



## Diary

Wednesday August 8, 2007

### Guardian

This week, "Oxford-educated writer" Charles Hills of Clapham was jailed for six years at the Old Bailey for trying to procure a hitman to bump off his late mother's lover in the Algarve. He was frustrated that his mum had allowed Flavio Rosa, a handyman, to remain in her villa after her death and offered a "hitman" £15,000 to remove this obstacle to his inheritance. Many reports mentioned that Hills had worked for the Guardian and New Statesman. A trawl through the archives indicates that a Charles Hills did indeed write an article for the paper in 1991. It was titled "Gatecrashing the guru - With time to kill in Tangier, Charles Hills joined the queue of literary disciples beating a path to the door of an author he had never read." Oh, Charles, if only you had stuck to killing time.

- In the article, Hills explained he had missed his ferry to Faro and was stuck in Tangier. "I decided to pass the time by going to see Paul Bowles," he wrote. "After all, I was a writer, if not yet a well-known one. It was almost my right to meet him. The fact that I had never read any of his works, and had no idea what I might say to him, didn't seem to matter." And why should it?

- Hills faced other challenges: "I went back to the hotel to get dressed. This was difficult, since the seat of one of my pairs of trousers had split and the other pair had holes in the pockets. And my rechargeable electric razor had run down." Overcoming these hurdles, he arrives chez Bowles to find the author of *The Sheltering Sky* about to go to bed. "He was polite, but didn't give me the impression he particularly wanted to see me again." Persistence pays off, and soon, "I was alone with the famous writer. I asked him how long he had been living in this block of flats. 'I've been here for ever,' he said. 'Since 1957.' I said he probably didn't want to move now, and he agreed he didn't." And that, alas, was where the interview ended.

- "Mad" Frank Fraser is endorsing the current campaign to free ailing train robber Ronnie Biggs, who has just been moved from Belmarsh to Norwich prison, an event which brings to mind a jape that Frank himself employed when he was being transferred from jail to jail during his long spell inside: when the prison van in which he was being transferred stopped at traffic lights, if there was a car full of young men in the adjoining lane, he would mouth "Not now! Not now!" at the bemused young men, causing panic among his escorts.

- Consumer Direct, the government advice service, is advising potential pet owners to "bone up" on their rights. It received more than 2,700 complaints from pet buyers last year. One caller from Essex bought two dwarf rabbits from a local pet shop, both of which died within 10 days. After calling for advice, he returned to the shop and obtained a refund of £76, claiming the animals were not of a "satisfactory quality" under the Sale of Goods Act. Possibly the basis for a comedy sketch?

- *Cooking for Dogs* by Marjorie Walsh is reviewed in the Working Dog and Ferret section of the *Countryman's Weekly*. The book contains a To Share section, which, according to the review, includes "mouth-watering suggestions like avocado and chicken casserole and Chinese stir-fried vegetables that will titillate the tastebuds of both you and your favourite pet". Suggestions for a suitable canine amuse-bouche welcomed.

- As the football season starts, Dr Jack Fawbert, senior lecturer in sociology at Bedfordshire University, publishes a study entitled *Representations of Change, Community, Culture and Replica Football Shirts*. "In our postmodern society, community is not something that should necessarily be understood by clearly recognisable geographical limits," concludes Dr Fawbert. "Today, people pick and choose and mix and match from identities available in the lifestyle marketplace, which have replaced the old working-class communities. It is a kind of do-it-yourself tribal culture, and replica football shirts can be signifiers of such cultural groupings." Or maybe even a signifier that you support the team whose shirt you're wearing?

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