

Skimming Don Quixote

By Hap Hansen

I decided to write about who was probably the most quixotic character in history. His name was Don Quixote. It is also the name a novel written by Miguel de Cervantes in 1605. The Spanish worded novel was translated into English in 1949. It has been translated into more languages than any other work, with the exception of the Bible, but is rarely read.

Don Quixote had several instances of quixotic behavior. Here are just a few: After traveling far, he, his manservant, and his horse stopped at an Inn, which he took to be a Castle. Assuming one of the servants was the Castle Lord, Quixote begged the servant to grant him knighthood. As a joke and with other servants watching and laughing, he was dubbed a 'Knight Errant' as the servant took Quixote's lance and rapped him over the head with it. Don Quixote was delighted. He thought he was now a Knight, but wasn't quite sure what 'Errant' meant!

In another instance, he and his horse charged Holland-style windmills, believing them to be giants with exceptionally long arms. The long, swirling arms of the windmill knocked both Quixote and his horse down. His manservant rode up on his donkey and helped both horse and rider back to their feet. They continued on their way, with the new Knight never looking back and believing he had vanquished big-bodied, long-armed giants.

They arrived at another Inn, which Quixote also believed was a fine Castle. In his fantasy, he told his squire that the daughter of the Castle's Lord came to him. Just as he was engaging her in sweet and amorous parley, a monstrous giant (who actually was the daughter's father) seized him by the arms and gave him so many blows that he was bleeding profusely.

I told you that story so that I could tell you this one: In a high school English Literature class many years ago my teacher decided to punish me for some perceived transgressions. She gave me the book, *Don Quixote*, told me to read it and give a book report on it the following week. I took the book, looked at it, and protesting, I said, "Ma'am, this book has over a thousand pages in it!" She said, "Read fast!" The next week, she called on me saying, "Did you read the book?" I said, "Ma'am, I skimmed it." Gritting her teeth, she said, "If you only skimmed it, how long will your book report be?" Facetiously, I replied, "About three hours." She said, "Sit down!" At the end of the class, I think trying to embarrass me, my teacher again looked at me and said, "I have three questions for you about Don Quixote: "One. What was the name of Quixote's man servant!" My answer: "Sancho Panza." "Two. What was the name of his perceived lady friend from the Inn?" My answer: "Dulcinea." "Three. What was the name his horse?" My answer: "Rocinante." She gave me an 'A' for that English Literature class!