

One fine day . . .

. . . God roamed the Earth again.

This time he took the form of Jacques Tati, the French comedian. Sometimes I had to be careful not to laugh when I saw Him walk because Jacques Tati has the funniest walk of all time. Torso bent at the waist, stiff legged kind of strut, bouncing up on the toes. While I didn't think it would be prudent to laugh at God, I eventually asked Him why He took this particular guise. He said that He liked the film, "Mr. Hulot's Holiday." So did I, but I still had to suppress smiling whenever He walked, bouncing up and down, smoking this meerschaum pipe.

He said He wasn't exactly bored. God doesn't get bored for obvious reasons. But lately He said he had been restless, perhaps He just needed some amusement. It seems that He is amused infrequently these days but sometimes things happen that are so funny that He smiles. He rarely guffaws. Big belly laughs are indeed rare. He had one when Michael showed him the "Letters from Earth" that Lucifer had once sent the Archangel Michael, describing what people thought about Heaven. Trillions of people wanging away on harps that they couldn't play, producing unimaginable noise, certainly displeasing to the Creator. Mark Twain eons later wrote something like it. Michael asked God why he couldn't just make a miracle and have them all sing and play perfectly. God laughed so loud that He had to repair much of the universe. It took several days, and He was in a very foul temper when he finished the job.

Before I get to the things we did together, I'll try to give a flavor of some of the things we talked about and at first I didn't have a clue why He chose me. Frankly I don't know much more about His nature after this Roaming experience than I did before, but take my word for it; He is a really interesting Person or Persons depending on your particular religious proclivity. I tried to pin Him down about which group was more correct, but He always deflected even the most cleverly disguised question with the comment, "Buh," an expression He said He particularly liked, one that He borrowed from 14th century Italians in the Po Valley. He also told me, in a conspiratorial tone, that while He didn't condone many of the Roman Catholic excesses, he loved the stories about Don Camillo by Giovanni Guareschi. He thought Russian Orthodox music was the best. He was very critical about the apparent abolition of Gregorian Chant. "Episcopalians are much more Catholic than

Catholics, these days,” He mentioned wistfully. Baptists had more fun than most, He said. He singled out “The Hokey Pokey” as His favorite pop dance. He had caused the idea to germinate in a bumper sticker company that produced thousands of banners reading, “What if the Hokey Pokey IS what it’s all about.” God told me that this was a profound idea that He tried to get Descartes to write about without thinking that it would be about 800 years before the song was written.

Anyway, He said He chose me to Roam with basically because He liked me and I was “perfectly imperfect,” whatever that meant. He said that He spent some considerable time, something he had much of, deciding whom to Roam with. I was of course flattered, thinking that He might have me nominated for ‘saint of the year’ or something. He immediately picked this up and said, “No, you are certainly not of the saintly category...that’s one of the reasons I chose you.” Knowing that I had a math background, He later confided that I was statistically anomalous. I argued with Him about this, but it turns out that He is pretty knowledgeable about mathematics. His summary of my life was interesting. He said that I grew up, went to some good universities. He liked the lady I married, was pleased that we had children, and followed my progress as a young “eclectical engineer.” (He gave me that deliberate misspelling and I use it with alacrity now). I worked in the Aerospace Industry once. He said that he found my resume interesting, especially when I told people that I designed efficient death rays but in fact produced some primitive guidance computers for explosive devices called “missiles” aimed at our satellite called the “Moon.”

God smiled when He told me that. He had done some recent homework regarding local syntactical idioms. “To Moon,” God explained, “was an amusing verbal rhetorical trope intended to be an anatomically pejorative journalistic statement aimed towards the target of one’s approbation with a ritual downing of one’s clothing below the belt and a mandatory bending of the waist in a direction 180 degrees away from the object of insult. “Strange ritual, but amusing,” He said. “I would never have guessed that this orifice I designed would be used so imaginatively. You people sometimes amaze even Me.”

God also made it clear that I didn’t know squat about real death rays. “Let me tell you about death rays. When the universe finally collapses on the ‘big bang,’ THAT is a death ray. Krakatoa was one that I used to good effect on Earth. At the time, your species needed some good sunsets to uplift your spirits. KA-BOOM. Great Death Ray, these volcanoes. The key is to make a big noise but

not kill anyone. ‘Death Rays’ are anomalous,” he said with a mathematical smile.

God was not impressed by the fact that I knew about Legendre Polynomials and Fourier Transforms. Saints, He explained patiently, all were excellent mathematicians but often apparently didn’t realize it. Transcendental functions were somehow acquired by all saints on the way to sanctity, He said. He wasn’t sure why. A non-saint that He really admired was an Indian mathematician, Ramanujan, who without any real math training past high school, rediscovered the calculus and could see infinite series approximations to the most wonderful trigonometric functions imaginable. He said that He almost awarded him sainthood for that impossible insight. God also, obviously, liked the notion of ‘infinite’ series anyway. “Aquinas was actually a lousy mathematician. Good logic, but really bad at algebra. I even gave him a vision about factoring, but he just couldn’t get it right. I finally gave up. Nice man, though. I liked his proofs of My existence. Cause and Effect is my favorite.”

“Adam,” He continued, “was math phobic. He couldn’t add compound fractions. That fact somehow missed Genesis. If you don’t write it down it gets lost. One big one really missed the boat. There were actually seventeen commandments, not ten. ‘Mind thy own business’ was number twelve and ‘Honor thy children’ sixteen.”

So that’s the flavor of things we talked about while we Roamed. I didn’t think that it would be polite to ask Him what He might want to see since He knew everything anyway, but after awhile I got over being overawed. He seemed to be a really good Guy. We shot some pool in one of my favorite bars of some years ago: the Castle in Manhattan Beach. He cleaned my clock in a game of eight ball, but I held my own in a variation of the game where you had to call your next shot. I said it wouldn’t be fair for Him to know what I was going to do, so He deliberately held back the future for the time being. We split six games and had a few Guinness Stouts.

Finally I asked Him if there was something He would really like to see. “Yes,” He said. “On the sixth day during my creative period...and believe Me, I was very busy that day... I made this animal that, well, I was in a whimsical mood. I had finished the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea and the animals of the land when Michael distracted me with some trivial heavenly logistics problem and I started to laugh. I imagined an animal with a huge body, a horse-like

head, though bigger, with cartilage protruding from its forehead and long, skinny legs. I decided it should walk as if it were trying to avoid stepping on eggshells, you know, dainty little steps a ballet dancer might make. So I waved my arms, and created it, but to tell the truth I forget what I called it.”

“It’s a moose,” I answered. “I saw one last week when I was in Nova Scotia. Funniest damn (‘excuse me,’ I said) animal on earth.” God started to chuckle. “Oh, yeah. Now I remember. The legs were left over from an eight legged camel-like creature I was going to call a “Wump.” One of your children’s book authors recreated the idea a few years ago himself but with a lot more humps. By the way, camels are also really funny looking animals. I got the idea to let them spit from a saloon on a planet in the Andromeda galaxy.

So we rented a car and went to Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. I drove because He said that He needed some time to attend to other matters in the universe for a little while. Looked like He took a nap to me, but He later told me that a super nova in Orion’s Belt threatened a sentient race of slugs. I said that slugs probably were too challenged and how did they get along without opposable thumbs? God looked at me as if I were nuts. “The only thing you folks have done with your vaunted opposable thumbs is to make machines and bombs. I sometimes wish I had blessed the dolphins before you. They have philosophers you could never understand and a moral code that is transcendent. They care for their aged, infirm and poor. Why you grind them up with tuna is beyond Me. Someday your race will be held accountable for that.” He went into snooze mode for the next few hours as we passed Halifax on the way to the causeway.

We were both starved when we pulled into a small restaurant north of Ingonish. The waiter was an old timer and asked where we were going. I could see that he found God pretty funny the way He was walking, but I pretended not to notice. I asked him where the best place to see moose might be. “Well, probably up at Meat Cove,” he said. “Ay-ah.” He proceeded to describe the herds of moose that used to roam (God perked up His ears at that word) and were slaughtered by the locals for export. “Pretty stinky stuff when you get enough moose all cut up. Ay-ah. Sailors said they could smell it 60 miles out. Still some moose there now, but not so many. Locals tell of a big old one, antlers like a bulldozer. Ay-ah. Lucky if you see him, that’s for sure. If he exists, he doesn’t come out for just anyone.” While I paid the bill, God walked over to the waiter and I noticed they were talking and laughing. I guess

he can laugh ok without damage to the universe when he assumes another form. When I caught up with Him I asked if they were talking about something profound. “No,” he said. “He wanted to know why I walk so funny.”

We got back in the car and I drove up to the turn off, then the dirt road up to the edge of the cliff observable from below. A Canadian flag could be seen at the top. “Ever notice the Canadian flag,” God asked me? “Not really,” I said. “Well it is an unintentional optical illusion. Two angry men face each other on the perimeters of the maple leaf. Pretty amusing.” We started climbing up the steep slope, through some dense fir trees and a small meadow. With his funny walk I was concerned that He might get winded. Then I realized who He was and decided to take care of myself. Finally we came to the top, a beautiful grassy promenade overlooking the north Atlantic. We sat together in silence for a long time. Several whales surfaced for a time and disappeared.

“Big Sur is like this,” He finally said. “Also the Amalfi-Positano coast in Italy.” I said nothing though I had been to both places. God said, “Yeah, I know. That’s why I brought it up.” And he smiled. Made me feel good. We were silent for a long time again.

I started looking around with my binoculars. God lay back, closed His eyes and seemed to be snoozing again. This time I didn’t think he was taking care of the universe. As best I can describe it is that He really was focused on being on Cape Meat. Either he put a moratorium on problems or he had delegated things to Michael...I don’t know...but I knew He was very here. I scanned the coastline. Beautiful, craggy rocks, waves attacking them, birds everywhere. On the hill behind us was a forest of pines, green, green all the way to the horizon.

In the middle I spotted something white. Really white. Bone bleached white. I increased the magnification on the binoculars. It was a large tree, jagged like lightening but a tree that had died a very long time ago. Startling and alone in a small clearing in the midst of a dark blanket of fir trees. God opened one eye and said, “This tree is five thousand years old, the granddaddy of all the other trees on this island. I nicknamed him ‘Ralph.’ He’s my favorite tree in the universe. Ralph is one damn good tree.” I had a small intake of breath over His phraseology.

You don't take a tree singled out by God lightly even if it is dead, even if it has been dead for thousands of years. I suppressed a question of whether trees also go to heaven, and what constitutes a good tree from a bad tree. I thought I saw Him with a sliver of a smile, but who knows. Then I saw it. "Look at that...over by Ralph," I yelled. There beside the blanched limbs was a huge animal. "The damn Moose the old guy was talking about," I shouted.

God was staring intently at the beast.

The enormous rack of antlers, the wide chest, steam out of the flaring nostrils, pawing the ground with those pencil-like legs, the moose reared up, shook his head and stopped, silent, rigid almost, looked towards where we were seated. Then he leaned over, bent his forelegs and knelt, lowered his wonderful antlers and then, abruptly, nodded his huge head, got back up, turned around and walked majestically back into the forest.

We sat for time. God turned to me and looked perplexed. "Well, I guess the moose isn't so funny looking after all." We finally climbed down the trail and later checked into a motel. We were both silent. I slept like a baby. The next morning I awoke. God was gone. A note on my duffle bag said, "Go spend a few hours with Ralph." Signed God.

For a moment I pondered what a signed autograph by God might be worth on E-Bay.

Nah, I thought. Probably not.

I can't be sure, but I think I felt God smiling.