



"WOT? ME GAFIATE?" ISSUE

Kevin Smith, 53 Altrincham Road, Gatley, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 4EL, England.

"That's a new address, boy. Write, I say, write it down."

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

When I applied speculatively for a job with another, much smaller, accountancy firm in December 1981 I really had no intention of moving to Manchester and getting engaged. But that's what happened, anyway.

I was pretty secure in my job at Ernst and Whinney, and earning what most people would think a good salary. I'd been with the firm for just over seven years, man and boy, joining straight from university, qualifying to become the butt of John Cleese's jokes (i.e. a chartered accountant), and moving into the computer audit department. I was set fair to become a manager and get a company car (up to a Ford Cortina 1.6GL, and presumably a Sierra these days). I enjoyed the company of the people in my department. I liked the work and the style of working. What could be wrong?

Well, I had no prospect of advancement to partner and the big money: one computer audit partner was enough -- he made sure of that. And I could earn better money elsewhere. So not a lot was wrong; just enough to cause wandering eyes.

So when I spotted a likely looking job in Accountancy Age (the coming Age is not of Aquarius at all) (God! I've just dated myself.) I sent off a speculative application. I was totally relaxed about the whole thing; it didn't matter at all whether I got that job or not. It would just be nice if I did.

I didn't, as it happened. But I spotted another and applied. That put me on the books of a recruitment agency, and a couple more

interviews followed. Then I realised I did want another job. I mean, really wanted it.

Now that took me completely by surprise.

I can't pinpoint when the realisation came, can't even identify a particular event that might have caused it. One day I didn't especially want another job, the next I'd been wanting one for ages.

The job came, inevitably. My first interview with Shell was remarkable for the fact that my interviewer did most of the talking and answered several of his questions himself. He was selling the job harder than I was selling myself, or so it felt: quite flattering.

I also had to see a personnel department interviewer that morning. Now, there was of course competition for the job, and the other person at that pair of interviews (doing them the other way round) was a manager from my department at Ernst and Whinney... I'd arrived first, and while waiting in the enormous reception area I saw him come in and approach the desk. "Well isn't this a turn up for the books," I thought to myself, or something to that effect. Ernst and Whinney did the audit of some bit of Shell, but not, I thought, the bit in this building. Was I wrong? From thirty yards (an enormous reception area, I said) I swear I could lip-read him asking for the same personnel person as I had, no matter that he had his back to me. Since no one knew that either of us was applying for jobs we instantly formed a conspiracy of silence. Amazingly the conspiracy held, though times I found myself about to give the game away when someone came up with some damn fool suggestion about which manager was going to leave first, or some fatuous idea about job prospects in the big outside world. More than once we went out for a quiet drink and chat about jobs in pubs no one from the firm went to. (They were hard to find; people from Ernst and Whinney will drink anywhere.)

The automatic smug grin when I got the job and he didn't was inhibited somewhat by the realisation that he wouldn't have accepted it on the terms offered to me. On the other hand, they were offered to me. I didn't resign immediately, because the job offer was conditional on a medical examination, and at this examination the friendly Shell doctor (they have their own, several of them) discovered that I had a heart murmur of no significance. The murmur was discovered immediately: the total absence of significance took rather longer and a specialist to demonstrate.

Oh yes. The job would be based in Manchester; would I mind?

No, I said confidently. I was confident, too. I had got into a rut in London: working ten till six, having a couple of pints with the lads after work ('couple' equals anything from two to seven), Limpwrist twice a month, the Tun once. The same people all the time.

That sounds insulting. It isn't meant to be. They couldn't

help being the same people, and no fault or blame can be attached to any of them. It was in me that the restlessness lay. I felt I needed to shake up my life -- and what better to shake it than Manchester? That's a rhetorical question.

I'm sure the rut I was in was more enjoyable than most people's; nothing that involves getting mildly drunk fairly frequently can be all bad. But it was a rut nonetheless.

My new job was also responsible for my becoming engaged. No, I didn't meet Diana at work; we've known each other for eleven years since Oxford. No, she doesn't live in Manchester; she was in London all the time I was and currently lives in Orpington. What then can explain this singularly perverse manner of falling in love? Well, if I hadn't been starting a new job in July, I wouldn't have needed to take a week's holiday in May -- and gone to a Pieria in Cornwall --, and I wouldn't have been co-host (one of six!) at a mass 'Ernst and Whinney computer audit department imminent leavers' party a couple of weeks later. An unlikely sequence of events, of course, but aren't they all?

So here I am, in Manchester, and engaged to be married.

Last December, I started looking speculatively at car magazines to see if I could find the ideal car for cruising the motorways between Manchester and Orpington. It doesn't matter whether I find one quickly, or at all. My current car, though not great, is entirely adequate for the job. It would just be nice to have a better one, that's all.

PHYSICAL

When I took this new job in Manchester I told myself that it wasn't all that different, in terms of climate, from sunny Surbiton -- a less than honest alliteration. I told a lot of other people, too -- Southerners all, convinced that they'd need passports, snowshoes and wet-suits to visit me. I told them, but they didn't believe me. I produced the evidence that more days' play had been lost through rain at Lords than at Old Trafford since 1945, but the revered name of Bill Frindall was as nothing to them. "Yes, Kevin," they said in that tone of voice that asks if the men in white coats have been sent for, and if not, shouldn't someone do it without delay? One or two questioned whether the move was really worth it when all of the increase in salary would go on fur coats and thermal underwear.

I laughed at them. After all, did I not originate in Leicestershire, nearly as far north as Manchester? Was I not tough? And did I not intend, in any case, to live on the south side...?

My body knew better.

During the long summer months while I was living in a hotel

at company expense waiting for my solicitors, Sloth, Sloth and Loris, to do the legalities on my house purchase, my body, all unbeknownst to me, was making preparations.

I moved into my house at the end of November. Wild, impersonal nature straightway hit me with frost, snow and strong, icy winds, denying me even the time to figure out how all the gas fires worked. The intellectual me had no answer to this primitive onslaught, but the body was ready. It slapped on an extra layer of fat in no time -- magic!

What I still don't understand, what I probably never will understand, is why Mother Nature thinks I need a warm stomach.

REFERENCES

So what is this wonderful new job for which I came to the fannish wasteland? What do I actually do?

I can best answer these questions with my 'reference indicator'. The Shell group's reference indicator system identifies every department in every company in the group more or less uniquely in a roughly hierarchical way. Letters give the company identity and the overall department, and numbers give the position within the department -- a sort of fine-tuning of the system. My reference indicator, as Darroll Pardoe knows full well, is UKFA/1, from which you can see that 'UK' is the Shell company I work for, and 'FA' is what I do...

HONESTLY BOSS, THIS ISN'T A FEUD WITH ARTHUR HLAVATY

"Dear Kevin,

"So you want to know about the giant return addresses on my envelopes. All you have to do is ask. Would you believe it was done as part of an effort to weed out of fandom those mentally unstable enough to be freaked out by little things like oversized return addresses? No? Didn't think so. A more plausible explanation is the dread curse of Address Envy. Your address, like so many British ones, is almost the size of an essay. I look at my puny little 3-line address (well, four when I'm writing overseas), and feel insecure and inferior, until there is nothing left but to strike back in whatever way I can. (A more mundane explanation...funny animal rubber stamps.)" [100 boring words of extremely unlikely explanation omitted here - Ed.]

Well, Arthur, just goes to show what happens when you live in such a well-ordered, highly structured society as America, doesn't it? All addresses look the same. My favourite address was my one at university: "Oriel College, Oxford". Two lines only (I didn't know any foreign persons then, except Dave Langford, who is Welsh, and he was at Oxford anyway).

POSTSCRIPT

I had letters from 27 people about Ellipsis, as it was called. Most, though not all, of these letters are nearly a year old and hardly worth bothering with for that reason. I suppose I could publish more often, and thus use the letters when they were more relevant. This has been a possibility for several years...

Let's start with MICHAEL ASHLEY.

"The only bit [of Ellipsis] that held any sort of interest for me was your return visit to university. It was interesting mainly by contrast. Oriel appears to be a place with atmosphere and heritage, a place where you feel you are somehow part of a tradition. Lancaster University (for it is he) was built in the Sixties, lovingly thrown together using some leftover concrete, plastic, and steel girders. (You'll find a reasonable likeness in the 'University of Watermouth' described in Malcolm Bradbury's The History Man.)

"You're obviously a different sort of person to me anyway... I spend much time trying to avoid people like Chomsky and Lyons and then here's you spending five pounds on them, voluntarily. Deviant behaviour, you could call that."

It would be less deviant if I'd actually read the linguistics books by now. As it is, I've merely promised myself that I will, one day, RSN. I spent three days at Lancaster University, on a conference. All I remember is that they kept closing the bar; the rest I have successfully blotted out from my memory. Next is WILLIAM BAINS.

"You think having Kilworth in Blackwells is bad. Well, yes, I suppose it is, but our local library can sink lower. Prominently displayed are half a dozen tomes by that arachnidoid of space opera, Spider Robinson. But have heart! While I was in a few weeks ago pondering which Mills and Boon to take out next, a two-year old, obviously following his/her mother's example at a lower physical level, reached up and managed to extract Telempath from the shelves of skiffy. Like taking out a rotten tooth, maybe. The infant turned it over a few times, examining its literary value, then dropped it and stood on it to gain sufficient height to get to the H - M shelf."

Now now, William. I didn't make any value judgements about Garry Kilworth's books. Obviously you were superimposing your own on my very factual words. (Okay, Garry, let go of the arm.) We move on to PHIL JAMES.

"Thank you for Ellipsis... Such an appropriate name for the issue... (That's enough of that gag, I think.)"

I don't know what you mean, Phil...

(Anyway, readers, this is a man who confesses that he listens to the Archers. Regularly. Damned media fan!)

WAHF

Harry Andruschak, Chris Bailey,
John Berry, Pamela Boal, Geogre
Bondar, Leigh Edmonds, Jeff
Ford, Mark Greener, Lucy M.
Huntzinger, Barney Neufeld,
Darroll Pardoe, Eunice Pearson,
Mickey Poland, Pete Presford,
Chris Priest, David Redd, Steve
Sneyd, Andrew Stephenson, Bruce
Tonwley, Glen Warminger, Harry
Warner Jr, Pam Wells, and The
Mervyn Peake Society.

TAFF TALK 13½

Since TAFF TALK 13, last Dec-
ember, not only has Avedon
Carol been elected TAFF dele-
gate, she's made the trip and
gone home again. TAFF TALK --
always up with the news!

TAFF TALK has obviously been
mentioned in strange places.
Yesterday I received a sort of
fanzine from 'The Gild (sic)
of St. George', which doubles
as 'A Social Credit Journal of
General Interest' and contains
some foolish economics and lots
of exhortations to write to MPs.
The editor wanted to trade with
TAFF TALK, so I suspected he
thought it was some sort of
Welsh nationalist magazine.
Then today I received Howl,
the magazine of the Hunt Sab-
oteurs Association, a couple
of CND leaflets and a sticker
all wrapped up in poster adver-
tising a CFC (Cause for Concern)
cassette, along with a request
to mention it. Well, I've men-
tioned it, but I'm still not
sure quite what it is, or where
it's from. I shall be watching
the post with interest.

More a DO than a DOT, wasn't
it? But it's better than
nothing, marginally.



PRINTED
PAPERS

Joe Siclari
4599 N W 5 Ave
Boca Raton
FL 33431
U S A

KEVIN SMITH
53 ALTRINCHAM ROAD
GATLEY
CHEADLE
CHESHIRE SK8 4EL
ENGLAND

By air mail
Paravion