



INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER

Issue 4 March 2001

Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road, Tottenham, London N15 4JU

e-mail: jehanna@gn.apc.org / josephn@globalnet.co.uk

Spring is on the way (or it would be if winter wasn't taking so damn long to depart), the frogs are spawning, and it must therefore be time to get another issue of our occasional publication into the mail before planting, weeding and general tidying take over our weekends. As ever, *International Revolutionary Gardener* is nominally a science fiction fanzine, produced by two people who read the stuff from time to time but rarely talk about it, and who hardly if ever discuss fandom itself (except in this very issue). It is available for the usual reasons for which fanzines are available; cannot be had for money; and is published only in this old-fashioned sliced dead tree format. Vote Green on 3 May!

Contents

Growing Up in Books -- Judith Hanna	page 3
Down Here in the Dream Quarter -- letters, edited by Judith Hanna (the Barbie bits) and Joseph Nicholas (everything else)	page 13
More Observations from Life -- Joseph Nicholas	page 20

Cover illustration by Judith Hanna

MAKE LITTERING A CAPITAL OFFENCE!

Are you irritated beyond endurance by the rubbish which fills Britain's streets? Do you think that more bins should be provided for people to deposit their garbage in, and lessons given in how to use them? Do you shake with rage when leaving the house in the morning to find a detritus of discarded burger cartons and cigarette wrappers in your front garden? Do you consider that litter-louts should be garrotted on the spot and their corpses hung from lamp-posts as a warning to others? Then sign the on-line petition and join the campaign at www.terminatewithextremeprejudice.org.uk. You know it makes sense!

Growing up in Books

Judith Hanna

I grew up in books, emerging every now and then, mostly reluctantly, to make contact with real life. On the whole, real life just didn't measure up to either fiction or theory. Over time, however, I've become reconciled to it. For us bookworms, that's what growing up amounts to.

One of my few memories of my first 'kindergarten' year of primary school at Bomaderry, south of Sydney, is winning the class prize for 'best reader'. It was a Little Golden Book about Squirrel Nutkin, a red squirrel who has an alarming encounter with a pine marten. I also remember having the 'Poky Little Puppy' Little Golden Book, and one about a ladybird, and a nursery rhyme book. The next year, Grade 1, we had to walk a block or so from morning assembly at the big school to our classroom in an old wooden church hall, past dead bats fallen onto the footpath from the electricity wires above. "The birds don't get hurt when they perch on the wires, because both their feet are on the same wire," our teacher explained. "The bats get killed because they perch with one foot on one wire, the other on the other, and the electricity runs through the bat and kills it." That's the first science lesson I can remember. We made fluffy yellow ducklings for an Easter card to take home by shaking up cottonwool balls with powdered yellow chalk in a brown paper bag, and I learned to make pom-poms by winding wool around two cardboard discs.

That was the year the Navy moved Dad to HMAS Tarangau on Manus Island, Bismark Archipelago, north of New Guinea and 70 miles south of the equator, and we went with him.¹

The Navy 'Primary A' school (for white kids)² was two wooden buildings, each one classroom. Mrs Griffiths taught us littlies (kindie, grades 1 and 2) in the smaller building with a sandpit outside, Mr Griffiths taught the big kids (grades 3 to 6) in the other. There was no high school on the island. There was a small assembly area between the two, and at morning assembly two of the big boys would ceremonially run the Australian flag up the flagpole. One day we were all called to gather around the coconut palm by the door of the big classroom to see a coconut crab, a weird shape I

now think of as like a dark aborted foetus, about to haul itself up the trunk.

At this stage, reality was more interesting than the Dick and Dora and Janet and John school primers we were reading out loud in chorus in class, and bringing home to read out loud to Mum homework. The one story I recall from them was about a shoe-maker with a nasturtium that grew in an old boot, and the nasturtium grew all up and over his house -- then the yellow and orange and scarlet flowers came out. Oh, said the neighbours, his whole house is on fire! They called the fire engine to put it out -- but it was just the glowing flowers.

We lived close enough to walk home for lunch through a gap between houses, then along the Cameron's side verandah. They faced out onto the same curve of road as our house, with an island of lush greenery and scarlet hibiscus in between. The Cameron's house was a Quonset hut, a long semi-cylinder of galvanised iron. Dad being an officer, we had a proper house of fibro -- pressed asbestos board. The Camerons had about six kids; the oldest girl taught us little ones to dance rock'n'roll, jiving to 'Rock around the Clock' and such-like.

The school library was a wall of shelves in the narrow teacher's office back of the big kids classroom. I quickly worked my way through all the little kids books -- ones with more pictures than words -- and was given formal permission to take out proper big books, with mostly words. This must mark having mastered the mechanics of translating letters into meaning, and learning the trick of silent reading inside my own head.

What books do I remember from the Manus school shelves? Milly-Molly-Mandy, Enid Blyton's *Secret Seven* stories, and Mrs Aeneas Gunn's *Little Black Princess*, about a little Aboriginal girl called Daisy on the Gunn's cattle station by the Roper River in Arnhem Land. I liked that story, and was pleased to find another by her, *We of the Never-Never*. "You can't borrow that, it's too old for you. You won't be able to read it," said the big girl on library duty. I was stubborn, and Mrs Griffiths was called in. "You can borrow it," she

¹ See 'Alien landscapes' in John Jarrold's *Prevert ? 19??* -- if anyone has a copy in their fanzine collection, I'd be very grateful for a photocopy. I've somehow lost mine. JH

² Across the valley was a 'Primary T' school for the native kids.

said, "and see if you can read it or not." The big girl was right -- it was too dense for a seven year old. Although I recognised most of the words there were just too many of them to wade through, and in too small print.

Grade 3 at Manus, in the big classroom with Mr Griffiths, was where I met poetry lessons and realised that rhyme and verse wasn't natural spontaneous wordplay that just happened all by itself. As well as the nursery rhymes that came in books, Dad was always reeling out his repertoire of verses for us: "*Little fishie in the brook, Daddy catchee with a hook, Mummy fry'ee in a pan, Petey eaty like a man.*" (Or Johnny or Julian, my other brothers.) And "*My birchbark canoe is the boat of my heart, It's as light as a feather and swift as a dart. No fish in the ocean, No bird in the blue, Can keep up in a race with my birchbark canoe. Last night down the rapids Red Indians gave chase, Fast dipped their paddles and mad was the chase. But no fish in the ocean, No bird in the blue, Could keep up in a race with my birchbark canoe.*" Never seen it in print, no idea who wrote it.

At school, we were given printed poems to recite out loud from a lesson sheet, all in chorus. Two stick in my mind from that classroom: "*Fat and full of health are the valleys of the Condamine; there the dum de dah and the dumpty dumpty grow... Here nothing changes, Seed time or harvest time.... Mulga round the skyline, mulga round the place....*" Can anyone supply author and proper title? I drew a picture of the 'fat and full of health' valley. The other was WH Davies' Leisure "*What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare...*" One of these days, I must make that into a sampler for Joseph. Then the Navy moved Dad back to Australia, to HMAS Leeuwin in Fremantle. As we drove across the Nullarbor against the dust thrown up by traffic returning from the Perth Commonwealth Games, I read *Black Beauty* in the back of our two-tone grey and black Holden station wagon.

Our new house had the Swan River just down the hill for catching 'blowies' (blowfish) from the great chunks of sandstone that lined our stretch of its banks. The rocks also made excellent castles and pirate ships to defend against all comers, imaginary or rival kids. We went to Richmond primary school -- this involved walking over the hill behind the house, and a couple of blocks down the other side. Getting to and from school was a social adventure -- John, Peter and me, Ilse from next door, a couple of other neighbouring Peters,

Ruth from the rectory on top of the hill, Jane Stanley and her brothers, Debra with polio, clambering up and down the sandstone cutting that took the road through the top of the hill, gossiping, daring, hopscotching in season, teasing as we went.

VERSE AND WORSE...

Learning poetry by heart, being able to recite aloud, was a game Dad played with us. Sometimes my brothers rebelled by refusing take up the verses Dad started off. I went the other way -- on the family bookshelves was a *Sunburnt Country* anthology of Australian verse. I showed off by learning (over the years) quite a lot of it by heart -- I took revenge on Dad when he dropped out after a couple of lines or verses by refusing to stop until I'd declaimed the whole poem all the way through.

I started, I think, with some of the shorter, poems, like Henry Kendall's ripplingly lyrical 'Bellbirds':

*By channels of coolness the bellbirds are calling, And through the deep gorges I hear the creek falling, And softer than slumber and sweeter than singing, The notes of the bellbirds are running and ringing...*³ and 'Australian Sunrise':

"The Cross hung low to the sea, And down the shadowy reaches, the tide came swirling free. The lustrous purple blackness of the soft Australian night, Waned in the grey awakening that heralded the light.

Still in the dying darkness, still in the forest dim, the pearly dew of the dawning, Clung to each giant limb. 'Til the sun came up from the ocean, Red with the cold sea-mist, And smote the limestone ridges and the shining tree-tops kissed.

Then the fiery Scorpion vanished, And the magpie's note was heard, The wind in the she-oaks wavered And the honeysuckle stirred,

The airy gold vapour, Rose from the river's breast, The kingfisher came darting, Out of her crannied nest, The bulrushes and reed-beds, Put off their sallow grey, And burned with fiery crimson, At the dawning of the day.

Not bad for a Pom, gets the feel of the Sydney and Blue Mountains landscape. But hasn't the native-born feel of that staple of Australian identity, Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country':

"I love a sunburnt country, a land of the sweeping plains, Of rugged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains, I love her far

³ Note to Australian pedants: not checked against book, because the books are still in the family bookshelves back home. Lines and verses omitted in mercy to readers who didn't breathe this stuff in with their zeitgeist.

horizons, I love her jewel sea, Her beauty and her terror, The wide brown land for me.

Her stark white ring-barked forests, All tragic to the moon, Her sapphire-misted mountains, The hot gold hush of noon...

Core of my heart, my country, Land of the rainbow gold, For flood and fire and famine, she pays us back threefold,
... An opal-hearted country, A wilful lavish land...
... Wherever I may die, I know to what brown country, My homing thoughts will fly."

Then I memorised epic bush ballads like 'Banjo' Patterson's 26-verse 'The Man From Snowy River'. The bit every Australian knows is:

"There was movement at the station for the word had passed around, That the colt from Old Regret had got away, And had joined the wild bush horses...."

I still know it all the way through to:

"Down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise, Their torn and rugged battlements on high, And the air is clear as crystal and the white stars fairly blaze, At midnight in the cold and frosty sky. And down by the Overflow, where the reed-beds sweep and sway, To the breezes and the rolling plains are wide, There the Man from Snowy River is a household word today, And the bushmen tell the story of his ride."

I restrain myself from giving you more. This stuff isn't mere literature, it's the spirit of Australian bush pioneer mateship. The bush ethos took form through the voice given it by the 'Banjo of the Bush' and by the gloomy -- and less memorable, I've found -- Henry Lawson. On the '1066 and all that' principle that what counts is what you can remember, Banjo is rivalled only by AA Milne and the prolific Anon.

'Clancy of the Overflow' is a leading character in the Snowy River epic, Banjo gave him his own poem, and I've got that too in my head:

"I had written him a letter, which I had for want of better Knowledge, sent to where I met him down the Lachlan years ago. The answer came directed in a writing unexpected, And I think the same was written with a thumbnail dipped in tar. 'Twas his shearing mate who wrote it, And verbatim I will

quote it: "Clancy's gone to Queensland droving and we don't know where he are..."

...I am sitting in my dingy little office where a stingy Ray of sunshine struggles feebly down between the houses tall, And the fetid air and gritty of the dusty dirty city Through the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all...

Visions come to me of Clancy, gone a-droving down the Cooper where the western drovers go. As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind them singing, For the drovers life has pleasures that the townfolk never know... And he sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended, And at night the wondrous glow of the everlasting stars.

...And I sometimes rather fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy, And take a turn at droving where the seasons come and go... But I doubt he'd suit the office, Clancy of the Overflow."

Also Banjo's were 'The Man From Ironbark' (a mere 8 verses), 'The Bush Christening' (innocent babe named for a whiskey bottle). But the mock-gloomy 'Said Hanrahan' was by one John O'Dowd:

"We'll all be rooned, said Hanrahan, "if rain don't come this week." In God's good time down came the rain.... Outside the church, ere mass began, Each man squatted on his heel and chewed a piece of grass, "Tis wet all right, said Daniel Croke... "Never since the banks went broke⁴, Has season's been so bad..." "We'll all be rooned, said Hanrahan, if this here rain don't stop..."

Still sums up the gist of farm conversation. Our Dad's theme tune...

We had an old illustrated copy of CJ Dennis's 'Songs of a Sentimental Bloke'⁵, about a Melbourne city larrikin in love, and I was taken by the 19-verse 'The Play':

"What's in a name," she says, And then she sighs, And clasps her little hands and rolls her eyes... Chuck yer old pot and change yer moniker.

This Romeo 'e's lurking wiv a crew, A dead tough bunch of crooks named Montague. His cliner's push wot's nicknamed Capulet, they 'as them set. Fair narks they are, Just like them back-street clicks, Except they fights wiv skewers stead of sticks. Wot's just plain stoush wiv us right here today, Is valour if yer far enough away...

⁴ Presumably the 1890 bank crash, in which Mum's grandfather John James StClair, a director of Sydney's Joint Stock Bank, went bankrupt and retired to Burwood, not far from the 2000 Olympics stadium. Grandpa remembered riding horseback through the bush to the nearest shops at now inner-city suburbs Leichardt and Annandale.

⁵ Angus & Robertson 1915, illustrated by Hal Gye, foreword by Henry Lawson, cover now sadly damaged by termites and damp

*A tug named Tybalt, cousin to the skirt, sprags
'em and makes a start to sling off dirt, Next minute
there's a real old ding-dong go, 'Arf round or so,*

*Mick Curio 'e gets it in the neck, 'Ar rats, 'e
says, and passes in 'is check. Quite natchril,
Romeo gets wet as 'ell, 'Its you or me, 'e sez, And
wiv a yell, plunks Tybalt through the gizzard wiv
'is sword, 'Ow I encored! ...*

*Now things get mixed a treat and starts to
whirl, Here's Romeo comes back and finds his
girl, Tucked in her little coffin cold and stiff, And
in a jiff, He swallows lysol, throws a fancy fit,
Head over turkey and his soul has flit.*

*Fair Juliet wakes up and sees him there, Turns
on the waterworks and tears her hair, Dear love,
she says, I cannot live alone, And wiv a moan, She
grabs 'is pocket-knife and ends her cares,
'Peanuts and lollies' shouts the boy upstairs."*

A masterly plot summary and translation into the vernacular. I've not been able to take Romeo and Juliet seriously since -- like the classic definition of opera: "a story you sing because it's too silly to say."⁶

As well as lots of Australian verse, some of it even qualifying as poetry, I could also recite the whole of Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' which I have mostly forgotten now. The best way to memorise poetry is to tuck the book behind the taps of the sink while you are doing the washing up for a family of eight plus any visitors, plus milk separator, calf or lamb feeding apparatus, and mutter away as you wash.

Julian, my youngest brother, went several better -- starting when he was three with a party piece from Christopher Robin. These days, apart from running the farm, he's a 'man of mark'⁷ as a bush poet. He's won the Liar's Prize at Toodyay Folk Festival and various bush poetry prizes, and is regularly asked to perform at weddings, parties, anything. Apart from personalised wedding epics for his mates and his little sisters, his magnum opera are 'The Man from Kaomagma'⁸ and his heartfelt tribute to 'My Dog Blue'. The latter explains what a master with sheep Blue is, not just rounding up the woollies but opening the gates and shutting them again after they've gone through. Then at the pub at the end of the day, his hard-hearted master won't let the poor dog have a beer, "Nah, you've got to drive me home." Can't

have Blue drinking and driving, of course. Gotta set the townies a good example

BACK IN THE PROSE WORLD

In Fremantle, Mr Pavlovic was my Grade 4 teacher, with whom I had some difficulties. On Manus, we'd got as far as six times tables -- in Fremantle they'd gone all the way up to nine times tables. I blame my creative ability to get a different answer every time I do a simple sum on this. On the other hand, on Manus we were spelling three syllable words, while down in Fremantle the class spelling book was still on little one and two syllable words. I discovered that simply reading a library book under my desk kept me from being bored during spelling. Then Mr Pavlovic told me not to. So I kept boredom at bay by scribbling and doodling on my spelling book instead, and he told me off. I explained to him perfectly calmly and reasonably that it was my spelling book, paid for by my parents, not his book, and I had to do something to keep from being bored because I knew all the words in the book. Apparently, this was giving cheek and he lost his temper and sent me outside,⁹ where I got on with reading my book. This is what comes of bringing up children to expect to be treated as reasonable thinking beings, entitled to logical explanation and discussion, rather than exerting unthinking obedience to authority -- so it was therefore all Mum's fault.

There were no such problems with my Grade 5 teacher, jolly Mr Judge. Not even when several of us devised an efficient system for sharing answers to tests so that our group could all get good marks. It hadn't previously occurred to me that co-operation in tests was cheating and definitely not allowed. By this time I was reading quite a lot -- most of the books in the class library shelves seemed to be girls boarding school stories about Dimsie and Chalet School in the Swiss Alps, and an Abbey School in the English countryside (wildflower May-queens and folk-dancing), and boy's school and adventure stories by Eric Leyland and WE John's Gimlet. I didn't like the sound of Biggles at all, and steered clear of him -- until the Christmas when my brother Peter was given *Biggles of the Camel Squadron* as a Christmas present. As a book addict, of course I had to read all the new Christmas books, even if I didn't expect to like them. Having quite enjoyed that taste

⁶ Maria Prerauer, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1975

⁷ Like Banjo's 'Man from Ironbark'

⁸ Kaomagma is a suspension of kaolin widely used in parts of rural Australia off the mains water supply as a remedy for runny tummy. A fact of farm life.

⁹ See also 'The Great Beetle Bug Craze' in Pam Wells *Nutz* 3, May 1985

of Biggles, I worked my way through the rest of them

School library books were supplemented by trips into Fremantle Library, then in a white-painted building close to the Esplanade. Mum took out yellow-backed Gollancz science fiction. I can remember getting out stories by Arthur Ransome, and sea-adventures by Captain Frank Knight. The Frank Knight story that sticks in my mind has the boy protagonist meeting a very intelligent talking octopus, who gives him a helmet that lets him breathe under the sea and visit Davy Jones locker. Knight's other stories, as far as I remember, were all perfectly realist sea, boating and yachting adventure yarns. My other Fremantle library favourites were history stories -- Geoffrey Trease and Henry Treece, Rosemary Sutcliffe, etc. Often, it seemed, modern child hits head or falls asleep, wakes up somewhere back in history caught up in Viking, medieval battle or whatever adventure, until gets hit on head again, wakes up and it was all a dream...

Of course, we also borrowed non-fiction books -- but it's the stories that stick in memory. I think the stage at which I graduated from the children's library to being allowed to take books from the grown-up shelves was during Grade 5. Having browsed around the town library, finally settling on a mere handful of all the tempting books to take out, the big treat was to get crisp hot gold-battered fish and chips from Cicceroni's, the fishermen's wharf co-op, and eat them while we sat on the grass under the Norfolk pines surrounded by screaming silver gulls and usually, it seemed, whipped by a brisk sea-breeze under brilliant blue sky.

Some of the books around were Australian. There was Mary Grant Bruce's 'Billabong' series, which started off as brother and sister on a Victorian¹⁰ homestead, followed them to boarding school from which they brought their best friends home for holiday adventures, and ended up with each marrying the other's handy best friend and producing babies. At home I found Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* and, in the library, its sequel *Family at Misrule*, about seven kids in a rambling riverside Parramatta house with a stern father and nice young stepmother. The first turns into a tear-jerker when the mischievous Judy gets squashed by a falling tree as she saves the baby from it.

We also had at home *Tales from the Dead Heart*, in which a rock python called Woma tells stories of the Dreamtime to an aboriginal boy out

in the desert country. There was one about the origin of honey ants, another about the frogs that bury themselves in the mud during droughts, and of course, about the rainbow snake.

I worked my way through a whole lot of classic old-fashioned girls stories. *Little Women* was, I think, Mum's girlhood copy and its sequels followed as Christmas and birthday presents. *Anne of Green Gables*, set on Prince Edward Island, Canada, I came across when we were visiting Dad's cousin Aunty Sylvia at Floreat Park one weekend. I was allowed to borrow it and a handful of other Anne books, and worked my way through the whole series.

At this stage, stories conjured up people who were more real, more comprehensible and easier to get on with than people unmediated by printed words -- in a variety of worlds beyond the narrow confines of going to school and coming home again week in, week out.

But I recall putting down my reading at least occasionally to join in games of dodge and hopscotch and skipping outside that classroom. At the end of the year Mr Judge made me the editor of a class newspaper, which I re-read in Mum's family archive files last time I was home.

Grade 6 was Mr Davidson, who played the piano accordion for us to sing along. In his class, we'd do morning news shows -- a team would be assigned to devise a show, usually dressing up reading a news script with a bit of singing (Puppet on a String, Mary Hopkins), go-go dancing, spoof ads, maybe a quiz show. The grand finale was usually flinging jelly beans, smarties or other sweets to the rest of the class. Very educational exercise: team-building, media deconstruction, creative writing and dramatic presentation, and current affairs in pulling together the token spot of news. Also great fun.

I think Mr Davidson must have been taking German lessons, because at the end of year, after exams, he filled in the time by teaching us *der, die, das; ich bin, du bist, sie sind* etc and a few words of vocabulary. My first encounter with foreign language -- apart from a few words of Pidgin up on Manus, enough to read the Mickey Mouse cartoon in the Pacific Island Monthly and learning the Sunday School hymn "*Jesus emi fren na bruder/ Karim sins belong olman/ Oltaim wi kan tok e heerim/ Evri sumting wi kan tok*" (*What a friend we have in Jesus/ All our sins and griefs to bear/ What a privilege to carry/ Everything to him in prayer.*) Singing 'Frere Jacques' and the Maori farewell 'Po kare kare ana' were just rote learning.

¹⁰ The Australian state, not the Saxe-Coburg queen's reign

The bookshelves at home suffered sudden denuding when my toddler sister Zena decided to take an interest, particularly grabbing and trying to eat any with yellow covers. Manning Coles *A Brother for Hugh*, a pacy amusing thriller about an Argentinian gang and a respectable Surbiton gent, still bears the scars. They had to be packed away until not only Zena, but a brand-new Roslyn who arrived six weeks after we moved to the farm¹¹ were safely at the stage of being reasoned with.

WE MOVE TO THE BUSH

Mr Potter, fresh out of teachers college, struggled with Grade 7 at Kojonup. "What are you reading under your desk?" he asked me, "this is an English lesson." "It's an English book," I said. It was not, after all, in French. But it was not, of course, the lesson book about how to use commas and full-stops -- I'd long since worked that out and had whipped through the exercises. Mr Potter made a fuss, and I got sent to the dreaded Mrs Benn for being cheeky. The class was amused. But they didn't like some new girl just arriving, and coming top of all the tests, all the time without even trying for the whole four years I was there -- particularly not the three boys who'd jockeyed with each other for top until I came along.

One of the main things to do with sisters and brothers too young to read for themselves is to read stories out loud to them. This was an excuse to pull out the nursery rhyme and fairy tale books that had survived me and John and Peter -- and even some that Mum and Dad had when they were little -- and have another wallow in them. A small fat book about a family of bunny rabbits was one of Dad's, as were various 'Boy's Book of Ships' and similar annuals, with riotous 'Moonshine Boys' cartoon scenes adorning their endpapers. If only they had not been used for the purpose they were made for -- letting rowdy children pore over their pages and batter them about -- they'd be valuable collectors editions. By this time, Zena and Rosie had grown out of eating books; I was the one who was devouring them.

Of course, the little ones also got brand new books I hadn't read before for their birthdays and Christmases. Christopher Robin arrived as presents to Julian when he was just starting school -- 'Now We are Six' marking the appropriate birthday -- so we'd read the poems out in chorus. Julian and I both learned quite a few of the Christopher Robin poems by heart. His party-piece was to recite: "*I had sixpence, bright shiny sixpence; I took my sixpence to the market square.*"

I wanted a rabbit, a little brown rabbit; But they didn't have a rabbit, not anywhere there..."

He goes to the lady who sells fresh lavender (*only a penny for a bunch of lavender*), and to the man who sells bright saucepans (*come on now, sixpence for a bright shiny saucepan*), but they don't have a rabbit, not anywhere there. Then:

"I went to the common, the old gold common, and I saw little rabbits most everywhere!"

This poem (and Dad's old bunny family book) did not, somehow connect with the reality of Dad, John and Peter going out trapping and shooting rabbits as a pest, and all of us eating them.

Sunday mornings on ABC Radio was "For the Young in Heart" -- classic children's stories read or acted out. When Roslyn was small, all six of us kids piled onto Mum and Dad's big double bed to listen to *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, and E Nesbit's *Five Children and It*. Most of the Narnia stories arrived later as birthday presents. Casting around the class library shelves for more of this fairytale sort of adventure, I found George MacDonald's *The Princess and Curdy*, but thought it a bit complicated. Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* was better. But neither was as engaging as May Gibbs *The Gumnut Babies*, with Snugglepot and Cuddlepie kidnapped by the horrifying Big Bad Banksia Men. Evenings, after the very thorough state-wide weather forecast and farming news, we listened to 'Round the Horne' with Rambling Sid Rumpo's archetypal folk songs, and "*Hello, I'm Julian and this is my friend Sandy... How bono to vida your jolly old eek again...*"

There were several reasons I did most of the reading out loud, and much of listening to the little ones doing their read-out-loud homework, often while peeling potatoes or podding homegrown peas for dinner. One, of course, was simply having a cuddly pair of little sisters to be played with, looked after, and as a willing captive audience. The boys were more inclined to muck around in the great outdoors helping Dad take tractors apart and put them together, chase sheep, put up fences and so on. It was only when John and Peter had gone down with measles while we were in Fremantle, and had to stay in bed in a darkened room, that they really stayed still as an audience for stories. Having them in a darkened room made reading to amuse them difficult, so I'd had to make up stories myself to tell them -- the first time I'd ever thought of doing this.

Next was that I was a bookworm who liked sitting around reading, so reading to them was pretty much an extension of what I wanted to do

¹¹ See 'Out in the Sticks', FTT 21, Nov 1996

anyway. Instead of just being a lazy bookworm, I could be a *usefully* lazy bookworm. Third was that while I was doing big sister duty, Mum could get on with the many other much harder and more complicated jobs involved in bringing up six kids and keeping the farm's household base going. Since we had bought the farm at what proved to be the start of an agricultural depression, make do and mend was the rule during those early years. An excuse to sit comfortably under cover, not getting all dirty or having to run around outside in the blazing sun or windy wet cold, suited me down to the ground.

Some of the books us bigger kids got were good for reading out loud to the little ones too: *Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland*. I had particular fun with Kipling's *Just So Stories*.

The fun of Kipling was, and remains, his richly rhythmic mastery of language. Who could forget that the Elephant's Child lived beside the "*great grey-green greasy Limpopo River all set about with fever-trees*", was "*full of 'satiabable curiosity'*", which led to having his "*mere-smear nose*" pulled into the first ever elephant's trunk by a crocodile. The book, I found, was full of lots more stories with even more satisfying runs of rhetoric. Best was Old Man Kangaroo, who "*ran through the desert, and ran through the mountains, he ran through the ti-trees, he ran through the mulga, he ran through the salt-pans in the middle of Australia, he had to,*" being chased by Yellow-Dog Dingo, "*always hungry, grinning like a rat-trap, never getting nearer, never getting farther, ran after Kangaroo, he had to*" and that was how the Kangaroo learned to jump. Then there were Sticky-Prickly Hedgehog and Slow-Solid Tortoise on the banks of the turbid Amazon, hiding from Painted Jaguar and his Mother who told him ever so many times graciously waving her tail "*Can't curl, can swim, Slow-Solid that's him; Curls up, can't swim, Sticky-Prickly that's him,*" until they turned themselves into armadillos to puzzle him. Next thing you know, I was unwrapping a copy of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, with its 'oak, ash and thorn' and people from history telling their own stories. The language was less intoxicating, the magic was in the sense of place -- Pevensy and the Weald through the ages.

In High School, we had different teachers for different subjects. Mr Quaternaas (who took science and maths) and Mr Brennan (English and social studies) were good teachers, both new at Kojonup when I started first year. Both had the sense to accept me reading in class, and fed me

books. That is, at the end of the first week of Science A (general science), Mr Quaternaas set the class a test. Mum, whose turns on the school canteen roster were a chance to catch up on staff-room gossip, told me that he'd planned in setting the test to show me that I didn't know everything and should pay attention in class. I think I scored 18/20 -- and came in next day with a plant book from home to show him that sandalwood and quandong were parasitic plants, like I'd said, even though they weren't the answers given in the textbook (which only gave mistletoe, fig and the yellow-flowering West Australian christmas tree). I had already read through the whole Science A textbook, and I thought he'd like some variety in the answers. Mum suggested it would be politer and more tactful not to correct the teacher in front of the whole class in future.

I'm interested, as I write this, to realise how much what I remember is oral literature -- stuff that sounds good to say aloud. Mr Brennan played us modern poetry tapes -- the one that sticks in my memory is a rollingly sonorous black American voice swooping, stretching, almost singing: "*The Lord's lost him his mocking bird, His fancy warbler. Satan sweet-talked her, Four bullets hushed her, Who would have thought she would end that way.*" It's a poem I've never seen in print; no idea who wrote it. Our poetry textbooks were the three volumes of Charles Causley's excellent *Voices* anthology.

Mrs Prandi at Kojonup hit on the best way to deal with a teenage bookworm. She caught me lurking one lunchtime, cosily hidden in the out-of-bounds collection of untidy bookcases at the back of the art-room that was allegedly the school library. "Right," she said. "You can be school librarian." She showed me how to work the lending cards system, how to accession books, how the Dewey classification system worked, and the school library was open for business. I spent lunchtimes, and when I could manage, sports sessions, happily surrounded by lots of books to read my way through, occasionally interrupted by people popping in to borrow or return something. Win-win solution all round.

I was surprised to discover that walking around the school corridors with my head stuck¹² in a book was considered an eccentricity. Apparently, kids used to steer into my way just so that they could marvel at how I avoided collision without lifting my head from the book. During my migratory school-life, I worked out that it takes about two years for any class of kids to accept a

¹² Metaphorically, not literally

newcomer -- and mostly, I stayed at any one school for two years, then had to break in another lot of schoolmates. But I don't recall ever being bullied -- unless you count having a mouse dropped on my head once, soon after arriving at Kojonup. I'm told I squeaked with surprise, like a mouse myself. But when I realised what it was, far from jumping on a chair in panic, suggested that whoever brought it in better put the poor thing somewhere safe before it got trodden on or the teacher came in.

At school, tennis was my favourite sport -- everyone else wanted to bag the courts for a game, so I could just sit back under a shady tree saying, "No, I'm right, you go ahead," and carry on reading. That took care of summer. For winter, hockey, you actually got picked (I was always last) for a team, and had to run around chasing balls in unreliable weather. Luckily, farm life made lots of healthy exercise unavoidable, however much I tried to make my excuses: wood-chopping, sheep-chasing, cycling a couple of miles to the school bus stop every weekday morning and evening.

Little brother Peter was mad about tennis, constantly practising his serve against the sagging wire of the chicken yard. This must have given any chickens inhabiting it severe nervous attacks. Perhaps this was when Mum started building extra chicken yards where the birds could get on with egg-laying in peace. Major scenes any Sunday when Dad was not punctually ready to set off for tennis at Wahkinup after lunch -- Peter in his tennis whites, sitting in the red Leyland P76 with tennis racket gripped and ready, parping on the horn for everyone else to hurry up. The courts at Wahkinup were surfaced with crushed termite nests, a nice fine silty mud. The surrounding geology was dirty grey sand interspersed with ironstone gravel, on the Pre-Cambrian granite of the Yilgarn Shield. Bits of the gravel would cling to a magnet, and from time to time iron spikes with shreds of red plastic fluttering showed where someone had pegged a bauxite mining claim, for aluminium -- none of them so far carried into actual mining. Tennis at Wahkinup was good reading time for me, in the shade of the she-oaks around the courts, emerging for afternoon tea, cakes and gossip at half-time in the wooden community hall.

Finding Mum's old copy of *Swiss Family Robinson* set me working out detailed plans for being comfortably marooned on a tropical island, which I still find a good way to relax into falling asleep. The trick, I reckon, is to go equipped with a

well-stocked ship full of all the equipment you could possibly need -- and choose a good island.¹³

Pride of place in our main bookcase, where Great Grandpa StClair's pendulum clock sat flanked by the china figures we called the Sultan and Sultana and a pair of Victorian crystal prism hangers, was Mum and Dad's collection of Australiana. Ion Idriess alone occupied a couple of shelves -- histories of white exploration (eg, *Lassiter's Last Ride*) and Aboriginal resistance (*Red Kangaroo*), fiction like the melodramatic *The Drums of Mer* -- a white castaway saved from cannibalism by being claimed as the ghost of a dead son on one of the Torres Straits islands and surviving as a white savage. They sat beside the *Wildflowers of Western Australia* book and Neville Cayley's classic *What Bird is That?* Julian started acquiring 'living off the land' and what are now called 'bush bucker' books -- and one day ran away to try out their handy survival hints.

That bookshelf also held *Johnno Johnson Deepsea Diver*. Johnno was one of the grizzled characters that Dad had brought home for dinner and drinks up at Manus, where Dad was Staff Officer Radio Intelligence North Australia and Chief Officer Coast-watching Australia. The coastwatchers were planters, missionaries and trading ship skippers who'd radioed news about Japanese landings and occupation to the Allies during WW2's Battle of the Coral Sea. The heroes of books about the WW2 Battle of the Coral Sea were the weather-beaten blokes us kids had been introduced to before being sent off to bed so the grown-ups could get on with talking. Johnno had arrived after the War, one of the first salvage divers to go down in a diving bell, below the depths a diving suit could stand. Lots of valuable scrap metal sent to the bottom of the sea during the sea-battles.

My great-grandfather Harrison's set of the MacMillan's Colonial Library editions of Kipling's short stories I dug out of the bookcase in the dark hallway -- and found them mesmerising. At first reading, what strikes you is their confident assurance and virtuoso bravado; only on later re-reading did I start to appreciate or question what they were really about. John James Harrison, who as Surveyor General of New South Wales had drawn up plans for a Northern Beaches railway which regrettably was not built, also left a set of Carlyle which I never really got to grips with, and a set of miniature volumes that included WS Gilbert's catchily humorous *Bab Ballads* -- several

¹³ See 'Desert Island Books', IRG 2, 1999

of which were expanded into the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas he wrote.

Georgette Heyer was the other author who cast an spell of assurance -- the point of Heyer is the elegant charmed world of Regency England's 'Upper Ten Thousand' aristocracy, all balls and badinage, that her heroines move through, not the mercifully perfunctory romantic endings.

The Hanna family lavishly looted the Kojonup Town Library in the Memorial Hall at the top of the hill. Each borrower was entitled to two fiction cards (yellow) and two non-fiction (blue). With eight in the family, that made thirty-two books we could take out between us. The way it worked was that whoever of the family went into the library to return books that we'd finished got to take out whatever books caught their eye. Mum would get out history and archaeology, geology and plate tectonics, nice quiet middle-class murder mysteries and yellow-backed 'Best SF' anthologies, so of course I read them all too.

Once you were in High School, you were allowed to go up the town at lunchtime if you brought in a note from your parents. Sometimes, too, Mum or Dad would drive into town for some shopping, and instead of going back on the school bus, we'd go up town to meet them. With a human population of about 2000 (but around 2 million sheep) in the shire and maybe 20 shops in the town, locating the family car and a parent wasn't a challenge.

I don't remember Dad being much of a book reader -- farm accounts, the news and magazines seemed to take up what time he had for reading. Mail for the farm arrived twice a week, and the bread was delivered with it. Our mail box was a 10-gallon drum nailed to a tree trunk where our dirt road (the Dinninup road) met the tarmac Qualeup road a couple of miles from the farm's front gate, which was itself about half a mile from the house. To catch the school bus, we cycled to the mail box in the morning, left the bikes behind a fallen tree on the road verge -- there was always a fallen tree around -- and cycled back in the afternoon. Fridays' mail brought the *Australian Women's Weekly*, which everyone in the family flicked through, and to which I later sold a couple of short stories.

Reading Mum's non-fiction library books led to trouble with the new Anglican rector, Mr Finlay, who took Scripture on Friday mornings. In one of his first lessons he went around the class, asking us all what we wanted to be when we grew up. Most of the boys answered "farmer", most of the girls

were answering either "teacher", "nurse" or "get married and have children." I thought he must be getting as bored with this as I was. So when the quiz reached me, I answered "Palaeontologist." After all, I'd been having fun reading about the Leakeys and Olduvai Gorge, and digging up dinosaurs, and that sort of thing. Mr Finlay glared grimly back and said "I bet you think I don't know what that means." Until he said that, it hadn't crossed my mind that he wouldn't.

Then, the next March, Mum took out a book on medical mysteries -- for instance, did Henry VIII die of syphilis? Come Easter, Mr Finlay asked us to write a composition about Jesus dying on the cross. So naturally I summarised the chapter that had suggested that Jesus may simply have gone into a coma on the cross and revived naturally after being taken down. Mum came back from her next stint on the parents' roster to tell us, with relish, that Mr Finlay had gone storming into the staff-room waving my paper, demanding that the headmaster expel me for heresy. I don't remember Mr Finlay saying anything to me.

Kojonup Junior High School went up to what was then called the Junior Certificate, taken when you were about fifteen. I came dux¹⁴ of the school. To carry on to Leaving and Matriculation certificate, I had to go to Katanning Senior High School, 25 miles the other side of Kojonup, or 50 miles from home. This meant boarding at the Hostel, along with kids from surrounding districts as far east as Esperance on the edge of the Nullarbor. Sundays, after (compulsory) Church, I escaped to have lunch with my Nana Hanna, and Uncle Milton, Dad's youngest brother, if he wasn't off to Bremer Bay on the Bight, fishing with his mates.

Nana lived in a red-brick railway cottage, at the edge of town. It had a deeply shaded front verandah with a cane swinging seat. Nana's front bedroom and a front parlour, both with their blinds kept drawn, faced each other across a hallway with a gleamingly polished jarrah wood floor. This opened into the kitchen, which was the main living room. Uncle Milton's room opened off the kitchen. What had been built as a back verandah was enclosed to make the bathroom and a 'sleep-out' bedroom. At the end of the back yard was the old dunny, overgrown with fresh-smelling asparagus fern -- great excitement when it was replaced by a flush toilet built into the outdoor laundry, with its own septic tank. Nana's front garden had roses -- one a deep crimson with the sweetest and headiest rich rose scent I've ever sniffed -- and a massive

¹⁴ Joseph does not recognise this term -- but of course, it's an import from the British school system.

jade tree or money tree beside the step up to the verandah. Hydrangeas grew along the shady side of the house; in the back yard was a big apple tree and a vegetable bed.

Nana kept a stack of *Woman's Day* and *New Idea* magazines on a chair by the dresser in the kitchen; Minner's room was stocked with *Readers Digests*, cowboy paperbacks, and *Phantom* comics -- "who sees the evil in the hearts of men - the Phantom does." In the front parlour was a 10 volume set of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopaedia* in their own 2-tier bookshelf, and a gleaming, glass-fronted bookcase filled with grandpa Langford Hanna's collection of P G Wodehouse, O'Henry, Damon Runyon and assorted other 2/6d hardbacks. Lanks, as Nana called him, had died when I was a baby; he'd been wounded at Gallipoli, and had been a railway engine driver. His photo in army uniform was on the front room wall, but his collection of wryly humorous books gave me more impression of a personality I'd have liked to have known.

Nana Hanna (née Veale) was famous for her vanilla sponge cakes, her sister Auntie Vera, who lived by the University up in Perth, for her ginger sponges. As a girl before the War, Nana had worked in Bon Marché up in Perth; Bon Marché had become Mark Foys department store, which became David Jones, and the building still stands at the east end of Hay St Mall in Perth.

There was a big flour mill beside Port Beach, where we were taken swimming and jogging every morning when we lived in Fremantle, victims of Dad's physical fitness regime. Then, it was blazoned as Dingo Flour, but it had once been Veale's Famous Horseshoe Flour. When Nana's father Benoni Tresize Veale died, my Great-Nana Hanna (Elizabeth Veale) let or sold it to a chap who traded as Magnet Flour, pinching a clone of the old horseshoe trademark without paying for the goodwill. There was a court case that Elizabeth Veale won, but the legal costs swallowed up the money at the end of it.

The Veales hailed from Cornwall, came out to Victoria in the Gold Rush. Great Nana Veale lived to a month or so short of 100, and I could just about squeeze my feet into the elegantly narrow black Edwardian shoes she used to wear.

On the Hanna side, Lanks' father Frederick had run away to sea on the clippers, doing every job but skipper. Eventually he settled on the West Australian goldfields, keeping the hotel at Kookaburra Mine, near Leonora. On leave during World War I, grandpa Lanks had visited his father's family in Belfast. "Very well off," Nana

remembered, "and a statue of one of them in one of the squares." It was of 'Roaring Hugh' Hanna, apparently the Ian Paisley of his day; it was blown up by the IRA, and I recall a media flurry over a proposal from Bernadette McAliskey to replace it with a statue commemorating prostitutes.

At Katanning Senior High School, I refused to do sports and phys ed. "School isn't compulsory for me -- I'm here by choice to pass exams and get to Uni. Sport doesn't contribute to this aim. I want to spend the time on reading and study," I argued. Mrs Frith, the biology teacher rallied as an ally, dubbing me 'science librarian.' This let me spend two years of sports and phys.ed periods diligently cataloguing about thirty Scientific American off-prints, mostly on cell chemistry and microbiology, which I found fascinating, and getting on with other reading.

For French lessons, our class of six was tucked into the library annexe, which was lined with piles of books waiting for repair or accession. Luc Delhaize from Esperance had the unfair advantage of Belgian parents. That was where I came across Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and liked it so much I never got around to returning it. It was a set book for second or third year (14-15 year olds), so there were thirty or more copies lying around. I took it home for holidays, and read it out loud to Zena and Roslyn. Then spotted *Lord of the Rings* out on the open shelves, borrowed the set and took them home for holidays and reading out loud too.

"Rosie's too little to understand a complicated story like that," reckoned John. But it was Roslyn who was bringing the big book to me for next instalment. "What's the story about, Rosie?" we asked her. "Dragons, gold, Bilbo, dwarves in misty mountains, nice elves..." she murmured, a fair summary of main points so far. Of course the details of the story washed over her -- but she was drinking in the imagery, getting vivid pictures in her head, enjoying the rhythms of the language. The whole world, after all, is a mass of complicated fast-moving stuff that a two-year-old takes in without it making logical sense yet.

Then I was off to Uni in Perth. Suddenly, instead of reading being an abnormal addiction, I realised that I was surrounded by fellow bookworms and swots. So I stopped burying myself in books and started discovering real people, including boyfriends. Some of them were into science fiction as a genre, which in due course led me to fandom.

MS485

DOWN HERE IN THE DREAM QUARTER

Letters – edited by Judith Hanna (the Barbie bits)
and Joseph Nicholas (everything else)

Stealing our title from an old Barry Malzberg novel -- does anyone still read him? is he even alive? and other questions too uninteresting to pursue at this juncture -- and with an early eighties soundtrack from the likes of Toni Basil and Department S (ah, nostalgia!), we pause before plunging into the letter column to note that, mere weeks after I'd said that Guy Hamilton's 1969 film The Battle Of Britain "is now little-shown, even on daytime television", it turned up on Channel 4 on a Saturday evening as part of their commemorations of the event. The narrative was as stodgy as ever, but the flying sequences were wonderful; others agreed:

Nic Farey
P.O. Box 178
St Leonard
Maryland 20685
USA

A school trip had been organised to see the movie on its original release in 1969, but for some reason I didn't get on it. My parents took me to London on the

same night as the school trip, to the big ole cinema at the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. We had to go, really, since my Dad was ex-RAF. I enjoyed the movie immensely at the time, and probably still would today -- really "goshwow", that. I completely identify with Joseph's analysis of "the Airfix generation". My own personal pride and joy was a model of a Superfortress bomber, and my father spent many a cement-fingered evening assembling the Saturn V (Apollo) kit, whose stages were all detachable and included the LEM an'all. I was more of a Lego person than a Meccano person, basically having little in the way of mechanical skills (a situation which persists to this day). I'm not sure that I care to think of myself as Being Of A Certain Age, but there it is.

Yes, I had a Superfortress, too...and how enormous it was alongside the Spitfire and Sopwith Camel. (Even the Lancaster looked small.) All the models I made as a boy now sit in a box in parents' attic: they are probably in terrible condition. But mention of my visit to the RAF Museum in the previous issue prompted a note from my father, forwarding a copy of Richard Overy's The Battle, a slim little volume

which he described as "one of the best summaries I've read on the Battle of Britain, dealing with some of the more popular myths and misconceptions". And so it does: for example, the timing of the Luftwaffe's switches from attacking the radar stations to the airfields, and thence to attacking London, weren't premature but planned; Goering had simply overestimated the likely effects of his raids, which faulty intelligence was unable to correct. For another example, the "lost bomber" incident seems never to have happened: so much for contingency.

Turning now from national history to more local varieties:

Dale Speirs
Box 6830
Calgary
Alberta T2P 2E7
Canada

I was interested to read of the connection of your neighbourhood to Sir Rowland Hill of postage stamp fame. Although he is best remembered for

postage stamps, the main impact of his 1840 postal reforms was standardised postage rates and forward sorting, with improved mail delivery as a result. Zines as we know them today could not have existed prior to him because of the expense of mailing. (Some people try to trace zines back to ancient Greeks in the same way that some trace science fiction back to Greece, but modern self-aware zinedom did not begin until the 1870s and modern SF fandom until the 1920s.)

If Sir Rowland invented a duplicator, it was not the first, as such devices were known a century before him. He probably invented a modification or improved device. James Watt of steam engine fame is generally considered to be the first person to come up with a practical duplicator. Nonetheless, Sir Rowland should be considered a patron saint of zinedom for developing cheap postage and efficient mail handling.

I subsequently ascertained that what Hill invented -- and what his nephew was imperfectly describing -- was not a duplicator but an early rotary press of the kind used to print newspapers. His original is in the Science Museum; one day I must go to see it.

Sean Russell Friend
P.O. Box 2757
Brighton
East Sussex BN2 1NT

I'd place the fanzine
further back than
Rowland Hill, at least
in England. (In
Ireland, its roots are

infinite, because the oral tradition always encompassed exactly the fanzine's criteria, only without putting it on paper.) In England, where people don't talk to each other very much, I'd put it at the door of William Beckford, who self-published short booklets of his own observational writings, poems, novel extracts, and letters of comment from such notables as Lord Byron, John Polidori, the Shelleys, Matthew Lewis, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, as well as running adverts for various books comprising capsule reviews -- all this before the Penny Black in 1840! After all, the postal service existed before the postage stamp....

Beckford was also one of the most innovative gardeners of his time, and his green fantasia can be viewed at Fonthill in Wiltshire to this day. He cultivated black roses, apparently, and just like Neil Henderson he had a problem with squirrels!

Can't accept a claim for "the oral tradition" as a root for fanzines -- if it's not written down, it can't really be a zine, what? But in tune with your closing cue, here's:

Neil K Henderson
46 Revoch Drive
Knightswood
Glasgow G13 4SB

Regarding birdlife in the garden, I've been putting out birdfood (bought loose from a local pet store, and half the price of the packaged stuff) for years, and the bloke next door now does so also. We do get a fair variety of birds, including the tits -- blue, coal, great (but no dimmock) -- though the once prevalent greenfinches have completely vanished. Whether or not this is connected with the great magpie influx, I don't know. One drawback with feeding birds here is that it attracts pigeons from neighbouring fanciers' lofts. A row of them regularly perches on the roof waiting for one of us to put food into the feeding tube. Then they trundle about on the ground till a sparrow comes and starts chucking seed out for them. The odd energetic pigeon has even tried to access the tube directly, resulting in broken perches which had to be replaced by twigs. One thing which deters pigeons (and everything else), however, is the periodic appearance of a sparrowhawk. I've seen a few circles of plucked feathers denoting a kill in the back garden, and a couple of times have actually seen one coming down in my tiny front garden, on my little lawn, protected from the road by hedge and shrubs, plucking away at an

unfortunate speug (Scots sparrow, pronounced "spyug"). Of course, pigeon fanciers hate them, but I find it quite exciting to have a bird of prey literally dropping in on me like that.

As for herons, I have seen the odd one in Knightswood. There is a lot of water around here -- I'm close to part of the Forth and Clyde Canal, recently revitalised by EU money -- and a stream, the Garscadden Burn, flows nearby. I also remember seeing a pair of herons standing by the pond in Knightswood Park. (This was early one morning when I was on a bus to work. And I've just realised it was twenty years ago.) One of my neighbours further along the Drive had an imitation heron on the roof of his shed, presumably to scare off other herons by claiming the territory. The strange thing, though, is the apparent absence of a pond in his garden. May be the fake heron was just a yuppie ornament.

Gardening is the new sex; herons are the new gnomes; Charlie Dimmock is the new Barbie. Charlie Dimmock dolls with heron accessories -- now there's the thing for the twenty-first century garden!

Which seems an appropriate place to say that, having seen Charlie Dimmock's series on wildlife gardening when it was screened last autumn, it's no surprise that we weren't chosen: there was little if anything that she could have done for us that we weren't doing already. And although we have the tidiest allotment on our site, the one which appeared in the series was tidier still: less wildlife-friendly than manicured to within an inch of its life.

Even more unfortunately, the heron I wrote about last issue was found dead a few days later by two of our fellow allotmentees, presumably of disease since there were no marks on it: they buried it, but on their next visit had to do so again because it had been dug up and worried at, probably by a fox or cat. Its second burial was beneath their compost heap.

E. B. Frohvet
4716 Dorsey Hall
Drive #506
Ellicott City
Maryland 21042
USA

The temptation is to agree with you about the fashion industry, which exists to convince middle-aged people to buy clothes which will only look good on gaunt pouty twenty-year-old models and possibly not even then. But once you've damned one industry as nonfunctional, there is no obvious place to stop in condemning everything which is not immediately utilitarian: music, horse-breeding, publishing (of anything except textbooks and how-to manuals). Not too long a trip down that road leaves you with a dull grey, joyless, unaesthetic world in which everything is

defined only by use. Sort of a combination of George Orwell's 1984 and the "Rational Christianity" of John Barnes's *A Million Open Doors*. Even if I don't go to the symphony very often, I like to know it's there.

I can't comment on the prevalence of herons in the London area, but they are no unusual sight around here. I've walked up within ten feet or so of fishing blue herons at the local lakes and been studiously ignored. I've seen egrets at Centennial Lake, loons in fall, along with the obligatory ducks, geese, red-winged blackbirds, etc.. Twice, one time literally on my own doorstep, I've seen large falcons which I can't make out to be anything but peregrines. Most of what comes to my feeder in winter are sparrows, finches and cardinals, but I get slate juncos each February, and various other types.

The politics of food seems to me a dull subject. I generally cook vegetarian 80% of the time when cooking for myself (by my definition that includes eggs, cheese and similar non-slaughter animal products), but when I get the urge to eat meat I do so with no sense of guilt. I have never eaten road-kill rabbit, squirrel or possum, the species most likely to get flattened here, but I have eaten road-kill venison. However, I have known strict vegans, been guest in their homes, and eaten what they served me which was often quite tasty.

Anyone following a strict vegan diet, however tasty it may be, will end up with some serious nutritional deficiencies, since there are some things, such as vitamin B12, which you can't get other than from animal products. That aside, though, the politics of food is much broader and deeper than these essential parochial questions of dietary choice -- for example, the industrialisation and intensification of modern agriculture, the environmental effects of same, the supermarket chains' domination of all stages of the production process, food miles, imbalances in commodity trade (and commodity prices) between the developed and the majority worlds, land tenure and land access, and the developed world's global "footprint". And if these questions strike you as too theoretical, consider the practical examples provided by the McLibel trial, the Jose Bove case, the Italian "slow food" movement, and WTO's ruling on Caribbean bananas (to name just a few). I could provide an outline reading list if you like....

William Breiding
150 Grattan Street #4
San Francisco
California 94117
USA

I would have to say that I was boggled, no, even crogged, when I read the locs in *IRG 3*. You hear of people who don't know where

meat comes from, or think that veggies are something that comes from a cardboard box from the freezer section of the store, without wondering about the origins of these reports. But I've always dismissed them as unbelievable. How could anyone not know these things, have not had the curiosity to find out if they didn't?

Maybe it was because I grew up first rural (not farming, but rural), then smallish town, that I know all about foodstuffs, from the slaughtering of animals to harvesting vegetables, to making pickles and baking bread. But all you need to do is go to Chinatown or the Latin quarter of your city and find plenty of fresh dead animals and vegetables -- in their raw, whole state!

I'm reminded of the excited reactions of my younger brother and sister, when still young, to the sight of a cow or a sheep: to them, it was something rare and strange, whereas when I was their age such sights were of no remark. And I didn't grow up in a rural area!

Henry Welch
1525 Sixteenth Avenue
Grafton
Wisconsin 53024-2017
USA

The discussion of food-miles in the LOCcol reminds me of some of the bizarre federal legislation in this country.

In the days of old the federal government, in order to encourage geographical diversity in the dairy market, introduced price supports that set the wholesale price of milk based on a farm's distance from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. This means that dairy farmers in states like California and New York benefit significantly while Wisconsin farmers do not. This is clearly not a level playing field and the original purpose for the price supports is no longer necessary. (California now has more dairy cattle than Wisconsin and will shortly outdo production as well, which is no surprise given the relative sizes of each state.) For some reason Congress seems incapable of removing this legislation since it is probably viewed as "pork" for Wisconsin.

Brant Kresovich
P.O. Box 404
Getzville
New York 14068-0404
USA

Boy and man, I've spent many an hour cooling my heels in fabric stores. As a boy trailing my mother, sponge-like, I soaked

up the vocabulary -- silkeen, poplin, crepe de chine, muslin -- without grasping what they were or how they were different.

As a travellin' man, I've followed my wife Peggy on fabric hunting expeditions on three continents. I played porter to her bwana in such

far-flung cloth emporiums as Yuzawaya (Tokyo), Wing-On Street (Hongkong), and the home store of Pallahalli in Helsinki (which had a branch in Riga, where we lived for a time). No trip in the US has been without scoping out what the local stores have to enable my wife to pursue her hobbies of sewing, quilting, knitting, crocheting, needle-point, embroidery, and, most recently, upholstering.

I can say with confidence, then, there is no sport -- not US football, not golf, not ice hockey -- more equipment intensive than sewing and its allied crafts. And the material costs! -- purchase costs, storage costs, moving costs, inventory maintenance costs. The cost in space which must be used for fabric and tools instead of, say, books! "Excuse me, dear, my pet, love of my life, but could we store this tailor's ham anywhere else but on my chair at my computer table? Honeybunch, please? Do you hear me?"

In an unguarded moment, my aunt -- born in 1917, so respect the wisdom, and no slouch in fabric acquisition department herself -- observed that "You can be a good housekeeper or a good sewer, but you can't be both." I repeat this fundamental truth as I hop about, rubbing my foot after having stepped on a pin in the carpet. Making an unkind reference to my Mohawk heritage, Peggy scolds me, "Well, if you picked up your feet rather than shuffling like your ancestors creeping through the woods to butcher colonists, these things wouldn't happen." You'd think after 20 years I'd have learned another fundamental truth: "Whatever bad happens to the husband is his own damn fault."

So when I read about Joseph's saying sternly "You can't buy any more until you've used up the stuff you've got," I can but snicker. Chortle, in fact. Snort. In the early days of our struggle for the power to allocate money and space (i.e., our marriage), I thought I actually had a say in these matters.

I periodically used to issue a strict "cloth moratorium," in which my loyal One and Only would, in theory, refrain from buying any more until she had used up the stuff she'd got. Nowadays I can but chuckle at my naivete.

The upside is that sometimes I do get clothes out of this arrangement. But more often the conversation is like: "Hey, is that for me?" "Are you wearing brick this spring?" "What colour is brick?" "It's a dark red." "Like hell." "Well, there you go." Hey, I'm into names, but colour names defeat me. What is fuschia? Taupe?

The other upside, I'm motivated to achieve balance. That is, if she's going to acquire, then I'm going to get rid of, strip down, toss, cull, or do without. It drives her crazy when I throw stuff out or pass on buying. Ah, joy.

I can empathise with this! At the time of writing, Judith has a great stack of gardening magazines which she's been planning to donate to a local community centre for, like, months -- whereas I spent a day during the Christmas holiday weeding back issues of "my" magazines and then took them round to the recycling bins without a second thought. If in doubt, throw it out (as I said in response to Geri Sullivan's appallingly lengthy list of stuff with which her house is crammed!

Elaine Cochrane
59 Keele Street
Collingwood
Victoria 3066
Australia

I was never a doll person -- used to pull the heads off and throw the bits over the fence; much preferred meccano -- but I've

always been interested in textiles and colour and texture. So I do girly things like embroider, and I knit. Myers -- the largest department store in Melbourne -- has just closed its craft section, so there is now nowhere in central Melbourne to buy knitting supplies. I won't suffer too badly -- my stockpile will last me years and I often buy wool by mail-order -- but it makes me wonder if they've just killed off the craft. Can't see people starting knitting if they can't buy the goods off the shelf on a whim.

Lloyd Penney
1706-24 Eva Road
Etobicoke
Ontario M9C 2B2
Canada

Not only does Yvonne have more fabric than she could possibly handle for the next decade, but she conducts fabric

expeditions down the highway to the city of Hamilton, one area of which is almost solid fabric shops, the cloth equivalent of Hay-on-Wye. She also has a collection of buttons: "Fabric: The Gathering", "She who dies with the most fabric wins!", and "So much fabric, so little time". She also has a button with a quotation, "You'd be amazed at what you can learn while doing alterations," attributed to Elim Garak, the Cardassian tailor on *Deep Space Nine*.

Which brings us bumping up against the Barbie stuff...although the first few responses to arrive were from chaps who carefully didn't mention anything as umm, girly, as Judith's article about Barbie. First prize for best Barbie response has to go to Giulia di Cesare, who sent me the August 2000 issue of the lavishly-illustrated Barbie Bazaar -- The OFFICIAL Barbie Doll Collector's Magazine. So did Steve Jeffrey ("Pipped at the post by the Plokta cabal again! Curses!" he hissed by e-mail.) I knew something like this must exist, but leafing through the

ultimate Barbie collector's bible still comes as a shock -- 134 pages of Barbie conventions, serious Barbie addiction, nostalgia merchandise, special edition collectors couture dolls...including a Morgan Le Fay and the 'Magic of Camelot' soap opera. Great fun!

The runner-up is:

Eric Lindsay
P.O. Box 640
Airlie Beach
Queensland 4802
Australia

Barbies should be barefoot and in the kitchen: they deserve it. Actually, I never could picture you with Barbies. Teapots yes,

and Alice in Wonderland. Must mention that while at Brisbane airport, we came upon a large pink Barbie dispensing machine. Yes, while rushing between domestic flights, you could buy a Barbie doll. I was crogged by this discovery.

So am !!

Some chaps commented more or less sympathetically on what they saw as a confession of my Barbie "obsession", although Brant Kresovich probably diagnosed it more accurately. Lloyd Penney's perspective on what I wrote was perhaps skewed by the cavalier way his own family failed to respect his collections of treasures:

Lloyd Penney
(address as before)

It sounded as if your mother was very strict, with a stereotypically

stiff upper lip. If I was a young girl, I would think that I'd make the decision as to when I would or wouldn't need my dolls. My own mother tried to make it for me when it came to comic books, and I think this arbitrariness allowed me my first rebellion against my parents. I didn't have many comics, and was not a collector, but I did like seeing familiar cartoon characters in a format I could access any time I liked. They threw up their hands, and angrily said all right, you can keep them, and I did, until I realised I didn't want or need them any more. (Yvonne's mother was worse -- if she saw something of hers she didn't recognise or understand, she automatically thought it was garbage, and out it went. So went Yvonne's collection of American Confederate money, which she was told could have been worth thousands of dollars today.)

I did become a collector, though, and before discovering SF and fandom, I collected paperback books of various kinds (MAD, Ripley's *Believe It Or Not!* and other series), and also old coins. When I was accepted at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto, I was living on the west coast of Canada. I stuffed my books, coins and other personal stuff like my prized baseball glove in a cedar trunk, locked it tight,

and off I went to school. At the end of my first year, I returned home and opened the trunk...to find it had been jimmed open, and all my books, coins, glove, and other things gone. Literally within days of my departure, my brothers had broken into the trunk and taken everything they thought had value, spent the coins (like American Kennedy half-dollars and Eisenhower silver dollars) and sold everything else, and spent the entire proceeds on gum and cigarettes. I exploded, and promptly got into trouble with my parents for threatening to kick their soft little heads in. So, no reparations for me, and a summer where I was in dutch with my parents, and where I had to hide everything away in a locker at school to keep it away from voracious thieves, namely, my brothers.

One local fan, Louise Hypher, is a Barbie collector. She doesn't buy everything that comes along, but she does own some rare dolls, invests in rare accessories, and keeps everything in a large collector's cupboard, much like a big china cabinet. She has a t-shirt that sums it all up: "When I grow up, I want to be Barbie. The bitch has everything". I think even your mother would agree with that sentiment. I know it's crazy, and as you say, crassly consumeristic, but so American, especially if millionaire fashion designers like Bob Mackie take the time to design clothes for Barbie. There's the Barbie games, CD and computer, beauty salon, more and more....Mattel should return to Barbie's sultry/sulky look, which would say, "I do have it all, and you don't".

I've done my mother an injustice if she came over starched and strict. The background to keep in mind is the feminist debate over how dolls condition little girls to just be mummies or sex symbols. I was growing up in the sixties, when women were fighting ground-breaking battles to be able to go out to work after they got married, let alone get equal pay. I remember seeing TV news coverage of a Womens Lib bra-burning one evening, then discussing it with Mum next day. Of course, it was very radical and unladylike. But, she told me, back around the First World War, my grandma's family had been horrified at the idea of their daughter going out to work in the family solicitor's office -- young ladies were permitted to earn pin money by giving piano lessons or teaching similar accomplishments, but actual work? When Mum left school, during the Second World War, she wanted to do industrial chemistry but the course wasn't open to girls, so she asked about forestry -- but no women were accepted there either. So she ended up as a physiotherapist, until she married Dad. Then, of course, she became a housewife. "No need to rush into getting

married," she always told us. "Have a life first, go travelling." That is: she supported the feminist position, though put off by their style. It comes as a shock to recall just how completely the social world has changed for modern western women in the course of just a few decades.

Mum didn't see Barbie quite this way, though:

Jae Leslie Adams
621 Spruce Street
Madison
Wisconsin 53715
USA

Barbie was designed, quite intentionally, as a single career woman, not as a mom -- and in 1959 that was a pretty radical feminist

position.

That's actually a quote from Jae's apazine Alphabet Obsession 83, on "Barbie the Feminist". "What are Toys for?" in Alphabet Obsession 87, considered how to play with Barbie. "You can't quote them", says Joseph, "they aren't locs." Could we hear from the umpires of fannish etiquette on this?

Meanwhile, Pamela Boal also caught the spirit of the Barbie thing:

Pamela Boal
4 Westfield Way
Charlton Heights
Wantage
Oxfordshire
OX12 7EW

I think for you Barbie is part of the fairly general fascination with the miniature. That liking I was able to indulge fully when the children were small; we were all Airfix

Kids (especially Mum) including the Airfix bricks that came before Lego. It was, however, the dolls house that Derek made for Christine that allowed me to really indulge my passion for making things miniature. Decorated with carpet and wall paper samples, furnished with a few purchased items (money was tight) but mostly ingenuity, lamp shades from perfume bottle tops, a rocking horse (for the nursery) carved from balsa wood. Anything and everything that was the right size or could be cut down wound up in the poshest split level house complete with patio and car port.

Wooden packing cases which carried all our worldly possessions to Singapore became toy boxes for the children. Steven had a well equipped garage and showroom on top of his, David had a fire station (all home made of course; the accessories that couldn't be made came cheap from the Ahma's Market) both set in painted roads and a landscape of dyed sorbo rubber trees and hedges. Papier-mache for contouring, old mirrors for ponds and lollypop sticks were all useful materials and of course no magazine was safe from my scissors and paste.

Henry Welch
(address as before)

It was hard to get motivated for the article on Barbie. I've never

owned anything as important to me as the Barbie is to Judith. (It is probably a male thing of which I am severely afflicted at times.) My two older children (both boys) had a strong attachment to a single stuffed animal when they were younger and despite occasional brief attachments to others never showed much interest in dolls. (I was the same as a child.) My youngest, however (a girl age 3), has shown much more interest in dolls but the favourite seems to vary. The current favourite is Amber, an American Girl Baby doll. Amber, however, has been displaced at times including about two weeks by Dollygosh (a handmade doll that she picked from Great-Grandma's collection) and Amber often takes a sideline to the varied collection of Barbie dolls and clothes that she owns. Her Barbie habit is clearly subsidised by the yard sale market which makes it both easy and inexpensive to amass a fair collection of outfits and bodies. We do own one of the collector Barbies (it is actually Kira, Friend of Barbie) since that is our daughter's name.

Jackie Duckhawk
11 Hayster Drive
Cherry Hinton
Cambridgeshire
CB1 9PB

Katherine has never taken a great deal of interest in her Barbies, despite buying the first one with her own money.

My mother made **some** clothes for them, because the range of accessories was so poor. Even I made two very simple dresses. The one she like best was her Spice Girl Barbie (BabySpice) -- but I'm not sure if that was because she was a Spice Girl or because she had a very shiny dress!

Kate Yule
1905 SE 43rd Avenue
Portland
Oregon 97215
USA

Your long piece on Barbie, including the shifts in her manifestation in different parts of the Empire, was

fascinating. David said in wonderment, "She's writing at great length about Barbie...and making me want to read it!" (I had a similar response to Andy Hooper on baseball.)

We bought this house from a family with three girls under age 10. The first night we slept in the house, mattress tossed on the parlour floor (we were still in the process of painting our bedroom NOT pink-with-purple trim, the legacy of the eldest daughter), I laid down and found myself nose-to-nose with a small piece of plastic. A Barbie shoe. I picked it up and cooed. I took it wordlessly to my mother, who was visiting. She

too reacted strongly, stunned. The menfolk gazed at us, and marvelled. But for mom and I -- and my sister, surely, had she been there -- that tiny green Cuban-heel held wonder. It was the wonder of recognising something that had been ubiquitous in our lives -- Barbie shoes in the carpet the very definition of ubiquity -- but which had then vanished from those lives completely, not thought about for lo these many years. And here one was, as it they had never gone away; clearly the phenomenon had continued without us. A Barbie shoe in the carpet....(the poignancy of its useless mate, unseen but implicit).... Somehow the little buggers had embedded themselves on our souls as well as our soles.

Rodney Leighton RR#3, Tatamagoushe Nova Scotia B0K 1V0 Canada
I was rather amazed that Judith could create such a long and interesting article from playing with a doll, although I was somewhat taken aback at some of the things her Mum did. Making your own clothes at age 12 seems a tad harsh -- but then I wondered what I was thinking, since at that age I was responsible for sawing, splitting and carrying in enough firewood to keep my Mum, my siblings and I warm in a crackerbox house with no basement and no insulation and for Mum to cook with until I got home from school. I went to school at 7.00am and got home about 4.30pm; in winter, it was dark when I left and almost dark when I got home. Digging wood out from under 3 feet of snow and then converting it to burnable size by the light of a single 60-watt bulb was no fun. But I survived.

Almost the end. Let's close with this recipe:

Elaine Cochrane
(address as before)

Celeriac is a variety of celery, bred to develop the fat root (or maybe the common was bred from it for long stems). Anyway, it makes the best celery soup: just substitute a celeriac root, peeled, for the pumpkin in a basic pumpkin soup recipe. Chop an onion, fry in butter until soft, add chicken stock, celeriac peeled and chopped into chunks, and a couple of spuds, simmer until the veg are soft and put it all through the blender. It's supposed to be easier to grow than the stem celery so I may try it some year.

And with that, we're into the WAHFs: Harry Andruschak ("My memories of toys include electric trains, erector sets, Tinkertoys, and games that depended on skill more than chance. My current games are still those that depend more on mental skills than on chance or dexterity."), Sheryl Birkhead, Chester Cuthbert, Steve Jeffrey, Sue Jones, Leigh Kennedy ("I had an early Barbie but, alas, she went up in a house fire when I was 13. I remember my mother being frustrated by her dimensions when helping me try to make clothes for her." -- Leigh also sent a clipping from the Summer/Autumn 2000 issue of Mslexia, proposing outfits for a "Booker Barbie" writer doll), Karen Pender Gunn ("I was never one for dolls -- I actually find them slightly disturbing. I did have one of the original Barbies brought by a family friend from the US many years ago. My father decided I didn't want her when I left home so he gave her away to his step-grandkids. Not that he asked me if he could...."), Derek Pickles, David Redd ("The one hot favourite must-query item is the one you don't want comments on!"), and Alan Sullivan. Our thanks to you all!

Economic crime is back in the news as it emerges that a whole new generation of overenthusiastic entrepreneurs has regrettably ordered goods and services while forgetting to pay. Be baffled by the jargon of regulation and investigation no more, thanks to our beginner's guide to fraud:

- *Internal controls were poor* -- all the money is missing
- *There was not a culture of compliance* -- we sold anything to anyone prepared to buy it.
- *The operating units remained sound* -- the holding company is riddled with fraud and incompetence.
- *Some of the investments were unorthodox* -- such as the boss's yacht.
- *We are talking about one rogue employee* -- the one who got caught.
- *He was a one-off. No one could have rumbled him* -- our bonuses were up and no one wanted to.
- *Essentially, these are minor technical breaches* -- for which we are being fined a record £6m.
- *We are talking about cock-up rather than conspiracy* -- systematic embezzlement going back years.

- *The real problem has been weak leadership* -- we are going to sack the most junior executive we can find.
- *Despite everything, we remain excited by the potential of our internet division* -- we're looking for a quick sale.
- *These practices were confined to one small sub-office* -- these practices are routine throughout the group.
- *We are confident of a clean bill of health from our auditors* -- because otherwise they'll lose our consultancy contract.
- *We are confident of a clean bill of health from the regulators* -- we destroyed all incriminating documents before they got here.
- *It was we who alerted regulators to the problem* -- because it was a spot check and there was nothing we could do.
- *This is very much a legal grey area* -- known as the Theft Act.
- *We are co-operating fully with the regulators and the SFO* -- we have hired a top QC and are saying nothing.

Adapted from the now defunct "Worm's Eye" column by Dan Atkinson in *The Guardian*, 14 February 2000

More Observations from Life

Joseph Nicholas

Why Fan History is Rubbish

D West's most penetrating remark about fan history was that it has a tendency to regard the Second World War as an inconvenient interruption to the postal service. In other words, that it has no sense of proportion -- something it seems to have abandoned from the very outset. As Harry Warner reputedly said of Sam Moskowitz's *The Immortal Storm*, the first real work in the fan history canon, if read immediately after World War two it is not an anti-climax.

To be fair, a similar charge could be levelled at any history of any special interest group. Because of their inherently restricted focus, and consequent lack of externalising context, such histories will always absurdly overinflate the importance and influence of the personalities and events concerned. For example, a squabble between two retired colonels over who has the right to organise the village's annual rose-growing competition will appear tedious and infantile to outsiders; but to the participants, it's a titanic struggle between ever-shifting alliances for village hegemony, with if not the promise of a gilded throne for the victor then at least an approving review in the parish newsletter.

But even in comparison with these other histories, fan history has a problem. Chiefly, it has no theory or ideology: it sees its purpose as the accurate documentation of undisputed facts, with the aim of establishing an unchallengeable record of what happened when and to whom -- without ever addressing the why or how. There are few if any attempts to analyse the reasons which underlie the events recorded, or to examine why those selected for inclusion should be considered more important than those excluded: instead, it presents us with merely an annotated chronology, offered to us in place of a coherent and structured narrative. But chronology isn't history, as anyone who reads history will notice almost immediately: there, the issue is not merely to establish the facts about the past but also to interrogate and reinterpret them; to review our understanding of the past in the light of the present and against the needs of the present.

If that sounds revisionist, too bad. Revision is one of the chief purposes of historical enquiry: to validate the correctness or otherwise of current knowledge and understanding, and if otherwise to propose alternative explanations that will better suit both the available evidence and the requirements of contemporary society -- from which it should be clear there can be no such thing as a "correct" historical understanding, because understanding will vary from generation to generation and from individual to individual. And if that sounds too radical, bear in mind that (consciously or not) these were precisely the approaches adopted by the various parties involved in the recent Balkan conflicts, each seeking to justify their actions by reference to their versions of history as they understood it; as they had constructed it.

In short: history is political. The actual facts of the past will not change, but the emphases placed upon them (and the choice of facts to be excluded) will. As the historiographer E H Carr put it in the first of the six lectures which make up *What Is History?*: "It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is of course untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor and in what order or context.... The only reason why we are interested to know that the battle was fought at Hastings in 1066 is that historians regard it as a major historical event. It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all."

Fan history acknowledges none of this, precisely because it has no theory or ideology. In consequence, fan historians' arguments about supposedly significant events in fandom's past -- Topic A, the Breendoggle, the Great Exclusion Act, whatever -- always revolve around the accuracy or otherwise of the record of what actually happened when (and who did what to whom), before sooner or later descending into trivial squabbles about who has the better memory or the most complete fanzine collection upon which to draw. (Although the triviality of

some of the events argued over suggests that they should really be referred to as "non-events" -- whether a negative review of somebody else's fanzine appeared in the first or fourth issue of a particular publication, for example. A copious list of examples of such nonsense has been omitted in the interests of not boring everyone into oblivion, but may be supplied on request to those who think themselves hardened enough to withstand it.) Where is the ideology? Where is the politics?

Shouts of "nowhere" should be resisted. Fan history has ideology and politics, but they are implicit rather than overt -- thus: because it offers no narrative more advanced than an annotated chronology, fan history cannot advance beyond a focus on the actions of the select individuals who appear in it. Inevitably, therefore, arguments about what happened when serve primarily to validate (and revalidate) the individuals concerned, in the process elevating them above others. Fan history thus ceases to be the record of a particular social group, or of particular periods in the life of the group and its subsets, and becomes instead disguised hagiography.

The obvious retort to this is that fan history has to focus on the people which make it up because there isn't anything else. Not so. Fandom is as much a part of wider society as any other special interest sub-group, and thus prone to influence and animation by the same cultural currents; accordingly, any "true" history of fandom -- i.e., one which seeks to explain it rather than merely record it -- must focus as much on its socio-cultural aspects as on the people involved. For example, instead of the story of Bob Tucker's invention of "the usual", "smoooooth!" and all the other so-called "traditions", why not an examination of fans' (sometimes radical) political outlook during the thirties? Or, for another (even more serious) example, why not -- rather than another reverent exegesis about Walt Willis and Irish Fandom -- an analysis of fans' responses to the conflict between post-1945 Cold War tensions and the public faith in scientific progress which then still obtained? And so on.

But when fan history does discuss the people involved, its focus is their personalities and individual activities and not, as it should be, the role they played in fandom: the impact they had on their contemporaries and successors, who they influenced and by whom they were influenced. To my knowledge, however, only the British fandom of the early and middle seventies has ever been approached from a perspective which sought to view the fans involved as contributors to the whole rather than cast them as the focus for it, but this is a single, isolated

example (and regrettably unbalanced by its too-rigorous focus on the project to establish an indigenous British fandom which owed nothing to other models. To avoid charges of false modesty, I should acknowledge that I was its author). Instead, discussion of individual fans provides us with either denunciation of people the writer doesn't like or, more commonly, praise for those the writer does: the reflexive and repeated glorification of a supposedly unchallengeably superior pantheon of individuals with whose allegedly unimprovably perfect fanwriting we should be eternally grateful to have the opportunity to acquaint ourselves.

Bugger that. When I'm confronted with a piece of writing from the past, by a fan or by anyone else, my first question is always how well it holds up in the here and now, not who the authors were and what they did with the rest of their lives. The hagiographers, on the other hand, invert these considerations: for them, the question is whether Fan X was the first to do something forty years ago or Fan Y the best at doing something else ten years later, and if the answer to such questions is in the affirmative then greatness is assumed to follow. Issues of relative merit and absolute value are avoided; preservation of their material for the betterment of future generations is taken as mandatory.

(In adopting this attitude, of course, the hagiographers leave themselves open to the charge that if the writings of this pantheon of past fans are so wonderful then there is no point anyone, including themselves, writing anything else at all, including panegyric essays to these now-vanished giants. But this is presumably an issue which has to be carefully avoided lest awkward questions start being asked about the hagiographers' activities.)

This sort of hagiography seems to be practised more in the US than UK -- which may be one reason why so many British fans express such apparent disdain for fan history. US fan Andy Hooper once referred to this as "an obvious resentment of tradition", but in doing so missed the point: it's the air of uncritical veneration which characterises the US approach to tradition that UK fans disdain, not tradition *per se*. But even then there's nothing special about tradition: one of the first lessons which anthropology teaches is that traditions are maintained only so long as they are useful, and discarded once they cease to be of relevance. So it should be with history and historical interpretation: accept nothing uncritically and be open to revision at all times. But if all fan history can provide is tedious chronologies of unexamined events and demands that we bow in worship to this or that supposed great fan writer of the past, then it will remain the rubbish it is.

Life with the Nutkins

The British are not alone in anthropomorphising small furry animals but, in the long history of such behaviour, probably no one did it better or more enduringly than Beatrix Potter, who must have enlivened the childhoods of many of this fanzine's readers. (At least, I assume this is so as far as our British readers are concerned, although since I pay no attention to children's literature beyond the ubiquitous J K Rowling I don't know if Potter is still being read anywhere.) I'm told that when I was very small (no personal memory remains of this era) I knew enough of *The Tale Of Peter Rabbit* to be able to recite it along with my mother as she read it to me.

So it was fairly inevitable that when a grey squirrel began visiting the bird table in our garden in the autumn of 1999 it acquired the Beatrix Potter-like sobriquet of Mrs Nutkin.

Not, mind you, that we initially recognised it as female. For the first few months it was referred to solely as "the squirrel", and it was only in the late spring of 2000, when pink nipples became visible through the fur on its underside, that we realised it must be a nursing mother with babies somewhere nearby. At first, too, I was somewhat ambivalent about it: urban wildlife is one thing, but urban wildlife that scrambles up onto the bird table and starts appropriating the peanuts and sunflower seeds for itself is another thing altogether. (Particularly in view of the mess it left -- birds eat sunflower seeds whole, but Mrs Nutkin carefully de-shelled them first, leaving the bird table covered in black fragments which then had to be laboriously picked out of the other seeds it had ignored. I had a go at teaching it to tidy up after itself -- or at any rate, it sat on the fence and watched me as I cleaned off the shell fragments and threw them on the ground, but I suspect that it was really developing its ideas on the ultimate source of the new food supply it had discovered.) And when she'd finished with the bird table, Mrs Nutkin turned her attentions to modifying the hanging plastic feeder on the arch, not merely enlarging the openings on either side but also destroying the perches below them.

On the other hand, though, in a north London suburb you need all the wildlife you can get. So we ordered industrial quantities of peanuts and sunflower seeds from our bird food people (C J WildBird Foods of Shropshire -- their web site offers an instructive screen saver, too), plus a metal feeder to supplement the plastic one Mrs Nutkin had modified, and settled back to enjoy the sight of her scampering about the garden on summer mornings. She in turn became so used to us that at times I'd come down after the alarm clock had gone off to find

her hanging about outside the back door, waiting for me to deliver breakfast.

Then one morning in early autumn last year I went outside to replenish the bird table after our breakfast, only to find it occupied by another squirrel entirely. Not that I realised as much at first: I thought I'd startled Mrs Nutkin by my too-sudden appearance, but when it happened the second time I realised that the squirrel leaping away along the fence was not her at all, but smaller and less mature. One of her babies, perhaps, newly kicked out of the nest and looking for a territory of its own? Confirmation came the following day, when both appeared in the garden at the same time: Mrs Nutkin crouching on the arch, rapidly curling and uncurling the tip of her tail in the way squirrels do when they wish to signal danger or alarm, and the smaller squirrel crouched on the fence by the bird table, making cautious tail flicks of its own.

This tableau lasted for perhaps fifteen or twenty seconds. Then Mrs Nutkin leaped into action -- off the arch and into the apple trees, from the trees to the roof of the bird table, from there to the fence, then along the fence and off into the next-door garden in pursuit of the now retreating smaller squirrel. But barely had she disappeared from view than a third (small) squirrel emerged from the ivy at the end of the garden -- presumably another of her babies. But, mother or not, Mrs Nutkin came racing back to chase off that one too.

But neither of them stayed away for long -- the lure of a bird table replenished twice each morning was just too much. Within days, we were able to identify the new squirrels as one male and one female; and almost immediately dubbed them Little Nutkins. Not that they stayed small for long: the female, who we renamed Sister Nutkin, filled out rapidly and was soon indistinguishable from her mother; while the male, who became visibly plumper while initially remaining smaller in size, was renamed Littlest Nutkin (or Littlest for short), and could be distinguished from the other two by his thinner, less bushy tail.

Unfortunately, Littlest soon showed himself to be a squirrel of very little brain. With three appetites to satisfy, the squirrel feeder -- as the modified plastic feeder had been renamed -- needs frequent refilling. One weekend morning in late autumn, as I was cleaning the bird table of sunflower seed shell fragments, Littlest emerged from under the fence to the (other) next door garden and advanced up the path to the arch before spotting me and doing the squirrel equivalent of a double take. But hunger is hunger, so he climbed up the arch towards the squirrel feeder, anchored his back feet against its ridges, and hung down to grab some peanuts.

Except that the squirrel feeder wasn't there, having been taken inside for cleaning; but it was only after a few seconds of scrabbling with his paws at where it ought to have been that Littlest seemed to realise this. He climbed back on top of the arch, looking baffled. I was about to utter a few encouraging words, in the way one does to a pet animal, when I saw another squirrel -- Sister or Mrs -- lying on the roof above the greenhouse with her front paws crossed, watching us both. I have no doubt that if squirrels could laugh, she would have done so.

Perhaps to compensate for his size and dimness, Littlest is also a very aggressive squirrel. Normally, while the squirrels help themselves to peanuts on the bird table, the larger of the various species of birds which visit our garden -- wood pigeons and collared doves -- perch on the fence waiting for them to finish. (The smaller birds, on the other hand, use the intervals when a squirrel descends from the bird table to bury a peanut in the lawn to flit in for a beakful of the seed the squirrels ignore. Tits, great and blue, are particularly good at this. Is it just that wood pigeons, with their absurd head-body ratio, look stupid, or do tits actually have larger brains?) If the bird table has been emptied, however, and the squirrels are taking their peanuts from the feeder on the arch, the wood pigeons generally fly down to investigate the ground below for any dropped items: a move which seems to enrage Littlest, who rushes down to chase them away -- never actually getting a paw on them and (given that many instances of animal aggression are only for display) probably not intending to, but providing us with much amusement nevertheless.

Apart from the very first occasion I saw them all together, however, the squirrels largely gave up chasing each other, settling for a wary accommodation of the garden as the overlapping part of their respective territories. They would enter it together, but took care to keep their distance from each other -- especially when taking their food from the same source. The bird table is preferred to the feeder, because it's easier to loot; thus, even if both have peanuts, the squirrels go for the table, one sneaking in as the other runs off to eat or (more likely) bury its nuts. (Burying food in autumn and winter is clearly such an instinctual behaviour that the fact we put out food fresh every day is insufficient to overcome it.) Only when the bird table had been cleared, and the feeder had begun to run low on peanuts, did chasing behaviour commence -- but even then it seemed to be more of a chase for the sake of a chase, around and over the fences of the adjoining gardens, and sometimes onto the roofs of the neighbouring houses, than a genuine attempt by one to drive the other away.

The wood pigeons, for their part, would watch all this from their perch on the fence, immobilised by their dimwitted inability to react as fast as the tits.

(Other birds are quicker to take advantage of the situation. I'd mention, in addition to the tits, the jay which visited us during the summer and learned to help itself from the squirrel feeder when the bird table was empty. Generally, jays are too large for feeder perches, and so ignore all hanging tubes; but this one was clearly intelligent enough to spot that the openings modified by Mrs Nutkin were now large enough for it as well. Its first tactic was to approach the feeder by launching itself from the top of the arch, making a tight rolling turn immediately after take-off and coming up to snatch a peanut on the wing; subsequently, it learned to hang on the bottom lip of the feeder and take two or three peanuts before flying off to eat elsewhere. The latter seemed to involve more effort -- more flapping of wings to maintain position -- but presumably there was an equivalence between the two methods in terms of energy expended and protein gained. Subsequently, perhaps as a consequence of its peanut diet, it became large enough to reach the squirrel feeder from one of the arch's cross-bars, without having to expend any wing-muscle energy at all.)

Thirty years ago, much of the squirrels' activity would have ebbed with the onset of winter but, as many nature writers have pointed out, species of animals which would previously have hibernated for the duration now remain active instead -- a sure sign of climate change. Not even the (very rare for London) fall of a couple of inches of snow two days after Christmas and the freezing temperatures of the days following slowed them down. Even the squirrels in our local park were still active, bounding down from the trees and right up to us for hand-outs from the bag of peanuts we'd brought along -- approaching so close, in fact, that we were forced to shuffle until the bag was exhausted. It was interesting to note, too, their very different behaviour: clearly acting as more of a group, and although feeding as individuals more tolerant of each others' proximity. Another noticeable difference between them and the Nutkins was that, individually, they were much slimmer -- but if this perhaps hinted at scarcer supplies of food, it failed to explain why they were so many more of them.

However, although the Nutkins were individually plumper and thus better equipped for adverse conditions, they did seem to be affected by further spells of very cold weather (colder than the post-Christmas snap) in the first two months of this year. (As did the rest of the

wildlife which visits our garden: for example, there have been noticeably fewer tits. As though to compensate, we have increased the number of feeders hanging from the arch and installed some fat balls on the cherry tree.) Specifically, I think that one or more of the Nutkins may have perished: where there would have been at least two squirrels in or around the garden at the same time, there is usually now only one -- although, as I recently discovered, it is in fact illegal to allow squirrels to feed in your garden, because the Grey Squirrels (Prohibition of Importation and Keeping) Order, a statutory instrument made in 1937 which still remains in force, requires "the occupier of any land, who knows that grey squirrels, not being grey squirrels kept by him under licence, are to be found thereon shall forthwith give notice to the appropriate department". The appropriate department, in this case, is the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who (surprisingly) retain responsibility for the eradication of grey squirrels, having presumably classified them as vermin many decades ago and having never revisited the issue since.

Precisely how squirrels are to be prevented from raiding bird tables is doubtless something on which the Order remains silent. (But if the scum in suits who gave us BSE and are now killing badgers in another of their futile attempts to eradicate bovine TB want to cull our squirrels they'll damn well have to shoot their way in. Ruby Ridge and Waco will have nothing on us, no sirree bob! or whatever else it is that survivalist loons say....) In the meantime, spring is on the way. We look forward to seeing whether Mrs and/or Sister Nutkin have survived the winter to produce another crop of babies to entertain us this autumn.

Do you Remember Dot.Com Mania?

Of course you must -- it was only last week....

Or last month. Or maybe last year, when gullible "investors" -- who, having been offered a choice between a foreign holiday and a lobotomy, had obviously chosen the latter -- were throwing money at bright young entrepreneurs who had realised that if they smiled nicely, talked fast and cashed in their share options early they could make a pile or three before it dawned on everyone else that firms with no assets, infrastructure or actual goods to sell were simply another South Sea Bubble waiting to burst. The bright young entrepreneurs are presumably now sipping champagne in the south of France while working on their tans; the "investors" are telling themselves with wry smiles that they'll know better next time (although stock market history shows that they never learn from their mistakes,

because their memories -- just like their profit expectations -- are too short to measure); and the only people still embarrassed by the whole business must be the thirty-something think-tankers of Demos and the IPPR who last year were making wild-eyed declarations about the "unstoppable momentum" of the "internet revolution" and who must now be busily negotiating with their bank managers for another extension to their overdrafts in between labouring desperately to identify the Next Big Trend on which to float another instant bestseller. (In retrospect, Charles Leadbeater's *Living On Thin Air* is clearly *the* comic masterpiece of 1999, but it is unfortunately now too late to nominate it for any of the awards it so richly deserves. Mark it down as a candidate for a future prose comedy hall of fame, nevertheless.)

None of this should be particularly surprising, since -- the fulminations of ex-communist think-tankers notwithstanding -- the internet is merely the latest phase in the technological abolition of time and distance which began with the overland and undersea telegraphs in the mid-nineteenth century and has been marching steadily forward ever since. J M Keynes's subsequent comments about the utility of the telephone, such as (his specific example) its ability to deliver the stock market report while people were sitting up in bed drinking their morning tea, are just as applicable now as they were at the turn of the last century -- with the sole difference being that you now get a lot of fancy graphics which you neither need nor want, which take ages to download, and whose only purpose is to increase the duration and thus the eventual cost of the call.

And there are other parallels. Consider, for example, the current vogue for spending the evening surfing the world-wide waste-of-time, which strikes me as very little different from spending the evening watching television when it was first introduced to the UK, solely because of its novelty value. (And once the novelty wears off....) In fact, it's worse: surfing the net must be like watching television irrespective of the quality or content of the programmes and whether you actually want to watch them, with the computer's mouse substituting for the television set's remote. But if this makes internet surfers into couch potatoes, we shall soon be able to distinguish them from the television variety by virtue of their inability to stand upright because of the amount of time they've spent hunched in front of their computers.

As any historian will confirm, the internet will never completely displace other forms of communication and information exchange because no new technology has ever entirely

supplanted an older one. CDs are ubiquitous; but vinyl records are still being manufactured because without them dance DJs would have nothing to scratch up. E-mail won't eliminate stamped postal delivery and collection, because people will always wish to send and receive some items in physical rather than electronic form (this fanzine, for instance). Television will be with us for many decades yet, despite web designers' dreams of "convergence" that may eventually deliver TV programmes over the web (but only to a few ultra-rich dolts, since everyone else will have too much common sense to lay down the ludicrous sums of money required -- always assuming that streaming software can ever be brought up to anywhere near the picture quality required). Books, of course, are too convenient ever to be displaced -- indeed, it's really rather amusing to note that they're one of the largest single commodities actually bought over the internet, and that they cannot be enjoyed without first switching off the damned computer and settling down in a comfy chair with a glass of wine and some Mozart on the player (music being another commodity which will always be cheaper to buy on CD than download over the internet). Aside from which, e-commerce in general will never be a substitute for actual physical shopping, just as mail-order isn't, because shopping is as much of a social and cultural activity as (and perhaps even more so than) a commercial one. (After all, you can't try on clothes via computer.)

Internet visionaries will disagree with all of this, but since they constitute only a tiny fragment of the total population their opinions can be disregarded. Some of their claims for the internet, after all, were spectacularly silly -- for example, the suggestion, still being bruited about only a couple of years ago, that it could viably substitute for anything and everything in human life, up to and including the replacement of everyday social interaction with badly-typed chat-room "conversations" with pseudonymous non-entities supposedly anywhere on the planet (but mostly the USA). Casting a cold eye once again across Leadbeater's breathless tome, you wonder how anyone could ever have seriously entertained such fatuous rubbish. (But then, having executed so many *volte-faces* over the past twenty years, the ex-communist Demos think-tankers are presumably now capable of believing anything at all.) Claims for the internet, still being advanced in some quarters (such as the propellerheads who write for *The Guardian's On Line* supplement), as a tool which will democratise the world by empowering the individual will only be true if everyone in the world is given a free computer, if all telephone calls everywhere are free, and government

secrecy is abolished *in toto* -- but since this will never be the case, democratisation and empowerment won't be either. As usual, it's just a bunch of rich boys playing with their shiny toys, and mistaking their ignorance of the real world for a new paradigm. (Information wants to be free? But don't the same geeks who proclaim this also maintain their lifestyles by charging everyone else for this same information?)

After all, it's not as though the internet is exactly overflowing with valuable and important information. E-mail is very useful, particularly for campaigning purposes and other specialised mailing lists; but the public newsgroups are clogged with conspiracy theorists and other nutters, and as for the world-wide waste-of-time....rambling theses on cattle mutilations and UFO abductions by alumni of the University of Cowpat, Michigan, sub-literate "home pages" from breathlessly excited people who think we're just dying to share their empty lives and weird hobbies, e-zines full of flashing bells and whistles which are too tiring to read on screen and have to be printed out instead (thus negating their ostensible purpose), and more junk than one can shake a stick at. There may just possibly be something out there worth looking at; but finding it must be next to impossible -- a bit like sitting through long strings of television advertisements in the hope that there might be the ghost of a halfway-decent programme in there somewhere. Why bother?

Like most ISPs, the one I use for my e-mail (and the only ISP I have) gives free webspace to its private customers as a sign-up inducement -- in this case, 50Mb. I'm told that this is quite large by comparison with other ISPs (Judith's GreeNet hands out a mere 3Mb to its customers), but the figure is nevertheless completely meaningless to me because I have no idea what 50Mb looks like or how much it could hold. Never mind no intention of ever using it -- the web is clogged enough without me adding to it, and in any case I haven't the time or the inclination to learn how to construct web pages. Life's too short, the real world is in every sense more interesting than the virtual one, there's too much gardening to do, and so forth. But if any reader of this fanzine can think of something for which they might need 50Mb then they can have it, free, gratis, and for nothing, if they care to apply in writing to the editorial address and if, following the most stringent possible scrutiny of their motives and business plan, their case is deemed more plausible (or perhaps less ridiculous and insane) than all the others. In the meantime, I'm off to do what anyone of any common sense should have done when they first took the computer out of the box: delete the browser program.

Baffled by the new economy? Lost in the 21st century's manic stock market and kaleidoscopic industrial scene? Worry no more -- here is your decoder:

- *In terms of economic behaviour, a fundamental change of step:* straight off Beachy Head.
- *A new paradigm that remodels everything we thought we knew about markets, labour and consumer goods:* purple haze/going through my brain....
- *We are now living in a world without borders:* modish concept dreamed up on TV gardening programmes.
- *Britain, after decades of under-achievement, is now poised to lead Europe in terms of economic growth:* as in 1959, 1964, 1973 and 1987.
- *The key to the new economy is a relentless downward pressure on costs:* of labour.
- *However, there will remain high-cost "hot spots":* profits, rents, prices....
- *Nothing could be more obsolete than the old ways of measuring corporate success:* such as profitability, turnover and the approval of a respectable accountant.
- *Investors need to learn the new yardsticks:* chronic losses, a trendy logo and the approval of a PR consultant.
- *We need to give maximum encouragement to "smart regions" in the new economy:* we need to concrete over the countryside in the south-east.
- *There is no place for sentiment in regional assistance:* cut off aid to former mining villages.
- *Transport is pivotal to success in this new economic environment:* extra carriageways for everyone and no congestion charges.
- *America is setting the pace in this new decade and is the model for us all:* as were Sweden, Germany, Japan, Singapore, Cuba, the Soviet Union....
- *Globalisation is here to stay:* except for asylum seekers, immigrants, refugees....
- *The WTO is a monument to international co-operation:* in the fields of teargas, rubber bullets and riot control.
- *Only the most backward-looking would want to reverse the enormous changes seen during the past twenty years:* you're the madman, not me.
- *To oppose free trade is lunacy:* nurse, the screens!
- *The internet will change everything:* remember Prestel?
- *We are moving towards a knowledge economy:* everyone will work as London taxi drivers.
- *Books, wine, CDs:* the only commodities ever mentioned in connection with e-commerce, doubtless to give the impression that online shoppers are discerning chaps rather than unhygienic sad-cakes.
- *Britain can win in the new economy:* anything's possible.
- *But it will need discipline and restraint:* wage restraint.
- *There is no room for uncompetitive working practices:* you're fired.
- *However, success and talent must be properly rewarded:* share options all round!
- *We are moving into exciting and wonderful new times:* just another shot, a small one....
- *And we can clearly see a bright road ahead:* leave the bottle here, it'll save time.
- *There is no gain without pain in the new economic order:* cue stock market crash.
- *Tomorrow is another day:* the party's over.

Adapted from the now-defunct "Worm's Eye" column by Dan Atkinson in *The Guardian*, 17 January 2000

This is *INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GARDENER* #4

From: Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road, Tottenham
London N15 4JU, United Kingdom

PRINTED MATTER

REDUCED RATE