

CHESTER PISMO SNAVELY: THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE LEGEND

After the staff decided to name one of the new meeting rooms for Chester Pismo Snavely, they asked for some background/history of how Chester became associated with SCLS. I went to the source, Peter Hamon, former SCLS Director.

“Chester was W.C.Fields' son in A Fatal Glass of Beer. Dad and Mom live in the far North and herd reindeer. As a standing gag, throughout the film every time Fields opens the cabin door he gets a face full of snow and says, "taint a fit night out for man nor beast." Chester arrives home, having been in prison. He had the fatal glass of beer, fell upon dissolute ways, and allegedly stole some bonds. His parents welcome him back with open arms, Chester proclaims his innocence, and his parents assure him they believe him. In a fit of remorse, he then confesses that he really did steal the bonds, but overcome with horror at his deed, just threw them away. Without further ado, his parents then throw him out into the blizzard, acting on the assumption that if he did steal "them bonds," they should at least have gotten a share. The film has no socially redeeming qualities at all, but it is very funny.”

Peter continued, “On a more personal note, I've been using Chester as a nom de plume since the early 70's. He has appeared on several foundation and political contribution lists, as the author of various writings, and as identification on numerous medical records. Chester was always present at SCLS events, but really came to life when Kathryn Curtis (former SCLS Board from Columbia County and wife of another former board member “Doc” Robert Curtis) stood up in a gray wig at System Celebration one year, announced herself to be Chester’s wife, Gwendolyn, and began to vigorously defend his character. He was unfortunately murdered the next year in a play, but the folks at System Celebration, as you may recall, had a fun time sorting it all out.”

The Chester Pismo Snavely Memorial Award for a Nifty Activity was established for System Celebration in 1989. Jeanne Radke of Cambria was the first recipient of the award in recognition of her work with migrant workers.

The following letter dated June 1, 1990, was addressed to “Mr. Hamon.”

“The entire Snavely family would like to express our deep appreciation to you and the Southern Center for Loan Systems for once again presenting an award in Chester’s honor at your upcoming gathering. We are so proud! Chessie would be too.

As you know, Chester’s life came to a sudden end when he was crushed under the weight of a book shelf at our local library. The poor dear was simply searching for a book on spineless mammals.

It is comforting to know our Chester's memory will live on whenever this year's award recipient looks up at that piece of wood.

Thank you and God bless you. Mrs. Chester Pismo Snavelly, Rt.1, Plain WI 53577

And so from that time on, Chester has been with SCLS as an award, as a running joke, as a backhanded reference to Peter and as a reminder that we always need to make time for fun.

Respectfully reported,
Phyllis Davis