing him to fill a roster spot. The fact that he played his last four--and least productive--seasons as a personal favourite of owner Tom Yawkey on the country club Red Sox only adds merit to this supposition. However, as Dawidoff hints at but does not discuss in detail, it appears that Berg was a great student of the game and better than average at teaching and demonstrating the necessary

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distracting photo by Larry Ellis