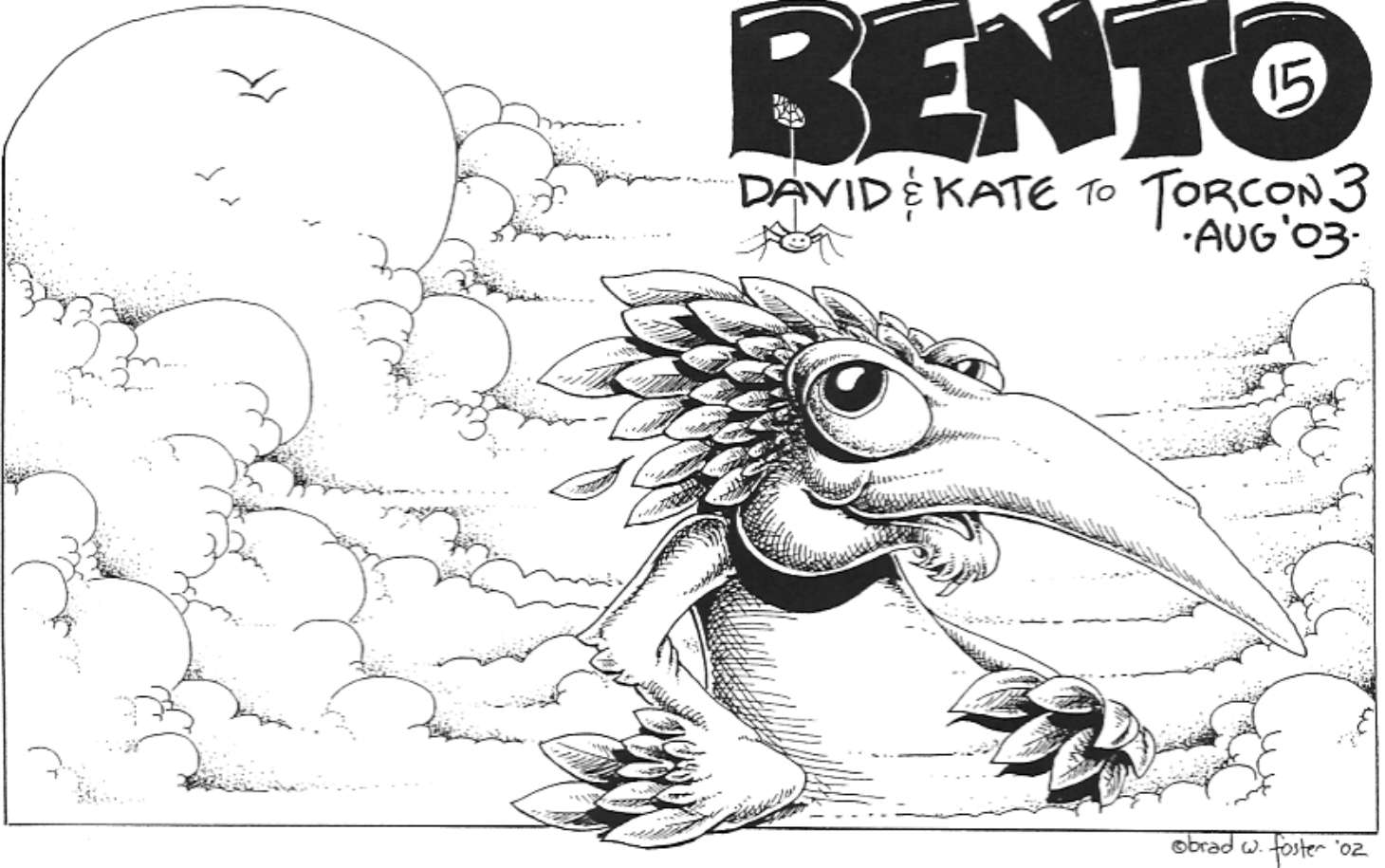


# BENTO 15

DAVID & KATE TO TORCON 3  
AUG '03



## Colophon

Blah blah blah yet another Worldcon blah blah blah Kate Yule and David D. Levine blah blah love to hear from you blah blah 1905 SE 43rd Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97215 blah blah e-blah David@BentoPress.com blah Kate@BentoPress.com blah blah www.BentoPress.com blah blah blah the usual blah blah blah blah blabbity blah.

## I Must Be a Writer; It Says So Right Here on My Nametag

One of the things they taught us at the Famous Science Fiction Writers' School (Our Motto: "Close Cover Before Striking") is to carefully consider sensations and situations and describe them as they really are, not as they are conventionally described. I'm going to try to describe here what success really feels like.

I mean, here I am on the Hugo ballot—okay, technically the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer isn't a Hugo, but *is* on the same ballot. That's quite a feat, and it really is an honor just to be nominated.

So why is my stomach churning?

To be blunt, I'm not expecting to win. Campbells go to novelists, not short story hacks. Campbells go to writers in their second year of eligibility, not rank upstarts like me. Campbells go to *really amazing* writers like Charles Coleman Finlay, whose debut story "Footnotes" makes me drool with envy.

But there's a huge emotional gap between not-expecting-to-win and not-having-won, and the anticipatory dread is nerve-racking. You'd think I would be able to relax and say "hey, I know I'm not going to win, so why worry?" No such luck.

I'm convinced I'm not only going to lose, but lose so badly that they will take away my Writers of the Future Award and my James White Award and the Phobos trophy I haven't even received yet and my Clarion diploma and every single nice thing anyone has ever said about my writing. They'll march me out in the hot sun, in the plaza behind the Royal York, and cut the buttons and leather elbow patches off my writing jacket and break my pen, and everywhere I go I'll have to hang my head in shame, and the other writers will point at me and whisper "there goes the only person who ever got a negative vote count in the Hugos."

All die. Oh the embarrassment.

You think I exaggerate. You say "Remember Neil Gaiman, who prepared no acceptance speech last year because he expected not to win? We know where *that* got him!"

Well, I'm writing this on August 14, 2003, two weeks before the Worldcon. I have just received a festive card which reads:

Noreascon Four is pleased to invite  
**David D. Levine**  
to join us for the  
**Hugo Losers Party**

...do they know something I don't?

—DDL

## Observations on Adolescence

by Elizabeth Bourne

Watching my son explode in a moment's rage over failing to pass the food handler's test, a test he had no reason to think he would pass having never cracked the manual, but with the baseless confidence of youth he felt was a certainty, made me think that having a teenager is like having a wild bird in the house.

Consider: there you are with your coffee and morning paper, comfortably settled, when a commotion breaks out. Something crashes into the room, and you, disturbed, try to understand what it is. An insect? A bat? Then you see it's a sparrow or finch that has somehow come into your house and desperately wants out of it.

You try to approach it, but that only drives it mad. It crashes into the ceiling, the walls, the door, frantic to get away from you. You're afraid it will hurt itself, break its wings, its neck. In the meantime feathers flutter to the floor while your belongings seem to be in immediate danger of breaking.

Dashing around the room you open all the windows and doors to encourage the bird to find its way out. But the more you try to



help, the more it flails about the room. You think about catching it in a pillowcase, anything to stop that insane flying and crashing that you are sure will kill it at any second, but your movements only upset it more. With you at a safe distance it will settle briefly, and you see by the glare in its eyes and passionate heartbeat that if will alone worked it would melt through the lath and plaster into the outdoors.

But they don't melt, and so the two of you continue your frantic dance until at last, through some accident or design, the bird does manage to fly out of the window instead of into the window pane. Rushing over, you watch it for a moment to make sure it can successfully fly, that it isn't hurt, that it doesn't go from your door straight to the mouth of some predator.

Relieved, you return to your (lukewarm) coffee and crack the paper, thinking about the stories you are going to tell about the bird in your house.

Image from [www.dfg.ca.gov/hcpb/images/anml\\_accts/swallow.gif](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hcpb/images/anml_accts/swallow.gif)

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*Last night was Kate's monthly Investment Club meeting. Members include Juli, Julie, Ariel, Ariel, Mary, Mary Ann, Ann, Ann, Nancy Towne-Smith, Nancy Smith, a Petersen, and a Pedersen. We have a woman named Sharan that wants to join, but she may need to change her name.*

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## Sit! Stay! Roll over?

Back in 1991, David posted a piece to rec.humor.funny on "Why Usenet is Like a Penis." A Google search will point you to thousands of copies of this today. Many of them even attributed! Recently we noticed another correlation.

- "Down, boy!"
- "Oh, don't go poking in th... oh..."
- "No, we are *not* going out just because I said 'walk'."
- "I find it's a good way to meet women."
- "Very nice, but I'm more of a cat person myself."
- "They look so stupid in those little raincoats."
- "Don't be like that! You know her! You *like* her!"
- "That's quite an interesting collar."
- "Has he had all his shots?"
- "Oh look, he likes you!"
- "Did he get out *again!*?"
- "I used to have one just like that..."
- "Is this... yours?"
- "I've never seen one that size before."
- "You'll never get that out of the carpet, you know."
- "Sorry, he's always like this when we have to go to the vet."
- "Yes! Yes, we're talking about *you!* Stupid git."
- "Play dead."
- "*Please* play dead."

—DDL/KY

## "And What Do You Do?"

Kate rambles

I hate it when people ask "And what do *you* do?" Oh, all the usual things, think I to myself...read, seek chocolate, breathe, sweat, metabolize....

Except of course that's not what they mean by "What do you do?" They mean "What do you do for 30–60 hours per week in exchange for income?" Studying something can count, if there's money involved: they pay you (a research job) or you pay them (lots and *lots* of money, on the understanding that someday they'll present you with a piece of fake parchment inscribed in Latin). If female, one can generally get by with "I have *n* kids". They may move away from you on the Group W bench there, but they feel the question's been answered.

The truth is, I don't do anything in that sense, and have not found a good way to say so. One can say "I don't drink" and have it be understood that one is not a koala, getting all fluids from eucalyptus leaves. "I'm not seeing anyone" doesn't call for a white cane. But "I don't do anything"? That sounds awful!

I do work outside the home, somewhat. I volunteer at a non-profit women's bookstore twice a week, doing whatever needs to be done. The manager wants to beef up the SF/Fantasy section. It's very cool to see titles I suggest appear on the shelves—even better to see them gone again! Making up a recommendation list, I was stunned by how many likely titles were out of

print. *Dreamsnake*, *Virtual Girl*, *Bending the Landscape* (SF or Fantasy), *The City Not Long After*, most Joanna Russ—out of print, or “special order”, which I’m told means there may be an odd stash here and there at a distributor but don’t count on it.

I’m knitting, of course. When I first picked it up, I just wanted something to do with my hands. Product was secondary. Now, with nieces and nephew, various fund-raising auctions, and Ooh, Gotta Try That! ideas, projects are piling up. For Foolscap this year, I took the con’s motto, *Flat Things and Funny Hats*, added one of its founders’ love of Kool-Aid, and simmered gently for 45 minutes or until the water turns clear. The wool turns lovely colors! Great fun.

Baby blankets, which are a good beginner’s project because they’re never the wrong size, are a magnet for stereotypical assumptions. For one thing, as soon as the project exceeds 3’ in any direction, I am sure to hear “Making a sweater?” Um, right. If I actually say the words “baby blanket”, everyone—and I mean everyone, friend, lover, complete stranger, people who truly ought to know better—gets a funny half-smiling (or half-worried) look and asks whether there’s “something they should know.” I glared at the manager of the feminist bookstore and said “Yes. It takes a village to raise a child. *You* should know that.” Honestly.

Overdid it in the spring, what with a slew of conventions back to back. I knit in the car, on planes, during convention panels, waiting in movie lines, you name it. This led to numbness and tingling in my left hand, and eventually a half-dozen sessions with

needles? I considered the lethal potentials of ballpoint pens, shoelaces, and pointy metal earpieces on eyeglasses, none of which we expect *or want* the gummit to try to do away with...and started planning another blanket.

What do I do? I get on with life. Despite everything, I get on with life. —KY

## FAQ

1. What time is it?
2. Are you going to eat that?
3. What’s for dinner?
4. Whose turn is it?
5. Can we go now?
6. Will there be anything else?
7. Is everyone here?
8. Where are my keys?
9. What did you want to see me about?
10. Are we there yet?

—KY

## An Appreciation of Spiders

We have a division of labor around the house, Kate and I. Generally we do the shopping and the groceries and the laundry together. We both cook, though due to our schedules Kate does more than her share. We ignore the dishes equally. But Kate is in

Occupational Therapists—“Occupational” meaning not just job-related, they carefully explained, but simply what you “occupy” your time with in a normal day. When these people asked “What do you do?” they really meant it! I liked my hand therapists. Now I have color-coded putty to exercise with.

Yes, I said knitting on airplanes. Yes, yes, even today. I use “circular” needles—imagine two half-needles, each ending not in a knob but in a short length of nylon that joins the two. (Like “idiot strings” on a kid’s mittens.) No dropping the spare needle, no jabbing my neighbor in the kidneys with a long stick, easy to roll up and put away without any fear of stitches sliding off. And they don’t “read” as Knitting Needles. I haven’t had them come to the attention of anyone at airport security barriers; I don’t know what their opinion would be if forced to have one. I do know that the flight attendants never bat an eye.

For a time I tried crochet—a crochet hook, unless it’s very fine, is about as blunt as a capped pen—but enjoyed neither the process nor the results. Plastic knitting needles seemed more innocuous than metal ones.... no, no good: the added flex made an uncomfortable difference in the effort needed from my hands.

I asked myself the important question: Would I and others *be safer* on an airplane guaranteed to be devoid of circular knitting

charge of all plants inside and out, while I handle anything that involves hammers or electricity.

Spiders are my department.

I must confess I don’t really understand why so many people hate and fear spiders so intensely. I find them fascinating—I can watch them for hours—and not at all scary. I admire them! They embody so many positive qualities: patience, industriousness, perseverance, thrift, attention to detail, grace, even mother-love. They thrive in every environment from deserts to jungles and even underwater.

Have you ever watched a spider spinning a web? It’s as much fun as watching a bridge being built. (I lost a few of you there, I can tell.) Working with nothing but instinct and a small repertoire of all-natural building materials, the spider steps deliberately around the growing web like the ticking second hand of a clock, building a structure that is the very model of efficiency, symmetry, utility, and, dare I say it, beauty. Who could fail to marvel at a fine orb web shimmering in the morning dew? The spider herself, set delicately at the center of the web, completes the piece like the diamond in a wedding ring.

*But they are predators!* you may say, and you would be right. So are cats and dogs and ladybugs. *They make those disgusting cobwebs!* And so they do, but dusty cobwebs are dead abandoned things, and to judge the spider by the cobweb is to judge humanity by East St. Louis or the worst parts of the Bronx. *They bite people!* Yes they do, occasionally. But many, many unidentified skin

lesions are identified as “spider bites” when there is no evidence whatsoever that spiders are involved. In particular the Brown Recluse, which has been blamed for horrific wounds in California, does not even exist in that state (except for a few imported from the Midwest).

The *real* biting problem is mosquitoes, blackflies, deerflies, and other such pests, which make people’s lives miserable and spread disease. I hate flies and mosquitoes with a passion (paradoxically, they seem to love me) and the spider is my ally in the eternal battle against these vermin. Six legs bad, eight legs good.

And so, when Kate shrieks and points out some eight-legged invader of our home, I do not squish it; I delicately coerce it onto a piece of paper and carry it outside. Sometimes they resist coercion, and end up squished by accident. Spiders are capable of remarkable speed but they tire easily; it’s unusual for one to get away. Sometimes they try to parachute or rappel down from the paper, but I pick them up by the web and keep going. I place them gently on the porch and encourage them to dine well.

This is not to say I don’t go “pflghb!” when I walk into the web that’s been strung across the front porch steps first thing in the morning. But while I curse and pick the webs out of my hair, I admire the audacity of the tiny creature who has, inadvertently, tried to trap something thousands of times her size. —DDL

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*“It’s not f’ me,” was his indignant cry, “it’s f’ the woim!”*

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## Under Pressure

We drove up to Seattle for one of the weekly Clarion parties last month. On the way, we saw a big traffic jam going the other way. Kate noticed that there was no accident or anything else at the head of it—why was everyone bunched up for no reason?

I gave her an explanation I’d read somewhere once, that traffic behaves like a gas and that traffic jams are like pressure waves. When the flow of traffic is temporarily restricted, say by a dog running across the highway, the “pressure” increases (the cars slow down and the distance between cars decreases) behind the block. Even when the cause of the block is removed, the blockage itself remains, because cars can’t drive through the area of high pressure at speed—they must slow down, thus causing those behind them to slow down, which perpetuates the problem. The pressure wave propagates upstream until it reaches an area of low density (few cars) and dissipates.

So when you see a traffic jam, the original source may be hours gone and hundreds of yards beyond the current jam. Sometimes you can even see the phenomenon in action, cars accumulating at the back of the jam and evaporating from the front of it while the jam itself moves slowly in the opposite direction from the flow of traffic.

This phenomenon occurs all the time, but is only noticeable when the original pressure is high enough that a local increase causes significant slowing. In other words, when the traffic is light

## Speaking of Spiders...

Lastish we asked (1) What *kind* of spider went up the water-spout? And (2) Where did you live until you were about 8?

“Why are you asking?” inquires Damien Warman. Because David says it’s the eensy beensy spider and I think he’s barking mad, that’s why.

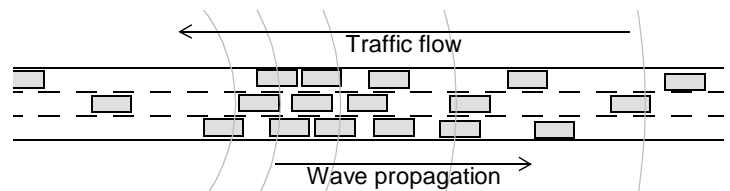
It turns out that, in our poll, exactly one person backs him up on Eensy-Beensy: Ariel Shattan. She has long alleged that she and David grew up as siblings—albeit in separate homes, families, and cities—so that figures. (Mind you, she hasn’t managed to pass it to her own kids!)

Incey-Wincey or -Wintsy, say the (four) British & Australian respondents. Insy-Binsy, says Arthur Shattan. Eentsy-Weentsy, says Jeanne Mealy of Iowa/southern Wisconsin.

The American spider of choice is, without question, **Itsy-Bitsy**. Eleven respondents said so, plus eight of the ten co-workers polled by one reader at her local library. There are folks from the Midwest in both majority and minority camps; I think what this tells us is that midwesterners answer surveys.

There’s a bit more on this in the LoCs. I’m interested that many people assumed there is some *one* “other answer”. Judith Hanna hints that Incey-Wincey may be related to Anansi, the trickster spider.

George Flynn has no idea what if anything he grew up saying. Honestly after all this, neither do I. Thank you for playing! —KY



a slow-down evaporates quickly, but at rush hour even a small temporary disruption can turn a smoothly-flowing stream of dense traffic into a horrific mess that lasts for hours.

This means, by the way, that you can help by slowing down as soon as you see the taillights ahead, rather than driving at full speed until you *must* slow down. Slowing early creates a region of lower pressure upstream of the jam; if enough people do this, the traveling pressure wave only raises the low pressure to a somewhat higher level, and dissipates quickly. But if everyone slams into the back of the jam, it packs the cars tightly together, making the jam shorter in length but more severe and longer-lasting.

After the party—which was held at Jerry and Suzle’s and was absolutely brilliant, packed with writers and editors from all across the country as well as the usual cream of Seattle fandom—we stayed at the home of Hal and Ulrika O’Brien (and Sarah the dog, who did not let us forget it). The next morning we kicked around town with Ulrika, and in the car we had one of those fannish conversations where you just want to tape the whole thing, brilliant and witty and wide-ranging.

Among other things, we talked about the impact of military technology such as the Minie ball on society after a war. Why was the aftermath of World War I the Lost Generation, but World War II gave us the Baby Boom? We surmised that WWI, with its trench warfare and influenza epidemic, killed a much higher percentage of Europeans than WWII, with its air war and sulfa drugs, killed Americans. Also, WWII lasted longer. So you had a large population of American men of marriageable age kept away from their women for years and then returning from the war in unprecedentedly high proportion. Kate half-remembered a statistical analysis showing that there “was no Baby Boom”—that the total number of births across 1940–1960 was exactly what you’d expect.

Aha! The Baby Boom was the simultaneous expression of all the child-fathering that those men would have done during the war years, amplified by the expansive tendencies of postwar prosperity. A pressure wave! A sharp increase in “child pressure” following a long period of low pressure. A literal boom, in the acoustic, air-pressure sense of the word.

As the birth rate dropped off in the Sixties, the pressure at the leading edge decreased. The traffic jam is no longer visible at the point of the original disruption. But, just as a traffic jam propagates upstream long after its source has vanished, the Baby Boom echoes down the years, moving through the demographics like a pig in a python. And just as the high density within a traffic jam causes temper tantrums, overheating, and accidents, so the Baby

Boom has had an effect on society: urban sprawl, pollution, violence, and depletion of resources.

The pig must, of course, reach the python’s tail eventually. The pressure wave will dissipate as individual Boomers die, until the wave vanishes completely. But what will be left in its wake?

The answer depends on the behavior of those driving into the traffic jam. Will they keep having babies at the usual rate, piling on at the back of the jam and maintaining the pressure within? Or will they see the jam ahead and slow down, creating an area of lower pressure where the negative phenomena will be more manageable and the wave may eventually dissipate?

This analogy is limited, of course. Because this “highway” runs through time, the “cars” at different points on the “road” represent people of different ages who are actually present in the same place and time. The absolute number of “cars” on the “highway” is also increasing, raising the pressure independent of any temporally-local phenomenon like the Baby Boom. However, it does suggest some solutions: fewer trips (fewer children), shorter trips (shorter life spans—no thanks!), smaller cars (more efficient use of resources), more lanes (new resources, or increased extraction of existing resources), mass transit (group living situations).

As for me, I’m touching my brakes and just hoping I don’t get slammed into from behind. —DDL

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“Usability isn’t rocket surgery.”

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## Cowboy Grammar

Chapter 3, Unit 1: The Regular Verb

### Model Verb: mosey

**Meaning:** to move slowly    **Participle:** mosey’d

**Infinitive:** ta mosey    **Gerund:** moseyin’

Indicative	
<b>Present</b>	<b>Perfect</b>
Ah mosey you mosey he <b>moseys</b> we’uns mosey y’all mosey they’uns mosey	Ah done mosey’d you done mosey’d he done mosey’d we’uns done mosey’d y’all done mosey’d they’uns done mosey’d
<b>Past</b>	<b>Pluperfect</b>
Ah mosey’d you mosey’d he mosey’d we’uns mosey’d y’all mosey’d they’uns mosey’d	Ah’d done finished moseyin’ you’d done finished moseyin’ he’d done finished moseyin’ we’uns’d done finished moseyin’ y’all’d done finished moseyin’ they’uns’d done finished moseyin’

Future		Future perfect	
Ah’m gonna mosey you’re gonna mosey he’s gonna mosey we’uns’re gonna mosey y’all’re gonna mosey they’uns’re <b>gon</b> ’ mosey	Ah’m fixin’ ta mosey you’re fixin’ ta mosey he’s fixin’ ta mosey we’uns’re fixin’ ta mosey y’all’re fixin’ <b>t</b> ’ mosey they’uns’re fixin’ ta mosey		
Conditional			
<b>Present</b>	<b>Perfect</b>		
Ah might jes’ mosey you might jes’ mosey he might jes’ mosey we’uns might jes’ mosey y’all might jes’ mosey they’uns might jes’ mosey	Ah might’ve mosey’d you might’ve mosey’d he might’ve mosey’d we’uns might’ve mosey’d y’all might’ve mosey’d they’uns might’ve mosey’d		
Imperative			
(you) mosey			
(we’uns) let’s us mosey			
(y’all) mosey			

## Blah Blah Blah LoCs Blah Blah Blah

### Karen Schaffer

San Jose, CA  
25 Feb 2003

Tangentially related to the cents rant in Bento (and I do so agree)—why isn't there a cent sign on our keyboards? Who came up with this standard and why didn't the cent sign make the cut? It was on typewriters, right? At least one inquiring mind wants to know (not that the inquiring mind has put out any effort on the issue, other than vaguely wondering, and now writing this loc).

*[The parental typewriter of my childhood assumed one would backspace to overprint the letter c with a slash. It also relied on apostrophe + period = exclamation point. —K]*

### Ron Serdiuk

Brisbane, Australia  
28 Feb 2003

I enjoyed the article about the social history books you and others had been reading. I read a book many years ago by Canadian academic Margaret Visser called *Much Depends on Dinner*—and I was hooked. Still one of my favourites. *[I loved it too. I think that's where I learned that Francis Bacon died as a result of stuffing snow into a chicken. —K]*

Two popular histories I really wanna recommend from recent times are more about events rather than a specific objects.

British writer Neal Hanson (Hansen?) was a guest here at the Brisbane Writers' Festival to promote his book *The Dreadful Judgement*—a history of the Great Fire of London. My love of this book was probably heavily influenced by seeing him perform. In a jam-packed venue with electronic problems—every audio visual aid malfunctioned & he was pretty much left on his own—he gave one of the best lectures/talks by an author I've ever seen. And I've been to a lot of cons! An hour and ten minutes without notes (that I could see) and nary an “um” or an “er” the whole time. And fascinating stuff—he looks at the whole event and the mythology that grew around it thru' the eyes of modern forensic research. He spoke to firemen, medical people, scientists, crematorium workers. Alas, no smoking gun when it comes to possible suspects of who really started it—but he did find a lot of new historical material in collections of papers not thought to deal with the event. Wonderful stuff!

...and even more exciting was a publisher's proof I received just before Christmas called *The Devil in the White City* by American writer Eric Larson (Larsen?)—a history of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893—a now-mostly-forgotten-about historical watershed event that really was responsible for helping to shape how we lived this century. It's so good—I just can't begin list the things that I found exciting about it. Juxtaposed with the story of the fair is the story of a serial killer who makes Jack the Ripper look like a pussycat. He too is largely forgotten nowadays.

### David S Bratman

San Jose CA 95129  
06 March 2003

I agree entirely with the spirit of David's “Condition Orange”. On someone's weblog I read the observation that there was this advantage to the Cold War: not only did the U.S. deter the Soviet Union for 45 years, but the Soviet Union deterred the U.S.

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*Pat Murphy on the World Fantasy Award: “I'm honored, I'm touched, and I dress Lovecraft up for the holidays.”*

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### Peter Motte

Geraardsbergen, BELGIUM  
6 Mar 2003

Quite a relief to read “Condition Orange” and notice that not every US citizen supports the war idea.

Lots of things are going on here. People start to avoid US products. Almost nobody believes the President of the US. Colin Powell is being considered as a liar. The US is seen as an oppressive force. All in all: Hussein might be a dictator, but we don't have to deal with him, whereas we do have to deal with Bush. It's partly the close relationship with the US which turns a lot of people against the US nowadays.

At the same time, some people become afraid of outing their opinion. And that's even more dangerous, because then things start to boil under the surface, and could burst out heavily.

*[I was dismayed to see to see how many of our European readers thought the US populace was all behind Bush. This is, of course, the impression that the government and the right-wing media would like to give, but among our friends, and the letters to the editor in the local paper, the majority is solidly against it. Part of the problem is, as you say, that people are afraid of publicly stating their opinion. And that's the scariest part. —D]*

*[LoC omitted from the web version  
at the request of the sender — DDL]*

Have you changed your email address since the last issue? Perhaps why I'm not in the WAHF column this time. I'm sure I wrote. I admit, I use email for its convenience, but if you prefer a proper letter on real paper as a matter of courtesy, do let me know.

*[Paper mail and email are equally welcome. The bentopress.com and the older spiritone.com email addresses both work; bentopress.com is intended to move with us no matter what. Please don't fret about WAHF's—we're sure to miss a few. Sorry!]*

**Rick Simkin**

Chicago IL

12 & 13 Mar 2003

I've discovered jet lag as a job skill—I was so tired that none of the workplace nonsense and hassle bothered me—I just let it slide by.

It was an "itsy-bitsy" spider. My nieces' father, who grew up in Milwaukee, thinks it was an eensy-weensy spider, but of course he's wrong.

We tend to learn these things from our parents, who learned them from their parents, ... But this is a nation of immigrants, and my family came didn't even speak English until the first half of the 20th century. So where/how did the culture graft happen?

I grew up with a lot of typical English nursery rhymes and songs: Pop goes the Weasel, Rock-a-bye Baby, London Bridge is Falling Down, ABCDEFG. A friend from India has a 1-year-old son now. The kid has toys that make music, and my friend doesn't recognize these tunes.

**Steve Jeffery**

Kidlington, Oxon, England

9 March 2003

I'm glad somebody else has my problems of non-existence, at least as a defined "type". A couple of years ago, at 130 lb, 6 ft 2 in, I didn't even exist on those doctor's height/weight charts. Having put on an extra stone, I now edge into the white area marked dangerously underweight. Odd, I don't feel dangerous. (Though Vikki thinks my elbows might be classed as lethal weapons).

Napoleon was 5 ft 5 in, I gather. Which was, apparently, the average height for a Frenchman of his time. So how did he come to give his name to a "Napoleon complex"? ("I feel insecure that I am shorter than people who will be born 200 years after I am dead.")

My mother only brought us one German babies' game, and I didn't know anything similar in English growing up. Sit the baby on your lap, chant the rhyme while bouncing your knees gently, and at the end of the rhyme roll the baby backwards to a supine position or even upside-down:

Hoppa, hoppa, Reiter, / Wenn er faellt denn schreit er

Faellt er in den Graben / Fressen ihn die Raven

Faellt er in sen Sumpf / Macht der Reiter BLUUUUUUUMS!

The grisly translation:

Giddyup, giddyup, rider / When he falls he screams

If he falls in the ditch / The ravens eat him

If he falls in the swamp / He goes Woooooops

A few years ago I was visiting a friend in Boston who demonstrated a similar game in English. I'd never have learned it in Chicago because of the Boston references, meaningless here:

Trot, trot to Boston, / Trot, trot to Lynn

Look in the river / But don't fall INNNNNN!

Am I done with Question One yet?

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*"Karaoke is business filk."*

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**David Keldsen**

Toronto, ON, Canada

17 April 2003

The Giant Donut from Bentos past reminds me of a tangent...a place I've seen on Bloor Street, just east of here. It's "Galaxy

Donuts"...except that there's a big "doughnut" in the middle of the sign, which makes it look rather like "Galaxy O'Donuts"...sounds like the protagonist from a Canadian-space-opera-cum-police-procedural. Sort of a Film Noir Avec Chocolat Sprinkles ala Franglais.

**Roger Waddington**

Norton, Malton, N. Yorkshire, England

On the "been there, done that, got the t-shirt" topic, I would have pointed out my Fifties version. That was collecting a cloth badge, or patches I believe you call them, from every place, or event, visited and sewing them on my jacket or maybe my duffel bag. Alas, they're all long gone now; but it strikes me as a better alternative to a wardrobe full of t-shirts. Especially in this British climate, where the t-shirt season is so limited.

**Joseph Major**

Louisville, Kentucky

May 29, 2003

If tiny, cluttered con badges are like closed stacks, and legible ones like open ones, what are the badges that are made so they flip around? Or the ones that only bear the wearer's first name? *[Those would be books without title & author on the spine. And badges where the only thing you can focus on is the name of the event (we know where we ARE, dang it!)]—those are short story collections that give author and BOOK title as the page headers... —K]*

**Judith Hanna**

Tottenham, London, England  
8 March 2003

What kind of spider went up the waterspout? This is indeed a question meriting further inquiry. On the one hand, the name “Incy-wincy” seems clearly to derive from the West African trickster Anansi, a semi-mythical super-spider; I should make inquiries among some of the local West Africans about whether they connect him with any actual species. If the Anansi-spirit had become naturalised as an English spider, where the rhyme comes from, then I suspect he would be a Garden Orb spider (*Araneus diadematus*), which spins webs lavishly around the place during late summer and autumn.

Where did I live until I was about eight?

1. Nowra, NSW;
2. CowPlain, outside Portsmouth, in England—Dad was doing PT instructor training, prior to setting up the Australian Navy’s first formal physical fitness programme;
3. Somers or Somerville, south of Melbourne. Two vague memories, the first of a cubby house in our back garden; the other of bleak, windswept sand dunes;
4. Foote St, Frankston, south of Melbourne. Dad stationed at HMAS Flinders base for both these, two little brothers arrive. Sandpit in back garden and swing;
5. 26 Cambawarra Rd, Bomaderry, near Nowra. View of Mt Cambawarra in the Blue Mountains across the bush on the

other side of the road from our house, Dad stationed at HMAS Albatross base, another little brother arrives, also a corgi called Pickles and a kitten called Marmalade. I start school;

6. Manus Island, north of what was then the UN Protectorate of New Guinea. Dad at HMAS Tarangau. Weekend trips in Navy work-boat over turquoise sea to white sand beaches fringed with reef, or bouncing around in back of jeep along white coral road to same. Coconut palms, hibiscus, ceiling fans, anti-malaria tablets. Just 70 miles south of the equator, nice and warm...
7. Fremantle, West Australia, first at 163 Petra St, then 21 Woodhouse Rd, both close to the Swan River. Dad at HMAS Leeuwin. Little sister arrives.

Then when I was about 12, we moved to a sheep farm down at Kojonup, West Australia, halfway between Fremantle and Albany. Well, you did ask.

**Eric Lindsay**

Airlie Beach, Qld, Australia  
12-14 March 2003

We haven’t had a coin smaller than 5c for years. No pennies or two cents any longer. Totals are rounded down or up 1 or 2 cents when paying cash, not rounded when using a credit card. Doesn’t seem to worry anyone much.

I did like your article on ASL. I recall a convention we shared with deaf mutes, and it really did cut down on the noise complaints.

*[From them, maybe! Hearing people at Deaf social events may want earplugs—if there’s music, it will be cranked up to 11.]*

**Fred Teti**

California  
23 February 2003

(I will refrain from informing Kate that her email ID is homophonous with “Kew!”, the hipster-y version of “Cool”, that is. I know. She’s heard it before. Homophones are like that.)

*[Actually no, but I have now! And I’ll forgive you because you used the word “homophonous”. I like that in a man. And because you put the commas outside the quotation marks when they aren’t what you’re quoting. Hmm. “Performative” speech is when one says something, and by the very act of saying it, makes it so: “Thank you”, or “I order you to desist!” So is there a word for when one says something, and by the very act of saying it, makes it NOT so? “I will refrain from informing...” —K]*

**Greg Wilson**

Henderson NV  
5 March 2003

I noticed Darin’s response to your piece on gated communities. Did he mention that we live in one? Not a regular, run-of-the-mill gated community either. This is a gated country club community where the guards carry guns. Speed limits are strictly enforced. Get caught speeding and you’ll be shot. Well, ticketed. It turns out the guards don’t want to use their guns because of all the paperwork involved afterwards. The guarded gate isn’t sufficient to keep the unwanted at bay. Not long ago we were swarmed by an army (gaggle?) of girl scouts selling cookies. How can this happen? Is no place safe? Do you have any idea how many boxes of cookies we now have in our two walk-in pantries? If you come to the house warming party, remember not to speed or you’ll be forced to eat copious amounts of girl scout cookies.

**Julie Humphries**

Madison, WI  
16 Mar 2003

Nonexistence—I once went shopping with a Bay Area fan who is about 40, and barely 5 feet tall. She has a very professional job, and has a difficult time buying clothes. The salesgirl kept saying “oh, this would look so *cute* on you!” She was given a withering look and a harsh “I don’t want to look *cute*, I want to look *professional!*” I think she mostly special-orders her outfits from catalogs for petite women.



Really enjoyed reading about the whole Hollywood experience. Mmmm... donuts... Krispy Kreme is as close as Milwaukee now, might hit Madison sometime this year. I can't wait! *[The second Krispy Kreme in Oregon will be just down the road from my office, and it opens in two weeks. The local media have been all aflutter. I recently found myself explaining to two of my Chinese co-workers that, yes, it's a good donut, but it's not that good. —D]*

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*The OTHER Seven Dwarves: Sleazy, Horny, Dumpy, Nasty, Greedy, Loathsome, and Spike.*

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### **Jeanne Mealy**

St Paul MN

17 Apr 2003

Thanks for the fancy invitation to Bento 14. I was pleased to accept. What is the Wombat Principle? *[The rule of thumb that all the items in a salad or stir-fry should be cut to about the same size. Why "wombat"? Because "wombats" are the good bits that fall to the bottom of the bowl. But why "wombats"? Because of the Wombat and Cereal Lover's Dilemma: "What do you do when you're all out of wombats and there's nothing left but the cereal?" BUT WHY WOM... oh never mind. —D]*

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*(The Twenty Dwarves were down to 8 before anyone suspected Hungry.)*

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more. If you don't do that, it leaves that annoying grit on your teeth when you eat it. But by some miracle, packaged salad spinach is actually clean, and requires a minimum of additional washing.

3) I don't buy pesto from the deli; I prefer to make sauces from packaged mixes: more work, but cheaper.

4) I wouldn't be looking for the pasta strainer while sauteing the spinach: I give it constant attention. (I've tried steaming it—the Roman method, we discovered after visiting there—but we don't care for that as much.)

### **Karen Schaffer**

Re: "What's for Dinner?" Can I answer "D. Barbecued chicken in the oven!?" But I have to admit, this is mostly because I utterly despise flabby chicken skin, but adore it if it has been crisped properly (i.e., roasting or grilling/barbecuing). Since you do say that you removed most of the skin, I guess I can live with that. *[I'm not claiming this ranks as excellent BBQ chicken, but it is at least tasty food, more wholesome than Domino's and less hassle than Julia Child (or Paul Prudhomme). —K]* Frozen gnocchi? You bet. And I don't know for sure what those other people eat either, but I have my suspicions, based on the ever-increasing number of freezer cases in the grocery stores full of frozen dinners.

Speaking of flabby chicken skin, I am continually amazed at the number of classic recipes (e.g., coq au vin, chicken cacciatore, chicken paprikash) that call for carefully browning the chicken pieces, but then cooking it in liquid, thereby guaranteeing chicken

## **What's For Dinner?**

*[In issue 14 Kate described a not-atypical dinner for us, and wondered if our readers found the effort overkill, underkill, or Just Right. What do self-proclaimed "non-cooks" subsist on? Cooks and non-cooks responded:]*

### **David Bratman**

I mentioned at Potlatch that I was part of your group B in the "What's for Dinner?" survey, and relieved I was to realize it too, surrounded as I seem to be by gourmet C's and the occasional non-cooking A. (I was once invited over for dinner by some semi-fannish acquaintances who, it turned out, didn't actually believe in dinner.)

I've never cooked for a party of more than 4 people (contributions to potlucks excepted), and as Berni is a vegetarian, I would not be cooking chicken. But what remains—spinach and gnocchi—is quite similar to a normal meal I would make at home for the two of us. The differences are tiny:

1) I don't actually like gnocchi (though Berni does): ravioli stuffed with cheese or vegetables would be more likely.

2) For cooking spinach, I'm a convert to spinach salad packages. Bulk spinach is such a nuisance to wash. Many people, I find, don't wash it nearly enough. One needs either to scrub each leaf individually with a little brush, or else soak and rinse it many times over until long past the point where every visible grain of dirt is gone—about ten times—and then soak and rinse it ten times

with flabby skin in a greasy sauce. Nasty, nasty, yuck! These days, I tend to fry the chicken skin by itself (or with onions, garlic, whatever is called for in the recipe) to render a bit of the fat and get some of that nice caramelization, then discard the skin and add the liquid and chicken (no browning of the skinless chicken—just makes the meat tough, imho). Great flavor, less fat, no flabby skin. End of chicken skin rant. *[Yum!]*

### **George Flynn**

Well, I sort of cook, but mostly it's just a matter of heating prepared foods (when I can find them in single-serving quantities). Frying hamburger and rice together is about as complicated as I get. (After all, cooking takes time that I could be using for more important activities like reading fanzines.)

### **Hope Leibowitz**

When I know that I'm eating at home and not cooking, I buy a can of salmon or tuna, chop up a tomato or 2 or 3 and sometimes an English cucumber too, and some feta if I can find the light variety (not possible in the supermarket in which I do most of my shopping), mix the tuna or salmon with lemon juice and spicy mustard and rosemary and maybe other herbs, mix in the tomatoes and cucumber and feta and that is my dinner. Not too bad.

I used to fry up these great veggie burgers from Yves (black bean and mushroom) but they discontinued them and the garden ones are so boring I stopped buying them. Even putting lots of hot sauce on them didn't help much.

The exception recently is Etuska's Death Chili (she is a friend, and she made this really hot chili and I took some home). Three times now I've diluted all or part of this chili with tomato paste, chick peas, corn, tomatoes, a whole English cucumber, kidney beans and water, and it is still very, very hot! No one at the party even tried it except one other guy and me, and he turned bright red and started choking.

Or I just steam some broccoli or asparagus and eat a can of tuna with it—less work than the salad stuff. I guess that is why I eat out a lot—much less boring and labor intensive. And if I'm going to a movie or something after work I have no choice about eating out as I wouldn't waste the time or foot power to go home first.

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*"Dammit, there's more to the Swedish Chef than just 'bork, bork, bork'!"*

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### Eric Lindsay

"What's For Dinner" reminded me that ingredients seem to vary greatly between countries. Chicken isn't a problem, but I've never encountered Maple Chipotle Grill Sauce, and I'm not at all sure about frozen gnocchi, nor even pre-made pesto. Spinach is out of season, although we have silver beet (which I loathe).

*[Maple chipotle sauce would be far from universal, although bottled BBQ sauce in general is quite common in the US. —K]*

### Roger Waddington

In spite of the plethora of cookery programmes (apparently the new sex) that fill the TV schedules, and the allied cookery books that fill the best-seller lists, I'm not so sure that we are such a nation of cooks as the evidence might suggest. I have my suspicions that the vast majority of us perhaps try and experiment with one or two of the recipes; and, when they don't come out like the photo in the book, chuck it aside and phone for a takeaway.

### We Also Heard From

*(known to his friends as "WAHF")*

**Shandra Bauer; Jeffrey "Miles" Carr**, who saw Bento #10 on line: "I've been trying to find that John Caldwell cartoon you mentioned for ages, it was the genesis of my nickname"; **Brad Foster** ("More BENTO! More BENTO!"); **John Hertz** ("particularly liked K's cooking article—reminds me of 'Take Back the Night'"); **Terry Jeeves; John Oshin; Jill Roberts; Mike Scott; Ariel Shattan; Janna Silverstein** ("David, be comforted. Though the thought will clothe you not, You Are Not Alone"); **Dave Smidt; Davey Snyder** ("oh goodygoody yay!"); **Jan Stinson; Damien Warman; Henry Welch** ("All three of my children have been taught a fair amount of ASL in the local elementary school"); **Donald Wileman** ("the Glyptodont cartoon, even though it was by someone else, seemed to capture that odd angle of thinking that you do so well"); and **Jon Singer**, who sent comments on issue #1.

What do we eat? Mostly pre-made Leonard's chicken items, like chicken in filo pastry or crumbed stuffed with avocado and cheese, or with other fillings. Saves a lot of preparation time when you only have to stuff them in an oven for 40 minutes. Steamed vegetables (easy). Grilled lamb chops, or pork chops maybe once a week. Spaghetti or pasta with lots of meat sauce.

Meat is usually pretty cheap here, at least until the recent drought started to break. Meat was even cheaper during the drought, because farmers couldn't get fodder and sold off animals. Now they are retaining them, trying to fatten them up for better prices, and to build up herds again, so I expect meat prices to stay high for several years.

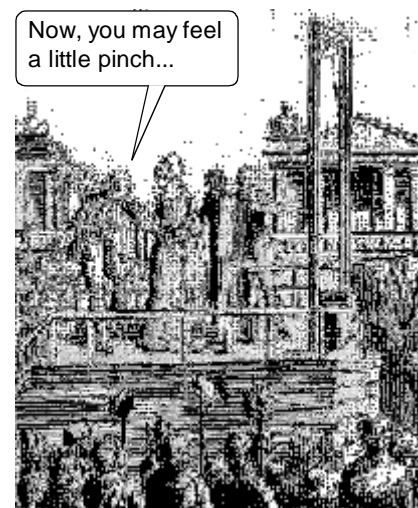
### Steve Jeffery

We have an oven. It is, admittedly, 12 years old, and second hand, and mainly used for pies and pizza. I used to cook from basics, but more and more it's a question of throwing something together from what's in the fridge and cupboards, using supermarket sauces rather than making them from scratch.

Meals tend to run permutations around the same limited number of ingredients: onions (white, red or spring), peppers (green and red, maybe also yellow or orange), carrots, mushrooms, chicken, pork or fish, a cupboard full of herbs and spices, garlic or ginger (both if it's Indonesian or Malay). Despite which, I have never been able to make a recipe come out the same way twice. Partly I think because I never measure anything except by eye.

### Art Credits

Cover by Brad Foster. Page 27 by Sue Mason. The rest by David, or liberated from the capitalist running-dog lackeys of the Web.



<http://www.freeway.fr/MARIE-ANTOINETTE/life.html>

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*"If I didn't know it was root beer, I wouldn't know it was root beer."*

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