

BUSY SOCIALLY IN A RURAL SETTING

I grew up where men seldom touched other men, beyond a handshake, and everybody was happy with that arrangement. But, when I came out to the coast, well, people hugged. You see the guy from the stamp club, it's a big-old hug. I submitted, but if they weren't opening the wingspan first, well, I went for the handshake, although sometimes a quick question can also deflect.

The scene can go something like this: He steps forward into the narrow passage in the library's Bookmobile, a rural blessing and much appreciated at otherwise empty crossroads. "Bill!" he shouts out and comes full throttle down the corridor, into the rear of the bus and he's got a wingspan going. No escaping that.

Ah, but we did overcome the huge prehistoric beasts, we can think quickly. Imagine, if you will, you are a prehistoric knuckler in a smelly animal robe and you are ducking and hiding from the flying creatures with huge claws.

There's one, it sees you, you run, you go into the swamp of alder trees, you bend over a big limb into a giant whip, and when the beast swoops in for the kill, you let loose the whip and it punctuates the big duffus. Lunchtime, you think.

Outsmarting the situation while cornered in the back of the Bookmobile, about to be engulfed by a hairy guy with a smelly hat, you say immediately, "I hear Doris fell and broke her toe." He is distracted. His Doris, he just left out in the station wagon, boiling away in the heat, she hates opening the windows. "The mosquitoes can ruin my day."

So Doris had deflected the hug. Now you start up on another subject, leaving Doris's condition for a future entrapment. You say "Nice shirt." Now he's checking out his style and he will never return to hugging on this day, with me.

At the closing it's a TA-TA, and a slight wave of the hand, and, I recommend, the Good Queens Book of Waves from a Carriage. You can still buy a cardboard Queen E. with a stick on element that you put in your backside window, and there she is, wearing the crown, a sickly smile, and a sincere wave, as best as she can manage. Although I doubt if she waves much around the house. "Oh William, you dashing little bastard, here's a morning wave for you."

The Wave, that's the other rural phenomenon. You drive by someone you know, recognize the car and you give the good-morning-neighbor wave. A friend of mine, a coastal building inspector, was the champion waver. Ed liked to take you by surprise. He'd be coming up Highway 1 when I'm going into town, he's in his little county white truck and you really don't actually notice him until he is passed except, just as he goes by, Ed would give a last minute wave and catch you with your hand on the wheel. Dang, you think, Ed got me again, so you sheepishly wave in the

rear-view mirror, a sop, but you know you've been beat by a better waver. He knew what you were driving, but those little white trucks all look alike. It was a game with Ed. He's cruising up to Westport, to listen to some guy try to weasel out of something, and he sees you coming down the road in the white Volvo station wagon. Ever see a cat smile at a mouse.

Then of course there is the non-wave. Here comes Moony. I know his red Toyota, I wave, HI MOONY, and get nothing back. He's on down the road, and you're left with, What? Is Moony mad at me? He didn't see me. Hey Moony, are you okay?

And the deliberate non-affirming-wave. Here comes Midge Crossaunt, her latest outburst in the A.V.A., affirming the water rights of corporations, she doesn't deserve a wave. I excommunicate you from the church of neighborly wave society. Be lonely. The wave, the non-wave, and the hug. Busy territory in rural settings.