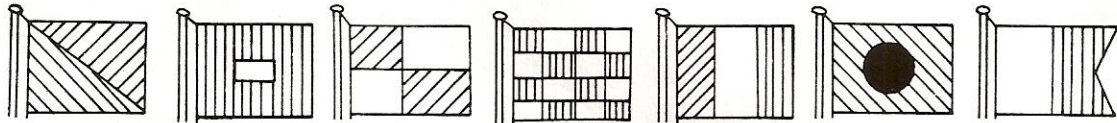
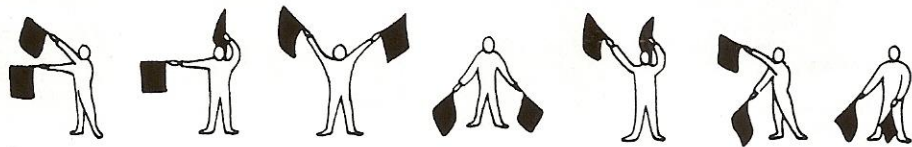


# OPUNTIA #11.5



ISSN 1183-2703

OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$1 cash, trade for your zine, or letter of comment.

Whole-numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviews, and .5 issues are perzines. The following back issues are still available at \$1 each: #10.5A, 10.5B, and 11.1. All other issues sold out.

EDITORIAL: If OPUNTIA seems to be coming out faster than ever, it's because I'm on vacation during the month of February, and have time to do more work on it. I'm also doing some renovation in my house. Nothing serious, just tearing up floors, knocking out walls, putting in a new wall, making a utility access corridor. If you've ever renovated, you know what it's like. If you haven't, you have probably heard stories from your friends about it. I actually haven't had too much trouble so far. So far.

I WONDER WHAT 'OPUNTIA' SPELL-CHECKS AS?

The Calgary Aquarium Society publishes a monthly bulletin called CALQUARIUM. The editor reports that when she ran the copy for the latest issue through a computer spell-checker, it suggested the word 'salubrious' as a substitute for 'CALQUARIUM'.

And, after all, aquarium keeping is supposed to be good you. Mental peace watching the fish, and all that.

## OPENING SEQUENCES

Went to see the movie DR. STRANGELOVE, to me one of the best movies ever made. It has one of my favourite opening sequences. The camera floats above the cloud layer, a few mountain peaks sticking through like islands arising out of the ocean. There is quiet orchestral music as we look down from the tail of a fuel tanker and watch a B-52 bomber nuzzling up to a tanker boom. The B-52 sways slightly from side to side as it refuels. As the credits roll on the screen, there are cutaways to a long-distance view of the plane refueling. The final closeup of the B-52 shows the fuel boom suddenly snapping away as the job is completed. A peaceful, almost pastoral scene, setting off the contrast with the fact that the planes are carrying atom bombs.

My #1 favourite opening sequence is from the Woody Allen film BANANAS, which opens with sports broadcaster Howard Cosell doing the play-by-play on a Latin American coup. Cosell does the commentary on El Presidente's assassination, then pushes his way through the crowd (shouting "American television! American television!" to clear a path) to get an interview with the victorious Generalissimo. The interview goes just like any you've ever seen at a sports event where the winning coach is brought before the camera.

One problem with doing a parody of television is that it is such an easy target. In fact, it's hard to tell the difference between the parody and the reality.

Although I take in movies at theatres, I don't own a television set. I watch it occasionally at friends; I can only wonder how people take it seriously. As the song goes, "87 channels and nothing on".

For the first time in twelve years, Calgary had snow on the ground at Christmas. A generation of teenagers lives here who have never experienced a white Christmas. I was over at my brother's house for the family dinner, my parents having driven down from Red Deer. Neil's wife Pam is expecting her second child and is too heavily pregnant to want to travel. She has been showing us ultrasound pictures of the fetus; years from now I'll be able to say to the kid "I saw you before you were born."

The usual turkey dinner, ably cooked by Pam. She and Dad got to talking about how the pioneer Speirs' had to cook in the old days, constantly watching the wood stove while baking bread, deciding whether to add another stick, open the damper, close the damper, etc.. We take a lot of conveniences for granted today, such as electric stoves. Since Dad grew up in the treeless prairie of southern Saskatchewan, I had to wonder hearing him talking about a wood stove. Where did the wood come from? He told us about the annual expedition once a year to Cypress Hills, when Grandfather would hitch up the team and take a wagon 80 km westward to the forested hills. After loading up the wagon with a year's supply of wood, it was often too heavy to get up slopes on the road home. Grandfather travelled with another teamster; when the horses couldn't get the wagon up a hill, the other team would be hooked up to the first to move the load. After they got to the top of the hill, the wagon was unhitched and the double team went back down to bring up the other wagon.

Grandfather Speirs died in 1981 at the ripe old age of 88. I remember him telling me a story a few years before he died about a neighbour of his who was fond of alcohol. He would drive his horse and buggy into Shaunavon and get drunk in the local tavern. When his money was gone and he was semi- or un-conscious, the barkeep would load him into the buggy, slap the horse on the rump, and send them on their way. The horse knew the way home. On one occa-

sion, he slipped from the buggy seat and hung unconscious partway over the side, his head only inches from the wagon wheel. One bad bump on the road and he would have been decapitated.

I WONDER IF THERE IS A GUY NAMED NORMAN OKLAHOMA?

The Boxing Day newspapers are generally filled by holiday fluff. The big attraction for most people is the full-page crossword puzzle. I came across a story out of Edmonton about a woman in Tacoma, Washington, USA, whose name is Alberta Canada. She is a 40ish black woman who works for the Social Security administration checking names for the old-age pension. She has seen a list of every person who ever applied for the OAP, and has never found another with the same name. She has seen two Texan sisters named Ima Hogg and Yura Hogg (why do parents do such terrible things to their children?), a Pork Chop, and a woman called Mary Christmas.

Her surname comes from her great-great-grandfather, an escaped slave who fled Oklahoma for Canada. He took the name of the country on his return home. Alberta the province was named after Queen Victoria's fourth daughter (over the objections of its inhabitants, who wanted it to keep its native name Assiniboia). Alberta the woman was named after her aunt; her middle name is Julie.

As a young child, Alberta Canada resented the name but by Grade 5 had come to appreciate it because it was a good icebreaker for conversation. She now uses the name as an opportunity to tell the unusual story about her ancestors. "I don't believe there have been more than a dozen people in my entire life who have ever forgotten my name", she says.



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO EL NIÑO?

1992-12-31

It's been a very good year for Ralph Klein. A month ago, he was elected Premier of Alberta. Now he has won the lottery. On a ticket drawn a few days ago, Klein was the winner of \$100,000.

Meanwhile, since just before Christmas, a polar front has been sitting over Calgary, with overnight lows down to  $-39^{\circ}\text{C}$  and daytime highs of  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  (as measured in the suburbs; the downtown core is as much as two or three degrees warmer due to the heat island effect). No relief in sight until early January. Tow-trucks and taxicabs report a six or seven hour backlog of calls. My car is five years old, and the battery finally gave out in the cold. Most of the day I spent riding buses and trains to get to the dealer to buy a new battery and back home again. No point in even attempting to phone for a taxi. I got the second last battery in stock; most automotive stores have been rushing in extra shipments of batteries, trying to keep up with the demand. Canadian Tire had trouble because the truck delivering the resupply froze up. Fortunately it was my day off, so I didn't lose any pay. Although the old battery is still good for warmer weather, say  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ , my policy has always been that the first time a battery lets me down is also the last. It just isn't worth the risk of being stranded somewhere in the cold or losing a day's pay. About five years seems to be the average life of a battery, even the so-called 'lifetime' batteries.

When I pulled the dead battery out of my car, I was annoyed to see it nestled in peanuts. Every morning going out the door I scatter a handful of peanuts down the steps for the neighbourhood squirrels. Apparently one of them decided it was too much trouble to dig caches into the snow, and began using the engine compartment as a stockpile. Unbeknownst to myself, I had been driving a portable peanut warehouse for the past few weeks.

Down to  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  or so, it is not necessary to plug in a car if it is in good condition. To explain for those who live in warmer climates, a plug-in is an electrical heater attached to the engine block. The plug dangles out the grille, and when one parks a car for more than a few hours, an extension cord is used to connect the plug-in with an outside electrical outlet. The better carparks have electrical outlets for each stall. Below  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ , a plug-in makes the difference between an easy start or running down the battery trying to turn over a frozen engine. Below  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ , everything is marginal, and at  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ , strange things start to happen. Metal snaps or bends; I recall getting into my old VW Beetle and starting it up at  $-42^{\circ}\text{C}$ . It started okay but the accelerator pedal bent like a piece of cardboard.

After I got the car going again with the new battery, I went off to the bank to pay a bill. The Streets Department has been sanding the city roads with pea gravel (salt doesn't work below  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) and motorists have been reaping a harvest of paint chips on their cars as a result. Driving up Crowchild Trail, a single piece of pea gravel pinged off my windshield. In warmer weather it would have left no impression, but in the cold of  $-39^{\circ}\text{C}$  there was a loud SNAP!, and a horizontal crack appeared across one-third of the windshield. A minute later there was a second SNAP, and the crack suddenly covered two-thirds of the windshield. Yet another minute later, two quick snaps enabled the crack to complete its journey across the windshield. Stress on the glass was only relieved when the crack had travelled completely from one end to the other. At least it was along the bottom of the windshield, not interfering with my sightlines.

Arriving at the mall, I noticed a restaurant on fire a few doors down from the bank. The firefighters seemed to have it under control; it looked like a stovetop fire. Shoppers ignored the alarms. The bank teller was surprised when I told her there really was a fire, not just a false alarm.

It has been announced that the leader without a country, Mikhail Gorbachev, will be coming to Calgary in March. He will spend two days here, then a city a day across Canada for his week-long stay in this country. He arrives March 24, and the University of Calgary, which is organizing the visit, is already rubbing its collective hands with glee at the thought of the publicity. Brenda Kennedy, a co-ordinator at the U. of C.'s International Centre, made the announcement with an unfortunate choice of words, saying "... we see it rather as a coup ..."

#### WHERE OH WHERE CAN MY SECATEURS BE?

With a decade of winter pruning during which there was little or no snow on the ground, we have had to relearn how to prune in deep, powder snow. One forgets the empty tree hole where a dead tree was removed last summer and a replacement scheduled for next spring. One forgets, but only until suddenly sinking up to the knees while wading through the powder on the way to the next tree to be pruned. The cold weather produces hard crystalline snow which crunches under the foot. We wear felt-lined waterproof boots of course, keeping the feet warm, but these boots are wide and blocky. On windblown crusted snow the width of the boots enables us to walk on the crust as if wearing snowshoes. But where the snow is powder, it is exhausting slogging.

The worst problem is losing pruning tools. Yes, we have tool belts to hold saws, secateurs, and loppers, but they are heavy. Over the past few years, we are used to using secateurs, for example, then dropping them on the ground while doing some sawing. This year, however, has given a few gardeners a bad scare when they dropped a tool on the ground from force of habit and then couldn't find it again in the deep powder. This means sweeping all snow

away with the feet in an ever increasing radius about the tree until the errant tool is located. Assuming, that is, one remembers which tree the tool was lost at, for it may not have been needed for a while and thus forgotten.

The powdery snow is advantageous in a way, for it is an excellent insulator and keeps the feet warmer than might otherwise be the case. The boots we are required to wear must have toe protection. Summer boots are steel-toed like any construction worker's boots, but steel toes are deathly cold in winter. Instead, we wear fibreglass-toed boots, which offer the same protection but do not transmit cold (or radiate heat; I have pretty much forgotten my university physics).

The snowless winters of yesterdecade also enabled us to drive trucks right up to the trees being pruned and load cut branches directly into them. Now, even a drunk in a four-wheel-drive wouldn't dare go off the roads, so the branches must be dragged out by hand.

#### AND THE NEXT CLUE WAS A FOUR-LETTER WORD 1993-1-19

In doing today's crossword puzzle in the newspaper, I came across a four-letter word, first letter was 'f'. I checked the clue which read: "\_\_\_\_ off: rebuff". Now I am a small-l liberal man, but this was a bit much in a family paper. I resisted the temptation to fit in the obvious word, and tried to verify it by the words crossing it. Unfortunately, I couldn't seem to get the other clues, and had to work out a dozen words to find out that "\_\_\_\_ off" wasn't anything more obscene than "fend".

It is rather annoying when the clues consist of "Asian river" or "city on the Danube". I did, however, have no problem a week ago with "Calgary rodeo", which was, of course, "Stampede".

## WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?

1993-1-20

I never have my tape recorder when I really need it. I was driving at work, on my way to the jobsite and listening to the news on the AM radio. The announcer was reading an item about mine tailings to be cleaned up in the north of Saskatchewan at Uranium City. I distinctly heard him say "the lake may have been contaminated by geraniums from the mine tailings". A picture immediately sprang to mind of desolate fisherfolk moodily contemplating a lake overgrown with bedding-out plants. It certainly presents a more cheerful picture than muddy uranium sludge.

## 3-D OR NOT 3-D, THAT IS THE QUESTION

1993-1-23

I went to the Plaza Theatre this afternoon. This is a repertoire theatre, showing classic movies, off-run commercial movies, subtitled foreign films, and experimental pieces. Subtitled films are a particular favourite of mine because that way I don't miss any of the dialogue. Soundtracks on some modern movies are so muddy that half the audience can't hear it. I thought it was just me, but I've noticed that I'm not the only one cupping an ear with a hand in a futile effort to make out what is being said. And there is a low mutter from the audience, as half of them are asking their spouses "What'd he say, Ethel?".

But I digress. This afternoon's feature was REVENGE OF THE CREATURE, the sequel to CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON. Atrocious plot, even for a B-movie; you can see it coming fifteen minutes before it gets here. The special effects are what one would expect for a 1955 movie, with the usual rubber suit monster, the Gill Man. This one had the additional problem of doing most of the monster work underwater, so a scuba tank had to be hidden under the suit.

The major interest of this movie was that it was 3-D. So besides juggling a box of buttered popcorn, cold drink, and Nanaimo bar, I had to wear the 3-D glasses overtop my prescription glasses. The 3-D glasses have one blue lense and one red lense. The movie is blurred until the glasses are put on. Then one sees a B&W movie with both eyes, a blue monochrome film by closing the right eye, and a red film by closing the left eye. Not much use was made of the 3-D effect though, which gets the best response from the audience when a character pokes something out of the screen directly at the audience. Only two scenes really used the effect, one where the hero pokes an electrical prod out at the Gill Man, the other with a trombone player.

The audience got laughs from the sexist dialogue. The heroine wonders if she shouldn't have married and had babies instead of pursuing a scientific career. Her boyfriend replies that fortunately men don't have to worry about that kind of choice. And another scientist announces the discovery of the Gill Man thusly: "Guess what? We've just made the greatest discovery since Peking Man!", to which he receives the reply, "Why, did they find a natural blonde?".

In another scene, the heroine explains brain waves to a reporter and tells him a sleeping brain has similar waves to an insane brain. The reporter: "You mean I'm crazy when I sleep?". Heroine: "No more so than when you're awake.". The reporter nods in apparent understanding, then doubletakes as the alternate meaning sinks in.

I suppose it is unfair to judge such movies by our standards instead of 1955's standards. It is interesting though to note how serious dialogue then will nowadays trigger laughter. Topical dialogue meant to get a laugh from a 1955 audience sails by us today as serious, because we completely miss the allusions.



Which the downtown merchants prefer to call the Stephen Avenue Mall, as it was originally Stephen Avenue before Calgary converted to numbered avenues and streets. It was turned into a pedestrian mall in the 1970s, and is lined with a mixture of sandstone buildings and glass-curtain skyscrapers. The sandstone buildings are left over from the late 1800s. Like every city, Calgary had a Great Fire that burned out the pioneering clutter of wooden buildings and canvas tents. The fire of November 7, 1886, scarred the psyches of Calgarians, and from then until World War One, the favoured construction material was sandstone. It was replaced by brick and concrete after the war, and by glass and granite slabs in modern times.

Like every city, Calgary has its share of peculiar and/or unusual people, who seem to gravitate to the downtown, if only because nobody is home out in the suburbs to pay any attention to them. One I haven't seen for a while is the Whooper, a middle-aged German man. He is dressed in a suit and carries a plastic shopping bag full of religious tracts. As he walked along, every few metres he would let out a loud whoop. You could hear him a block away.

Dancing Betty is another one. Middle-aged going on to elderly, she wore bright red dresses and scarfs, glossy red lipstick and a thick layer of blush makeup, and dyed her hair to match the rest of her. In sunny weather, one had to put on sunglasses to look at her. She lived to dance; any street musician was sure of her attentions and she would do the two-step shuffle all day. Dancing Betty loved the Winter Festival, the Stampede, or any other event for which the store owners on the Mall hire bands.

The Sidewalk Pavarotti is the current dean of the Mall. Real name Ted Wilson, age 60, he is a trained opera tenor who discovered he could make a living singing "Che Gelida Nanina" on the Mall. A restaurant on the Mall allows him to plug in his tape recorder to their outlet, which pro-

vides the music to which he sings. The altitude and dry air of Calgary are not so much the major problem of singing outdoors seven days a week as the cold. The cold in the winter places a singing voice at risk, but Wilson once worked on an Arctic drilling rig, and Innu tribesmen taught him the special techniques for singing in cold weather. The exertion of singing keeps him warm. Cold weather singing is best for sound quality, since the dense air transmits sound farther and with less loss in quality.

I've noticed this myself. My house is two blocks off Crowchild Trail. In summer, the traffic noise is not very loud, just a faint rumble carrying across the open field between. But in winter, especially polar cold, the sound is noticeable in my living room. I can almost hear the drivers picking their noses out at the traffic lights.

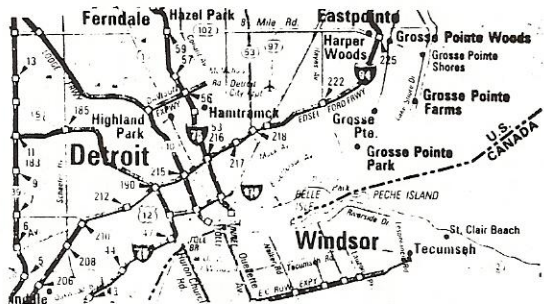
I don't get downtown that much, so there may be other street performers I never see. The parking hassle what it is, I generally prefer to go down there in the evening, when I can find a place for my car without having to feed the meters. At one time, people went there because the stores were unique individuals. Now they are all the same chain stores seen in suburban shopping malls, so why bother. The only attraction to me is a couple of book superstores and a record store specializing in classical music.

Not too many squirrels on the Mall, but certainly lots of pigeons. Rather arrogant birds, for as one walks up to them, they will only grudgingly move out of the way, giving me a bad look for interrupting them at their gravel pecking. Calgary has an extensive system of pedestrian overpasses connecting skyscrapers, so that you can walk from one end of the downtown core to the other without going outside. The pedway system is also excellent for the pigeons, who roost on the roofs and crevices of the overpasses.

## POTATOES AND BABIES, OR, A FEW ZINE REVIEWS

Brian Earl Brown is a familiar name in the locs, but his zine *STICKY QUARTERS* hasn't appeared as often as we would like to see it. S.Q. #21, bearing a photo of proud papa and baby Sarah, arrived the other day. Perzine matters are mostly the arrival of the little girl; as Brown says, "I should have paid more attention to Murphy Brown this week". (That television episode of Murphy Brown dealt with her Lamaze class.) A few reviews on dinosaurian items, and a report on his new laboratory at work, which sounds like my new maintenance depot, and proves that the bureaucracies of the world are identical.

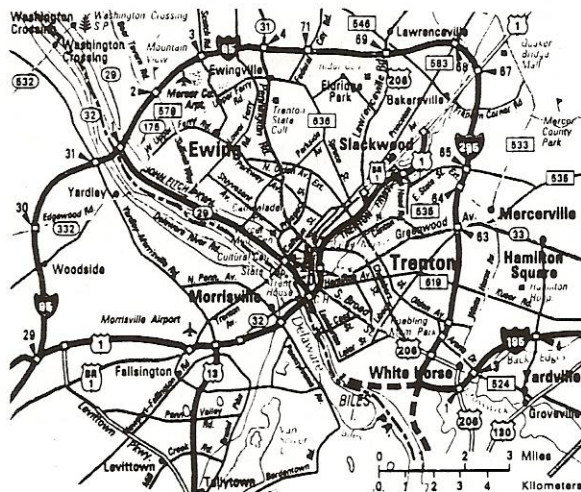
The repro of the zine is a bit smeared, but still readable. \$1 will get you a copy from Brian Earl Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, Michigan 48224.



*LAST RESORT* #1 is a new zine out from Steve George, 642 Ingersoll Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 2J4. He doesn't like to have his locs edited by other fanzine editors, so he will now loc them in his zine, which classifies it as

either a loczine or a reviewzine. He then appeals for locs to his zine. You can get it for *The Usual*. It should be noted that not every zine is a *FOSFAX*; some of us cut short letters for lack of space, not because of ulterior motives.

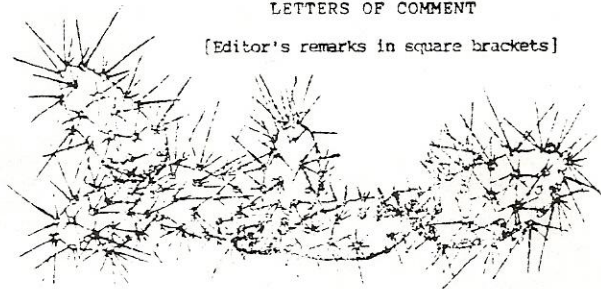
From the exotic locales of New Jersey, high above the city of Trenton, comes another new zine, *SPUD* #1. Gary Deindorfer publishes a mixture of reviews, perzine stuff, fictive fragments, and what appears to be stream of consciousness stuff. A bit of everything for *The Usual* from him at 447 Bellevue Avenue #9B, Trenton, New Jersey 08618.





LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Lloyd Penney  
412 - 4 Lisa Street  
Brampton, Ontario L6T 4B6

1992-11-25

I used to live on Vancouver Island in the village of Qualicum Beach, north of Nanaimo. The folks who lived there always made sure that you knew how to spell the name of their town, and beware of bloody blue murder if you didn't. I noticed this, Dale, after you spelled it Naniamo, the way many do. One time the residents tried to organize a boycott of the island's bus line when buses pulled up with their destination signs spelling Nanaimo wrong. One delightful part of living on the island is finding that for every person there, there's a different recipe for Nanaimo bars. Now commercial mixes are available to make them in a variety of flavours, like mocha, mint, cherry, peanut butter, and orange.

[Aaargh! Considering how sensitive I am about how people constantly mis-spell my own name with an 'ie' instead of 'ei', I blushed very loudly when you pointed out the 'ia'

error in Nanaimo. As far as the desserts go, I prefer the traditional lemon flavour, often have the cherry, avoid the mint, and once ate a peanut butter by mistake. For those who don't know what a Nanaimo bar is, it is basically a brownie with a thick (1 cm) layer of flavoured icing such as lemon or cherry, then a hard layer of dark chocolate (about 0.5 cm).]

1992-12-27

In the movie SNEAKERS, Dan Ackroyd was very nearly typecast in his role. He admits to being a compunerd, and his estate north of Toronto is coated in intruder detection equipment, burglar alarms, proximity detectors, and the like.

The final division of Northwest Territories into Dene-deh and Nunavut isn't coming until the turn of the century, but geography fanatics like Ben Yalow made sure that Worldcon would know about it. He's already submitted an amendment to the Worldcon constitution that would recognize the new regions when they finally come to be.

[Nunavut is scheduled to become self-governing in 1999 and perhaps Worldcon will be ready by then. One never knows; some enthusiastic Innu might put in a bid for a Worldcon.]

FROM: Joseph Major  
4701 Taylor Boulevard #8  
Louisville, Kentucky 40215-2343

1992-11-30

The Calgary Stampede sounds so much like Louisville's [Kentucky] Derby Festival in its impact on the poor fools who have to live in the town the rest of the year while enduring the annual influx of hordes of tourists. Have you ever considered relocating during

the Stampede to flee the rush? No, me neither. So much alike, I said. Like, for example, the composition of the parade. Bands, Shriners, and lots of horses are there too, but we lack indigenous Americans. Kentucky was sort of a neutral ground between tribes, probably because it made their mutual raids more practicable; they could keep from being counter-raided quite so readily.

1993-1-11

I find it startling that "Canada has free trade with United States and Mexico but not within itself". The US owes its constitution in part to a similar condition. The state of New York placed high import and export duties on commerce crossing its borders. All land commerce going from the New England states to the other states had to go through New York. As a result, the glorious result of independence was the vanishing of cash in New England. In turn, this led to unrest of various kinds (they never taught me in school that our glorious revolutionary hero Ethan Allen spent the 1780s trying to make Vermont a part of Canada) and a stupendous financial crisis in New England. This provoked various forms of action, including Article 1, Section 10, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution which prohibits state import and export duties.

Continuing the similarity of Calgary and Louisville, we too have disappearing islands. Corn Island, the original site of George Roger Clark's Beargrass Settlement, has been worn or dredged away, along with other islands in the Ohio River near here.

FROM: Buck Coulson  
2677W-500N  
Hartford City, Indiana 47348

1992-11-26

Training ponies by tying them to the back of a pickup truck didn't surprise me. Around here, people exercise

their coonhounds by driving slowly down a country road on the wrong side, with one arm out the window holding the dog leashes. This is referred to as 'roading' the dogs.

The crooks caught in the traffic jam ought to be reported to the magazine SHOOTING TIMES, which has a regular column of dumb crook stories. They get some lusus, including one in which two bank robbers planned to charge into the bank as soon as it was open, waving their guns. They mistimed it, charging up the sidewalk and into the closed bank door. The man in the lead bounced off and into his companion, then back into the door and down on the walk. After which they slunk off, since no police were on hand.

[My favourite dumb crook story is the one about bank robbers who jumped into their getaway car, backed into a snowdrift, then sped away leaving a perfect imprint of their vehicle licence plate in the snow.]

I'm sure you're right about California needing Congressional approval to subdivide, Harry, but wrong on any other state needing it. Texas came into the USA under a provision that allows it to divide into "not more than four" other states any time it wants to. For years it was so proud of the fact that it was the largest state that it had no intention of dividing, but now that Alaska has displaced it, I wouldn't be too surprised if it did divide one of these years, though pride in all things Texan might keep it together.

[I recall reading somewhere that Texas lost the right to subdivide during the War Between The States. And by coincidence, the Jan/Feb 1993 issue of TOPICAL TIME mentions that the original constitution of Czechoslovakia was based on the constitution of the Republic of Texas. All Knowledge Is Found In Stamp Magazines.]

[continued next page]

I've never understood the sports furor at all, but then I'm not much of a sports fan. I can understand cheering for a team if it's from the high school or college one graduated from. Partisanship for a pro sports team from a different state or province is just silly.

I had an interesting experience with stamps today. A Christmas card arrived with a U.S. 'New Year's' stamp on it. I stopped in at the post office when we went into town and asked if they had them. The clerk said they did "But we can't sell them until tomorrow". I said I'd just received one on an envelope. She said she'd check, and disappeared, presumably to talk to the postmaster. Came back to say the stamps positively could not be sold until tomorrow. Any value to a stamp on cover with a postmark of three days before it officially can be sold? (No, I thought not.)

[Modern stamps have little or no value if postmarked before the first day of issue, simply because with the huge number of post offices across the country, there will always be some idiot who opens the package of stamps without reading the warning notice. In any event, only older stamps are valuable because in those days no record was kept of first days of issue, and the postmark is therefore valuable to determine when the stamp was released.]

FROM: Joseph Nicholas  
5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill  
London N15 6NH, England

[Re:] ... the outcome of the vote to divide the Northwest Territories into two new 'native' states ... I haven't been able to work out from the reports I've read of that proposal whether such a division was contingent upon acceptance of the new constitution. If not, what was the

outcome of the vote? And if the division was dependent on the wider federal issue, what happens to the proposal now?

[The breakup of Northwest Territories into Nunavut and Denedeh is an internal matter not affected by the Canadian constitutional crisis. Actually any province or territory could split itself apart or merge with another simply by referendum of the affected peoples. It even applies to secession; the last Québec referendum to secede was rejected by the populace of Québec.]

I note that you saw and enjoyed the movie SNEAKERS. Me too, although I couldn't help noticing that there were a couple of minor plot glitches involving the handling of the decoder chip that in retrospect undermine the success of Redford's team in getting away with it. The first glitch is the scene where Redford was caught in Kingsley's office building, but Kingsley can't bring himself to execute an old friend, so instructs one of his heavies to do the job, then leaves the room, but without retrieving the chip from Redford beforehand.

The second glitch: you'll recall the scene where Kingsley has later trapped Redford on the roof of the building, and threatens that this time he will shoot him unless he hands over the chip, so Redford hands over the box and is allowed to leave. But Kingsley doesn't check to see if the box is empty or not before letting him go. One could also argue a third glitch in the little epilogue of the newsreader reporting on unlikely cash movements in big bank accounts; once the Mafia and NSA knew that Redford's lot had managed to get away with the chip after all, wouldn't they come after him with everything short of tactical nuclear weapons?

[That last one might be an excuse for a sequel, with Redford's gang on the run from everybody. The movie earned well, so it might be sequelized.]



FROM: Harry Warner Jr.  
423 Summit Avenue  
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

1992-12-26

12

I suppose the closest thing I've experienced to your constitutional referendum was about a dozen or more years ago when the State of Maryland indulged in the same exercise. The old constitution was outdated in many ways because of changes in social and scientific conditions. The proposed new constitution was voted down with help from my own vote. I didn't feel the changes were essential to the state's survival. I sensed what would happen if the new constitution had been approved; decades of litigation on the exact meaning of many of its provisions, an ordeal that the old constitution has already experienced, so judges have set precedents on how to interpret almost everything in it. I suspect Canada would face something similar if it obtained a shiny new constitution.

[And, in fact, Canadian courts are still busy interpreting the 1982 constitution and Charter of Rights.]

FROM: Chester Cuthbert  
1104 Mulvey Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 1J5

1992-11-20

Your survey of western Canadian political events is useful ... Where you describe the destruction of oranges in California while people in Saskatchewan had to do without, you have stated what the situation is today, with millions of people in the world starving or having to go to food banks, while the stores are bursting with unsold food, and farmers are unable to sell their surpluses for enough to cover their costs and are being bankrupted.

Sure, laying off workers, shutting down production, and allowing surpluses to rot will ultimately eliminate the surpluses and make necessary again a revival of product-

ion and profit. But why retain such a stupid system when production for use is so easy and can benefit everyone by changing the system?

There is nothing new in what I say. The basic principles of the profit system: buy low and sell high, surpluses mean lower prices, scarcity means higher. What few people understand is that when our efficient technology produces abundance of every kind of material wealth, the surpluses must be financed, so that under our system overall bankruptcy is inevitable. Profit is impossible except when scarcity exists or develops. The 1930s Depression was not caused by shortage of material goods or money, but by the surpluses produced by technology and the failure to distribute them for use and not for profit. The situation is the same today. There is simply a failure to recognize that when technology is capable of producing abundance, a profit is no longer necessary. All we need is to change our thinking and modify the economic system to enable it to deal with reality. Retaining our old ideas means that the world is going bankrupt while we have surplus of real wealth everywhere sitting idle and rotting.

FROM: Judith Hanna  
5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill  
London N15 6NH, England

1993-1-13

The idea of creating community forests or urban forests to replace those felled and cleared away in past centuries emerged in the last year or so as a bright new government policy initiative. And indeed, it seems a jolly nice idea of which I am all in favour.

[In Calgary, the newer suburbs do include preserved areas of brush (we don't really have forests as such in our climate), mostly coulees overgrown with shrubs or riverbanks lined with cottonwood poplars. Although

[continued next page]

they are well-intentioned, they soon degrade under impact of heavy pedestrian traffic, children starting fires, or yahoos building bonfires with deadwood. In particular, my experience has been that people who buy \$200,000 executive homes beside natural areas then expect the grass to be mowed, trees cut down to improve the view, and deadwood hauled out. They want the area sprayed with pesticides at the first sight of a weed or first bite of a mosquito, and paved pathways installed so they won't get a bit of mud on their shoes following a natural footpath. Why buy a house if they can't live with messy nature?]

Meanwhile, over in the Department of Transport, which I keep a close eye on professionally, our jolly Secretary of State for Transport, 'Farmer' John MacGregor, wanders about the place burling on about how his department plants more roadside trees each year than does the Forestry Commission. We and others do keep trying to tell him that he doesn't have to send in the bulldozers and tarmac to knock down existing trees in order to plant new ones, particularly when the trees knocked down are Ice Age forest or Sites of Special Scientific Interest which are supposed to be protected.

The economic cost-benefit system for road planning (COBA) actually attracts road construction to SSSIs and other supposedly protected sites. COBA treats them as having zero development value because they are supposedly protected from development, or else negative value, requiring maintenance and therefore a drain on the public purse. This makes the 'protected' area the cheapest route for the new road, and COBA is, logically enough, set up to seek the lowest-cost route. Voila, goodbye Twyford Down with its two SSSIs, two Iron Age hillforts, and its 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' designation, goodbye Oxleas Wood, goodbye Naseby battlefield, etc.. Some 348 etc. threatened at present, if I recall the Royal Society for Nature Conservation figures correctly.

This anomaly could be cured very simply, by requiring

COBA to assume that any land being considered for road building should be valued at the same commercial development value as it would have if its protective status were removed and it was equally available for any other sort of development. If one wanted to reflect in the cost-benefit analysis that a forest had been given protective status, then protected sites could be assigned a higher value, say twice or three times the equivalent of ordinary development value. That should generally suffice to ensure a new road swings around them. All this concedes the market view that nature isn't beyond crass commercial values but can be flogged off for a price. At the moment, it's simply flung to the bulldozers as free, worth nothing.

[For years, Calgary Parks Dept. has had to suffer from Sewers or Waterworks cutting down trees or trenching through root systems (causing the tree to go into decline and die five years later). But recently, Streets cut through roots of boulevard elms in order to renew a heaved sidewalk. That produced a citizen uproar and put all the City engineers on the defensive; they could have regraded the old sidewalk and saved the elm roots. Finally, Parks Dept. is getting a hearing for its long-wanted plan to charge tree damage at actual value (up to \$20,000 for a mature tree) instead of about \$250 for the cost of a new handplanted tree. It would force engineers, architects, and developers to consider alternative methods of locating utility lines and sidewalks.]

FROM: Beulah Wadsworth  
#206, 1356 Meadowlands Drive East  
Nepean, Ontario K2E 6K6

1993-1-20

Putting maps in where your correspondents come from is amusing, but uses up valuable space where words of wisdom could drip from the page, or bletherings as the case may be.

[continued next page]

[On the proverbial other hand, I've had comments that the text should be broken up by more fillos. My preference is for the primacy of text, and probably the maps will go the way of all flesh eventually. I still have a backlog of maps to use up though, and I don't want to waste the photocopies.]

Most people seem rather busy these days, and fandom, or rather active working fans, for cons and clubs seem to be using their energies in other directions.

FROM: Robert Sabella 1993-1-17  
2 Natalie Drive  
Budd Lake, New Jersey 07828

Your fanzine is doing great damage to my fantasy of Canada as the great bastion of sanity in North America!

[There are no bastions of sanity anywhere, much less in North America.]

Would you do me the favour of expanding on your statement that "Catholics vote for a different set of candidates for their school system". Is public funding provided for two parallel school systems? If so, what percentage of the populace is Catholic? And how many of the Catholics use the Catholic school system?

[Without bothering to look it up, I believe that about half of Canadians are Catholic, with a greater concentration in eastern Canada, and more Protestants and Orthodox in the west. Because of Canada's complicated constitutional history, some provinces recognize two, publically supported school systems, the Public and the Separate. It merely means that when one pays property tax, there is a check-off on the tax form where you can say if you want the money to go to the Public School Board or the Separate (Catholic) School Board. In municipal elections, we vote

for whichever school trustee race that we pay taxes to. In the three prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, the two school systems are guaranteed as a result of a deal made with Louis Riel when he won his first rebellion in 1870. At that time, it was Northwest Territories rather than the three provinces. Manitoba was created as a result of Riel, and with it were given cultural guarantees such as school systems. When Alberta and Saskatchewan were split off Northwest Territories in 1905, those guarantees still applied to the new provinces.

As an aside, Louis Riel lost his second rebellion in Saskatchewan in 1885 and was hanged for treason. Today he is officially recognized as a Father of Confederation (for Manitoba) and a traitor to his country simultaneously (attempts to get him a posthumous pardon have failed).]

FROM: Ben Schilling 1993-1-20  
Box 548  
Minocqua, Wisconsin 54548-0548

... you can make a [pound sterling] symbol with a type-writer if you type an L and an f on top of each other. It's amazing what you can remember from a high school typing class ...

[Let me see now, L plus f equals E, whereas L plus - equals E. You're right, it does work. All knowledge is indeed found in zines.]

Each American state is allowed to decide what sort of alcoholic beverages it is going to let in and under what conditions. All other interstate trade is regulated by Congress, but the 21st Amendment gives the liquor trade to the states. I don't know if they could exclude beer made in another state, but I'm surprised

[continued next page]



that some states haven't tried it.

The row with Mulroney and the Cajuns reminds me of the time a Japanese politician claimed that the USA couldn't compete with Japan because of all the 'stupid Mexicans' in our educational system. I understand that the President of Mexico had a long talk with the Japanese Ambassador to Mexico about this.

FROM: Karl Johanson 1992-11-23  
4129 Carey Road  
Victoria, British Columbia V8Z 4G5

I liked "Where quality is a slogan" in OPUNTIA 10.5A. It reminded me of a sign we did for a local sports card shop; "We specialize in hockey cards, and we also specialize in baseball cards". A more obscure sign we made was for a used-car dealer. It was a cartoon cowboy with a word balloon saying "Let's talk clean". I never found out if it helped sell cars. A redundant example of the type of slogan the computer book store mentioned was the Constellation con. In spite of being Victoria's third convention, they advertized themselves as "Victoria's first and largest science fiction convention".

What does 'Yeeeeee Haw' mean? I spent just over three years in the reserve army and never learned the literal meaning of the military version 'Hoo Haw' (usually pronounced more like the sound of someone throwing up). Everyone used it, no one knew what it meant. At least the term 'fuck'n A' was easy to figure out. It means "I'm not very articulate so I'm going to say something with an obscene exclamatory in it to prove I'm cool".

['Yeeeeee Haw' is whooped out during the Calgary Stampede by self-conscious tourists and drunken young men. It is never heard in Calgary any other time of year. People who use it apparently believe they are harking back to

the days of cowboys riding herd on the range. As a lad growing up in central Alberta, I was in on several cattle drives, helping bring the herd up from the summer pasture into the feedlots for the winter. The only things I heard the cowboys say were things like "C'mon you stupid potlicker" (addressed to a cow wanting to depart the herd) or "Get going, you bloody bitch" (yet another cow, this time stopping to graze in the ditch, thereby causing the herd to jam up and begin milling around). And, of course, there were the traditional four-letter Anglo-Saxon words. But no self-respecting cowboy would ever go "Yeeeeee Haw!".]

A few issues ago you talked about people being Canada's greatest resource and that we should allow continued immigration. Canada is currently losing wildlife habitat at the rate of an acre per minute. How long before our growing 'greatest resource' makes extinct our current 211 endangered not-quite-so-important resources?

[For one thing, much urban sprawl is unnecessary. Calgary, for example, has about the same land area as London, England, but only a tenth of the population. A lot of land is wasted, such as little traffic islands in residential neighbourhoods which are too small for a park and are not required to separate traffic. The subsidization of roads and motor vehicles removes any incentive to live near work or the city core; instead, everyone wants a patch of land out in the suburbs. And not to forget pollution of course.]

FROM: Paula Johanson 1992-12-2  
Box 7 Site 1 RR 1  
Legal, Alberta T0G 1L0

So! Local news is a bore. The weather is dry and all the farmers are worried about water for the crops next

[continued next page]

summer. I may have time to finish another novel and magazine articles this winter, but unless I sell a book, my major income will be from the market garden and picking vegetables for my husband's brother again. For this I went to university. Try to get a teaching position or recreation job around here. At least beans and peas don't hold interviews or send rejection letters. Lovely conversation in the field this summer. One worker said he would join the Forces and take post-secondary courses. High school wasn't enough, he wanted a better job. Hah! My brother-in-law the farmer cheerfully informed him that he had an engineering certificate. I have a degree and teaching certificate; Bernie went to university and community colleges; his father went for extra training as a cop and his mother takes courses in greenhouses and market gardening. The worker was told he wasn't qualified for farm labour in this day and age; he only had high school. Did we laugh. And kept right on picking beans.

[Where I work, no special qualification is required to get on as a seasonal labourer, just luck of the draw in getting on of the few openings not taken by workers with recall rights from the previous season. Say about 100 openings out of 10,000 applicants. To get on permanent with Parks Dept., the senior seasonal workers are chosen in order of rank, but they won't go any higher, just be able to work year-round. The ambitious ones are busily studying for their horticulture diploma or signed up as apprentice gardener, since no one can make Gardener or District Foreman without horticultural papers. My own assistant foreman is racing to upgrade his qualifications before the Parks Dept. decides to change the rules. I have a B.Sc. in Horticulture (Univ. of Alberta '78) and my Journeyman Landscape Gardener papers, not to mention my provincial Pesticide Applicators Licence and too many certificates and short courses to count. It bothers me to see school-leavers who think they should be able to get a satisfying stable job with only a high-school diploma. I learned it's no use trying to convince my young seasonals to upgrade; they'd rather party hearty. It

isn't until they're in their late thirties or forties that they realize they're trapped. What usually happens is that they wake up one morning and realize they have a family to support, an old wreck of a car, no money for luxuries, and still only a seasonal worker. Then they become serious about studying for a horticultural certificate.]

FROM: Robert Lichtman  
Box 30  
Glen Ellen, California 95442

1992-12-21

In #10.5A I quite agree about the minimal effect of the price of admission going up 50¢ on a \$7 ticket; next to none. But I disagree with you over the effect of a \$50 increase in a \$1300 property tax bill. While you're correct that someone making \$600 monthly mortgage payments won't be seriously affected by a \$50 tax increase, there might well be a number of residents on fixed incomes, older people on a slim retirement whose homes have long been paid off, who would notice this. Are there provisions in Canadian law that excuse such homeownership semi-indigents from such tax increases?

[I don't know if there is a federal policy; some provinces and municipalities provide grants or discounts. There is also the possibility of reverse mortgages.]

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Harry Andruschak, Chuck Connor, Alexander Vasilkovsky, Henry Welch, Pär Nilsson.