



The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

a bi-weekly column in the

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“The Triskadekaphile (RIP Snake)”

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Triskaidekaphile, now there's a word that Douglas “Snake” Vogt, the late, lamented, still-much-on-our minds bartender, would have loved. We're approaching two years since Snake left the mortal pale, and two years since I began including one arcane vocabulary word in each Right Field column with the addendum, (RIP Snake). This tradition emanates from Snake himself, who loved to kid me about my penchant for throwing big words around in the *Advertiser*, whether the context warranted them or not. When he saw me on Thursdays at the Right Field Satellite Office (southeast corner of Oakwood and Elm), he greeted me with, “Hey, it's Thursday, *Advertiser* day. I brought my dictionary to work.” Then we'd have a good laugh as he set about drawing my beer. When we lost him—much too young at 62—I figured that including one big word a week (whether the context called for it or not) would make a fitting and constant memorial to him.

Certainly Snake would have gotten a chuckle out of this week's entry, triskaidekaphile, even more so after I admitted to him that I wasn't one hundred percent sure triskaidekaphile was a real word. I've never come across it in the New York Times Sunday Crossword, and Microsoft Word underlines it in red. But, just as sure as a triskadekaphobe fears or dislikes the number 13, a triskaidekaphile (from *treis* and *deka*, Greek for three and ten; and Greek *philos*, meaning beloved) must have a fondness for the number 13, as a bibliophile is fond of books, and a gastrophile loves good food.

The title triskaidekaphile suits me just fine, drawn as I am to underdogs and to the much-maligned, like poor old number 13. Thirteen—bad luck personified, so much so that for years hotels had no 13th floor. Friday the 13th, the unluckiest day of the year. I remember one year when I managed our softball team, the Aurora Ready-Mix Concretestadores (get it?). No doubt the job fell to me by default because no one else wanted the thankless task of shepherding a dozen aging, increasingly hapless

ballplayers. One of my duties before the first game was to design and order new team jerseys. At the first practice, I carried the box of shirts out the bench, and let the guys eagerly dig through them, looking for their favorite numbers. It took them a little while to discover that all twelve of the Concretestadore shirts were emblazoned with not only our puzzling—bordering on moronic—team name across the front, but with the number “13” on the backs. I claimed having all of us wear No. 13 was tactical genius, since our opponents could never set their defense by saying, “Watch out for No. 13, he hits it to right field.” Grumbling, they donned the shirts; eventually, they laughed.

I bring up the number 13 today because with this “View From Right Field,” my 338th (a multiple of 13, by the way), I complete my 13th year of biweekly columns in the world’s best hometown newspaper. From a humble beginning of 500-word natterings about sports in June Of 2005, Right Field has now sprawled into hopefully cogent, occasionally ungainly 1000-word epistles about everything from sports to local personalities to hometown history to childhood adventures to, well, arcane vocabulary. If you asked me, now 13 years into it, what Right Field is about today, I’d say I’m musing and wondering about what makes this place we call home tick.

Which brings me, at long last, to the point of this 13th anniversary column.

You may have seen the May 14 *Buffalo News* article by music critic Jeff Miers, called “90 Minutes in East Aurora.” He did as adequate a job in his story as a cursory visit will allow. He stopped at the Bookworm, Elm Street Bakery, Limelite Music, Knox Park, and 42 North Brewing Co., approximately two percent of the retail businesses in town and ten percent of the parks. Like so many visitors, he trotted out the “Q” word to describe us. We’re used to that characterization, although the last four letters of the “Q” word spell “ain’t”—make of that what you will. I agree with much of what he said, but I remain puzzled by this particular quote from Mr. Miers: “As I pulled into town, I passed the legendary Vidler’s 5 & 10 and parked on Church Street just off Main... I considered East Aurora’s current status as a village struggling to hold onto its ‘traditional small-town values’ while an influx of young moderns pushed toward hipster-infused change and growth.”

“Hipster infused change and growth?” Huh?

As it so happened, last week I was strolling uptown EA after watching Main Street come to life from my perch in the front window of Taste. (Is Taste an example of hipster infused change and growth?) At tables outside Purr-fect Tea & Lounge (hipster infused?), I discovered 12 or 13 ladies from their 20s to their 70s sporting lanyards and ID badges enjoying tea in the morning sun. Engaging them in conversation, I learned they were from the International African Violet Society (a hipster group?) in town for a convention in Buffalo. With a free morning, these ladies, who hailed from Chicago, Oakland, Toronto, Phoenix and Boston, bussed to the 14052 because, “somebody said it was a quaint [groan] place.”

“Now that you’ve visited our town for about 90 minutes,” I said, “would you say it’s hipster infused?”

“What in the world does that mean?” the spokesperson asked.

My thoughts exactly.

As I’ve been going about my business the last few days—attending a fundraiser at 42 North for youth baseball, dashing in to get cat food at Tops, doing a little painting for the Western New York Land Conservancy, grabbing lunch at the new Deli, attending Memorial Day services at the cemetery, recording a podcast for the *Advertiser*—I keep coming back to that question: What in the world is “hipster infused change and growth?” For that matter, what is a hipster?

If you’ve got the answer to these perplexing questions, bring them to Right Field. I’ll be at the *Advertiser* office, 710 Main Street on Wednesdays from 10-11 a.m. Drop in to say hello and talk townie with a genuine triskaidekaphile (RIP Snake). The best answer will be featured on—where else?—page 13 of a future *Advertiser*.