

The Arizona State University campus at Tempe caused a tingle in my hindlegs crossing grounds where mother's youngest brother, Robert Lackey, once went to classes and starred in football. Ironical, he died after a spectacular World War II record in an early peacetime test of jet fighter planes, to be the only hero known to the whole family tree.

The surroundings offered no place to reflect and be alone to remember him. By the time workshops opened in the morning, college students abounded in tri-millions for academic sessions and social sidelines to swarm the scene in high-pitched folly.

Super-energized young rascals barreled across walks, mounted on skateboards or race bicycles as indifferent to humans as starters at racetrack gates. They were oblivious to age or agility, and the peril exceeded that of New York subway mobs, Boston freeways, or any West Coast trail able to accommodate any vehicle past monocycle size.

The conference headquartered in a handsome stone house, probably once the college president's residence. On morning trips, we cut across the lawn to avoid the threat from a bicycle collision, paralyzing the body from waist

down, throwing the nervous system into spasms severe enough to twist the spinal column.

In the afternoons, unless one played hopscotch or mastered wide-spaced stepping-stones across creeks, the lawn became impassable, covered by young bodies entwined in romance – torrid, gawd-a-mighty, shocking outdoor romances, the likes never known in other days.

About the time that thoughts mellowed to “This boy/girl scene makes good study for the Department of Humanities,” the swish from bicycle tires brought the mind blindness found only in the aftermath from freeway pile-ups and train wrecks. Terror-ridden imagination created a mental picture of emergency personnel bent over a prostrate body, levering a wrecked bicycle wheel, flared in rusted spokes, stabbed into the fleshy waist and posterior mass.

On a detour for refuge down a hall in the biology building, a white-jacketed lady cleaned the glass caging two Gila monsters. She volunteered that Gila monsters were one of the two poisonous lizards in the world. She explained that the venom flowed into the open wound to allow more time to negate the toxins, versus the rapid injection from rattlesnake fangs. She further said, “A kid swiped one once and hid the lizard in his pocket. He (the

kid) suffered immense pain from being bitten on his hand and leg."

A quick appraisal ruled against the prospect of mentioning the giant monitor lizards, the Komodo dragons, we'd seen in Indonesia. Her impassive countenance also vetoed a playback on the mass detritus emptied from my seven sons' pockets on long-ago washdays.

I toyed, too, for a shot on the tale of a rancher in southern Arizona, down below Bisbee, who kept a Gila monster caged close to a hutch so long the lizard began to wrinkle his nose just like the rabbits. But experience makes you wary of folks wearing white coats for audiences. Give her credit, she was no academic dope; she aimed her talk toward my pal.

In the first workshop, the notebook rings popped open so loud, the snap broke the hearing aids' circuits. The course was "Dialogue for Playwrights." Writers in the newspaper dodge need dialogue skills to polish our habit of talking and answering ourselves in monologue enlarged to dialogue. Scorned and abandoned as the Royal typewriters we once used, newspaper scribes find solace, especially on payday, to open a soliloquy to gradually develop a reply to the topic at hand, ie, "Why don't you do something useful with your life?"

Answer: "I did once, 50 years ago."

The classroom filled with vigorous women students from college to retired age, frantic to complete cell phone hook-ups. One of the few men paired with me to split an assignment to write dialogue by joint contributions.

We were poor prospects to share. He lived alone — I do a lot of the time. We finished a small yellow page, wide-spaced and part scratched out. I doubt now if he could read my handwriting, yet his responses seemed on the subject at the time.

After readings and workshops, breaks opened into the foyer between classrooms that stood filled with shelved books by the featured conference writers. The right arm, crooked at the elbow, had to be placed just right to hold an open book and rest on a shelf without turning the shelves over onto the floor. Thus relaxed, I read an excellent memoir by a writer named Peggy Shumaker, there from Alaska. The discomfort experienced from cramped elbow tremor saved \$14.95, plus two pounds take-home weight in my suitcase.

Contact with lightweights and the big-name writers fell into sporadic meetings at coffee breaks behind the old stone house. The shock from prone bodies strewn over the grasses diminished into private reverie. No trace developed

from my heroic uncle's past. The one story I don't have to embellish remains unwritten.