

## NORTH COUNTRY NOTEBOOK/George Vukelich

## Good Old Girl

They were sitting around in the American Legion Bar up in Three Lakes the other night—"just topping off the tanks" is the way Steady Eddy puts it—and they got around to discussing the good old days at Legion posts across the country, when men were men and women were women and everybody knew what was what and who was who. Especially who was who.

"Well you know," Gene the bartender said. "I can understand that this is not the 1940s any more, and we have been up to our navels in a sexual revolution. But this thing in the paper about the guy in Connecticut is pretty far out. I mean this is *weird*."

Gene waited for a reaction from his customers, all two of them: the good priest and the good doctor.

"What thing in the paper?" Doc asked.

"You don't have to go to Connecticut to find weird," Father Himmelsbach said.

"What thing in the paper?" Doc asked again.

Gene reached over to the backbar and fished the newspaper clipping from its anchorage beneath the cribbage board.



"This thing," he said.

He thrust the clipping so close to their faces that it affected their vision. Father Himmelsbach's head came forward and he peered over the top of his glasses. Doc's head moved backward as he sought for clarity in that twilight zone where the bifocal fuses with the trifocal.

"Bridgette Brusseau talked to the press," Doc read after he was finally able to focus on the caption below the photo. "Fine looking woman."

"Reminds me," Father Himmelsbach said, "of a young woman I knew in the old days in Paris. We went on a picnic to the Marne. She was a very strong swimmer."

Gene snorted.

"If you swam in the Marne in the old days," he said, "you might have been with a Brusseau, but it wasn't Bridgette."

Gene pulled the clipping out of their reading ranges, and their heads snapped back to their normal bar positions. They sat there like bookends without a volume between them.

"Well," Gene said, "let me read this little item to you from the real world of Connecticut before nostalgia carries you away and you make a fool of yourself."

"I think," Doc said to the priest, "those words are addressed to you, Your Holiness."

"Is nothing sacred these days?" the priest asked.

Gene studied the UPI photo of Bridgette Brusseau talking to the press, and he shrugged.

"It's a good thing you became a priest," he told the priest. "It's a jungle out there."

"I take it," Doc said, "that as they say down in Mattoon, 'you are fixin' to read.'"

Gene cleared his throat.

"Too many members, just couldn't accept a woman who was a man," said Bridgette Poi Brusseau, who for a second time lost her bid to become the first transsexual to lead an American Legion post."

Gene looked up at the priest.

"How do you like it so far, Father?"

The priest never batted an eye.

"Gets your attention," he said.

"Brusseau, who was decorated during the Korean War while in the U.S. Air Force as Robert Brusseau, lost Monday to Vietnam veteran Dominic Q. Cirioni Jr. on a 52-22 vote by the John Coleman Prince Post No. 9 in New London, Connecticut."

Gene looked up, shook his head and then looked again.

"If she'd been *born* a woman I'd vote for her," Elmo E. Pearson, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War said before voting. "There's a name for a man who has sex with another man and it's not commander. It's outrageous. It's disgusting."

Doc raised his glass.

"Right on, Elmo," he said.

"Brusseau," Gene resumed, "wearing a red polka-dot dress, left immediately after the election, but told reporters in the parking lot that she would ask the national American Legion headquarters in Indianapolis to look into the election. 'I consider it fixed,' she said."

Gene shook his head.

"I'll tell you. This guy has got his gall."

"This guy," Doc corrected, "has got *her* gall."

"Brusseau," Gene continued,

"age 51, who was also defeated for post commander last year, said many Legion members felt threatened by the fact that she is a transsexual."

Gene put the clipping on the bar and stared at it. Then he stared at his customers.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," Doc said, "here's one Legion member who doesn't feel threatened by Bridgette Brusseau."

"Ah," Gene said. "That's only because Bridgette isn't in this Legion. Now, if she was in this Legion, then what would you say, esteemed Doctor of the Bleeding Heart?"

"Well," Doc said, "I don't think I'd mind. What the hell. I see enough of the

good old boys around here. It might be refreshing to see a good old girl."

Father Himmelsbach was studying the face in the clipping.

"It's not the Bridgette I knew in France," he said.

"The Bridgette you knew in France," Doc said, "is 110 by now. Listen. Why don't we make *this* Bridgette an honorary member and invite her to visit Three Lakes?"

"Him," Gene said.

"I'll drink to that," the priest said. ■

*George Vukelich reads selections from North Country Notebook Sunday night at 8 on Wisconsin Public Radio, WERN (88.7 FM).*