

# RANDOM THOUGHTS

## Talking to Juan Valdez, the original coffee man

By ELIZABETH ELLEN  
Staff Columnist

Fiction is arrayed pictures, fragments of lives lived, known and imagined.

In a dank and dim coffeehouse,

he sat, pondering his dog's boredom. His dog Sarah was there, too, and she was perhaps forming the concept of boredom in her mind. Or maybe, she wasn't.

For after all, the gift of verbal-

ization was beyond her experience. And aren't all concepts formed in terms of words? He just didn't know any more.

Bathed in the glow of a neon Jesus, he sat, contemplating ger-

rymandering to violate the principle of one woman, one vote. Jesus, plugged into the wall socket, burned a cool green because Jay had cared enough to change the bulb. Jay was just that kind of guy,

he was from Arkansas.

Zoroastrianism appealed to the coffee drinker as he went up to the counter for his free refill of the luscious liquid. The man pouring the coffee reminded him of Juan Valdez, except there was no burro in the vicinity.

But he really couldn't get into the Zoroastrian scene (neither could Juan Valdez for that matter) because he was already both a Quaker and a practicing Buddhist. This was one man with a Friend in Pennsylvania, in fact several of them, and Friends in South Dakota and Death Valley. The Death Valley Quakers he knew were of the denomination's ascetic branch.

Funny how animals symbolized cultural phenomena to him. He asked Juan about it, and the little coffee man replied, "Woodstock embodies the counterculture." Juan meant, of course, Snoopy's feathered friend. But the thinker recalled that when his father read "Peanuts" to him as a child, his father always called the bird Thorndyke.

Now that he had his coffee, he headed back to the table and stopped to chew on the flag, just to show respect. Saluting never became him. The green light distracted him for a moment, and he tripped over Sarah, who immediately snapped out of her boredom.

A woman from Frog Level, N.C., slithered into the chair across the table from him. She wondered aloud whether there was any truth to the statement that all Western philosophy was merely a series of footnotes on Plato. Not thinking much of Plato or his damn "Republic," the coffee drinker looked disgusted. He also looked bald.

A purple neon glow would have suited Sarah better, but Jay could not find purple bulbs. The thinker and the woman from Frog Level, N.C., agreed that gerrymandering was a sleazy practice and that chewing bubblegum was a vile habit. She didn't see the resemblance between the man behind the counter and Juan Valdez, though.

When the coffee was all gone and the mug was stained with a brown residue, the thinker left. He walked beside Sarah, who was feeling rather cynical, and wondered whether his father knew someone named Thorndyke.

Back at his apartment, he was jolted out of his reverie. A dart stuck into his dartboard pinned up a note threatening him with excommunication from both religions if he didn't shut up about Plato. Instantly, his little world, so recently crystalline and cleansed in a cool autumn rain, reeked of sour milk.

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