

French ginger ale at Newport's White Horse Tavern

CHARLES PINNING

I was devastated! I'd given Lisa Goodrich a Valentine's Day card and a box of chocolates, and she could barely say thank you before shoving them into her book bag and hurrying off to her mother's waiting Cadillac.

I walked home from school and must have looked as dejected as I felt, for as I approached our house, Anna Pasch, who lived next door, came out of hers and asked me what was wrong.

"Nothing."

"That's not true," she said.

"I gave a Valentine's Day card to this girl in my class and she just put it in her book bag and walked away."

Anna slung her arm around my shoulders. "C'mon inside and have some banana bread."

Halfway through my second slice, Anna got it out of me that it was Lisa Goodrich and that I'd also given her a box of chocolates.

"Oh, boy," sighed Anna.

I made a wounded animal sound.

"Will you do me a favor?" asked Anna. "Will you be my Valentine?"

My older brother was slapping English Leather on his face in preparation for his Valentine's night out with his girlfriend.

"I'm taking Sally to the Pier," he said. The Pier was a fancy restaurant on the harbor in downtown Newport.

"I'm going to the White Horse Tavern," I said.

"Yeah, sure."

"Anna's taking me."

My brother stopped. "What is it with you two, anyway?"

"I—" but before I could say any-

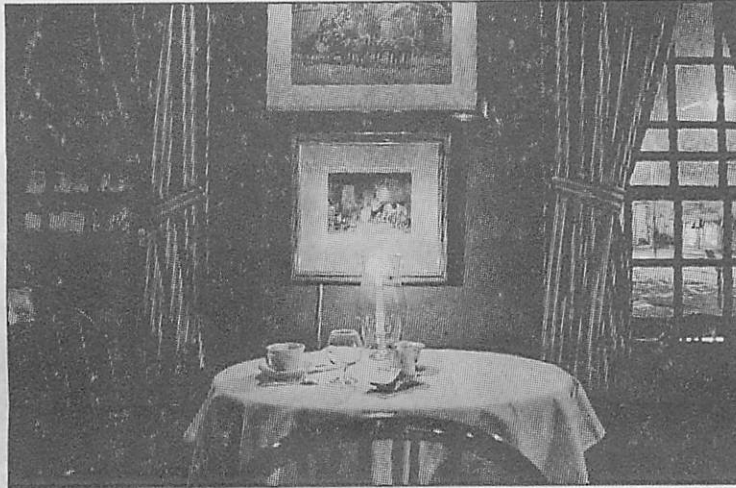


PHOTO BY CHARLES PINNING.

A table in the barroom of the White Horse Tavern, in Newport.

thing he cut me off.

"Anna Pasch is the most gorgeous creature in Newport, possibly the entire United States. I've asked her out. Everybody has asked her out, and my 14-year-old brother is the only person she'll go out with. I've asked you this before and I am asking you again: What do you two do together?"

"Nothing."

"That's impossible! Two people cannot do nothing together! Did you tell Mom and Dad?"

"Not yet."

"They'll let you go. They love her. You've never been to the White Horse."

"So?"

"Well, you better start getting ready. It's very fancy."

"As fancy as The Pier?"

"Fancier."

"Can I borrow one of your ties?"

"No."

Anna and I sat at a round table in front of the fireplace in the barroom. I wore my blue blazer, plaid

bell bottoms and loafers. I took a tie of my brothers anyway. He had so many he wouldn't even notice, if I put it back just right.

Anna looked like a movie star. Sixteen years old and over six feet tall, her effect was always impressive. Add to that her sapphire-blue eyes and bright blonde hair, perfect complexion and Wonder Woman body and basically everyone in view was dropping dead.

Anna's uncle was a manager at the White Horse, hence the table in front of the fireplace and the immediate tendering of two flute glasses of French ginger ale.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Sweetheart," Anna toasted, and after our first sip she kissed me. Her lipstick smelled like roses, made somehow more red and fragrant by the snow falling outside the windows, the candlelight and burning wood.

"Charlie, Lisa Goodrich will waste your time and break your heart. Her family came over on the Mayflower, and they think all

that is actually important. She is cute but she's conventional. Lisa will always be about Lisa," she said.

"You are intense and you are smart. And you are sensitive. If you try to please Lisa Goodrich, your edge will dull. Did she wiggle her tail for you?"

Stifling a laugh, I aspirated ginger ale out my nose.

"A female does that to attract and then sort out the possibilities and you've been rejected. Consider yourself lucky. She'll eventually settle on Barclay Belmont, or someone like him. You, as a male, are wired to fight for her and try to control her, even though actual life has surpassed the slow steps of biological evolution."

"Wow." I said wow a lot when I was around Anna.

"My love, you don't win something by conquering it. You win when what you want comes to you."

Before we got out of Anna's yellow Mustang convertible, we kissed. Anna and I had a way of getting lost in our kisses. We could let one kiss just go on and on, breathing in out of each other. Our lips had fit together perfectly from the start.

She took my hand. "Here. Feel my heart. Can you feel it beating?"

"Wow." I'd never felt anything like that before.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Sweetheart. All we have to do is be ourselves and the world is ours. It will be easy for us, if you let it."

Charles Pinning, an occasional contributor, is the author of the Rhode Island-based novel "Irreplaceable."