

Getting by Gerda

Gerda is 6 feet 8-and-half inches tall, weighs about 240 lbs., hides a lacquered lump of prematurely blue hair under a carefully anchored hair net, and rose meteorically up through the ranks of Third Reich to master the position she holds today in the world of Canadian business. I have not met Gerda, only talked to her on the phone. I doubt anyone has ever met Gerda or her boss for that matter. For it's Gerda's job and mission in life to make sure such things never happen. Gerda is every man, woman, and child with a great business idea. Gerda is every company's Protective Secretary.



William J. Thomas

"Hello, may I speak to Mr. Cooperman" is my usual polite and not-at-all unreasonable request.

"He's busy!" comes the curt response from "Waste-No-Words-And-Take-No-Prisoners Gerda."

Now I know Cooperman is not busy because I've already spoken with Gressler who told me off the record that Cooperman doesn't do diddly around the office, but he has the power. I take this to mean Cooperman's old man died and left him this plastics business with but one fly in the ointment - the hornet in a hair net - he left him Gerda and forgot to take the brass knuckles with him to his grave.

I imagine Cooperman is cowering under his desk, because just prior to my call he went out to Gerda's desk at reception and when he went to borrow a paperclip she slammed the metal drawer on his fingers and scolded him for not saying "May."

Nonetheless, I continue: "I realize Mr. Cooperman is a busy man but I'm calling long distance and if I could just have 20.....15 seconds of his time..."

"He's busy!" comes the reply, no louder, but no less threatening than the first. I suspect Cooperman hears this abrupt bellowing of the Sergeant of the Secretarial Pool and is now listening in on the line, daring not to say a word lest Gerda go after the good hand he is using to hold the phone.

"Do you think he might return my call when..."

"Mr. Cooperman seldom returns phone calls. What is this concerning?" comes the question from the commandant.

First of all, Cooperman might return a phone call if someone would show him which little button to push for his extension and then only if a message ever managed to slip by Gerda, the Great Corporate Perspiration Shield.

And second, if I wanted to convey my idea to Gerda I'd have come down to the office in person and explain it using big color pictures with fairytales-size print underneath and puppets for the hard parts. There's an expression for this. It goes: "Why mess with the monkey when you can go straight to the organ grinder." This conjures up a sadistic form of

punishment I'd like to subject Cooperman to, but I go on. I must go on.

"Look," I say, hoping the frankness of my voice covers up the desperation of my mind the way diuretics mask stanazolol.

I've got this great business creation which could change the lives of every person in the free world, never mind those commuting daily into Toronto from Oakville and Mississauga!"

"As I told you, sir, Mr. Cooperman is in..." At this point I distinctly recognize the clicking of a crown and anchor wheel as it spins past "conference" teeters on "Tokyo" and lands on "disposed."

I'm grovelling at this point. "But what if I send you a detailed diagram and complete description of my idea. Would you pass this along to Mr. Cooperman?" Silence. I'm ecstatic. Not only does the moment hold the possibility of a positive response, but it's the first sentence she's allowed me to finish.

Then I hear the scissors go back in the drawer and I realize she's been clipping her toenails. "I had to take another call...what were you saying?"

"My idea...I'll send you a diagram and you could...? I made it to mid-sentence.

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Ancient arena era

Sometimes it appear to yer ole Baba we're only a step removed from the ancient arena era of the ancient Romans. That was when various mad Emperors took delight in grabbing the attention and applause of their ignoramus subjects with blood-curdling attractions - Christians fighting for their lives against lions, tigers, and heaven only knows what other kinds of beastiary, and trained gladiators (usually the criminal dregs of Roman society) given a chance for life by hacking away at each other with sword, spear or trident and net. That was the political blood sport of the day. Not very much different from the 'blood sport' which goes on in our political, and other, arenas of today it seems.



Olga Landlak

It was an ad on the old Boob Tube promoting the sale of a weird collection of videos

which caught my attention. Weird, in the sense, that they were collections of recent episodes in sports which had to do with some sort of accidental mayhem. "A Super Bowl of Crashes" headlines the one on car racing, and we are given a sneak preview of these bug-like monstrosities going out of control, crashing into each other, and BODY and car parts flying every which way. This is sport????? This is entertainment?????

This looks more like the ancient Roman arena concept where, in place of hard stone benches steaming in the hot Italian sun and the air redolent with garlic and wine, one sits on the cosy old couch in the cosy old living room, stuffed with junk food and just as complacently watching people being maimed, injured, or even killed. The fact that these were real-live human beings, with feelings, emotions and fragile bodies just like the rest of us, doesn't seem to fizz on either the ancient populace or the one of today. How else to explain the promotion and sale of such a sickening collection of such sickening scenes?

What does that say about our society or us? That we are so inured to the FAKED violence and mayhem of the big and little screens, that we can now look on

unmoved upon actualities where actual people are being killed or maimed? That when the World Two, Korean and Vietnam Wars were being so gorily televised into our living rooms, we developed emotional skins as thick as those of the spectators of the ancient world whom we label as 'pagans' today? Are we not as 'pagan' as they when it comes to the amount of violence we can absorb in either fakery or actuality?

Is that why we still like all physical contact sports where there is a deliberate punch to the face or body, or the spur-of-the-moment one which sends us screaming to our television sets, "Fight! Fight!" Or why some of us go to circuses in the hopes of seeing the aerialists or the tight-rope-walkers plunge to an un-netted floor? Or why suicides

on twelve-story ledges draw instant crowds all shouting, "Jump! Jump!"

What is it with us? Is it still a remnant of the atavistic hunt-and-blood thing even older than Roman times, hurting and killing of all things upon the earth, including ourselves? How thick, or more to the point, how thin is the skin of civilization with which we self-righteously cloak ourselves as being most superior beings? Animals and birds have a good excuse for their blood mayhem - they are so programmed for survival. But we, we have deliberately programmed ourselves by allowing all this violence to become a part of our daily lives, so that by now we actually allow horrible hucksters to flog such killing episodes as a perverted form of entertainment.

We pride ourselves on our human minds and so-called intelligence, but it seems to yer old Baba that, with each instance of acceptance of such perversions, we are rapidly moving backwards to the ancient times of the ancient 'pagans', and all the deliberate murderings which took place in their arenas.

The only difference? They didn't televise or film it.

Quick and dirty cuts to CBC

Several people have asked me recently what I think about the massive cuts at the CBC. After all, they ask, you worked there for 13 years, and now you're on your own. What does it all mean?

First of all, it's important to understand CBC management's strategy for carrying out this round of cuts, compared to previous rounds.

You might remember, as I do, Finance Minister Michael Wilson announcing the first round of cuts shortly after the Tories took office in 1984. CBC had just announced that the proposed "CBC News World" could be opened for \$50 million "without any new money from the federal government". Wilson used that as an excuse to cut \$50 million from the CBC - in effect telling the Corporation to cancel their plans for News World and find some other way of not spending \$50 million. By the end of 1984, that \$50 million loss resulted in "pick and shovel" cuts across the board - a job here and there, and some minor program cuts: for example, the children's television show "The Friendly Giant" and one hour of CBC Radio's Noon

show in Thunder Bay. Voluntary early retirement plans and hiring freezes continued, wringing the last vestiges of "waste" out of the system, according to CBC management.

Next, CBC managers warned that any further cuts would result in the actual loss of stations. Radio stations on the "proposed cut list" included Thunder Bay.

Concerned staff members, including yours truly, let that fact be known to Members of Parliament (albeit confidentially, since CBC employees are prohibited from taking political action in their own defence). The three New Democratic MP's from northwestern Ontario at the time - John Parry, Iain Angus and Ernie Epp - led a postcard-writing campaign called "Save CBQ". Similar campaigns were launched in other hinterland areas of Canada.

The result was a report to the CBC Board of Directors which pointed out, among other things, that CBC Radio

services could not be cut without substantial public opposition. The board made a policy decision to save the regional radio stations from execution, and look almost entirely to other parts of the Corporation when making further cuts.

This left television to absorb nearly all further cuts, including the biggest slashes ever, in the 1990 round. Network television was left nearly uncut, although some current affairs shows like "The Fifth Estate" and "The Nature of Things" will produce fewer new shows from now on, and run more repeats.

What's gone is local television. Each province has been reduced to only one CBC-owned TV station. Local CBC Newscasts on television are gone, which leaves the remaining stations doing "regional" (which really means "provincial") news programming. Even regional current affairs shows are gone.

In northern Ontario, we won't notice

much of an immediate change, since there were no CBC-owned English language television stations in the north before the cuts. Instead, the CBC will continue to sell its material to the privately owned affiliates, such as CKPR-TV in Thunder Bay.

What's important to note about this round of cuts is the different strategy CBC management adopted this time, compared to 1984. This time, there was no warning. No "proposed list of stations" to be cut discussed ahead of time. No time for public opposition to develop. Labour laws require CBC management to give the 1,100 employees three months notice. Instead of letting them work off that three months, all the cancelled news and current affairs shows were pulled off the air the same day as the cuts were announced. The President of the CBC said "this spares our employees the agony of writing their own obituaries". How humane. What he didn't say was that the strategy also cuts off the public's chance to air their feelings about

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NORTHERN INSIGHTS

by Larry Sanders

