

THE FLUTE AND THE BRICKMAKER



**A RETIRED FSO REFLECTS APPRECIATIVELY
ON A LIFE OF ADVENTURES AS A HOBO, A
PALACE GUEST AND IN MANY OTHER ROLES.**

By JOHN NELSON HUTCHISON

I have lived in eight states and 10 countries, and lived in or visited every continent, including Antarctica. I have been a farmer, Eagle Scout, hobo, printer, newspaperman, Army officer, author, publicist, diplomat and foreign correspondent. Enough already.

Something recently awakened my recall of one of those incidents which, however unimportant, remain half-buried in the mind for decades, then suddenly pop into sharp, indelible clarity.

On the bank of a tiny river on the edge of the Sahara, I sat one day long ago, listening to a man play softly on

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a homemade flute while another did his laundry in the running water, pounding cleanliness into it with a wooden club. I could also watch a boy approaching, wielding a stick to keep a donkey in motion. And downstream past the launderer, a man was making bricks, one at a time, in a wooden mold, from clay dug nearby. No one hurried — not even the sad little donkey so cruelly assailed. Time slowed almost to a stop-action frame. Like a still photo, that scene remains sharp in the album of my mind.

Memory triggers other reminiscences. By most measurements, I have lived (as an ordinary man) an extraordinary life. Performing often minor duties but sometimes as a participant in great events, I have witnessed history from its near periphery or been directly involved in it. I am going to try to scamper rapidly through many more memories, helter-skelter and at random.

I have stood at the base of the cone in the crater of

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Vesuvius while it chuffed up red-hot cinders that rolled down almost to my feet. Only months later that fierce furnace blew off the whole crest of the peak, and one night I watched from a rooftop as the magma poured down the slopes and engulfed whole

buildings of the town a few streets away. I have also seen Etna and Stromboli and Tail and Ruapehu fume and belch.

I was in the small group at Casablanca that watched Roosevelt and Churchill introduce de Gaulle and Giraud to war correspondents. I attended what may have been the most bizarre audience faced by a pope in the history of the papacy. I found Wilhelm Frick, Hitler's minister of the interior, in Bavaria. As a result, he was captured by the Allies and subsequently hanged at Nuremberg.

For two-and-a-half years during World War II, I was General George Patton's public relations officer. I landed on beaches in assaults on three countries. I was the attaché in the American embassy in London assigned to assist Adlai Stevenson on two of his visits there as ambassador to the United Nations. And I was with him in the last hour before he left his office to have tea with Marietta Tree and died in the street. I attended a super-secret meeting of Averell Harriman's Marshall Plan staff in Paris on his return from an urgent trip to Washington; Harriman told us that President Truman had decided to declare war on North Korea. He did, that very day.

I have walked among the ancient marbles and columned temples of Greece and Rome; Carthage and Volubilis. I have marveled at Avebury and Stonehenge and pondered the huge stones manhandled by Tongans a millennium ago to mark the solstices. I have hugged the South Pole, walked New Zealand's Milford Track and climbed to the crest of Vaia to visit the Samoan tomb of Robert Louis Stevenson.

My parents taught me to love reading and nurtured me with gentle guidance through my early years. They never flagged in their concern and confidence in me, even in the Great Depression of the 1930s, when they had to give up amenities they had long taken for granted: electricity and the telephone. The '30s wrecked their dreams and took away their farm. My parents also taught me the virtues of tolerance and honesty;

John Nelson Hutchison was born in 1911 and died in 2001. Following service in World War II, he spent several years as a Marshall Plan official. In 1952 he was appointed head of the European Branch of the Press and Publications Service at the State Department. "Hutch" rose rapidly through the newly-created United States Information Agency, eventually becoming director of the International Press and Publications Service. In 1955, disgusted by a climate of political backstabbing and manipulation, Hutch left USIA for five years, working for United Crusade and the American Red Cross. Returning to USIA in 1960, he briefly headed IPS again, then switched to the Foreign Service. He served in London, Manila and Wellington. In retirement, he wrote columns on politics and wine and a self-published autobiography, The Road to Anywhere.

Hutch was married twice, first for 53 years to Sarabel Roberts. Several years after her death, he married New Zealander Vivienne Barnett. He is survived by his second wife, as well as Judith and Susan, daughters from his first marriage.

J. Michael Houlahan, a retired FSO who worked for Hutch during his last assignment as PAO in New Zealand and who maintained regular correspondence with him, sent the Journal this eloquent farewell essay, completed by Hutch a few weeks shy of his 90th birthday.

F O C U S

that hard work is honorable and that citizenship is a duty. When I became a railroad hobo, shoved about by joblessness, they welcomed me back home and helped me toward a college degree.

For long spring days I have followed a horse-drawn plow. In snowy winter I have cut down big oaks and hickories for fence posts and firewood with axe and crosscut, long before the chainsaw was invented. I have arranged for John Glenn to meet with the prime minister of the United Kingdom, been a cocktail guest of the King of Morocco, had lunch at a table for four with Harold Wilson, been the Queen's guest in Buckingham Palace and at her summer garden party. I have ridden a camel in the Sahara, a Goodyear blimp in Tennessee and a dugout canoe on a jungle river in Luzon.

In Chesapeake Bay I caught striped bass; in the

***In Chesapeake Bay
I caught striped bass;
in the Trinity Alps,
steelhead; outside the
Golden Gate, salmon.***

Trinity Alps, steelhead; outside the Golden Gate, salmon. I have picked beans and strawberries in the hot May sun, and in the fall, apples for 10 cents an hour six days a week. I have shoveled wheat in the Kansas harvest, husked corn in Iowa, been a witness before committees of the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, and held a job in the federal govern-

ment in which I had two deputies, a special assistant and two secretaries.

The U.S. Army gave me a promotion to lieutenant colonel and the Bronze Star in 1944.

The United States Information Service gave me a silver medal for superior service in 1973.

I have been a reporter on three big daily newspapers and the national public relations director of the American Red Cross. For 20 years after retirement I was a contributing editor of a wine magazine,

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F O C U S

co-authored two large books on wine, and was the West Coast correspondent for several New Zealand newspapers and a business journal.

Woven into the complex and curious basket that has held my life down all these years are fibers, wefts and warps which amaze me in their exciting, patternless design. But it is the silver vein of more than 50 years which gleams among the weaving which was my first enduring, loving marriage with Sarabel.

It brought us two talented daughters who sustain me with their affection and care.

And for nearly 10 years more, the basket has been adorned with strands as bright as new gold and the steel-strong bonds that tied together the new marriage with Vivienne, who is the treasure of my devotion, the deep pool of my joy and caretaker of my spirit. I am

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much loved and I am in love.

A broad streak of vanity runs through this recitation. It is unjustified. Most of what has happened to me was owing to no special talent or expertise, but was the result of my doing what authority and my conscience told me to do. In the course of my long journey two external forces have awarded me a happy life.

One is my remarkably good luck.

The other: I have been borne on the shoulders of a thousand friendships.

The boy and his donkey have long since disappeared into their horizon. The song of the flute has melted into the murmur of the river; the brickmaker's work has crumbled.

I am content. ■

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