

# The Metaphysical Review 26/27

July 1998



ISBN 0814-8805

Graphic by Ditmar

# The Metaphysical Review 26/27

July 1998

96 pages

## FROM

BRUCE GILLESPIE, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066 Australia  
(ph & fax: 61-3-9419 4797; e-mail: gandc@mira.net)  
Printed by Copy Place, 136 Queen Street, Melbourne VIC 3000.

## HOW TO GET IT

Available for letters of comment (if e-mailed, please also send your postal address), written or graphic contributions, traded publications, donations or subscriptions (\$30 within Australia: write cheques to 'Bruce Gillespie') (overseas airmail: equivalent of US\$40 or £20; please send your country's bank notes, or cheques marked 'Bruce Gillespie' already converted to Australian currency).

## THANKS

This issue was made possible by a generous financial grant from Dr DAVID J. LAKE of Brisbane.  
Many thanks also to the support of ELAINE COCHRANE through recent difficult times and DICK JENSSEN and IRWIN HIRSH for their help in providing the graphics.

## GRAPHICS PHOTOS

Front and back covers: DITMAR.  
CATH ORTLIEB: p. 3 \* DAVID LAKE: pp. 8, 12, 16 \* JOHN LITCHEN: pp. 25, 27, 33 \*  
IRWIN AND WENDY HIRSH: pp. 46, 47, 48, 50, 51, 54 (both), 75 \* GARY HOFF: p. 85

## 3, 83

### I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

THE EDITOR \* BUCK COULSON \* SYDNEY J. BOUNDS \* RICK KENNETT \* BEN INDICK  
\* RALPH ASHBROOK \* STEVE SNEYD \* HAROLD MACLEAN \* JERRY DAVIS \*  
GEORGE TURNER \* DAVE PIPER \* ED MESKYS \* IRWIN HIRSH \* E. D. WEBBER \*  
MARK PLUMMER \* ELIZABETH BILLINGER \* ROSLYN KOPEL GROSS \* wahf

## 8

### ARRIVING HOME

DAVID J. LAKE (includes 'Confession of a Complex Man')

## 25

### PAASCH EYLAND ISLA DE PASCUA ILE DE PAQUE EASTER ISLAND RAPA NUI

JOHN LITCHEN

## 39

### MOUNTAIN RUINS AND ANCIENT WELLS: LONDON—JERUSALEM—HAIFA: MAY 1994

DOUG BARBOUR

## 46

### TWELVE DAYS IN ITALY: A CHAPTER IN THE 1987 GUFF TRIP REPORT

IRWIN HIRSH (includes 'GUFF' and 'Previously Published Chapters of My Trip Report')

## 55

### PEOPLE REMEMBERED

JENNIFER BRYCE \* ALEX SKOVRON \* JOHN BERRY

## 61

### PEOPLE & FABLES

JOHN F. RAINEY \* E. D. WEBBER \* WALT McLAUGHLIN

## 64

### FEATURE LETTERS

MAE STRELKOV \* JAN CREGAN \* MAUREEN KINCAID SPELLER \* SKEL \* JOSEPH  
NICHOLAS \* CY CHAUVIN \* ANDY SAWYER \* GRAHAM STONE

---

# I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

---

## AFTER GEORGE

---

At 10 p.m. on Sunday, 8 June 1997, we arrived home with Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner from visiting John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland at Geelong, to find that our house had been broken into for the first time in the eighteen and a half years we have lived here.

Many *TMR* readers will be familiar with the doomed sinking feeling that follows such a discovery, but it was new to us. Despite all the burglaries that keep happening around Melbourne, somewhere at the back of our mind we believed we were safe; it would never happen to us.

The burglars found it so easy to enter from the back of the house that it was only surprising that we had not been burgled years ago. Our locks were so feeble that there was no sign of forced entry on the back door or window. Because we had left home about midday, we had not left any lights on. Maybe some such precaution might have kept us safe.

When the burglars entered the place, they found that the door to my room was deadlocked. Using the pickaxe they found in the back shed, they smashed through the heavy door to my study, then prised the deadlock out of its socket. Wooden chips were all over the floor. The effort proved worthwhile: they took a bag containing Elaine's very expensive camera equipment, as well as my inexpensive CD player/radio/cassette player. Some jewellery that had been Elaine's grandmother's, were carefully stolen so that it appeared no clothes had been disturbed. From the hall the burglars took the answerphone/fax machine, but luckily Elaine still had the old ordinary phone hidden away. We rang the police immediately.

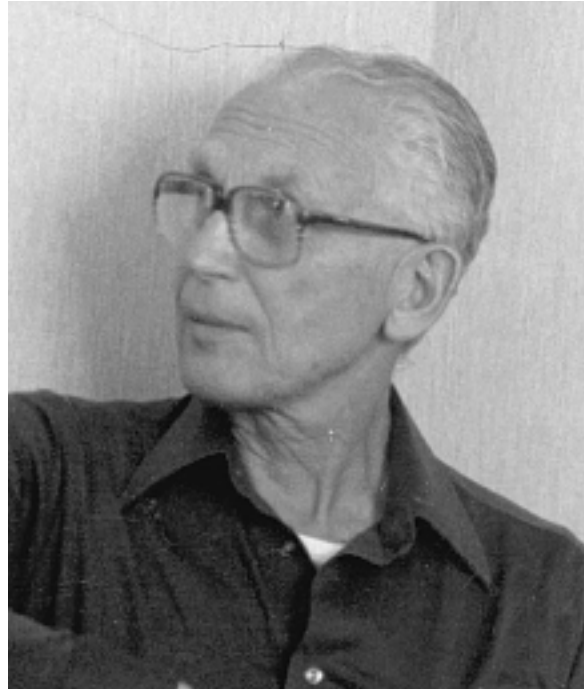
A few minutes later, Judy Buckrich rang to tell us that **George Turner** had died. He had suffered a major stroke on Thursday night, news we had heard only 24 hours before, so we were better prepared than most of George's friends, who had not heard about the stroke. Perhaps George died at the exact time when we were being burgled.

The repercussions of that night will go on for the rest of our lives.

We shouldn't have felt safe. Collingwood, an inner suburb, has been increasingly afflicted by drug-related crime during the last few years. Now we *really* don't feel safe. We've already had a security door put on the back door, and locks on all the windows. Since we've heard dozens of other people's burglary horror stories since 8 June, we've also installed a monitored alarm system. It's all insurance, not guaranteed safety; we will feel afflicted for some time to come. During the weeks after That Night I suffered a few panic attacks, and lost six kilograms. (Later they went back on.)

Although we didn't feel like leaving the house, on Wednesday 11 June we attended George's funeral in St Kilda. It was a cold and overcast day. I'm not sure how many people attended the funeral. Someone mentioned a figure of 100. Many had not been prepared for the news.

I've never thought of George as a lighthearted person, but it's interesting how many amusing tales about him were



George Turner (photo by Cath Ortlieb).

told at the funeral.

**John Bangsund** spoke first. Most of what he said was in the July 1997 *Ansible*. Like John, I remember a heartstopping moment when Leigh Edmonds and I were introduced to Caesar, George's Great Dane. I get the impression that the nearest George's heart came to breaking was when he arrived home in 1970 after a year away to find that Caesar had been poisoned two weeks before. The novel *Transit of Cassidy* is George's tribute to Caesar.

I spoke next. I didn't speak very well, but then, I rarely do. I had found out the day before that I was supposed to say something. At 5 a.m. that morning I lay in bed trying to think of something pithy and pertinent. In the end, I wrote down nothing and took with me a few of George's documents to quote from. Later I remembered all the things I wanted to say.

**Judy Buckrich** is George Turner's biographer; we hope that her book will appear before Aussiecon III in September next year. She addressed her remarks as a letter to George, telling us his life's story. This was the real eulogy; the story of the man's achievement.

**Andy Dunwoodie** spoke last, introducing us to a much more mellow figure than the rest of us have ever met. Through **Jim Dunwoodie**, George's best friend of the last 25 years, George had become part of a large family living in Ballarat. When he moved to Ballarat after his first stroke, George became more than ever part of this other life. 'Uncle George' was how Andy described him; 'a plain man'. George was about as complicated a person as I've ever met, but it was moving to hear that he spent his last few years among people with whom he could be 'plain'. Andy's best story was of George sitting at the dinner table with the rest

of the Dunwoodies. In the middle of the conversation, there was always a point when he would *disagree* with whoever was speaking. We know the feeling, Andy.

The proceedings from the funeral were published by the Australian Science Fiction Foundation in its magazine *The Instrumentality*; available for \$10 subscription from PO Box 215, Forest Hill VIC 3131 (or e-mail: mortlieb@vic-net.net.au).

After the funeral, Jim drew me aside. 'I think I should tell you that you're a beneficiary of George's will.' Me? Why? In what way?

Judy, John and Sally, Elaine and I went for lunch afterwards. On the way Elaine and I had bumped into **Stephen Campbell**, whom we had seen last about ten years ago. He looked well, but said he had no permanent address. It was that sort of day.

We went to Scheherazade, the last of the great old St Kilda Jewish restaurants. I made the mistake of ordering chicken schnitzel, while the others were sensible enough to order nothing more filling than chicken soup.

Around the table we told lots more stories about George, and speculated about who would be George's literary executor. George had told John twenty years ago that *he* would be, but hadn't mentioned the matter again.

Next day, while we were still wading through insurance assessors, police and repairers and trying to do some of the piled-up freelance work that pays the bills, Jim rang from Ballarat. George had made me his literary executor. How could this be? What does a literary executor *do*?

It's not even as if I ever felt particularly close to George. I had come to believe that there was a wall that George put between himself and everybody, and nobody crossed that wall. I didn't even try to cross it. George was one of the strongest father figures in my life, with all the disadvantages of that relationship as well as the advantages. I was also his publisher, first as publisher of a large percentage of his best reviews and critical articles, and then, with Carey and Rob in Norstrilia Press, as publisher of his only anthology of other people's writing, *The View from the Edge*, and the nearest he would permit himself to an autobiography, *In the Heart or in the Head: An Essay in Time Travel*. I was the only founder member of the Nova Mob who still attends today, and George once dedicated a book to the Nova Mob. And Elaine and I sent George the best of our LPs when we replaced them with CDs.

And although George knew my faults well enough, he knew that Elaine's strengths balanced my weaknesses.

But apart from that? I've looked for that computer file or scrap of paper that might explain George's reasoning in making me one of the only two beneficiaries of his will. (Jim, of course, is the other.) Nothing there. Even the Gillespie section in George's letter file is empty. It seems he's found a way of running the rest of my life. Now I have to guess what he had in mind for its direction.

A week and a day after the funeral, Jim and Andy brought down George's remaining literary papers from Ballarat. There are few of them. The rest, the carbons of everything George wrote before he bought the computer, were already with Judy, who had been consulting them for the biography. I had hoped the manuscripts of the early novels would be with Judy, but they're not. George travelled lightly throughout his life.

I looked through George's computer files, and found that he had been using a long-disappeared program called Ezy, which is a cutdown version of WordStar. Since Elaine and I are the last people alive who use WordStar for DOS,

I've had no trouble to retrieving George's unpublished manuscripts. No finished jewels, unfortunately, except the novel that's currently travelling America, but there's the first third of what would have been George's best novel since *The Sea and Summer (Drowning Towers)*. I sent everything useful to Cherry Weiner, George's American agent. Jack Dann and Janeen Webb have bought the unfinished piece for their forthcoming gigantic collection of SF and fantasy by Australian writers. I hope to publish a collection of George's non-fiction in time for Aussiecon II. I welcome suggestions for must-include items.

The odd thing about becoming the literary ghost of George is that his voice to me now rings louder and stronger in my head than ever before. Some of his generalising articles have dated badly, but many of famous pieces, in which he delves into particular works or authors, are as true now as when they were written.

Since George's funeral we've been working seven days a week, and waiting for cheques to appear, and wondering when the next burglary will take place (we know that a car was frightened away from the back lane that night; probably it was Them coming back for more). There's a knife-wielding street robber or robbers roaming Fitzroy.

Suddenly life seems dim. As 1997 ground on, and turned into 1998, it grew dimmer.

My income, which was regular and adequate until March 1997, has diminished, and sometimes almost disappeared, although Elaine has been very busy.

The buildings on both sides were sold in October last year. Both have been gutted and rebuilt ever since, with much skirling of saws and jacking of jack hammers.

In January a container-carrying truck was diverted down our side street because of sewerage work on the main thoroughfare. It went straight through the overhead electricity supply cable. A large section of bricks were ripped from our side wall. We suspect the driver did not even know that he had snapped the cable. Fortunately the sewerage workers saw the incident from Wellington Street, put witch's hats around the downed live wire, and took the number of the container. One of them rang the electricity company's emergency service. Fortunately the crew and our electrician could reconnect power that day, but it was two months before the section of wall was rebuilt and a permanent cable restored.

If George was our guardian angel, his absence is obvious and much lamented. We're waiting for the resurrection, George; surely you can do it.

Since George's death, many friends have been afflicted suddenly and shockingly.

**Ian Gunn**, perhaps the brightest star of Melbourne fandom for many years, learned that he was suffering from cancerous growths in various parts of his body. He had just turned thirty-nine. He underwent a rigorous treatment of chemotherapy, which altered his appearance startlingly and stopped him drawing for some time. Early this year he and Karen Pender Gunn held a Victory Dinner for well-wishers, but the cry of victory was premature. As I write, Ian has just finished another round of chemotherapy, even more ferocious than the first. Despite these difficulties he and Karen still managed to hold Basicon, last year's Australian national convention, and produce quite a few fanzines.

**Allan Bray**, stalwart South Australian fan, was diagnosed as having a brain tumour at about the same time as we heard the news about Gunny. After surgery, he seemed to be recovering well. Eleven years ago he met and married

Lesley, and they accomplished all sorts of things that Allan never would have tried on his own, such as working towards a university degree. He and Lesley had re-enrolled at university for 1998. But the tumour returned, and Allan died in late April. He was a valued member of ANZAPA during the 1980s, and a mainstay of South Australian fandom. I'm glad I was able to meet him for the first time in many years when he travelled to ANZAPACON in Melbourne a few years ago.

Earlier in the year, **Seth Goldberg**, Los Angeles fan, died of a sudden heart attack. He was in his early forties. Seth did not write a great deal, but he accomplished much. Because of him, I joined FAPA and stayed there for ten years. It still seems unbelievable that he's gone.

Several Australian fans, several of them younger than I am, also suffered heart problems during the last year. **Eric Lindsay**, of all people, suffered a heart attack in January. He's thin, fit, eats the right things, and is the same age as I am. He's recovered very nicely, but . . .

I haven't heard how **Nick Stathopoulos** is getting on. He suffered a heart attack late last year. He was forty at the time. Although we've met a few times, I know little about him except that he's a superb artist, very much in demand, and hardly ever turns down jobs. I'm told that he has at last consented to reduce his workload.

**James Allen**, who is also forty, also suffered a heart attack early in the year. Jocko, as he's known, has been a stalwart member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club for many years, and a reader of my magazines for even more years than that.

**Grant Stone** from Western Australia has suffered a minor stroke. That's what we were told. As with Nick, Grant is great company on the few occasions when we meet, but I know little about him except that he is always frantically busy. Perhaps there are advantages in being as lazy as I am.

Elaine and I have found ourselves concerned about, then grieving for a number of people we have known for many years, but perhaps who are not well known to *TMR* readers.

We have been close to **Jennifer Bryce** for many years: when she was with John Foyster; in the years after they separated; and especially in recent years, as she and **Graeme Foyster**, John's brother, grew closer and closer, then moved to Woodend in country Victoria. Although we had had little to do with Graeme, we gradually got to know him during recent years, as he became more and more ill. Jennifer and Graeme married in March 1997, which was a sun-filled occasion held in the huge garden of Wildwood, the Woodend house. We found ourselves travelling back to Woodend in October for Graeme's funeral. As Jenny said in her eulogy, she had already done all her grieving. In December she discovered that she would have to be undergo an operation for breast cancer. She had another operation in January, and has been undergoing chemotherapy since then.

In the last week of December, **John C. Foyster**, father of Graeme, John and Myfanwy, died suddenly at the age of eighty-seven. The list of his achievements, as related at the funeral, was extraordinary. A Presbyterian minister and scholar, after retirement he became one of the architects of the new Uniting Church (Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist) of Australia. A day before his death he was reading Mann's *Doctor Faustus* because it was easier to hold in bed than Gorbachev's *Memoirs*.

Also late last year we heard that **Elizabeth Darling** was very ill, so she and **Peter** had to cancel their annual At Home

At the Farm. Older Melbourne fans will remember Elizabeth's stimulating contributions to conventions during the 1960s and the 1970s, including her immortal line to us all: 'Why bother?' The last we heard, Elizabeth was recovering well.

**David Lake**, a chapter of whose autobiography appears in this issue, has been constantly beside his wife Marguerite as she has become increasingly afflicted by Parkinson's disease. I met David and Marguerite only once, in the late 1970s, but through his letters David has remained one of my greatest supporters. His letters at this difficult time have been very moving.

In January we lost our wonderful oldest cat **TC**. He was eighteen years old, and could barely walk. The fur had disappeared from his belly, and he stayed alive during two winters only because he lived on the electric cat mat that Geoff Roderick lent us. But as he became more and more decrepit, and his hearing and most of his sight faded, he seemed to become more and more cheerful. He ate well, and purred. He was still Boss Cat, who could terrify Sophie by merely looking at her. He was fond of Polly, the youngest cat, to such an extent that he would sometimes let her share the electric cat mat. But one morning in January he could no longer stand, and we took him on his final trip to the vet's. A month later, Elaine introduced a new cat, Violet, who is still not getting on very well with Polly. Cat wars are no fun.

If during the last year I've been afraid to ask friends 'How are you?' in case they tell us, I've had the same trepidation about opening the latest issue of *Locus*, *File 770* or *Ansible*. The news from overseas hasn't been much good.

I was deeply shocked to hear that **Margaret Aldiss** died recently from cancer. I met her only once, but once was enough to show me why she was one of the most valued convention attendees in Britain. She was also Brian's greatest supporter, and his bibliographer: just one of those people you cannot imagine as not alive any more.

**Judy Merrill** seemed set to go on forever, but even she has succumbed. In general, I owe Judy for all sorts of things: for her fiction during the 1940s and 1950s; for helping to promote and bring into existence the New Wave in SF during the 1950s and 1960s; for the donation that led to the setting up of the Merrill Collection (originally the Spaced-Out Library) in Toronto during the 1970s. In particular, my fondest memory is of nattering half the night with my arms around Judy on one side and Kate McLean on the other side of me on the steps of the Royal York Hotel in Toronto during Torcon in September 1973. This was after Judy offered to take me to 'the best Japanese restaurant in Toronto'. One catch: I'd never been to a Japanese restaurant before. We entered a tiny café-like place with formica-covered tables. I can't remember the food, as I suffered from a crippling social condition: I had never before been to a Japanese or a Chinese restaurant, and had no idea how to handle chopsticks. Embarrassment all round, but neither Judy nor Kate minded a bit. (This is a *long* while ago, I suddenly realise, but I'm still not too good at wielding chopsticks.) A few days later Judy interviewed me for Canadian radio: my one moment of national fame. I lost track of both Judy and Kate afterward; it was my own fault, although I suspect Judy changed address often without sending out CoA cards. But she must have remembered me, because Lorna Toolis and the other staff of the Merrill Collection keep in touch.

I had heard that **Jackie Causgrove** had been very ill from

lung cancer for about a year. But the fact that her death was expected did not make it easier to take. Jackie Franke, as she was then, once rescued me from a very difficult fix. In late September 1973 I was standing at the counter at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, ten minutes to go before boarding my aircraft back to Australia, with my luggage already on the plane, when I found that my ticket would not allow me to go home to Australia from USA. I had to go to Britain first, or pay \$700 on the spot to convert my ticket. I couldn't afford the \$700 but I had just enough money to stay in Britain briefly on the way back to Australia. I wandered around O'Hare in a daze for half an hour, then found in my diary the only fannish phone number I had for the Chicago area: that of Jackie and Wally Franke. I rang Jackie, who immediately drove 40 miles to rescue me. I had only my hand luggage with me. American Airlines assured me that they could retrieve my main luggage, but it would take a week to travel to Sydney and back. Jackie and Wally found me some spare clothes and put me up for that week. We visited several Chicago fans, including the Passevoys. Jackie drove us to Barrington to visit Gene and Rosemary Wolfe. The next weekend the Frankses and I drove across the vast plain to Bob Tucker's to stay the night. It was a great week. My luggage came back. I continued my trip, and eventually spent four weeks in Britain. In later years Jackie stopped writing to me, for reasons I'm not sure of. She and Wally split up, and somewhere in the late seventies she began living with Dave Locke, who was with her until she died of lung cancer on 15 May.

Not only is **Bill Rotsler** gone, but it was unpleasant to hear that he had a difficult last couple of years. The obits say he was seventy-one, but it's hard to think of him as anybody but the fifty-year-old cartoonist, who seemed no older than thirty, who visited Australia as a DUFF winner in 1977. For a splendid tribute, see the latest issue of *Trap Door*. The bright lights are going out all over fandom.

Recently I've been shocked on hearing that our friends' twenty-five-year-old marriages are ending. Nothing we can do about it, of course, but it was disturbing to hear within a week about the recent splitup of **Sally Yeoland** and **John Bangsund** and the December splitup of **Lee Harding** and **Irene Pagram**.

I have vivid memories of 1972, when both couples got together. From Canberra came fanzines and letters of delirious happiness from John. In Melbourne there were amazing scenes when Lee, then aged in his mid thirties, and Irene, then aged seventeen, became entangled with each other and with my life, which was doing odd things at the time. Two years later, I attended the welcome for John and Sally at John's mother's place. In 1982, Elaine and I went to Lee and Irene's wedding in a garden in Ferntree Gully, where we blissed out in October sunshine. Maddy was born, and we've watched her growing rapidly. Through the seventies and eighties Irene and Lee endured some hard times that would have battered anybody's marriage. We saw Irene and Lee together most recently at George Turner's funeral. We didn't hear from them for more than six months. Race Mathews tracked down Lee, who told him about the December breakup, and about Lee's heart attack in late February. Lee, who has been fitted with a stent in his aorta, is feeling much better. He's living at Rosebud, and Irene is still living in Echuca. Maddy is trying to commute between them.

I don't know what to say to Sally and John, apart from what I've said in person. Most of my memories of their

marriage are happy, sometimes sublimely so: wonderful meals at a variety of houses in Melbourne and Geelong; many years of Friday-night gatherings at Eastern Inn; tremendous support they have given to Elaine and me in times of trouble (especially when Elaine's parents and my father died); inspiration throughout. But we also realise there have been problems for many years, usually involving money, that seemed insoluble to them and incomprehensible to us, culminating in their bankruptcy a few years ago. As their marriage survived bankruptcy, we assumed they could go on forever together. Or perhaps this is the actual fallout from the bankruptcy. I just hope we don't lose touch with either or both of them.

Best wishes to Sally and John, and Irene and Lee and Maddy. What more can I say?

'When will something *good* happen?' we keep saying to each other. Suddenly we realise that we've been too complacent, too lucky for too long; that the whole world has gone dingy while we've not been looking. Everybody, we find, has a worse story than ours; my real difficulties over the last year or so have been making an income (after the arrangement with Macmillan finished) and rescuing files after computer hard disks go down. The shit keeps hitting the fans.

## Glims

---

Surely *something* good has happened since George died? Not much, and not often, but even a Gillespie must admit to seeing the odd glim among the mighty black clouds.

Most of the glims have been complete surprises.

For instance, the letter almost dropped from my twitching hand when I read that the Aussiecon III Bidding Committee had asked me to be the Fan Guest of Honour in September 1999.

My first thought was: why me? Why not (put your own name on the dotted line)?

My second thought was: what the hell will I say in my speech? Since then a well-meaning fan has told me that the Fan Guest of Honour Speech is the great under-attended item of a world convention. I hope.

I turned fifty in February 1997. This should not have been an occasion for rejoicing, especially when you consider the deterioration that followed my fortieth birthday, but I decided to do a bit of rejoicing anyway. Elaine and I were already frequent, satisfied customers of Mount Everest, a Nepalese restaurant in Collingwood. I booked the whole restaurant and sent out about 140 invitations, hoping that no more than 100 people would accept. Ninety-nine people turned up at one time or another during the evening. Thank you, everybody. It was a bit too warm in the restaurant, and it was a bit crowded, but everybody found somebody to talk to, and unlikely friendships were made. Best of all, the Everest brought out mountains of great food. There was at least one interstate representation (John Foyster) and an international delegate (Christina Lake). It was the last time that most of us saw or spoke to George Turner. The toasts were made by my sister Jeanette and my friend Frances Wade (who held her own fiftieth birthday at the same restaurant a few months later, where we met Graeme Stone's son, but that's another story . . .), but they were one-upped by Lama, the owner/chef of the restaurant, who presented me with a Nepalese *kris* (ceremonial dagger). A few people disobeyed my request not to bring presents, and I can't help thanking them for their disobedience.



A well-wisher, **David Lake**, sent me the money to guarantee the publication of these issues of *The Metaphysical Review*. Help on this scale has never happened before. Then I had to find the time to finish producing the monster(s).

A month or so ago, **Irwin Hirsh** told me about Kodak's FlashPix CD system, which has eased the difficulties of including photos in *TMR*. I sent to Kodak 66 fabulous fannish photos for scanning onto CD. The cost, including the cost of the CD itself, was \$74. If I want more done, I can send back the CD, plus the extra photos. Each CD can fit 100. The images themselves need to be read by Kodak's own software, which is installed from the CD, but each image can be unzipped into a TIF or BMP. Not that I'm ever going to run 66 photos here or in *TMR*, but at least now they are available for anybody who's interested.

**Merv Binns** and **Helena Roberts** got married. Merv, at the age of sixty-two, married for the first time. One of the founder members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, he remained a stalwart bachelor during all the years he kept the Club going, supplying books to us while he was manager of McGill's Newsagency, then owner of Space Age Books. He went broke, but was able to support his father during his final illness.

Helena joined the Melbourne Science Fiction Club in the 1950s. She married a photographer named Kelvin Roberts, who died about ten years ago. Merv and Helena seem to have been gravitating towards each other ever since. Although it was held on the hottest late March day ever (summer was supposed to have ended weeks before), the wedding was very enjoyable. The ceremony took place on the front lawn of Merv and Helena's house in Carnegie, followed by a wedding banquet in the back garden, with sumptuous amounts of food supplied by contributions from friends. As an example of how to hold a wedding when you're broke, it couldn't be better. Helena was definitely radiant, and Merv was seen to smile, except he came over all emotional as he told us how much it meant to him that his mother and father could not be there.

Recently Elaine and I went bush. Sort of. **John and Louise Gauci** were our very quiet neighbours, in the office building on the corner of Keele and Budd Streets, from the late 1980s until October last year. They set up their company, LJ Productions, to produce children's TV series, and had great success with *Sugar and Spice*, *Pugwall* and *Pugwall's Summer*. However, they've been underemployed during the last few years, and had to sell the building next door. At first we had little to do with them, although Louise always admired our cats, especially Monty and Sophie. When we got Sophie, she was the mirror image of LJ, the office cat. Sophie spread out wider and wider, so the resemblance ended, but Sophie often stared at LJ through their front door. Louise expressed interest when Elaine began to grow treelets for the Tree Project, so Elaine offered to try any seed Louise could provide from the 'block at Launching Place'. Eventually, six months after we stopped being neighbours, John and Louise took us to see the fabled block at Launching Place.

For some reason, I thought Launching Place was way off in netherest Gippsland. But it's part of the Yarra Valley; houses and small towns line the road all the way out beyond Seville to Launching Place. John and Louise said that the drought had been obvious at the block, but recent rain made it seem very green when we arrived there. The headwaters of the Yarra form one edge of the block. The rest is mainly paddock, which is now turning into a tree plantation, thanks to the many trees bought by John and Louise

or donated by Elaine. There are also two long rows of grapevines, and a large patch of the dreaded blackberries. The only living quarters is a tin shed, which contains a small tractor and some camping implements. Anything else John and Louise leave there, such as tools, is stolen. Many fishing enthusiasts and walkers probably walk through the block, down the bank of Yarra, without realising they are travelling through private land.

John and Louise are able to get away from it all because they haven't taken it all with them. They say the pleasure of the place is simply getting away from the city for the weekend. They are clearing the blackberries, harvesting the grapes in season, gathering up the rubbish that the fishing fraternity leave behind, and generally keeping the place green and alive.

Since I can't put a name to each tree in the valley, John and I stayed behind while Elaine and Louise went to inspect the treelets. John was a producer/director for the ABC until the early 1980s, and worked on such famous mini-series as *I Can Jump Puddles* and *Power Without Glory*. He knows lots of good gossip about the TV and film industry.

After giving us a barbecue lunch, John and Louise then drove us to the other side of the city to inspect their new studio. Although they could not keep up the bank payments on the Keele Street place, selling it enabled them to buy a double-storey house in a quiet suburban cul de sac in Yarraville. The house has plenty of room for their current scale of operations, and came complete with its own house cat, Booby. Yarraville itself is unique: Melbourne's best-kept secret. No main road runs through the shopping centre, which consists of several narrow streets lined by a wide variety of useful and trendy little shops. I can't think of another little patch of Melbourne that is so self-consciously picturesque. Perhaps the secret of Yarraville is already out: John and Louise said that almost every other house is being renovated at the moment.

Back to Keele Street, and the realisation that Wellington Street now seems horribly noisy, even on a Sunday. Ah well . . . but at least we did leave our house for a whole day. Who knows? Maybe one day we'll get back to Mount Buffalo Chalet, or even travel interstate. No, I don't believe *that*.

## Coulson exudes charm

**BUCK COULSON**  
2677W-500N, Hartford City IN 47348 USA

What have we been doing? Going to conventions, mostly: fourteen in 1995, counting a gaming convention that we went to one day because Juanita wanted to talk to the TSR editor. (She still wants to talk to the TSR editor; it seems to be a semi-permanent affliction if you're trying to write books for them.) Made a few new friends and acquaintances, including a professor of English at Far Eastern University in Vladivostok. Several young fem-fans told Juanita what a nice man I am. (That ought to surprise some of your readers.) Problem is that they don't tell me, they tell Juanita, and then she corners me and wants to know 'Just how nice were you!?' What can I say? I can't help it if I exude charm.

We've had two of our normal three Christmas celebrations. Son Bruce, with his wife, daughter and mistress (young women think he's a nice man, too) were here 22-24 December. On 25 December, we visited the Miesels in Indianapolis. The DeWeeses were coming

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 83

---

# ARRIVING HOME

by David J. Lake

---



David and Marguerite (Rita) Lake. The last picture taken of them together, at a Brisbane restaurant in 1991.

Here are the four central chapters of *Memoirs of a Mystical Masochist: A Complex Case*, David Lake's autobiography/confession/self-analysis.

DAVID LAKE is best known to *TMR* readers as the writer of a number of SF novels that appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They include *Walkers on the Sky* (winner of the Ditmar Award) and *The Fourth Hemisphere*. In the early 1980s he published two Young Adults' novels, one of which, *The Man Who Loved Morlocks*, won the Ditmar Award.

Until he retired, David Lake was a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Queensland. David Lake's academic writing includes major work on H. G. Wells, including the definitive editions of *First Men on the Moon* and *The Invisible Man* (OUP, New York) and *Darwin and Doom: H. G. Wells and 'The Time Machine'* (Nimrod Publications).

These achievements, however, occupy a small part of Lake's autobiography, which is mainly concerned with his deepest and least public experiences. The major events of the autobiography are internal; they spring from Lake's experience of growing up British in India, then spending much of the first forty years of his life travelling between conflicting cultures. The unique perspective provided by this 'colonial experience' has given him a deeply troubled view of himself and the world. Part of this experience can be summed up in what Lake calls his Complex. This psychological state, which Lake has written about for the *Journal of Abnormal Psychiatry*, is summarised in the boxed excerpt.



## FURTHER INDIA (1) AND PRETTY PEOPLE

The new headmaster of Sherrardswood School, 1957–58, was a dour Scot who was determined to push our ‘progressive’ school in the Gradgrind direction — in the primary section, back to the three Rs. Fewer ‘activities’; what was important was to push our kids through the 11-plus exam, which would give them entry to the state grammar school system. We primary staff thought we were doing enough already in that direction. A grim situation, and a grim grey man to work under. (We didn’t know it then, but he may have been grim because he was shortly to die.)

In the course of 1958, we all resigned. This jolt unsettled me nicely. Was I to moulder into middle age as a schoolmaster in England, living with my mother? By now, I really wanted out. I heard of jobs abroad teaching adults under the Colombo Plan — a form of British cultural foreign aid. There were two-year stints, with decent salaries, in India and the Far East. I applied to the British Council, who ran the scheme; but they were slow in finding me anything. Meanwhile I needed a new job for the year 1958–59. After several applications, I got a post at St Albans Boys’ Grammar — just a cycle ride from Welwyn. Perhaps unfortunately; for now I would still be living with my mother, and doing the dishes.

As soon as I had secured the job, that summer of ’58 I went for a month to Europe again: Austria and Greece, with Yugoslavia seen on a two-day train journey in between. I had the languages: adequate German, rather less ancient and modern Greek (both self-taught), even a few words of Serbo-Croat. My diary notes many pretty girls, and one Austrian girl-child in spotless village costume — and barefoot. As for Serbian peasants: ‘more than half of the women and children’ went barefoot. I also jotted down ‘a sense of great relief’ as the train passed from austere Communist Yugoslavia into comparatively rich capitalist Greece, where you could buy, at the stations, anything you wanted. (From that day on, I knew that Communism didn’t work.)

I was by now a devout Mozartian, so my first stop was Salzburg. From there, Athens; then to most of the great Classical sites of mainland Greece, by local buses and trains. At Mycenae, in the dark vault of the Tomb of Agamemnon I sang Sarastro’s aria ‘O Isis und Osiris’. I have a mediocre bass voice, but that vault has marvellous acoustics: better than a bathroom. I swam naked like the ancient Spartans in the Eurotas (which had only a few inches of water; but some modern Spartan boys were swimming there naked too). At Olympia I swam, slightly more clad, in lovely Alpheios (mentioned by Milton; Coleridge’s ‘Alph’). Then, on my way back, I ‘did’ Vienna and Innsbruck. At the latter place, I saw and heard *Zauberflöte* twice, and once *Cosi*.

But Innsbruck’s chief attraction was H., the Austrian woman whom I had left the previous year at Perpignan. Her mother lived just outside Innsbruck, was in poor health, and H. was visiting her. But H. was now cool to me, making her mother an excuse to see me only infrequently. Ah, that door I hadn’t opened . . .

So I went home, and took up the St Albans job. I liked that job, on the whole, especially teaching the keen twelve-year-olds who had just passed their 11-plus and felt success ahead of them. I liked my colleagues too, though they were all men, whereas my previous primary colleagues had all been women. But one man belonged to the wrong union — *Schoolmasters* — and believed women teachers should have lower pay than men. I didn’t hate him, but thought him benighted.

During this time I took part in a read-through produc-

tion of Pagnol’s Play *Topaze*, in the original French. I was *Topaze*. My fluent French would soon stand me in good stead.

For this job did not last long. Early in 1959, the British Council came up trumps, offering me a two-year English lectureship at the University of Saigon, South Vietnam — and I jumped at the chance. I left the St Albans school after only two terms. The headmaster gave me a nasty quarter of an hour about this; but finally he did the decent thing — supplied me with an adequate reference.

My birthday, 26 March, fell that year on Maundy Thursday, which must have been about my last day as a school teacher. A rather fraught birthday, which I did not celebrate. Thirty years old, and still a male virgin! I mourned my misspent and unspent youth. But at least, at last, now I was taking steps. I did not know it yet, but over the next five years I was to have a belated youth, perhaps the most exciting time of my life. Overtly, I would be transformed into an extrovert, and a man about three towns, Saigon, Bangkok, and London. And my life would move from utter failure to moderate success — marriage, a child, a career as an academic and a writer. At thirty, I was a nothing; at forty, I would be a father, a published author, and a poet.

How grateful I am now to that dying Scotsman, who got me out of my groove!

I must stress that in 1959 — indeed, for another four or five years — I planned none of this. It is not my way to make long-term plans. I merely take paths that open options. That was what I did when I read English at Cambridge in 1949, and when I went to Saigon in 1959. At these points, I was hardly at all ambitious. I merely wanted a pleasant life in the near future; and Saigon, away from mother, looked like being more pleasant than Welwyn with.

And so, about the middle of 1959, I left Europe again for the East. (My mother, soon after I left, left also, to live for some years in Bangalore.)

For Vietnam, around this time, read Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, which I read *sur place*, and found wonderfully accurate. But when I went, the country was between wars: the French war had ended in 1954, and the American war did not really become overt until about 1963. The country was now divided at the 17th parallel of latitude between the North (Communist, capital Hanoi) and the South, non-Communist, capital Saigon, under a Catholic ‘president’ (read, dictator), Ngo Dinh Diem. (The last name, which was the personal name, was pronounced ‘Ziem’ in the more official Hanoi dialect, or ‘Yiem’ in the demotic Saigon one.) I did not know it at the time, but this divided arrangement was in violation of the Geneva Accords of 1954. There should have been a nationwide election about 1955 — but that never took place, because ‘our’ side (the Americans) knew the Communists would win. The Saigon regime were mostly emigrées from the North, Vietnam was essentially one country, and the later war, 1963–75, would be a civil war. (One of my Viet anti-Communist friends had a brother, rather famous, on the other side.) While I was in South Vietnam, from 1959 to 1961, the Viet Cong guerrillas were infiltrating the countryside, but there were few reported incidents, and we travelled unworried everywhere by road. I was going to a doomed, but apparently quiet land.

These were still the days of sea travel. Now in mid 1959 I made another delightful voyage, my first long one as an adult, on the French liner *Vietnam*. I boarded at Marseilles,

## CONFESSION OF A COMPLEX MAN

I was born in 1929, and raised mainly in India, of British parents but with Indian servants. I experienced no overt sex in childhood, and was ignorant even of the ‘facts of life’ until early adolescence. When I reached puberty near the age of fourteen, sex manifested to me as a racist–masochist masturbation fantasy. The exciting idea was *being done unto*, not doing — and half against my will. And this was the only sex I had for well over ten years.

The essence of my fantasy/Complex is:

- *Submissive barefoot White slave-girls of dark men.* There is a tension here: the victim must submit, but not *too* willingly. In fact, there is a scale here, between ‘harder’ and ‘softer’ fantasies, which I will examine below.
  - *Barefoot.* When I was young, I did not know that in America, Australia and parts of Europe young White people went barefoot for preference. (I first saw that in Austria, when I was adult, and was amazed.) For me, the bare foot:
    - is in contact with *dirty* soil (humiliation).
    - is easily injured from below, by sharp stones, heat, cold (masochism).
    - can be trampled on from above (vulnerable, so sweetly pathetic).
    - suggests nakedness, and going to bed.
- Bare feet, in my fantasies, are the essential nakedness. In Australia, to which I have now migrated, young White girls often go barefoot, which has given me many a thrill. I like a woman’s breasts, but her feet, if they are shapely, can be still more exciting. My wife, at 68, still has beautiful white shapely feet. When I kiss them, I often stiffen with delight.
- *White.* The victim must be ‘White’ — not quite the same thing as ‘white’. She must be essentially, culturally, *one of us*. A girl of mixed blood will do if she is culturally European. On the other hand, not even the whitest Chinese or Japanese will do (and some of them are snow-white, and beautiful) — because she is not *one of us*. It is also useless for my purposes to imagine a White girl who is ‘taken over’ by brown natives at a very early age — because then the girl forgets she was ever White, and is in fact essentially a Native with a white skin. The girl must also be a Christian, at least nominally, and her captors will usually be non-Christian.
- *Slave-girls.* Outright slavery is not always essential: softer scenarios will have victims ‘taken over’ and dominated in other ways. But slavery or quasi-slavery is of the essence. Young boys can figure as victims, but girls are obviously better. A mother and her young son make a nice pair of victims.
- *Dark men.* Essential. Muslims as captors make for a

‘harder’ fantasy, usually, than pagans. African blacks also make for ‘hard’ fantasy, because they are barbarous, and *black* is a deeper degree of darkness than *brown*. But black South Indian Hindus will not make for a very hard fantasy, so really what matters is religion and culture.

Most of my scenarios are little historical novels. That sort of process led me to write actual captivity novels — including two full-length ones, which I never attempted to get published. I have not made much use of pornography for my Complex, since I can both draw and write my own.

For me there is a sharp distinction between *love* and *lust*. I believe this is true for many men. Love (sexual love) impels you to hug and kiss. Lust comes in when you complete the act. Love includes benevolence toward the other person. Lust is impersonal: any body will do. For most men, lust is aggressive. If any fantasy is involved, it is rape fantasy.

I am like other men as to *love*. When I hug a woman (sometimes also a child), I often get an erection. The emotion is joy in the other person’s being. If it is inappropriate to go further, I can easily stop at this point.

But if I go on, and go to bed with a woman, I have immediate difficulty. The transition to lust seldom puts me into the aggressive mode. I want to *give way*, and often do. Consequently, after ten or fifteen years of masochist fantasies, when I first tried to ‘make love’ to women, I had humiliating failures.

Gradually I learned a technique like ‘shifting gears’. Love would take me as far as penetration; after that, to reach orgasm, I had to switch into one of my masochist fantasies.

Marguerite has told me that the first time I made love to her, I did all right except that I didn’t reach orgasm; and at the time I said that I preferred it that way. I don’t remember this, but it sounds plausible. Obviously, I tried to be ‘good’ — do without fantasy.

I soon found that I couldn’t — not if I wanted orgasm too. So, during intercourse, I used fantasies. sometimes these might be classed as ‘sadistic’; but only by imagining my partner as the ‘victim’. Essentially, the fantasies remain what they always were: racist–masochist.

The difficulty of ‘shifting gears’ undermined my confidence in my late twenties. I wanted to have a normal life, but I found that, when it came to the point, I was often impotent. That is how my fantasies nearly ruined my happiness.

— David J. Lake, February 1998

and went Suez, Aden, Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Saigon: about three weeks. I travelled first class (fare paid by Britain), and it was all very smart. The head waiter once reprimanded me when I didn't wear a tie at dinner. I rather liked the people in Tourist Class, but some of our Firsts were OK too. I quickly made international friends, especially in the bar. There was a military officer who had fought in all the recent wars for France, and was going out again to Indo-China, as he said, 'until I get myself killed at last *pour la République*'.

I remember one conversation in the bar with a French schoolteacher who spoke elegant English:

He: Do you know what happens, when a man is hanged, by the modern method? As his neck breaks, he ejaculates. Orgasms.

I: What!? Does it *often* happen?

He: It *always* happens. A sweet death.

I have never checked this, but I expect he was right. I have an excellent memory for anything atrocious.

I spent much of my time, that voyage, lying in a deck chair, looking at the 'wine-faced sea' (*oinopa ponton*), and improving my Ancient Greek by the Schliemann method — reading the *Iliad* in a parallel Greek and English text. I got through it, too; perhaps I cheated a bit on the long battles.

By the time we reached Aden, I had made friends with one pleasant family who were useful to me later. Eddie, Dutch, worked in Singapore for the Shell Oil Company; his wife Anneke was half Dutch, half Indonesian, and their two young boys were handsome lads, one-quarter Indonesian, a pretty mixture.

When we reached Ceylon, some of us went on the usual day excursion by car from Colombo up to Kandy. I liked that country, the first Buddhist one I had seen. It was like India, but the people looked neater, and not so poor.

Little did I know it, but on that trip at Perideniya, near Kandy, I must have passed close to the woman I was to marry.

The ship sailed up the Saigon River, a meandering waterway in a vast flat plain, and moored at the docks of the city. It was hot: at 11 degrees North, the climate was almost equatorial, with usually a fine morning but a thunderstorm in the afternoon. I expected a city something like Calcutta.

And then, as soon as I got clear of the ship, I was amazed.

Saigon was not dirty, not too overcrowded, and most of the people could read. The street vendors, when trade was slack, were *reading newspapers*. Vietnam had a culture strongly influenced by China — it was the most purely Chinese segment of Indo-China (whereas Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma had really half-and-half cultures). The people were of the Oriental race, like brown Chinese, and their language was a tonal one; but luckily it was now written in a slightly modified version of the Roman alphabet, so that literacy came easy to them. It came, also, because like the Chinese they valued education. They were Asians, certainly, and their peasants worked in rice fields, but they altogether avoided nakedness, and they had aspirations. In the city, most men wore European dress: shirts and long trousers and shoes. The women wore wonderful long high-collared jackets, long white silk trousers, and smart shoes.

It struck me as a revelation that Further India (the ancient term for this region) was a much better part of Asia than India itself. If only, now, I had been brought up in one of *these* countries. (My children's fantasy novel, *The Changelings of Chaan* (1985) would be based on a wish-fulfilment of this kind, 'Chaan' being mainly Thailand plus Bali.)

And the women were beautiful — many of them. The men were handsome. Both sexes seemed to age very slowly, and I always underestimated ages. Once, when I had had lunch with a New Zealand family, I said, 'That's a nice teenage girl you have working for you.'

They: What teenage girl?

I: Your Vietnamese maid.

They: She is twenty-four.

There was no barrier between me and these people. I was not an invader of their country. The former colonial French went about, some of them, wearing shorts and long stockings, like the British in India, but I always wore long trousers, to distance myself from the colonialists and be like the locals.

I was met at the Saigon docks by Arthur Marlowe, an Englishman who had settled into the local scene, and had a Viet wife and three children by her. He was a *débrouillard*, a fixer, and the British Embassy, the boss that paid my salary, had appointed him to help me. He did, very efficiently, and soon an Embassy man was helping me (less efficiently) to find a flat. Finally I got established at 42 Boulevard Charner (as the French called it: Viet, Nguyen-Huê, 4th floor. This had only one main room, but a big one, with a balcony over the wide street. I got a manservant, Ba, with whom I communicated in French. He was a grim-looking small man with eleven fingers (an extra little finger, useless, growing out of the regular one). He, too, was a *débrouillard*, very efficient, a Vietnamese Jeeves. He was the first servant I ever employed myself. We respected each other, with reticence. It some six months into my stint when he asked when 'madame' would be joining me. Only then did I tell him I was not married.

I worked, giving language and literature classes at the University, mostly in the early morning and late afternoon — which gave time for a long siesta, or for a midday cocktail party and a lunch date. For I now entered the international cocktail set, and gave cocktails and dinners myself, I had my personal cards and invitation cards engraved with my name and address. Once I gave an evening cocktail party in my one-room flat for 70 people, including the German Minister, Baron Yorck von Wendland. Once also I shook the hand of the president-dictator himself.

But secretly I found that side of things funny. I was still a liberal-socialist at heart, and valued people for themselves, not their rank. (And all the while I knew I was 'a worm, and no man'.)

My closest friends, probably, were a couple who lived in my own apartment block, a Vietnamese historian, Trung Buu Lâm, and his Ukrainian wife, Katchka. They were lovely people, Catholics, but not bigoted, and childless. They had met at Louvain University — Katchka had escaped from Kiev with the Germans during the War, while still a child, then got to Belgium. Lâm was brown, quiet, slim, handsome; she was tall, slim, classically good-looking, very white, very blonde. She did not know much Vietnamese: they spoke French to each other, and to me. Katchka also gave me Russian lessons. I still remember her voice — *Vot stol, eto kniga . . .* and a whole chapter on *Progulka za gorod*. Bless them! I lost track afterwards, but I hear they escaped before 1975, and he went to Harvard.

Ah, my lost friends, blood shaking my heart! Why do I *leave* people, so? Is it one way to make them ageless? For of course, in my memories, they never grow old. Like those who die young.

I have a copious diary covering two months of my life in



David Lake, in his garden, Bangkok, early 1960s, aged about 33.

Vietnam, 24 November 1959 through 23 January 1960. It is as minutely detailed as Boswell's *London Journal*, perhaps partly inspired by that. But this, on the face of it, is odd, because all my other journals are concerned with holiday trips. In a sense, my whole Saigon life, 1959–61, was one long holiday trip. This diary begins suddenly (no preface) with some 800 words about an ordinary Tuesday:

I awoke in the early hours, and went into the passage to look at the moon . . .

Then, after a breakfast of toast, fruit and milkless tea:

write the first half a letter to my mother. It consisted of a moral and intellectual attack on Christianity.

Well, I went on doing *that* till my mother died in 1992. Nothing special there. But after my morning classes, there is a hospital visit to a Chinese girl in her twenties:

I went to see Pu-Chan at the Grail . . . I had been told by two people that the doctors had despaired of her life. She has kidney trouble, and poison is accumulating in her body . . . She was being fed intravenously . . . I told Pu-Chan that I was learning Chinese (Mandarin). She said: 'When I get well, we will talk together, and you can have practice.' It seems, then, that she does not know. Or does she? . . . My sorrow over Pu-Chan did not prevent me regretting that I had lent her some books, which I will probably never recover now. I insist on recording the fact that we humans are petty, selfish beasts.

The next day's entry begins with the birth of a boy (2 kilos 60) to Ba's wife. And so the diary goes on, mostly with trivialities. Pu-Chan died on 7 December, about 3 a.m.:

And we others (except perhaps the Hoggs) went on

eating, drinking and making merry, for tomorrow the same fate awaits us all — *omnes eodem cogimur* ['All herded down one road we go' — Horace, *Odes*, II,3 — my translation].

The Hoggs were the New Zealand family, close friends of Pu-Chan. I suspect this diary was meant to be a commentary on the human condition, as experienced by me, aged thirty. It is full of names, half of which are now faceless for me. But the other half are not.

The first Sunday entry, 29.11.1959, concerns a good friend, an older woman on the British Council staff, Margot:

I went to Margot's Swimming Pool in the morning about ten. I say 'Swimming Pool' rather like 'Court' or 'Drawing Room'. She has the top half of a house, and a half share of the garden, which includes a small swimming pool, which she throws open to a favoured circle every Sunday morning.

In fact, these Swimming Pools were also drinking parties, like most of our gatherings. Luckily, the water was nowhere deep. Between drinks, we played water polo or water rugby.

Other good friends were Derek and Prue Brinson. Derek was First Secretary at the British Embassy, a fiery drinker and a good, aggressive driver. Prue reminded me of my tough-charactered cousin Anne, and I was half in love with her. Here is part of the entry for 9 December:

In the evening, dinner chez moi . . . Derek made some embarrassing remarks; he was in his curious but common quarter-bottled state. Prue was very nice to me — I should say they both were. 'I was the most generous of the Colombo Plan people — the only U-English speaker.'

'U' was a current expression for 'Upper Class'. Then, at a lunchtime cocktail on 2 January:

Prue, as a 'Happy New Year', kissed me on both cheeks. 'Time, you thief — etc.'

That last quotation is from Leigh Hunt's little poem on a similar occasion, 'Jenny Kissed Me'.

Here is a vignette, 17.1.1960, of a lunch given by Arthur Marlowe, he of the half-Viet family, at his home:

Arthur's 3 girls laid the table & brought us drinks. They were white — one would not have guessed them Vietnamese without being told — but went barefoot, and talked hardly any English (Viet, French) . . . We ate 'stag'.

This must have been a sweet sight, especially for me — white girls barefoot, and serving at table! But I forgot it — only the diary has reminded me. For one thing, I never fantasised about people I met; for another, these girls were too young to be sex objects.

Sex objects . . . There were plenty of those on offer. The city was full of bars and night clubs, and Vietnamese or half-blood girls serving in those places. Some were called 'taxi girls' because they could be hired as dancing partners, and usually for other purposes too. My diary swaggers a lot about such; especially about a girl called Alice ('especially pneumatic') at a bar called Pop's. The entry for the night of 21 December includes:

I drank at Pop's till 12, and then Alice refused to go home with me. I am frustrated.

But I can't take this at face value. I have no memory of the incident. Perhaps Alice guessed that I was all talk. Once indeed a girl trailed after me into my block and knocked on my door. I stayed silent till she went away. This is *not* in my diary (perhaps it happened later), but I remember it. I had no physical sex with anyone in Vietnam, only sex-in-the-head, and my usual fantasies.

In December the Lâms (Lâm and Katchka) were leaders in two expeditions out of town to religious establishments. The first was a one-night trip to a Buddhist monastery by the sea, where Lâm had a friend among the monks. Then over Christmas, 24 through 28 December, Lâm and Katchka took Margot and myself to Ban Me Thuot, centre of an area of hill tribes, where we were paying guests at a convent of Benedictine nuns:

Margot was given a cell. We others were placed in two beautiful tile-floored brick rooms, part of the children's block.

I mention the 'happy, sweet-sounding voices' of the hill-tribe girls, whom the nuns had taken as boarders from their families out of the villages:

In age they range from 0–20 years, and one has a baby.

The girl with the baby was indeed married: she was of the Mnong tribe, her name was h'Kruk, and her baby (by a full-blood tribesman) was called François — a baby 'as good as gold' with a 'delightful smile'. All this makes harrowing reading for me now, for the Viet Cong massacred a lot of people in this area about 1968. I think they got the nuns. I hope h'Kruk and François survived.

My diary is sometimes honest enough to admit to utter despondency. Thus, for 31 December 1959:

I spent the last night of the old year alone . . . a party is not, I think, the best way of 'seeing the New Year in'. I like to be alone at this time, contemplating Time & the stars, as I did now from my balcony. I gazed at Canopus, Argo and Canis Major, and thought, the fifties are dead. Am I to endure 40 more years of this? I should like just to see the 21st Century — as I would like just to cross the Equator. But Life cannot really be lived in slavery to Time. I wish I could find an eternal solution.

Plus ça change . . . I was to cross the Equator less than four months later; whether I will cross into the twenty-first century is not yet sure, though I am nearly there. I *have* endured nearly forty more years, if not quite of 'this' — total frustration. But I have been through success, and have come out the other side. My literary voice now, and my vain desire for an 'eternal solution', are not much changed since the last night of 1959.

One friend I have not yet mentioned is Dick C. He was an American, based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, but often dropping in to Saigon. He was to sponsor the turning point of my life in 1962 — not that he was ever aware of that. I first met him some time before my diary opens, perhaps about September 1959.

Dick was a big fat man, an Italian-American Texan, with a huge American car and a huge American generosity. He was almost a caricature of that kind of American. He was, at least ostensibly, a linguist and an English-language teacher. I don't know what else he was: certainly an enthusiastic propagandist for the Americans and their way of life. No, I don't think he really could have been a spy — he was, for that job, too open-hearted.

Before November 1959 he had driven me for a few days into Cambodia. I have photos of us two at the seaside there (Kompong Som). I remember that on the open road he got me to drive his vast car — even though at that time I had no licence and couldn't really drive.

I put that right, as my diary attests, in January 1960. After one week of instruction by a Vietnamese (in bad French), I passed my test. Then Marlowe, the fixer, put me in touch with a Greek who was willing to sell me his old Peugeot 203. It was a heavy car, with poor visibility for the driver. When I first tried it out, when he had gone about one block, the Greek cried, '*Arrêtez, monsieur! Vous allez casser la voiture!*' Well, I *was* a bad driver at first. But I quickly improved. A driver and a car owner! I was making progress.

My diary ends with a description of a typical night on the town. I was chucked out of a bar at 3.30 a.m. The last words are, 'And that was, finally, the end.'

But it wasn't, of course. Very soon after, I flew to Phnom Penh in a twin-engined Dakota. Another first: my first plane flight. (I was horribly scared!) Then followed another holiday with Dick C. — he drove us to Angkor. That lost city was overwhelming. The most romantic ruin in the world.

It would be still more romantic, for me, in two-and-a-half years' time.

And then, in April 1960, I took to the air again, heading for Singapore and — Bali. Once more, there is a diary.

I first spent some days, over Easter, with Eddie and Anneke, my friends from the ship, in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and a hill resort in Malaya. Then Eddie made forward arrangements for me with Shell colleagues in Jakarta. And so I crossed the Equator, by air, on 22 April 1960, into the Southern Hemisphere. Already from Jakarta

I began observing a strange sky of stars, from the flat roof of my hotel.

The next day I arrived in Bali. I stayed eight days.

One of my motives was, quite simply, to see women going bare-breasted. Bali was notorious for that, in spite of Javanese Muslim attempts to stop it; and a man in Saigon had assured me the women still did, in country areas. I soon saw that he was right. But it was no great thrill for me: I am not a 'breast' man. Well, it was nice in some cases, if the woman was young. Once I watched a dance rehearsal by

a girl of about 13 who danced with naked little breasts. When she waggled her shoulders they flopped about like blanchmanges — brown ones; it was obvious that the movement was invented in the days before the wearing of tops spread through Greater India.

Greater India — that was the real point, my major reason for coming. I had heard, I had read, and I was not disappointed. Bali was *precisely* what India should have been: an ancient Hindu culture, with a simple caste system — only the original four castes. And the people not poor, usually clean, and of the brown Oriental race like the Indochinese. And the young boys often more beautiful than the women. And art, sculpture, music, dancing everywhere.

I kept, as far as possible, off the beaten tourist track, and I had great luck in the places where I stayed. Three nights, 27–29 April, at Ubud in the *kraton* (palace) of Tsekorda Agong, a Balinese prince who had turned his home into a wonderful hotel, and as part of his hospitality regaled his guests with local lore. But even before that, at the capital, Den Pasar . . .

The big Bali Hotel was booked out — a blessing in disguise. By now I had tourist Malay–Indonesian, so I went to a cheap local hotel on the outskirts of Den Pasar — the Oka. Here there were no Western guests at all, and (first night):

I got friendly with the management by speaking my broken Malay & showing willingness to share a room with an Indonesian (I didn't have to eventually). After dinner I went to a Djangar dance at the village of Pongyasan . . . There was no transport, but finally the management rustled up a couple of cycles. One was ridden by the hotel's Fat Boy, Windir . . . The other belonged to a beautiful young lad of 12 years called Menrò.

So I first wrote his name phonetically as I heard it — a bit like Munro with final stress. Later, I spelt his name correctly as Mandrà.

I rode this and took Menrò as my passenger on the carrier. We turned off the road onto a winding earth track, very dark under the palm trees and between the village houses. There were many people on foot going to the dance & steering wasn't easy, but we made it (about 8.30). We had to wait over half an hour — I used the time to be friendly with the boys & learn some words of Malay. Finally the dancers arrived with their orchestra from a nearby village, and sat down in a sort of 'dressing room'. Menrò took me by the hand & we went to stare at them. Some of the dancers, both boys & girls, were quite young — perhaps 5; the boys wore burnt-cork moustaches . . .

This was the highest kind of tourism. There wasn't another Westerner present, and I was watching a dance put on by the children of one village to entertain the people of the next village. And everyone seemed to accept me. Things ended like this:

The whole thing was amateurism at its best (no money was charged for admittance, of course). The movements of the performers were not under rigid discipline — scratching of noses, occasionally even spitting being permitted . . . At the end, with a final speeding-up & burst of noise, they just stopped, got up, stretched their limbs, & that was that. Nobody applauded.

On our way home we were caught by a shower, so we got off our bikes & sheltered under some kind of shelter . . . We whistled & hummed the Djanger tunes. The rain soon stopped, and we got home. I slept well.

Tonight also I had a clear view of the Greater Magellanic Cloud.

And that was the day that had begun with me observing planets, before sunrise, from the flat roof of the hotel in Jakarta; followed by a wonderful plane flight along the coast of Java. I have never known tourism better than that. (Except perhaps once more, and that wasn't mere tourism.)

The next night I saw a *Ketchak* (Monkey Dance), and:

On the way home, I saw that the Balinese fields were full of fireflies.

I felt very friendly with the young boy Mandrà. Then, on the evening of the 25th:

After dinner I was writing this when Mandrà turned up, saw my Biro and begged for it. I promised to give it to him at my departure. He was delighted, placed his hand on my knee (I was wearing only a sarong) & seemed about to seduce me when

the hotel manager turned up '& Mandrà disappeared'. On the morning of the 27th, I left for Ubud: 'before going I gave my Biro to Mandrà, which pleased him very much'. I don't know if I was imagining things: would the boy have offered me sex for a Biro pen? Balinese boys, in those days, did have a certain reputation that way, at least among pederasts. I was, of course, in those days craving for love; but I'm sure I wouldn't have 'done anything' with a pretty Balinese boy. A hug would have been quite enough. (Once, when I was much younger, I felt rather sentimental about an English boy, and spent some time lying on his bed and talking to him. But I think I hardly touched him; there was not even a kiss. Except that I liked women too much, I might have been Plato's ideal 'spiritual' lover.)

Back in Saigon, May 1960 to the early–middle of 1961, life went on much as in my diary days. Once Lâm and Katchka, with a few of Lâm's staff from the History Department, took me on a wonderful tour by road through most of South Vietnam as far as Huê, the old Imperial capital on the River of Perfume near the Seventeenth Parallel. We saw the ancient Hindu ruins of the Cham people (conquered by the Vietnamese in the seventeenth century). And at Huê I swam across the River of Perfume, with the old palaces of the emperors behind and beside me — dodging local sampans.

And then my two years were up. I sold my old Peugeot, thankfully, and flew back to England via India; precisely, via



my birthplace, Bangalore. My mother was living there, so I visited her for a week or two, revisiting old haunts. Bangalore was still unspoiled in 1961. The old bungalows were all there. (It has since exploded into a huge city. A shopping block has been built a hundred yards from my birth house. I will never go there again.)

That time in Bangalore, 1961, I got to know two women — Lila, who was what I may call Indo-Anglian; and Margaret, who was pure Indian. Both were Christians. Lila had an English mother and an Indian father. She had black hair, dark eyes, very white skin, a lovely figure and face, and she wore a sari. She was already married (or engaged — I forget which) to an Indian. Of course, a White woman in a sarong or sari appeals directly to my Complex. But multiple prohibitions kept me from making any approach, or even fantasising about her.

But Margaret was neither married nor engaged. I found her fairly attractive — the first young Indian woman I had ever got to know; and I was able to take her out to dinner. She was very dark — ‘black but beautiful’; she wore a sari, her midriff fetchingly bare; but she was a Catholic, and when I asked her what language she spoke at home in her family, she said ‘English’.

Mixed signals for me. Culturally rather ‘White’, but not enough to stir my Complex. And now again I was stuck. I knew she was a ‘nice girl’, who would be aiming at marriage or nothing; and I knew I did not love her enough to marry her. My own Code forbade me, in this situation, to do anything. So I didn’t.

The same dilemma would recur, in a closer relationship with an Asian girl, early in 1963.

I am a rather dreadful specimen, I think: a man who has so interiorised the old Western Christian code (without double standard) that he is really *incapable* of being naughty.

## FURTHER INDIA (2) AND FIRST LOVE

I was in England only briefly in the summer of 1961. Almost immediately I landed another two-year stint under the Colombo Plan, this time in Bangkok, Thailand. One difference in this contract was that it would not be a university post: I would be purely an English-*language* teacher, working directly for the Thai government, improving the English of technical people who would be going abroad from Thailand to the English-speaking world. This was less interesting as a job, but I would still be paid by the local British Embassy, and would have the same perks as in Saigon. Also, Thailand sounded very appealing: again Further India, but solidly Buddhist, with no Communist menace, and close enough to Indo-China for old friends to visit.

I caught the ship this time at Dover. It was a small Danish ship, mixed cargo and passengers — only about 20 passengers, all one class. It would be a slower voyage (six weeks), but it sounded good democratic fun.

It was. It was even better than the French liner. This time, I got through *The Odyssey*. And from the tiny ship’s library, I got out and read Aldous Huxley’s *Island*: serious Buddhism and mysticism.

We mixed with the crew, and I (of course) learnt a bit of Danish. We drank a lot of Carlsberg lager. There is a ridge on the bed of the Indian Ocean which the maps call ‘Carlsberg Ridge’. Maybe it’s composed of empties tossed over the side from Danish ships like ours.

The ship, being almost a tramp, tended to linger in some

ports, waiting for cargo. For example, near the end of the voyage we were stuck for several days at Port Swettenham in Malaya. Each day we went ashore to a local club, and used their swimming pool. The last day, I found myself acting as linesman in a soccer match between our crew and the crew of a Swedish ship, also stagnant in port. I forget who won, but we all celebrated afterwards — Danes, Swedes, passengers.

It was enormously pleasant; but in the end I finished *The Odyssey*, grew bored, and saved the sixth week by flying the last leg, Singapore to Bangkok.

The first thing that happened in Bangkok was that the Thai government supplied me with a free car (a big Wolseley), and found me a house, two-storeyed, in a southern suburb.

No, I lie. The first thing that happened, the very first night, was that my Thai boss, from the relevant Ministry, took me out to a night club as his guest.

I was going to like this . . .

It was all a bit like Saigon, but *better*. The Thais were much more relaxed than the Vietnamese. They didn’t have a war brooding. Also, *they had never been colonised*, and so they had no sense of inferiority to or grudge against Westerners — *farangs*, as they called us. We farangs and the Thais — we were real equals. The Royal Bangkok Sports Club, which I joined, had membership quotas for nationalities: half the members had to be Thai gentlemen. There was a generous quota for the British — for historical reasons, the Thais were pro-British (in the nineteenth century we helped them defy the French in Indo-China). Several Thai princes had been to Eton — including the charming Prince Prem, whom I got to know well. That was another comfortable thing: they had an ancient monarchy, and a real government of their own, not a regime propped up by foreigners. Not a regime, either, like Vietnam’s, one dominated by Catholic Christians. This was not the year 1961 AD — it was 2504, Buddhist Era. It was fun to be living in the twenty-sixth century.

I loved all this. Oh, if only I’d been brought up, a tolerated farang, in Thailand! Then I would certainly have had no Complex. I might even have turned Buddhist, like one famous farang I met there. Thai Buddhism itself was cheerful and relaxed. As Prince Kukrit said, they were really Hindus (without castes) for purposes of life, Buddhists for purposes of death. They were relaxed about death, too. I once went to the fifty-day ceremony for Prince Prem’s mother, a delayed wake, fifty days after her death. It was an almost cheerful occasion, a party.

I started learning Thai. It was tonal, like Vietnamese, and therefore hard, but I made more progress in it than I ever had with Vietnamese. Well, it was necessary. Nobody knew French, and working folk usually had little English.

My job, it’s true, was rather dull. Language teaching, without any literature, did prove boring. I fear I may have bored my students, too, but, nice people that they were, they never complained. I was their *khru*, a word derived from *guru*, and carrying an aura of respect. They were nice; but I missed the university ambience, missed having university colleagues. All I had was a room lent by Chulalongkorn University, which wasn’t the same.

But in effect, I did have colleagues. They were all English — one worked in the University, and several more were school teachers in Thai secondary schools.

We soon developed a ‘gang’. My life was subtly different from Saigon — far fewer cocktail parties, far more intimate groups where the gang assembled, or went to the seaside



David Lake and Celia Abbott, Bangkok, 1961–63.

together, or even ran an informal book club. ‘Read us something that has struck you, and we’ll discuss it.’ We discussed *Catch 22*, and Philip Larkin . . .

Instead of Margot’s Sunday Swimming Pools, we had *my* balcony. Well, it overspilled the balcony into my top-floor room. I had the highest salary in our gang, and the most palatial house, and Embassy perks (duty-free booze) that the school teachers did not share. This pained me a little — I slipped cheap bottles of whisky to the other members of the inner gang.

I was the host with the most. So on my balcony, Sunday mornings, we gathered, drank, sometimes flirted. But of course we were egalitarian. I was not the gang leader. (I never lead anybody.) The leader, the central energiser, was Gerry A.

Ah, Gerry, and his wife Celia! Celia was lovely, in her mid-twenties, and I flirted with her. (I have a photo of us on the balcony; I am holding a stein of beer; she is holding a sherry, and leering at me.) But Gerry — I hero-worshipped him. He was a couple of years younger than me, but apparently more mature; lean, whereas I had put on weight. He was bright in every sense, full of energy — and so *normal*. With his sexy wife Celia and their small child, he was something I wished I were, and knew I could not be. But I only envy people in the good way: I never wish them less happy. Frankly, I loved Gerry — without the slightest touch of homosexual feeling. (I once actually shared a bed with him — a huge bed — but there was no sex between us; there was a woman with me, that time. Gerry just slept nearby.)

Apart from Gerry and Celia, the other main gang member was Peter L., a young Englishman whom I had met already on the Danish ship. Good-natured, relaxed, he was sexually so normal that after a while he acquired a live-in Thai mistress. I hardly envied him *that* — since he had no intention of marrying her, it went against my code. (How would the woman feel when he left?)

Other significant members of our circle, though not of

the inner gang, included:

Josh — a rather strange, slightly older man, with glittering eyes. As a teacher in the Thai system, he was technically entitled to wear a uniform. So he wore it, peaked cap and all. I thought it made him look military. Celia said it made him look like a postman.

June — that is what I will call her. About my age, or a year or two younger. Dark-haired, fair-skinned, from the west of Britain. I think her job was with the University. She had a nice little house in an eastern suburb. Not exactly pretty, but quietly attractive. She was my friend for about a year.

G. — that is what I will call her. American Negro (as we used to say in those days). Very smart and vivacious. Not very dark, but thin, almost no ‘figure’, very short hair. She had a Siamese cat called Pyewacket, which hated me. It used to stalk me along the top of her sofa, until one day I shot it with a water pistol.

My house was really a charming place, on a quiet lane, with a fine garden. I had two servants, a young male gardener, and my housekeeper, Sumon. Sumon was to me what Ba was in Saigon — nearly everything, at home. But Sumon was a girl. A pretty Thai girl, surely younger than me.

She served me barefoot in my house, my holy ground. But when her time was up, she put on smart Western dress, and high-heeled shoes, and went home, some distance across town.

There was never any sex between us. I liked her very much, but I was not like Peter L. I remembered a certain proverb about not messing up your own doorstep. Besides, she made no play for me, so anything from me would have been unfair. (Nowadays called harassment.)

Dick C. was still based in Cambodia, and he dropped in on us more than once. I was very glad to see him: he was totally unchanged. But he startled me once. In a Bangkok bar we

net an American, dressed in loose shirt and sarong, who was holding forth about the delights of Thailand, and how much better it was than the USA. Dick grew highly indignant, and said to me: 'I think I better report him to his agency! Un-American —'

I: 'Dick, you can't do that!'

He: 'Why not? Bad-mouthing the US.'

I: 'But that was a private conversation . . . I could say the same about Britain. It doesn't mean he's not loyal.'

In the end, I convinced him (I hope).

Then Dick organised a long trip for the two of us to Chiang Mai in north Thailand, a city famous for beautiful old Buddhist temples and beautiful young Thai girls. We went by something like a jeep, over a most infamous road, two days each way. In Chiang Mai we sampled the temples (not the girls). There, too, I bought a large fierce male Siamese cat, but he proved a disaster. On the way back we had to keep him a wicker basket-cage, and he objected. Then half way back to Bangkok, Dick was suddenly smitten with painful stomach trouble, so we stayed the night in an infamous Chinese hotel. Dick groaned all night; the cat screamed; I felt equally sorry for both; and while I was looking after them someone (I found later) stole my passport.

Dick was better next morning, and we made it to Bangkok. When I reached my house, we released the cat, Sumon and the gardener helping. But it was no use: he glowered at us — especially at me — and fled. We never saw him again. I hope he made it back to Chiang Mai.

Now comes a bizarre episode.

I don't remember exactly why, but Gerry, Peter, myself and the African-American lady G. all went to the seaside together (Bangsaen, I think) and spent one night sharing a cottage there. There was some kind of platform-bed, or mattress, quite huge, and we all slept upon that. Gerry and Peter were on one side of me, G. on the other.

Peter and Gerry fell asleep promptly. Then I felt G. groping for my penis.

This time, it was not a case of my failing to rise. I didn't want a bit of it, and moved away, pretending to be asleep. The next day, nothing was said, and I remained, on the surface at least, friends with G.

Why, why such a method? I had never made any pass at G. I don't know that I ever gave her even a social kiss on the cheek. If she wanted to approach me, surely a hug or something, in her flat, would have been better. I don't think a grope would have endeared me to any woman, even one I fancied; and I didn't fancy G. that way at all. I don't think it was her race; she simply didn't have a feminine shape.

We corresponded, incidentally, after I left Thailand, and she was in America. When, in 1965, I wrote that I was married, suddenly her postcards ceased. So, poor lady, maybe she had a stronger feeling for me than I realised.

In the game of love, there are winners and losers. I was shortly to be both.

At last, now, I come to one of the most decisive moments of my life: about September 1962, when I was 33-and-a-half years old, almost in *mezzo del cammin*.

It happened that Dick breezed into Bangkok again, in his huge car, and invited me and June to visit Angkor with him, and after that go on to his flat in Phnom Penh. Both June and I accepted.

Apart from G., June was the only unattached woman in our circle. I liked her a lot, as I did other women friends,

but I was not then in love with her.

Dick, June and I drove across the border into Cambodia, stopped in Siem Reap (the nearby town), and went touring the ruins of Angkor. On this my second visit I found the place as overwhelmingly romantic as ever: Elflandish. At the hotel in Siem Reap we picked up another White woman, so that we made a foursome; but it was usually June and I who went together on the little journeys. I helped her over the difficult places of those ruins, and as she stepped like that, I noticed her delicate white feet, almost bare in her sandals . . .

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbled shot  
Love gave the wound . . .

My Complex was not entirely absent in those hours when I began to fall in love with June. There were wild-looking brown men about us, Cambodians, forest gypsies, and I felt June to be *vulnerable*. And the ancient Hindu place through which we were moving had already figured in a historical romance I had read, set in the Middle Ages, with a White slave girl at Angkor . . . But all that initial fillip faded into the background very quickly. Back in the hotel in Siem Reap, in someone's room, probably Dick's, we four ate tuna sandwiches and drank whisky; and there, in the corridors of the hotel, June and I began to look at each other . . .

Falling-in-love is essentially the projection of an image: for a man, the Juliet-Beatrice-goddess image. It is a bit silly, for the projection may not fit the other person's real character. I did not really know very much about June; I think she had already told me that she had an unhappy love in her past, in a far-off country. That, for me, increased her vulnerability. Anyway, my projection proceeded very fast. By the time we reached Phnom Penh, and met in Dick's flat drinking more whisky, we were holding hands, and I was very far gone. Dick played a record of music that was new to me: Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*: 'Dulcissime . . .' sang the soprano, 'Tota tibi subdo me . . .'

Orff's *Carmina* is very sexy music, and there I was hearing it for the first time, with my newfound love at my side. Angkor and the *Carmina Burana*! It is almost enough now, as I look back, to make me believe in a divinity that shaped that *felix coniunctio*. Perhaps the goddess Fortuna whom the medieval poet invokes. Anyway, for once in my sexual life, I was very high on her Wheel.

The Wheel took exactly one month to revolve.

As soon as we were back in Bangkok, June and I consummated our love. I think the first time was at my house; and then there were other times at her house, and at the nearby seaside. So, at last, I lost my male virginity. I was a very inadequate lover physically — very timid — but June was kind and patient and bore with me, and things got better as our month together proceeded.

The very first 'morning after' I told her that my intentions were 'strictly honorable', and she knew what I meant. But she put that aside, and all my later frequent proposals of marriage. I did not feel frightened by this; I thought she would come round in time. I knew she was no virgin herself; also that in that other affair she had been badly hurt. She found then 'too late, that men betray'. Perhaps now she did not trust me, for that reason . . .

Then her work contract expired. She left Thailand — I followed her, miserable, to the airport — and already, in her manner of taking leave, I felt a certain distancing. After that came her letters from Britain, each one a degree colder than the previous; and at last I could deceive myself no

longer. It was over. She had liked me enough for a month's affair; but she had not been 'in love' with me.

The pain was extreme for a while; but later I discovered more about her previous disastrous affair, and understood completely. I had forgiven her. What! Forgive her? I owe her a great deal of gratitude.

Bless her! She made me a man.

## LOVE AND MARRIAGE

But I didn't feel like that for a long time. Instead, I was raging. For the rest of my stint in Thailand, after I had despaired of June, I was seeking love, or at least sex, with ravenous intensity. I sought in impossible, loveless places. Once, very drunk, I brought home a bar girl (read, prostitute), but as far as I can remember I was impotent with her. She was a body, but she filled me with horror. The day after, panic. Whatever we had done, or not done, I was not safe. I went to our British doctor, and got a shot of penicillin in the buttock.

Once I knew I had no venereal disease, I had an 'affair' with an older European woman. This was really base, for I did not love her, but made a pretence. However, she was not stupid, and called my bluff to my face — and I lied again. Yes! I did that, in spite of my Code. But the code was deeply in me: I was, again, half impotent.

Around Christmas 1962 my mother came from India, and spent a couple of months at my Bangkok house.

This time I didn't have to do the dishes: Sumon did. But I felt my life handicapped again. Now I couldn't go chasing women. I told Gerry I was frustrated.

He: 'Frustrated? How, David?'

I: 'Well, I'm not exactly a eunuch . . .'

At last I told my mother, bluntly, that she was blocking my sex life. After all, she had long ago said she wanted to see me married. Now she was cramping my style. She was rather shocked; but soon after that, she did leave.

I had a few months more before my contract expired. About now, I seemed to run into Josh a good deal. With him there was often a short, pretty Thai girl (half Chinese, on an absent father's side). She was a secretary in a Bangkok office. Josh once had some kind of accident to his gleaming eyes, and she cared for him when he was half blind. But she did not seem to be his mistress. She could go out with me. Her name was Tipawan.

I took Tipawan with me to the seaside, but we were not lovers. Once, in the sea, as she was floating, I played with her feet, and tried to take her on my back, but she wouldn't allow that. But she did not break with me. She said she needed a new swimsuit, so in Bangkok I bought her one. In my suburban house, she tried it on, and came out into lounge room to show me. It was a red one-piece, very form-fitting. There she was, barefoot, barelegged, and we were alone. She turned, to show me how she looked from the back. She looked marvellous.

That was the moment when my fingers really itched. I wanted to caress her sweet body, and kiss her. It would be so easy, an arm round the slim waist, the shoulders . . .

I don't know, now, if she expected that. The sea, after all, had been a public place, and the Thais are, in public, very decorous. Perhaps now she would have welcomed my caresses . . . But I couldn't bring myself to get involved. She was not a bar girl; this would be serious. And I could not bear to lie to Tipawan, or to 'use' her. I liked her and desired

her, but not enough to marry her. There was not enough common ground, on an intellectual level, for that. And I was still racist in that I wanted to 'breed true', to have children White like me. Besides, she was so *short*. I didn't want children who might be dwarfish.

So I did nothing — except to say that her costume was fine. And she showed no emotion of any kind.

A month or two after that, my time was up, and I flew to London, about the end of June 1963. I arrived in a heat wave: for a few days, London was hotter than Bangkok.

When I arrived in London I was basically job hunting with the British Council. I needed somewhere to stay, and the Russell Square area would be convenient. I fixed on the Heathfield Hotel, a cheap bed-and-breakfast place in Guilford Street, just east of the Square.

When the hotel-keeper saw my surname on the register, he said: 'Hullo, we've got another Lake, on our staff. Our odd-job man. He lives in the basement.'

'Common name,' I said.

'Anyway, I'll have him up to meet you.'

The odd-job man was white-haired, with white stubble on his chin. His clothes were none too clean. But at that moment I hardly noticed his clothes; for I knew his face.

My uncle Charles! I had last seen him in 1945, in his own bungalow, which we shared in Calcutta — eighteen years ago. For the last ten years he had been entirely lost to us, his relations: presumed dead. After 1945 he had turned totally alcoholic, sold his nearly bankrupt business to his Indian partner, left his young daughters (still with their grandmother), and disappeared into England.

Now, he soon knew who I was. And — he called me 'Gov'nor'!

Then he took money from me, to buy drink. He was still on that.

It was dreadful, like the worst moments of *Great Expectations*. But I am not so great a snob as Pip. And I happened to have the current addresses of his daughters, young women now who lived in the English Midlands. I wrote to them.

Within a few days, they came down, and met their father. One was engaged, and came with boyfriend. The other was married, and came with a little daughter.

I did what I could, till about early September I moved to Chiswick. At that time, Uncle Charles was still the Heathfield odd-job man, but apparently in touch with his daughters.

I had done my obvious bare duty, but after that I did not see him again. I think he left the Heathfield, and disappeared elsewhere. The family reunion did not work.

Compare Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, and the old man who, like the wounded duck, will not come up, but 'dives to the bottom'.

By now, friends of mine from the East were also in the London area: Gerry and Celia — and Margot, ex-Saigon, but still on the British Council permanent staff, stationed for a while at home base.

Gerry now also landed a permanent job in the British Council. This would take him to foreign places, wherever he was sent to man a mission. I thought I wanted a job like that, too — one which would take me travelling for many years to pleasant places (e.g. such as Thailand), but as a permanent career. (This actually was a foolish idea. The British Council's foreign mission was a fluctuating one, dependent strongly on politics and economics. And my

desire was really for something that would delay my maturity, making me a perennial tourist.)

I applied to the Council, and Margot gave me a good reference. Then I was called to the interview.

The Board of three men asked searching questions. What did I know of the use of TV in English instruction?

Not much, I admitted, but I was willing to learn.

'What text book', said one man suddenly, 'did you use in Bangkok?'

'Eckersley,' I said.

'Eckersley is vulgar!'

I should have known then that I had failed. But I didn't. When the news came, several days later, I was devastated.

I had had rejections before, when I was competing with others for school jobs, but this had not seemed like a competition: it was like failing an exam. And I had been confident. And now I was shamed before my friends — Margot, Gerry.

Margot actually used her influence on my behalf, but no — as she told me, I had not impressed the Board. (However, she continued working for me, and later I got — not the main cake, but some useful plums.)

For a day or two I was quite shattered. I thought of jumping out of my window at the Heathfield. But I am too cowardly for suicide: I didn't like the idea of being mangled. Instead, I went to a movie — Peter O'Toole as *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Then I went to see Gerry and Celia, who were very nice to me. Gerry behaved exactly as a good and discrete man should. But — he had got the job, and I had not. Again, I felt he was superior in every way to me.

But even inferiors must live, if they decline to jump out of windows. So went job hunting again, in the London area, trying for something better than a mere secondary school — and presently was interviewed for an English-teaching post at Chiswick Polytechnic. (The polytechnics were tertiary institutions, of a kind, but inferior to universities: they handled dropouts from the main school system, plus adults.)

By now, I was Board-wise. At *that* interview, I stressed my experience teaching all ages of students — eight to eighty. I also told a racist joke about the Cambodians. Khmer, the Cambodian language, counts up to *five*, then goes 'five-one, five-two'. I said: 'You see, they have only one hand free. They're still hanging on, with the other, to their trees.'

That kind of thing was politically *correct* in England in 1963. I got the job.

This was the luckiest sequence of failure-plus-success in my life. It was going to lead to love and happiness. Gerry got sent to an Arab country — I know now that I would have hated anything like that. Instead . . .

In these months, summer and autumn 1963, I was again chasing women. Largely as a courtship aid, I bought a car, a Morris 1100, neat and fast on highways. Even before the car, I had two silly and abortive 'affairs'. After the car, when I had begun the job, there was a third, the silliest. This time, she was one of my young adult students. She was just as willing as I was — in a sense, more so, for I proved, as usual, an inadequate lover. When that one was over, I felt a great relief. I had committed no harassment, but — own doorstep. I could have been in bad trouble. Even my inadequacy, this time, was lucky. I silently vowed, *never again*. And that vow I have always kept.

Chiswick was a fine area for me to be in. I knew it of old, for

my favourite cousin M. and her husband lived there, so I had family nearby to turn to. I got digs in the house of an elderly lady — a not-quite-self-contained upper-floor flat. This was south of the Great West Road, a longish but possible walk to the Polytechnic by Turnham Green tube station. Near my digs stood, on its own wide and wonderful grounds, Chiswick House, a real eighteenth-century Enchanted Castle.

The Poly was fun to teach in. It had three sections — 'campuses' without fields, two of them being former children's schools. I had a variety of classes, the best of which was an odd crew of teenagers of both sexes and several ethnic groups, whom I remember as 2E. There was a neurotic Jewish boy, a half-crazy Pole, a rather nice but tough black Mauritian who possibly dealt with drugs; a little Indian girl, gaudy as a parrot, whose family *literally* worshipped money; and her friend, a big English blonde . . . Ah, they were the most memorable class-group of my life. Peace be to them! It is terrible to think that now they must all be about *fifty*. For me, they will always be young, drunk with youth, mad.

We taught — tried to teach — 2E and other groups, mostly at the school near the West motorway called Hogarth. I say 'we', for I soon found myself once more in a Gang, mostly men, but also one or two women. We were often ducking out together, lunchtimes, to a pub or a cafe. Then, evening parties developed. These staff members were older than my Bangkok gang, and one or two had the air of middle-aged, soured school teachers. At Hogarth we *were* rather like the staff of a school, with our coffee breaks, our common-room, the cupboards where we kept our textbooks . . .

Those cupboards. At first they seemed all taken, and I couldn't find a place for the books I was inflicting on 2E — *Kipps*, *Ten Twentieth Century Poets*, etc. Then a woman colleague took pity on me, and gave me half of her own cupboard. (She later confided that from the first she thought me very handsome, with my tropical tan contrasting with my white shirt.)

Her name was Rita, and she was almost exactly my age, just a few months younger. Rita Ferris. Not very tall, brown hair, blue eyes, a wide high forehead. *Very* blue eyes . . . Very soon, I sensed a comfortable niceness in her, a warmth. I thought at first she was a quite ordinary English woman, who just happened to have a degree in Economics. She lived with her mother in a house close to the main Poly building at Turnham Green. She was indeed a Londoner, born and bred. While I sat out the war in Calcutta, with just a token sprinkle of bombs, she as a child had been through the real Blitz, and the buzz-bombs, and the V2s. But there was nothing unusual about that: so had my other colleagues.

Then, gradually, I learnt the other side of her story. She was a widow, with three children. And — the main point — they were half-Asian children. When she was a student at London University, aged 21 or 22, she had met a handsome young Singhalese student. After a fierce fight with her parents, she had gone to him in Ceylon, married him, and in quick succession borne two girls and a boy. Then, two years back, 1961, in an epidemic her husband had died. Soon after, she had returned to England, bringing her children with her. 'Ferris', she confided, was actually her maiden name. She had taken it back recently, because the long strange Sinhalese name had got her little son mocked in his local Chiswick school.

'So, Rita — you have a sort of Asian background, too?'

'Yes, I was there ten years.'

She invited me to her home. Her mother, even more recently widowed, was a sharp woman who showed no liking for me. She was not poor, but in manner and accent she struck me as lower middle class, a Cockney. But the children were charming. The two girls, eleven and ten, were fair-skinned and pretty, with dark eyes and lovely black hair. The little boy, seven and a half, was darker skinned, but also very handsome.

I asked Rita more questions. Religion? No, she wasn't a Christian, never had been — not even baptized. Officially, if anything, she was a Buddhist.

Wow! A 'pagan princess', as in some science fantasy novel! Then —

'When you were in Ceylon, did you wear a sari?'

'Yes, I did.' (Wow, again!)

'Why did you leave Ceylon?'

'I couldn't rely on my in-laws. If I also died, I feared for my children. Friends in the government helped us all to get away.'

I was staggered, and charmed. Rita was like something out of my Complex fantasies, one of the Softer ones. An escaped White almost-slave girl! Indeed, the in-laws had wanted to keep her there, marry her off to her late husband's brother . . .

But Rita had no complex whatever, no touch of racism. She was — good. She was uncannily like what I should have been, if I had been born a girl.

By December 1963, I was inviting her, with other members of our Gang, to my upper-floor flat. The parties grew more enthusiastic, and noisier (much to the displeasure of the elderly landlady downstairs).

Finally, about Christmas, I gave one which went on and on. We drank. We played records. We danced. We drank more. At last the other men were leaving. The last one was being sick in the bathroom.

I danced now with Rita to a disc of Elvis Presley — 'Blue Hawaii' and 'Falling in Love With You'. It was not quite like *Carmina Burana*, but for its purpose, equally effective. We held each other very close.

Did I 'fall in love' with Rita? Not exactly. There was no *coup de foudre*, as with June: more of a long, slow, increasing warmth. I loved her now, but I also knew her. This was not the half-blind projection of an illusion.

The sick man at last recovered enough to go home. Then Rita and I took each other by the hand to my bedroom, and became lovers in the full sense. I knew her, and she knew me. I was not inadequate this time — in fact, there never was anything physically wrong with my potency: I merely sometimes got nervous. With Rita, usually, I was not nervous. She was very reassuring.

Of course, I at once proposed marriage, and she accepted.

Later — I don't remember exactly when — I began to tell her what I had never told anyone before — the shameful details of my Complex. To reach orgasm, I had to fantasise a bit — imagining her my slave, or the other way about. But — she was not shocked! She loved me, and was willing to go along with my quirks. Also, for purposes of confession, she was better than any priest.

The next thing that happened was, my landlady gave me notice to quit her house. Our party had been too noisy.

I accepted that cheerfully, and quickly found a more private, self-contained flat in Baron's Court. On the first floor, it overlooked a cemetery — which gave an extra relish to lovemaking: *memento mori, carpe diem* . . . This place was

further from the Polytechnic and from Rita's home, but with my car and the District Line tube, the journey was still quick: no problem.

But now a real, serious problem arose. It was in myself. Engaged to be married — but to those three stepchildren, and a mother-in-law who . . .

It was grisly. I had thought myself socially and racially enlightened, and now I found that, deep down, I was not. All the old snobbery and racism from my childhood in India was still lurking in my psyche: and perhaps strongest was the snobbery. How could I be intimately bound to that family?

I felt a brute, and I was a brute. Yet I also felt trapped, and wanted out. About New Year, I asked Rita to release me from my promise. I did not have the hide of D'Arcy on his first proposal to Elizabeth Bennett; I did not give my reasons in detail. And Rita had a gentler spirit than Elizabeth. She released me.

But I couldn't keep away from her, nor she from me. She came to Baron's Court, and we were lovers again. It went on like this, through the first half of 1964. I did love her, there was a strong bond, and yet —

Snob! Racist! It was horrible to know it; and I could not utter it. It was much worse than my sexual quirks. Those were a game; this was real evil. The best thing I can say for myself, that year, is that I *never* intended just to use her, for an 'affair'. I was, and I was not, acting contrary to my Code. I knew I was still trembling on the brink of marriage. At this stage of my life — 35 years old — I wanted to marry. But, could I marry Rita — and her family?

When the academic year ended, in July 1964, I quit the Polytechnic job. For the British Council had offered me a consolation plum, a present, and I jumped at it: a scholarship for a year, to get a Diploma in Linguistics, at the University of Wales, Bangor. It would qualify me for better jobs, University level, perhaps abroad again. The term would begin in October. I would be a graduate student, for from London . . .

Meanwhile, we had our summer holiday, on the continent of Europe.

I would not go off alone with Rita, at least, not initially. That would be too blatant, especially for her mother. Instead, we formed a little party, with my old friend from India, Peter S., and his aged father.

I have not mentioned Peter S. since our holiday together as very young men, in 1950. But he was always there in the background of my life. By now he was a lecturer in the University of Kent, Canterbury, and his father lived not far from there. Peter also had a sister, married to a Spaniard, now living at Sarlat, south-central France, a place of limestone caves and good cooking. Peter and his father were headed for Sarlat. Rita and I were, too, but also to places beyond. We took my car across the Channel, and I drove.

I have a brief diary, hardly more than an itinerary, of this journey. It is titled 'The Grand Tour, or Traverser le Lot'. Having my car made us very mobile.

The first night we spent at Rouen. Rita, myself, and Peter S. visited the memorial to Jeanne d'Arc, my favourite saint and model patriot. '*Jehanne, la bonne Lorraine/Qu'Englis brulerent a Rouan*' (Villon): a line I can never recall without tears. This wasn't my first visit to the place where they burnt her: Peter and I had been here in 1950. I took a photo, which I still have, of the other two standing by the slab on the ground and the flowers. It is the last picture I have of Peter.



Next day, while driving fast through France, I was suddenly stung by a bee. I managed to keep control, however, and came to a decorous halt. The diary says 'Driver passed out'. Rita tended my wound, I recovered, and we made it to Sarlat. It was very pleasant to meet Peter's sister Betty, whom I had known from childhood, and since, in 1957, in Spain. Now there she was with her husband small children. It was quite a family gathering.

But — everyone knew that Rita and I were lovers. Betty put us up in a single room. Rita felt bad about this, and so did I. In our circle, in 1964, it was not yet acceptable to 'have a mistress' — horrid phrase — or to be one.

We two stayed one more full day at Sarlat, visiting caves and, in the evening, going to an unpretentious restaurant and having a marvellous rich regional dinner. At the end of the meal, I shook hands with the cook, a vast French female, and then kissed her. She was quite pleased. Peter looked rather embarrassed.

Next day Rita and I set off on our Grand Tour. First we went into Spain; but Cadaqués was not what it had been. Now it was full of tourists. 'Too many people. Very poor lunch.' We left Spain after only three nights, and shot across southern France into Italy. Once I drove all night, 15–16 August, from Nîmes to Pisa, where we arrived at 6 a.m. Perhaps I was fleeing from something, such as myself.

We looked at Tuscany (Etruscan tombs), then Rome — my first visit there. I had seen Athens before Rome — the right order of things. Then we headed back: Florence, Innsbruck, Freiburg, Paris, Sarlat again. At Innsbruck I did *not* try to visit my old flame H. Instead, we bought a bottle of Stroh Rum — 120 proof — which we nicknamed Super-cortemaggiore, after a brand of petrol we'd seen in Italy. It certainly inspired my driving from Innsbruck to Sarlat.

The diary ends here, on 27 August, and I think I know why. After a day or two we left Peter and family, and drove back to Calais, to catch the ferry the next day. That night we shared a double bed in Calais, and it was a terrible time for both of us. I was soon going to leave Rita for my adventure in Bangor. She believed she would never see me again. I knew what she was thinking, and I suffered too, but I said nothing decisive. Indeed, I *was* feeling that I ought to make a break. But I couldn't bear to hurt her. That, at least, was how I put it to myself. Deep down, though, I needed her just as much as she needed me.

While I was in Wales that next term, October through December, I kept in touch with Rita only by letter.

Bangor was exciting and amusing. I had given up my Baron's Court flat, and I now found an odd place to stay, just across the Menai Bridge in Anglesey: a hotel converted into flats, named Chateau Rhianfa. (Our local Welsh doctor found this address amusing, with its ethnic clash: 'Chateau Rhianfa? Why not Plas Paris?') The other flats in the Rhianfa were occupied by fellow students, some of them members of my own Linguistics course. Our group comprised about twenty people: two Englishmen, one Nigerian, and over a dozen South Americans, mostly Brazilian or Argentinean, including several women. Our professor was Frank Palmer (who transformed my notions of English verb and noun phrases), and a notable lecturer was David Crystal (who, by and by, supervised my dissertation).

I enjoyed our life in and around Bangor enormously. I drove over the Bridge to work every week day, to the University where the classrooms were labelled in Welsh. Of course, I learnt a little Welsh. But I also practised my Spanish on the Argentineans. It was fun to be a student

again: deeply, I always prefer studying to teaching. And I did well in that course — ending up, next year, with a Starred First — the highest possible distinction.

But I hand't got *there* yet. These were early days. It was a bit like a throwback to an earlier, irresponsible life — a bit like Cambridge, a bit (since we were such a close group) like my last year in the Sixth Form. Rita, meanwhile, was far off in London, still teaching at the Polytechnic. I tried not to think about her too much. I was back at school — with attractive exotic girls and sex thrown in.

Oh yes, I had another of my mini-affairs, with a blonde Argentinean woman. We never actually went to bed, but there was some heavy petting. I suppose I was trying to break from Rita — and failing.

Then came the Christmas vacation.

To set this scene, I must place some of my family and friends. My mother was still in India. My dear Aunt C. had left Devizes and, with her husband, retired to Christchurch. A long-time woman friend in Devizes (not a girlfriend, though we had been close) invited me to the old town to spend New Year. But what about Christmas itself? I might, perhaps, have gone to Aunt C.'s daughter, my dear cousin M. in her part of Chiswick.

But then Rita invited me to stay over Christmas at her house — with her mother, her children, and their two white cats.

I accepted. *That* was a wonderful time. Of course my room was separate from Rita's, but — we were at once lovers again. Secretly, I crept to her room: and now our love was better, simpler than ever. I knew I preferred her to all the South Americans in the world.

Christmas that year fell on a Friday. By the Saturday, I knew all my struggles were over. And then in her room, either Saturday or Sunday, Rita said: 'Why don't we get married?'

'Of course!' I said. 'Yes, let's — right away!'

On the Monday, I tore through the legal requirements. The first possible day was Wednesday 30th. So on Wednesday, 30 December 1964, Rita and I got married in a West London registry office. Also present were Rita's mother and her three children, all one year older than when I had first met them — twelve, eleven, and eight and a half.

The official produced the ring on a velvet cushion. But apart from that, everything was very simple and undramatic. I preferred it that way — in outer things, I am not a ritualist. I forget what words I actually pronounced, but in my heart I intended the whole thing — forsaking all others, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death. I had dumped Christianity, but not the old Western ideal of indissoluble monogamy. And since that day I have kept my vows, literally and completely. There is no merit in that — here again, I don't believe in Free Will. I think I have so interiorised the Code that I am physically unable to be unfaithful.

People were startled by our sudden marriage, notably Rita's mother. But she came round to accept and approve, and she paid for the wedding luncheon, which we held at Bertorelli's Restaurant, one of the better haunts of the Hogarth gang. Some gang members were present, also my cousin M. and her husband, but it was a very small party.

I sent a telegram to my lady friend in Devizes: 'Coming 30th evening — with wife.'

And there indeed we spent our honeymoon, at my old home town, in a big ancient hotel full of white cats.

## SOUTH

It seems ludicrous to me now that I hesitated a full year before I married Rita. She was the ideal wife for me. An Asian would not have done: I am not the adventurous type who can really love an exotic. But an ordinary untravelled Englishwoman would not have done either: my Asian background would have rendered her, too, a bit exotic. Rita was like Goldilocks' middle bed: just right.

I have just discovered a poem I wrote on 18 January 1964, when I had broken my first engagement. It is a very bad poem, but significantly it keeps rhyming on *other*, *mother*, and *smother*.

It is not possible to love the other,  
The mother.

It is one monotonous yell of panic; but it puts my revulsion in a revealing light. Not just racism and snobbery: it was a primal fear of being swallowed by any woman. Compare Othello's fear for his 'unhoused free condition'; but my case was worse. I feared Rita might smother me as my mother nearly had.

I need not have worried. Rita was very different from my mother. She sensed my fear, and eased me very gently into my new role as husband and stepfather. For a long time the children were no problem: they were looked after by their grandmother. And then, for the first three months our marriage was a fine joke: we still went on like lovers. Between New Year and Easter Rita worked on in London during the week, and visited me at Bangor only at weekends. Our meetings in Chateau Rhianfa were lovers' meetings: I was carrying on a naughty affair with my legal wife. I'm afraid Rita had a lot of weary travel by train, and in the process once she caught a bad cold. It gave her dark rings round the eyes. The local Welsh shopkeepers thought I had been beating her up. (Possibly, they approved: in 1965, Anglesey was a very sexist island. Customers gave us a hard look when I took Rita into a pub: for they were all men.)

When the Linguistics course reassembled in January, I had to tell my friends: 'Oh, by the way, I'm married.' This was a bit of a shock for some of the South Americans. But I don't think I broke any heart; at least, I hope not.

At Easter, Rita resigned her job, and then we had a proper honeymoon. (The Devizes thing had been only a few days.) Now we went once more to the Continent — but in a much more relaxed way. We left the car behind, and got to the Riviera by train — but the less flashy section, the Porphyry Coast, with our base at Agay. We did a lot of exploring on foot, and a lot of good eating. We also visited the offshore island where people practised nudism. That struck us as rather funny — especially the formality of the French nudists, who shook hands in the sea while wearing nothing whatever. 'Monsieur — madame.' We also marvelled how 'les messieurs et madames' could stand the icy waters of Easter, in which we hardly dared bathe at all.

In my last term at Bangor, Rita lived with me while I studied hard. When all was over, we drove straight from the farewell party to Holyhead. Then the ferry over the Irish Sea, and a few frivolous days in Dublin. I found I hated Guinness, but loved Irish coffee. At first we couldn't see the pubs — they looked different from British ones — and then we realised that there was one on every street corner. We made a James Joyce pilgrimage — from one pub to another, and another.

Now life became more serious. I needed a job, but did not really want one in England. The East called me again, and the British Council once more was obliging, on the old basis of a two-year stint. But all their vacancies seemed to be in India. Finally, they offered me a post as Reader (Associate Professor) at Jadavpur University, on the outskirts of Calcutta.

Calcutta! The childhood stamping ground. Both frightening and tempting. The children, I thought, being half Asian, should at least fit in that scene . . . In the end, I took it.

But it was not, in fact, to be 'the children'. The elder ones, the girls, stayed on in school in Chiswick, with their grandmother, and flew out to visit us only for the two Christmases. Rita and I once more made the sea voyage — for we had heavy luggage, including the car — and took with us the little boy, now nine years old.

It was not a very pleasant voyage — P&O. I came to dislike British ships: the French and Danes did these things better. But soon it was over, and then — those familiar two days in the train, from Bombay to —

Calcutta. And at first we even had a flat in Park Circus, the place of my earliest memories. And —

It was traumatic. It was even worse that I remembered. I was prepared for the poverty and the dirt, but I had forgotten, or never noticed, the *dinginess*. Dammit, whitewash wasn't very expensive, but no, everything seemed to be dirty grey, not a lick of paint anywhere.

Outside the main entrance to the Jadavpur campus there stood a great dungheap, with *vultures* on it! And the university buildings, too, were dingy grey.

After a while we moved from Park Circus to a rather better flat in Camac Street, in a block with another of those high flat roofs, and I felt a bit better. We gave roof parties. From the roof, Calcutta didn't look so bad — especially at night.

But Calcutta was never as amusing as Saigon or Bangkok. For one thing, it was not a capital, so — no Embassies. For me, there was just the small British Council mission (but with an excellent library), and my Indian (Bengali) colleagues from the university, and one old Eurasian friend from childhood days.

For another thing — I was married, and also had parents in the offing.

My mother, from Bangalore, sneaked into town to pay us a visit. She was thereby breaking the separation agreement that excluded her from the home city of my father. However, I think she got away with this undetected by him. I think this visit must have been in late 1965, and this was the first time she met Rita.

The visit was not a success. Rita and I were both inclined to be quiet at home, to read a good deal (usually in our bedroom), and my mother felt neglected. At 66 years of age, she had great energy, including emotional energy. She suddenly threw one of her tantrums — and thereby considerably alarmed my young stepson. Later, we patched up a peace, and then she left for Bangalore again. (This was a foretaste of a much worse 'scene' a dozen years later.)

She had always said she wanted to see me married 'before her eyes were closed'. Now, with her eyes open, she did not much like the fulfilment of her wish.

I think it may have been after that when we contacted my father. He was now 71, and seemed to us very old and weak. He had certainly once been dangerously ill with lung and heart trouble. He was now living in a flat in Park Circus,

with his ultimate mistress (whom, not being divorced, he could not marry), a black West Indian nurse. Rita and I were polite to him and his lady, and we visited for over a year, but in the end, things went slowly wrong. He could not really forgive me for the way my mother had preferred me to him — even though I now saw his point of view quite clearly, and sympathised. By the time we left India, in 1967, we had ceased visiting. I never saw him again.

He died in 1974.

During these two years, I have little to say about my sexual development, for I hardly had any. Marriage did not cure my Complex — that was fixed for ever — but now it didn't really matter. No woman tempted me towards infidelity, not even in thought. How could any? I have no interest in casual sex; I am exactly the opposite of Don Juan/Don Giovanni. Even in my fantasies I am always thinking of permanent relationships — master-and-slave, never casual rape. And for a permanent relationship, I have never known a woman more interesting than my wife.

But once or twice, my Complex was stirred, activated. There was one English woman we knew, married to a South Indian; and she wore a sari. Once she confided to Rita that in hot weather she didn't even wear a bodice, but weighted the trailing end of the sari with a bunch of keys, so that it hung down her back tautly enough to cover her breasts. Charming idea! And once, casually walking down a street, I saw a very pretty young blonde going along, also in a sari, with her Indian man. At once I felt racial jealousy — 'one of ours' taken by 'one of them'. It was the typical stuff of my fantasies, but this time, for a few seconds, I fell into the mode of resistance. Then I pushed that thought and feeling out of my mind.

I had not yet seen photos of Rita when young, also wearing a sari. That pleasure was in store for me in a later year.

At the Easter vacation, 1966, I took Rita out of India for a holiday in Bangkok and its nearby seaside. She didn't enjoy this as much as I hoped, because by now she was pregnant, some four and a half months; and she never enjoyed pregnancies. The sea was a bit of a disaster: she found the water cold and scary.

Bangkok, at least, was better. Of my former friends, only Josh and Tipawan remained. We had a couple of good restaurant meals with them — separately. Rita thought Josh a strange man. I don't think he wore his uniform this time, but he deployed his usual marked, slightly hypnotic manner. His eyes gleamed brightly again, during this smart European meal, and he poured us the Chablis with a fine flourish . . . With Tipawan, we were more relaxed; she smiled a lot at Rita, and we had a good Thai meal. She was not yet married; but I detected not the slightest grudge against me. Perhaps, after all, she had just liked me — and that new red swimsuit.

By this time, Rita knew all about my 'past'. I made a point of telling my dear confessor everything. She never blamed me at all.

Rita really had enough children already to satisfy her urges that way — indeed, she was not very 'broody' — but she knew that I felt like many other husbands, especially ones who have been sexually insecure, that I would never be a complete man until I had begotten a child. Indeed, she had to take special steps to conceive: there was some little thing wrong inside her, but an English doctor in Calcutta put that

right, and then immediately she did conceive.

The baby was born very suddenly on a Monday evening in August. I had just finished my afternoon classes — then Rita's pains came, and I rushed her to the hospital — and by 6 p.m. we had a new daughter. I hadn't been aware of any sex preference, but when they showed me my little girl, I suddenly felt a great relief. Maybe, deep down, I had been afraid of the usual father-son struggle. Also, a son seems like a replacement for his father, and I was not ready yet to be replaced. Now I was indeed a complete man, a father — but my daughter would be no threat; she would be sweetly *unlike* me.

Of course she was hideous to start with — red and crumpled looking; and to my eyes all babies are ugly. But later, she turned out a beautiful girl, just as good-looking as her half-siblings.

We named her on the principle T. S. Eliot had stated in his poem 'The Naming of Cats'. Her two non-secret names were Sarah Catherine, one Hebrew, one Greek, for the two main strands of our Western tradition. The names had no family associations for either Rita or myself. Our daughter would be her own woman, not a property of anyone's ego. And so she proved! From very early, her temperament verged on the dramatic. We got her an ayah (who nicknamed her 'Sarah Banou' — meaning Sarah Bernhardt). The photos of Sarah in Calcutta in her ayah's arms are very like those of me, c. 1929–30, also in Calcutta in my ayah's arms. But Sarah did not stay long enough in India to carry that country in her psyche. As it happened, she grew up a good little Australian.

By late 1966, I was becoming at last academically ambitious. I had had several articles published, and my first book was nearly ready: a study, aimed at students in India, but not simplistic: *John Milton: Paradise Lost* (April 1967). A Calcutta publisher was bringing this out. It was a sincere book, written with love and passion. Perhaps the greatest influence on it was William Empson, *Milton's God* (2nd edition, 1965). Already at Bangor I once told David Crystal this was a terrific book — though he, as a Catholic, thought differently. Empson, a passionate atheist, loved Milton, and found that in his great poem 'the familiar bad small of Christianity is somehow surprisingly absent . . . Milton has cut out of Christianity both the torture-horror and the sex-horror' — the two main things I hated and hate in Christianity. Empson is quite right: which is why I (like the great Romantics) still love Milton. I also love some points of his philosophy. Milton encouraged me to be a Monist: matter and spirit (the two aspects) are both in God, and creation is not 'from nothing' but *ex Deo*, out of God's own substance. Apart from that, *Paradise Lost* is so good because it shows the Christian god to be so bad.

There I was, about January 1967, with a genuine book nearly published — and I wanted another job. I could have renewed my contract at Jadavpur for another two years, but I didn't want to. Two years of Calcutta was quite enough! Besides, I was tired of being rootless, a man without a country; and I saw that I could never settle in Asia. My ancestors had made that mistake, and now I wanted to undo it. Besides, I wanted Sarah to grow up in a White country — no Complex for her! Yet England would not really do for me, either. I hated the climate, both physical and social (dark grey cold winters and class conflict). I yearned for a third place, which might resolve all this — and, very naturally, thought of Australia.

I now scanned the job ads, and applied for several

Australian university posts. Then, about March 1967, I got a bite — from the English Department, University of Queensland, Brisbane. Excellent! Brisbane was 27.5 degrees from the Equator, therefore sub-tropical — another reconciliation. They were actually going to appoint me . . .

Then the Vice-Chancellor told the Department: 'You can't appoint a man unless you've seen him. Get him out of here, and interview him.'

An excellent principle. In those days, Australian universities had the money for such things. They paid my air fare, and off I went, alone, that March, to sample and be sampled by Australia.

I loved everything about that trip. From the plane I saw the stars shifting, Sirius and Canis Major coming right overhead. And when I landed, the sun was going round widdershins, right to left, shadows shifting accordingly. I was now really, deeply in the Southern Hemisphere.

Unlike India, Australia had wine, excellent wine. I bought bottles to take home to Rita.

They put me up in the Majestic Hotel in central Brisbane. I thought Brisbane a bit like Chiswick — but sunnier, and half Americanised. Indeed, this was another reconciliation I found in Australia — culturally, it seemed mid-Atlantic. People were fond of barbecues, and newspapers arrived with a flying thump on your porch or garden. And it was a huge country. Everyone had cars, even the students.

The Department made me feel very welcome. I had an anxious moment when an older man, who would be on the Board, quoted Browning, and I didn't recognise the tag. But Browning was not to everyone's taste; and after the interview, the same man (who later became a great friend) said to me: 'I suppose you know — you've got the job.' That was to be the last job interview of my life.

On leaving India, we did not go directly to Australia, but

instead returned briefly to England — with a short stopover in Athens. I wanted to show Rita the Parthenon, the Pnyx, and so on. But it was not a good time to visit Greece. The Colonels' coup was only a few weeks old, and from our hotel at night we heard sounds suspiciously similar to gunfire. By day, we were a bit lumbered with Sarah, about eight months old. She gave tongue in restaurants. She even declaimed where Aeschylus had done two and a half millennia earlier — the Theatre of Dionysus. I verified, as on my earlier trip in 1958, that Greek theatres have excellent acoustics.

Then, back to Chiswick and a big family reunion. My mother also was by now back in England, and she, of course, admired Sarah very much. But she was horrified to learn that Sarah was, like *her* mother, an unbaptised pagan.

Then it was time to make the big trip. Rita, I, and all four children flew first to Ceylon (now, Sri Lanka), and for a few days visited selected old friends and relations. (Not, however, her former parents-in-law.) Then, Singapore. In a board-floored room of the Raffles Hotel, Sarah, at 11 and a half months, managed her first solo steps.

On the early morning of 13 August 1967, our plane began descending toward Brisbane. I looked out the window, and saw sheets of silvery stuff in the hills.

'What's that?' I asked someone.

'Frost.'

That took us aback. When we landed, we found Brisbane did indeed have a real winter, and we were in it, but there was no actual frost in the suburbs near the university. Temperatures ranged from about 8°C early morning to 20°C mid afternoon. And the sun was gloriously bright.

Within a month, we had a big family car and an ample house and garden. Everyone was marvellously friendly.

We were home.

— David J. Lake, 1996

## Also available:

From **BRUCE GILLESPIE**, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066, Australia (phone and fax: 61-3-9419 4797; e-mail: gandc@mira.net)

### SF COMMENTARY

Twenty-ninth year of publication.

Next issue features Mathews, Barbour, Gillespie, Steele and many others. Subscription: \$30 per 6 issues.

### SF COMMENTARY REPRINT EDITION: FIRST YEAR 1969: SF COMMENTARY Nos. 1–8

152 pp. 150,000 words Photos ISBN 0 949587 00 1 \$40 per copy.

Mark cheques 'Bruce Gillespie'.

From **NORSTRILIA PRESS**, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood VIC 3066, Australia:

Titles published between 1975 and 1985, for \$14.95 (pb) or \$24.95 (hb) plus postage.

They include Greg Egan's first novel *An Unusual Angle*; George Turner's memoir *In the Heart or in the Head* and workshop anthology *The View from the Edge*; Lee Harding's anthology *The Altered I* from the Le Guin Workshop; Damien Broderick's much-praised *The Dreaming Dragons*, David King's anthology *Dreamworks*, Tolley and Singh's critical anthology *The Stellar Gauge*, and many more.

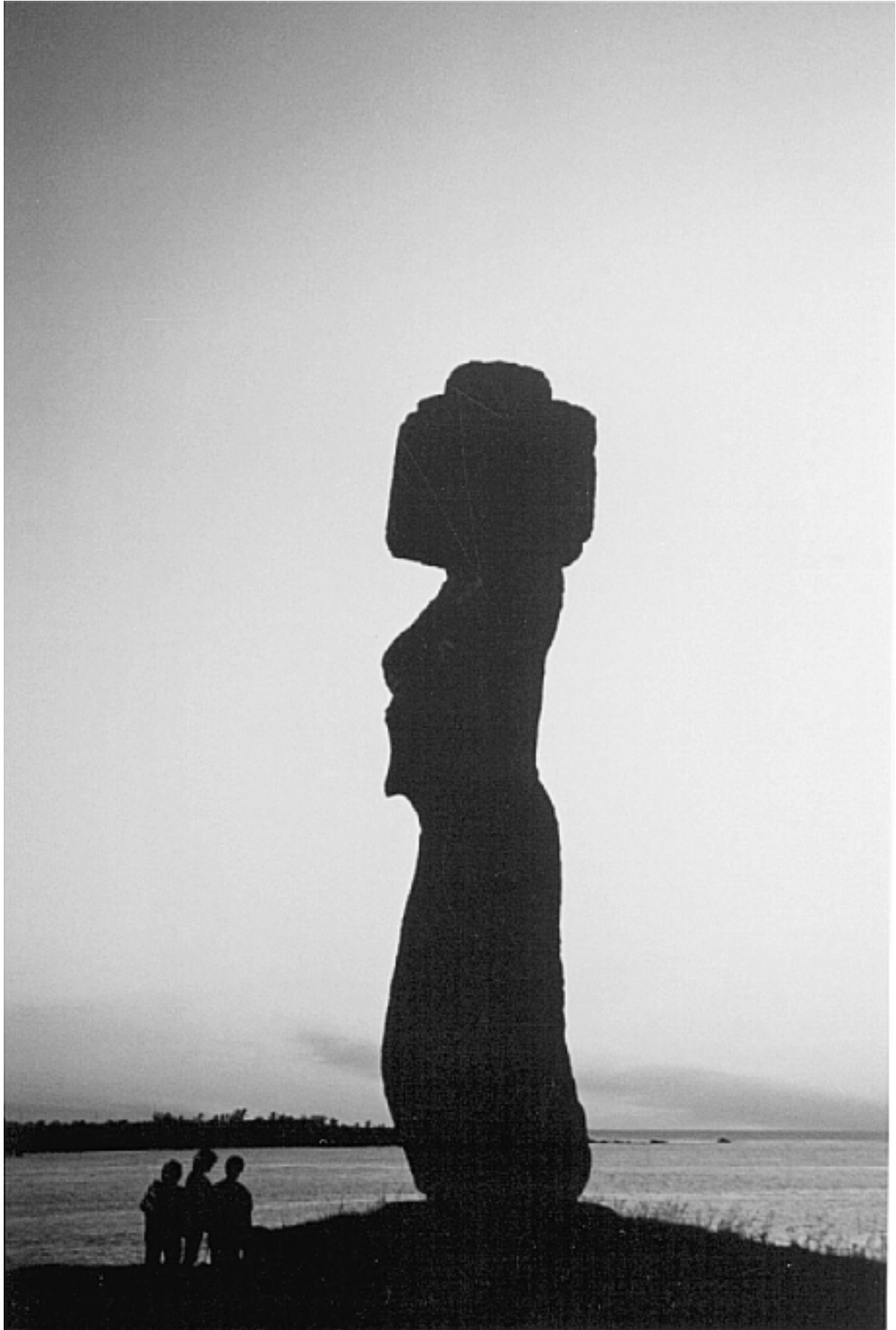
Mark cheques 'Norstrilia Press'.

Gerald Murnane's NP titles *The Plains* and *Landscape with Landscape* are now available from the author. Ask us for details.

From **PHOEBE PUBLISHING**, PO Box 305, Mt Evelyn VIC 3796 (ph: 61-3-9736 1377):

### TIRRA LIRRA: The Australian Independent Contemporary Magazine

Subscription: \$33 per year. Mark cheques: 'Eva Windisch'.



---

# PAASCH EYLAND ISLA DE PASCUA ILE DE PAQUE EASTER ISLAND RAPA NUI

---

Text and photographs by John Litchen

---

It's hard to imagine how isolated Easter Island is unless you go there.

Five hours flying from Tahiti across a vast empty ocean to find a tiny speck of land, and what if the plane couldn't land and had to go on to Chile another five hours away? Or back to Tahiti? There is nowhere else it could go. Did it carry enough fuel?

After hours of flying the plane finally started its descent. It banked, and I caught a glimpse of green outlined with a thin white line where waves smashed against a black rocky shore. Then it disappeared as the pilots positioned the plane for landing and again all I could see was an endless expanse of deep blue ocean.

The little bit of land I had seen was nothing more than the tip of a giant mountain extending three thousand metres beneath the ocean to what was once an unstable crust.

Many millions of years ago the Nasca and the Antarctic Plates nudged the Pacific Rise and the Earth's crust split open.

This new hot spot was part of a ridge of subsea mountains and active volcanoes extending for thousands of kilometres across the sea floor towards the coast of South America. At first the weight of the whole ocean above prevented the lava from flowing, but even the mighty ocean could not stop the Earth from venting its internal pressure.

Molten lava forced the crack wider. It vomited out in sluggish glowing waves across the sea floor, and cooled rapidly in water that could not boil because of the intense downwards pressure of the ocean above.

For centuries it continued flowing over and beyond that which had started to solidify. Another crack appeared many kilometres further along the ridge and more lava flowed across the ocean floor. When the two lava flows joined, a third crack opened. Fresh lava oozed out between the two main erupting points to form a huge trapezoidal base 130 km × 90 km × 60 km × 100 km.

Upon this base a mountain grew.

Three million years ago the first part of this mountain (*Poike*) was thrust above the surface of the ocean, and the black lava that was to become known as Easter Island was exposed to the sun, the wind and the battering waves of the Pacific.

It did not rise too high above the waves before it stopped. Over the next half a million years this tiny island rumbled and spewed small amounts of lava until finally the larger second volcano (*Rano-Kau*) burst forth, boiling the ocean surface. It threw mountains of steam and gas into the atmosphere. This joyful reunion caused the first volcano to come to life again and the twin lava flows joined. Parts of the island split. Vents and fumaroles opened. More than

seventy volcanic cones grew, the biggest of these (*Terevaka*) forming the third volcano that gives Easter Island its triangular shape. One other small volcano (*Rano-Raraku*), though its parent was Terevaka, grew beside Poike. This cinder cone exploded to form a crater of more porous material and it was here, once the island was inhabited, where the quarry for the great stone carvings was located.

At the other end of the island Rano-Kau also exploded, leaving a crater 1.5 km across. Terevaka is the youngest and the highest mount on the island even if it is only 510 metres above sea level. Its last eruption was a mere 12,000 years ago. Since that time the island has been geologically quiet.

The more porous volcanic tuff weathered by rain and the effects of the heating and cooling from the sun broke up and formed soil. Windborne grass seeds took root. Birds came from South America and other Pacific islands. They deposited guano and the seeds of trees and palms, and in time the island was forested. Some birds stayed, others maintained their migratory habits. The island became a small paradise until the arrival of humans changed it forever.

Easter Island is the most remote inhabited island in the world. Nothing but the vast Pacific Ocean surrounds it. 3700 kilometres to the East is Chile, the long thin edge of South America. Mangareva, at the bottom end of Polynesia, is 2300 kilometres north west, and due west is Pitcairn, a tiny inhabited speck of land 1900 kilometres away, famous because of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. There is nothing south of Rapa Nui except the frozen continent, Antarctica.

Yet people found this extremely remote island, perhaps not once but two or more times, which speaks volumes for those early seafarers and their ability to travel over vast distances of empty ocean. Once they came, they never left.

According to the oral history of the island, Hotu Matua came from the East and landed at Anakena, the only place on the island where there is a white sandy beach. These were the long ears. The short ears were part of another group that came later, from the West. Inevitably these two groups would fight each other until, just before the Europeans' arrival, most of the long ears were eliminated by the short ears in a huge battle that took place near Poike.

It was suggested by Thor Heyerdahl that Hotua Matua came from Peru, and he cites the similarity of stone walls and the styles of carving on some of the stone figures as obvious evidence. The existence of words similar to those used by tribal Indians in Peru, as well as vegetables found in South America but not in Polynesia is claimed as further evidence to prove his theory that people also migrated into the Pacific from the west of South America, moving eastwards, eventually meeting people from Polynesia who were moving westwards. He maintains there was a second wave





of people from Polynesia who also found Easter Island, as Europeans call it. There may even have been some travel back to Polynesia from Easter Island during the early days of colonisation. Modern archaeologists dispute Heyerdahl's theories, but there is still enough mystery to allow Heyerdahl some credence.

When Hotu Matua and his people arrived they found forests of giant palms and an abundant bird life. Sunflowers grew in clumps with tall grass across the volcanic steppes, and Totoria reeds had been growing in the crater of Rano Raraku for 30,000 years. Toromiro, a stunted tree unique to Easter Island, grew inside the craters of several smaller volcanoes. They built small canoes from the reeds of Rano Raraku, and large sea-going canoes from the trunks of the giant palms, similar to the Chilean wine palm, that grew in clumps all over the island. They fished for tuna and porpoise.

They lived well. Huts were built with oval stone bases covered by a wooden framework thatched with bundles of grass. The vegetables they had brought with them to the island, camote, manioc, uhi, kumara, all similar to sweet potatoes, and pukapuka, a kind of banana, grew well in the shallow but rich soil of the island. The chickens that came with them flourished, as did two species of small lizard said to have been stowaways on the canoes that brought Hotua Matua and his people.

Happy in their isolation, they called their island Te Pito O Te Henua, The Navel of the World. They did not call it Rapa Nui until much later.

As the population increased, more and more of the island's resources were used. When new arrivals came, battles were fought over territory. Once this had been established, there was peace, at least until the population grew to such an extent that it could not be supported by the

resources of the island.

Rapa Nui is a small island, only 120 square kilometres. It is twelve kilometres across at the widest point by about twenty-five kilometres long. Once the population reached over 6000, resources started to run out. Birds disappeared, fish became scarce. There were not the tropical reefs around the island to support large populations of fish, and without trees to build sea-going canoes, pelagic fish could not be hunted. Intense gardening couldn't supply enough food for such large numbers, so the people descended into savage warfare and cannibalism.

Everything stopped while they fought and killed each other. No more Ahu were constructed, no more Moai were carved, and those in progress, some of the biggest carvings ever made, were left still attached to the bedrock in the quarry at Rano Raraku.

People hid in caves. The island is riddled with lava tubes and caves. The population fell to about 2000, which was all the island could sustain. It was at this point in the history of Rapa Nui that Europeans discovered the island.

Late in the afternoon on April the 5th 1722, three Dutch ships commanded by Admiral Jacob Roggeveen arrived. Because this was the Easter weekend Roggeveen named the island Paasch Eyland. It appeared to be a low barren sandy island, but the sight of smoke told him it was inhabited. Unwilling to attempt a landing on a completely unknown coast so late in the day the ships spent the night hove to several kilometres offshore. During the night the weather deteriorated, so they did not attempt a landing the next day either.

By the morning of the following day the weather had calmed, and a single islander paddled out in a canoe to meet them. The ships followed the canoe and anchored near Anakena. 114 Dutchmen went ashore and lined up in a military formation. Hundreds of Islanders appeared. Perhaps the Europeans were nervous at the sight of so many naked fierce-looking warriors, so as a show of strength a number of sailors were ordered to fire their muskets. A dozen people fell dead, and many were wounded. The natives quickly dispersed, taking the injured and dead with them. The Europeans were left alone.

First contact had been made.

The Dutch reported in their log that they had been baffled by the giant Moai, and could only conclude that they were of religious significance.

It would be 47 years before another European expedition arrived. Gonzalo de Haedo claimed the island for the king of Spain and renamed it Isla San Carlos. With much pomp and ceremony the Spanish came ashore and marched to the top of the nearest hill, where they erected three large crosses. The priests sang litanies and the sailors carried colourful banners and Spanish flags. From the top of the hill they fired three volleys from their muskets. The ships anchored in the bay near Anakena answered with a twenty-one-gun salute.

A mere four years after the Spanish had left, Captain Cook anchored at Hanga Roa Otai, still on many maps as Bahia de Cook. He noted the resemblance of the people to other Polynesians. He had already explored much of the Pacific. He even had with him a man from Bora Bora who could almost understand the islanders' language. He noted that many of the Moai had been toppled over as if deliberately destroyed, and correctly concluded that a war between factions on the island had been the cause of the destruction.

It would be 88 years before the final disaster. Slavers arrived from Peru. They forced people to sign papers giving Easter Island to them. They tricked all the able-bodied men and women they could find to board their ships for a ride around the island, then took them to Peru to work in the guano mines along the South American coast. At the start of the voyage, when the people realised they were not going to be put back on Rapa Nui, they started to jump overboard to swim back to their island. The Spanish chained them below decks to prevent any more losses.

In the harsh climate along the coast of Peru the islanders suffered severely from homesickness and malnutrition, and they died from measles and smallpox. Missionaries were sent to Easter Island to convert the remaining people to Christianity. The whole population was baptised. Tattooing was forbidden, and European clothes had to be worn. Within a few years measles, influenza and malnutrition had reduced the islanders to a few hundred people living in wretched conditions.

Chile annexed the island in 1888 after winning a war against Bolivia and Peru. They didn't colonise, but leased the island to a businessman from Valparaiso who grazed sheep there. He sold his interests to a Scottish consortium known as Williamson Balfour and Company, which ruled the island with an iron hand. Many of the workers married islanders and the population began to diversify genetically. Because of harsh treatment by the company the workers staged a revolt in 1914, which was put down by the Chilean navy.

In 1953 the Chilean government revoked the lease given to the British and took control of the island. Though it encourages some migration from the mainland the government restricts population growth and development to the area around the village of Hanga Roa where about 2000 people now live. The rest of the island is designated as an archaeological park.

As the plane came down to land I caught a glimpse of the crater of a large volcano. Light sparkled off the water in the crater. Then we were past it, the wheels bumped and the plane settled smoothly onto the runway. The engines reversed with a roar and the plane slowed rapidly. Everyone relaxed. We had arrived.

Stepping out of the plane I could see low grassy hills rolling away from the long runway. Only a few years earlier it had been lengthened with the help of the US Government and NASA. It is now long enough to take an emergency landing of the Space Shuttle if that ever becomes necessary.

It was good to stretch my legs after the cramped flight from Tahiti, and the short walk across the tarmac to the moribund terminal building was a pleasure. Most of the people on the plane headed for the transit section of the building. Only a few followed me into the incoming passenger terminal. Going through Customs was a breeze. I only had a camera bag and one small overnighter slung over my shoulder. A perfunctory glance, a quick stamp in my passport, and I was through, stepping out onto a wide veranda bordered by a red dusty carpark.

Several local people approached me and asked if I had somewhere to stay. When I said 'not yet' they offered me a room at their house or residencial. Prices were quoted and I selected El Tauke, a place I remembered reading about in the Lonely Planet guide to Chile and Easter Island.

There are hardly any hotels on Easter Island, so most accommodation is in rooms people have added to their homes. Breakfast is taken with the host family. Other meals

too, if you want, but it is better to eat in the many little cafes at a time that suits you rather than eating at fixed times. I don't keep regular hours for meals, so bed and breakfast suited me.

Hanga Roa is less than two kilometres from the airport, so it didn't take long to be ferried to my room at Residencial Tauke. I took a few moments to freshen up and change the clothes I had slept in while travelling from Australia. Then I went for a walk.

It was warm and sultry, so I headed downhill towards the water. The road was dusty but paved — one of only two paved roads in the town. All other roads are dirt tracks. The vegetation by the roadside was lush and green, sub-tropical and redolent with the scent of frangipani and bananas. I could smell warm salty air as I got closer to the water, where a number of fishing boats had tied up. Several men were unloading yellowfin tuna.

Every person I passed said *Hola* or *Buenas Tardes*, and would readily fall into conversation if I hesitated. I asked about places I could walk to from Hanga Roa and was directed to a site, *Ahu Tahai*, about a kilometre along the coast from the tiny fishing harbour that was protected by a groyne from big waves that rolled in from the Pacific. I could see several Moai silhouetted against the late afternoon sky.

As I strolled towards the Moai in the distance, I found myself accompanied by an old lady who was walking to the cemetery which I had to pass on the way. She wanted to know where I came from, what I thought of Rapa Nui, where I was staying. I told her I had just arrived, and already I loved the place. She beamed happily. When I told her I was staying at Residencial Tauke, she said the owner was a friend of hers. His wife had died last year. She was Rapa Nui and was buried here in the cemetery. She offered to show me her grave.

The cemetery is on a bluff overlooking the great ocean in the direction of the setting sun. It was full of white and red flowers that stood out against the deep green of the cut grass around each grave. I could see it was a place looked after with love and affection. The old lady showed me the grave she had mentioned and gave me a flower to place there. After I had done that, she thanked me then wandered off to do whatever it was she had come to do.

At *Ahu Tahai* there is one group of five Moai on the nearest bluff and two individual Moai on separate *Ahu* on the further adjoining bluff. Between the two groups there is an ancient stone harbour with a stone boat ramp leading down to a narrow channel that twists and winds between jagged black rocks that stick up just enough out of the water to break the force of the waves. It looked a very dangerous place to bring in a small boat. But it must have been used at one stage or it would never have been built. I imagined that only someone who knew it well would have dared to bring a canoe through that twisting channel to the stone ramp.

*Ahu Tahai*, because of its proximity to Hanga Roa, is one of the most photographed archaeological sites on the island. It was restored by archaeologist William Mulloy, who first came to Easter Island with the Norwegian expedition led by Thor Heyerdahl. I was quite excited to see up close some of the actual statues I had only previously seen in photographs. I wished I had brought my camera with me on this first walk.

As I was examining the remains of an oval-shaped Hare Paenga or stone house, a mini-bus arrived, and several American tourists hopped out. Festooned with compact

cameras, they scrambled all over the site taking as many pictures as they could before the guide called them to get back into the bus so he could take them somewhere else. Because of the way the flights connected between Chile and Tahiti via Easter Island, they only had a day and a half, and it was a scramble to see all they could in that time. I was happy I had another ten days to go, so I could take my time.

I walked back to Hanga Roa, passing many people on horseback. People on motorbikes rode by at a leisurely pace, with sometimes as many as three people on the one bike. Nobody went fast. Twenty-five kilometres per hour was the speed limit in town, and you had to stop at every corner before proceeding. Out of town the roads were so rough you would be lucky to get to twenty-five kilometres per hour before having to slow down to negotiate deep ditches or sharp rocks.

That evening I had dinner in an elegant restaurant that was part of a *residencial* catering to tourists with money. By local standards it was an expensive place. I was the only customer and the meal had been specially prepared for me. I had met the proprietor earlier that afternoon as I walked along the main street. He was cutting a clump of bananas from a tree growing in his garden. When he found I had recently arrived he asked where I was going to eat that night.

'*No se. Todavía no he pensado en eso,*' I told him.

'What do you like to eat?' he asked. 'Meat, chicken, fresh fish.'

I thought about it for a moment. This was an island, so the fish should be fresh. I remembered the yellowfin tuna I had seen down by the pier.

'What about tuna?'

'Ah, an excellent choice. I can cook the best tuna you will ever taste. I do it with a local sauce so you can try true Rapa Nui food.'

'Sounds good.'

'What time do you want to eat?'

It was only three in the afternoon, but it felt like midday. I never think about the evening meal so early. I'm a late eater. But I didn't want to put him off so I asked if 6 p.m. was not too early.

'Perfect.' He beamed. 'I will have everything ready.'

At 6 p.m. the sun was still very high in the sky and I didn't feel the least bit hungry, but I had made an appointment, so there I was at the restaurant, and there was no one there. The place was open and all the tables inside had white linen tablecloths over them. Only one table was set with two wine glasses, a basket of fresh bread rolls with a small tub of butter, bread plate and cutlery. In the centre of the table was a small vase filled with sweet smelling frangipani flowers.

Raul was the owner's name and he came rushing from the kitchen.

'Sit down please.' He gestured to the set table.

'Is no one else eating here?'

'No. It is very quiet. No tourists come this time of year.'

And that was the reason I was there. I had seen in the paper that Lan Chile, in collaboration with Air New Zealand, was running a special off-season promotion to encourage people to holiday on Easter Island. The return airfare was inexpensive, and since Easter Island was a place I had often thought I would like to see, I jumped at the chance and went and bought a ticket.

Raul poured me a Chilean chardonnay that was first-class. I sipped this and nibbled on a fresh bread roll. Suddenly I felt immensely tired. It had been a long, virtually non-stop trip from Melbourne to Auckland, Auckland to Tahiti, Tahiti to Easter Island. I left Melbourne early in the

morning, travelled all day and night, only to arrive on Easter Island at midday of the same day I had left. After walking around the town as well as the few kilometres out to Tahai and back I was now ready for bed, but it was still only the middle of the afternoon.

Raul arrived with a huge plate. It had on it two very thick slabs of tuna marinated in lime juice and herbs after which it had been grilled. A whole avocado had been cut in half, each half filled with marinated fish and salad. There was mound of rice steamed with coconut milk, baked sweet potato or Kumara, and a variety of green vegetables. It was too much. There was enough food on the plate to satisfy three people, yet it was all for me.

I started on the fish which was delicious. Raul came and sat with me. He talked about Rapa Nui and the freedom movement. How, like the Tahitians, who want to be free of the French, the people of Rapa Nui want to be free of the Chileans. He asked what I thought, but the moment I started to answer, to tell him I had no thoughts on the subject having arrived only that day, he would point out that I had stopped eating and ask if there was something wrong with the food.

'The food is delicious,' I said.

'Please, eat. I will do the talking.'

He was a little overpowering. After every two or more sips of wine, he would grab the bottle and top up the glass. He told me about how much the locals wanted to develop the tourist industry, but that the Chilean government held them back. He was one of the founders of the Free Rapa Nui movement and had organised the protest banners erected in the grounds of the island's only church.

Finally I had eaten as much as I could, perhaps two-thirds of what I had been served. I asked for the bill.

'Will you be eating here every night?'

And when I hesitated he added, 'Because if you do it will be cheaper.'

'I don't know. I'd like to try some other places too.'

'In that case it will be seven dollars.'

That's US dollars of course. I gave him a five and two ones, and thanked him for the delicious meal.

The sun was only just starting to drift down towards the Western side of the island and it was almost 8 p.m. I walked back to my *residencial*, and went to bed.

The next morning, breakfast was waiting for me in the dining room: a plate with three flat bread rolls called *hallullas*. I had eaten these some years before while living in Chile. On the road out of Santiago, the capital, to the Maipu valley there are hundreds of roadside bakeries where *hallullas* are baked in clay or earthen ovens, and on Sundays these little bakeries are packed with day trippers stopping for a fresh coffee and a hot roll straight out of the oven. They are unbelievably delicious. And these ones before me were like that: cut in half, one was with cheese, one with marmalade, and one with ham. There was a cup and saucer, a selection of tea bags, a small tin of instant coffee, and a thermos of very hot water. There was also fresh fruit: bananas from the trees in the front garden, an orange, and a piece of melon.

After wishing me a good morning the owner's sister who had come over from Chile to help out after the owner's wife died, left me to help myself. I ate the bread rolls and the melon, and had two cups of coffee. Two inquisitive little girls kept running in and out of the dining room to ask me all kinds of things. The younger, about five or six, repeated everything her older sister said. She thought it was funny and laughed a lot. They were the owner's granddaughters and were there every morning. In the afternoons, too,

whenever I came back from somewhere and sat down on the patio in front of my room, both of them would miraculously appear as if out of thin air, again asking questions or telling me stories about what they had done at school or seen on television.

After breakfast I got my camera bag and walked down the road to the harbour. There was a soccer match in progress on an oval opposite the small protected boat harbour. The crowd was very enthusiastic, cheering and yelling at every move any of the players made. There were people surfing beyond the groyne that protected the harbour. I photographed the fishing boats in the harbour and some old wreckage nearby, then went to Tahai to get some shots of the Moai I had seen the evening before.

On the corner where the road from my *residencial* meets the road running along the beach by the harbour there is a dilapidated little restaurant. It doesn't look much, but I discovered later that their food was delicious. This time I stopped for a cup of coffee so I could watch the boat harbour and whatever was happening there. The coffee was served as a thermos of hot water, a tin of instant coffee (Nescafé) and a bowl of sugar. You make your own.

Since I was the only customer this early in the day, the lady who had served me sat down opposite and we had a long conversation about where I came from and what I was doing on Rapa Nui. She told me she had an artefacts stall in the craft market by the church and that if I wanted some good souvenirs I should come and have a look at what she had for sale. I told her I would do that.

There seemed to be a lot of people coming and going into and out of the house next door to the restaurant and I asked her what was happening.

'My older brother', she said, 'is very sick.'

At that point another customer arrived, a tourist with a local man acting as a guide. He told his guide in English with a German-sounding accent that he wanted to eat fish. The guide ordered in Spanish. When I saw the meal they served I decided then I would come back that evening for dinner. I ate there most evenings. The food was always excellent and the price a quarter of what I had paid for the meal I had had the day I arrived.

The sun was barely above the horizon when I got up on Sunday. It was 7 o'clock in the morning but it felt and looked more like 4 a.m. At breakfast I was told it is because the Chilean government makes them keep the same time as they do in Santiago. It is a permanent three hours of daylight saving.

By the time I had finished breakfast the sun was up and already the air was warm. I went back to my room and grabbed my camera bag and set off to walk to *Rano Kau*, the volcano on the other side of the airport. Perched precariously on the rim of the crater overlooking both the caldera on one side and the endless Pacific Ocean on the other, is the Bird Man village of *Orongo*.

All along the rim for about 500 metres are 47 low houses, no more than a metre high, which were constructed with flat slabs of rock to make the walls. To form the roof, larger flat slabs were laid across the top from wall to wall, then covered with earth and planted with grass. From a distance they are completely invisible. The doorway into each house was a small square tunnel not much wider than average shoulder width. Inside you could only crawl or sit. You could not even walk crouched over. It is pitch black inside, not a bit of light getting in through the walls or the roof. Only through the tiny entrance would any light get inside. It must have been claustrophobic in there.

It was a long walk, about six kilometres, and once I had gone through town and around the end of the airport runway, it was all up a steep incline. It got steadily warmer, but a cool breeze off the ocean disguised the intensity of the sun. There was not a cloud in the sky.

I passed through a clump of small eucalyptus trees, part of a reforestation program, and began the long winding walk up to the rim of the volcano. Here I could see a fair distance over the island, and it looked barren. The grass was beginning to dry, and the low rolling hills in the distance looked more like sand hills than grass covered knolls. I tried to imagine how it must have looked a thousand years ago when there were still forests and large groves of palms.

I knew that all the trees had been cut down and used for firewood, for building huts, and for transporting all over the island the giant stone carvings or Moai with which the people of Rapa Nui had become obsessed. The Moai, who represented kings, priests, and other important people, were erected on top of burial chambers or stone platforms called *Ahu*. I suppose at that time the islanders could not have imagined the forests would all disappear. Seeing such an abundance they must have thought it would last forever. They never knew what a rapid expansion of a population could do, and by the time they did realise, it was too late. There are lessons here for all of us if we take note, but the world is more interested in the mystery surrounding the construction and transport of the giant statues or *Moai*, than they are in the destruction of the environment by overpopulation and overuse of resources.

A couple of hire cars (small Suzuki four-wheel drive vehicles) and a mini-bus of tourists passed me. I could see further up the track others walking, and there was another couple about a kilometre behind me. It was harder than I thought, and by the time I got to the point where I could look over the rim and down into the crater of the volcano the camera bag was very heavy. My shoulders ached from the weight of the bag, but I was glad I had brought my cameras because the view across the one-and-a-half kilometre crater was superb.

Islands of reeds and matted algae floated on deep blue water. It was said you could walk across, from island to island, but if you fell in you would disappear forever.

Parts of it looked very swampy to me, and you would have to be crazy to try walking across. There is a story that a scientist taking water samples from the middle of the crater, after having walked across the floating reed islands, fell in, or got trapped in a boggy section and sank beneath the surface. He was never found, and few people have ventured out into the crater on foot since then. I could not confirm this, though many people talked about it. No one seems to know how deep the water in the crater is.

Because of all the lava tubes and the porosity of the soil which rapidly absorbs surface water left by rainstorms the whole island appears semi-arid. The only surface water available that is fresh is found in the craters of the three main volcanoes, Rano Kau, Rano Raraku and Rano Aroi. Rano Kau, the largest, is the only one where a village was established: Orongo, the village of the Bird Men.

The only way to photograph the whole crater would be from the air, or to use a fisheye lens. Since I didn't have one of those I had to be content with taking a series of shots that I could later join together to form a panoramic view.

About 500 metres past the viewing point is the village of Orongo. There is also a car park and a small office where a fee is collected from visitors. This fee covers the costs of maintaining the various archaeological sites all over Rapa

Nui. The ticket issued entitles you to visit any site anywhere on the island. If you come across a park ranger elsewhere on the island he may ask to see this ticket. Of course, if you don't have one he will immediately issue one and collect the fee.

'Please, do not stand on the roofs of the houses,' I was told as I purchased my ticket. 'Follow the paths.'

The paths were like narrow mountain goat tracks. There were a number of people strolling along the paths between the lowly houses.

One path ran along the very edge of the cliff on the ocean side of the crater rim, so I followed this. The path was so close to the edge that without leaning I could look down over a sheer drop of perhaps 300 metres to where reefs of jagged black lava took the brunt of huge waves crashing into the shore. I tried to visualise the young men of the tribe climbing down these cliffs, making their way through those massive waves so they could swim the kilometre out to a black needle of rock beyond which lay the islets of Motu iti and Motu nui. They swam out there to await the arrival of the first seabirds for the season. Each year sooty terns would return to nest on these three wild islets.

No doubt the men would fight over who got the first egg laid, and perhaps many would be broken. Eventually each would get an egg, and gently holding it in his mouth so his hands would be free, he would swim back and climb the cliffs to the village. The jagged rocks at the bottom of the cliffs had to be negotiated while the waves pounded, a path had to be found up the cliff, then a short race along the crater rim to the king's house, the one with the petroglyphs carved into the stones by the entrance. More eggs would be broken, but the first man to have the honour of carrying an unbroken egg back to the house of the king would himself become king for a year.

Orongo was not a permanent village, although it appears very permanent, being all built of stone. It was only used during the season when the sooty terns' migration across the Pacific brought them to Rapa Nui to breed. Orongo was probably abandoned about the same time as production of the giant Moai ceased, just before discovery of the island by Europeans.

On my way back down the road well below the rim of Rano Kau I was out of the wind and I could feel the sun burning my face. I broke a branch off a bush and held it over my head to try blocking the sun. I wished I had bought a hat, and resolved to do so as soon as I got back to Hanga Roa.

As I came around the end of the runway a Suzuki pulled up next to me. The driver asked if I wanted a ride.

'*Si, por favor,*' I said. I climbed in, relieved to be out of the sun, and not having to walk the last 2 kilometres into town.

'*Te quemaste la cara,*' he commented. 'Your face is sun-burnt.'

'I can feel it.'

He drove carefully, stopping at every corner, never exceeding the speed limit of 25 kph. At first this slow speed gives the impression that life on Easter Island is laid back, lazy, that everything happens in slow motion. But after a while this becomes the normal pace, and I found myself relaxing. Tension dissipates easily here, and it becomes difficult to imagine how we can sustain the rapid pace at which we live in the big cities all around the world.

He asked the usual questions: Where was I from? What did I think of Rapa Nui? Where was I staying? Would I post a letter for him when I got back to Australia? He had a friend

who lived in Sydney, someone he met while they were filming the movie *Rapa Nui*.

'Certainly, I'd be happy to post your letter.'

'I'll pay you for the stamps. How much do they cost?'

'Don't worry about it.'

He told me he was a sculptor, that he had a stand in the handicrafts market opposite the church on the hill, that I should come and see his work, not to buy but just to talk. He also worked for the local council when he wasn't selling his handicrafts.

'Why do I work so hard', he said, 'when every Pasquense has his own land? The land provides food and there is fish in the sea. No one has to work. When people ask me that I say, because I'm not lazy like you. That's what I tell them. The truth is I have three daughters and one is at school in Tahiti, and the other two are in Chile: one in Iquique, the other at Vina. It costs a lot to keep three kids at school overseas.'

I had to agree. He made a U-turn in front of my *residencial*.

'I will bring the letter before you leave,' he told me.

'*Hola Luis,*' the owner of the *residencial* called out. He was fixing the engine of an old Volkswagen Kombi in his driveway and his hands were covered in grease.

'*Hola Tauke,*' Luis called. To me he said, before driving off, '*Ahi nos vemos, Ill see you around.*'

'He's a good man,' Tauke told me. 'He works hard, like a Chilean.'

Tauke was originally from Chile, and was always working, fixing old cars, hot water systems, anything mechanical or electrical. He was always gone early in the morning before I had breakfast.

'Your face is burnt,' Tauke said. 'You should wear a hat.'

I went to my room, showered and changed clothes. The water stung where I was sunburnt so I put some oil on it to ease the skin. Then I went out and bought a hat. I walked down to the little restaurant overlooking the boat harbour and had an instant coffee and a cheese sandwich for lunch.

There were a lot of people at the restaurant. People kept coming and going to the house next door too, visiting the man inside who lay sick and dying. When my sandwich arrived I asked how the man was next door.

'He will last perhaps another day, but he is old. There is nothing anyone can do. When your time comes it is best to go with dignity. He did not want to die in the hospital. He is happy to be home where his family and friends can be with him.'

There was no one at the other restaurant over the road, closer to where the fishing boats tied up. Both these places are mentioned in the Lonely Planet guide. Both of them have good food. The only reason I could see why no one patronised the other place was that where I was, the owners who both cooked and waited on the tables were charming ladies with wonderful out-going personalities. They made you feel at home, that they were old friends, and they loved to gossip. Mostly they spoke Rapa Nui with a few Spanish words mixed in, but to people like myself, visitors to the island, they used Spanish.

When I finished my sandwich and coffee I walked over to the fishing harbour, but the only activity there was a man washing out a boat with a bucket of sea water. A road ran along the top of a ridge, below which was a small beach protected by the groyne. There were a few kids out surfing but the waves were not big. Several schoolkids were taking swimming lessons in the shallow water. There was a lot of laughter and splashing. A couple of kids sat in the shade of

a giant head sticking up out of the grass verge by the roadside. I walked along the road and followed a different path back into town. I discovered the telephone office, and the bank where I could change some money. I also found the tourist information centre where I obtained several excellent maps. Tomorrow I would rent a car and visit all the sites shown on the maps.

Raul had introduced me to a man who ran a general store in the main street. This man also hired Suzuki Sierras to tourists wanting to visit the less accessible archaeological sites. He assured me the man would rent one to me at a good price. I went there, and after negotiating a price, not as low as Raul said, but a good third off the normal rental price, I got the vehicle for the day.

Following the rules, I didn't exceed 25 kph, and I made sure I stopped at each corner. I drove back to my *residencial* and collected my cameras and the hat. There is a little shop next door, so I went in there and bought some mineral water and a couple of oranges to take with me. The lady was very friendly. She told me she has a daughter who is married to an Australian and lives in Sydney. She went there last year to visit her. She was very impressed by the size of the city. It was the first time she had been anywhere other than Tahiti.

When I went to pay for the drinks and oranges she discovered she didn't have enough change. 'Why don't you pay me later', she suggested, 'when you get some smaller money?'

I drove out the way I had walked, around the runway to the airport, but instead of taking the right hand track and going up Rano Kau to Orongo, I went left and followed the track to the far end of the runway to the other side of the volcano. The track degenerated into two wheel ruts as it went down a steep slope towards the ocean. Coming around behind Rano Kau the land levelled and there was Vinapu. There was a Moai here that had fallen, or had been toppled over, and was broken into several pieces. The head was staring at me as I got out of the Suzuki and walked towards it. But it was the walls of the Ahu beyond the fallen head that caught my attention.

Like the Inca walls along the road at Tiahuanaco in Peru, here was a wall made of accurately cut blocks of stone that are of immense size but fitted together so smoothly that you could not find a gap wide enough to poke a blade of grass through.

There is no other stone wall like this on the island.

All the other Ahu are made of stone that is not cut and shaped to fit. They are much rougher and more primitive looking. Thor Heyerdahl claimed that Vinapu was built first while the early settlers retained the stone-mason skills brought with them from Peru; that the other Ahu all were degenerated and less skillfully constructed as subsequent generations lost the art of the original stone masons, until the final and most recent Ahu were simply made of piles of stones stacked together without any skill whatsoever. One of the walls had been extended at a later period and the stones were not as well made as the original ones. These Ahu at Vinapu were not used as burial chambers as were the more recent constructions, but were simply bases upon which to stand the Moai.

Other archaeologists claim the reverse: that Vinapu shows the final development after centuries of learning to work with stone. Carbon dating has not provided any evidence one way or the other, since only the rock can be dated but not the work put into the construction.

I took photographs, and sat on the grass as I contemplated the Ahu. A cool breeze blew off the water and the



sun shone in a deep blue sky. After a while I got back into the Suzuki and drove diagonally across the island to Anakena, where Hotu Matua was supposed to have landed.

I did not see another vehicle on the drive across the island and there was no one at Anakena. I parked in the shade by a clump of coconut palms and walked past several new picnic tables and stools that seemed new. Once I had walked through the grove of coconut palms, which had been planted many years ago as part of the rehabilitation of the beach, I could see the beach. Glittering white sand lapped by water so clear and calm it seemed to be invisible. But what dominates this beach is a huge Ahu on which stand seven Moai, four of which have red topknots balanced on their heads. With their backs to the beach these Moai stare inland towards the coconut palms.

On a small knoll further away from the beach is another single older Moai. This was the first Moai to be replaced on its pedestal. Thor Heyerdahl had asked the islanders assisting his archaeological expedition how the statues were placed on the platforms, so the mayor at that time gathered a group together and over a couple of weeks they showed him how it was done.

The Moai was laying face down. The men jacked the face up off the ground using long poles. Small stones were placed underneath to keep the giant statue off the ground. It was then jacked up a little higher. More stones were gathered and placed under the statue. Little by little, the pile of stones grew taller and the statue was raised higher and higher. When the head was a bit higher than forty-five or fifty degrees off the ground ropes were tied around the head and the statue was pulled from behind until it rocked back onto its base. After three hundred years or more of lying on its face, it stood proudly once again staring inland.

Just around the bluff from Anakena is another small beach of golden sand surrounded by black lava rocks, Ovahe. There are a lot of caves beside this beach and it was here in these caves that Hotu Matua and the first settlers stayed. These are the only two real beaches on Rapa Nui.

Anakena is popular during the tourist season but nobody swims at Ovahe because there are lots of sharks in the water.

I followed the track around the coast, losing count of the number of times I stopped to look at broken fallen Moai. There are hundreds of platforms all along the coast, each one having at least five and often seven fallen Moai.

Not far from Ovahe is Tongariki, which is in the process of being restored. Tongariki is the largest Ahu on the island, with the most Moai. There are thirteen huge Moai standing here, the biggest I had seen so far. Two more are lying on the ground quite a distance away from the platform. Tongariki had been partially restored when in 1960 a huge earthquake off the coast of Chile triggered a massive tsunami which hit the east coast of Rapa Nui. The force of the water lifted the giant Moai off the pedestal, toppling them all, carrying several of these eighty to one hundred tonne statues as much as fifty metres inland.

A man on a small motorbike pulled up as I was trying to get back far enough to photograph all of Tongariki in one shot. He was the only person I had seen since leaving Hanga Roa two hours earlier. He was a park ranger, but he didn't ask to see my ticket, the one I had bought at Orongo the day before. He just wanted to say hello, and to remind me not to forget to visit the quarry that was nearby at Rano Raraku. It was a couple of kilometres directly in from where we were standing. Its jagged volcanic rim stood out sharply against the soft rounded hills surrounding it. I thanked him and he rode off towards the quarry, leaving a trail of dust to show me where the track was.

Rano Raraku is the quarry where all of the Moai were carved. The whole world knows this place — if not by name, then they know the image — the place where the giant heads stick up out of the grass. It is synonymous with Easter Island because of the many photographs published in hundreds of magazines over the last half a century. It is an astounding place when you realise that there are over three hundred giant statues in various stages of completion scattered along the inner and outer slopes of this small volcano.



The huge heads sticking up out of the grass, some of them as tall as six metres, are all statues that were stood up to await finishing touches before being transported to whatever part of the island they were to be erected. To walk amongst these Moai, to realise they were carved with nothing more than stone tools, to realise that most of the island's population must have been involved in the carving and transport of these Moai, to wonder why they were so obsessed with carving them, sends shivers along your spine.

The statues of the lower slopes are all partially buried by rubble that fell down or washed down from higher up. As you climb about the more rocky heights there are probably more than one hundred unfinished statues. Some of them are complete, lying on their backs as they were carved but not detached from the bedrock beneath them. Others are mere outlines cut into the side of a rock wall. Some are in what at first appear to be caves, but closer examination reveals that the rock has been chipped away from around the statue to form a cave in which the carvers worked. Always, the last part of the statue to be chipped away was the back. As this was chipped away, the statue would collapse onto its back. Then it could be dragged down the slope, where the workers would stand it up so the final finishing could be done. The largest of the Moai is still attached to the bedrock. It measures 21 metres long.

I spent most of the day here, wandering along the slopes of Rano Raraku. I met the park ranger again and he told me that his people spent more than 500 years carving the 900 or so Moai that are all over Rapa Nui. It would often take 40 or 50 carvers over a year to produce one Moai. Many of them were carved simultaneously. I imagined there must have been teams of carvers working all over Rano Raraku, like ants swarming over an ant hill. Then all of a sudden it stopped, and everything was abandoned.

The conflict must have been horrific. The population destroyed itself. Thousands of people died. One whole group, the long ears, were completely exterminated. Most of the standing Moai were toppled and deliberately broken, while those in transit were abandoned along the roadside. Families hid from other families in secret caves, and cannibalism was rife. But once the population had stabilised at a number the island could support, life returned to normal.

That is until the Europeans came. Through slavery and disease the population was rapidly reduced to little more than one hundred people, who lost the continuity of the culture that had existed before. Things were forgotten. Stories were muddled, genealogies confused, and with team after team of archaeologists studying the island the natives told them what they wanted to hear rather than what they could truly remember. No wonder there was so much mystery.

But today, with the population back around the 2000 mark, the people are proud of their history, no matter how bloody it might have been, and proud of the enigma of the Moai, those giant statues that have baffled the world for centuries. They call themselves Rapa Nui and their island Rapa Nui. And like the rest of Polynesia they want to be independent, tied to no nation but themselves.

Everyone is concerned with independence to one degree or another. Raul is leader of the protest group who erected the banners in French, English and Spanish in the grounds of the church on top of the hill at the end of the street where I was staying. One of the banners stated in bold red letters against a white background: *El Pueblo de Rapa Nui solicita la restitucion de sus tierras usurpadas por el Estado de Chile*. The people of Rapa Nui seek restitution of the lands

stolen by Chile.

Everyone talks about this, usually politely, but I did meet a drunk who was rather blunt. I had just left the office of Lan Chile after confirming my return flight to Tahiti. The office is halfway from the town to the airport. I had stopped out the front by the roadside when this drunk staggered across the road. He was the only person on the island I had seen drunk. He called out to me so I stepped forward to meet him. He grabbed my hand and shook it. '*Como te llamas?*' he said. 'What's your name?'

'John. *Me llamo John. Soy Australiano.*'

'My name is John too. John Rapanui. You like Rapa Nui?'

'Yeah. I like Rapa Nui. Everyone is very friendly. *Muy amable.*'

I started to walk back towards the town. He kept right next to me.

'Where you going?' he asked.

'To the town centre.'

He laughed. 'There is no town centre here.'

'Well, whatever there is, that's where I'm going.'

'You like Chileans?'

'I don't know, I said diplomatically.'

'Rapanui no like Chilean,' he stated with a gesture crude enough to be understood by anyone. Then he said, 'Rapanui', gesturing with a closed fist thumb up, 'Good'. Then to make sure I understood him completely he stood in front of me so I had to stop. He ran his fingers across his throat as if cutting it with a razor. 'Chileans, *afuera!* Out of here!'

He was angry but harmless. He was so drunk he could hardly stand up. Having said his piece his anger abated. He held on to my shoulder until he regained his balance before politely asking me for a cigarette.

'I'm sorry, I don't smoke.'

'Ahh,' he said. For a moment he seemed at a loss, then he let go of my shoulder. 'It was good to talk to you.'

'Yes. It was very nice to meet you,' I said in return.

'I see you later, maybe.'

'*Chao.*'

He sat down in the shade of a tree as I continued on my way.

I thought about this as I drove back along the coast. The land was grassy but extremely rocky. Broken black lava everywhere. There was no shortage of rocks to build Ahu or platforms, stone fences, and houses. The only animal life visible were several scrawny horses I had seen grazing in a rocky paddock. I passed many large Ahu where all the Moai had been toppled over and broken. I stopped at each one to take photographs. The government is hoping to eventually restore most of these, if not all of them. This is an enormous task that will take a long time. There are over six hundred broken Moai at sites all around the island, and so far only a handful have been restored. When this task is completed Rapa Nui will be a magnificent place to visit.

It was late afternoon when I got back to Hanga Roa. I returned the Suzuki, took my cameras back to the *residencial*, then went down to the little restaurant by the waterfront to have a coffee and a sandwich. Luis was among a group of people sitting in front of the house next door.

'*Hola,*' he called out when he saw me.

I went over and sat down. 'What are you doing here?'

'I am carving this small Moai Kavakava.' He held out the piece of wood he had been working on with a small knife. Already I could see the shape of a long skinny man with prominent ribs.

'One night', Luis said, 'not long after Hotu Matua came he dreamed of two ghosts who were tall and skinny. They

had hollow cheeks and a shrunken stomach, as if they had been starving and all that was left of them was skin and bones. They had eyes that burned into your skull, and they stared at Hotu Matua as if trying to tell him something. He woke up and immediately grabbed a piece of wood and made a carving of what he had seen so he would not forget. We have been making similar carvings ever since.'

The lady from the restaurant called to me to let me know my sandwich was ready.

'It is my father', Luis said, 'who is dying. That's why I am here.'

'I'm sorry, Luis.'

'Thank you. You'd better go and have your sandwich.'

While I was eating a lot of people arrived and they all went inside the house. Luis accompanied them. They had not come out when I had finished. I left the restaurant and walked over to the pier by the waterfront. Two boats had come in and the fishermen were busy stacking several large tuna on the concrete landing. Blood seeped from the gills and collected in small puddles on the concrete.

When all the fish were on the wharf the men in the boats started to wash their boats with buckets of sea water. Other people on the wharf gutted and cleaned the fish. The entrails were thrown into the water to be gobbled quickly by hundreds of tiny darting fish. Buckets were passed up, the tuna were washed, and the blood sluiced into the water. A station wagon pulled up and the lady driving was the lady from the little store next to my *residancial*. She said hello and explained that her husband was one of the fishermen. She had come to collect him. I watched them load his fish into the back of the wagon, then they took off.

As I left the fishing wharf, Luis came out of the house. He held the carving he was making out to show me. 'I make this one for you, if you want it,' he said. 'Will you come tomorrow to the craft market to see my work?'

'I'll come in the afternoon,' I told him.

The next morning I was woken early by the sound of children's voices laughing and yelling with excitement. I got up to see what was happening. There is a school on the other side of the road from *Residancial Tauke*, and there must have been thirty or more children between the ages of ten to twelve milling about with an equal number of horses. Some of the children were already sitting in the saddles; others were trying to calm the horses so they could mount them. There was a lot of laughter and good-natured jesting from those older ones watching the younger ones struggling with their horses. It took about half an hour before everyone was mounted, then the leader called something and started up the hill towards the church. The other children followed singly or in pairs, riding quietly along the wide grassy footpath. Now that they were moving the excitement seemed to have died down. They followed the road around the church and disappeared.

Not long after the bigger kids on horseback had disappeared there was more noise around the corner in the other street. Lots of younger voices this time. I went back inside and grabbed a camera, then went down the street to see what was happening. There was a crowd of little children all dressed in native costumes. Their faces were painted with patterns in bright colours representing tattoos. They were children from the kindergartens, and there were several teachers telling them what to do, how to line up. There was a clown on stilts marching and swaying along the street in front of the children and they all started to follow him. They also started singing. A delightful song in Rapa Nui. I could not understand a word of it but the harmonies were simply

beautiful. One of the teachers, a man, played a mandolin, strumming the melody and singing counterpart in a deep voice to add a bass line to the children's high pitched voices.

Some of the children held up signs proclaiming *El Dia de Los Ninos*, Children's Day. As they marched along others ran to people who were watching from the footpaths and handed them small cards with drawings and messages on them. They had made them at the kindergartens just so they could hand them out to people during their parade. A little girl gave me one which said: *Si un nino crece con amor, aprende a amar*. If a child is brought up with love, he/she will learn to love.

I followed the little parade along the street snapping quite a few photos until they turned by the market and headed towards the small beach down where the fishing boats were moored.

I stayed by the market. Stalls under thatched awnings were loaded with vegetables and fruit. There were piles of root vegetables I had not seen before, and others that were familiar. I asked the names and was told: 'This was camote, and that, manioca. Over there was taro,' which I had seen before. There was uhi and kumara, which I also knew. They were all varieties of sweet potato. There was pukapuka, a kind of plantain, and cana, sugar cane that had been introduced from Tahiti. Then there were the things you find everywhere else: peas, beans, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, pumpkin, carrots, and potatoes. The fruits were tropical. Mango, papaya and paw paw, melons, and bananas. There were no apples, pears or stone fruits; these would have to be brought in from the mainland (Chile) and would cost too much. Oranges and pomelos which I had seen in one of the general stores (imported from Tahiti) were not here in the market. They were also too expensive.

Towards the back of the market was a lady cooking something in a large wok over a gas burner. She was deep frying what looked like small pancakes, and when I asked her what they were she told me; 'Sopaipillas.'

She lifted one out with a pair of tongs and drained it on a paper towel. She put it on a small plate and handed it to me. 'Why don't you try it?'

I did, and it was delicious. I wanted to buy some but she wouldn't let me pay for them. She cooked several more, and put them on my plate, insisting that I eat them. While I was eating those several other people came over and bought plates of sopaipillas from her. An old lady came and greeted the cook, then she sat next to me and started talking to me. Her voice was so soft, softer than a whisper, it was non-existent. But she talked and talked, and I nodded as if I understood, and she seemed very happy.

Two young school girls came up to me. They were selling raffle tickets at 2000 pesos each (about \$5). The tickets were to raise funds for a child who needed an operation on her heart. I couldn't quite understand what the prize was, but it was to be raffled on Saturday, a week after I would be leaving. I didn't buy a ticket but I gave them a 1000 pesos towards the fund for the operation.

'*Muy caballero. Muchisimas gracias senor,*' the one with the tickets said.

'*Gracias,*' the other repeated.

The old lady stood up and smiled. Her mouth moved, but I couldn't hear anything. She turned and left.

'She likes you,' the cook said. 'She wouldn't have talked so much otherwise. You know, she never talks to strangers.'

Even though I had not understood anything the old lady had said, I felt privileged that she had taken the time to talk to me.

'More sopaipillas?' the cook asked.

'Thank you, no. I've had plenty. I'd better be going.'

'Come again,' she said as I stood up to leave.

When I got back to the residencial the lady who runs the little shop next door came running out. She was very excited, almost jumping out of her skin.

'My daughter who lives in Sydney just telephoned. She's going to have a baby.'

I could hear people inside her shop laughing.

'Come inside,' the lady from the shop said, 'and have a drink.'

Inside the shop were the two young girls and the lady from the residencial, and another older woman. They were all laughing and joking. Having a great time.

'I'm going to be a grandmother. Can you believe that? At my age!'

She went to the fridge behind the counter and took out a can of Cristal beer. She passed it to me, raised her own drink. 'To my daughter, and to my new granddaughter,' she said happily.

Everyone drank with enthusiasm.

'I'm too excited to stay here,' the lady from the shop said. 'Would you like to go and see the *Siete Moai*?' she asked me.

'Yes, of course.'

So she closed the shop, and while I waited with the lady from the residencial, she went and got her car.

The *Siete Moai* are situated at *Ahu Akivi*, which is two and a half kilometres inland. Unlike all the coastal Ahu where the Moai all had their backs to the sea, staring inland, the seven statues at Ahu Akivi are staring East, out over the ocean towards the rising sun. These statues do not wear *Pukao*, the stone hats made from red scoria. The seven statues at Ahu Akivi were the last to be erected before the great battles that decimated the population and stopped all work at the quarry. They too were toppled over and damaged. William Mulloy and Gonzalo Figueroa, who had been members of Thor Heyerdahl's original expedition, had returned a number of times to Easter Island. They had in collaboration with Sergio Rapu and the Chilean University of Santiago excavated Ahu Akivi and restored the *Siete Moai*.

The lady from the shop took us out of Hanga Roa by way of several back streets. Clouds of red dust floated behind us marking our route through the streets. It was still dry season and there had been no rain for months so all the trees and bushes in the gardens of the houses along the way were covered with a fine patina of red powder, dust thrown up by passing cars and motor bikes. Only after the first rains of the wet season would the brilliant greens of these sub-tropical plants be seen.

Out of town we bounced over ruts that jarred the car's suspension.

'Not too many people come this way,' the lady from the shop said.

She wasn't exaggerating because the path we followed was nothing more than two wheel ruts winding through knee-high grass. I could hear the grass swishing along the sides of the car.

Suddenly she turned off the track and drove across a grassy swathe towards a dry stunted tree which had tiny silvery green leaves at the tips of long barren branches.

'*Puna Pau*,' she said. 'This is where they carved the *Pukao*.'

There was a low hill on either side of us, both of which turned out to be small extinct volcanoes. She led the way

up the side of the one to the left of us. A lovely cool breeze was blowing which masked the intensity of the sun. I was glad I had brought my hat along.

We passed one of the *Pukao*. It looked just like a huge stone wheel with a round hub in the centre. It was lying flat and was as thick as I was tall. It must have weighed tonnes.

'They transported these on reed boats to the Ahu along the coast,' the lady from the shop explained.

We were standing on a ridge and could see down the slope. Beneath us was Hanga Roa and the coast. In a direct line it would have been a bit over a kilometre.

'How did they get them down there?' I asked.

She shrugged.

'Maybe they rolled them down,' I suggested.

The children had disappeared over the lip of the shallow volcano so I hurried along after them. Looking back down the way we had come I could see several *Pukao*. Some were lying flat with the topknot or hub sticking up, others were on their side. It was just as if they had been rolled down the slope, tipping over as they went. There were heaps of them inside the crater. Perhaps twenty or more. Some were lying flat, some were on their sides, as if ready to roll away. All of them were as thick as I was tall with a diameter of maybe one and a half metres. I imagined it would have been one heck of a job rolling them up the incline of the crater to the lip. Once over they could simply roll downhill until they tipped over. Was this how it was done? I don't know. Nobody could give me an answer either.

The women stayed on top of the crater rim where there was a cool breeze while I went down into the crater to take some photos of the *Pukao*. When I had finished we went back to the car to continue along the track to Ahu Akivi.

Once we arrived the women sat down on the grass and chatted while I wandered around the seven statues taking pictures with two different cameras from as many angles as possible. These statues are the only ones that look out to sea rather than inland, and it is said that they are searching for others who were expected to arrive from the East. This is the direction from which Hotu Matua came. It is also said that they represent the seven explorers Hotu Matua sent out to explore the island after he and his people had landed at Anakena.

Once I had finished taking photos we all jumped back in the car for the drive back to Hanga Roa. Before opening her shop she asked me I would take a letter and post it when I got to Australia. 'It takes so long from here,' she said. 'First it must go to Chile, then after sorting it gets sent to Australia. Some times it takes two months.'

I said I would do it with pleasure.

'I will write it tonight.'

Raul who had cooked dinner for me the first day I had arrived strolled past. He had come from the church on the hill at the top of the road where Residencial Tauke was situated. He stopped to say *Buenos dias*.

'Why have you not come for dinner again?'

'Well,' I couldn't think of any real reason.

'Perhaps you will come before you leave.'

'I'll certainly try.'

'*Bueno entonces, ahi nos vemos.*'

'*Chao.*'

I decided to walk to the craft market opposite the church at the top of the street. I took my camera bag back into the residencial and changed into a fresh shirt. The market consisted of a number of stalls along each side and down the centre of a very large tin shed. There may have been

forty different stalls inside. Flaps in the side walls had been opened to allow breezes to blow through. Without that it would have been too hot inside.

Some of the stalls were closed, their contents covered by sheets of canvas, but most of the others were open for business. All of them were full of carvings, miniature Moai in volcanic pumice, or wooden statues called Moai Kavakava. There was some decorated shell jewellery, some masks and a few weapons like clubs and spears.

I looked at most of the work before coming to the stall operated by Luis. There was a lot of variation in the skills exhibited by the different artisans. Some of the work was quite crude, while other work would be of fine detail or exquisite craftsmanship. There were a few buyers arguing prices at some of the stalls.

Luis was showing an American lady a book of traditional Easter Island art where explanations in English told her what the carvings he had made represented. While she studied the book Luis went behind the stall and brought out a wood carving.

'This is the one I was making the other day.' He handed it to me. 'It's for you, if you want it.'

I studied the carving while Luis went back to his other customer. It was a lovely piece of work with fine detail. It was not very heavy and not too long. It would fit into my overnight bag without any problem.

'*Que piensas?*'

'I like it,' I told him. 'I'll take it.'

'And what about one of these stone carvings?' He indicated a large stone moai that he had made. It stood about a metre tall. It would look great in my garden but it must have weighed fifty kilos.

'I travel light.'

'I can ship it to Australia.'

'I don't think so.'

'Only \$100. It took two months to carve. That's good value.'

'It's too big.' That was the wrong thing to say.

'Something smaller perhaps,' he pointed at another stone moai about half the size. 'you can take twenty kilos in your luggage without paying extra.'

'I don't travel with luggage,' I told him. 'Only what I can carry. That way I don't get held up at airports with customs or lost luggage.'

'I understand,' he said. He grabbed a smaller carving and passed it to me. 'This is the one. It weighs no more than five kilos. Surely you can manage that?'

It was a nice piece, and just big enough to look good. I decided I would buy that also.

'*Muy Bien.*'

A price was agreed and Luis said he would bring them around to the residential in the evening.

He never came that evening because that was the night his father died.

I found that out the next morning when I went out into the street after breakfast. There were quite a few people coming slowly up the street from the waterfront. They were singing a slow rhythmic song. Perhaps it was a prayer. The men wore suits and the women had on what looked like evening dresses, the sort of thing they would wear if they were going out to the theatre, the opera or a ball. It was most unusual. I had never seen anyone dressed up like that during the time I had been here.

As they came closer I realised that the knot of people in front of the procession were carrying a white coffin. Most of those were the people from the restaurant by the water-

front where I regularly had dinner. Amongst them was Luis. He saw me standing by the front gate of the residential and nodded. He indicated I should join the procession, but I felt uncomfortable doing that. Even though people were beginning to accept me as one who lives on Rapa Nui rather than as a visitor or tourist, it would not be right for me to be a part of this procession.

There were a lot of kids running around the edges of the group walking up the road towards the church, and quite a few people had come out of their houses or shops to watch the funeral party go by. I joined them and stood in the shade of a tree to watch.

The church bells had started tolling. A deep sonorous sound that echoed along the street. I'm sure they were heard all over Hanga Roa. Once the funeral party had reached the church, a lot of others who had been attracted by the bells followed them inside.

The priest used a microphone so everyone outside the church could hear the mass. It was a long mass broken by much beautiful singing in Rapa Nui even though the priest spoke in Spanish. The prayers and chants were not Gregorian but were sung with that particular South Pacific Islander harmony that is so beautiful it brings tears to your eyes. Some of the people outside the church, those who were the closest, also joined in with the singing. It was a very moving mass.

After more than an hour the mourners emerged from the church. They were led by a man incongruously wearing a navy blue parka over his suit. He must have been very hot because it was the middle of the day and the sun was beating down. He held aloft a very long pole on top of which was a tiny gold cross. The pall bearers carrying the coffin followed closely behind him. There was a large number so they could keep changing as those actually carrying the coffin got tired. The rest of the party tagged along behind chanting prayers and occasionally bursting into song.

It took an hour for the funeral party to go down the street to the waterfront, where more people joined the crowd following the procession, then along the cliff top to the cemetery overlooking the ocean. There were more ceremonies at the graveside, and more singing under the watchful eyes of the giant Moai standing on the clifftops nearby. I didn't go into the cemetery this time, not wanting to intrude.

I walked back along the cliff top to the waterfront. I could still hear the singing from there almost a kilometre away. The sun was shining, and an intermittent breeze blew across the island carrying the voices far and wide. It was my second last day on Rapa Nui and I felt sad to be leaving the next day.

Later that afternoon I went to the craft market to see if Luis was there. He wasn't but his wife was looking after the stall. When she saw me coming she knew who I was.

'These are yours,' she said. She picked up the wooden moai kavakava and the much heavier moai carved from pumice. I gave her the money Luis and I had agreed was the price. She put each carving in a plastic bag for me. 'Luis will see you tomorrow, before you leave.'

The next day was a Sunday. A French warship had arrived before dawn. It was anchored about a kilometre off shore. The fishermen were ferrying the sailors back and forth. Many of the artisans from the craft market had set up stalls or had laid out blankets on top of which they displayed their carvings and souvenirs. Sailors were crowded around these stalls, studying the carvings and discussing prices.

Several officers were supervising stores being loaded onto a boat to be taken out to the ship.

Others were climbing onto saddled horses to be taken on horseback tours of nearby places of interest. Everyone on the island who owned a horse must have been there because there were horses everywhere. I could see a long line of them heading towards the cemetery and Ahu Tahai on the cliff beyond. A trio of sailors on horseback headed up the street towards the church, while coming down towards the waterfront were more islanders leading horses. All the restaurants and cafes near the waterfront were full of sailors out of uniform, having breakfast, drinking beer, laughing and shouting, having a good time. There were people in little jeeps, with the tops down, or on motorbikes slowly driving along the waterfront. They went no faster than walking pace because there were so many horses and riders wandering over the road. They waved at, or called out to friends as they went past. They would circle the oval where a soccer game was in progress, then come back along the road by the water again waving and calling to their friends.

Every so often when the wind shifted I could hear the voices singing the mass drift down from the church at the other end of the street going up the hill from the waterfront. I suspected that apart from those at the church, practically the whole population of Hanga Roa was down here by the waterfront. It is not often a ship visits, so it is always something not to be missed. I bought some *empanadas* and sat by the oval to eat them and watch the soccer game. It was played with not much skill, but with lots of enthusiasm and loud encouragement from the spectators. Once the Sunday mass was over, most of those people came down from the church to join the crowd watching the soccer.

I thought it was a good way to end my stay on Rapa Nui. It was like a carnival with people on horseback, crowds of enthusiastic soccer fans, people driving back and forth waving and calling to friends, families picnicking on the grass. All it lacked was a group of dancers and some singers.

After a while people drifted away to do other things. I went back to my residential to pack my things and put my cameras away. I had used all the film I brought with me. All I had to do now was wait till midnight when the plane from Chile came in to pick up passengers heading for Tahiti and beyond. If it was on time I would connect in Tahiti with a flight for New Zealand and Australia.

Luis came by and gave me the letter he wanted me to post. He also gave me a shell necklace as a going-away gift. When he left the lady from the little shop next to the residential came over and gave me the letter she wanted me to send to her daughter in Sydney. She also gave me a fine shell necklace. 'For your wife,' she said. 'She must be *Muy amable*,' because, she told me, I was a very nice person. She makes the necklaces while she sits in her shop talking to customers, or when there is not much to do on a slow day.

She took another necklace from her bag and put this one over my head. 'For good luck,' she said. 'You must wear this when you leave.'

I didn't know what to say.

'I will see you later, at the airport. I work as a cabin cleaner when the plane comes in from Santiago.'

Later that evening while I was sitting out on the veranda in front of the residential, waiting for the owner to take me

to the airport, Luis came by again, this time riding a bike.

'Hola John,' he called out from the street.

'How come you're riding a bike?'

'*Es para bajar el peso*,' he said. 'I'm ninety-four kilos. I should be eighty.'

It was a nice looking bike.

'I got this off a French sailor. He wanted to trade it for some carvings. They haven't been paid for a month and they don't have any money. I thought it was a good trade. What do you think?'

'I think it's great.'

After we talked a while he said goodbye once again, and reminded me that if I ever returned to Rapa Nui to come and see him. 'I'll look after you, no worries.'

'*Gracias*.'

'*De nada. Chao*.'

He rode off into the dark.

My friend from the little shop was standing beside the boarding steps as I walked across the tarmac. She gave me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. She beamed when she saw I was wearing the necklace she had made. She reminded me not to forget to come and see her whenever (not if ever) I was on the island again. I turned at the top of the stairs to take one last look at Easter Island and she gave me a thumbs up sign.

Much later as I was flying back to Australia I knew I would never forget Easter Island, not because I had seen the giant statues and learned something of the mystery surrounding them, but because of the people I had met. People who had made me feel welcome, who made me feel that if I had wanted, I could have been one of them.

## Recommended books

There are many other books, but these five cover everything that is known about Easter Island at the present time:

***Easter Island: Archaeology, Ecology and Culture* by Jo Anne Van Tilburg (British Museum Press)**

Probably the best and most technical book yet published.

***Easter Island, Earth Island* by Paul Bahn and John Flenley (Thames & Hudson)**

A new look at Easter Island, with warnings to the people of Earth about repeating mistakes that could lead to ecological disaster.

***La Tierra de Hotu Matu'a* by Sebastián Englert (Editorial Universitaria)**

For those who read and understand Spanish, this is the best book in Spanish by the man who did the most to preserve and catalogue the history and art of Rapa Nui.

***Aku Aku* by Thor Heyerdahl (Rand McNally (hb); Penguin (pb))**

The story of the first Norwegian expedition to Easter Island. A world bestseller, it answered many questions and posed many mysteries. Although often discredited and disputed by other archaeologists, it is still a fascinating book.

***Easter Island: The Mystery Solved* by Thor Heyerdahl (Stoddart)**

Heyerdahl's answers to his critics, and a summing up of his work on Easter Island.

— John Litchen, 1994

---

DOUG BARBOUR regularly reviews science fiction and fantasy for the *Edmonton Journal*, and so reads perhaps too much of the stuff. He escapes escape literature by reading contemporary poetry, including such Australian masters as Robert Adamson, John Kinsella and John Tranter.

---

## MOUNTAIN RUINS AND ANCIENT WELLS:

LONDON — JERUSALEM — HAIFA:

MAY 1994

by Doug Barbour

---

Invited to the Israeli Association of Canadian Studies Annual Conference in Jerusalem, I had wondered whether (and a lot of my friends had worried that) it would be dangerous. Danielle Schaub, the organiser of the literary section of the conference, had not only invited me, but in a long series of e-mail conversations convinced me it would be safe to come — as indeed it was.

So I left Edmonton, late in the afternoon of 30 April 1994, arrived at Heathrow at about 0630 London time, having managed only a smidgen of real sleep on the plane, and with a stopover between planes of about 16 hours. Once I got through customs and wandered about a bit waiting for enough time to pass to be civilised about these things, I called some of the people I hoped to see the following weekend when I got back. I contacted Avedon Carol and Rob Hansen, whom I knew through SF fandom connections, and tentatively set up dinner the next Saturday; and also got in touch with Rhona McAdam, a poet now living in London, who had been a student of mine in another life, and we arranged that I'd call her next Saturday, and hope we could have lunch together on Sunday, maybe with Norm Sacuta, another ex-student studying for his PhD at Sussex.

I called Don and Mildred Kerr, who were in London during his sabbatical. Finding them in, I arranged to meet them for lunch. Don, a poet and playwright and member of the Board of NeWest Press, teaches at the University of Saskatoon. I found my way to Notting Hill Gate and to their walk-up, where we were joined by an old teacher and friend of Don's, William Dumaresq, and wandered around the streets there to a fine old pub where we ate lunch. Dumaresq is an interesting chap; he left Canada back in the sixties, if I got it right, and has lived in London, writing etc., ever since. A charming, gentlemanly sort, he spoke with a bit of a stutter because of a recent stroke, but what he said was intelligent and witty. He warned me off a few of the plays I had been thinking about seeing (and knowing I had only a few evenings to do the theatre, I took his advice when I got back). Don was thinking of going to a movie that afternoon, but he and Mildred suggested that what I needed was a snooze, so I took them up on the offer of their bed and rested for about three hours. I believe it helped, although it didn't get me back on schedule.

Back out at Heathrow, after tea, I had to go through what might be called extreme customs. I was flying British Air-

ways, but the care with which our stowaway luggage was searched reminded us, had we forgotten, that we were heading into the Middle East. Once again we flew overnight, and I arrived in Tel Aviv at 0530 Israel time. I wasn't thinking because I was so tired. Having forgotten the instructions to take a group cab, I let myself be inveigled into taking a single taxi when it seemed no other people were trying to get to Jerusalem at that moment — alas for my wallet when I got there. The drive, through the hills of Israel, as the sun slowly rose, was both interesting and oddly beautiful. We were on a highway, but on either side I could see dirt and gravel trails looking no different than they might have done a thousand or more years ago. Jerusalem is full of new buildings, and so are the hills around it (although I didn't really see them until we took a tour at the end of the conference), but I also saw at least one old building that looked a proper ruin. We drove through mist, and the red round sun above the hills came straight out of an historic image bank. But I was driven right to the Mount Scopus campus of Hebrew University: in Beit Maierdorf, the faculty club that's a hotel, I registered, had a small breakfast, then went upstairs to sleep until well into the afternoon.

The conference, sponsored by the Hebrew Centre for Canadian Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, took place right in the Beit Maierdorf, where we also ate breakfast and lunch and one dinner. The rooms were good, with a fine view over the hills of Jerusalem. Luckily, I woke up in time for the opening ceremonies, and as I entered the plenary session room, having registered downstairs, I saw Janice Kulyk Keefer talking to a tall woman I soon figured had to be Danielle Schaub. I also saw Susan Rudy Dorscht and Jeanne Perrault from the University of Calgary. I would meet many of the others as the conference proceeded. We were welcomed by the Rector, and the Canadian Ambassador, Dr Norman Spector, Bernd Dietz from Spain, the official representative of the ICCS (International Conference of Canadian Studies) and Arie Shachar, President of the Israel Association of Canadian Studies.

The opening session of the conference, on political themes, looked at Pierre Trudeau's kind of federalism in "Federalism, Nationalism and Reason" Reassessed', at 'Electoral Discontinuity: the 1993 Canadian Federal Election', and at 'Factors in Canadian Middle East Policy'.

Afterwards we milled around meeting people, then got together over a buffet dinner. So I got to meet Danielle, with whom I felt quite familiar after months of e-talk (this phenomenon will, I suspect, increase in the future). Our table ended up with Susan, Jeanne, Danielle and Bina Toledo Freiwald from Concordia University in Montréal, whom the University of Alberta had tried to hire back in the 1980s. Susan said some nice things about my Ondaatje book, and talked about how she and Pauline Butling were trying to walk the same line, in their book on contemporary Canadian poetry, between knowing the writers well personally and knowing their work. Janice and I talked about students' writing. She agreed with me that students seemed to have no idea of how to use prepositions (this was something I'd really noticed this past year). She wondered if it was a failure to comprehend what used to be normative idioms. Everybody wanted to get a good night's sleep, so we all went off to our rooms around 2130.

Because I didn't want to go to bed too early, I decided to take a little walk. I took the elevator down to the entrance, which turned out to be in a huge underground parking lot, the only public entrance by car into the university. When I got there I found Rony Blum Lipovetsky, a graduate student who had also been at our table at dinner, and two men, all waiting for a cab. One was just arriving. Rony took a look at the driver, then told the men to take it. She then asked me to stay with her till the next one came, so I said sure. She then explained, with a certain embarrassment, that although she and her husband were 'left wing' and in favour of the peace settlement with the Palestinians, she felt it wasn't safe at night to take a taxi driven by a Palestinian, especially to the part of the city where they lived. When the next cab came and she couldn't see who was driving it, she asked me to go back with her in the elevator to the third floor Registration area, from where she could call her husband to come and get her. I left her waiting for him to arrive, having discovered that I could get out into the courtyard of the university from there. so I took a small walk around the campus close to the Maierdorf, and thought about the complexities of the situation for those who were living right in it. As she told me at the time, and again the next day, she was really grateful for my presence and for my staying with her while she waited. Nevertheless, I thought, if she is one of the peacemakers in Israel, it's going to be a long, arduous journey to any shared lives among Israelis and Palestinians. On the other hand, as I knew nothing about what it's like to live in Jerusalem, I certainly couldn't argue with her or blame her for her fear.

Back in my room, I read for awhile and hoped I would sleep all night. I was reading an interesting novel about the life of Wittgenstein, Russell and Moore, *The World As I Found It*, a real biggie, and wasn't sure I'd get through it on the trip. Not to worry: I kept waking up really early, and took to reading for an hour or two before getting up in the mornings.

The next morning, when I set out for a walk, again within the university, I found I couldn't get out. As Richard Sherwin, a Jew from Boston now living in Israel, later explained, when the university was built after the 1967 war, it was built as a bunker, with the only open entrances underground, although there were a few locked gates above ground. So it's a modern set of buildings, all facing inward. I rambled around the inner courtyards, and got a couple of good shots of the hills of the city from Mount Scopus. All the buildings are named after donors: that too is interesting. But all these 'factors' only served to clarify for me how little use a gener-

alised 'liberal' view of politics was to the average tourist. My feelings from back in Canada about the way Israelis treat Palestinians, or about how the Palestinians too have to make concessions — all of these are 'out of place' once you're there, and it seemed to me that it would be better to shut up and listen than argue abstract cases with my hosts.

The days of the conference were busy and full: the general quality of the presentations was pretty high; and it was an engaging and provocative series of presentations I attended.

Bernd Dietz, a really charming fellow, gave a somewhat off-the-cuff overview of experimental poetry in Canada, from bpNichol right through to Jeff Derksen and some of the other young L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E-type poets who are almost completely ignored in the Canadian academy. Yet he's had Jeff at Universidad de la Laguna in the Canary Islands once already, and is having a week-long conference with a bunch of these writers later this summer! I had further talks with him on the subject, fascinated to find someone in a part of Spain who knew more about this poetry than most Canadianists in Canada.

Danielle gave a solid reading of Janice Kulyk Keefer's novel *Rest Harrow*, and Shuli Barzilai of the Hebrew University gave a really intriguing paper on 'The Rhetoric of Ambivalence in Atwood's *Survival*', a reading that attempted to get beneath the surface of that too easily dismissed text.

Later, Sherwin, who's also a poet, and who loves his laptop, from which he read his notes, tried to define 'multiculturalism', and offered some intriguing versions of the idea, and Bina Toledo Freiwald offered some brilliant insights into women's autobiographical writing.

Jeanne and Susan gave a paired set of papers on 'Feminism and Anti-racism in Contemporary Canadian Women's Writing', which both addressed the problems and introduced the audience to a number of less well-known Canadian writers. Janice later looked at 'Transcultural Aesthetics' in Norman Ravin's *Cafe des Westerns*, and it was becoming clear that one of the major themes of the literature section of the conference was multiculturalism (and, as I later found out in conversation with a most interesting sociologist from the University of Toronto, that was a major theme in the other sections — on geography and politics, and on ethnography — as well).

A group of us wandered around Jerusalem and had dinner out that evening. The group included Danielle, Bina, Susan and me, and well as some of the francophone delegates, including Michel Martiny, who teaches in Cork, Ireland, and whom I had met that morning at breakfast. We wandered through a very rich area of the city overlooking the old walled city — all these new and expensive buildings, a kind of gentrification project — and then to a nifty little vegetarian restaurant also looking across at the walls of ancient Jerusalem. All kinds of blossoms everywhere we went. Also all kinds of police and soldiers, stopping cars and checking them, or just walking around with their Uzis casually draped over their shoulders.

Tuesday morning, 3 May, Susan, Jeanne, Janice and I took the bus downtown to look at the wonderful food market off Agrippa Street: incredible red peppers, fruits, vegetables, fresh fish, some still flopping about. Then, while Susan and Jeanne tried to change some money, Janice and I walked slowly down Jaffa to the Jaffa Gate of Old Jerusalem. When they finally caught up with us, we entered past the usual armed guards, and looked at the Citadel (David's Tower), and then entered the maze of streets, almost all of



which are part of the all-embracing souk that is Old Jerusalem (I think I would have to include all the places of worship under that rubric too) and found our way to the Western Wall. Not quickly, however, as we were importuned at every doorway to buy something, and Jeanne succumbed to a hand-hammered metal bowl while Susan bought a pair of sandals for her husband (she did haggle with the seller, but wasn't at all sure that she had gotten a bargain). Janice and I were not to be moved, and just kept nodding politely and saying No thank you and looking in wonder at the displays and the people.

There weren't many men praying at the Wall, but quite a few women, and a bunch of Japanese tourists taking photos and videos. As we entered the square facing the Wall, we again passed a checkpoint with guards, all quite casual, but the Uzis were hanging from their shoulder straps. We then climbed the path behind the wall up into the Temple Mount, where we decided not to be guided, especially as the mosques were about to close. So we looked at the outsides of El Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, Mosque of Omar, with its huge gold dome glittering in the sun. Jeanne and Susan tried to enter El Aqsa, until they found out it would cost them about \$5 each. We wandered around the mount, and I really liked the ruins of old Roman gates facing in all four directions from the edges; we also had a fine view of the Mount of Olives.

As it was getting near to lunch and we had to be back for the afternoon session (especially as I was chairing it) we descended into the city again, this time making our way up the Via Dolorosa, with the Stations of the Cross marked on doorways. It moves through the Moslem Quarter into the Christian Quarter, and it is more a stations of the cross my palm today, one long souk, a busy, noisy market continually in action. It is exciting to see, but you have to be a born haggler to enjoy buying something there, and I am not. But it was lively, and full of energetic and sometimes lazy humanity. I especially enjoyed the older Arab men, their burnooses on over tattered suits, sitting in doorways with their beads, chatting. The women were dressed in a wide range of clothes, from black chadors to blouses and jeans, and every possibility in between. There was tremendous bustle everywhere and, as Janice said, no space for privacy, especially for the women, and no way out of the city to open spaces, such as we are used to feeling we can at least reach. Jeanne remembered a small restaurant at the Damascus Gate, and we finally found it. We had fresh Israeli grapefruit juice, almost orange-like in its sweetness, though still just tart enough, and falafel: delicious. We had had a good morning of casual conversation, and I had felt especially good about getting to know Janice a bit better (I had met her only once before, at a Canada Council jury meeting). She talked, as we ate, of the difficulty of even recognising cultural signs in the crowds, let alone being able to read them (and, Jeanne added, there are many different Muslims here, plus Armenians, Jews, Christians, Copts, etc. all meshed together, so the signs are of many differing cultures). All of which drove home the point that we are truly no more than merest tourists here. We can only distantly comprehend with what ease or difficulty all these people get along, although they certainly seem to, at least within the markets of the Old City. And always we were aware, if only because we are so unused to it, of the young men and women, in uniform or just in jeans and t-shirts, those machine guns casually hanging at their sides.

That afternoon I chaired a session mostly on theatre, including a comparison of Fringe Festivals in Canada and

Israel, and an analysis of apocalyptic fictions by women writers in the two countries. The final plenary session on multiculturalism was also interesting, with a sociological view from Raymond Breton, a Saskatchewan-born and Manitoba-educated francophone, a legal view from Bruce Elman, a lawyer from my own university (whom I had never met before, a typical situation in a faculty of over 3500), and a whimsical yet insightful discussion of 'Blacks and Jews: Racism and Antisemitism in Canada: The Case of *Showboat*', by Howard Adelman of York University, which was partly entertaining for the ways in which Adelman managed, as he talked about rather than read his paper, to find ways to pat himself on the back for his 'philosophical' involvement in the controversy.

That evening, at the final dinner at the downtown campus of Hebrew University, I ended up sitting with Raymond Breton, a charming, civilised and learned man: he had much to say about how little we differ from the US in our handling of multiculturalism (once you factor out the Québécois); and about how the failure of Meech Lake was a failure of an attempt to match symbolic discourses: in an economy of symbols between Québec and the rest of Canada the exchange broke down; and about how he thought the Québec election would go to the Parti Québécois but that the referendum on separation would fail, provided people in English Canada didn't fuel any separatist fires (which some politicians started to do, once I got back). At this point, one of the Hebrew University people rose to offer a public thanks to Dr Shachar for doing such a fine job of organising the conference, and he mentioned all the 'guys' who helped out too, but somehow managed to leave Danielle's name out of his eulogy. Susan and Janice, and the rest of us, soon caught him up on that typical patriarchal [?] disregard of a person who had been responsible for organising one-half of the conference; and Danielle had organised — asking us by e-mail to get our papers in ahead of time, and making sure to get copies on the spot from the procrastinators, so we had copies of many of the papers, if we wanted them to take away with us. I think she was a bit embarrassed by the fuss we made, but even more miffed that she hadn't been mentioned, and quite rightly.

We had an enjoyable reading, Janice reading from her new novel and a few poems, Richard Sherwin reading a series of poems about a Chinese poet, and an old professor from Hebrew University rambling on for twice his allotted time about his old friend Stanley Cooperman, who had finished his life in Canada, and also come to Jerusalem occasionally, and managing to read a couple of poems as well. I read after Janice, including a sound poem that had the waves saying Shalom, and they all seemed to enjoy that. Later, back at the Maierdorf, I had a bit of a talk with Bernd Dietz about bpNichol and his friendship with some of the other experimental writers such as Jeff Derksen, Steve McCaffrey and Karen MacCormack, and others.

The final morning there were no literature sessions, but it was interesting to attend some of the ones in Geography (where Rony Blum Lipovetsky read parts of her MA thesis on 'Nativisation in Nouvelle-France', and Ethnicity, where one of Israel's leading feminists, Esther Eillam, gave a necessarily angry paper on 'The Failure of Multicultural Strategies to Advance Feminism in Israel'). She clearly wanted all the various groups to realise that they wouldn't gain much until they joined together and stopped fighting one another. After a brief lunch the many visitors, plus Danielle and a young Canadian Social Geographer now studying at Hebrew University, Joseph Glass, who was our

extremely knowledgeable guide, boarded the bus for the tour to Masada and the Dead Sea. Danielle talked with various of us on the trip, switching easily from English to French depending on whom she was talking to.

(Perhaps this is as good a place as any to say something about this remarkable person: I had 'met' her on e-mail, when she got my address from Frank Davey and wrote to invite me to the conference. She then kept me informed continually about it, as well as about her PhD dissertation defence, which occurred just a few weeks before the conference; as she told us all, we helped her make it through, fighting the neglect of her supervisor partly through our spiritual support. The thesis is on one of Canada's best expatriate writers, Mavis Gallant, a fitting subject for a thesis at the Free University of Brussels. In person, she was a bit different from her e-mail personality: a tall woman with short dark hair, she tends to be very intense in conversation, although some of that tension no doubt had to do with making sure her section of the conference ran well and on time. But she is also witty and gracious, in at least two languages. Her multilingualism had many of us Canadians feeling extremely envious, but, as she explained to me later, she had grown up in a multilingual family so, like her own children, who already speak English, French and Hebrew fluently, she just absorbed many languages when she was young. Watching her in action, and later watching her children, I was even more convinced of the foolishness of trying to stay unilingual and crying that 'they' are forcing French down our throats, as many in the West continue to do. One thing for sure, she has immense energy, which she applies to whatever project she is involved in. I felt tired just listening to her talk about all the things she was doing.)

Our trip to the Dead Sea and Masada was fascinating, beginning just on the edge of Jerusalem, where new satellite cities have been and are being built on the hills in a wide circle around it, to solidify Israeli claims to the central city. For these areas, like Mount Scopus, were only gained in the 1967 war. The massive, mass-produced, red-roofed buildings are scattered across the hilltops above meagre forests planted there early in the century. While Jerusalem itself is in a rain area some parts of the year, the territory east and southward is essentially desert, although what we saw was rock rather than sand. It looked like the badlands of Alberta, the rocks cut by the flash floods that occur when the rain does fall. A savagely beautiful landscape full of sharp verticals and declivities, the caves carved out of the rock. As we approached Jericho, which we bypassed, we saw some green, oases planted with date palms from Iraq, but mostly it was bare rock and gravel. Meanwhile we had been descending from 700 feet above sea level to 400 feet below by the time we reached the edge of the Dead Sea, and doing so fast enough to pop our ears a few times. The road carved through the hills both below the cliffs and above gullies, at the bottom of which we sometimes saw small gatherings of tin-roofed shacks. Joseph told us that these were the camps of the Bedouin, who had until recently still pitched their tents there, but had also, since the late nineteenth century, occasionally built these tin huts. Now, rather than in tents they tended to live in the huts, which they had built not where they could find water, as in the past, but where water, brought by trucks, could find them. His explanation was dry, but the whole sad tale of a culture's loss of real independence, however much it might pretend to hold onto something like it, could be seen in those metal shacks. On the other hand, however much these little shacktowns resembled the worst reservations in Canada, perhaps the

Bedouin still feel they have a certain freedom in their gullies; they certainly live different lives from those ensconced in the satellite cities plastered to tops of the same hills do.

We drove alongside the Dead Sea, hints of green near the water, and on the other side of the road nothing but 'red' rock towering upward and sliced through by the flooding runoff from the rains. A spectacular if minimalist landscape. As we drove onwards, we were told to note a hotel, built 50 years earlier right on the shore but now, with its beach cabanas and tables, a good 50 metres from the water because of evaporation and the mining of the minerals in the water. Across the road, the cliffs pulled back to reveal a small mountainous ridge running parallel to the sea. Masada had been 'hidden' in a valley cut into the hills, or rather hidden above the valley. It was only rediscovered in the middle of the nineteenth century, and only uncovered and turned into the magnificent archaeological site it is now in the 1960s. Because it had escaped notice during the long centuries, it had not been looted. We were each given water bottles and told to drink a lot since our sweat evaporated so quickly we wouldn't notice we were losing water till it was too late, then we took the cable car up to the cliff top. When we arrived, the first thing Joseph asked us to look at was a couple of squares on the desert below us: piles of sand or whatever, they were two of the Roman camps that had encircled Masada during the famous siege. After nearly twenty centuries their outlines and that of the wall connecting the camps and surrounding the cliff fortress were still clearly visible, unaltered by anything like either vegetable or human erasure.

Joseph gave us a good short history of all the groups who had used the place after Herod first built it. We looked first at one of the twelve cisterns, a huge deep cave capable of providing water for a large community for months at least. We visited the Western Palace, where Herod put up his visitors, a magnificent and large building, with some of the earliest mosaics ever discovered in Israel on its lower floors, which we could only gaze down upon from above. There were baths down there too, and signs of how later residents had altered the buildings for their own use. We didn't have enough time to look at everything on the site (that would require at least one day, maybe more), but Joseph took us to the Western Gate, overlooking the Masada Valley, to see the outline of the largest Roman camp, as well as the huge ramp, built by slave (Jewish) labour to attack the Zealots under siege there from 66 to 70 CE (Christian Era — a neat way of putting it), and then to the so-called Synagogue where, according to Julius Flavius, El'Azar gave his famous oration to the Zealots urging them to commit suicide rather than be taken by the Romans. Joseph asked me to read it to the group and I did: powerful words, indeed, but also terribly patriarchal: Let us kill our women and children rather than allow them ever to belong to someone Other. When the Romans did take Masada, they found the dead Zealots and full stores, the huge granaries full of dried grain and vegetables and fruit, and the cisterns full enough to last for several years. A stark message of sorts: they had not been starved out, or to death; their death was chosen, to escape capture and enslavement.

Afterward, walking toward the Northern Palace, Bina, who was born and grew up in Israel, told me that both this story and this place have terrific resonance for Israeli Jews today, and it has been turned into one of the central myths of nationhood. But, she added, the famous peroration seemed much more problematical to her today than when

she was young, for as a secular feminist she could hear the patriarchal force of it: the man willing to sacrifice his women and children lest they become the property of the Romans. Better *their* death than that: *he* could not stand it.

We didn't have time to go through the extraordinary Northern Palace, with its three terraces standing out from the cliffside but the rooms dug into the rock, so could only look down and out from the Upper Terrace. A good enough reason to hope I can visit the place again some time, for there is much more to explore there. We did visit one of the large baths as well as a granary: like the rest of Masada, they were examples of careful and massive building and rebuilding over time. We then drove down to the Dead Sea, where a few of us did go floating in the heavy, oily water, and then the long trip back to Jerusalem, the sun glowing redly off the barren hills on the Jordan shore, and, as it fell behind the hills on 'our' side, starkly defining every cliff and gully, every rock and cut, in them. As we climbed we finally hit the top of one hill and saw the red ball of the sun hovering over the three hills of Jerusalem with their various separate towers; as we came closer, the Bedouin camps seemed more populated, in gathering darkness below the brand new concrete cities on the hills (and so economics is implicated with race, nationality and religion; but in how complicated a manner I can only hope to begin to infer). Back at Hebrew University, we made plans for the evening, Joseph recommending Samis, on Agrippa Street, for good cheap food.

Michel, Susan, Jeanne and I took a cab down there about an hour later, meeting Bina and Danielle. The food was good, thick pita bread with various spicy vegetable dishes, and a main course of kebob. Beer. For about \$CAN20 each. We had a funny time, with gossip as well as serious talk, this being the last night. One odd moment came when Michel had all the women laughing with his story of the cemetery where Jerusalem's gays cruise. He was approached by one wearing a kippa (skullcap), which is, he told us, a sign that the wearer would only go with Jews, not with Arabs. Apparently, he was willing to try a Christian too. The sociological point — that many gays cross racial lines — was interesting, but so was the trace of homophobia signalled by Michel's repetitions of how he put off and was put off by the man. Michel's English is so charming that he, and we, laughed at his story.

The next morning, Danielle arrived to pick me up just after breakfast, and we all said our goodbyes. She drove fast, but that seemed to be the norm, and we got to Haifa shortly before noon. We paused at her house, magnificently poised on a hillside overlooking the main city and the Mediterranean, but had to leave immediately as she had an appointment downtown. We had talked about many things on the trip, including her trials and tribulations with her supervisor, and her success in overcoming all that. She dropped me at a small sculpture park she said was a nice place to rest and meditate, and it was, with a view over the sea from some parts. But the 'Sculptures by Ursula Malkin' were less than overwhelming; representational but not too highly realistic, especially the nude young women (the boys all had swimsuits on), all presented with what I would call a 'soft focus' effect that was debilitating — as art — in its sentimentalisation of the figures. I walked a bit further down towards the city centre, and into the beautifully laid-out gardens of the Bahai religious centre, but their 'church', with its Byzantine dome, was closed. Gnarled trees with twisted trunks (possibly eucalypts of some kind) had a wild beauty both stricter and more conducive to a kind of peaceful meditation than the sculptures in the other garden. Danielle picked me up

there and we went in search of her children, who were getting out of school: David nine-plus, and Maya, seven, both polite and intelligent, neat, hardworking kids who turned to their homework before play, even though Danielle had brought a gift of a puzzle from a friend in Jerusalem. We had a late lunch and just lazed about. Sam Wajc, Danielle's husband, arrived. A gentle man in his late fifties with white hair and a trim body, he is a highly educated European, a chemical engineer who is highly cultured and articulate in at least three languages. In the house, he tends to speak French while Danielle speaks English, and they all drop into Hebrew sometimes, and the kids just slide from one language to another without even seeming to notice. Danielle is Sam's second wife, his first having died some years ago. Like Danielle, she was an English professor. Both Danielle and Sam used to teach at the Free University of Brussels, and in fact he still teaches there, being flown back one week every month to do so. He had been teaching at the University of Haifa, where Danielle also teaches, but now devotes all his time to a research facility there. After supper, I found I was very tired, so went to bed quite early — and still woke up early the next morning.

Their house, by the way, is incredible: they purchased it from its designer, an architect who had used it as both home and office. Four levels, all except the bottom one with terraces (we ate breakfast outside in the warming early morning sun). Airy interiors. The children's rooms plus bathroom on the second level. The living, dining, kitchen and TV area, plus guest room and bathroom, and garage on the third level — the kitchen being a stunning island with a halfmoon part wall cutting it off from the living area. Their bedroom, bathroom and a wonderful large library, once the architect's office, on the fourth level. All looking outward over the hills, the downtown, and the Mediterranean.

Danielle said she wanted to spend Friday with the children (as you might guess, they each spend good time with them, but seldom together, and Danielle had been away for a week), so Sam took me on a tour of northern Israel. He proved a most entertaining and knowledgeable guide, a highly cultivated man who is also scientifically aware, especially in his own field. So we packed water and our hats, and took off into the sun. Already high in the hills, we drove a bit higher to the east, and Sam stopped the car and took me to a viewpoint over the industrial parks and the port. He pointed out the huge waste-water cleansing plants, some oil plants, and the complex where he works. We then drove down to the valley floor and took a highway southeast. How would you like to visit Armageddon, he asked me? Now that's a good conversation opener. It turns out that Megiddo, lying at the head of a mountain pass at the western end of the valley of Jazreel, standing above the major road from Egypt in the south to Syria and Mesopotamia in the north, has been a vital strategic site throughout history and the scene of many biblical battles. It was a fortification occupied and attacked by various contending empires from pre-biblical times right up to World War I, and is often mentioned in second-millennium documents and the Bible. Small wonder that this site of so many battles enters the Book of Revelations as the site of the last great battle, Armageddon (a corruption of the Hebrew Har Megiddo, meaning Mount Megiddo). Since 1925 the tel, or artificial mound, has been an archaeological site in which the remains of twenty distinct historical periods from 4000 BCE to 400 BCE have been uncovered. The ruins are

spectacular, and include a fortified chariot city built by Solomon in the tenth century BCE, as well as earlier Hyksos and Canaanite cities, including the circular remains of a Canaanite temple. We looked at a public grain silo from the eighth century BCE, stables from Solomon's time, when it was known as the City of Chariots, and the remarkable engineering feats over some centuries that first enclosed and then dug a tunnel — 120 feet deep and 215 feet long! — to the spring at the bottom of the hill. The site was huge; when full, it was not a mere military encampment but a full-fledged city of warriors.

That marked the beginning of a day of historical discoveries for me, accompanied by some great stories from Sam. Lucky me, as I tend not to prepare much for these trips, that I had such an informative guide. I was happy, though, that some of the places we visited had been expanded since his last visits there, and so the day was, I hope, more than just a show of hospitality for him. Anyway, as we drove south from Megiddo, he began a long, complicated tale about how the mining of potassium sulphite in the Dead Sea began. It took him much of the rest of the day to complete it, and it was fascinating. Many Jews were exiled to Siberia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and some of them built up a strong chemical industry there. Late in the nineteenth century, a Siberian Jew, head of a company that mined potassium sulphite by freezing water in winter and thus crystallizing it out, visited the Dead Sea and wondered if there were some way to mine the PS there by dehydration. He consulted experts, conducted some experiments himself, and was ready to try when World War I and the Russian Revolution interrupted his plans. In 1920, he and his family were allowed to emigrate, but he then faced seventeen frustrating years of fighting British bureaucracy before he was allowed to start development, and the British Government insisted on being a partner in the enterprise. Nevertheless that was the beginning of one of Israel's major chemical companies, which is even now in competition with Saskatchewan on the world market.

That's the barest outline of what was a marvellously complex narration. While Sam unfolded it, we drove to Kibbutz Heftzi-Bah at the foot of Mount Gilboa, where we looked at the remains of the ancient Bet Alpha synagogue, dating from the sixth century CE. The synagogue is famous for its mosaic floor: the main decoration, near the Ark, depicts Jewish ritual objects — a Holy Ark flanked by lions, birds and *menorot*, and surrounded by animals, fruits and geometric designs. The central section is a zodiac with the symbols of the months named in both Hebrew and Aramaic; in the centre is the Sun God Helios, riding a chariot drawn by four horses, and in the four corners figures of women symbolise the four seasons. The base of the mosaic, nearest the entrance, depicts the sacrifice of Isaac, accompanied by passages in Hebrew. An inscription says the floor was laid by Marianus and his son Shanina during the reign of Emperor Justin (517–528 CE). Although we're told the mosaic does not reflect pagan influences, it is interesting that there is so much figuration in it. Also interesting is the fact that, although, as Sam told me, there was a thriving industry of not only manufacturing mosaic tiles but also providing designs to follow in laying them, this mosaic is, awkwardly, not made to any plan, except in the general imagery of the Ark and the zodiac. In actual fact, the human and animal figures are extremely naive and primitive, the art awkward, as I have said. It's finally interesting for its existence more than for demonstrating any high craft in mosaics.

On the way to Bet Alpha we passed a large prison right alongside the highway — high walls with barbed wire along the tops, a lot of gun towers/observation posts, all seemingly empty. Sam pointed out that most of these places — many rather hastily built in the interior of the country — were empty now the Palestinian agreement was going forward. In placement they had a certain brutal casualness, which got paired with all the young people toting Uzis in my mind. Beside that image, place this story Sam told me: that in a very small area on the slopes of Mount Gilboa there grows the Mount Gilboa Black Iris (actually a very dark purple, he says), which hundreds of people come to see bloom but no one picks. All those people there to see but not disturb their rare flowers.

We drove next to Bet-She'an, where we had a nice lunch in a little unprepossessing cafe before actually entering the National Park. The remains of some twenty layers of settlement, going back to the fifth millennium BCE, have been found in the tel, where excavations are continuing (so much so that Sam said there were many newly uncovered sections since he had last visited it about a year before). The tel is now a high hill, where it hasn't been dug up, partly created simply by the act of building over and over again on the ruins of previous cities. It's been an important place for so long because of a combination of factors: its position at a major crossroads, the fertile land surrounding it, the abundance of water in the area. History: Egyptian rule over Canaan, sixteenth to twelfth centuries BCE; Philistine rule, but King David conquered it, and it was an administrative centre during Solomon's reign; during the Hellenistic period known as Scythopolis; during the Roman period, a mixed population of pagans, Samaritans, Jews; mostly a Christian population during the Byzantine period, when the city became the provincial capital of Second Palestine at the end of the fourth century CE; it reached its greatest population, 30–40 thousand, during the sixth century; passed into the hands of the Muslims during the seventh century; and was destroyed by an earthquake in 749. It was a small city during the medieval period; a fortress was built on the site during the Crusades; and it remained a small regional centre under Ottoman rule and during the British Protectorate. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, there has been an attempt to build the city once again, and its population is about 15,000 today, many of them Ethiopian Jews. But, as Sam pointed out, there's no industry, except for a growing tourist trade, most of it brought about by the continuing excavations at the archaeological site — which is fabulous. It includes much of a Roman theatre, with incredible acoustics, baths, a colonnaded street. You can see the paving stones, the outlines of buildings from different eras, a Roman temple, plus a colonnade with many of the columns still standing, and in their midst a Byzantine street of shops. Standing high on the tel looking down upon what has been unearthed — these palimpsests of city plans inscribed in the actual soil of their development — is incredible, especially as you know that under your feet are likely other finds; and it's easy to imagine the people who wandered those streets below, seeing their ghosts stopping for a chat at a corner, or by the entrance to the theatre. Looking outward, over the richly fertile valleys, a small river winding below, some ruins in the distance, you can feel the layers of lived history beneath your feet. We spent a good deal of time taking it all in, walking about the various cities in the burning sun. Along with Megiddo, this was the highlight of the day.

We still had time to visit the Sea of Galilee, and look

across to the Golan Heights on the far side. But the whole of the western shore is now one continuous tourist resort, especially at Tiberias, with its hot springs, hotels, restaurants, video game emporiums: your typical tourist trap, in fact, where every place offers St Peter's fish for \$30. But across the street from the lake-shore hotel was Hammath Tiberias, another palimpsestic ruin. A number of synagogues, as well as some early spring-fed baths, are there, and at the level of the fourth century, another mosaic, cut through by a wall built later across the centre. Still, its top and centre are similar to the one at Bet Alpha, while the bottom has a pair of wonderful lions rather than the sacrifice of Isaac; more importantly, the general style and craft here is far superior aesthetically to the Bet Alpha mosaic. We sat by the shore and had a small tea, watching the tourist boats with their loud blaring pop music and the many smaller speedboats curving across in front of us. Hard to think of Jesus preaching from a speedboat. Still, it was something to have seen the Sea of Galilee, and near its southern end, a famous baptism spot, carefully marked by large traffic signs. We drove back to Haifa then, but Sam took us aside to see a couple of Druze villages in the hills outside the city, where the people dressed in everything from the priests' special garb, through women's traditional long dresses and coloured vests, to jeans and bright US jackets and pants for the young. Interesting architecture, too, with the often open spaces of the ground floors.

I thanked Sam for a terrific day, and we spent a quiet evening with me heading to bed early as I had to get up at 0400 to catch a cab to the airport at Tel Aviv. Sam and Danielle got up to see me off, which was really nice, and I thanked them both again for their great hospitality; I was really glad I had accepted her invitation to Haifa, and especially for the wonderful tour the previous day. The taxi was picking up a number of people, so I got to see a bit of downtown Haifa as the driver tried to find the last passenger — and failed. Haifa is a big enough city that it's never quiet, and there was a fair amount of traffic on the streets; and on the highway when we finally took off for the airport. Nevertheless our driver managed to hit 140 kph for much of the trip. We had to be at the airport two hours at least before departure because you have to go through a thorough check at customs. I was almost three hours early, and wishing I had been able to grab that extra hour for sleep; especially when I was only questioned and did not have to open all my luggage, as many people did. They do take safety seriously in Israel. So I was able to finish *The World As I Found It* there and on the flight. As it wasn't a full flight, I was able to observe the Greek Orthodox nun in the window seat across the aisle pray us into the air, with large rhetorical gestures for crossing herself, and pray and chant us safely all the way to Heathrow. Well, not quite; she did stop to eat, and do her nails; but most of the time she prayed or sang, quite softly but I could hear the clear high tones of her remarkably pure soprano quite easily over the noise of the engines.

#### Afterword

In London, I managed to stop to phone home, it being Mother's Day, and Sharon's birthday. I managed to get through to both my mother, who was pleased to hear that I had survived Israel, and Sharon, who has put up with my

missing her birthday two years in a row now.

I had my usual Tuesday morning phone conversation with my mother that week. She was struck down by some form of powerful arthritis or worse on Friday 29 May. My brother, having rushed back from his cottage in North Bay, called me on the Sunday. At that time he said I didn't to come but that she was quite ill, and couldn't move. As it turned out, he helped as best he could through her final week of life. I talked to her briefly on Tuesday, when she told me, with a mixture of fear and acceptance, that she knew she would have to go into a nursing home — something she had always feared and hated. Then I tried to call her Thursday morning, only to have the nurse tell me that she was being taken to the hospital. There she died early the next morning, Friday 3 June 1994.

What to say? It is very hard for us, but I believe that it was the best for her. Recently Mom had been worrying more and more about the deterioration of her body and her deepening inability to get around. Her mind was clear until just before the end, and she had expressed the wish to pass away quietly in the night sometime. Sadly, it was harder for her than that, and she did suffer; but I believe she made a choice of some kind when the sudden illness took hold, and that she did not want to 'recover' only to be a burden to everybody including herself. According to what the doctor told Wilson, she would have required round-the-clock nursing: she would not have wanted that.

We spent the days after her death clearing out her small apartment in Beechwood Place in Mississauga, and it was hard, removing the remains of a life, all that she had managed to keep after Dad died. Bit by bit, what helped to create memory is stripped and only the memories remain. Happily, they are good ones, of a still sharp, tough, lively woman, who continued right to the end to be interested in the world and what was happening in it. Mom had lived through the development of a social safety net in Canada and she was appalled by what seemed like the preparations for its destruction. But, unlike so many people her age or less in Beechwood Place, she did stay in touch with what was going on. I am going to miss our weekly talks, I do miss her.

There was a fine service of memory on Thursday, and it was especially nice that the pastor, Clare Carruthers, of First United Church in Port Credit, had met Mom and knew something of her. She spoke movingly about her contributions and of her courage, forthrightness and spark. There aren't many of Mom's friends left, but many were there, as well as younger members of the 'family'. Afterward, at Wilson's we had a quiet wake but a full feeling; I think Mom would have approved. On Friday 10 June, which would have been Mom's ninety-third birthday, Wilson and I took the urn to Winnipeg, where we buried her in the Barbour family plot at the St John's Cathedral cemetery overlooking the Red River. It was a typical Winnipeg June day, as I remember them, a mixture of sudden rain squalls and bright sunshine. We had just had a moment of silence at the graveside when I heard the rain rushing at us through the trees, and we had to run for the sanctuary of the cathedral. Later, Wilson and I visited various old homes we or he remembered, and discovered how you can't go home again, but at least you can look at it and remember something.

— Doug Barbour, June 1994



Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Roma.

---

IRWIN HIRSH has been hanging around fandom since 1977. Back then he was a high school student; these days he is a husband, a father and an accountant. He's worked as a factory hand, teacher, and as an assistant film editor. He gave *Thyme* its title, is waiting for Seattle to host the 1985 Australian Science Fiction Convention, reckons that George Spartels and Peter Combe are better than the Wiggles, and that the Weddings Parties Anything song 'Monday's Experts' should still be the theme to the TV show 'Talking Footy'. While he has a Roneo 750 in his garage he has no desire to see if it still works.

---

## Twelve Days in Italy: A Chapter in the 1987 GUFF Trip Report

by Irwin Hirsh

---

We walked out of Santa Lucia Station, and as the sight before us hit a rush of adrenalin went to my head. There lay Venezia's Canal Grande and two rows of gondolas gently rocking with the movement of the water. Above the gondolas was an impressive-looking church, San Simeone e Giuda, with an entrance porch framed by white Corinthian columns and topped by a huge green copper dome that doubled the height of the church. And over to our left was the Ponte degli Scalzi, a simple, neat-looking white stone bridge connecting the two banks of the canal. All around us was a sea of activity as people rushed to and from the station in their early-morning rush to get to work.

Of all the cities Wendy and I visited the one for which I was least prepared was Venezia. I knew that it has a rich cultural and artistic history, is built on an archipelago of more than 100 islands, that its gondola is a symbol of romance, but the idea of a city with no cars, or one that cannot grow outward, was something I had to work hard at to grasp.

The city is connected to mainland Italy by a long low bridge. As I looked out the train window it looked as if our train was skating across the top of the water. Watching the water skim past I pondered the days ahead. We hadn't made any connections with Italian fans, so for the first time in our





Venezia's Piazza San Marco.

trip we would be left to our own devices.

First on the agenda was finding a room for our stay. *Lista di Spagna*, a street to the left of the station, had been described as a good place in which to start our search. The first place we tried charged 80,000 lira (about \$85) a night, well out of our price range, but curiosity demanded we have a look at the room. The next place charged 55,000 lira, which was still a bit too much for us. The *Hotel Marte* offered us a room for 33,000 lira (plus 1000 for every shower), which we took.

The size of the rooms in each of the three places decreased along with the price, but fortunately the size decreases were not in the same ratio as price decreases. Still, once we'd laid out our bags around the bed there was not much floor to be seen. The room was not grotty or dirty, but its size and darkness did the trick of making sure we were out and about for as much as possible.

The *Canal Grande* runs like an S through Venezia, splitting the city in two. Water that enters the Canal near the Station flows out past the *Piazza San Marco*. This square is Venezia's most famous landmark, and for centuries a magnet for Europe's artists. And it is not hard to see why, for as we turned into the Piazza another rush of adrenalin went through me. No postcard, no exotically filmed ad, had prepared me for this. Lots of people, lots of pigeons, the gold of the *Basilica of San Marco*, the pink of the *Doges' Palace* next to it, the red of the *Belltower* in front, the open-air cafes making up the other three sides of the square, and above the cafes three floors of a neo-classical

façade of arches and pillars. There was a beautiful air about the whole square, and with all the people a delightful buzz completed the atmosphere.

However, between the sight across from the Station and *Piazza San Marco*, Venezia lacked a sense of drive, and I was never really grabbed by the city. By contrast Wendy was enchanted by it, and ever since we've each jokingly tried to assert our own individual feelings about the city onto the other. Those artists who were drawn to the place may have unwittingly provided me with the evidence that Venezia is not an enchanted city. As we visited the galleries of Europe we saw many, many paintings of Venezia, and apart from an occasional view of the *Canal Grande* at the *Ponte Rialto*, all were of *Piazza San Marco*. Away from the Canal and *Piazza San Marco* Venezia is a dark, colourless, crowded city, dominated by architectural styles I find garish and overbearing. The buildings aren't very tall, but with the thin streets and small squares the buildings tower over and darken the pedestrian ways below. I missed a bit of space and a plot of grass, and I was relieved when we stepped onto a train to go to Roma.

To the right of *Roma Termini* is *Via Palestro*, and it was on the fifth floor of a building in this street that we found a room for our five-day stay in the 'eternal city'. Our room was large and reasonably priced at 40,000 lira a night (and included free showers), and overlooked a courtyard that could've been out of any number of Italian films. Clotheslines connected opposite windows and it was easy to imag-





Wendy and Irwin Hirsh.

## GUFF

GUFF (the Get Up and Over Fan Fund or Going Under Fan Fund) is a charity, contributed to by fans, that sends Australian and European fans to a major SF convention in either continent. Since 1979 there have been nine such trips. Irwin Hirsh won GUFF in 1987, and with his wife Wendy attended Conspiracy '87 (the 45th Worldcon) as part of a four-month trip.

### Previously published chapters of my trip report

- 'Back Home', *Larrikin* 16, June 1988 (ed. Irwin Hirsh and Perry Middlemiss).
- 'You Gotta Go To Finland', *Larrikin* 19, December 1988 (ed. Irwin Hirsh and Perry Middlemiss).
- 'Half the Fun', *Sikander* 15, March 1989 (ed. Irwin Hirsh).
- 'First Days in London Town', *Empties* 12, November 1993 (ed. Martin Tudor).
- 'Leaps and Bounds', *Attitude* 9, October 1996 (ed. Michael Abbott, John Dallman and Pam Wells).
- 'Reading 'n' Oxford', *Thyme* 119, January 1998 (ed. Alan Stewart).

'Down in Brighton', *Banana Wings* 9, March 1998 (ed. Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer).

Another chapter is due to be published in the next issue of *WeberWoman's Wrevenge*, which Jean tells me she hopes to have out in June.

'Half the Fun' was reprinted, in French, in *Yellow Sub-marine* 61, a French fanzine published by André-François Ruaud.

The above order is the way in which the chapters were written, not in the order they'll appear in the final report (if I ever get that far). 'Back Home' is the final chapter, describing our first days back home. 'Half the Fun', 'First Days in LondonTown' and 'Down in Brighton' and the chapter Jean is publishing are the first four chapters, while 'Reading 'n' Oxford' will probably be the sixth chapter. The chapter you are reading is followed by 'You Gotta Go To Finland'.

I don't have any spare copies of the *Larrikins* but do have a small number of spares of *Sikander* 15. Anyone else wanting a copy can get one for A\$4 or local equivalent (cash only of the latter), of which the balance (after paying for postage and so forth) I'll donate to GUFF. (My address is 26 Jessamine Ave., Prahran East VIC 3181, Australia.) I have no idea of the availability of the other fanzines.

ine one of those great, arm-waving Italian arguments going on, cutting across all the floors. Our host was a nice middle-aged woman who spoke no English. Despite this barrier we only once had to get out a notepad and Italian/English dictionary to converse. A nice touch provided by our host was that when she was aware that we were awake she would bring cups of coffee to our room. The single negative aspect of the room was that it was on the wrong side of the railway station. Every day we had to cut through the station, adding time and distance to our adventures.

Our first full day in Roma was devoted to the aim of visiting another country: the Vatican. We had a nice, leisurely four-and-a-half-kilometre wander through the streets as we aimed for the border.

Roma proved to be a great city for walking. Rather than sticking to the main roads we kept on cutting through the smaller side streets, always coming across nice little piazzas and interesting bits of architecture and sculpture. We crossed the Tiber River at the Ponte S. Angelo and joined the throng making the pilgrimage along Via della Conciliazione, a wide street full of hawkers and cafes. I possess a mental image of walking up a steep incline towards San Pietro, but I suspect this has more to do with the majestic features of the church we could see before us than with anything greater than a gentle slope.

As with the crossing of borders in the UK there are no border guards checking passports, so there is no obvious crossover point between Italy and the Vatican. The maps seem to indicate that when it is possible to get run over by a car you're in Roma. Walking across Piazza San Pietro I was struck by how the Square unfolded for us, its size only revealing itself to us as we walked the last couple of hundred metres to the Basilica.

San Pietro is a fine building, clearly one of the great churches of the world and one of my three favourite churches of the trip. However there is a difference between it and Chester and Albi Cathedrals. Whereas the latter two are joys to behold complete in itself, San Pietro is more of a never complete jigsaw — it is perhaps too big, too overlaid and with too much to it to be attractive as something complete in itself.

Our walk began down the left side aisle through to the left side of the transcript, with every few steps leading to new treasures. I was particularly taken by Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Monument to Alexander VII. Built in the space above an existing doorway the pope is depicted kneeling, hands together, in prayer. Below him are four people who are linked by the shroud which is wrapped around the base upon which the Pope is kneeling. In the foreground and coming out from under the shroud is a skeleton.

I liked the piece for a number of reasons. The first sight of it is a striking experience, with the contrast between the rich red of the shroud against the white of the figures. I also liked the way the Pope is presented as human rather than saintly. And finally I like the sense of place with which Bernini designed the piece. While the skeleton was included in the monument for its symbolism, its position serves a useful purpose: it is there to stop the shroud from flowing right down to the floor, blocking the doorway. In a sense the skeleton is not completely successful, as the shroud still overflows and hides our view of the top of the door.

Bernini also gave the Basilica its striking Baldacchino, the bronze canopy over the papal altar, which is in the central crossing of the building, directly beneath Michelangelo's dome. I wandered around it, first looking at it in

isolation, then within the context of its surrounds. The canopy's size and position spoils the view of the interior of the dome, and limits the opportunity to get a floor-level perspective of the relationship between the dome and main body of the building. This sort of issue shows that while the Basilica was built during the Renaissance period it is very much a palace of the Baroque. It could be said that the late sixteenth-century popes created the Baroque period. They wanted an art style conveying stature and grandeur, and the artists of the period were breaking away from more classical Renaissance form. So that while Michelangelo's building worked up a sense of majesty, Baroque artists like Bernini created an explosive surge through ornate, curved lines and opulent and extravagant materials.

At the end of the right aisle, and almost at our exit from the building, is Michelangelo's sculpture *Pieta*. Created more than a century before many of the items we'd seen before, it provided a contrast to those pieces, and seemed a perfect way of ending the tour of the church. Michelangelo's signature was the strength and power of his line. It was just the antidote to all the opulence we'd seen before.

We walked out of the building with the idea of visiting the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel. We soon found out that they close in the early afternoon and that we'd have to make a return visit to the Vatican another day. So we set down at the foot of a statue and just let our eyes wander around the Piazza, including to the spot where the next morning we were asking a Swiss guard for directions to the Museum's entrance. 'Through that door, up the stairs, first door on the left.'

We followed his directions, confirming things with another guard on the way, but as we waited in line it didn't feel right. The fifteen other people waiting were all middle-aged rural Italians, not the diverse mix I would expect, there was no ticket window ahead of us, and the line stopped at a doorway leading to a priest's office. And while I had my hand in my pocket ready to whip out a few thousand lira, everyone around us was eagerly clutching typed letters.

When it was our turn to go forth into the priest's office I realised that the standard 'Two please' could be embarrassing and insulting. 'Ummm, we're looking for the entrance to the Museums and Sistine Chapel. This isn't it, is it?'

'No, this is for those seeking a seat at tomorrow's Audience. Go back out the way you came in, and on the left wall will be a map on how to get to the entrance.'

So we retraced our steps, finding the map just a few metres past that first guard. A kilometre walk and 14,000 lira later, we were in.

The Museum has a reputation for fine collections of art and antiquities, but my main interest was in the museum rooms rather than what is in them. This is because many of the rooms represent some of the history of the link between the various popes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the artists of the day. This comes down to a feeling that anyone can gather together a collection of sculptures, but very few people were in the position to get the greatest artists of the day to come around to paint frescoes on the walls of their apartments. The most impressive were the Raphael Rooms, decorated for Pope Julius II by Raphael Sanzio and his assistants. It was particularly great to see Raphael's *School of Athens*, a work I knew quite well.

If there is a disappointment about the Museums it was a sense that we'd missed out on one room — that which houses the penises that the Church has replaced by fig leaves on all the male nude statues. Some of the 'improve-



Perry Middlemiss and Robyn Mills in Roma.

ments' were clumsily done, with fig leaves chosen with no feeling for the lines of the work or the colour of the stone. Rather than suggesting a sense of modesty, the process only pointed to the editing that had gone on.

Entering the Sistine Chapel I was overwhelmed in a most unexpected way. When considering this visit I'd envisaged a gasp with that first look at Michelangelo's contributions to the room, but what took me was the large number of people. As we'd been walking through the Museum we hadn't been given the opportunity to imagine that our fellow visitors numbered this many. We snaked our way through the crowd to the middle of the room, stopped, and turned our heads upward.

'If I stand like this for too long I'm going to get a sore neck and back,' Wendy said.

I knew what she was saying and scanned the room for somewhere to sit down. Looking past Wendy's shoulder I saw a gap on the bench running the length of one wall, and told Wendy to grab it. 'I'll try to find something on the opposite wall.' I took a few steps and to my left saw some familiar people looking up at the ceilings. Changing my direction I marched over and tapped them on their shoulders.

'Now we can forget about Zurich,' I said by way of a greeting.

It was Perry Middlemiss and Robyn Mills. It took them a moment to work out what was going on. Robyn did a very good impersonation of someone whose jaw has dropped while Perry adopted a disbelieving tone of face.

Then Wendy came running over. 'I was just told to be quiet.' We turned to look at her.

'I was sitting there, watching what was going on and in a loud voice I said "Oh, my god". I said that in the Sistine Chapel of all places. And all around me these people told

me to be quiet.'

We regained our composure, chatted for a bit, and arranged to meet up again in an hour.

As we walked away Wendy was triumphant. 'I told you they'd be in Italy the same time as us.'

'I never disagreed with you,' I replied. 'I just doubted we'd bump into them.'

'Yes. And in the Sistine Chapel.'

And before we knew it, overtaken with the moment we walked out of the Chapel, foregoing any further study of Michelangelo's work.

An hour later we wandered back into Italy with Perry and Robyn, and began the afternoon with some frenzied chat in a cafe. Mr Middlemiss and Ms Mills were doing much the same tour of Continental Europe as we were, but they were travelling anticlockwise. So we didn't so much compare notes as swap notes. But we did agree that this idea of meeting in Zurich on the following Monday (2 November) had played havoc with our itineraries. It was over a beer at the October Wellington meeting in London that Perry and I had set the date and place for a Continental rendezvous. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but in the cold hard light of the day (in particular the day Wendy and I sat down to work out a schedule for the two months we would be spending with Eurail tickets) we had wished I'd given Perry some way of contacting us to confirm things. As it was, Wendy and I intended to go from Roma up to Zurich, then travel back down to Firenze and Pisa. 'Now we don't have to worry about all that extra travel,' I said, and Robyn indicated that their plans had, till an hour ago, also involved some serious backtracking.

The previous day's visit to San Pietro had inspired a number of religio-symbolic queries in me, and I shot forth a series of questions to the Catholic of the party. But Robyn

Part of Firenze's Santa Maria del Fiore.

proved to be very little help. 'Robyn, Robyn, Robyn', I tut-tutted, 'what would your mother say?'

'My mother! Photos! I have to take lots of photos today. Of you three,' Robyn said, inspired. Robyn's parents hadn't liked this idea of their only daughter travelling around Europe with that over-sexed specimen of manhood that is Perry, and in order to calm them Robyn had indicated that she and Perry would be travelling as part of a larger group. The implication behind this lie was that there'd be people there ready to step in to protect the Mills's daughter's honour. Robyn had actually used Wendy's and my names in this elaborate scam, and now wanted photos of us as some sort of evidence.

'I'd like to be there when you show them these photos', Wendy said, 'to see if they notice that we're in the photos from Roma, but not those of Paris, Munich or Amsterdam's red-light district.'

The afternoon was spent in walk and talk. When the sun went down we adjourned to a restaurant just behind Piazza Navona, where we had the most delicious antipasto. We then spent an hour on the Piazza itself, watching the passing

promenade. Perry and Robyn were due to catch an early morning train, so mid evening we bade our farewells.

As we went our separate ways Wendy summed up the day: 'God, that was one hell of amazing luck, finding them. And there of all places.'

'No', I corrected her, 'given where we were, it was a heaven of luck.'

The next day we spent in central Roma, which included visiting the Trevi Fountain, where we cheapskated and tossed in only one coin, and the Pantheon, which because of its dimensions (as tall as it is wide) in such a large building, is awe-inspiring. A mid-afternoon coffee and gelati was consumed during a return visit to Piazza Navano. As we sat at a cafe we had Bernini's baroque, grandiose *Fontana del Fiumi (Fountain of the Four Rivers)* in the foreground, while close behind was Francesco Borromini's elegant façade of S. Angenese in Agona. It was a good vantage point from which to observe the most public utterances in the Salieri-Mozart-type feud between Bernini and Borromini. The previous evening Robyn and I had been discussing how the figures in the fountain are all looking away from the church as Bernini's expres-

sion of his disgust that his rival had obtained the commission to design the building's façade. At least that is the way the myth would have it, because in truth the fountain was unveiled two years before Borromini was called in to complete the designs and build the church.

A traveller's visit to the cashing-travellers' cheques counter at the American Express office was required, so we headed off to the Piazza di Spagna and the home of some high-class shops. Almost next door to AmEx is a large McDonald's. I couldn't understand this, as McDonald's couldn't expect to attract the same crowd as would the Gucci shop. But as we walked around to the foot of the Spanish Steps my confusion was resolved, as the Steps are a significant meeting place for Roma's youth and the world's backpackers. In any photo I've ever seen the steps have always been crowded with flowers but deficient in people. We climbed the Steps and at the top found a nice broad view of Roma, the dome of San Pietro being the dominant force.

The next day was our final in Roma, the only rainy day we encountered in the city, and was dominated by a visit to the Museo Borghese. Housed within the Casino Borghese, a building built by a nephew of one of the seventeenth-century popes, this is a fine museum. Our only disappoint-

ment was that because of renovations being undertaken we were unable to visit the second/top floor which housed the collection of paintings. This meant we were restricted to a viewing of only the collection of sculptures. And only half the building itself, for it was something to be equally admired. Each room was richly decorated, from floor to ceiling. Bas reliefs, niches for statues and busts, mosaics, columns and frescoes on the walls and vaults. The Museo was small enough for us to do a number of circuits, each time taking in a different part of what was there.

One circuit was for admiring the frescoed ceilings, all of which continued the theme of the walls and used perspective to enlarge the room. One room's frescoes suggested eight sculptured figures holding up the ceiling and a balcony from which someone could look down upon us. Another room had the suggestion of a ledge, along which satyrs, leopards and naked boys were walking. In one way all this was over the top. It was not enough that this beautiful building is erected; the ceilings have to be used to create the illusion that the place is bigger and grander again. On the other hand it was very easy to admire the excellence of the work. There was one room in which I needed more than just a couple of seconds to convince myself that I wasn't looking at some statues but a painting of statues.

Another circuit took in the collection of sculptures, chief among them being Bernini's *David* and his incomplete *Truth*. The collection also had us thinking back to the Vatican. Having a rest in one room we sat between two male nude statues. One had the approved fig leaf; the other had some restoration work where once a fig leaf had been. Unfortunately the restoration was not well done, with an obvious line where the penis had once been removed.

I've been told that Firenze's tourist office is extremely helpful in arranging accommodation. All I know is they certainly gave us good value for the 1200-lira commission. I gave a price range of 30–40 thousand lira a night, and was offered a room for 28,000 lira. As we walked to the *pensione* I picked up on the vibes of the streets and knew I was going to enjoy this city.

First we went to a street market where Wendy finally found a range of leather jackets that hadn't been designed by someone in the US Air Force. Throughout Venezia and Roma Wendy had been thinking it had been decided that she was only meant to look like Tom Cruise (out of *Top Gun*). It was some relief to know that she'd actually be able to do her impression of someone wearing Italian leather.

Then it was off to Palazzo Vecchio, an impressive building built almost 700 years ago. This was followed by a wander around the nearby Piazza della Signoria, the square where Michelangelo's *David* once stood, and through to Fiume Arno and its Ponte Vecchio. The latter is Firenze's oldest existing bridge; the only one to have survived World War II, a legacy, so it goes, of a German army commander who could not bear to blow it up in retreat. The Corridoio Vasariano, an overhead passageway, runs over the bridge, so that for the most part it felt like we were walking down a street of shops and not a structure over water.

We began the next day at the Galleria dell'Accademia, the gallery that is the home to Michelangelo's *David*. If this isn't the world's single most impressive sculpture, it is not through a lack of presentation. The Tribune where it stands was designed just for the statue, and the light and space allow for a powerful, heroic sight.

The Galleria is also the home of a number of Michelangelo's unfinished works, the *Four Slaves* and *St Matthew*.

I've read differing opinions about these pieces. Some art historians claim these are intentionally unfinished. Others claim that they are part of monuments — for Pope Julius II's tomb in Roma and for the cathedral of Firenze, respectively — which were decommissioned before completion. My guess is that both groups are correct, only that the former have given the wrong values to the scheme of things. That is, not finishing the pieces was imposed upon Michelangelo, and he merely left them as they were rather doing something else with them.

From the artistic process point of view they are interesting to look at. There's an old joke: How do you carve an elephant? Answer: Just chip away everything that doesn't look like an elephant. Michelangelo's philosophy tells this joke in a different way: that the sculpture already exists within the stone, and the sculptor's job is merely to take away what is superfluous. In their unfinished state these five works show what the guy was on about, with the figures emerging out of, and trying to break away from, the stone.

After the Galleria we visited the Palazzo Pitti, which was built in the fifteenth century for Luca Pitti, a banker who wanted to have the grandest palace in the city. Over the next 400 years it was taken over by the Medici family, who expanded the size of the Palace, and when Firenze was the capital of Italy it was the residence of the king. These days it houses a number of Museums, of which we toured just those that displayed the interests of the previous owners of the place. The rough stone brick exterior of the approach to the palace is quite a contrast to the sumptuous interiors.

Behind the palace is the carefully landscaped Giardino di Boboli. We decided to have a picnic lunch on the steps past the Neptune Fountain. I'm not sure, but I think only those with Eurail tickets are allowed on those steps. Certainly all those around us were people swapping travel tales. We chatted to an USAn who was in Europe for two months. He was shocked to hear that we were travelling for double that time. 'Is that all? All the Australians I've met are over for at least a year.' Then he added that on his travels he thought he'd meet people from everywhere, but all he met were Australians and New Zealanders.

That afternoon we visited the Galleria degli Uffizi. Fate dealt us a cruel hand here, for we were unable to appreciate what the gallery had to offer. We still had a further day in Firenze and would've scheduled to visit the Uffizi then, but that last day was All Saints Day, and we were afraid that the various museums would be closed. With morning visits to the Accademia and the Pitti we'd reached our threshold of art viewing. My main enduring image of the Uffizi is looking at Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and noting that it is duller than just about every photographic reproduction I've ever seen. I was in that sort of mood.

Our All Saints Day began at Piazza del Duomo, home of the city's Santa Maria del Fiore (cathedral), the baptistry of San Giovanni Battista, and the campanile. This is a most impressive trio of buildings. Mass was in progress when we entered the Cathedral, so we stood at the back of the church, quietly taking in the event and the building. Unfortunately at the end of the service we were asked to vacate the building, so had no chance to wander around. Instead we walked around to the baptistry and gazed upon its famed *Gates of Paradise*, the gilded bronze doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti. As we weren't able to climb up to the dome of the cathedral we decided to climb the 414 steps of the belltower.

Wendy counted the steps as we went, from time to time relaying to me our progress. We reached the top of one



flight. '71,' she told me. A middle-aged woman resting on the landing heard Wendy and just sighed as we walked past her. At a further resting point we sat down. Soon the woman joined us. '150,' she said between puffs.

I turned to Wendy for confirmation. '150?'

'147,' Wendy answered.

'147!' said our climbing companion, who wasn't impressed. 'Oh no, that's three more I have to climb.'

We spent most of the day just wandering around, admiring the city. It may have been the most willingly religious day of my life, as we visited many churches and the city's synagogue. The latter was interesting on a personal level. While I'm not religious I am Jewish. My Jewish cultural experience is based in my families' Ashkenazi (European) background and in a community that arose out of migration away from Nazi Germany. In Venezia we spent a morning in Ghetto Vecchio and Ghetto Nuovo, apparently the world's first Jewish ghettos, where we visited synagogues that are 400 years old. Firenze's synagogue is not as old (inaugurated in 1882) but like Venezia's is a place of worship to a community that is predominantly of Oriental or Spanish origin. On both the age and origin basis it was intriguing for me to compare things with what I'm familiar with, though it wouldn't have been hard for me to be impressed. Caulfield Synagogue, where I had my Bar Mitzvah, is my main point of comparison and, from an aesthetic point of view, probably the most soulless place of worship I've been in.

A Jewish Museum occupies a room on the first floor of Firenze's Synagogue, and the woman there offered to show us around the building and tell us something of its and the community's history. We weren't sure how to take some of the things she told us. When Wendy and I said that the place didn't feel like a synagogue she told us that could be because the architects and builders were Catholic. This prompted me to ask if she knew why there is a large Star of David in the Basilica of Santa Croce, and I was told this was because the façade's designer was Jewish. I haven't been able to determine the religions of the people involved, but somehow these responses didn't feel right. The building may not feel like it is a synagogue but it also doesn't feel like a church. It is of Moorish design, and feels somewhat like a Muslim Mosque. And the Old Testament, and some of its symbols, have currency within the Christian religion. The answers we were given seem too simple.

Over dinner Wendy noted that of all the buildings we'd visited in Firenze the Synagogue, at 105 years old, could be regarded as 'modern'. We laughed at our different perspective. In Melbourne a 105-year-old building would be ancient.

Wherever we turned there was someone telling us we had no need to stay in Pisa. Friends would tell us 'It's only an hour from Firenze'. *Europe by Train*, a guide book we were given, devoted just two brief paragraphs to the town, advising us to 'head straight to the Piazza del Duomo with its famous Leaning Tower' upon arrival. Another guide book advised against walking to the Piazza, suggesting instead to take a bus from the station. Even the town's tourist authority wondered why we wanted to stay there. We walked into their office at the train station and asked about booking a room for the night, and we were told that only the office on Piazza del Duomo offered such a facility.

We'd decided to stay in Pisa because our next journey would be on the train that goes through Pisa and not Firenze. To have spent an extra night in the latter would

have involved some unneeded back and forth. Also, it was an early-morning train we were catching, and staying in Pisa for the night meant we could have an hour or more extra sleep. Standing there in that tourist office we didn't understand why we would have to walk 1.5 kilometres to book accommodation. Surely the place to offer an accommodation booking service is at the spot there where people arrive in a town? And besides, because we were catching a morning train we wanted to stay near the station. The person behind the desk understood what we were on about and, against the rules, suggested that we try a place 100 metres down the road.

After the hectic pace set in our previous eleven days in Italy we were in the need of a day to unwind, and Pisa proved to be up for the challenge. We weren't in any rush to visit the belltower so we just wandered wherever whim took us. Up *Corsa Italia*, then along the banks of the Arno River, lunch at a cafe on Piazza dei Cavalieri, slowly moving towards Italy's most famous symbol. A lot of the town is tightly packed, with dull yellow buildings, a lot erected after World War II, but we found the atmosphere created by Pisa being a university town to be most attractive. During the day there'd be students milling about or rushing to classes. At night we found them out having a drink.

Our first glimpse of the tower was when walking down one of the streets leading onto the Piazza del Duomo. From where we were there was no lean (or rather, it was leaning towards us, not across our line of sight), which was a good way to see it for the first time in the flesh. With no lean there is nothing to act as a distraction to its fine elegant, Romanesque design.

The Piazza, with its complex of Duomo, Baptistery and Tower, sits apart from the rest of the town. The cramped, squat yellow is replaced by white sitting within a green, open space. Walking out from a street into the Piazza, the contrast is quite stark, with almost a different light. It is as if there is a barrier between the town and the Piazza. The Piazza is also known as the Campo dei Miracoli (the Field of Miracles), a name that seems to fit.

Back in 1987 it was still possible to climb the Leaning Tower. The steps inside are well worn, requiring care when climbing. At each level we went out to walk within the arches. The paths were also well worn and uneven. Combined with the lean to the south-east I found it difficult to walk around. It was particularly unnerving when walking down with the lean and being aware that there were no safety barriers. Wendy, however, was quite calm and enjoyed the whole thing, including my reaction. The fiend.

At Perry and Robyn's suggestion we had dinner at Trattoria de Stelio on Piazza Dante. At we walked I recalled being given a description of the decor. Each wall is lined with napkins, each inscribed by the restaurant's patrons. (Tourist leaving behind a souvenir.) Noticing a napkin with a drawing of a kangaroo, I stepped up to have a closer look. The signature said 'David and Elizabeth Kellaway'. 'No', I thought, 'I'm not even going to try to find Perry and Robyn's napkin.'

We were about to sit down at a table when the waiter waved us to a table two down, indicating we'd be further away from the door. We sat down, but before we could settle in the waiter was asking us what we wanted to drink. A delaying tactic was necessary.

'Er . . . can we please see the menu?'

'No menu . . . just a tourist menu. 12,000 lira. Three courses. Spaghetti, ravioli, er, er, then roast beef, chicken or steak. Then sweets. 12,000 lira. Okay?'



Napkin 1.

‘Okay!’

‘Okay. What to drink? Vino, beer?’

‘I’ll have wine . . . red,’ and turned to Wendy. ‘What do you want?’

Wendy didn’t respond, her eyes fixed upon a napkin. ‘Look’ she cried. Her pointing finger shot past my nose.

There, half a metre from my left shoulder, was Perry and Robyn’s napkin.

Wendy looked up at the waiter. ‘We came here because they told us to.’ Then she asked for an orange juice, and we made our choices of the three courses.

A minute later the waiter was back. He placed an orange juice in front of Wendy and a 1.5-litre bottle of red wine and a glass in front of me. I couldn’t believe this. ‘Half! Half!’ the waiter said, and I relaxed.

The meal was excellent, a fine way of rounding out our

Italian tour. My steak was superb and the wine was good, appropriate and plentiful. We happily added our bit to the Walls of Napkins.

The next morning we finally caught up with that post-Mussolini Italian tradition of ‘Train timetable? What timetable?’ Our final sampling of the Ferovie dello Strato was the only one to run late. On the other hand the first few hours of the journey, along the Italian west coast, was some of the best train travel we took during our two-month Continental travel. At Genova our train turned inland. If the train hadn’t been running late we would’ve had a few hours in which to catch a glimpse of Torino. As it was, all we had was time for a quick meal before hopping onto the train bound for France.

— Irwin Hirsh, 1996



Napkin 2.



# PEOPLE REMEMBERED

COLIN GILRAY:

MEMORIES OF MY GRANDFATHER

by Jennifer Bryce

JENNY BRYCE

'Wildwood', 2 Morris Road, Woodend VIC 3442

Stemming from the very moving piece you wrote some time ago about your father, there have been some beautiful tributes to fathers and other people in issues I have seen of *The Metaphysical Review*. I'm unable to write about my father (who died during his regular game of tennis in September 1991). We really didn't have a good relationship. At one stage, when I was twenty-four, I was told that I would not be welcome in the family home. (My first marriage had split up and I was involved with another man.) I had to meet my mother clandestinely in cafes . . . there was ultimately a reconciliation but, as you can imagine, we were never close. In some ways I am relieved that he is no longer alive, because keeping up the pretence of a father-daughter relationship was a strain. I bear him no malice, and it is a great relief to know that he died swiftly and probably with a minimum of pain.

I was much closer to my maternal grandfather, who died when he was eighty-nine in 1974. Thinking about this I remembered that about four years ago I wrote a piece about Grandad. It was a response to a draft manuscript by Geoffrey Searle, who was writing a biography of him. (He was principal of Scotch College and had led a life worthy of a published biography.) I think that Geoffrey Searle had been one of his pupils, but the biography was based on official documents and I felt that it didn't describe adequately the person I had known. So I wrote this little piece.

(20 January 1996)

The Grandad of my early childhood was a figure of fun. I spent a lot of time with him. I went to kindergarten up the road from the school where he was headmaster, so I usually had lunch with my grandparents, who lived on the school grounds. After lunch, my grandmother would have forty winks and Grandad would go to his study to smoke a pipe and read. This was when he was meant to look after me.

Grandad loved art. He would sometimes talk about the paintings on his study walls — a Constable print, a Max Raglass, an etching of a friend called 'Wiley'. Grandad had a special way of cupping his hands around his eyes when he looked at paintings, to blot out the other visual distractions. When I was a little older, he would take me to the National Gallery and we would walk around with our hands cupped in this way.

Grandad loved reading, and he was very good at reading out aloud. He had a special way of reading *Winnie-the-Pooh*, inventing voices for the characters. After lunch we usually read books from his own shelves. I'm sure he sometimes read me Latin texts, or whatever he was studying at the time, but he usually read something especially for me. When I was four he introduced me to French with a story about a family of mice, '*La vie de Madame Souris*'. My favourite story was 'Little Boy Lost' by Hudson. Grandad had a complete collection of Hudson, thick green bound books with gold lettering on the spines. I would point to the volume that held my favourite. I think he sometimes hid it so that we didn't have to read it every day!

Sometimes Grandad would become so absorbed in his own reading that he didn't keep a close enough eye on me. Once I got a boiled lolly stuck in my throat. Another time I fell off a book shelf and cut my head open (it needed stitches). Each time Grandad was reprimanded sternly. He was thought to be very absentminded.

Grandad was very patient — or perhaps he was very good at seeming to pay attention when he was really engrossed in something else. Around this time I saw my first movie. Someone had tried to explain to me how animation is done. As a result I made 'films'. I would kneel behind a small table in his study and hold up drawings that were meant to show characters moving. Three or four drawings were needed to show a leg moving. All would be accompanied by my hastily improvised dialogue. It must have been exceedingly tedious to watch! Sometimes Grandad was subjected to 'documentaries'. I would cut pictures out of magazines and hold

them up. Perhaps he read surreptitiously during these prolonged viewings. If so, I didn't notice.

When I was four I started to learn the piano. I was amazed to discover that Grandad couldn't read music. I decided that this was a serious failing for a school headmaster and became his music teacher. He didn't have a piano, so I taught him the names of the notes. I awarded him special gold stars (my own were green and silver) and I wrote 'Colin' next to the gold ones so that my teacher could see how well he was progressing. Sometimes he didn't do his homework.

By this time Grandad would have been close to retirement. He developed a duodenal ulcer and was not supposed to take pepper with his food. Although Grandad and I had many secrets — such as his nickname for my rather short and tubby music teacher — I felt that I had to tell on him if he sneaked the pepper pot at the lunch table. I'm sure he did this mainly for my benefit, as he would catch my eye and indicate that I shouldn't tell anyone. I thought that the pepper might kill him so, although I felt a traitor, I would shout 'Grandad's got the pepper!'

Overall I developed a huge respect for Grandad. It was largely because of him that I developed a deep love of poetry, cultivated the habit of visiting art galleries and ultimately took an Arts degree at university, but at the age of four I probably didn't show much respect. Grandad would sometimes take me aside in his study and tell me what an important person he was. Perhaps he was concerned about my seeming lack of respect, or perhaps he felt that the family didn't fully appreciate all he had done and I was the only person innocent enough for his confidence.

Grandad took great care choosing presents. He insisted on choosing dolls himself to make sure that they had suitably pleasant faces. Of course he loved choosing books. From the time when I was about seven, there would be an annual pilgrimage into the Margareta Webber Bookroom at birthday time. Grandad was always a perfect gentleman, and afforded me the same respect he would have given an adult. We would select a book, then he would take me to afternoon tea. I remember once setting out for the Wattle Tearooms ('What'll we do? We'll go to the Wattle!') and Grandad was so put out when we found they had closed down that we went to the Windsor Hotel.

I always dreaded going driving with Grandad. He had injured his ankle in the 1920s, and for the rest of his life it was very uncomfortable to use his left leg. He therefore avoided using the clutch and used only third and fourth gears — and reverse, when absolutely necessary. With a lot of revving, his Austin, number plate GLU (Gilray's Little Unit), could kangaroo-hop start in third gear. After his retirement, two afternoons a week, Grandad would drive me to my piano lesson. On the way home we would have to negotiate Barkers Road hill in peak-hour traffic. All the way up the hill I would quietly pray for a miracle — that the lights would be green, the traffic flowing, and we wouldn't have to stop. But the traffic was usually heavy. A handbrake start in third gear was often required! The car usually stalled and we would run backwards into the traffic, which would toot loudly. After several attempts (and several light changes) the car would lurch forward with much revving and we would putter around the corner onto the welcome flatness of Burke Road. Gilray's Little Unit needed frequent new clutches!

My grandparents must have had some terrifying driving experiences. Amazingly, there were no serious accidents. Grandad drove quite fast, and everyone else on the road was

a 'silly arse'. Maybe the duodenal ulcers of his later years were induced by the stress of driving. He could have afforded to give up the car and take taxis, but he drove until he was about eighty-five. An automatic transmission would overcome the gear-changing difficulties, but in the early days most automatic cars were American, and Grandad despised things that were American. British was best. He even bought BP petrol in the mistaken belief that it came from Britain. He was at least eighty when he was persuaded to trade in Gilray's Little Unit for an automatic Holden. The dealer was one of his Old Boys, to whom he was always very loyal, and this helped to make buying a non-British car acceptable. Driving, or 'motoring', as he would have said, became more pleasurable. But the freedom of not having to change gear meant that he drove even faster! My Grandmother, who must have endured many terrifying incidents, refused to travel in the front seat.

The last time I remember being driven by Grandad was when we went to the newly opened National Gallery in about 1968. I had a licence and my own car, but Grandad was in charge of the outing. I didn't look at the speed as we spiralled around the concrete maze of the new multi-storeyed car park. I think that Grandad had developed a habit of not braking while driving up hill (to avoid the old third-gear handbrake starts). But it is difficult to look for a parking spot without applying the brake. I was absolutely certain that we were going to career out of the concrete edifice and plunge to our deaths, but in spite of being almost paralysed with fear I was able to acknowledge that he still had amazingly good reflexes. He had been a New Zealand All Blacks rugby player in his youth, and I guess that his early sports training helped him now as he quite deftly negotiated the S bends in a manner not dissimilar to Stirling Moss. I don't remember the car stopping, the Art Gallery, or the afternoon tea that we most certainly would have had in the new restaurant.

A couple of years later, my parents built a house at Eltham. My Grandmother had died, and Grandad was to live in a flat attached to the house. He was persuaded to sell the car. He would occasionally take taxis, then forget how to direct them home. My parents would be telephoned by anxious taxi drivers in obscure parts of Warrandyte or Templestowe, wondering what to do. He became almost senile, but had bursts of lucidity and great honesty when he would tell me how awful it was when all of your friends had died and you kept forgetting everyday things. Oh, how I wish I could have been so honest with him!

I knew Grandad only as a kindly and fun-loving grandfather, but I experienced qualities that must have made him an extremely perceptive teacher and headmaster. I was nearly seven when my brother was born. He was the first boy in the family in our generation. There was much fuss and celebration. I remember Grandad taking me aside and saying, 'You know, I wouldn't have minded another granddaughter'. It was the very reassurance I needed. Much later, when my first marriage had broken up and I was the 'black sheep' of the family — literally an outcast, because I was involved with another man — Grandad insisted on seeing me. He was now living in the flat at Eltham. We would go for drives in my little Volkswagen and he still took me to afternoon tea, although he sometimes got muddled with the decimal currency. Whereas my parents — especially my father — had been mainly concerned about the family name and how sinful I had been, Grandad often said how sorry he was that I had been unhappy. He seemed in no way judgmental. He would fix me with his intent gaze and ask

whether everything was all right. I assumed that he hadn't been told about the other man and so, coward that I was, I changed the subject to a safe, platitudinous level.

Much later, after his death from a heart attack, I read a diary that Grandad had kept. I was shocked to discover that he had known everything. If only I had opened up and talked to him! I had not believed that my gentlemanly

grandfather of eighty-nine could have put aside what must have been profound disappointment and perhaps embarrassment to proffer sincere concern for my happiness and welfare. I had loved him and very much enjoyed his company, but I hadn't really known him.

— Jennifer Bryce, 1992

## PLAIN SPEAKING ABOUT PHILIP HODGINS

by Alex Skovron

### ALEX SKOVRON

172 Hawthorn Rd, Caulfield North VIC 3161

I'm enclosing the obituary I wrote for Philip Hodgins [see box]. It was first published in the Melbourne PEN newsletter (September 1995), and was subsequently reprinted in the November issue of *Write On*, the newsletter of the Victorian Writers' Centre.

You might be interested in some personal reminiscences about Philip, and the six paragraphs that follow are (more or less) what I said at the public tribute to Philip, held at Mietta's on 9 December 1995.

I first met Philip in 1981, some time after I had joined the publishing firm of Macmillan, where he was also employed. It was our passion for poetry which initially drew us together, and before very long we were showing each other our poems. Philip was already a published

poet; I was on the threshold, and just beginning to publish poems during this period. We both welcomed the accident of having been thrown together in the interests of poetry and conversation, and we took it up with gusto.

And indeed, as the friendship blossomed, we conducted many a long conversation in those South Melbourne offices (often when we really should have been working). There were also some talkative lunches. We'd cover a kaleidoscope of topics: poetry of course, and language, art, European history (for which Philip had a profound fascination) — and a dose of the latest literary gossip. Our discussions were often triggered by what we happened to be reading at the time.

From the start, I found in Philip a warm, modest, understated young man, level-headed and self-contained, possessed of a natural grace, good humour and an exuberance for knowledge. He was intensely curious, and not only read avidly and broadly — for he loved books

### A SPECIAL MUSIC

#### Philip Hodgins (1959–1995)

(First published in the Melbourne PEN newsletter, September 1995.)

Between 1983, when he was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia and given three years to live, and his death on 18 August 1995 at the age of 36, Philip Hodgins pursued an intense, highly focused and creative life, punctuated by hospital visits and procedures, bouts of chemotherapy, and periods of physical pain and discomfort. His predicament seemed to galvanise his creative energy, and over little more than a decade he produced five substantial collections of poems — *Blood and Bone* (1986), *Down the Lake with Half a Chook* (1988), *Animal Warmth* (1990), *Up on AllFours* (1993) and *Things Happen* (1995) — as well as a verse novella, *Dispossessed* (1994).

Much of his work was inspired by a profound affinity for Australian rural life; having grown up on a dairy farm, his experience of the land was both firsthand and extensive. His poems are rich in intricate detail, imagery that can startle and delight, incisive, often wry observation, an understated humour, and a sense of atmosphere as elusive and moving as the land itself.

The other recurring presence in Hodgins's poetry is of course death, which remained his relentless familiar. His subtle interweaving of rural themes about the shadow of that presence must stand as unique in Australian poetry.

But these were by no means his only poetic concerns. Philip Hodgins cared greatly about language and art, literature and history; many of his poems mirror those interests to telling effect. His poetry is highly crafted and controlled, his voice almost conversational in its clarity.

Philip was a gracious, softly spoken man, with a natural warmth and an openness of spirit; whilst possessed of a genuine humility, he was forthright in his opinions, strongminded, prepared to fight for what he believed. Throughout, he displayed a courage and a dignity that were truly inspiring.

He is survived by his wife, the writer Janet Shaw, and two young daughters. Philip Hodgins has left our poetry enriched with a special music. He will be much missed.

— Alex Skovron, August 1995

and he loved ideas — but thought deeply about what he read. He was also a deadly observer, with an instinctive impatience for anything that struck him as pretentious or counterfeit, and he could be merciless in debunking it.

Occasionally, for instance, he enjoyed a sling at certain types of intellectuals. 'They might know all about Wittgenstein', he wrote to me in one of his letters from overseas during 1985, 'but they couldn't track an elephant through the snow.' (An observation that surfaced, albeit somewhat modified, in one of his poems.) And on the subject of a famous novelist Philip was reading: 'He's very elegant. Sometimes a little too elegant. I prefer plain speaking — from books and people.' Though he felt compelled to add, fairly-mindedly: 'Nevertheless this book is recommended reading.'

These letters would, more than likely, contain a recent poem, neatly handwritten within the body of the letter, or on the back: that was how I first read poems such as 'The Shortlist', 'Resurrection' and 'From County Down'. Philip saw many of my early drafts as well; and sometimes, when I shared with him my excitement at a particularly productive writing session I had just experienced (perhaps late into the night before), he might smile knowingly and remark: 'The volcano has erupted!' Well, it seems to me that he was the volcano. He had to be.

And sooner or later, my memory returns to the day, towards the end of 1983, when Philip learnt of his illness. Over the months (and years) that followed, how extraordinary it was to watch his creativity explode and channel itself and flow so richly into the poetry that became *Blood and Bone*, and the books beyond. Right to the end, he addressed his muse with courage and with dignity.

I then read out four poems: my own 'From the Carriage', from *Sleeve Notes*, a poem which bears a dedication to Philip (and, by a strange coincidence, was written in September 1986, the month *Blood and Bone* was

launched); two of Philip's poems, 'The Map' from *Animal Warmth* and 'Midday Horizon' from *Things Happen*, the last book; and an 'Elegy' to Philip by the poet Anthony Lawrence.

The tribute was a great success. Mietta's, hosting one of its very last functions, was full, and a tidy sum was raised for Janet and the girls.

Hard to believe that Philip is no longer with us. But he is, of course. We need to regard his struggle as a victory. For years he stared death in the face; and if he didn't outstare it in the end (and who does?), he stared it down long enough to say what he needed to say, in the way that only he could say it. And how much richer we are for that.

After the *TMR* pieces on Philip and on Dinny O'Hearn, to which I turned first, it seemed appropriate to read Catherine Hoffmann's 'A Traveller's Prayer to Hermes' — which I think contains some of the best writing I've seen from Cathy. It's been months since I last spoke to her.

As for my own work, *Infinite City* manuscript (the 100 sonatinas) is finished and being considered by a Sydney publisher at the moment. I'm reprinting *The Rearrangement* in paperback early in 1996; I'd like it back in circulation for a while longer, together with *Sleeve Notes*, which is still in print and available from Hale & Iremonger or from me. Finally, many of the new poems I wrote in 1994 under the Lit Board grant will find their way into my fourth collection.

Then there's the short fiction, which may be news to you. I've now had two stories published, with a third doing the rounds. (in the early 1970s I also wrote several SF stories, but they represent an earlier phase of my writing and I can't honestly see myself trying to publish them now.) As well, I recently reworked a novella that I wrote back in 1980, though I don't know yet quite what I'll doing with it. It comes in at about 27,000 words, and is currently in its third draft.

(31 December 1995)

---

## IN PERPETUAL MOTION:

### A PORTRAIT OF MY FATHER

by John Berry

---

#### JOHN BERRY

4 Chilterns, S. Hatfield, Herts AL10 8JU England

The contents of *TMR* Nos. 22/25 do fluctuate between old age and death, and perchance should be digested with Strauss's *Metamorphosen* being played in the background. Nevertheless, the pages are filled with a sagacity and understanding of life that one does not as a rule obtain from the average fanzine.

I have enclosed my 'Nor the Years Condemn', concerning the life and death of my father, as it seems to fit in with your current editorial policy.

(9 February 1996)

My father died in 1961 aged seventy-three. This age is easy to work out because he was unfortunate enough to be burdened with the Christian name Jubilee, being born in 1887. (This year coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne of England.) Fortunately, he was also given the Christian names Ernest Edward. Otherwise going through life called Jubilee Berry would probably have caused a severe psychological shock.

I have questioned my aged mother about his early years. (She is now eighty-seven years old and is living with Diane and me at Hatfield, Herts.) It has been difficult to ascertain what happened in his formative years, but I elicited the fact that he lived with his grandmother. It seems that his father had defected one day, leaving his wife, my father and another baby, and shortly after this my father, about six

years old, returned home after a day's scrumping and discovered that his mother and baby brother had also absconded. My mother tells me that a family get-together was organised to find someone to assume parental control over him, and his grandmother either won or lost, as the case may be.

My mother has recounted the strange fact that his father (my grandfather) was drowned in Lake Ontario whilst out rowing with a mysterious girl. For some reason the boat capsized. What worries my mother is that a Bible allegedly found on his body, and sent to his son, my father, was 'as dry as a bone'. She feels that this was mute evidence of a planned disappearance. It was not for me to judge an affair that happened many years before I was born, but must presume that the fact that the Bible was not still wet after crossing the Atlantic by a slow boat could not be construed as a superlative piece of forensic jurisprudence.

I understand that my father's early years were spent in the Shropshire countryside near Ludlow. I know that he did not attend school very much, and I do believe that if he had been educated he would have been an inventor. He was assuredly skilled in a mechanical way.

My father had a horizontal U-shaped scar on his chin which, whilst not in any way disfiguring his features, was certainly plainly visible.

I once asked him how he'd got it, and he told me that one day when he was a young man he had worked on a coal-tip aerial railway at Clee Hill, Cleobury Mortimer, also near Ludlow. As two buckets crossed in mid air, he leapt from one to the other, and a slight misjudgment had caused his chin to hit the metal-bucket edge. A few days ago, whilst searching through some old documents of my mother's, I discovered a postcard depicting the scene of his suborbital flight. The card is dated 23 September 1910.

I have a faded photograph of him and his friends posing in their army uniforms, as privates in the Shropshire Light Infantry. One important fact can be deduced from this pictorial evidence. A date stamp on the rear of the photograph shows it was taken in 1913, one year before the Great War. Although, as I've stated, he and his friends were in army uniform, he alone had the distinction of wearing a large civilian cap. Whether or not this was a portent I cannot ascertain, but I do possess evidence of a very strong nature — whereas everyone else appeared to have gone to war in 1914, my father shrewdly left the army at this juncture.

Just the other day, my mother revealed that she recalls that my dad invented the pedal-cycle sidecar. I must confess that I have never seen one of these contraptions, although I was a cyclist for many years. She states that when my eldest sister Mary was of tender years, my father made a little sidecar to carry her, and he made frequent cycle forays into the countryside, once even as far as Cleobury Mortimer. 'But I think they must have returned by train because the sidecar was broken and Mary was covered in bruises.'

I possess several other postcards my father sent to my mother when they were courting, and varying writing on the cards confirms that he was illiterate. When they married, they moved to Birmingham, and their first child, Mary, was born in 1915. She died of stomach cancer in 1971. I was born in 1926, and their third child, Barbara Joan, was born in 1928. She died in 1973 of a brain tumor.

My father, by trade, was a tool setter, and worked in a factory at Tyseley, Birmingham, until it was bombed in 1941, and he speedily found work of the same nature at the Rover Co. in Solihull.

As I've said, he had a mechanical bent. He dabbled in

various fields, for example, manufacturing cat's-whisker wireless sets. I recall us all sitting around the kitchen table wearing earphones, with looks of bewilderment on our faces as he manipulated a large console in front of him. Eventually he got the machine to work by constructing an aerial at the bottom of our garden, a sophisticated structure which, insofar as my memory serves me, would be in keeping with modern radio astronomy devices.

However, pride of place in his career as a scientist/inventor was his lifelong and eminently unsuccessful search for a perpetual motion machine. Year in, year out, he retired to the bathroom every Sunday morning, and when I grew up old enough to appreciate his intensity and enthusiasm I was permitted into his sanctum, and hence I can describe in detail his hopeless quest.

He had constructed a wooden platform that fitted over the bath, creating a work bench. His experimental machines were always shrouded in dusty sheets in the corner of the bathroom, and my mother was not permitted to touch them. Once in the bathroom, he would bid me to sit down, and he would lock the door. He would give a couple of triumphant cackles, load his latest device on the wooden table, and whip off the sheets. Of course, I cannot exactly describe his models, but his later constructions were wonderful to behold.

Obviously, every day at work he had made a metal device of some sort, which he had smuggled home and utilised in his eternal quest for the impossible.

Details of his bizarre constructions are embedded forever in my mind . . . I recall lots of pistons and rubber-driven pulley wheels, and here and there various miniature boiler-type constructions with pipes sprouting out all over them, rather like hedgehogs with rigor mortis. I cannot describe the technical details of his obsession, because he did not deign to confide in me, and all his theories and calculations were in his head. When he died, I searched his effects in a desperate effort to find just a mere trace of some obscure physical property he had discovered to flout the Laws of Motion, but nothing existed.

Luckily, if I concentrate really hard I get quick lashes of his actions, because I noted them many times. First he oiled all the necessary little places, and then he took a deep breath. With eyes mere dots in a big red flushed face, moustache nestling under his nostrils, he blew explosively into a rubber tube, and then with lightning speed he rammed the end into a socket. His burst of breath turned a wheel round. The pistons thus attached actuated governors on a little boiler and two more pistons actuated flywheels and turned even more wheels, but gradually inertia set in and the wheels and pistons and things still moved but got slower and slower and eventually ceased functioning. He always looked at me out of the corner of his eyes with a frustrated expression, and with his right hand concealed from me behind his body he sometimes surreptitiously flipped a flywheel, as if hoping that a miracle would happen and the whole damn contraption would burst into the ecstasy of everlasting life.

But of course it never did.

I left home to join the army in 1944, but during my periods of army leave his Sunday Experience had not become dimmed with failure. The stubborn Berry trait was still dominant. Now he had built his devilish machine to massive proportions. It had just about taken over the bathroom. The perpetual motion machine now included quite a lot of large iron-case wheels with dozens of little pieces of lead appended to the spokes with subtle wiring. This time, his

rapid but controlled exudation of breath made the wheels fairly hum with smooth motion, and he jabbed little spots of oil on the axles and held his breath excitedly. Sheer willpower and, if you'll permit the suggestion, little electronic beams of mind-over-matter seemed to make the very atmosphere tingle. His machine just couldn't stop — but of course it always did . . . slower . . . slower . . . until the machine was finally motionless.

World War II started in September 1939, and just before that date the famous corrugated metal Anderson air raid shelters were delivered to every home in Birmingham.

This represented one of my father's most fantastic coups, because he had built his air-raid shelter two years before.

I do not comprehend how he had assessed the necessity for this drastic step; I knew he couldn't read the newspapers, but my mother is and always has been an astute political observer, and whatever she had told him had significantly alerted him to the possibility that Birmingham, or at least the 18 Roydon Road, Acocks Green section of it, was going to be bombed. To show his insight in its true perspective I must proudly report that an incendiary bomb actually did land in our back garden in 1942. But in 1937 his air-raid shelter was a sensation locally, and lots of people came to look and marvel at it. It was not a sophisticated design — he had just burrowed down like an anxious mole — but in due course he had assembled a hand-operated pump to keep the water level down to an acceptable depth, and he had also constructed five bunks on stilts. It used to have a dank smell, and my gang held its meetings there for some time until the boy next door caught pneumonia. When the Anderson shelter did arrive in its prefabricated state, my father recognised that the metal was preferable to his orange-crate-constructed roof, and he dismantled his structure, and replaced it with the official one, smilingly smugly to himself the while.

During the air raids over Birmingham, the neighbours formed a local organisation to take it in turns to guard their street during the night, and this duty was officially entered in a heavy book, which was passed to the next person on duty.

I always went outside with my father when his tour of duty came round. He did it conscientiously, walking up and down Roydon Road with his steel helmet at a jaunty angle, just covering his right spectacle. Sometimes the air raids were heavy, and even if it wasn't his turn for duty, he would swiftly whip on his helmet, and with gas-mask bag rampant would walk into the road at the first siren wail. He let me stay outside with him, as I was fifteen or sixteen years old. The German bombers would throb overhead, searchlights would probe for them, bombs whistled down but never came near us, except for the shower of incendiaries that traversed Roydon Road and Tavistock Road. One landed about ten feet from the back of our house. My father, alerted by the next-door neighbour's shouts, quickly covered it with sand bags he kept in the garden. I often pondered over this near miss. A split second saved our house from becoming a blazing inferno. Quite often, after the heavy blasting of anti-aircraft fire, shrapnel could be heard dropping on the roofs of the houses, and some nights, after I'd gone to bed to try and sleep with the sounds of bombs and planes and AA fire, he would come upstairs to my room and press a jagged piece of warm shrapnel in

my hand. He knew I liked souvenirs like that. And of course, in common with millions of other English people during the War, he was always on time at work next morning.

I received a telephone call one day in September 1961 to say that my father was seriously ill. I flew over from Belfast to see him and got home after midnight.

My mother was sleeping with my elder sister Mary, and he was alone in the big front bedroom. I held his hand when I saw him lying there. He was taking big ponderous breaths, and there was a pause until the next breath. He recognised me and whispered, 'I want to see Barbara.'

My younger sister Barbara had a rather complicated marital career, being involved in several affairs, which eventually concluded with my mother not knowing her name, status or whereabouts.

Next morning my father was worse. The pauses between breaths seemed to be imperceptibly longer. My mother asked me if I would try and trace Barbara, because Dad desperately wanted to see her. She gave me twenty pounds.

First I telephoned the last place she had worked at. She had been a photographer at an RAF aerodrome. After several more calls I traced her to Bridgewater in Somerset. I took an express train to Weston-super-Mare, where I stopped for the night. Next morning I caught a bus to Bridgewater, and made telephone calls to different firms, eventually concentrating on the unemployment sector. I found one vital fact: mail for her should be left at a box number at the Bridgewater Post Office.

I wrote her a terse note asking her to go home quickly as Dad was dying. I returned home. He was worse, his breathing now laboured. I had to return to Belfast to attend court the next day to give fingerprint evidence, and in the meantime I telephoned the doctor, stating that my mother could not manage to look after him, as he was very heavy, and kept trying to get out of bed. I was sitting by his bed when the specialist came in. He was well dressed, and spoke in an educated accent.

'We'll soon get you on your feet, old chap,' he said, giving us a wide, flashing smile.

My father turned to me and said in a hoarse stage whisper, 'I don't like the look of this bloke.'

Of course, my father's judgment was cynical but considered. He was moved to hospital shortly after I returned to Belfast, and died a couple of days later. My sister Barbara received my letter at Bridgewater and saw Dad in hospital just before he died.

I flew home again for the funeral.

My father was kindness personified. Never once in my entire life did he hit me, or even shout at me, and he always made model aircraft and catapults and farms and things when I was young.

But I still remember him mostly for his perpetual motion experiments.

I went to see him in his coffin at the funeral parlour on the Stratford Road, Birmingham. His eyes were closed and he looked restful, but one corner of his lips was twisted upward and his grey moustache was slightly askew, as if to say, 'Maybe, if I'd tried just once more, it might have worked . . .'

— John Berry

# PEOPLE & FABLES

## THE FAIRY BUSH

by John F. Rainey

Ireland, where I spent the first three and a half decades of my life, is a land of giants and fairies. Equally prominent is the devil, who seems to be an absentee landlord of many holdings. In Portrush, where I lived from the age of eight, we had the Devil's Washtub, and eight miles away, the Giant's Causeway; and we all know the hand Finn Macool had in that. But this tale is not about giants or the devil, but about fairies. It is a true story.

In some fields in Ireland, one can see a single blackthorn bush growing on a little hill or mound. This is known as a fairy bush, and was supposed, according to local legend, never to be disturbed. Many were the stories told of the dire consequences of disturbing a fairy bush, also tales of crocks of gold hidden there. I was born and lived on a farm for a time, and I can still remember being regaled with stories of fairy bushes and fairies, or the 'wee folk' as they are often referred to. Some actions, it seemed, pleased the wee folk, but then again certain other things displeased them. As one who professes not to be superstitious, I did not take much heed, except, of course, to take care not to do anything that might offend — just in case. In the light of the experience I now relate, who can blame me?

The Warnock family had a farm about four miles from ours, a prosperous enough holding with good land. The family consisted of the father James, the mother, one daughter and one son. The father is the only one whose name I remember, and I can still recall what he looked like, but cannot now remember the appearance of the others. They had a fairy bush in one of their fields.

James got tired of the inconvenience of ploughing and harvesting around the bush, and decided to remove it, against, I believe, the wishes of the family. So he and the son rooted out the bush, levelled the mound and ploughed over it. The neighbours could scarcely believe that he could be so foolish, but James said the whole thing was a lot of rubbish and he was glad to be rid of the nuisance.

I can still remember a few of our neighbours sitting around the open peat fire in our kitchen, when the talk came around to the removed bush. Down the years I can still see old Will Jock McMaster stroking his long beard and saying 'Jamie Warnock will live to rue the day'. As it transpired he was partly right.

Within a few months James Warnock's daughter died of tuberculosis, or consumption as it was then called. Nothing really strange as she had been delicate for a number of years. However, within six months the son was killed in a motor-cycle accident, and before the year was out the old man was killed by a kick from a horse, leaving only the wife surviving. I recall old Will Jock saying, 'She'll be all right, she's not of the blood.' Meaning, of course, that not being a blood relative she was free of the anger of the wee folk.

Coincidence? What else could it be, to think otherwise is to go against all logic. The anger of the wee folk — surely this is being foolish? All the same, I suspect that he should have left that bush undisturbed.

— John F. Rainey, 1993

## A FABLE

by E. D. Webber

I went to high school on Long Island during the sleepwalking 'fifties, and in 1955 our high-school class play was *The Wizard of Oz*. In the eyes and opinions of all who witnessed it the play was a great success and spoke well for all participants. Our parents and teachers said so anyway, and we, being in no position yet to argue with whatever successes came our way, went along with the program.

The girl who played Dorothy was a brilliant singer, better than any of us had thought she'd be, and was Jewish and intelligent enough to know the shortcomings of show business for what they are. Even at that age, she was aware, and would have none of it. It was only a high-school play, as far as she was concerned. Being more brilliant than New York Jewish, she did not go on to NYU or Columbia but to an Ivy



League University on full scholarship instead, did independent graduate work in Mexico City, and her doctorate in clinical psychology at one of the leading universities in her field in the country. She now works for the city of New York as a bilingual adolescent psychologist, specialising in teenaged rapes within the school system. She has been offered partnerships in private practice, but will only think about doing so after the city retires her. Private practice strikes her as a feeding of fantasies for money. She is married to a university lecturer, has two children in private school, and hasn't sung publicly since she was Dorothy in high school.

The boy who played the Cowardly Lion went on to college too, but dropped out after a semester to enter the Air Force. After four years in the military, without ever going any farther from home than Nebraska, he returned to his high-school home town to become a policeman. He's travelled once since then — to a policemen's convention in Hawaii — and really travelled overseas once to Europe. But he didn't like the food. His record says that he is an exemplary policeman. Aside from a few and thoroughly misunderstood racial incidents, he has a squeaky-clean record. Nothing even unseemly has ever managed to touch him and he's never touched anything that might. He has never even been accused of taking a bribe, much less soliciting one. He'll retire as a senior sergeant in a few years, and is considering buying a house farther out on the island or maybe in Florida. He has policeman friends who've retired to Florida, however, and is not sure at all about the Cubans there. At the risk of being a New York cliché that is not true as far as he is concerned, he was raised an Irish Catholic and still is. He has three children, all educated at Catholic schools with one planning to be a lawyer after Fordham. He and his wife of some thirty years still consider themselves practising Roman Catholics, but do not attend mass much anymore. They miss the Latin. Both are very content with their lives.

The Tin Man seriously went on to college, majored in Mathematics at a little Ivy League school closely connected with the insurance business so he might more directly go from college to industry, and did his degree in exactly four years. To the surprise of everyone who knew him and her in high school, he did not marry his school sweetheart, but waited exactly a year after taking his degree and then married a girl from Mt Holyoke he'd met at a mixer between their two schools. Raised as a Baptist, he changed his nominal religion while in college, and the wedding was an Ivy League affair dutifully celebrated at New York City's Little Church Around the Corner. The church itself must have been as deeply within the American establishment as he wanted to go because he took a job teaching math at a high school a few miles away from where he went to school and he's been doing so ever since. He thought about going to graduate school, but couldn't see what good it would do him. He's still married to the same person and they have one child, a son who went to Harvard and now works for a bank in California. Having been the class president in high school, he still organises all the class reunions, and they are always successful gatherings.

The Scarecrow left town as soon as he could, did four years in the army overseas, and never came back to his home town save for very short visits in passage to somewhere else. He was an undergraduate in California for eight years, finally took a degree in Humanities and Literature, did a Master's degree in New York in a year, and has never made any real use of his education whatsoever. That's surprising

in itself, because he had the second-highest IQ of the class when tested in high school the same year as the play. The highest scorer was the daughter of a Philosophy professor at Columbia who didn't go in for drama much. He and the Tin Man were the best of friends in high school, but lost track of each other after the Tin Man's wedding. The Scarecrow happened to be in New York at the same time, and it could be that his wedding present of a moose head was not really appreciated. He's not sure, and it was a short visit anyway. During and after the Scarecrow's passage through the rites of higher education, he worked as a waiter in Nevada casino showrooms, owned his own restaurant, and has been married four times. He's travelled far more than most, speaks a few foreign languages, and has lived overseas extensively. If he ever does retire he's not at all sure what it'd be from. His teachers in high school considered him to be an underachiever and that he'd bloom in later life, but he fooled them.

The girl who played the Wicked Witch is more interesting. She was eleven when she played the role. She was the only black girl in the school. For some reason, the black boys didn't count. And she could sing, and had the stage presence that only a witch should have. There is no question but that she was made for the part, the same way the Jewish girl was for Dorothy. She went on after high school in what must have been suburban nowhere for a bright black girl, to NYU and a subsequent career in law. She married a white boy, also from Long Island, while in Law School, and is still married. They have two children. With their own partnership now, he does mostly *pro bono* work and she concentrates on the corporate stuff. To hear them talk, she makes more money than he does and neither seems to mind. They live in the city and never go to either of their home towns on the island except when passing through on their way to their weekend place in the Hamptons. Upon their eventual retirement, they intend to live somewhere in the West Indies.

The Wizard didn't get much of a rave when we did the play. He doesn't in many reviews of the original book either. It's not known why a fat kid was chosen to play the part, but he was, and nobody seemed to care anyway. He wasn't a dumb kid, bright enough to get accepted at Yale, but he wasn't brilliant either. He actually did marry his high-school girlfriend, one of the few who did. It was not idyllic, however. They both had to drop out of college, she to have a baby and he to work in advertising. He did well selling toothpaste and other items necessary to make things look better than they are, though. He had his company's London office in ten years and was a corporate vice-president in less than twenty. Some people say he really is a wizard, the way he's managed to make such a good living for himself and his family by manipulating public perceptions of products. He's passed up his company's top position several times and has no intention of owning his own company. He's still married to the same girl from school, with two children who both have degrees from Yale, and is as good as comfortably retired any time he wants to be. A bit like the guy who played the Scarecrow, whom he didn't like much in high school and vice-versa, the Wizard doesn't go home a lot, and then only to show off the kids and/or their accomplishments. He has been toying with the idea of going into politics, however, and figures he might have to press the flesh a bit now and then. His proven skills in advertising just might not cover all the bases, but he's not sure. Market research never was his strong point in the business. He's always proved to be more the creative type.

One of the interesting things about my classmates' high-school play, of course, is that none of them went any further along into show business in later life. Maybe that would have been anticlimactic. What is really interesting is how prophetic the casting was and how realistic the so-called fantasy world of *The Wizard of Oz* can be without even trying. Evi-

dently, all it takes is a little patience and a lot of what drama critics call emotional distance from the role you're supposed to be playing.

— E. D. Webber, 1997

---

## A COSMOLOGICAL HUMILIATION

by Walt McLaughlin

---

Shortly after the divorce was finalised, I put my fledgling book store on the market and began formulating a plan for a one-way trip into the wilds of Alaska. Some of my friends thought the urge was suicidal, but I assured them that I intended to live in the wild, not die there. All the same, there was no denying what was at stake: I was suffering from a deep-seated spiritual malaise and was willing to go to any extreme to overcome it. Dire situations call for drastic measures. Either I would bridge the gap between myself and the Eternal Other, or I would die trying.

'Man is the synthesis of the infinite and the finite,' the existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once wrote. Therein lies the despair which is, as he put it, 'a sickness unto death'. In other words, there's something about the human condition that naturally distances us from God and the world. That distance causes a spiritual malaise within us that we must overcome in order to feel whole. Some of us are more keenly aware of this malaise than others. Some of us are more willing to do something about it. That's how I saw things, anyhow, as I donned a thunderbird necklace — the symbol of a new self rising from the ashes — and prepared for a long journey that would heal me.

Winter melted into spring; summer gradually unfolded. A few prospective buyers looked at my book store but no one made an acceptable offer. Since the business was only two years old, there really wasn't much for them to buy. All the same, I hoped for the best. I did whatever I could to improve the operation. In another year or so, I figured, the store would have enough of a sales record to attract serious attention. Meanwhile, I would continue the somewhat strenuous physical regimen I had established to better condition myself for an eventual showdown in wild nature. I meditated regularly, too, but made little headway on that count. No matter. Everything would surface once I reached the wilds of Alaska. The main thing was to get there as soon as I could — the following summer, if possible.

The divorce process had been an emotional roller coaster but my frayed nerves had started healing as soon as the process ended. Six months after the divorce was finalised, I had convinced myself that it was all behind me. I was relatively happy — a man with a plan, revelling in the delights of newfound freedom. No one could have told me that there was any correlation between that recent emotional upset and my Alaska plan. I wouldn't hear it. My love of wilderness was real and I was certain that any spiritual malaise could be overcome there. The divorce process had only freed me of emotional entanglements so that I could address these unfinished spiritual matters. There was no more to it than that.

Everything went pretty smoothly during the summer, but in early October I sprained my ankle. That put a real crink in my conditioning program. All the same, I remained undaunted. With the help of a physical trainer, I devised a new program to strengthen my ankle. I was determined to get to Alaska, no matter what. Nothing as inconsequential as a sprained ankle was going to stop me.

Towards the end of October, something else happened — something taking me completely by surprise. I had a bizarre visitation, a bad dream or something like that. Actually, I wasn't quite sure what was going on when I bolted upright in bed in the middle of the night, whirling in that muddled state of mind between the dream world and reality, only to find a shadowy spectre standing over me.

'What?' I barked at it, but the apparition didn't respond. It just stood there silently pointing at my ankle with a darkened finger. As I gradually awoke, the apparition faded away. I dismissed the incident as a bad dream once I was fully awake. Then I went back to sleep. Only a dream, yes, of course, but in the clarity of the early morning light a few hours later, I began to wonder . . .

I grew listless and distracted during the days that followed. I spent a great deal of time pondering the significance of that dream but couldn't really make any sense of it. Should I wear a brace on my ankle? Should I avoid any activities that might further weaken it? I went through the motions at the store, but my thoughts were obviously elsewhere.

A week passed without event. Then a few more days slipped away. Then I awoke one morning feeling incredibly unmotivated. Instead of my usual morning routine, I took a long hot bath. I tried to soak as if I didn't have a care in the world, but an unspecific burden weighed heavily upon my chest. Among other things, I pondered that dream and what it might mean. I still couldn't make any sense of it. Then it struck me like a bolt of lightning: there would be no great realisation in the wilds of Alaska. There would be no closing the gap between me and the Eternal Other. The only thing awaiting me there was a senseless, premature death. I was being driven to it by emotional fallout left over from my divorce. My Alaska plan reeked of desperation and bravado. If I clung stubbornly to it, I would surely perish. So then, having no real desire to die, I abandoned the plan right then and there.

Rising from the water, I felt tremendous relief . . . and the utter desolation that accompanies the sudden loss of a cherished dream. Rising from the water, I sensed the absurdity of my situation: I had just made a critical life-or-death decision while soaking in a tub of warm, soapy water.

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 82

# FEATURE LETTERS

## EPISTLES FROM JUJUY

by Mae Strelkov

**MAE STRELKOV**  
4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina

Dearest Casey

Your letter of comment to Bruce [TMR 22/23] mentioning my stuff just arrived. May I call you 'dearest'? Dearest people are rare, though most everybody is a dear in some way. But your preciousness comes to light in what you wrote, pouring out your heart. And if a therapist helped you free your inner self that way, it's splendid.

About changing your name: a good idea! It strikes me as a strange coincidence that lately I've been thinking that if ever my language studies should see print I'd want a name change. Dropping Strelkov. Maybe use my maiden surname again: 'Surtees'. When I married Vadim in 1936, he and his grim old Russian father Nicholas were the only two male Strelkovs as far as they knew. (It's not a usual Russian name.) But I've borne five sons and two daughters. Two sons have died, one just two years ago, and the other in 1976. Females can lose their maiden surname by marriage. Men can't change surnames so easily. The girls married and are Strelkovs no more (save Alice in Canada, who in her scientific papers still uses her maiden name). The boys? The eldest, George, born in Southern Chile in 1938 and near sixty now and with health problems, living in Canada, is a stern Strelkov. He divorced his Argentine wife when their children were grown, and remarried: a very nice lady some years his elder. (He met her only after the divorce.) I remain a close friend of Elsa, his first wife, who formerly hated me because she believed the most awful lies told her by my aged parents-in-law. She loves me now. George and Elsa's two Strelkov sons, now adults, are lovely humans, but they are Strelkovs and I'm *not*, as I recognise. They are proud enough of me — I sent Elsa my story of my early childhood in China, a long novel, and they read it and loved it. But there you are. Three Strelkovs already in Canada I must take into account if ever I get more widely published. I don't want to embarrass them somehow.

Here in Argentina, there are two more living Strelkov sons, and between them four Strelkov grandsons. Another son, Robert, died at age fifty-two years back (unhappy in his marriage but bravely going through each day of it cheerfully). And he left one son, Nico, for me the reincarnation of my cruel father-in-law Nicholas, and he came to live with us here last year when he was eighteen.

I have to tell you, dear beautiful Casey, it knocked me out to face this identical 'reincarnation or return' of that cruel, shattering old man. I wrote to Bruce and Elaine, confessing that I was no longer 'in cahoots with the Creator' — he'd played a dreadful joke on me sending 'Old Nick' back unchanged. It really knocked me out, forcing me to rethink my idealistic outlook. Hideous old men, even if given new chances, new bodies, go right on unchanged, still hideous, oldster-minded, ruthless. Unchanged indeed. It hurt me. I wanted desperately to die to escape facing his horrible reality the beloved Creator was forcing me to accept. ('Some really aren't savable as easily as you supposed, silly Beulah Mae' — Beulah is my first given name.)

You can well believe I understood all you wrote, identifying deeply. You did right to change your name. If you have a chance to read Robert Jordan's series 'The Wheel of Time', one book has beautiful scenes of wolves versus a youth who is a wolf at heart and a fine man too.

You experienced 'a very troubled family'. So did I, from the day I promised to marry my husband Vadim (Strelkov) when I was barely eighteen, in 1935 in China. I can't write up the details even yet. In 1958, trying to pretend everything was 'lovely' I underwent a total collapse; I didn't even know my name or identity. Electro-and-insulin shock treatment forced me back to face anew my problems. But it's true. When I say a brief goodnight prayer while falling asleep each night, it hurts me to think of those sons, as I focus on each in turn. Too many griefs shuttered and unfaced for too long! In my case, the shock treatment erased the more unbearable memories of my life under Vadim's parents' cruel control in everything. I couldn't call my soul my own.

I know how it is to live with someone else's version of the truth (in your case, your father's version). I do understand. I live daily with Vadim's version; he'll never understand how I found his parents so frightening always. We can't discuss our mutual past even yet.

'The minstrel boy' I learned in a Shanghai public school for girls. Haunting, evocative, lovely. It forges already a link between us.

You say 'I had to stop feeling sympathy for the strangler'. I too have had to begin learning this past year as old Nicholas Strelkov returned to us unchanged as Nico Strelkov, ruthlessly domineering and heartless (complete with all the old mannerisms unchanged).

It was no 'renewal'. Instead it was like a zombie soul with a handsome new body, containing some of my genetic material, worse still. Trying to love him anew was so costly I longed for death, last year, to escape. (If reincarnation brings back evil as well as goodness, how terrible!)

'Dreams of houses and trying to move in.' I have them too. 'Dreams of floating also.' How alike we are, you and I. And violation! With me, the Strelkovs stripped me of my very self from 1935 until the shock treatment (1958) freed me. I still have great bitterness, brought to the fore by Nico's return. He's gone now from the household, having found a female of thirty, with a mother forced by her daughter to support him in town.

'Forget betrayal, overwhelming pain, etc.' It's impossible, really. How I know it. And yet, facing 'old Nick' back again, as 'young Nico' last year, forced me to remember all (anguish!) and now I *am* today free.

You went through horror at the age of six — too, too early. I, only when I was eighteen. But I was as foolish and trusting as a six-year-old.

Dear love, your writing is beautiful. 'Helixes spinning into eternity.' Do you paint or draw? Your love of colour suggests you could.

I do feel there comes a time to write 'Finish', as I did last year when I knew young Nico wanted to succeed where Old Nick had finally failed to crush me. I've shut him out of my life. I had to! I trust never to meet him again in any future incarnation. Straight out of hell is all he's ever been to me. Let others pity the devil; I never did. Do these 'lost souls' never change? Or get 'saved' eventually?

(15 February 1996)

Dear Casey, and Bruce

It's all over, my spleen over poor Nico. He and the girl have produced a beautiful baby named Lucas. They sent me a photo when he was just weeks old. As for the girl's mother, she's my problem now, but mild by comparison. She's deep into Yogism, and when she's meditating like a yogi, I kinda get lost in how to react. I tried 'approving', but it only makes the poor soul — well — dumb. All spiritual, you know. My spirituality fades as I age. I'm not the saint who wrote that piece Bruce published some time ago. My 'serene saintliness' is non-existent. I'm a mean crotchety old great-grandma, and would frighten even that 'Old Nick' of my past. As for his youthful equivalent, oh, poor boy — and the poor girl — both are so scared of my opinion. As long as they just visit 'realsoonnow' I can bear them around me. For a day.

It's gorgeous to have become my natural self as I age. Freed of all the love-one-another traditions beaten into me, by constant reiteration, in my early youth. (Science fiction has corrupted me ever since 1961 or '62 when *Cry of the Nameless* first subverted me.)

Casey, I still feel all I said in my earlier letter, and I still think you're a very special person, but I do hope it takes you less time to say *I don't give a damn* than it took me. I was so stubbornly *loving*. Now I love, but not sentimentally.

Your childhood was probably awful. Your hints may force us to imagine it worse than the truth. I'd certainly want to change my surname if haunted by such a memory! And your siblings don't understand? Jesus, too, had problems with his own mother and close relatives. If we're going to talk about the imagery of Mary, I see her as

the native Pachamama, Mother Earth, rugged and even brutal if need be.

You are young, still at the start of an active new maturity. I am reaching a quiet end with Vadim, lessons learned (mostly), at peace together if we *never* refer to the years from 1935 till his parents died (aged ninety-three and eighty-eight) in 1972. You cannot write up your childhood, Casey? I could write a beastly, nasty, sarcastic story of those years with my poor in-laws; but why make Vadim and our children and grandchildren squirm? It's not worth it. Besides, just to write it up would get me furious, and I would go on the warpath all over again. Bygone editors invited me to 'do an autobiography. You write such fascinating letters.' Eeeech! was my reaction when I made the attempt on several occasions. That was years ago. Such gents are in their nineties now, if not in the Better Land.

Bruce wants 'brass tacks'. Who supports you? Me, from 1936 till 1961 I was a mainstay — first my aunt in the USA sent us big cheques. When I refused to accept more handouts because I'd got my first job in 1939 in Buenos Aires, the old pair were furious — they had a right to all my aunt's money because wasn't I their daughter-in-law, and shouldn't I have brought a dowry to my hubby who was, you see, a 'prince'? He was the grandson of one, anyway, or rather the great-grandson, born to a very nice princess, just a dear old lady when I met her in China in 1935–6. She'd married a doctor, a Jew as I figure it out. He died during an epidemic through working with the ill. His son, my father-in-law, viciously hated Jews. But his cousins were half-Jewish, for his princess-grandma's daughters married very nice English Jews, way back then.

If I'm fiercely pro-Jewish, you know why. I was treated like a 'despicable Jewish female' by my in-laws, who thought I'd never find out their secrets. Vadim's true mother was Jewish — she died in a Czarist prison when Vadim was born, and the baby was collected to carry to the baby's father in Manchuria by my mother-in-law. This is so explosive a topic that Vadim cannot stand it to be discussed. But how many more years do I have left for saying facts straight out that should have been aired and faced long ago?

To avoid 'telling the facts' I found I could study intensely, which I did. I wrote good poetry *till* I married at eighteen. That 'inspiration' silenced me. Old folks demanding that I change every brush stroke when I tried to paint; every word I wrote. (They used to censor my letters.)

That's over. See? I'm getting mad. Already ready to write a long nasty story that would fill me with guilt as well as rage. I think my studies into archaic Chinese are so 'soul-shaking' that even the Christians' dogmas would totter, could the material be presented openly. Right now I'm completing Book Five. It discusses the Minotaur in its prehistoric Chinese forms, attested by the very character's use for Min versus Tar proto-ideas. Wonderful stuff, if I may say so. In sorting out my tons of old manuscripts I threw nine-tenths of it away. I draft newer versions on the backs of the old stuff, then discard both old and new in more rewriting still. I want it 'perfect', and it can't be so. I read about kids now who are into e-mail and virtual reality, and try to couch what I have to say in the baby talk they'll accept.

Bruce remains stalwart to true literature, and Casey, you are beginning to write it, flowingly. Now, yes, Casey

darling, *get down to brass tacks*. Yes, I failed to, I know. You'll produce a bestseller in a week or two, I bet. Try!

Much love from fandom's one and only  
'Great-grandma Mae'.

(February 1996)

### Two years later:

Dear Bruce

Two years have passed since my last letter to you.

Everything is still topsy turvey since we moved from the old part of the house to the newer flat-like half where son Tony, wife Graciela and three kiddies used to live. They now live in a wild and lovely place further north, where strange hot springs are. Graciela's father had bought the hollow at an auction, but it seems that even four or more big outfits right then were in competition to acquire it by illegal means. (They'd missed the chance to attend the auction, apparently.) One outfit, for example, was prepared to invest a million or two dollars to put there a bottling plant to sell the curative waters all over. Another outfit had European sponsors, who wanted to build there a luxurious spa. Meanwhile, a gang called the *Rompe Bolas* (Ballbreakers) stampeded in those wilds, frightening off the sick who wanted to reach the magical springs.

So son Tony took over to help his father-in-law keep his property. (Still another outfit was secretly trying to take over the place by law, getting the 'mineral rights', but Tony was warned in time and got those rights himself, his father-in-law helping.) Now there's this marvellous new park, a big new roofed-over swimming pool that floats you away if you aren't ready to swim energetically in it; an open restaurant nicely thatched overhead; camping spaces; many little thatched umbrella-like places for picnickers, etc. Nice bathrooms and WCs. All the needed facilities, and now individual rooms are going up separately for those who don't want to camp but stay on comfortably. Crowds now come. The entrance fee is so 'shockingly cheap' that visitors practically demand that Tony raises it, which he's slow to do, for he wants simple folk (as long as they're not of the *Rompe Bolas* type) to feel welcome. The several parties who had plans to expropriate the property have lost hope. There is no way Tony's creations can be condemned, and the crowds already returning each season would make a stink if the big shots took over, putting up prices and keeping the place exclusively for the rich from abroad.

We have had to cope with a murderer (a policeman in charge formerly, but he's been removed) backing a project to condemn us as 'evil foreigners exploiting the poor innocent regional folk'. The 'exploited' happen to be loyal friends, thanks to all we do for them always, so that wouldn't wash in this new climate in which the military aren't in absolute power.

Right now a new murderer has entered the picture, some stray figure living with a neighbour. He is beholden to us, he feels, because we granted him free (and legally) two hectares he'd been squatting on when we first bought the place fifteen years ago. This stray — a murderer by his

own boast and formerly in jail for the deed — seems to have decided to upset us by trying on the sly to kill our pet tapir, which had been raised from babyhood, when we saved it from dogs up in the hills. It — she, I should have said — is devoted not only to us but to all our friendly neighbours when she gets out of her corral and goes visiting around. This fellow waited for his chance to get the tapir alone before dawn a week ago, right near us, and plunged in his puñal, seeking her jugular (which is how they kill pigs here) but missed. She was so fat and her hide so thick, that it seems she was only stunned at first and didn't know what to do next. He must have thought her half-fainting for he began sawing at her neck (half the neck was cut!). She came to her senses: 'Why! He's not petting me! This hurts!' She tried to snap at him so plunged his weapon into her open jaws and hurt her there too. Now her wildness came to her rescue. She began chewing his leg furiously. (Twenty stitches in the Palma Sola Hospital.) The poor animal staggered to our front lawn and collapsed, dying, it seemed. We treated her with medicines and filled the wounds with healing powders, adrenalin, etc., then days later Sylvia, our veterinarian daughter, gave her a penicillin injection. The wounds are now slowly healing, though they'll remain awful scars. She's shockingly thin, but has a tremendous appetite for the special foods we're giving her. She spends her nights and days at the foot of our land in an irrigation ditch. Beneath an overhang under thick shrubbery she sleeps and the body marvellously performs the healing process. Each sunset she reappears on our front porch eager for supper with extras. We're amazed.

Of course we still have a vengeful murderer looming, for he's back and full of anger, but not knowing how to hurt us in return — not with the entire community speaking against him for trying to kill their favourite pet. They are so proud of the tame *anta* (tapir, in Quechuan).

So it goes — I'm eighty and Vadim is eighty-three and we're still consulted by our kids and our grandchildren during all these untoward situations. For my part, I look back at 'Bubbling Mae' in all my earlier writings and regret I couldn't have toned down my endless enthusiasms. There's not time for it — 'Life is Serious' is my motto now as I remain in fighting trim. Vadim too. Meanwhile, it's my great joy to reread page after page of your splendid publications, meditating unhurriedly over each human's hopes and desires revealed therein. Seeing my own stuff I sigh, 'Why couldn't I have written like them, with calm dignity?' I'll keep trying. Perhaps when I'm ninety I'll manage it?

(25 February 1998)

\* You make me feel really young, Mae, not because you seem old, but because you become more and more energetic with each letter and each passing year. I haven't heard from Casey yet on how she reacts to your letters, but I'm certainly cheered by them. I don't know why you should aim for 'calm dignity'. Why not aim for even more feistiness to balance the sweetness? \*

---

# MELBOURNE GHOSTS

by Jan Cregan

---

**JAN CREGAN**

**PO Box 124, Balmain NSW 2041**

I can't believe that it's more than six months since we talked on the phone about not having coffee together in Melbourne last time I was down there. And about the July issue of *The Metaphysical Review* that arrived shortly after I got home from that trip. I meant to sit down and write straight away about all the things that I found interesting in your magazine, and if you will admit my personal definition of 'straight away', this is that letter.

I suppose I should be mainly interested in your account of our primary school reunion. It's not easy to say why I'm less interested in that than in other pieces. I was there, and enjoyed myself. I scored a personal mention in your article, and I'm pleased by that. I sat behind or beside all those names and faces, in those rows of scratched and worn-down wooden desks with sad blue daisies dying in the inkwells. I remember (or, rather, my fingers do) Colonel Bogie and all those other American cheerleader marches for fife, flute and piccolo. I clearly remember Elja Joustra's two 'J's heavily pronounced, Wolfgang Peters called 'Woolf-gang', and Nick Arvanitakis renamed 'Arkantikas' by teachers who hadn't learned to wrap their Celtic tongues around European names. I remember freewheeling on my bike down the hill from school, racing against those faces in the old school photograph. Such a feat of breathtaking courage — and such a little slope today.

Our old family house is gone. It was being demolished even while we stood and talked, too-substantial ghosts, on Wal's deck at the first reunion. Wal drove a carload of us to the school and past our childhood homes one afternoon, and when I saw the new building beginning where my home had been, I had a sense of lightening, freedom, relief.

How many of our memories were about discipline? Mr Tonkin's strap; I remember him wielding a large wooden ruler. The leather strap was a threat that hung in the headmaster's office — the classroom teachers' final ambit against the boys (mainly Stewart Mallinson). Lines on the playground marking off boys' from girls' areas. Taunts and jeers from the boys as we walked the narrow no man's land along their quadrangle to the girls' toilets. The dreadful un-named punishment, the shame and disgrace waiting for anyone who strayed into the other gender's space.

About ten or so years ago, at afternoon tea with a friend, I met a nice gentle old man who was visiting from Melbourne. We talked, and he asked what area I came from, and when I told him he said he had once been the

Mayor of Oakleigh, and 'What a cultural desert that was'. I was surprised for a tiny moment. I'd had piano lessons, hadn't I? Some of my friends had been sent to dancing classes in the old church halls. Hadn't there been a municipal library, a band? He meant the Anglo monoculture, the anticulture that teaches kids just so much and no more. Teaches them to sing Lieder in tune, but not to be interested in the words. Teaches the little girls to tap and point and raise a pretty dust on the stage of the local hall, but a place in 'The Ballet' is out. It's for people who are really special, not us, not our kind.

We lived next door to another former Mayor of Oakleigh, in Bletchley Road. He lived in the house of an old lady the grownups in the street called a spinster; they felt sorry for her. Sometimes the old man and the old lady would shout at each other, and one day we heard her call him a silly old faggot. 'What's a faggot, Mummy?' For a long time 'You're a silly old bundle of firewood' was a favourite taunt.

I got a bigger spark of memory from the piece by Adrian Rawlins. Seeing his name and face in your magazine shocked me back to another forgotten time packet that is more comfortable to visit than the old primary school. Shocked me in much the same way as hearing you talk about Gerald Murnane brought me a vivid recollection of being introduced to a young writer (Gerald, not Gerry!) in Tattersall's Hotel about a thousand years ago. Did I really meet one of my favourite writers before he was one of my favourite writers? Before he was even really a writer perhaps? No, he hadn't written, and that's OK, but perhaps when you see him or speak on the phone you might ask him for me if he really could have been at that pub on that evening having that drink. Perhaps he made it all up. Or perhaps I did. There was certainly no hotel on the corner last time I drove by.

The memory of Adrian Rawlins is a bit different, but also involves me being somewhere that my parents would never have approved of. I remember going to a pop music festival at Sunbury with a group of friends and some Green Vegetable Matter to help out with a light show that someone had agreed to run (and I'm sure he would have done it too, if it hadn't been for the GVM). Early in the afternoon, one of my friends looked suddenly awestruck and whispered 'That's Adrian Rawlins', pointing to a slimmer, hairier version of the person on page 35. I don't think I actually found out what an Adrian Rawlins was that particular day but, for the rest of my time in Melbourne, his presence was a sort of marker for me of music and places and substances that were exciting and different and where I liked to be.

(28 February 1995)

---

# WHEN THE WIND IS IN CERTAIN DIRECTIONS

by *Maureen Kincaid Speller*

---

**MAUREEN KINCAID SPELLER**  
60 Bournemouth Rd, Folkestone,  
Kent CT19 5AZ England

I would hate to appear as a whingeing Pom, but it is freezing in here today. Along with all the other things wrong with this house, my study window is loose in the frame and the draught is awful when the wind is in certain directions. It is not unknown to have minor snowfalls on the desk, which entrances the cats, but I have to remember not to leave work lying around. Today, there is only a strong wind, which is bad enough as it seems to be emanating from Siberia, but a distinct improvement on the week before last, when we had snow and gales mixed. It really was very difficult to get around for several days. For reasons I can't begin to fathom, the council seemed to eschew all responsibility for clearing the pavements, and as there was anything up to a foot of snow — unusual for a coastal town — the resulting mess made life very difficult. When anyone did attempt to clear snow, dumping it in the gutter, this of course blocked the passage of the melting snow, creating huge puddles at road crossings. Either one froze or was soaked, or both. As the snow packed down it became difficult to dig out and it was nothing to come across areas where blocks of a couple of inches thick were being hacked out and piled up. We could probably have built igloos with enough of the stuff. I am afraid that most of what you hear about the UK being unprepared for bad weather is entirely true, at least in the south of the country, where we persist in this happy fantasy that it won't happen to us, honest, and then look puzzled when it happens yet again!

And having moaned about my rotting Victorian pile, I'm pleased to say that we now have a solid and weatherproof porch, and the wind can no longer whip the door open and smash the glass. This certainly makes a big difference to the look of the place, though it does highlight the awfulness of the window frames generally, and as the door opens outwards people have to be a little careful about getting too close when I am answering the doorbell. If only I could work out in advance who were the people I didn't want to speak to then I could fling the door wide and catch them as I do so. Instead, I emerge dormouse-like and blinking, timid and wondering what's going on. And it's still someone trying to peddle religion! The porch being properly closed in has entirely altered the acoustics of the place; the hall echoes strangely now, and the sound of the post being dropped through the (large) letterbox is quite terrifying at times. I almost always hear the arrival of the parcel post as well, though I am no longer so concerned, as they can put things in the porch and close the door. I also think it has improved the insulation, though the window frames are also loose.

Our house? Well, it's Victorian more or less — 1903, in fact, but built to a Victorian style, given that things tended to change rather slowly — and at the end of a

terrace, so just a little bit bigger than most of the other houses. Two storeys, with two reception rooms knocked through into one and a fairly large kitchen downstairs. On the first floor is a large bedroom with bay window, a second large room, which is our primary library and the place where junk and duplicators live right now. On the top floor are the two attic rooms, one quite large, one about 9 feet by 9 feet, which is this room. But the house also extends into the back garden, so above the kitchen is the loo, bathroom and a funny little box room which is tiny. Originally, I think the whole of the area over the kitchen was given over the bathroom and toilet, but at some point, and quite a long time ago, someone partitioned the whole thing to make a minute bathroom into a loo like an upright coffin and this little back bedroom which, with due deference to my feline friends, is too small to even swing one of them in — though maybe next door's kitten could just about manage. I'm basing this theory on looking at my neighbour's house, which is similar, and also the curious position of a fireplace which would, if still in use, scorch the opposite wall, a mere three feet away. I can only assume that at some point someone needed more rooms in this house and put up partitions, probably in the 1930s, to judge from the frames.

Indeed, the whole area is something of a mystery. The housing was built by the Earls of Radnor, whose descendants held the freehold on the house until the 1960s, when they finally sold it off. Even so, if I wanted to radically alter the front of the house I would have to seek permission from the equally mysterious Folkestone Estate. I am assuming that the Earls built the housing for their employees but I am not at all sure what sort of estate they kept here. They did a lot of work trying to develop and promote Folkestone at the turn of the century, but now seemed to have vanished. Unfortunately, Folkestonians tend to be remarkably uninterested in their history. What little information I have, you also have now. One day, I keep promising myself, I will write the definitive history of Folkestone, but that project is probably doomed to stillbirth. I have far too much else I must do, and it would take so much work! Kent is one of the few English counties that does not have a *Victoria County History*, ironic, as the very publisher of that remarkable nationwide survey is actually situated here in Folkestone! It's intensely frustrating that this doesn't exist, as the area is of course very rich in historical happenings, but I have to tease them out from books as I come across mentions.

Much as I love my rotting pile, with its high ceilings — a feature rarely incorporated into new houses, and don't start me on the iniquities of modern architecture else I could give Charlie a run for his money — I have to admit that Australian housing, at least from what I have seen from the things Yvonne Rousseau sends me, does look very . . . I'm not sure of the word. It seems more individual and stylish, but this may be because we have



tended in the last thirty-odd years to semi-detacheds, then bijou urban executive villages which utilise the 'best' of rural architecture by dotting it on nasty little brick boxes with four minute bedrooms, and now, worse still, minute terraces of two up, two downs which, according to my calculations, have a frontage that can be entirely fitted into the width of my bedroom, and that's only about fifteen feet. I have the same feeling looking at Australian housing as I do when I look at American suburbia. It's suburbia all right, but writ large. And yes, I know that's a sweeping generalisation, but one can only rely on what one sees.

Over here, there is no doubt that post-world War II housing is very much poorer in standard than prewar. Indeed, I have seen a marked deterioration in housing within my own lifetime. I spent most of my childhood in a 1960s semi-detached. It wasn't anything special, and indeed the builder was notorious for cutting corners, as witnessed by a nasty leak in the roof where he had skimmed on roofing felt, but the house was basically solid, and the faults, such as they were, could be corrected. It wasn't a big house but there was a certain amount of room, and you could just about accommodate a family of five in reasonable comfort, even if I did conceive a violent desire to ever after have as much space as I could to myself — this, though, was family dynamics rather than an architectural failing.

As it turns out, I know very few people who live in modern housing, so my sense of what is being built now is governed by articles and what I can see through windows as I go past. There is no doubt that housing built within the last ten years, say, is significantly smaller — I think the official statistic is something like 15–20 per cent less space per house — and it is a constant source of wonder to me where people put their stuff. Do they even have stuff? Of course, this explains why most people I know tend not to live in new houses, though it would be fair to say that not all old houses are mansions by comparison. Guildhall Street was small — I have a friend living in an Edinburgh tenement flat which was, we reckoned, bigger than our little artisan's cottage — and Pat McMurray's house, charming as it is, is very small and might well become overcrowded. Mark Plummer's house is a nice size but has an awful lot of books in it already . . .

And the 1980s property boom did little to stop this trend. Apart from the absurdities of people paying immense amounts of money to live in broom cupboards in London, there was great pressure on people to become home-owners, the dream of Thatcherite Britain of course — security in bricks and mortar and all that. So, you have property developers cramming more into less, and people desperate to get their own homes falling into council-led schemes to buy a starter property, only to find that a few years on, no one wants to buy because the bottom has dropped out of the market. I have seen pictures of miniature residences with rooms so narrow you can actually touch opposite walls with your hands outstretched, and people are trying to bring up whole families in these tiny houses. Frankly, to my mind it is no wonder the British family is generally dysfunctional when it has to live in these conditions. (7 March 1996)

\* When replying to Maureen, I tried to give some outline of the nature of Australian cities and the relationship between central cities and suburbia. All in two paragraphs, of course. The essence is: Australia has a lot more land available than Britain. Traditionally the city centre has been the place where people work. The suburbs are where people live. In the suburbs of Melbourne, most people have traditionally been able to afford a large block of land occupied by a large house and a garden and/or lawn. Even in the 1870s, in the working-class suburb of Footscray 70 per cent of houses were owned by their occupants. When your children grew up, they bought a house on an even larger block in a suburb that was even further from the centre of the city. Until the 1960s they commuted to the city by train, tram or bus. Now they commute by car, because the public transport system has been run down. Meanwhile services have been downgraded or withdrawn in the outer suburbs. The current Victorian government, more Thatcherite than Thatcher, has encouraged people to pull down large houses and put up smaller houses, and move back to the inner suburbs. In the leafy suburbs (as a friend of mine calls them) traditional suburbanites have formed Save Our Suburbs organisations to stop the destruction of old houses and miniaturisation of available living space. The population is increasing in the inner suburbs. Nobody quite knows if the whole change will prove Good or Bad. \*

I've been trying to reconcile the Australian model of suburbia with that in the UK, but while they match in terms of the desire to move from the centre outwards, the issue of the land associated with houses means that they never quite fit. Whether this is just the pressure on available land, given the acreage/population ratio, I'm not entirely sure. We have more people in a smaller space to start with, but having said that, the building of dwellings and flat conversions and so on, and the way they so often tend to stand empty, suggests that the desire to supply doesn't quite match the rate of demand. Add to that the way many people utilise even tiny balconies and patios and it would seem that people want decent-sized gardens. But then, most people doesn't seem to like gardens too big. I can't work out if this is some kind of inverted snobbery (the usual British thing of knowing our place and keeping to it), or the recognition of the difficulty of keeping up a large garden. It's certainly more difficult to find cheap labour here than in America; I don't know if that's so for Australia. I could hypothesise that our immigrant underclass is smaller proportionately, and also not drawn from an agricultural background, but that might be pushing things too far. Also, much of our underclass is in fact British rather than immigrant, and thus is not inclined to work for comparative peanuts.

What I do know is that many British become profoundly suspicious of people whose gardens seem out of kilter with their supposed status.

I keep wishing I had more garden, before reminding myself it would be better to get what garden I have under control first.

(9 June 1996)

---

# IMMORTALITY'S A DOODLE

or TWIRLY-WHIRLIES AND TULIPS

by *Skel*

---

**SKEL**

**25 Bowland Close,  
Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 5NW England**

Already things augur well for a saner, more productive, more structured year for me than was 1995. Proof? You want proof! OK! I begin all my correspondence by copying in a file containing my address, a date, and the spacing down to (but not including) the line for the recipient. It saves time, which I can then devote to becoming immortal. Well, this morning I changed the year on the source file from 1994 to 1996. From this you may gather that 1995 was not a terribly well organised year for me. So now with every letter I can save that little bit more time and by so doing improve my chances of immortality to that exact same degree.

It seems to me that immortality should be a doddle, if you approach it scientifically, and I have been approaching it with great scientific vigour for almost two weeks now . . . and it's working. I can tell this because I've been waking up every morning feeling really terrible, and, as everyone knows, anything that's good for you (i.e. medicine/exercise/surgery) either tastes awful or makes you feel really bad when you first get into it.

The reason I've had almost two weeks to devote to this scientific endeavour is down to working for a living, and the annual holidays that accrue from such endeavour. Last year I was forced to carry over a week's leave because I couldn't take it (my employer's preferred option) and also perform all the outstanding tasks for which they employ me (my employer's even-more-preferred option). Also this holiday year (running 1 March to the end of February, for some reason that would surely baffle even the Gods themselves) should have been the one in which I squirrelled away a couple of weeks' holiday entitlement to add to next year's in order to take our intended triennial US holiday in late 1996.

Our daughter Bethany, though, dropped a bombshell into the lake of our expectations by announcing her intention to get married next April, the financial ripples from which easily swamped the fragile craft that was our US schedule. Suddenly therefore I found myself arse-deep in untaken holidays, and in a 'Use it or lose it!' situation. Needless to say I chose to use it, though basically in the interests of Science, you understand. So it was that I finished work on Thursday 21 December and won't return until tomorrow (2 January).

The way circumstances practically conspired, I suppose the rest was inevitable. I guess one other thing you should be aware of is that I brew my own beer. It gets better the longer you leave it . . . within reason. However, I once had reason to leave a brew that looked really cruddy on bottling for just over three years, at which juncture it tasted like nectar, so I tend to bottle ahead, and

as 'three years' has been proven to be 'within reason', I can't consider my actions unreasonable. I also have plenty of storage space . . . and lots of bottles. Thus the stage is set. As a background, there's getting on for 900 pints of well-aged beer (even the stuff bottled a few weeks ago will be well aged by the time I get through the preceding 850 pints). By way of a garnish there's 170 quids worth of stronger, more alcoholic beverage purchased specifically to see us through the Christmas and New Year festivities . . . not to mention Christmas presents of single malt or wine, of which there were several . . . but that's enough clues. Believe me, you're really gonna kick yourself when you die and I live forever.

Immortality? It's bloody obvious! Don't they say that about 90 per cent of the human body is water? Well, if you drink enough liquid to replace that 90 per cent every couple of days, then 90 per cent of your body is never more than two days old. That's where the beer comes in. Now if the rest of your intake contains enough alcohol to pickle the remaining 10 per cent of your body, then it stands to sense that you can never snuff it because the parts of your body are either too young to die or incapable of deteriorating. I defy anyone to find the flaw in my logic. Cas may aver, as she frequently does, that I am simply a boozy sod, but that just shows how little she knows, eh?

Or how little anyone knows, for aren't there comments in this latest *TMR* that indicate that \*ghasp\* red wine is bad for you \*unghasp\*? Shurely Shome Mishtake? The thing is, governments have always held that ~~anything that you enjoy~~ pleasant experiences are bad for you. Ergo you shouldn't drink. Hence 'Prohibition'. But when that became untenable they switched to 'If you're gonna drink, drink so little that it isn't any fun'. To do this they divided alcohol up into 'units' (whereas anyone sensible knows that you divide alcohol up into 'glasses'), and set limits of ingestion such that if you walked past a pub open in your life your liver would implode and you'd die instantly. Many of us felt this to be a touch excessive.

What they said was 21 units of alcohol (half a pint of beer or one scotch per unit) was what the human body could cope with in a week. Who are these people who think there are only two days in a week? Limits are fine, and good guidelines, providing they are at least sensible. Come on Government. Get Real! During the week I'd drink three pints of beer a night (30 units) and at the weekend five pints a day (20 units). The Government guidelines were no help at all. But I am married, and Cas could nag for England. So I cut back. The guidelines also recommended two alcohol-free days each week, to enable the liver to recover from its excesses. So I took that on board. I also watched my drinking during the week so that I was on about two and a half pints per night, which brought me down to about 35 units of alcohol per week. Nowhere near the 21 guidelines, but a damn sight less

than I had been drinking.

Then one day, ironically in the doctor's surgery, I read an article that implied that drinking (within reason) was good for you. It cut the risk of heart attacks if you drank moderately . . . and they defined 'moderately' as 'less than 31 units'. Sitting back on 35 units I knew I could never get within a mile of 21, so I'd simply stood pat. But 31 was within striking distance, and could be achieved simply by stretching my non-drinking days from two to three . . . which I've done for a couple of years now. Obviously Christmas, not to mention the occasional bottle of malt whisky, blows me out of the water. Generally, though, I figure I'm OK. Certainly close enough for fanwriting. The fact is, though, that I have cut my alcohol consumption to 'reasonable' levels, and have done so because those reasonable levels were offered to me as such.

The Government has long accepted that its recommended level of 21 units was somewhat underpitched. They have, however, refused to increase it on the assumption that if anyone is told they could drink more, then they would drink more. They've now had second thoughts, though, and increased it to 28 units, against the recommendation of the medical fraternity. Basically this means that for once the Government has said 'We should tell people the truth', and doctors have come out strongly in favour of lying to people. I don't know about you, but I find this a touch worrying. Nobody with any sense trusts the Government to do anything at all, whereas most people trust their doctors to look after their health . . . in which context this tendency of doctors wanting to lie to you whilst the Government wants to tell you the truth is rather alarming.

Anyway, one thing they're all clear on is that if you're going to drink alcohol, then by far and away the best alcohol to drink is red wine. 'Drink red wine, don't have a heart attack' seems to be the message, and I can but concur. I've taken the message on board, am drinking a lot more red wine, and still haven't had a single heart attack. My turds are a lot darker too, although the Government and the doctors don't mention this aspect. Well they wouldn't; it's not normally a selling point.

I am reminded of this because we are currently trying to housetrain a new puppy. You are supposed to encourage it to defecate on newspapers, and gradually move the newspapers out to the door and eventually out into the yard. Unfortunately the new puppy, Fergie, displayed a propensity for crapping on the hall tiles. To discourage this we have moved the newspaper to the front door rather than to the back. In dog-training terms this is working fine, but it means that if we have a lie-in, and the dog goes before the postman comes, then when a fanzine goes SPLAT on the hall floor it is not joy unalloyed. On only one occasion, though, has the normal course of events been reversed. Just once has Fergie actually gone downstairs and crapped on a newly delivered fanzine. Why am I telling you this? Guess which faned got lucky . . .

Nor do I think that Fergie should necessarily be chided, for perhaps he was simply sticking up for me (born in 1947) a propos Jerry Davis's comment that anyone born between 1946 and 1964 should be taken right away to the ovens. It wasn't Jerry's letter, though, that made the greatest impression upon me. It was, in fact, Joseph Nicholas's letter that bore out to me why I basically can't get along with the guy. He's a fucking Renaissance Man! I can do nothing, and he can do

bloody-well anything! I mean, the guy is not only an intellectual, he can also do gardening. What's more, he enjoys it. The man is nothing less than a Saint. Me, I hate gardening. That's 'hate' as in 'H-fucking-A-fucking-T-fucking-E' fucking gardening. I'm not keen. The Devil is not shown with a pitchfork for nothing. It's a gardening implement, and the moral is that if you don't behave yourself in this life then you will be sent to Hell . . . and have to do gardening for all eternity. Conversely, if you're good, God will enable you to concrete over your garden and you won't have any problems. Makes sense to me.

Apparently, though, I haven't yet been good enough to have my garden concreted over. Fortunately, though, it is Cas who is demented enough to try and do 'gardening' in our household. It isn't generally known, but apparently plants come in two distinct types — live ones, and ones that Cas has tried to grow. It's true. There are apparently millions of things that kill plants when they're feeling bored, and it seems one of them is known by the scientific name of 'Christ-Omigawd-No-Oh-Shit-It's-Cas!'

I'm not kidding. We read articles by Ted White about how he grows two different kinds of azaleas, which proliferate even as he but gazes upon them. Cas went to the local garden centre and bought one of each type, which I swear must have committed suicide the moment they heard her say 'I'll take those'.

I was also taken by your remarks at the end of Joseph's letter about you not planning an overseas trip this year, or even taking a holiday at all. Cas and I went nearly twenty years without really taking a holiday, other than token gestures aimed more at the kids than at ourselves. However, since that remarkable day when Alyson Abramowitz presented us with the entire USA on the platter of her surplus Air Miles we try to get over to the US and visit our friends there every three years or so, though, as I mentioned earlier, our 1996 visit has alas been dashed upon the rocks of our daughter Bethany's impending marriage. 1998, though, for sure.

God, but I really like the USA and Canada, love visiting my friends there, but like the places too. But thinking about it, how could it be otherwise? We've spent nearly eleven weeks there now, split over two visits. Always October, running into November, but barring a couple of days the weather has invariably been glorious. Just lucky, I guess. Plus we were on holiday, for a minimum of a month. This tends to help. When I'm in this country I'm mostly not on holiday, but when I've been in the USA or Canada I've always been so . . . and I like being on holiday. So the good feeling from the latter colours the former.

Also, when we're over there we are to be found in the company of friends who wherever possible take their holidays to ensure us that company. So let's recapitulate here — we're invariably having a good time with good friends too infrequently met. The weather is glorious and we're swanning around enjoying ourselves, doing nothing we don't absolutely want to do, amidst a tourist Utopia. Yeah, we have a great time. Hard to imagine, isn't it?

This good feeling about the place even manages to outweigh the fact that it was on the American Airlines flight back from Chicago after our 1990 visit that Cas, now a confirmed arctophile, bought her first teddy bear — O'Hare. The last time we were over there, in 1993, we finished by visiting with Dave Rowe and Carolyn Doyle in (or rather some miles outside) Franklin, Indiana. Good friends. How good? Well, let me put it this way . . . you

know how enamoured Cas is of teddy bears? Well, when Dave and Carolyn bought a house they knew we'd be visiting soon and they wouldn't have time to redecorate, so they insisted upon buying one where the guest bedroom already had a teddy-bear motif. How many cheaper or better houses must they have spurned so that Cas would feel more at home? I couldn't say, but we appreciated the gesture.

They'd visited with us several years earlier, and we'd met them both briefly during our 1990 visit, Dave somewhat less briefly than Carolyn . . . which was a little unfair, because Dave was already a good friend of ours before he left England, emigrated to the USA, met Carolyn, and became fulfilled. An unlikely friend, though, because during the early stages of our fannish involvement with each other we were at odds. This was because when we first started pubbing our ish (as we faneds tended to refer to it at the time) I thought my co-editor Brian Robinson and I were doing OK. I also thought that some good buddies of Dave's were underachieving. Dave took umbrage at this, quite rightly, because whilst the latter was true the former wasn't, and it wasn't too many more issues before *Hell* became a reasonable fanzine.

Our ready, albeit belated appreciation of this fact spiked his guns and a 'feud' with possibly infinite potential (you wouldn't believe how I can hold a grudge) was nipped in the bud, to the extent that when Cas and I finally held 'open house', and fans from far and wide visited with us, Dave was seen as an old friend. He came up as a member of the 'kitten' group, as did Gerald Lawrence. He may have already been friends with Gerald even then, although I can't say for sure. Certainly by the time he emigrated Dave, Gerald, Cas and I were all mutually good friends and in fairly frequent contact, increasingly at a distance, though, for even before our 1990 sojourn Gerald had decided to pursue a career as a Computer Systems Contractor in Belgium and Holland.

Like I said, Dave and Carolyn were the last folks we stayed with on our 1993 US trip, and whilst squiring us around Dave humoured our requirement to snack and brunch in 'typical' obscure (to UK visitors) US eateries. Our very last meal, on the way to Cincinnati airport, was at some apparently renowned local eaterie, but their renown was so local that it did not extend to the Mastercard people, and my attempt to pay for this final meal was laughed out of court at the checkout. Needless to say, being hell bent for the airport and the UK, we had not sequestered about our persons enough soon-to-be-useless dollar bills, and so David had to rush to the rescue with his US billfold. Embarrassing. Strive as I might I cannot with certainty recall the name of this establishment . . . Compton's Cow Palace nudges insistently around the edges of memory, but as my memory's edges usually end up with me caught out in the slips I'm disinclined to bank on it. We have a photo, but alas there is no sign outside proclaiming the place's name. Anyway, whatever it was called, Dave recommended it, so he'd only himself to blame.

Another place Dave took us was a restaurant in the Black Eyed Pea chain. I have no trouble remembering this name because I filched one of their menu-holders as a souvenir. It's downstairs on the sideboard now, a large wooden black-eyed pea on a plinth, with several twirly-whirlies jammed into it like miniature palm trees. Twirly-whirlies? Ah yes, that's even more embarrassing.

Dave insisted on taking us to Finale's. For America has yet again boldly gone where more staid nations fear to dine. Everywhere else you go out for a meal, but apparently now in the US you go out for a course. You have the meal, but if you don't like the dessert you move on . . . to Finale's. That's all Finale's serves — desserts and coffee (and alcoholic beverages, too, of course). Mind you, that was back in 1993. By now there's probably also a chain called Aperitifs, one called Starters, one called Main Course, and so on. Or maybe they too have been upstaged, and there is now a chain called Cheese & Biscuits where folk go to finish their meal. It could well be that by now going out for a meal in America might call for much leaping in and out of cars, not to mention the petroleum output of several Middle East Sultanates. It could also take several weeks, given the typical US citizen's willingness to drive what to others seem amazingly long distances for trivial reasons (although I guess Wal Robinson may have his own viewpoint on what comprises a 'trivial reason' for 'driving a long distance' . . . do you think Wal might be a closet Yank?)

Well, Finale's had 'Twirly-Whirlies'. I can't remember their purpose, if indeed they ever had one. They were long thin sticks, and the end burst out pom-pom like in a spray of coloured plasticised foil. Cas so christened them because when you rolled the stick between your fingers the foil sprays twirled and whirled and glinted. Not, of course, that anyone other than Cas was so twirling. Hers was red, whereas I think Dave's and mine were green. At other tables were blues, golds and silver ones. Cas immediately fixated upon the idea of having a complete set as souvenirs, and either Dave or I were sent scavenging to nearby (or even not-so-nearby) tables when other patrons departed and left their twirly-whirlies tantalisingly in Cas's view. Of course, Dave and I realised we came across as total dweebs during these excursions, but you have to realise that Cas's will is sometimes implacable.

Oddly, whilst Dave and Carolyn were the last couple we'd visited in America, they were also to be the first we'd meet again, for they visited the UK in the spring of 1995, and whilst their cramped itinerary made another visit to Stockport impossible (partly because they were also visiting Gerald Lawrence in the Netherlands), they wrote asking if we might meet up with them elsewhere in the UK portion of their trip. Reluctantly we had to say them nay, not being able to afford the train fare to London just then. We could, though, we said, meet both them and Gerald in Holland.

The thing was, as a result entirely of our 1993 visit we'd acquired enough American Airlines 'frequent flier' points for free flights to one of several European capitals. Of course, neither you nor I would trumpet 'once-in-every-three-years' as being 'frequent', but in the light of their generosity it would have been discourteous to quibble about their misuse of the language. Particularly so, in that as a result of an American Airlines cockup we'd actually acquired enough points to take along our (and Gerald's) good friend Joan Sharp. Joan was initially thrilled at the idea but reluctant to accept as she is, somewhat belatedly, attempting a University Degree and, in typical student fashion, living a hand-to-mouth existence. Even more so than most students, as she no longer has any parents to bail her out in emergencies, of which all students have many. We pointed out, though, that the flight wouldn't cost us anything, and would

otherwise be wasted. Also, there was a guest room at Gerald's that would sleep only one person, and which would otherwise also go to waste. We finally broke down her resistance by point out that she'd only need spending money provided she allowed us to pay for her other essentials (fares, meals and drinks) by way of an early combined Christmas/birthday present. Taking her along therefore wouldn't really cost us anything. It still seems odd, though, that thanks to the flights being, like my earlier mentioned holidays, 'Use 'em or lose 'em', whilst we couldn't afford the train to London for two, we could afford the plane to Amsterdam for three. The bind moggles.

The other thing you have to realise is that, apart from our two US/Canada visits, Cas and I have never set adult foot beyond these shores, although Cas insists on mentioning her visit to the Isle of Man when she was twenty-two years of age. This has no real bearing, though, as even had I known back in 1972 what a pedantic twat she could be, I'd probably still have married her anyway. The picking of this semantic nit notwithstanding, bold adventurers we are not. Yet here we were, in response to a phone call saying 'Yeah, fine, meet you in Amsterdam'. We are somewhat staid and middle-aged, so we hung up the phone both amazed at our own impulsiveness, yet aware that no other decision had been possible.

One drawback to Holland is that it encourages apparently brain-damaged wives to burst into song . . . even before they get there. That in itself wouldn't be too bad, but unfortunately the songs are invariably either the old Max Bygraves standby 'Tulips from Amsterdam', or something hideously twee about little mice with clogs on ('Where? 'There, on the stair!' 'Where on the stair?' 'Right there! A little mouse with clogs on!' 'Well! I declare' Going clip-clippedy-clop on the stair.') which is enough to make your brain crawl out of your ear and throw itself screaming into a bucket of advocaat. Still not a good enough explanation for the existence of advocaat, mind you, but it comes fairly close.

Is it any wonder that I dragged us into bars to anaesthetise my brain cells at every opportunity? Of course, having been married to Cas for some \*mumblety-mumble\* years now, I was all too readily able to foresee this situation, and as we piled into the taxi on our way to Manchester Airport for the outward journey I looked sternly at Joan and Cas and threatened dire consequences (a bunch of fives on the snotbox, I think it was) to the first person who rescued these numbers from the oblivion to which they had been rightly been consigned. Well, it was actually 'Tulips from Amsterdam' against which I cautioned, having mercifully forgotten all about the other monstrosity. Joan was as good as gold. A wonderful woman, and I'm sure never a trial to anyone. Cas, though, having been married to me for the same \*mumblety-mumble\* years knows what a pussycat I really am, and that my threats are invariably empty posturings. So unsure of herself is she, though, that she would invariably trail off into silence after being glared at for a bar or two. But of course I'd failed to allow for the fact there is indeed a God, that he hates me, and that apparently *he lives in Holland!*

We all went out for a meal at the Stads Cafe in Haarlem on the Saturday night, and had a few drinks in the bar whilst waiting for a table to become free. Well, we sensibly hadn't booked in advance. No, that's *not* funny. Look, if you don't book in advance then obviously you

have to spend some considerable time in the bar first, drinking some fine Dutch and some even-more-fabulous Belgian beer. On one of the beams over the bar someone had painted the words 'Everybody is different'. Which was odd, because when I saw this there were seven guys seated at the bar, all dressed identically in a brightly patterned black-backgrounded shirt, coloured waistcoat and matching trousers. I immediately buttonholed one of these gentlemen and in almost flawless English I pointed out the sign and how it seemed at variance with the reality within the bar. In *absolutely* flawless English, which all Dutch people appear to speak, he informed me that they were nothing at all to do with the sign. He and his friends were in fact members of the Haarlem Choral Society, the male members of which roam the town of an evening getting in some extra practice singing in bars as barbershop quartets, rotating their membership throughout the evening. 'Just popping out for choir practice, luv,' they doubtless in all honesty tell their wives as they head out for the bars every night.

'What a marvellous idea!' I thought . . . and it was, as they performed several excellent numbers and we on our part consumed some equally excellent beers. So impressed was Gerald that he bought them a round of drinks. They raised their glasses to him in thanks and burst once more into song . . . and a really good time was being had by all. Such a good time, in fact, that I simply never saw the outflanking manoeuvre coming.

I think I was chatting to Dave and Carolyn, my back to the action, when I felt an icy hand clutch my heart as a voice from down the bar, a voice I recognised all too well, hesitantly asked the barmaid, 'Do they do requests?' By the time I'd disengaged myself from the conversation and turned to face the music it was already too late. I could only sit there utterly chagrined and listen to a barbershop quartet deliver three full minutes of 'Tulips from Amsterdam' in Dutch, whilst down the bar Cas beamed at me the whole time in utter triumph. What's more, to cap it all, so as not to appear churlish I had to join in the applause afterwards.

Bastard!

The following morning Dave and Carolyn had to fly back to the US and we all bussed out to Schiphol Airport to bid them farewell. Whilst enjoying a final farewell drink at the airport Dave 'discovered' that he had a spare 100-guilder note that he would now have no opportunity to spend, and quite reasonably tried to give it to Gerald, using the additional argument that it would help offset some of the expenses he'd incurred for our visit. Knowing Dave, I suspect this was not entirely a case of accidental overbudgeting. Gerald, however, ~~is a stubborn sod~~ demurred, and in the face of his intransigence there seemed little Dave could do other than take the money home and convert it back into dollars. Cas, though, grabbed the note and stuffed it into her purse. 'We'll see to it, Dave,' she said. Gerald sulked because he knew that, unlike Dave and Carolyn, we'd be in a position to ensure he got the dosh, for he'd already have left for work the next morning when we'd be calling round at his place to collect Joan, leave the money, and head home in our turn. A neat move on Cas's part, which ensured that Dave and Carolyn could fly off with their ambitions thwarted in but a single regard.

To Americans, apparently, trains are an exotic and unusual form of transport, and I know Carolyn had

particularly wanted to take a train journey whilst in Holland (whereas the rest of us didn't much care either way), so it seemed grossly unfair that having not taken one whilst in Dave and Carolyn's company the first thing we did after bidding them farewell at the airport was dive down to the train station for our trip into Amsterdam. I snapped a couple of shots at both Schiphol and Amsterdam stations, though, for Carolyn ~~just to rub in what she missed~~ so she could share at least that element of the experience.

Amsterdam itself was a great disappointment. The area around the station was very tacky. Lots of small shops selling cheap tourist souvenirs and pornography. It reminded me of the cheapest parts of the Blackpool sea front, with the porn added to remind you that if you think you've seen grotty, it can always get worse. The quieter parts of Amsterdam were pleasant, but the day kept going overcast and drizzly and not really suitable for taking a canal trip in one of the sightseeing launches, which was one of the things Cas most wanted to do. The other thing Cas wanted to do (Joan too) was go round the Anne Frank Museum, but when we got there the queue for entry stretched out the front door, all the way down the block, around the corner and off into the distance. Standing for hours in a line did not seem the ideal way to spend our limited time in Amsterdam, so we gave that a miss too. What did seem an ideal way was to pop into a back-street bar for lunch. It wasn't a touristy place, just a local bar frequented by local people, with the occasional tourist. There were large tables at which to eat, and these provided a cosy atmosphere, because instead of being bare, or spread with table cloths, they were instead covered by thickly woven rich red carpets. The quietly friendly ambience was a perfect accompaniment to the enjoyment of reasonable food and fine beer, not to mention the odd glass or two of jonge generer.

With the afternoon well advanced, we all agreed Haarlem was a much nicer place, and that we'd prefer to spend our final evening there . . . particularly in an excellent cafe-bar in the town square, where we ensconced ourselves for a couple of hours of talking, drinking and pastry eating . . . and building up a large tab. At one point something really weird happened. Some young ladies came in, about ten of them, in the company of one seriously handsome young man. The odd thing about them was that every single one was an absolute stunning knockout. Meal-break time at the local brothel, I hypothesised, but they were too attractive. They stayed together as a group, didn't pick up any men, and left together after about 45 minutes.

We'd argued in a friendly fashion about who was going to pick up the tab, and whilst Gerald was away from the table we asked the waiter for the bill. Flying in the face of our pre-flight agreement Joan was adamant that as either we or Gerald had picked up most of the others she would get this one . . . but we'd been there a long time and it was simply beyond her means. It would have almost wiped out the money she had earmarked for souvenirs and gifts for her children and grandchildren. Gerald returned whilst she was absorbing this information, so he and I went around a few more times before Cas came up with a compromise. 'Why not let Dave and Carolyn pay for it?' she asked, taking out the 100-guilder note they'd left with her for Gerald. Sandbagged! Gerald acquiesced fairly graciously. Well, he'd have picked up the tab anyway, I suspect, for haven't

I already told you of his sometimes intransigent nature? Besides, he did have the advantage of being on home ground, and I also suspect he'd already arranged with the waiter not to accept payment from anyone else. Still, he also knew that he had no way of preventing us from leaving the money at his place the following morning. So Gerald effectively lost one battle by accepting the money, but won the more immediate one by settling the bill. A face-saving compromise all round, thanks to Dave and Carolyn. I didn't really mind losing the argument about paying as I'd be picking up that night's dinner tab, and I'd only been arguing by way of setting up the 'sting'.

Dinner was at a restaurant that was, as Gerald had told us, very big on meat, which was why we'd left it until the evening after Dave (a committed vegetarian) and Carolyn had flown home. This restaurant's idea of a 'vegetarian' meal was 'OK, just a small portion of meat', and its concept of 'small' was the equivalent of everyone else's 'bleeding enormous'. It was full downstairs, but there was an upstairs area with a spare table . . . mind you, the stairs were not significantly less steep than those in Gerald's house (where they were a cross between a spiral staircase and a ladder), albeit they did ascend in a straight line. It was almost like climbing a step ladder but without using your hands. This restaurant had taken the US concept of 'bottomless' coffee one step further. They served 'bottomless' ribs. Mind you, the first slab was so enormous it finished me, and I was the only one having ribs. But when I'd finished they made a point of asking if I wanted more. They were also delicious. If we ever return I'm going back there, but I'll make a point of not eating for several days beforehand. Mind you, though none of us could manage more main course, we all had to have a dessert. This was partly because they looked delicious as they were served to other diners, but mainly because they were accompanied by, as Cas's excited squeal of surprised delight had announced to the entire restaurant upon our arrival upstairs, 'twirly-whirlies'!

On the way back, Gerald took us through Haarlem's 'red light' district, which I think comprises a couple of massage parlours and one out-and-out brothel where the girls sit wearing next to nothing in a large lighted window. I think I was right earlier, because they were nowhere near as stunning as the young ladies in the bar . . . although it was difficult to be sure because, as a typically well-raised Englishman, after the first glance in the window I hastily and politely (and embarrassedly) averted my gaze. I embarrass very easily. Sometimes when watching a film on TV I find myself so embarrassed for the character that I have to get up and leave the room until the scene is over. Ridiculous!

The weather in Holland was generally pretty good, bright and sunny despite it being early spring. However, every time I remarked upon the fact it would cloud over on the instant. On our last night, though, it appeared to deteriorate and Cas and I spent the final night in the hotel lying in bed listening to it rain very heavily. Nonetheless, as we set off from the hotel the following morning for our twenty-minute walk to Gerald's place to pick up Joan, grab a late breakfast and head off out to the airport, the weather was so glorious that I once more couldn't help but remark upon this fact to Cas. 'Can you believe', I asked in amazement, 'that after last night it looks like being a really glorious day?'

'Dickhead!' she responded. 'Haven't you learned to keep your big mouth shut about the weather here?' Sure

enough, during our short walk from the hotel it clouded over and started briefly to rain. The 'briefly' wasn't all that good news either, because the only reason it stopped raining was that it turned gradually to sleet, then quickly to hail before finally settling upon snow, which really blizzarded down for a good ten minutes, stopping just before we arrived at Gerald's door. Because of all the rain the night before it had been too wet for the snow to stick on the ground, where it dissolved almost instantly. We two, though, were a different proposition, and Joan opened the door to blink disbelievingly at two snow-draped figures standing there in the bright sunlight

on an otherwise snowless street.

It's like I said: when you're a God and therefore omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, it's no big deal to make sure that whenever Life's bed gets too soft you can give an allergy to goose down.

Oh yeah. At Schiphol Airport on the way home, Cas bought another teddy bear to add to her collection, which now numbers about 240 after nearly five and a half years. Two hundred and forty bears in a little over five years . . . as the fannish punchline has it — that's not too many.

Never trust a fannish punchline.

(1 January 1996)

---

## MORE NOTES FROM OUR GARDENING CORRESPONDENT

by *Joseph Nicholas*

---

### JOSEPH NICHOLAS

15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London N15 4JU  
England

When did your most recent issues of *The Metaphysical Review* arrive? Early January, or perhaps even late December 1995, since I remember bashing out a couple of pages in response to the issue of Elaine's *Digging Is What Keeps Me Sane* that accompanied them, following that letter a couple of weeks later with an excited postcard reporting the first (nocturnal) sighting of a frog in our pond and speculating that it might be intending to spawn there; and as you'll have seen from the letters column of *FTT 20*, a frog or frogs subsequently did deposit a vast mass of eggs, to even greater excitement from yours truly. (Moon landings, voyages to the bottom of the sea — who needs those when you have frogs resident in your garden pond?) Following that, though, there were a couple of cold snaps which froze the pond over, and which I thought might have killed the spawn altogether; but although the outer layers did die, the majority of the eggs survived and began to hatch out over the Easter weekend (when we were away at the Eastercon and thus unable to play at being proud parents — poot poot poot). There are far, far more tadpoles than our little pond can support, but doubtless the bigger ones will eat the smaller ones and survive to return next year. Indeed, we think that some of the tadpoles we introduced into the pond last year have returned this year as frogs — really tiny frogs, of course, no bigger than a thumbnail, but . . . 'whee!' as we said in *FTT 20*.

We also had a go at reducing the number of tadpoles in the pond by transferring some of them to the pond at the allotment; but, like the allotment, it had been neglected for some time and, although we scooped out huge quantities of decaying leaf matter and introduced some oxygenating pond weed, they have probably not survived. However, Judith says that she has since seen a frog in that pond, which suggests that the water quality may be increasing; if, later in the year, it looks clearer and less algaceous than it did, we might see about transferring

some more tadpoles. As environmentalists, we must practise what we preach; we must provide a habitat for wildlife, grow our vegetables without nasty pesticides, welcome the birds to inspect the soil as we dig . . .

Or: we have an allotment. Half an allotment, anyway: through a process not convenient to describe, it was brought to Judith's attention by the allotment secretary, who had been advised by its tenant that at his advanced age he did not feel capable of managing the whole plot this year; and when we saw the plot it was obvious that he had not felt up to managing it all last year, either. Even an old bonfire heap had become overgrown . . . So we have been clearing it bit by bit, as we dig out and plant one bed after another; there are several more still to be dug, but to try to do them all at once would be backbreaking. The soil is like iron: pushing a garden fork into the tangled mass of weed roots and levering up a



Judith Hanna and Joseph Nicholas. (Photo: Irwin and Wendy Hirsh.)



clump of earth causes one's muscles not merely to ripple but to positively bulge. The only way of then breaking up the clumps of soil thus levered up is by using the spade like an axe, and physically smashing them apart. And the stones! Perhaps it's because the whole allotment area was once a railway — part, pre-Beeching, of the Finsbury Park to Alexandria Palace line — and there was therefore a lot of track bedding left behind when the rails themselves were removed, but not by any stretch of the imagination could the soil be described as 'fine'. We haven't sieved every bed we've dug, but since we'll have to sieve those we haven't at the end of the growing season I now make it a point to sieve each new one as it's dug; and while I was doing so last weekend an inquisitive robin came down to inspect the results for tasty beetles and earthworms. At one point, it even did the clichéd thing of sitting on the handle of the garden fork to watch me; and it was as close to me as this letter is now to you, its head tilted to one side and its dark little eyes fixed on mine. (L-5 colonies, Mars terraformation — who needs those when you have inquisitive robins to sit on your garden fork?)

Acquiring (half) an allotment not only enables us to grow more vegetables — particularly vegetables that would otherwise take up a lot of room in our small garden, such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cabbages— but also allows us to transfer to it some stuff that was taking up room in our garden, such as Jerusalem artichokes and strawberries, and to rearrange the garden accordingly. In particular, it has released space for a pergola arbour adjacent to the pond, which will not only provide fixed seating to admire the frogs and tadpoles but also trellis support for climbers such as peas, beans and spaghetti marrows. We have agreed, however, that purchase and installation of this item should be deferred for a further year, and that we should instead prioritise the roofing over of the passage down the side of the house, to provide a dry storage area for bicycles, flowerpots, gardening canes, bags of compost, worm bins, and so forth. (It wouldn't be totally enclosed, since that would cause problems *vis-à-vis* damp-coursing and air-bricks; the main intention is to keep the rain off things.) But we probably won't start work on that until later in the year; at the moment, I'm busy putting up shelves in my office, having not done so (as promised in my previous letter) in 1995 and having thus foregone for a further year the pleasure of unpacking my boxes of books. And as I do so, I realise just how few SF paperbacks I have in comparison to scads of other fans: what Judith calls 'gaps in the collection' and what I call stuff I was never going to read again so just got rid of.

Which brings me to your comments about getting rid of a load of books you weren't going to read. You make it sound like a major trauma, but I found getting rid of armloads of ill-written tat positively liberating. Asimov, Clarke, Poul Anderson, Herbert, Harry Harrison, Moorcock, Lloyd Biggle, early Silverberg, Van Vogt, Heinlein — one day you'll be dead and uncaring relatives will flog the lot to a charity shop, so why not save them the bother and do it now?

Needless to say, I didn't used to think like this. Once upon a time, over two decades ago, when my little library had barely crawled into three figures, I thought that to own a thousand SF books would be terrific, and for a long time crossing that magic threshold was my chief aim in life — an aim achieved some time in the late seventies or early eighties, when it then became impossible to avoid

the question of what to do next. Go for another thousand? Clear out stuff I didn't much care for to make room for more? Reduce the collection to a core I was happy with, and turn my attention elsewhere? The choice was eventually made for me shortly after we moved to Denbigh Street in Pimlico, when the landlord brought a surveyor round with thoughts of selling it (although, as I discovered many years later, he himself was merely a lessee with no right to sublet the property) and I decided to reduce the cost of any impending move by separating out a raft of stuff to dump. Having done so, however, reintegrating the two stacks seemed too much bother, so for the next three years the UK end of GUFF was part-funded by auctioning the dump off at various conventions. After 1985 we got heavily into political activism, and I ceased buying SF altogether. When I resumed, some time in the early nineties, I did so in the awareness that any books purchased would have to be fitted in with all my other reading and that my choices would need to be very selective.

Which is where I part company with your assertion that ceasing to buy books would be like closing down the brain. On the contrary: ceasing to read books would be like closing down the brain, but the act of purchase is merely an act of purchase; nothing more. Indeed, it could be argued that buying books as indiscriminately as you appear to have done is like closing down the brain, because it represents a failure to exercise some control at the initial stage. It would surely have been preferable to find out that the first ten pages didn't grab you while you were still in the shop, not years after you'd got the book home and put it on the shelves, what what?

I know my average reading speed, I know the average life span of males in the industrialised West, I know (roughly) what else needs to be fitted into my waking hours — and that means that I will have to be very careful about what I read. At its simplest, this means that I will never read some of the 'classic' authors with which anyone of any reasonable literacy is supposed to have some familiarity. Ernest Hemingway, for example — I've never yet read any of his work, and now won't, because I don't have time. Ditto for the Brontë sisters (but what a relief). Ditto for Henry James and Herman Melville, John Updike and Saul Bellow; even old Charles Dickens gets the boot. Fernand Braudel and Eric Hobsbawm call instead, luring me on with promises of grand theories and piercing insights, with other historians jostling in their wake for attention — not forgetting new economists such as James Robertson and Paul Elkins, or environmentalists Fred Pearce and Richard Mabey. Fiction in general has to take a back seat (although there's still room for Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad — mention of whom reminds me that I must re-read *Nostromo* before the TV dramatisation this autumn . . . have you had the BBC version of *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice* in Australia yet, and if so, what did you think of them?)

One trusts, though, that having got rid of one load of books you've decided you were never going to read, you haven't gone straight out and replaced them with another load of books that in a few years' time you'll be disposing of for exactly the same reasons, rather than leaving the space free for other things — but, Bruce Gillespie being Bruce Gillespie, I'll bet you took the money you'd received straight round to the nearest bookshop?

\* But are books books, or are they friends? Every book I've

bought I've intended to read, but in the end I don't have a few hundred years ahead of me. I would be content to have them sitting on shelves if I had the shelf space. More and more are stored in boxes, which means I forget which ones I've bought. Only Justin Ackroyd, my book dealer, can remember all the SF and fantasy books I have.

I've sold many books over the years, but the sold volumes have made little dint in the collection. I certainly don't sell books for the cash, since books, like CDs, have little resale value. Which books to keep? Experience indicates that the SF and fantasy books are the ones that will prove useful some time in the future. I volunteered to talk about Joanna Russ for an upcoming Nova Mob meeting. How could I do this without owning Russ titles that have been unobtainable for the last twenty-five years? Some of them are in Ace Special editions, with the great Dillon covers.

CDs threaten to take over my book shelves. And CDs are worth even less than books when you take them to the secondhand shop. But CDs can be even more valuable than books to own, rather than borrow. Want to find that version of that song to compare with this new version on this new CD? No good trying to track down the elusive connection if you heard the CD only on radio, or borrowed it from a library. Compare and contrast; dip and feed; only connect. A collection is not a collection, but a hologram, with each small piece adding to the three-dimensionality of the whole.

All we need is the money to buy a house with three times as much wall to put up three times as many book and CD shelves. \*

A remark to which I dare say Walt Willis would object. He refers in his letter in one of these issues to some vacuum cleaner salesman course of his, but this alleged 'course' comprised a mere two sentences at the end of a rather longer passage about D. West which appeared in a private corre-

spondence apa once published by Chuck Harris, and would therefore have been seen by scarcely more than a dozen people. Willis also suggests that I didn't understand it; but since I didn't respond to it this is pure speculation on his part — indeed, to take lack of response as indicative of anything other than lack of response is to make a conceptual leap in which few other people would wish to join him. Willis's passage about D. West was subsequently dismantled by D. himself in the course of an article now reprinted in this decade's Westathon, *Deliverance*, in which he pointed out the contradictions of an argument claiming that fandom consists of people who love each other while simultaneously criticising those who think otherwise, remarked that the passage about him appeared to have been written by someone who'd just managed to struggle through the instructions in a 'Ted White Insult Your Friends Starter Pack', and concluded that nevertheless he 'shouldn't grumble', since he'd 'done rather better than Joseph Nicholas, who was favoured with a particularly inscrutable Chinese joke about vacuum cleaners'. I'd actually forgotten about this until Willis's letter reminded me, so I got out the Westathon and re-read the article. 'Bloody Moon' is the title; a major piece of work about life, death, books and fandom. The thing is probably out of print already, but should you ever have an opportunity to purchase a copy, hesitate not.

\* One problem: no D. West fanzines ever reach Australia. See my reply to Mark Plummer elsewhere in this issue. \*

Elsewhere in one of these issues Bob Day refers in one of his letters to someone called 'Joe Nicholas'. Is this person any relation of mine? The name seems very familiar. I think I should be told!

(9 May 1996)

---

## TERRAFORMING

by *Cy Chauvin*

---

**CY CHAUVIN**  
14248 Wilfred, Detroit MI 48213 USA

Roger and Pat Sims brought photographs back from Australia to Midwestcon (held mid-summer) and I enjoyed seeing the ones of you and Elaine and many others. I also met a friend of yours, Mark Linneman, who used to live in Australia. It was good to get some news and conversation about Australian fandom firsthand, rather than from a fanzine — although I still firmly believe it's a disappointment to 'only' meet a fan in person, and never through his or her writing.

My last letter of comment to *TMR*, filled with neighbourhood horror stories, certainly deserves an update . . .

I saw a house on my street two blocks away with a sign on it, and a cross: 'Habitat for Humanity. Creating Housing for God's People in Need.' There were flowers planted in front, and I thought to myself, 'Oh, a church must own that house, and is fixing it.' But I thought no

more of it. I assumed it was intended to be a neighbourhood church of some kind.

In the meantime, I got a copy of a neighbourhood newsletter on my door. It invited me to come to a meeting about neighbourhood problems. I was very surprised to get this — I thought that the neighbourhood association no longer existed. Because of all the problems with the house next door, I was primed and motivated, and went to the meeting. Someone mentioned the need for some cheap way to print their newsletter. 'I have a mimeograph machine,' I volunteered. 'A Gestetner?' asked a young man black man. 'They are the best kind.' It was the sort of comment I would only have expected from a fan (but no, I didn't ask if he read SF).

A few meetings later, someone asked me if I wanted to go to a 'Habitat for Humanity' workday.

In the meantime, the house next door was demolished. It happened while I was away at work, and I didn't return home until late. It was summer, and while it was dark, the evening light was still in the sky, and the air had an eerie

and wonderful quality about it, so typical of late summer in the Midwest. As I walked in the back door I saw the lights from the house beyond, and realised that 14240 Wilfred had been demolished. It was so strange: it seemed such a huge gap had been made. (Now, five years later, the lot seems so narrow, and my mother even crazily remarked, 'Are you sure a house was here before?') The debris from the demolition still filled the space, and it looked odd in the light, fairy-tale like.

The debris wasn't removed for months, so it wasn't until spring that I could begin 'terraforming' the land. It was certainly as hostile as an alien planet. I don't know what Elaine found in her new garden's dirt, but mine had large chunks of asphalt and concrete buried in with the dirt used to fill the house's basement. Some of the fill dirt wasn't dirt at all but gravel, cinders and bits of wood left from the house. I never thought growing something as simple as grass would give me pleasure, but in that dead earth it did. I raked nearly every inch of it. I also planted some small trees (pine, tulip, apricot) and a vegetable garden. The vegetables grew quite well considering that a broken concrete floor (from the garage) was buried underneath them.

I haven't been able to purchase the property yet, because it takes about seven years for property to be seized by the State and then the City for non-payment of taxes. I was afraid attempting to buy the lot from the former house-owners might make me liable for the demolition costs. Unlike your home in Melbourne, mine is not in an area where there is commercial development, and it is unlikely that anyone besides myself or the adjacent property owner would be interested in this lot.

I let the portion of the lot at the very rear (where the alley had originally been located) 'return to nature' — I didn't plant anything there except a few raspberries at the edges, but just let the soil seed itself. An amazing variety of plants grew, including burdock, mulberries, asters and milkweeds. (I always think of milkweeds as really belonging to the countryside, so I was surprised to see them grow.) Some large thistles attracted a flock of finches in the autumn. I knew finches like thistle seed, but was still surprised by it. I also enjoy how the extra lot changes the whole perspective of my existing backyard and the house; when I sat towards the back of the new lot during the summer, it was just large enough that I no longer felt I was in the city, but was sitting in the countryside instead. It really isn't that large an area — the new lot is only 35 feet wide, the old one maybe 40 feet — but the trees make it seem larger, 'taller', and block some bad views. Actually I enjoy gardens much as you do, just walking around them aimlessly. Planting things can be fun or can be frustrating and hard work, but watching things grow is always a pleasure. Even a plant that grows up unexpectedly can be a pleasure, like a letter from

someone you never mailed a fanzine to, or expected to hear from.

At the same time that I was terraforming this vacant lot, I became more involved with the neighbourhood association and Habitat for Humanity. I ran off thousands of copies of the neighbourhood newsletter on my mimeograph (thankfully it was never more than two pages) and went to all sorts of meetings. But it never really did what I expected it to be or hoped it might do — make some real improvements in the neighbourhood. Instead, it really was another way to meet people. It does help to meet other people in your neighbourhood, and find out that there are a lot of common concerns and decent, kind people living there, but I wish more could come of it than that. I kept waiting for things to truly come together, but for a lack of good organising, and other reasons, it never has.

I became involved with Habitat for Humanity at about the same time. Habitat builds or renovates houses for low-income families. Two houses on my own street were renovated by Habitat, and I became interested for that reason. Most of the houses in the neighbourhood were built about 1920–35, and I also was attracted to it for historical/architectural reasons. Now Habitat is well organised, and does renovate or build houses, but along the way many of its ideals and goals became compromised, particularly those that concerned how other people are treated. Also, it became too much a business and not enough of a charity, and I'm not particularly interested in helping run a business as a hobby.

But I also found with Habitat too that meeting people might be the best part of it, not building houses. One evening, a small group went out to a bar after a work day for dinner and a drink. One fellow said to the woman next to him, 'Well, I've finished with the Gregory Benford. Do you have others you want to trade for that?' I almost screamed out '*Gregory Benford!*' I don't remember most of the rest of the conversation, although I found out they read SF regularly, and I even lent them a few books.

But I've retreated quite a bit from both these organisations, at least for a while. In a sense, they are other 'fandoms', which have not perhaps discovered the pure pleasure of friendship yet. Or perhaps I just need to decide carefully how much time is worthwhile to put into each, since otherwise all the free time I have is used up. And I think I've been neglecting the other friends I've had because of the novelty of these new organisations, fooled by their shiny coats of 'charity' and 'non-profit' into believing they were more important than other friends, fandom or writing. I no longer believe this is the case. I appreciate the perspective I've got from them, however.

(24 January 1996)

---

# TRAVELS TO TUNIS

by *Andy Sawyer*

---

## ANDY SAWYER

1 The Flaxyard, Woodfall Lane,  
Little Neston, South Wirral L64 4BT, England

I feel I ought to follow Peter Nicholls *et al.* and produce my 100 best writers, but the thought terrifies me. I did start, but my mind ran dry at about number 30: not because I couldn't think of anyone but because I pick up books all the time and enthuse over them. So my terror was of ending up with a list of 250 and having to edit it down.

But I was interested in Peter's 'Shame list'. Why Poppy Z. Brite? I have only read four stories by her, introduced to me by my one of my daughters, oddly enough, who said, 'These are weird. You'll like them.' And I did. Harriet also persuaded me to read another of Peter's Shame list, who is more certainly on mine: David Eddings. But Harriet was twelve at that time. I zipped my way through the Belgariad, stopped, began the 'Elenium' (sp?) series, which I was reviewing at the time, and stopped for no real reason. But I remember feeling that Eddings was fun to read in a way that many other fantasy writers aren't, though I hold no great shakes for his imagination.

Melanie Rawn I just have not been able to fathom at all — I tried one, found it tedious beyond belief, and gave up. But I remember going through a period in my teens of intense reading of Dennis Wheatley, starting with the black magic books and ending up with the historicals. In fact, I passed my History A level on Dennis Wheatley, because the man was a master of the infodump. 'As you know, Sir Pellinore,' one character would remark to another, 'the current trouble in the Balkans began when . . .' Then follows twenty pages on the decline and fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all written from an extremely right-wing viewpoint and with very little to do with the mechanics of the plot, but perfect when you have an exam in that subject next week. Now I would probably read George Macdonald Fraser, who is a much better (not to mention funnier) writer, but I would certainly count myself as having been addicted to Wheatley.

Back to real life. We spent a week in Tunis at Easter 1996. It may be the last holiday we all spend together, as Rosamund has already flown the coop and is studying medicine at university and Harriet is taking her A levels and hoping to spend a few months in India before going to university herself. We'd been to Tunisia before, but hadn't actually got to Tunis itself to visit the Bardo Museum, which is supposed to have the best collection of Roman mosaics in the world. This time we did, and if there is a better one I'd like to see it. We'd actually started mosaic-spotting not far from our hotel, where the scrappy little map we were given by our tour rep mentioned the Roman remains at Pupput — sort of 'at the back end of this field you'll find these piles of bricks'. In fact, there was what was almost a small town there. True, it was flat among the scrub, and scattered with rubble, but there had

been some serious excavating, and there were some superb floor mosaics, including a pattern of semi-oval curves which, looked at one way, were stylised fish and, in another, were stylised serpents. There was another which was musical instruments. And a wrecked statue, which was only a torso but which (according to Rosamund, fresh from a year's dissection of the human body) showed incredibly accurate muscular features. And this was stuff which was deemed unimportant enough to be left out in the open, exposed to the elements and whatever tourists came along. (On that day there was one other family there, also English.) We met a young lad who introduced himself as the caretaker's son, an engineering student who helped out — i.e. showed tourists round for (we assumed) a tip — during the holidays. He seemed to know a lot about the site anyway: i.e., if it was a scam it was a plausible scam, and he certainly was able to direct us to parts of the site we would have missed. A couple of days later we made it to Tunisia and the famous Bardo Museum, which was every bit as good as the guidebooks said. Most of the mosaics were of nature scenes, some showing hunting in quite relentlessly bloody scenes (one of a horse being savaged by a bear, blood pouring out of the mouths of both beasts, was particularly nasty), others as pastoral as you could wish. Some amazed by their size and detail, others by their attention to light and shade: the portrait of Virgil, for instance, was amazingly lifelike and struck you as as natural as any painted portrait. The amount of skill in selecting and matching the coloured pieces of mosaic must have been immense.

On a separate journey we went to Carthage, which is now basically a rich people's suburb with Roman remains dotted about. It was a fascinating sight to see kids playing football on waste ground with Roman columns as the goalposts. It was a coach tour, so we were tied to the schedule, but even so, the walk up and down Sidi Bou Said, a former artists' colony, with its blue and white houses reflecting the sea and rock, was curiously restful, despite the crowds of local tourists doing exactly the same thing. However, we decided that we wanted to see more than we got on a coach tour, so in the end we hired a car and driver to take us round the Cap Bon Peninsula, via a Spanish fort, a fishing village, a 'real' Carthaginian site (Carthage itself is largely Roman, built up after the devastation of the original town in the Punic Wars: but at Kerkouan there has been excavated a fascinating Carthaginian town, with houses so identical that at first it was thought it was a kind of holiday camp), and the quarries where the stone for Carthage was taken. This was quite spooky: it reminded me of the beginning of *Spartacus* in the mines, where slaves were worked in the baking heat until they dropped. I'm sure that was the case there.

Tunisia was a fascinating country. As in most Islamic countries its human rights record isn't much to write home about, but it seemed relaxed enough and people

were very friendly. There were a few press reports last year ago when some women won a court case for harassment from waiters in their hotel, but we saw no sign of that sort of thing (directly at any rate: Harriet did get asked out by one young waiter, who was quite obviously terrified of being seen by his bosses spending too much time hanging around our table, which caused some problem when Harriet had to change the arrangement and needed to tell him an alternative time!). I did get offered five million camels for both daughters in the souk in Tunis, but I got the impression that this was the kind of thing which stallholders in Tunisian souks think tourists expect. Of course, they had the hard-sell technique off pat, but then again there was no more hassle on that front than you get in many English markets, and certainly in terms of sexual harassment there was far less offensiveness than you'd get with a bunch of horny English lads faced with a couple of attractive female tourists. It probably helped that Mary and the girls dressed modestly and that I was with them, but even so there was less hassle than I'd heard described in Morocco or Egypt — or Italy, for that matter.

Richard Thompson played Liverpool last Thursday night. I mentioned at work that I was going. 'Yes, I know,' Peter said. 'What do you mean?' 'Well, I've just been cataloguing an Australian fanzine and there was a letter from you in it discussing Thompson, and I knew he was

appearing here, so . . .' I think I'm going to have to watch what I write in fanzines in future. (This one's for you, Peter!) It was a good show, although Mary wasn't so keen as she doesn't know many (any) of the songs and doesn't like Thompson as a performer. I can only stand in awe of him as a songwriter and guitarist. He had a good band: Danny Thompson on bass, Pete Zorn on guitar, mandolin and saxes and Dave Mattacks on drums. Zorn was particularly good: he did a wonderful solo on 'Shoot Out the Lights' — somehow I'd never heard rock-mandolin in that song before, but it worked. He played good soprano in 'Devonside'. And Thompson's own solo work — a mixture of amplified acoustic on his own or with the bass and rockier electric stuff with the full band — was great: a nice rocky version of 'Hokey Pokey' to end with. I'm not as familiar with the newer stuff as I ought to be, but there were several new songs that were at least as good as the rest, except for the obligatory single which sounded cobbled together, as a lot of his singles have done. But then, I think he will never have a hit single, though it's a shame that he doesn't put out something that would attract a bit of airplay. One song, of which I can't remember the title now, reminded me immensely of Elvis Costello for some reason (though I know that Costello has covered some of Thompson's songs): wish I could remember why!

(25 May 1996)

## SF ACTIVITY IN AUSTRALIA, 1930s—1950s

by *Graham Stone*

**GRAHAM STONE**  
GPO Box 4440 Sydney NSW 2001

A lot of Race Mathews' early reading ('Whirlaway to Thrilling Wonder Stories', TMR 22/23) overlaps with mine, as would be expected. Adelaide was a cultural desert in the thirties compared to Melbourne and there wasn't much to read, but I did come across some of the same things.

*Whirlaway*: I missed this. I think Race is wrong to call it a casualty of the war. It was published in 1937, and there was enough time for it to make an impression in Australia before things became too difficult. It was just too different from anything before, I think. I found it for the first time only perhaps ten years ago, listed in George Locke's *Spectrum of Fantasy*, and read it in the National Library. An appealing book, but I don't think the fairy and pet koala fitted the theme very well.

But I found dinosaurs in a lot of sources: in some books, and they were of course perennial in the twopennies. I acquired some *Boys' Friend Library* paperbacks. I think they had to be ordered in, and one I had had Cave-Boy Ereke floundering anachronistically through the horsetail forests dodging pterodactyls and stegosauri. I heard about *The Lost World* as a silent film from the projectionist at the local theatre. My mother ran the shop there for years and I saw a lot of flicks free, but silents were already ancient history.

'Budge and Betty'! This is the first time I've seen them mentioned anywhere! The first four books were among lots of good stuff in the house at Lone Gum, near Monash, near Berry in the now Riverland, where I spent some time about 1933. Interesting, but even then the magicking toys into the real car, train, submarine etc. was a bit too easy. And I think a lot of it was rather dated natural-history-without-tears, with encounters with all the animals.

Tolkien, I have to say, I find a total loss. I read half a page and felt positively sick.

E. Nesbit I never encountered.

William, yes. I read a lot of the books, and also episodes in the *Happy Magazine* — of which I remember nothing else whatever — around the time I was graduating from Buck Rogers to the newly found SF magazines, 1938–39, the same period when I read all of *The Saint*, and lots of Wodehouse books. But William was great stuff, appealing to a wide age range.

*Chums* I don't think I ever saw way back when. I did find some old volumes of the *Boys' Own Paper*, much the same thing. In that *The Power of the Pygmies* by Major Chas Gilson stands out; otherwise my main impression is of school stories.

Prewar English comics: ah yes! From *Chicks' Own* for the very young just starting to read (agonising! all those hyphenated syllables!) through *Tiger Tim*, to those solid tabloid pages in telephone book type on pink or green paper with titles I can't remember.

American comics, such as *Wags* in 1936, were totally different and a revelation; although *Buck Rogers* came a bit before that. *Flash Gordon*, striking but puerile, earlier again. By 1933 I had consciously moved on from comics as childish things to the story papers, and *Buck* and *Alley Oop*, etc. in *Wags* showed comics in quite a different light.

I started with the *Champion*, the first issues I saw running a serial *The War of the Planets*, in which Mars (perhaps) and Venus (perhaps) were in conflict, with the venturers from Earth supporting the one peopled by humans in white nightshirts against the opposing one people by beetle-men.

Simultaneously *Triumph* had *Terror from the Stratosphere*, with the air pirate Captain Crash flitting about doing mischief in his helicopter/airscrew/rocket craft. I'm not sure of the date, but I fancy it was about 1933 to 1934.

That was what I wanted, though I didn't know it was called science fiction till mid-1938. At about the same time Mandrake the Magician in the *Women's Weekly* was up against a bad guy who was a brain transplanted into a gorilla. This may help to date it. Hey, the *Women's Weekly* only started in 1934.

But yes, the *Champion*, *Triumph* . . . Yes, I admit it, I read the *Magnet* and *Gem* every week for a long time too, though I was vaguely aware that that kind of environment, as far as it had any connection with reality, was long outdated, compared with the *Modern Boy*, with Captain Justice.

Not long ago, by the way, John Tipper found for me several *Captain Justice* paperbacks in the *Boys' Friend* series. Woefully stickytaped, they are sitting in the stack of books to be rehabilitated and rebound. I've read only two — the beginning of the series explaining for the first time to me how Justice got started: as a modern pirate motivated by revenge on the bean counters who had ruined his father in business shenanigans — and *The Rocketeers*, the flight to the wandering planet *Stellaris*, of which I had read one stray part in the dim past. It must have been only three or four years later there was another wandering planet, *Nuvius*, which I remember well. It broke up, and a substantial part splashed down in the Atlantic to form a new island. I note that the readership turned over every few years and plots were easily recycled.

*Film Fun*: yes, I remember it; and the *Better Boys' Cinema*, with text rather than comics adapted from movies. But most of the titles I see mentioned now I don't remember ever reading then: *Beano*, *Wizard*, *Rover*, *Hotspur* . . . There was the *Thriller*, as the title indicated, which I think was aimed at a readership a bit older. *Nelson Lee* I knew of, but didn't see often. *Sexton Blake*, similarly; I don't remember reading it.

Turner's *Boys Will Be Boys* I know, sure, but I didn't get into digging into this field as Race did.

*Emil and the Detectives*: yes, I read that in the library at Sydney High School. Some other books that Race mentions I never saw. Would you believe I have not to this day ever read Dickens? But Haggard, yes! First, back there contemporary with the story papers, *Alan and the Ice-Gods*. *Ayasha*, sequel to *She*, have I only recently caught up with. *King Solomon's Mines*, later. Years after enjoying the film with Paul Robeson there was the book, again at Sydney High School library.

American comics, now, I never much got into. *Buck Rogers* was a wild exception. When he appeared in 1936 there had never been the like. I followed the semiannual,

then monthly series up to 1938. And, as I've mentioned, *Wags* started about this time. When the new American comic books started appearing all over the place a bit later they didn't much register.

Race's introduction to magazine SF was the Tenth Anniversary *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. What an introduction that was! I on the other hand spotted *Tales of Wonder* No. 2, and realised that *Sleepers of Mars* was a sequel to Beynon's *Planet Plane*, read a year before, along with all the Burroughs and Walsh's *Vandals of the Void* and a few other things in that commercial library at Exeter. In mid-1938 my mother had moved to the other side of Adelaide to run just such a place, and it included the William books, some Wells (seem to have passed over him, but he was a strong element), the Saint, Wheatley . . . But though I couldn't afford that *ToW* (I bought No. 3 first, then No. 1) I had found a name for it, Science Fiction! Of course! What else would you call it?

Then came *Thrilling Wonder*, October 1937, with the magnificent tyrannosauroid licking up a man in its long tongue, and there was modern American SF rampant: Kuttner, Zagat, Hamilton, Barnes, Long and all the rest.

By the time June 1939 rolled around I had read a lot of magazines and knew how exceptional this issue was, but I was sadly disappointed with that cover. It is truly awful. I learned that the magazine had originally been better titled *Science Wonder Stories*, and already I knew that there was a history behind it; the correspondence pages had a lot of nostalgic mutterings about issues of a few years earlier.

And then we come to fans and stuff.

Race calls Roger Dard's *Star Rover* sporadic? My recollection is that it was a one-shot.

I have not been able to get to the bottom of the business about *Weird Tales*, not only with Roger but generally. There was agitation against pulps in the mid-thirties, and some action in 1938. *Weird Tales* and the horror group stopped coming in. I went through the papers remembering something being said at the time, and sure enough the then Minister ordered some publications to be stopped. But even though I found vague notices in the *Gazette*, I have not been able to find the list of titles that surely must have existed. It must have been circulated internally. Maybe it can be found through the Freedom of Information route, but it would mean a lot of work.

Marshall McLennan? I met him just after the war, and was able to see a lot of his stuff, including an incredible recollection of prewar fanmags. What happened to them?

ASFS, alas. Its failure was, I now realise, largely due to my lousy managerial talent and trying to do too many things at once. The quotes Race gives from me are fairly sensible, I'm relieved to see.

Because Ron Clarke has been reprinting Vol Molesworth's history of Australian fandom in *The Mentor* and asked me to write some comments on it, I have given a lot of thought to events in the group in the fifties, and I'm not at all clear on what was going on at some times. I simply do not understand the dispute about the library, in particular. I do know I wasn't happy about the trust handling it and wanted it returned to the control of the membership, but I wonder how it became a major issue. It is inconceivable that I wanted to run it, on top of everything I was attempting, but apparently I was forced to volunteer for it.

One thing I wish Race hadn't mentioned is the ridiculous business about the women. There had never been many; there were only a few in 1952–54, and as far as I can recall they seemed to fit in well. But several of them apparently felt they weren't wanted, and Rosemary Simmons was made an Oliver Twist. Vol said at the meeting when the whole thing came up that women had created problems in the wartime group, which as far as I knew was not true: I wish I had questioned him closely about this at the time.

At most five women ever had anything to do with the wartime group: Enid Evans, Roma Castellari, Gwen Heming, Ralph Smith's sister, and the only one who wasn't someone's wife or sister and took any active part, Jean Roberts, who was Treasurer for awhile. (She interpreted the post as fund-raising officer: raffles and stuff.) It didn't seem to me that she caused any trouble. Perhaps things went on that I didn't know of.

One thing I can say about the situation in the 1950s is that a few women being in the group meant certain new possibilities, and the custom of adultery had been introduced. Notably there was the liaison that led to a grudge fight by Queensberry rules after a meeting. Decades later a witness told me, 'When X approached me with a very grim expression to ask me to be his second in the fight with Y, my first thought was that he'd found out that I'd also been boffing Z.'

Simmons was indeed a little pushy, but what of that? I'm not sure how she got into the scene: both Lex Banning and I knew her from student affairs, and she worked with Laura Molesworth, although that may have been a bit later. Laura, by the way, introduced me to Joy Anderson, my first wife.

I put up the idea of a Women's Auxiliary (by analogy with the RSL and other stag organisations), which was howled down. But I didn't want to marginalise the women: I wanted to give them something to do, and particularly to draw in fans' wives and girlfriends who weren't interested in SF but who could have been got into a social group. Instead Simmons and others formed a women's fan group putting out *Vertical Horizons*, which was all right in its way. But it only ran to four or five issues, with no particular content. If they had put together a more substantial effort they would have made a greater impression.

It gives a quite wrong impression to say 'The society's all-male membership went ahead to vote down Ms Simmons by a two-thirds majority.' This was the governing body, not the group as a whole. Simmons, Diana Wilkes, Norma Williams, Norma Heming, Christine Davison, Charmaine Brown, Patricia Smith, Nikki Gore and others came to meetings regularly before and after that. Laura Molesworth was in the FSS long before then and long after. Certainly there were only a few.

For the record, I had forgotten about lending those very hard-to-come-by items and not getting them back, but at the time it was a serious matter. It permanently changed my policy on lending anything. I replaced the set of *Fanscient* a few years afterwards: it was a very outstanding production running to 14 issues in the late forties by Donald B. Day, who went on to publish the first good SF magazine index. In those days, it was one of very few amateur SF projects that you could show with pride to anyone.

(9 February 1996)

#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63

There was no dignity in it at all. Just then the sky seemed to open overhead and all the creatures of the earth started laughing. I heard the blades of grass, the trees, the rocks, the clouds, the whole universe. But it wasn't just me they were laughing at — humanity itself was the joke. Behold! Once again, *Homo sapiens* so completely full of itself — finite and infinite, indeed! As if it doesn't bleed and its bones never crack! As if all of nature bends to its will!

Suddenly I was ashamed of my humanness. I, *Homo sapiens*, wasn't the pinnacle of creation — I was the joke of the universe and everything animate and inanimate knew it. Only me and my kind were kept in the dark. Or perhaps more to the point, only me and my kind refused to see the obvious. I, *Homo sapiens*, the thinking animal, creature of unlimited potential with godlike qualities, would hunt down the Eternal Other and force it to acknowledge me . . . or else die trying. The incredible arrogance of it! The utter foolishness! The stars scattered across the heavens were definitely amused.

A few hours later, while standing on a cliff overlooking Lake Champlain, I threw my thunderbird necklace as far as I could. Something died in me as the tiny object disappeared beneath the choppy waters with a sudden *ker-plung!* Something died, but I was glad to be rid of it. I turned away, walking back down the path fully aware of being a man

— nothing more, nothing less. I headed for my book store. Time was slipping away. I had a business to run. If I kept a good pace, I could have the store open by noon.

In due time, I sold my store, remarried and slowly fashioned a world view to counter that spiritual malaise. And yes, I did make it to the wilds of Alaska eventually, but only for a visit. My brief, solitary sojourn there was a tenuous affair — more of an exercise in flexibility than anything else. It wasn't the least bit like that all-or-nothing spiritual adventure I had originally planned. Thank God for that! As things were, I had a hard enough time getting along with brown bears, negotiating dense alder bush and surviving the elements. Had I been any less flexible, the wild would have devoured me for certain.

'Humility is the land where God wants us to go and offer sacrifice,' an ancient monk once said, according to Thomas Merton in *The Wisdom of the Desert*. Some things lie within our abilities; others do not. It's such a simple concept, really. Why do we have so much trouble with it? I'm not sure. All I know is that I was extremely fortunate to have grasped this concept well in advance of my eventual excursion to Alaska, before I was forced to learn the lesson the hard way.

— Walt McLaughlin, 1995



down today, but we discouraged them; if they'd actually arrived we'd have had to shovel the entire 180 feet of driveway this morning, instead of doing half of it over the course of the day.

Since our dog Severian got run over and killed last spring, we acquired another one from the animal shelter in October. Elli (from the Lois Bujold character) is a mix of Irish setter and golden retriever, maybe a year old, weight 65–70 pounds. She'd been abused and was afraid of everybody when we got her; by now she's recovered enough to nag us for attention (she sits out on the back patio and barks until we either come out or yell at her.) About a year old and very puppyish, she's getting accustomed to walking on leash and coming in the house (the first time we brought her in, because she was sopping wet, it took both of us to drag her; now she'll come in if invited). Loves riding in the station wagon, and while she still curls up in the front passenger seat when we get out, she's learned to climb in back when we get back in. (Hauling a 70-pound dog across a car seat isn't much fun.) The shelter manager was quite discouraging about my taking her, since another man had taken her out and brought her back the next day, but I figure I can make friends with any dog except perhaps a large vicious one, and could probably handle one of those if given enough time. One just has to think like a dog. She's still afraid of strange men and children of any age, but that's no problem out here. She still won't go through interior doors in the house by herself, but that's fine with us; I may consider curing that when she's older and less prone to chew things.

Juanita and I have been getting our exercise this year in shovelling snow out of our driveway. The piles of shovelled snow on either side of the drive are up to five feet deep in places now. In between shovellings, I've been reading *Icebound*, by Leonard Guttridge, about the 1879 polar expedition in the ship *Jeannette*, commanded by a US naval officer, Lt. De Long. The descriptions are enough to make shovelling a little snow seem trivial; the ship is crushed by ice and the survivors stumble south through Siberia. 'Erikson's every forward step had become an agony, his right foot shedding blackened lumps of flesh, exposing bone and tendons.' The percentage of the crew who survived was not high. So far, our worst experience this winter has been the need to stay over an extra day at a convention (in Nashville, Tennessee, of all places) because the highways were closed by a snowstorm. We've had somewhere around 27 inches of snow here since 1 January, which makes it the worst winter we've had for several years.

Re *TMR* Nos. 22–25: I'm a little younger than Brian Aldiss: I'll be 68 in May [1996]. I can't say I feel that old, except about the time I'm ready to quit snow shovelling. I can feel younger, now that I saw Bob Tucker at Chabanacon; if the Nicholls/Clute *Encyclopedia* is correct, he's 81, and still getting around well, though walking a bit slower than usual. Same fund of funny stories; I was on the Old Farts' Panel at the con with Tucker and Rusty Hevelin. I was definitely the Junior Fart. You, however, are a Very Junior Fart.

\* I've already written about my fiftieth birthday party. This is Very Junior Fartdom? As the young fans see it, I was an Old Fart ten years ago. But it's satisfying to seem young to someone with a bit of perspective.

Good to hear that Bob Tucker is getting along okay. He's

still one of my Top Ten SF Writers. I don't know what I did to offend, but I haven't heard from him since 1976. \*

Race Mathews' reading reminiscences don't parallel mine to any great extent; no reason why they should. I remember getting a few letters from him years ago in response to *Yandro*; or it may still have been *Eisfa* then. He was probably the first Australian fan I was in contact with.

I can barely imagine someone getting worked up over an award in fandom, as Terry Frost relates. As I recall, *Yandro* was on the final ballot for a fanzine Hugo ten years in a row, and lost nine times, and we started calling Y 'the world's best second-rate fanzine'. The one we did win spent several years as a holder for three-inch ID rolls of tape, and worked very well, but now it's up with various other trophies — including some of Bruce's, which I'm going to deliver to him next time we visit; let him give house room to his own awards. Friends are important; awards are secondary. (I've made some new friends recently, so I figure I'm doing well.)

I think Casey June Wolf explained her name change very well, and the change itself is easy enough to understand. I don't necessarily agree with it, but I'm basically unemotional; bad things happen and you go on. Name changes mean nothing; personality changes — if you can make them — are important. Names don't define the person; they're tag lines so you don't get somebody else's mail. Casey won't agree; no reason she should have to. One more important item: changing the name may make you feel better, but it doesn't make you a different person. You have to go deeper than the name for that.

For Leigh Edmonds: yes, it's possible to get around in the US without tipping, or at least without much. Carry your own luggage, if possible. Stay in the cheaper hotels, or as much as possible in motels, which do sort of require that you're in an automobile because public transportation doesn't come anywhere near them. Eat at cheap restaurant chains; McDonald's, Wendy's, Bob Evans, etc. The food is perfectly good, if not epicurean. If you spend time in big cities, big hotels and fancy restaurants, you'll be expected to tip. You don't *have* to — tipping is still mostly voluntary — but if you want good service at the next meal, you'll do it. Ask advice from Eric Lindsay about getting around; of all the Australian and British fans we've met, Eric adapted to the US with the least strain, though Ken Ozanne and family apparently did very well, also.

And, Leigh, stay with fans instead of at hotels whenever possible.

There were still active public transport systems when Juanita and I were growing up in the 1930s and 1940s. Not only streetcars, but interurbans (a sort of rural streetcar that took you from one town to another). By 1944, when I worked in Indianapolis during the summer, the streetcars had been replaced by city buses, which didn't run on rails but still got their power from overhead electric lines. I was living with cousins, and most of the time rode to work with my cousin-in-law, but now and then took the bus, and a few times rode the buses elsewhere. All this was done away with following World War II, because everybody bought automobiles. The civilians had spent four years earning good money and having very little to spend it on, and the soldiers were getting cheap or free university educations and had usually saved up back pay because they had nowhere to spend it. So the streetcars and buses went out of business

because they had no passengers, the railroads diminished passenger service and became freight haulers, and so on. I doubt very much that automobile manufacturers bothered to buy up public conveyances; they didn't have to and they were too busy turning out new cars for the biggest demand they'd ever had.

(12 January 1996)

\* The American Government also donated a multi-billion-dollar subsidy to the car industry in the form of the national freeway system, which has been built since World War II. The result? Easy car travel between cities, but levels of pollution in major cities that are much higher than in Australian cities.

Governments in the most populous states of Australia continued to subsidise public transport after World War II, with the result that the level of road use and pollution became critically high only recently. Now our loony state government has launched a vast scheme of toll-freeways in Melbourne, just as many American cities are trying to rid themselves of freeways. At the same time the Kennett Government chooses to 'privatise' public transport, signalling the inevitable destruction of what could still resurrected into a great system. Melbourne's new traffic scheme will never be used effectively, because Melbourne drivers will do their best to avoid paying tolls, but public transport will disappear. \*

## Elderly person saga

---

**SYDNEY J. BOUNDS**

**27 Borough Rd, Kingston on Thames,  
Surrey KT2 6BD  
England**

I think of *TMR* 22/23 as 'this mortal issue' — this issue of farewells. At my age, of course, friends and relatives have been dropping off for some time. I find it depressing.

I've been recently classed as an 'elderly person', which meant attending for an elderly person's health check. This involved three questionnaires, a urine sample and a blood-pressure test. All was well until I had to blow through a peak flow meter. 'Short of breath,' accused the practice nurse. 'Pipe smoker for fifty years.' Off to the hospital for a chest X-ray. This was okay. 'Maybe asthma,' she says. So now I've got my own flow meter to chart the readings on a graph, morning and evening. And a week's course of steroids. What next?

Race Mathews was interesting. I was never much interested in William, but a friend of mine was an avid reader. Looking for presents this Xmas I found a William calendar using the original illustrations, so this solved one problem.

I bought some of the Howard Baker facsimiles of the *Magnet* and *Gem*, and enjoyed a bit of nostalgia. The press packed in when Baker died. For a time they were sold off cheaply, and one year the remainder shops were filled with them; then, mysteriously, they vanished. I assume dealers snapped them up to hide away till the price goes up.

I attended one meeting of the Old Boys' Book Club, and was fortunate enough to hear Edward Searles Brooks talk about his experience. This past October I went up to London for a session with Phil Harbottle and Ted Tubby; both are thriving.

(21 January 1996)

Doug Barbour's article (*TMR* 24/25) was interesting because here is someone who goes to art exhibitions. Adrian Rawlins' article is the first I've read on flamenco, so you're entitled to advertise: you read it first in *TMR*.

As usual, your letter column is dominated by Mae Strelkov, who is rapidly developing into one of my favourite writers. From South America, via Australian fanmags to England.

I seem to detect, more than usual, an emphasis on age. None of us is getting younger, but does *TMR* have to turn into a retirement magazine? Where's the new blood?

\* Where indeed? The younger fans in Melbourne don't seem to be interested in my type of fanzine, but I live in hope of making contact with newer fans overseas, especially in Britain. \*

And Joseph Nicholas as your gardening correspondent? Surely this must be the scoop of the century?

My elderly-person saga continues: I now have five different inhalers. I was aiming for a complete set, but the doctor is now talking about a relaxation tape. How can I relax when I'm buried under work?

The good news is that an American small press will reprint one of my old crime novels in a limited edition for collectors.

(1 May 1996)

## Courier message

---

**RICK KENNETT**

**PO Box 118, Pascoe Vale South VIC 3044**

Having noted your political remarks in the two most recent issues of *TMR*, I would like to point out that I am *not* related in any way, shape or form to Jeff Kennett. If fact, if I was I wouldn't admit it. Come to think of it, I'd take a chain saw to the family tree.

I really enjoyed Race Mathews' time travelling into Melbourne SF's prehistory. Mention of the bound copies of the British edition of *Unknown Worlds* make me check my bound volume of six copies of the magazine. Sure enough, it bears the book plate of Bob McCubbin.

A very small quibble. As a courier I pride myself on a working knowledge of Melbourne's streets. but I know not this intersection of High Street and Balaclava Road, St Kilda, where once was Saddlers. Could Mr Mathews mean St Kilda Road and Balaclava Road, St Kilda? It's a small point, I know, but to me it's like a piece of grit in the mental wheels. (Actually, if you want to get nitpicky, it's Carlisle Street and St Kilda Road, because Balaclava Road changes its name at Chapel Street. Doubtless this is something you've always wanted to know.)

(5 February 1996)

\* One day I opened the door to greet the usual courier — we see about three a day. And there was Rick Kennett! I'd forgotten that he still earns his living this way. We were both so surprised that we had nothing to say to each other. Rick is doing very nicely selling fiction in Australia and overseas, but not quite well enough to quit couriering. \*



**Syncon II, 1972.** Gary Hoff, who gave me this photo, is sitting front left. To the right of him, directly in front, are A. Bertram (Bert) Chandler and Ron Graham. Behind them (left) are Ron Clarke, Susan Clarke. Behind Ron Graham is John Bangsund. On the other side of his head is Leigh Edmonds. Extreme right is David Grigg, with Carey Handfield a bit behind him. Behind Susan is Joy Window. Behind Bert is Alan Sandercock. Disappearing into the distance, from left, are Bill Moon (?), John Alderson, Bill Wright, me, Eric Lindsay (looking left), Paul Stevens, Merv Binns, and quite a few people whose names I can't remember.

## The never-forgotten

**BEN INDICK**  
**428 Sagamore Ave, Teaneck NJ 07666-2626 USA**

Your photo with Polly in *TMR* 22/23 is that of a man who appears content. I trust Polly has filled the place of Monty. We had a mutt, Edna, for nearly 19 years. The last few were very bad, as she had little bowel control and was nearly blind, existing to eat and have bowel movements. I did not have the heart to put Edna away. I had always sworn I never would just because a dog becomes an inconvenience. A vet took it out of our hands. We'd brought her in for a checkup and before we knew it he had written up the papers and had taken her away. Driving home, my wife, sitting silent and tearful, suddenly cried out once, and that was the only time. It is many years now and, not having tried to replace her, we still miss her. Ironically, a block away a woman has a mutt, not exactly the same origins as ours, and male, who looks remarkably like Edna. This is a male, but it is rather unfriendly. I had thought of attempting to buy the dog, which fits in our house after all, but his attitude, despite the close-to-mirror image, makes him undesirable.

It is nice to see a photo of a very young Bert Chandler, whom I met once, and never forgot.

(30 January 1996)

\* Bert was very much part of the local scene until he died, especially after he retired from being a ship's captain. *Kelly Country*, one of his best novels, was only published in

Australia. Thanks to Kodak's new FlashPix system (photos on CD-ROM) I can now publish a greater number of photos of Fans and Writers As They Were. For instance, the photo above, from Syncon II, 1972, shows Bert Chandler, Ron Graham, and quite a few people who are still with us. \*

## Metaphysicists all

**RALPH ASHBROOK**  
**303 Tregaron Rd, Bala Cynwyd PA 19004 USA**

Thank you for the Metaphysical compendium. Your continued self-examination caused me to reexamine my view of your inspiration to me and (your printed letters attest) to many others. In a quantum model, some (meta)physicist has suggested that matter is created by the interference of time waves colliding. I see your publishing generating a form of creative wave that collides with your readers' movement through time, producing thought and written matter that would have been impossible without you. As the letters illustrate, your impact on everyone is different, but decided. If the soul resides in relationships, whatever you haven't been doing all these years, you have been nurturing your soul. Again thanks.

Loved the hundred lists. Where is the meta-list of names that appear on most lists? Have you run into Harold Bloom's *The Western Cannon* (or perhaps only *Canon*)? I bet he got the idea from you. I'm amazed at Robert Musil on your list. Not only is he a man without qualities. He is a man without books in any American bookstore or library. I exaggerate only slightly. I have

been on the lookout for anything by him (I have found a precious few articles and reviews) for about five years. Delighted to find G. K. Chesterton on a few lists. His non-fiction gets more fun every decade.

\* Since your letter, the new, expanded translation of *The Man Without Qualities* has appeared in both hardback and paperback. The hardback was published by Alfred A. Knopf at \$US60 (\$A110) for a two-volume slipcased set; 1774 pp.; ISBN 0-394-51052-6. About 600 pages of this was translated into English for the first time. The new translation is by Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike. The earlier translation, by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, was reissued in 1979 in hardback and paperback. It is a much better translation than the new one, but Eithne Wilkins died before the last 600 pages could be finished. If you can't find either translation in a bookstore, perhaps it is still available from AMAZON.COM. \*

Speaking of time waves, I am enclosing views of two recent movies that contribute to my favourite SF topic:

#### **NIXON (Stone) fragment**

Nixon's story has been called *A Christmas Carol* in reverse. He started out sweet and ends as Scrooge. I disagree. He is never allowed the innocence that most people lose but remember. His Devilish mother raised him in an atmosphere of perpetual adult anxiety. Standards were not too high, as he was confusedly told. They were wrong, as he deeply knew. Life is cruel — especially to the innocent. If you advance, it is by climbing over dead bodies.

Her ghoulish, aborted corruption of the message being broadcast from the Year Zero warped and crippled a drive and acuteness that could have delivered some sort of bounty at least to Nixon if not to the country and world. Nixon's recurring image of his haunted childhood eyes erase the myth of time. Nixon's one freedom was to be living all the moments of his life at once as they are, not to be fooled by the illusion of sequence. His prison was that not only time stood still for him, but so did his obsession with inadequacy. He surrounded himself with pragmatists — men who delighted in the ends justifying the means. His difference confounded them but attracted them. He was a warning to us all.

Stone deserves credit for creating Nixon as a wonderful man. He lived intensely and enormously. He was often criticised for smiling a little too late. But his secret was that no smile is too late or too early if you are still there.

#### **Terry Gilliam: Back to the future**

The disjointed atmosphere Gilliam creates in the final minutes of *The Holy Grail* (the Monty Python one, not the Fisher King one) anticipates the special anxiety he visits in *Twelve Monkeys*. Stowe, Willis and Pitt all experience other realities. Stowe's is the most 'explainable' (*déjà vu* all over again — surely lurking in Gilliam's mind from Monty Python sketches). In some ways they are all liberated by their release from consensus reality, but because there is no paradox in *Twelve Monkeys'* time travel, there is no real escape. The liberation is understanding and a kind of peace that goes with understanding (but doesn't 'passeth' it).

In addition to the time/place discomfort, Willis has the burden of handling repeated evidence that *he* is the cause of everything. Gilliam is saying that if you are caught in

some karmic loop, embrace the vanishing point as you logout and login. This might be a bland offering from a traditional film maker (and most reviewers seem to feel the film is better than the degree they liked it) but it takes on depth (might we say 'perspective?') when we see the part of the artistic spectrum Gilliam has emerged from.

A graphic artist deals with frozen images. For years Gilliam created collages that moved. They were caught in time, but moving through time. *Twelve Monkeys* abounds in striking images that seem both to be still and on a collision course: the beautiful out-of-kilter airport Stowe with the wrong-coloured dress and hair, the eyes of the young Willis, the actively crumbling futurepast. Gilliam is saying for all of us every day (the Ralph mark of a *real* movie or novel) that time is a puzzle. We experience it in pieces, we save and re-experience it, we shuffle it around. The result is life as understood by the Buddhists: often mistranslated as 'suffering', more correctly 'incomplete'. Time haunts us. You can't get away from it. I think Gilliam is saying: don't try to reduce it to one thing: appreciate the wonder of its guises.

(January 1996)

\* I agree with your thoughts about *Twelve Monkeys*. I'm still pretty dazzled by seeing it the first time; since I haven't seen it the (compulsory) second time, I don't have a 'view' of it yet. *Brazil* didn't come into focus for me until I saw it the second time, and I haven't seen *The Fisher King*. \*

### **Handwritten genre poetry**

---

\* In *TMR 24/25* I write a bit about Steve Sneyd's hand-written fanzine *Data Dump* and his other publishing activity. In reply: \*

#### **STEVE SNEYD**

**4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PD England**

*Data Dump* does not present alternative poetry, but specifically *genre* poetry, i.e. science fiction, fantasy, horror, etc. poetry. Publishing using handwritten masters is fairly common in the field of the 'other kind of fanzines' (such as music poetry fanzines). I think the idea was revived by Wainwright's walking guides to the British uplands, all handwritten texts, an idea that indie publishers hooked into.

I've used the idea for other publications, such as two little gazetteer-type books on castles and fortified sites in West and South Yorkshire. In transcribing complex factual data I find I make fewer mistakes handwriting than when keyboarding. I can constantly adjust the size of writing to fit the available space, which fits the accreting nature of the *Data Dump* lists. If I ever get around to a proper resource book of genre poetry, it will be typeset.

Talking of genre poetry, can I recommend Brian Aldiss's collection of poetry *At the Caligula Hotel* (Sinclair-Stevenson, London, May 1995), although it's a pity the book does not include the poetry from *Barefoot in the Head*, some of Aldiss's most interesting. There's not even an extract from *Pile*.

Perhaps still available is a book that Ned Brooks sent me, the Discon chapbook of Zelazny's poems, his first collection.

(13 January 1996)

\* I would also recommend *At the Caligula Hotel* (I hope to fit a short review somewhere in this issue). Bill Wright owns a copy of Zelazny's first collection of poetry, but I haven't seen a copy of Zelazny's last collection. (His second collection, *When Pussywillows Last in the Catyard Bloomed* is still available from Norstrilia Press at \$14.95 pb or \$24.95 hb.)

Steve publishes lots: in January 1996 he sent me notices for *Spaceman* (Dave Calder), *The Fantastic Muse* (Arthur C. Clarke), *The Seven Wonders of the Universe* (Mike Johnson) and *In Coils of Earthen Hold, The Devil's Logbooks, A Mile Beyond the Bus* and *Bad News from the Stars* (Steve Sneyd). No doubt there have been more since. \*

## More memories of Marie Maclean

**HAROLD MACLEAN**

**16 Wattle Valley Road, Canterbury VIC 3126**

Thank you enormously not only for your letter, which was among those sent after Marie's death which have been most welcome and heartening, but also for the copy of *The Metaphysical Review*, your own comments and the publication of her letter to you. I might add a few comments to what you wrote.

Indeed Marie frequently did give the impression of being younger than she was (actually she was sixty-six when she died), and was enormously amused when one of her correspondents on the Net told her that it was all very well for people like her who were under thirty to write as she did. She wrote back with glee to inform him that she was a grandmother. I should add to her remark about Derrida that I was so encouraged by his two letters to her that I wrote to inform him when she died and was both surprised and grateful to receive a cordial and appreciative letter in reply.

You were one of those people she regarded with particular affection, and I was always sorry that we never met. That was my fault; partly it was because at the time she was most involved with the Nova Mob I was having some problems of my own. As a matter of fact I always shared her interest in SF, though I would never claim to have had the same depth of knowledge or understanding as she had. But during the time she was teaching her SF course at Monash I took part at times and even conducted seminars for her on alternative worlds and Stanislaw Lem. (My own background was German Studies at Melbourne University till retirement and continuing involvement in Performance Studies at both undergraduate and postgraduate level from 1975, but especially since retirement.)

I am reading the issue of the journal with a lot of enjoyment. I knew Race Mathews had a side to him other than politics, but I was really pleased to find that he was one of the first to engage in SF. But I was able to relate personally most to your piece about Dinny O'Hearn. I knew him over a very long period, especially of course while he was Sub-Dean. I did once get invited to a St Patrick's Day at-home, and my chief memory was of the collapse of some enormous guy within two inches of my nose and toes. I thought I had reacted with great calm, but I guess I didn't measure up, because I was never invited again. I suppose I had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with him. On the one hand, I was labelled a WASP and, like you, neither an enthusiastic boozier nor a pub-goer. On the other hand, I was one of those who

helped set up the interdepartmental courses in the mid-seventies, and he was an enthusiastic supporter of the ID Drama Course (helping to save it on several occasions when the conservative forces wanted to abolish it). So, except for the not infrequent occasions when I managed to annoy him (and vice-versa), we got on very well.

I'm enclosing Mary's last article, 'The Heirs of Amphitryon'. I suppose you could call it a companion piece to *The Name of the Mother*. It appeared in November 1995 as a journal article (the offprints arrived only a few days ago), and it will appear again at the end of 1996 as one article in a book called *Fictions of Adultery*, published by Macmillan.

It's something which moves me very much, I have to confess. Quite apart from the fact I believe it to be one of her best essays, it was written during the time when her condition was slowly (then not so slowly) deteriorating. We talked about it a lot during those months, and it brings back a lot of memories. Those memories of the work we did together have been a big help over the past year.

(14 January 1996)

\* I wasn't able to attend the memorial celebration for Marie's life and work that was held later in 1996. Harold wrote to me in September to say that many of Marie's friends gathered in a deeply felt celebration. \*

## American Dream and Ayn Rand

**JERRY DAVIS**

**109 Seaview St,**

**Port Hueneme CA 93045-3330 USA**

### The American Dream

California has its beauty spots, but the state has no character, and neither do the residents. This is not to say that Appalachia is heaven (West Virginia, Almost Heaven — the state slogan). It isn't. People are really poor there, and must leave the mountain state to become low-paid workers and prostitutes in big cities such as Baltimore and Washington DC, places that are as crime-ridden as anywhere in the world.

The so-called American Dream is kaput. We went from 'the wretched refuse of your foreign shores' (Emma Lazarus) to middle class as we peaked out in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and it was all downhill from there. Part of it was abandoning our isolationism (no more kings, dukes and earls for us, except Duke Ellington) to wage competition with Indonesians.

I've written to my Queensland relatives that they are living in a fool's paradise, except, of course, that any economic disaster can be indefinitely postponed. California's main feature is that it is easy. They call New Orleans 'the Big Easy', but that's because anything goes there. California is the Big Easy. If you can't make it in the Golden State you can't hack it anywhere.

### Ayn Rand

I read all of Ayn Rand one summer, became fascinated, converted, and joined the Libertarian Party. I was in my early twenties — to me, now, that is young. I'd already been in a war, married, and had children but I took to her creed like a duck takes to water. I loved it. I guess I still do love it, but maybe it is like science fiction — it only works up to a certain age for many; they either outgrow it or it

outgrows them by becoming too literary and/or too cerebral. On the other hand, I've spent a lot of my working life around academics, and most of them can't write their way out of a paper bag. There are exceptions: Harry Turtledove, Vernor Vinge, and others do teach for their monthly pay cheque and moonlight as writers.

(28 February 1986)

\* I was so bowled over by reading *Atlas Shrugged* at the age of sixteen that I began to think for myself. As a result of this dreadful process, within a year I had taken a political position exactly the opposite of Rand's. The worldwide political changes during the last twenty years, dictated by a very Randian bent of mind, have pushed me even further to the left. \*

## George Turner's last letter?

\* The last time we saw George Turner was at my fiftieth birthday party in February 1997. We exchanged a few notes after this, and he sent me the letter of comment that appears in 'More Books We Really Read'. This was George Turner's last letter to Elaine and me. \*

### GEORGE TURNER Ballarat VIC 3350.

Sorry I was unable to stay over for Nova Mob on Wednesday night, but my time has suddenly become not entirely my own. I have become involved in the production of a 'youth' magazine to be published in Ballarat and written by young folk and teenagers, to highlight their problems by writing about them to their own kind. I come in as a sort of literary godfather to teach up-and-coming genius how to present its articles in effective form and, presumably, to deal with problems of grammar and syntax. Life will be busy!

(early March? early April? 1997)

## Life after angina

### DAVE PIPER 7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6BZ England

At the end of July 1996 I had a couple of weeks off to decorate the back room and generally fart around (for the second week). So I spent all the first week decorating. On the Thursday of the second week, at 0050 hours in the P.M., feeling quite bored with doing the decorating, decided I'd have (what I thought was) a heart attack! Pains in the chest, indigestion feeling in the throat, ache in left arm, etc. Cath called an ambulance, and within ten minutes I ended up on oxygen on the way to hospital.

To cut a long, boring story short — I hadn't had a heart attack but was, and am, suffering from angina.

At present I'm on medicinal compounds to clear it up, if possible. Otherwise it's angioplasty (balloon up artery to press the gunk against the vein wall) or, as a final effort, a bypass. That I'm not looking forward to . . . hope it won't be necessary.

I'm off work at present, and have just about decided to apply for early retirement (medical grounds).

I also have a cholesterol problem and a potassium deficiency (I didn't know I had potassium, let alone a deficiency!) which we're also trying to sort out/stabilise.

All in all, not such a good report, I fear. I trust that next time I drop you a line things will be better. Good job I packed up smoking in February.

(1 October 1996)

To continue the story . . . I was thrown out of the hospital ('Get out, yer National 'Elf malingering layabout,' they cried) with innumerable pills and put on the list for a stress test as a preliminary to (possible) further treatment. That was in August.

After several appointments I got a date for the stress test . . . early December.

Had it, then had to wait several weeks for an appointment to learn the result. Result was an appointment, in June 1997, at Hatfield Hospital to undergo an angiogram (exploratory operation, through a main artery in my groin, to ascertain seriousness, and number of the blockage(s) in my veins) which, in the event, showed that the main artery coming away from my heart was blocked and an operation would be needed.

All this time I had been on medication (some to keep the blood thin and flowing which, apart from any other effects, had resulted in me feeling very cold, especially in the winter months) and was severely on the physical side of life (the London Marathon was *out* . . . but then, the London Marathon was never *in*, come to think of it!)

The worry I had was that during the course of the angioplasty (where they put a balloon up the artery, inflate it, and try to push the gunk causing the blockage against the wall of the vein, thus enabling the blood to flow) it may prove necessary for them to carry out a bypass. (I'll leave that to your imagination.)

In October I duly went into hospital for the angioplasty. It was found necessary to put a 'stent' (a small metal spring-like device) into the artery (which remains in there) as the blockage was quite severe and the operation took twice as long as forecast (which caused Cath considerable worry) but Bobs yer uncle, and fingers crossed, all now seems well. I have no pains, blood seems to be flowing OK, and I hope to be taken off the medication when I go back for a (final?) checkup in January 1998.

Luckily I had packed up smoking (after circa 43 years and zillions of Camels) at 1130 hours on 15 February 1996 (to try to get my youngest daughter to do the same . . . unsuccessfully, I'm afraid) as smoking, with angina, is a big no-no.

I haven't had a drink (alcoholic) since 7 August 1996.

I eat lots of salads and fruit.

Colour me just a boring old fart!!!

Cath's fine (which is a miracle in itself, given the worry she's been under), the Girls have moved out, so it's Darby and Joan at Chez Piper, and I'm retiring in February 1999.

(December 1997)

\* That was a round-robin letter that Dave and Cath sent to all wellwishers late last year, but I'm a bit worried that I haven't had a hand-written note from Dave since 1996. Dave was just about *SFC's* first subscriber (Peter Darling was the first) way back in 1969. Best wishes, Dave; I need all you First-Generation *SFC* Readers to stick around. \*



## The voice of TMR

---

ED MESKYS

RR2, Box 63, Center Harbor NH 03226-9708 USA

E-mail: [edmund.meskys@gsel.org](mailto:edmund.meskys@gsel.org)

[http://www.conknet.com/~b\\_thurston/entropy](http://www.conknet.com/~b_thurston/entropy)

I've just finished reading the December 1995 *Metaphysical Review*, and found much of interest. I sent it to a volunteer taping agency, which used to have a four-month turnaround, but they have run into trouble. I sent 24/25 out on 2 March and got the tapes back on 23 December. I gave higher priority to the newer ish since the LoC would be of greater relevance. I sent out 22/23 on 30 April. (I was allowed to send three items a month, and shipped bundles around the first of the month. Now they have cut back to one item every second month, and the turnaround is over one year, so I am sending only books and not fanzines.) Lord knows when I will get the other back.

The agency is at a prison in California, and the 'clients' do the volunteer reading. I have sent them stuff such as the Willis *Warhoon 28*, proceedings of the Centenary Tolkien Conference in England, several fanthologies, *Habakkuks*, *Mimosas*, and several anthologies of Terry Carr's stuff, as well as a lot of other stuff over the years. I always wondered what they thought of the faanish stuff.

I now have a scanner on my talking computer and am reading some small fanzines (*Erg*, *Twink*) with it. There are many errors. For instance, I could understand none of the article on Doc Savage in *Erg* 130. Usually I can get the gist of the material, though sometimes I have to review a line of text one character at a time. NESFA, Ned Brooks and the N3F send me fanzines on ASCII disk, which is wonderful. Two readers still do fanzines for me a total of three hours a week, but I use them mostly for *Locus*, *Headlights* (an electric railroad fanzine) and *File 770*.

I read the lists of 100 Favourites with interest. Some I have never read, some I didn't care for, but some I loved. Favourite writers I didn't find are Madeleine L'Engle (not her 'Wrinkle' trilogy but her series about Vickie Austen and about Polly, and some of her mainstream novels), Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels, Charlotte McLeod's series of funny crime stories about Professor Peter Shandy, Robert L. Forward, Feintuch, whoever wrote *Sorcery and Cecilia*, C. S. Lewis for his non-fiction, James Blish, Diane Duane, Diana Wynne Jones, L. Sprague de Camp (also the de Camp/Pratt collaborations), Brin, Hogan, Benford, Hubbard for his SF and fantasy from the 1940s, whoever wrote *Merlin's Mistake* and *The Testing of Tertius*, Jane Langton for her 'Diamond in the Window' series, Andre Norton, Philip K. Dick, Edmond Hamilton (his *The Star Kings* blew me away when I was in high school), Spider Robinson, Diane Gabaldon, K. M. Briggs (she wrote only two novels, and I read only one, *Hobberty Dick*) and Terry Pratchett. I'm doing this off the top of my head and am sure I missed some. I didn't take notes, and it is too difficult to search back and forth on the cassette hunting for a particular name.

I doubt I will ever visit Australia or you. Trans-Pacific flights are just too expensive. While my wife loves to travel in the British Isles she has no interest in seeing Australia. So it looks as if we will miss the '99 Worldcon.

On the Web and computerised fanzines: I read Langford's newszine by e-mail. It comes into my

electronic mailbox every month and I listen to it on my talking computer.

(30 January 1997)

\* It should be easy to send this issue in ASCII to you, Ed. I can't have TMR listeners waiting ten months to soak up all this fabulous stuff. \*

## Fandom, books and life

---

IRWIN HIRSH

26 Jessamine Ave, East Prahran VIC 3181

Thanks for TMR 22/23 and 24/25. Next time you are sending us this much paper, don't pop the thing in the post; hop on a tram and deliver the one-fifth ream in person. A tram ticket would be cheaper than the postage, surely?

Did I really say that it is difficult to get Australians to write LoCs to Australian fanzines? Just like that? I'm amazed. It doesn't sound like me, since it's been a long, long time since I've believed such a thing in such general terms. These days I'm more likely to look at a specific fanzine and discuss why it does or doesn't get a lot of LoCs from Aussies. (I've also noticed that when someone generalises that Australians won't write LoCs the statement-maker is likely to be someone who isn't actually a productive LoCwriter . . .)

It is not exactly correct for Terry Frost to say that I told him many times how and why I voted in the 1994 Ditmars. What happened was that I told other people how and why I voted, and the times when I did such telling was when Terry just happened, by mere coincidence, to be in hearing range. I am pleased to see that Marc Ortlieb, at the awards ceremony, and Terry, in his ceremony-report, gave wide publicity to my vote.

All this lists of 100 authors for a desert island are interesting, with perhaps the most interesting comparison being that you listed 'Dave Langford' while Yvonne Rousseau listed 'David Langford'. I'm unlikely to actually sit down and construct a similar list, but I have been letting my mind wander in the general direction of how I'd go about making selections. I lean the way that you and Peter Nicholls hinted at: stuff that evokes particular emotions and memories. So I'm likely to select the Pauline Kael book that contains her review of Robert Altman's *Nashville*, a particularly fine review of one of my favourite films. Similarly I'm likely to select Ross Fitzgerald and Ken Spillman's anthology *The Greatest Game*, because it has good writing which prompts memories of good football matches and footballers.

I don't keep lists of books read, films seen or music bought, so I'm not in any position to contribute my own best lists. And besides, I doubt I saw more than five films or bought five CDs in 1995. Did I first see *The Wrong Trousers* in 1995? If so, it would be my favourite film seen in the year. And I'm pretty sure we bought *The Beach Boys' Pet Sounds* on New Year's Day 1995, and that would be my favourite new music for the year. Certainly, two out of every three times I listen to music *Pet Sounds* would be one of the albums I send through the speakers.

It seems we discovered Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine at about the same time, though you've delved deeper into her work than I. You don't say how you were introduced to her, but my introduction came via a three-hour TV



adaptation of *A Fatal Inversion*. The day after watching the show's conclusion I was searching the shelves at the local library. Unfortunately I read the book far too closely in time to watching the TV series, as the latter was a very close adaptation, but I liked what I read and went on to read one of her Inspector Wexford books. I was part way through another Wexford when I decided I couldn't be bothered with them for much the same reasons as you give. At that point I decided that Rendell uses one name for writing the Wexford books, and the other name for 'good' books. Thank you for correcting me on this, as I now have another slab of her books to read. I just have to remember to flick through each book, and if I see the word 'Wexford' return the book to the shelf. (I've since seen TV adaptations of *Gallowglass* and *A Dark-Adapted Eye*. I recommend the latter, but I hesitate to recommend *Gallowglass*. The performances weren't particularly strong, so it was hard to get into the characters. I much preferred the book.)

\* It's hard to reconstruct how I discovered Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine. Her books were often compared by reviewers to those of P. D. James. That's mainly incorrect, but James did write one very Vine-ish book, *Innocent Blood*. I read that, then read Rendell's *Talking to Strange Men*, which I still think is a highly original mystery novel. I read several Barbara Vine novels, then came back to Ruth Rendell when I realised that there were two Rendell styles. Now I read all the Vine and Rendell novels as they appear, even the Wexford books. \*

In regard to your response to Walt Willis's letter: NESFA Press is selling copies of *Warhoon 28* — or were in June 1994: US\$30, plus \$4 postage, from Box 809, Framingham MA 01701-0203, USA. The standard credit cards were acceptable.

I'm glad Mae Strelkov mentioned that there were/are two staircases in the Gilliland home. Over the past few years Wendy and I have noticed that many of the homes in US sitcoms have two staircases, one from the living room and one from the kitchen at the other end of the House. I was quite intrigued by this fashion in set design, but now I find that there is actually some substance to it all.

I enjoyed all three trip reports, and I think it was a good editorial decision to place the most 'different' report in the middle. On the other hand I'm not sure about the editorial decision that allowed Doug Barbour to get away with calling one marsupial a 'koala bear'. My favourite report is Wal Robinson's, probably because I've travelled up the Birdsville Track and been refused a drink at the Birdsville Hotel. (You can't travel down the Birdsville Track. From the Birdsvillians' perspective, looking south, the track is called the Marree Track. Though this may just be my memory playing tricks with me. I was eleven when the journey and refused drink occurred.)

I can match your knowing someone whose statue has been put up in Brunswick Street, and maybe even raise it: There is a statue in the National Gallery of Victoria of the chap who was the MC at Wendy's and my wedding reception, though I don't think that his being a sculptor's model was a reward for his contribution to our big day. As it happens, we bumped into Mark — the model — during a recent visit to the NGV. He told us that every time he walked past a member of the gallery staff he would look at him or her out of the corner of his eye, waiting to see if the

gallery attendant made the connection between him and one of the Gallery's more popular exhibits.

(19 June 1996)

## Peter Beagle and Gore Vidal

E. D. WEBBER

PO Box 1059, Dee Why NSW 2099

In a sense, I have the ultimate secular fellowship. I'm a disabled pensioner with MS, though I don't recommend the disease as a means towards social stability. From a writer's point of view, as opposed to the ostensibly literate public's, a willy-nilly ability to lose syntax the way other people lose their house keys can be a bit of a worry. I used to be able to work very fast.

My Peter Beagle study, 'Flying Under their Radar', is tentatively done. I suppose it's a companion piece to my Kesey study, and I really am sorry to see that Ken didn't keep on the bounce as well as I thought he could. Logic tells me I should now round out the Stanford '59 trilogy with something on Larry McMurtry, but *Lonesome Dove* notwithstanding, I really think *The Last Picture Show* was the last picture show, and I'd be sorely tempted to call my critical study of McMurtry 'Beating a Dead Horse'.

Not that much of the above answers your question of how I wound up in Dee Why, any more than the fact of my wife having been born and raised a few blocks away does. On the surface, it immediately had to do with the divorce in 'The Snow Goose Cookbook', which is not a cookbook at all, but I think it had to do with Rod Serling's 'divine dissatisfaction', which propelled me to Lake Tahoe to begin with. Strange town: America's year-round playground, and if *Northern Exposure* hadn't been set in Alaska it could have been done at Tahoe without changing a character. Well, we didn't have the moose but we did have our share of bears on the run from Yosemite.

I suppose it all has to do with seeking viable alternatives, and I'm not sorry about the move at all. In fact, I and my local bookseller, who went to Princeton and survived, are probably the northern beach's resident anti-Americans. Our MP thinks so, anyway. The thing I remember most about when I first landed in Sydney in 1977 was feeling like I'd wandered into a scene from *The Odyssey* (my all-time favourite novel, as well it should be, as it is the archetypal novel of the Western world) wherein everybody comes from someplace else. Yep, that makes me a multiculturalist, albeit with the track record and language to prove it. Not being one to flag-wave at all, Australia's proven itself to be a very viable alternative. The Americanisation of the place is a bit of a worry, though. To the best of my literary recollection, Aunt Sally didn't follow Huck when he lit out for the territory. Then again, she'd probably never understand Cavafy's Ithaka anyway.

(9 September 1996)

Recent literary events: First we had a Pom posing as a Ukrainian, then a white woman doing Aboriginal paintings, then a white male winning a prize as a black woman, and shock, horror, cry the nation's doyens, not to mention keepers of the gates and judges for the prizes. It's supposed to be the work judged and not the worker. I'd say it's pretty funny were it not for the fact of the work being overlooked and personality placed supreme, and it's kinda sad. It's all not very good criticism, methinks.

What would the Americans have said, peradventure, had it been known that Frank Yerby, bestselling writer of antebellum southern romances, was a black guy who collected his royalty cheques in Paris?

I personally like the radical view of Peter S. Beagle, who figures, after the third beer anyway, that all writing is fantasy anyway, that as soon as we begin putting events on paper we begin to lie about them and that it makes no difference if we try on the skin of a dragon or a bank teller. Maybe a fantasy writer such as Beagle would say something like that, save that I don't think Pete's entirely a fantasy writer. I don't think I am, and I do agree with his view of the writing game. I think it was Chekhov who said art is a lie, thereby implying that by telling a lie we arrive at a greater truth than previously afforded us. That's another way of stating Kesey's line 'It's the truth even if it didn't happen', save that he lifted it from the Italian. Luke Slattery's discussion of literary hoaxes in *The Oz's Review of Books* was on the right track by speaking of the writer as a discoverer. It beats the *NY Times'* masthead of 'All the news that's fit to print'. It still comes down to the mixing of raw materials and techniques.

I just wanted to get that off my chest.

The high point of Sydney's literary year should have been when Gore Vidal descended from Olympus to impart his wit and wisdom to we colonials. Considering the famous faces in attendance, it had the makings of one hell of a graduate seminar come question time. Unfortunately, Bob and Gough Productions put paid to that idea, and the evening turned into a bunch of undergrads asking stock questions to gain a good mark for speaking up in class. Maybe Dylan Thomas was right with his shot about a writer being finished as soon as he becomes a man of letters, but Vidal appeared to me to be his condescendingly bitchy self (I voted for him when he ran for the US Senate, by the way) and the dullness of the evening seemed to me to have been something the audience brought in with them. They were there to pay homage to an ikon, and an Australian question from me with my accent would have definitely strayed it from its appointed rounds. Interestingly enough, I was there with Leo Schofield, and we agreed that the mainstream press would pan it, which it did, save for Bob Ellis's name-dropping exercise in *The Oz* as month after the fact.  
(24 April 1997)

\* *'The Oz'* is *The Australian*, Australia's only national daily newspaper.

The Gore Vidal presentation in Sydney took the form of an interview by Ramona Koval, followed by Question Time, which was broadcast on the ABC's Radio National network. I thought it was highly entertaining, especially Vidal's claim that it was the Mafia who got rid of his good friend Jack Kennedy. Vidal did not say how, but he did say why.

A short version of E. D. Webber's study of Peter Beagle is scheduled to appear in the next issue of *SF Commentary*, when I can find the money to publish it. \*

## British fanzines: impossible to 'cover the field'?

MARK PLUMMER

14 Northway Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE, England

I received *Apparatchik* No. 74, 14 February 1997, yesterday, and reading 'The Great Australian Barbecue' by Christina Lake I came across a description of Perry Middlemiss's New Year barbecue where Christina met various people 'including Bruce Gillespie (who immediately put me at my ease with his air of affable gloom: "No-one in Britain is sending me fanzines anymore!" he declared'.

This allows for several interpretations:

- What you actually meant to say was 'No-one in Britain is sending me fanzines anymore . . . well, except for the people who are, like Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer.'
- What you actually did say was 'No-one in Britain is sending me fanzines anymore . . . well, except for the people who are, like Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer', and that Christina is actually misrepresenting you, or summarising, or something.
- Fanzines from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer don't count.
- We are being vacuous — or rather, I am being vacuous, seeing as how I maintain the mailing list — and sending your copies (the most recent of which was consigned to the post yesterday, before I'd read the *Appak*) to some incorrect address, thus confusing some poor non-fan who's wondering why these two Brits keep sending him these duplicated bundles of paper which wobble on about everything and nothing.

Hey, Bruce, we still love you, honest we do; we send you stuff even if nobody else in the UK does. The question is, are you actually getting it or are we . . . sorry, am I doing something horribly wrong causing your copies to disappear somewhere in the international postal system?

(3 March 1997)

Thanks for your letter. I didn't mean to give the impression that it was really *urgent* or anything. It's just that I'm constantly paranoid that I'm sending copies to wrong addresses, especially the overseas copies, so when I see comments like yours about not receiving any British fanzines I worry some more. Yes, I guessed that the quote attributed to you probably wasn't being reported exactly, but it sort of gave me an excuse to enquire.

Don't worry, you're not missing out on a whole wave of non-apa fanzines from other Acnestis members. Aside from the Kincaid/Speller household and us — and *Ansible*, of course — there really aren't that many. Kevin does something very occasionally, but he put the last one through the apa anyway. Dop does do stuff, and fairly regularly, but his distribution is always appalling, relying largely on handing stuff out at conventions and pub meetings; I doubt that any copies find their way outside the UK. Jenny Glover used to produce a fair number of fanzines but she hasn't done anything for about eighteen months; others have been silent for longer, if indeed they were ever interested at all.

I take your point about how people used to send a copy to 'everyone in the field', but surely the field is a hell of a lot bigger these days. Also, the impression I get is that

postage costs are (relatively) a lot higher. We use air mail, mainly because surface mail takes so long, and to our way of thinking isn't a viable option for a fanzine that comes out (roughly) quarterly. However, that's costing us the best part of two pounds an issue for Australia. Our Australian mailing list consists of seven addresses: yourself and Yvonne (who we know from *Acnestis*), Ian Gunn and Karen Pender-Gunn (who we've known for years — we met Ian when he was over here ten years or so back), Ron Clarke and Irwin Hirsh (Greg Pickersgill's Recommended Australians), Kim Huett (who we met at *Attitude*) and John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland (whose address I happened to find on the Internet). Oh, and there was Christina Lake as well, of course, but she was only 'passing through'. John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland are the only ones from whom we've heard nothing, so I guess they'll get dropped on the next issue. Maybe there are other people we should be trying — we got some stuff from Perry Middlemiss the other day so a copy of *Banana Wings* has just gone winging his way — but I'm conscious of the distribution costs mounting up and also the limits of how many copies we can realistically duplicate over one weekend in Folkestone. Sure, there are alternatives, but I think you've mentioned before how much money you spend doing *TMR* and sorry, but I don't love doing this *that much* . . .

In fact, thinking on it some more, how many fanzines do in fact reach everyone on the field? I would have guessed that, aside from *Ansible*, which gets massive distribution through the Internet on top of the paper copies, *Attitude* is probably the UK fanzine with the largest circulation, and I would have said that if anything was 'reaching everybody in the field', this was it. Obviously not so.

\* Very much not so. I've never seen a copy of *Attitude*. Fortunately I do see every issue of *Banana Wings*, BSFA Award-winning fanzine, as well as Maureen's *Snuffin's Bum*. I still see a few other British fanzines: *Vector*, *Matrix* and *Focus*, because I'm currently a member of the BSFA, Joseph and Judith's *FTT*, Steve Sneyd's publications, Eve Harvey's *Wallbanger*, Christina Lake's adventures, *Plotka*, Terry Jeeves's *Erg*, Dave Langford's *Ansible*, and very little else. David Pringle sends me *Interzone*, which is not a fanzine, but is very accessible. \*

I don't think it's really the case that UK editors rely entirely or even largely on convention distribution; there are exceptions, such as *Dop* as mentioned earlier, but if anything there are plenty of people who deliberately eschew the hand-delivery approach. *Attitude*, for instance, moved away from convention distribution about eighteen months ago, even though most of their issues still seem to appear at the same time as major conventions. At Novacon in 1995 the place was swamped with fanzines — twenty or thirty from a 300-person convention, and one that didn't have a specific fanzine focus at that — and I think that many people noticed the lack of response this garnered. In 1996 Novacon's output was down to four, but with about half a dozen titles produced in the preceding three weeks and mailed out before the convention. Most of these were from people who were going to be at Novacon anyway but who elected to mail the stuff out in advance. (One fanzine arrived from Scotland on the Friday morning before I went to Birmingham. I saw the woman who'd sent it in the bar less than twelve hours after it arrived.) Why did they do it? Maybe it was to get a better

response rate. Maybe they didn't want people to think they were touting for a Nova (something which didn't occur to me until a couple of people suggested that was what we were doing). I guess we'll stick to convention distribution as an adjunct to mail whenever we can, simply because it can save us anything up to about £30. If we do indeed produce an issue in the Summer, as we intend at present, this will be our first that will be totally distributed by post; it'll be interesting to see what difference this makes.

(13 May 1997)

## Violence in the home

---

ELIZABETH BILLINGER

1 Long Row Close, Everdon, Daventry,  
Northants NN11 3BE, England

The *Vectors* are on their way to you, and since they've been in transit since June, you should be getting them soon, I hope. The package contains all the ones you wanted (which are still available) plus everything else that was lurking in Maureen's cellar. We still haven't worked out a cost for the ones you did want, but the ones you didn't ask for are free of charge. Hope that you enjoy them.

Hope that they cheer you up a little after the burglary trauma. We have never been burgled, but we were attacked by our next-door neighbour on Christmas Day 1995. They were very drunk next door and making lots of noise (really excessive noise that had been wearing us down all day), so Paul went round to politely ask them to turn the music down. They did, but moments later the man of the house came round, put his fist through the glass in our front door, and then when Paul opened the door, pushed him around and threatened to kill him. I was shocked and very frightened — I can watch any amount of fictional violence, and even enjoy it, but the real thing is something I've rarely had to deal with. I think the impact on us both was similar to burglary, because it happened in our own home. Paul was depressed for a while — something he's never been before or since — and I kept having nightmares about the house being besieged and the two of us being attacked and beaten. After that our house never really felt quite the same. For the first few weeks I didn't want to be in the house, but Paul couldn't bear to leave it. It did wear off, but we continued for many months to lock the front door and draw the curtain across it in the evening. At least we didn't have to cope, at the same time, with the loss of things that were important to us.

(20 August 1997)

## I must get organised!

---

ROSLYN KOPEL GROSS

42 Gardenia Rd, North Balwyn VIC 3104

Your letter was the first I'd heard of George Turner's death. That, and the news of your friend's serious illness, must be difficult to digest. I've had times (in fact, nearly every year until this one) in which everything seems to go wrong, one thing after another, so I have an idea of what it's like, and can sympathise with you.

You mentioned the Net. We're lucky enough to be connected (through Abe's work, because he does a lot of work from home) and it's both a great pleasure and a bane in my life. It's so addictive and interesting that it's taking up far too much of my time and energy. I'm on two mailing lists (interest groups) for readers and writers of SF/fantasy, and lots of writers have their own pages/Web sites — there is so much information out there (as well as a lot of rubbish, of course).

Apart from the fact that my life is as disorganised as usual, and I still have no regular source of income, things have settled down a little this year for us. Although Abe still has his chronic illness, new medication has prevented the worst symptoms, so a more 'normal' life is possible; and fortunately, he has had no more trouble with his heart.

I'm in the throes of trying to get back into teaching — probably just emergency teaching — simply because I absolutely must have some income and there doesn't seem to be anything else. I've also been trying to put together a book about my father's experiences as a boy during the Holocaust, as well as trying to jump-start some creative writing. That's apart from the stresses of two children, writing book reviews (regularly but very slowly) for the *Australian Jewish News*, and all the chauffeuring and work that running a household involves. I only wish I could get *organised*!

(8 October 1997)

## We also heard from . . .

**TERRY JEEVES**, who was suffering a fair number of health problems in early 1996, but has been able to produce some issues of *Erg* since then. He disagreed with Race Mathews' choice of nostalgia items from the 1930s: 'jibbed a bit at the idea of mentioning the ghastly comics *Chick's Own* and *Rainbow* (anaemic, mentally retarded pablum), not a patch on the American funnies such as *Li'l Abner*, *Gasoline Alley*, *Captain and the Kids*, etc. . . . [Race's article was] a nice parallel to my own 'Down Memory Park Lane', a 200-page epic in search of a publisher'.

In 1995 **JOHN FOYSTER** was seeking material for a Timebinders Web page about fandom in the 1960s from an Australian viewpoint. Since I was frantically busy when I received John's letter I was no help at the time, and John has been busy since then as well. Material should be sent to John at PO Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000.

Thanks very much, John, for sending me the eulogy from your father's funeral.

I'm not sure whether or not **TOM WHALEN** is in New Orleans or in Stuttgart, since he seems to commute between universities in either city. He seems very busy, producing a wide range of books of experimental and speculative fiction.

In 1995 **TERRY GREEN** sent me a copy of his very enjoyable novel *Shadow of Ashland*, but my review has until now appeared nowhere but in my apazines.

From time to time I've kept in touch with **DAVID SEED** from the University of Liverpool and **ROBIN BLOXSIDGE** of the University's Press, but nothing has come of the proposed *Best of SF Commentary*. An article about Cordwainer Smith by David is scheduled to appear in *SFC* when I can raise the money to publish it.

I have exchanged many many letters and cards with **YVONNE ROUSSEAU**, but none can be described exactly as a letter of comment to the most recent issues of *TMR*.

(She has sent some letters about various apazines, though.) Yvonne did me one great favour when she introduced me to Acnestis, the British apa for People Who (Still) Read. Then she dropped out, leaving me as the sole non-British member. Yvonne's letters are filled with information unobtainable elsewhere, such as the fact that Jack London bought the plot of his last, unfinished novel *The Assassination Bureau* from Sinclair Lewis for \$52.50. London did not finish the book, which was completed by Robert L. Fish in 1963.

Thanks also, Yvonne, for sending me the obituary for your mother Annie Jessie Rousseau.

In another letter, among many gems of observation not particularly linked to *TMR*, she refers to some future *TMR* when she writes about Bloom's *The Western Canon*: 'I found him excellent upon what he admires, although rather silly upon the "School of Resentment"; and I was pleased that he recommended Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* in his Appendix-D list.'

**WAL ROBINSON**'s article about travelling up the Birdsville Track by MG gained quite a bit of comment from *TMR* letter-writers. Wal sent me a later article about a trip that he and friends made in MGs to Alice Springs and Uluru.

**JOYCE SCRIVNER** sends me her annual round-robin letter, and now I can talk to her by Internet.

**LANGLEY SEARLES** and I nearly got out of contact because I put the wrong postcode on the Keele Street address in one recent issue. Langley got back in touch via Graham Stone, who had my GPO Box number. I received two *Fantasy Commentators* in early 1996, but nothing since. Langley just might be waiting for a stray fanzine in return.

**EVA WINDISCH** is still publishing *Tirra Lirra* far more frequently than I publish any of my magazines. Inquiries to PO Box 305, Mt Evelyn VIC 3796.

I've had several letters from **LEE HARDING**, who has had his difficulties over the last two years (see the first few pages of this column). His best news is that in 1997 he published *Heartsease*, his first novel since the early 1980s, and is writing his next book.

I've had several letters from **GREG EGAN**, who describes his novels as 'thought experiments'. His description of *Diaspora*, before it was published, made it sound pretty formidable, but those who've read it are bowled over by it. Me? At the moment I cannot allow myself to read anything but Young Adult SF and Fantasy (because I'm a judge in that category for next year's Aurealis Awards) or works by Joanna Russ (because I'm scheduled to give a talk on them at November's meeting of the Nova Mob). Meanwhile, Elaine is reading lots of Greg Egan works for *her* talk to the August Nova Mob.

**ADRIENNE LOSIN** sends lots of letters and cards, each usually from a different part of Australia from the previous one. She reminded me yet again that SF fandom and folk music fandom have lots of similarities in Australia: 'I met your sister Jeanette at the Daylesford Singers and Songwriters Festival [in January 1996] — she wrote her first original songs at Bruce Watson's songwriting workshops. Ask her about her "Photocopy Copy" song.' I hardly see my sister often enough to hear her sing, let alone ask her about her songs, Adrienne. I must remember to do that soon.

**JOHN D. BERRY** writes that 'of course we're still interested!' but I might be able to break through the 'wall of inertia' by sending an e-mail. Any month now. John and his partner Eileen Gunn have just moved back to New York (507 11th St, Apt 2, Brooklyn NY 11215) from Seattle.

**SARAH ENDACOTT** wrote to say that she was not earning money enough to pay for a subscription. You miss the point, Sarah: it's letters of comment I crave. Money is just the stuff that's needed to pay the printer and Australia Post.

I'd say the same to **GEOFFREY FARMER** from Tasmania, who can't see his way clear to continuing his subscription. Letters of comment will do.

**MERV BINNS** was very interested in Race's article about the history of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. In 1995 he wrote some fan history for John Foyster's project but 'I never received a reply'. Earlier, Merv sent a card commemorating the life of his father, Ern Binns, who died in 1996.

**DAVID RUSSELL** specialises in sending subscriptions, encouraging letters and even more encouraging birthday presents. In 1996 he sent me four of my favourite movies on video; in 1997 he sent lots of coffee; and in 1998 he sent a whole run of *Cerebus*, his favourite comic. I enjoyed the movies (especially *Singing in the Rain*, whose Technicolor has been full restored), drank the coffee, but have not yet had time to read much of *Cerebus*, which is a long novel in graphics form. What can I send to David for his birthday? I have no idea, since he won't tell me his birthday.

**MURRAY MOORE** sent a good long letter of comment, than put DNQ on it. That's how I interpret his last sentence: 'How can I arrange with you to have my letter described in the next WAHF as were Jan Cregan's letters: "fascinating and brilliant letters, but she won't let me quote from them"'? Consider yourself fascinating and brilliant, Murray.

At the end of 1997, Murray sent a fanzine describing an extreme-cram high-technology course that he's currently undertaking. He's the Old Man of the IT class, but 'before I took the IT course, I had no idea that UNIX was a multi-user, multi-tasking, multi-threading operating system that is powerful, open and robust.' Your brain is a lot more flexible than mine, Murray.

**JOHN WEEKS** runs a weekly radio program about SF and fantasy, but I can't hear it because the aerial points the wrong way. If I lived in a deep-southern suburb such as Frankston, I could listen to *Spectrum* (3MDR, 97.1 FM) every week. John sent me a tape of my appearance on the show. He would very much like contributions of SF sound tapes, especially from past conventions: to 19 Bennett Avenue, Belgrave VIC 3160.

I've heard from **ANNETTE CARTER** every Christmas for the last ten years or more, but this Christmas, *nyet*. Maybe she's working overseas in 1998.

**WALT McLAUGHLIN** sent the article that appears here or in the next issue of *TMR*. Sorry to take so long to get back to you, Walt.

**ARTHUR D. HLAVATY**, venerable fanzine editor and staff member of *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, noted that he, his spouse Bernadette Bosky, Maureen Speller (who shares an apa with Bernadette and Elaine) and I share a common profession: 'Bernadette noticed that the job title we Americans render as "proofreader" is known in England as "proof-reader". Now we find an eminently literate Aussie source rendering it as "proof reader". I wonder what spelling is left for the Canadians: ProofReader?'

**WELLER** and I shared an apa for some years, but none of us can raise her by letter or e-mail. At one stage she was going to track down *Avengers* videotapes for me, but I'm not sure that would have worked, since Australian TV works on the PAL system. Perhaps I should try an English supplier of tapes. Meanwhile, does anybody in Pennsylvania have any

news of Weller?

**LORNA TOOLIS**, of the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, mourned the lack of *SF Commentary* since No. 73/74/75. Not half as much as I mourn it. It's already survived the death of two hard disks, but has not arranged a miracle that would transfer it to paper. Meanwhile, Murray Moore helped me send a contribution to the Merrill Collection, which is now at 239 College Street, Toronto Ontario M5T 1R5, Canada.

I hear from **DAMIEN BRODERICK** from time to time, these days by e-mail, but the only letter of comment I've received recently was about an article published in *Australian Book Review!*

**MIKE O'BRIEN** was amazed that I had never seen copies of *The Beano*, so he sent two copies. These two issues are dated 1996. I don't know whether they are reprints of old stuff, or a modern reincarnation. 'It has puzzled me that like many people I have been reading less and less as I grow older. Not that I've stopped *buying* books, of course; I've just switched over to rummaging through op shops and second-hand shops as less money has been available.'

**ROBERT DAY** sent a Christmas card of comment for 1996, but I didn't hear from him last Christmas. 'I've been busy with work, in these output-driven, efficiency-saving, cost-neutral times; with trade union activities, as writer and cartoonist in one of the union journals and as Executive Committee member and as negotiator over pay and grading (except our DG won't negotiate, so we're in dispute); with running a local model club which celebrated its twentieth anniversary; and with travel — a trip to Austria and a trip to Dresden.' He also listens to lots of Bach, but hasn't yet written the articles he promised me a few years ago. Don't worry, Robert; I haven't yet written most of the articles I've promised to write for myself over the last thirty years. For example, I would liked to have written that definitive study of the major works of John Brunner before he died. Now I suppose it will never happen.

**HENRY GASKO** sent a family round-robin letter at the end of 1996, but we didn't hear from him, Judy, Emily and Anne at the end of 1997. With the New Electrical Marvel of e-mail I 'wrote' to Henry, who said that things are much the same at their place, what with schooling children, battling mergers and restructures, and trying to survive in the late, great State of Victoria.

**TIM JONES** and **KAY GUBBINS** sent a nice little piece of his FFANZ report *Australian Crawl* which talks about the night they met William Gibson and (ahem) Elaine and me. We all enjoyed meeting Bill that night.

**LEE HARDING**, as I've already mentioned, has been attending the University of Ard Nox during the last year or so, but took time out to reply to my request for George Turner pieces that should be run in the planned volume of his non-fiction. 'The only item that comes to mind . . . is his autobiographical "addendum" *Off-Cuts*, written at the behest of Erik Harding and published as a chapbook for Swancon 86. I suspect this item had little circulation outside that gathering and it deserves a wider audience, especially since it fills in some of the gaps in George's early life.' **LUCY SUSSEX** and **GRANT STONE** both suggested the same book, with Lucy suggesting that *Off-Cuts* tells us a bit more about the 'real' George Turner than the whole of *In the Heart or in the Head*.

Lee also thanks me for my comments on his *Heartsease*, a shortish review that has only appeared so far only in an apazine: 'You're the only reviewer who appears to have read the book I wrote.' The more I read Young Adults fiction,

the more I appreciate what Lee achieves in *Heartsease*, which probably would have won the Australian Children's Book of the Year award if it had been SF or fantasy. (Yes, you read that right; Australian children's and young adult fiction is probably the only high-prestige literary field in which it is an advantage to write SF or fantasy.)

**CATH ORTLIEB**, on behalf of the **AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION FOUNDATION**, thanked me for my contribution to the issue of *The Instrumentality* about George Turner, and offers encouragement for the upcoming book of non-fiction.

**NORMAN TALBOT** has begun a project which echoes something I wanted to do twenty years ago, but for which I didn't have funds. **NIMROD PUBLICATIONS/BABEL HANDBOOKS** is a series of monographs by a wide range of critics about a wide range of SF writers. The range of critics is so wide that (grinding my teeth) I can only ask why I was not asked to be one of them. Okay, so I'm not David Lake (on Wells), Yvonne Rousseau (on Cherry Wilder), Norman Talbot (on William Morris), Rosaleen Love (on Michael Frayn), Sylvia Kelso (on Tepper), Cath Filmer-Davies (on Lewis), David Connell (on Moorcock) or Russell Blackford (on Damien Broderick). But I'm Bruce Gillespie (on Banks, Roberts, Stapledon, Wilhelm, Dick, Smith or almost anybody else I've written about during the last year or so; see the next *SFC* when and if it appears). Babel Handbooks are \$10 per copy; write for a catalogue to Norman Talbot at PO Box 170, New Lambton, NSW 2305.

**RACE MATHEWS** sent us a postcard from his and Iola's most recent overseas journey. It shows Stonehenge, which tourists now can't get near. The card bears an English stamp celebrating Enid Blyton's 'Secret Seven'.

**DAVID AND SUE GRIGG** sent their annual round-robin letter giving details of their move from the outer-suburb of Research to Kew, which is just across Yarra from us. (Then why did it take Elaine and me six months to arrange to visit them? We're not even as busy as they are.) CoA is 147 Eglinton St, Kew VIC 3101.

Various letters and e-mails have been sent to and arrived from **JEREMY BYRNE**, the one *Eidolon* editor I've been able to keep in touch with. We talked about costs of production, as producers of magazines will do, and found that *Eidolon* actually costs more to produce per word than *TMR* does. But *Eidolon* has about 100 more subscribers than my magazines have. During 1997 *Eidolon* did a special George Turner Issue, which might still be available (\$30 per annual subscription) from PO Box 225, North Perth WA 6006.

**RICHARD BRANDT** wrote asking for rights to publish a Web version of *Fanthology '87*, which contains 'Trains in the Distance', one of the two articles of mine that keeps travelling. He also sent me *The Least Horrible of Roy Tackett*, a collection he did when Tackett was Guest of Honour at the San Antonio Worldcon. This prompted me to wonder whether anybody wants to do 'The Least Horrible of Bruce Gillespie' for Aussiecon III, since I want to do the George Turner collection for the same convention. Then I thought: even I had not thought of doing a collection of my stuff. . . .

**JANICE MURRAY** sent a cat-picture card after she and **ALAN ROSENTHAL** visited Australia last September for their DUFF trip. 'Alan and I had a wonderful time. He loved talking about classical music and I really enjoyed playing in the garden. We both had a lot of fun looking at the photos of Torcon II and Syncon II. And the cats were wonderful! I wish I'd taken a picture of Oscar going all liquid on the sofa. What a love. He looks like an animated soft toy. And that purr! (I'm writing this with Odie on my lap. He looks like Sophie, acts like Oscar, and has the IQ of the garden plants.) Boy, these guys have a tough life.' Longtime readers will sympathise: 'Janice and Alan had to put up with *Gillespie's fan photos* yet again. And those cats!'

After many years I heard from **DAVID KING** (editor of *Dreamworks* for for Norstrilia Press and *Urban Fantasies* for Ebony Books) who sent me a short novel he's written. Somewhat to my surprise, David was enquiring about 1950s Australian-reprint Disney comics (especially *Uncle Scrooge*), the only comic books I've kept from my childhood; seems they are valuable to collectors. They are valuable in a different way to me: I don't think I could part with some of the best stories written and illustrated by Carl Barks. On the other hand, just how much are manic comics collectors paying these days?

**JOHN McPHARLIN** usually gets in touch, via **PERRY MIDDLEMISS**, when he's in Melbourne, and quite often we gather around a Sunday yum cha table in some Little Bourke Street Chinese restaurant and talk about music and other things. I gave John a duplicate P. J. Harvey CD, and he sent me a tape of a P. J. Harvey concert; who can top that? (I offered tapes of Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Victoria Williams, the Jayhawks, Fred Eaglesmith, and many other great 'No Depression' performers, but John didn't seem overjoyed.)

**CASEY JUNE WOLF** is still alive and busy. She sent me her very own fanzine, the newsletter of a pagan religious organisation. Although Casey edits it in Vancouver, the production is done in Tasmania. I didn't click with most of the contents, but I can recognise a true fanzine editor when I read one: the magazine was filled with letters of comment.

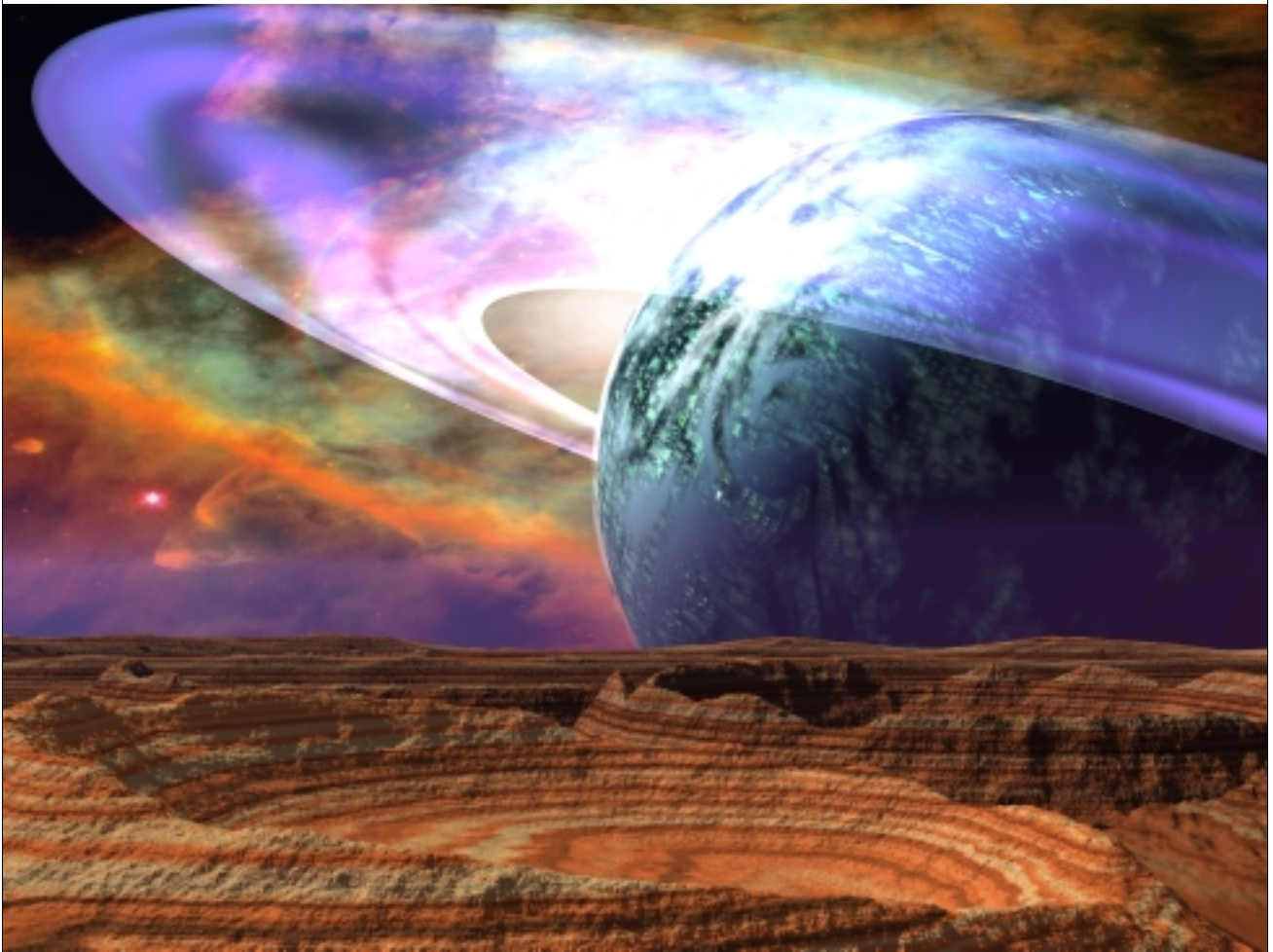
**GERALD AND CATHERINE MURNANE**, **EVA WINDISCH** ('O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'), **ELIZABETH AND PETER DARLING**, **DON AND MAX ASHBY** and **JOHN BANGSUND AND SALLY YEOLAND** were among many people who sent creative, brilliant and/or whimsical replies to my invitation to join me for my fiftieth birthday celebration. Apart from this letter column I still haven't replied adequately to some people, such as Gerald and Catherine and Elizabeth and Peter. Apologies. Of the people who couldn't turn up on the night, Don and Max had the best excuse: a new Ashby, Taliesin Alfred David.

Also received, but not able to be listed here, are vast numbers of fanzines. I keep meaning to start a fanzine review column (or even an acknowledgment list) but I never have room. Thank you, everybody.

— Bruce Gillespie, 10 June 1998

**Thus endeth the first part of this year's 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. It continueth in the next exciting issue, which might or might not occupy the same packet as this one.**





Graphic by Ditmar.

**You have just been enjoying or are about to enjoy the work of these contributors:**

**RALPH ASHBROOK  
DOUG BARBOUR  
JOHN BERRY  
ELIZABETH BILLINGER  
SYDNEY J. BOUNDS  
JENNIFER BRYCE  
CY CHAUVIN  
BUCK COULSON  
JAN CREGAN  
JERRY DAVIS  
DITMAR  
BRUCE GILLESPIE  
ROSLYN KOPEL GROSS**

**IRWIN HIRSH  
WENDY HIRSH  
GARY HOFF  
BEN INDICK  
RICK KENNETT  
DAVID J. LAKE  
JOHN LITCHEN  
WALT McLAUGHLIN  
HAROLD MACLEAN  
ED MESKYS  
JOSEPH NICHOLAS  
CATH ORTLIEB  
DAVE PIPER**

**MARK PLUMMER  
JOHN F. RAINEY  
ANDY SAWYER  
SKEL  
ALEX SKOVRON  
STEVE SNEYD  
MAUREEN KINCAID  
SPELLER  
GRAHAM STONE  
MAE STRELKOV  
GEORGE TURNER  
E. D. WEBBER**

**and many others.**