

## **I Know I Owed You A Letter or Card in 1997... here are my excuses.**

Towards Xmas 1996, I realised I'd failed to send anyone Xmas greetings, but figured I'd have a better year in 1997. Hubris gets you every time.

In December, a freak summer hail storm smashed all my skylights at home, and parts of the balconies, and some fanzines got water damaged. I discovered the wet carpets around 2 a.m. when I returned bleary eyed from a Xmas party. Took nearly two weeks before the roof was repaired. And in the course of the repairs, during the more vigorous thumping of hammers, a 7 metre long bookcase partially collapsed from the vibration, spraying books all over.

On 13th January my 83 year old mother suffered a cerebral haemorrhage, was taken to Nepean hospital, and operated on without success. She died without regaining consciousness on 17th January. The hospital could not give me any hope of any other outcome, after the first few hours. I found organising the funeral and everything very trying, but had a lot of support from Jean, at work, and from many friends and acquaintances of my mother.

My mother's home was crammed with the accumulation of a lifetime, and after repeated trips taking stuff to charity stores, and giving away everything in sight, it was still full. We did take my mother's cat Tinka home with us, where she settled in very well after a few days of being nervous. I've detailed that in *Gegenschein 77*.

I had organised a trip to the USA in mid February to attend Boskone in Boston, visit the Haldemans in Florida, visit friends in Cincinnati, and attend Potlatch in Seattle and Corflu in San Francisco. Jean encouraged me to go, rather than lose the money previously paid for airline tickets. Considering how little effect I seemed to be having on the contents of my mother's house, I decided that leaving was a good idea. It was too, and I had a good month. I've detailed that in *Gegenschein 79*.

While I was away, Jean disposed of more stuff from my mother's house. When I returned, I disposed of more every weekend... and it was still full. The constant work of getting rid of stuff made me determined to reduce the amount of needless clutter in my house, as soon as I could find time.

Martin left work in March, after ten years of looking after all the software. We had been in the process of moving from Unix to Microsoft Windows NT. Against all expectation, I had found a replacement willing to learn the NT side, but I had to take over all of Martin's Unix and network jobs, something for which I'm ill suited, and lack the time in any case.

Jean had an eye operation in March, mostly eliminating her need for thick glasses. I got to do a lot of the driving for the next month.

We kept throwing things out at my mother's place. A friend advised getting in an auctioneer. In May, some 8 days after first contacting the Archer's auctioneer, the house was finally empty. I did a little more cleaning up, hired someone to fix my cleaning up, and sold the house a few months later.

Meanwhile, Jean went overseas for a conference in Toronto in May.

In June, Jean claimed we should visit Leanne in Mackay ... and while we were up there, we should get an apartment at Airlie Beach, because she was tired of Sydney. So we did, although it took until the end of August to do so. And after we got it the fridges broke, and the bracket holding the air conditioner broke, and a pipe leaked, and some tiles were broken ... and we still have to renovate it.

In September I drove the DUFF winners in a hire car via Canberra and the Snowy Mountains down to Melbourne for Basicon. Had a fine time, but I had to grab an early flight home due to football crowds booking all the hotel rooms. I described Basicon in *Gegnschein 80*.

My renovations at home continued, with the garage floor tiled and the garage doors replaced by sliding glass doors. I'm still trying to put up the ceiling tiles, do timber walls, install the home made recessed lighting, and add plumbing. When that is all complete, I'll have either a home office for Jean, or a place to live in if I rent out the top of the house.

I'm also still trying to organise the disposal of several thousand of my books and magazines, and heaps of other accumulated stuff from 50 years of never throwing much out. If you want some books, some fanzines, or even some furniture, please contact me.

I visited the USA again in late October, upgraded on frequent flyer points. I attended Ditto in Cincinnati, then saw friends in Minneapolis. I met Jean again in San Francisco so we could see her sister and visit friends. We had the exhausting visit to Las Vegas for Comdex, the big computer show, with meetings with friends before and after. Despite walking miles and miles around the show, I had no problems. Afterwards we relaxed at her parents' place near Seattle for Thanksgiving before returning home on Wednesday 3rd December.

Back at work only one day, with plenty to do. I rushed out late for the train, and ran up the long hill to Central. I had some chest pain that I ignored, thinking I'd just been overdoing the running to catch the train. I shouldn't have ignored it.

On Friday 5th December, after moving it seemed every piece of furniture and every book in the house, I had a heart attack that really did get my attention. Ambulance to the hospital, a stay in the heart unit for a week, and some pretty forceful encouragement to take things easy for a while. I looked a real wreck, with a drip in each arm, an oxygen mask, and a ECG continually monitoring me. Pity Jean forgot to bring a camera, to take photos before I recovered.

The tests say I've probably lost some 25% of my heart function, so I'm not allowed back to work full time until March (I'm planning to get in part time before that, if the doctors agree). I'm enrolled in a heart rehabilitation program at Westmead Hospital starting mid January (I gather this is basically supervised exercise). I'm also enrolled in a double blind trial of a new drug believed to improve heart function after a heart attack - I just hope the tablets are the real ones, and not the placebos. My only heart risk factors appear to be that I'm male, over 50, and stress. I don't think I can do anything about them. I'm not overweight nor do I have high cholesterol, but I'm modifying my diet in any case (no more bacon and egg McMuffins for breakfast).

My thanks to all the people who sent me Xmas cards, Get Well cards, and email.  
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