

OPUNTIA is published irregularly by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$2 cash, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Whole numbered issues are sercon, .1 issues are reviews, and .5 issues are perzines. Just so you don't blame the post office, there was no 12.5 or 13.1.

ABOUT THE COVER: To help you keep track in this issue about the Alberta political parties, I've included the genealogy of the major parties. Not included are minor parties that arose de novo, such as the Communists, the Greens, Natural Law, Confederation of Regions, and Canada In A New Century. As it was, I had enough trouble doing this chart. Federal parties are much the same, and I'll leave it to the zine FROZEN FROG to do the Québec parties. It is interesting to note that almost all of the fringe parties, that is, everyone except the Tories and Grits, originated either in Alberta or Québec.

WHA'S LAK US?

From Los Angeles I got a clipping from Harry Andruschak about the Elliots of the Scottish Borderlands. I had mentioned that Speirs was a Lowlander name and had wondered why (in OPUNTIA #7.1) everyone lauded the Highlanders but ignored the more civilized Lowlanders. Harry points out that the Lowlanders were not exactly paragons of virtue themselves. Along the border with England, where the Speirs name originated, a major occupation was cattle theft, the Elliots being the epitome of the cross-border raiders. In the 1600s, King James VI executed a batch of Elliots and sent many others into exile, thereby finally breaking

them. The Speirs family was not without sin either.

My family name was first recorded in Renfrewshire, and probably originated before the Norman Conquest, although written records do not appear until the 1300s. The family developed from Strathclyde Britons and was centered about the Border Counties. The name is an official name, that is, the founder of the family was a spyer or watchman. A steady job for sure in a land where raiding was the major industry. The name has variants of Spyer, Spire, Spiour, Spyers, Speir, Speris, Spere, and Spier/Spiers (pronounced with a long 'i', not the 'ee' sound).

Speirs is not that common of a name. Since it is frequently mispronounced with a long 'ee' sound, many think it is a German name. And, of course, there is that damned "i before e, except after c" rule so beloved of schoolmarms, and which has cursed our family for generations.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGES

1993-2-24

Today Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced his resignation as party leader of the federal Progressive Conservatives. Pundits who had spent the last eight years pontificating on what he was doing wrong immediately aboutfaced and began writing about how he had transformed the nation, etcetera. They had recent exercise in doing this, for a few days ago Joe Clark (Minister of Unity, and a former P.M. before he had been overthrown by Mulroney) had announced he was not standing for re-election. Columnists and broadcasters treated both the traditional method that we do

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the deceased; don't speak ill of the dead, even if they were scorned and criticized daily while alive. As Clark and Mulroney ride off into the sunset to collect their six-digit pensions, the abuse heaped on them (with good reason) during their political careers has suddenly been transformed into good wishes for their afterlife in the real world. Mulroney was a corporate executive before entering politics, and so will probably have no trouble finding work. Clark has never met a payroll, having been in politics since graduating from the University of Alberta, but no doubt some corporation will be glad to hire him as a figurehead director just for the prestige.

Paradoxically, while I didn't like Mulroney, I had to agree with many of the policies he implemented during his time as Prime Minister. Mulroney's biggest problem was that he exaggerated and blustered his way through crises, and indulged in blarney and evasion even when it wasn't needed. Many of his policies could have been put into place with a lot less trouble had he taken the time to explain them to the ignorant public, or been more diplomatic with people. Instead, he tried to bully his way to success, costing him a lot of political capital, so much so that he finally had to resign. With more tact, he could still be continuing on.

Free trade with United States was the big issue of the last election. Canada sends 85% of its exports south of the border, and we are the USA's biggest trading partner. (Not Japan, as many Americans mistakenly believe.) The only practical method of surviving protectionist forces in the USA was to lock in the Free Trade Agreement, or else be excluded by trade blocs. The same goes with the extension of the deal to Mexico; we are either on the inside getting part of the action, or sheltered in our own little world getting none of it. Since Canada does not have sufficient population to sustain its industry, we must export or die. But Mulroney failed to get this over to voters in a proper manner; the FTA went through, but

only after a lot of unnecessary screaming and yelling.

The General Sales Tax (= V.A.T. of European countries) was another example. The 7% G.S.T. is a consumption tax useful in controlling inflation. It replaced a 14% manufacturer's tax, which most Canadians never knew existed because it was hidden in the price tag, rather than added at the cash register as is G.S.T.. This tax put manufacturers at a disadvantage, since imports did not have to pay it. The G.S.T. is applied to both domestic products and imports, but since manufacturers get a refund at each stage prior to final sale, they now have the advantage. Immediately the Tories proposed the G.S.T., there were cries of special-interest groups to be exempted. The silliest of these was the publishing industry, which claimed that illiteracy would be increased if books were taxed. Since it is caused by socioeconomic problems, not the prices of books, this argument is nonsense. There was a credit to help the poor who had to pay G.S.T., and a partial exemption on food. But again Mulroney seemed to take the bumpiest roads in bringing in the tax. Personal income taxes were reduced slightly prior to the G.S.T. being brought in, but it was done before an election and the G.S.T. brought in after it, so that people had lost sight of the connection between the two.

And there were the two failures at constitutional reform, the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown Accord. Mulroney and the provincial premiers twice negotiated accords without understanding what the public wanted: no special favouritism for any province. Both Accords failed. Each time, Mulroney hysterically predicted disaster and civil war; each time, nothing much happened after the votes.

The pundits noted, as they always do after a long-time leader steps down, that he was now grey-haired and had more creases in his face. The implication is that

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the cares and worries of running a nation have prematurely aged him. Nonsense; any man passing from his 40s into his 50s is going to pick up grey hairs. He certainly had lots of vacations in Florida or Bermuda, and those creases are more a product of too much suntanning rather than governing a nation.

THE RED BLOOD REIGNS IN THE WINTER'S PALE

1993-3-2

I was doing the inventory of some new parks we have taken over in the McKenzie subdivision, the developer having finished construction of them. This involves measuring turf areas, fences, playsites, and so forth in order to calculate budgets. The inventory is put on computer. We know that a large triple-deck mower can cut 1 ha/hr, a small mower takes 3 hours per hectare, and fencelines are trimmed x times per year at y minutes per kilometre. These data are multiplied by the inventory data to give us the cost of maintaining the park.

Difficult in some places to push the measuring wheel, as even with a week of chinooking, there is still 1 m of snow in some places. I checked one park that I had been unable to get into earlier and discovered that it was a natural area on a low cliff overlooking the Bow River. The river is mostly open water, but ice still clings to the banks. Along the east bank, directly below where I stood, there was a wide shelf of ice on the river. Puddles had formed on top of the ice layer. The weak winter sun had warmed the puddles just enough to allow red algae to grow. The puddles were manure-red in colour from the algae, a quite striking contrast to the white ice and blue water.

RED EYE AND INTERDEPARTMENTAL CO-OPERATION

1993-3-22

Pruning today in beautiful chinook weather, with sunny sky and 15°C. We were waiting at an intersection for the traffic light to change. On the other side, in an oncoming lane of traffic, was a stalled car. Its hood was up and

four-way signal lights flashing. You could see it two kilometres away. Along came a pickup truck, which the driver pulled in close behind the dead car. After several minutes, he finally became impatient, or perhaps he noticed the hood and flashers, and backed up the truck. With a roaring engine, the truck changed lanes and went around the car, then turned into the intersection and drove by us. We burst into laughter as it went by, for the sign on it said "Eagle Eye Maintenance".

Our traffic light turned green and we drove on down a street with pollarded trees that had been decapitated by Electric System in order to keep overhead power lines clear. The trees looked terrible but the line had priority, even if it had been installed after the trees were planted. Nowadays all lines are underground and utilities work together to avoid conflicts. But the sight of these pollarded trees prompted Dan, one of my pruners, to tell me a story about one job they did years ago. The pruners had gone along the street and legged up the trees. Legging up is the removal of all branches from ground level to about 2 m, leaving a bare trunk with no branches to poke pedestrians in the eye, scrape the sides of passing vehicles, or obstruct the view at an intersection. About a week after Dan and his crew had legged up one batch of trees, Electric System came along and topped those trees to keep the power lines clear. One whorl of branches was therefore left on each tree, producing the effect of a row of giant umbrellas along the street. The trees looked like parasols with a gland problem.

TODAY THE UNION, TOMORROW THE WORLD

1993-3-23

Went down to the C.U.P.E. Hall tonight to vote in the Local 709 (Civic Foremen's union) elections. Normally I never vote or attend meetings unless it is a strike vote, but Erwin talked me into coming out tonight to support him in his bid for re-election as Secretary-

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Treasurer. He's been very active in campaigning; about half the audience was Parks Dept. foremen. Erwin is a District Foreman like I am, and our districts are adjacent to each other. The Engineering Dept. is the largest department in the Corporation but their foremen aren't as active as Parks foremen. There were two acclamations and the rest of the slate was an Engineering candidate versus a Parks candidate. Parks swept all positions on the poll that it was contesting (nobody wanted to be Sergeant-At-Arms, so two Engineering foremen fought that out). As a colleague said to me, "Parks could take over and run it if they wanted to.". One moment of hilarity occurred when a nominator forgot his candidate's last name. "Brother Manchuk, I nominate John uh John ...".

After the ballots were counted the successful candidates (Erwin among them) were lined up at the front of the room and made to recite a lengthy oath of office. We all had to rise and stand at solemn attention while the oath was administered. It was difficult for most of us to keep a straight face. Presidents and prime ministers are sworn in with less ceremony than a Local 709 official. The oath was longer than a wedding vow but shorter than the debate in the House of Commons on the Charlottetown Accord.

Strictly speaking, I am not a member of Local 709, but do have the right to vote under the Rand Formula, established by a judge of that name (Rand, not Formula) just after WW2. Justice Rand had been asked to settle the question of closed shop versus open shop unions. On the one hand, no one should be forced to join a union to get a job, but on the proverbial other hand, a non-union worker should not be entitled to good wages and benefits won by unions. Rand settled the matter by stating that no one had to belong to a union, but anyone receiving the benefits therefrom had to pay union dues. Thus I pay dues to 709 since I am quite happy to accept the wage rises, but I don't hold a membership card. Also under the Rand Formula is the fact that anyone paying dues, member or not, has the

right to vote in elections or contract ratifications. Local 709 is not a very militant union, unlike Local 37 (outside workers, which my staff are). The difference is due to demographics. Outside workers are generally younger people with a Trans-Am, a case of beer, and no commitments beyond next month's credit card statement. They tend to be more militant since they have little to lose, and are thus more likely to vote for a strike. But few people make foremen until they are in their 30s or 40s, by which time they have families to support, mortgages, or an RRSP to think about. There are only a couple of hundred foremen out of 13,000 Corporation workers, but thousands of Local 37, so the threat of strike action is not as inconvenient either.

DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO

1993-3-24

Gorbachev arrived in Calgary this evening for his Canadian tour. (Raisa was ill and couldn't make the trip) Meanwhile, Yeltsin is feuding with the Congress of People's Deputies over who is in charge of Russia and the April 25 referendum. Naturally the reporters asked Gorbachev about the situation, to which he replied that Yeltsin should call an election and go to the people. It was different when Gorbachev was in charge and refused to call a vote, but that was then and this is now. Asked if he would run in such an election, Gorbachev was evasive, saying the matter "was not too important".

The press scrum was at Palliser Hotel, an elderly pile that is Calgary's oldest and most prestigious hotel. All VIPs stay here; HM The Queen, the Olympic mandarins during the 1988 Winter Games, the Prime Minister. At the welcoming ceremonies for Gorbachev there was a brief scare when a man was spotted in the hotel carrying what looked like a machine gun. It turned out he was dressed up as a gangster for a costume party. This

reminds me of when I was on the OLYMPEX 88 committee, the international stamp exhibition held during the Winter Games. On the opening night of the Games, we had scheduled a grand opening ceremony, unaware that Princess Anne and other dignitaries were simultaneously booked for the same hall for their reception. Their security agents did not know about us and were horrified to learn that several hundred stamp collectors were to have crashed the royal party. Push came to shove and we had to reschedule our ceremony to the next day. Not that philatelists were muttering about declaring a Second Republic in England; any neoCromwellians realized HRH had priority over MNH.

(MNH = mint never hinged, used to describe stamps)

Gorbachev and his daughter went over to City Hall for the traditional White Hat ceremony, where the Mayor presents distinguished visitors with a white cowboy hat. Calgary's flag and logo use a white cowboy hat on a red background. (In Red Deer, where I grew up, they use a red cowboy hat) Gorbachev was in Calgary ten years ago but at that time he was USSR's Minister of Agriculture, and his visit passed unnoticed. I suspect that he didn't get a white hat then. I mention this because the Royal Family has been to Calgary so many times that they have a closet of white hats. Prince Phillip is still unpopular with many Calgaryans because of a remark he made about fifteen years ago to the effect of "Not another bloody hat?!". He has been to town in the intervening period but Corporation officials wisely refrain from inviting him to anymore ceremonies.

Gorbachev went off to visit a mixed farm south of Calgary at his request. News reporters were excluded, again at his request. He is quite knowledgeable about practical matters in farming, as he comes from a peasant family and drove a combine on a collective before entering public life. He toured the Bruketa family farm, where three generations of the family live, running 100 head of cattle and about 200 hectares of wheat, barley, and oats.

QUESTION PERIOD

1993-3-26

Today Gorbachev was at the Bowness High School, in the west end of Calgary. Prior to his visit there had been a citywide contest in the schools, the best ten essays winning the right to ask Gorbachev a question. The one catching the attention of the news media was asked by Heidi Jury, who wanted to know why no women had sat on the Central Communist Committee. Gorbachev tried a joke ("A man should be vigilant when answering this question. This is a threat from women. We men should insist on our rights."), then verbally tap danced his way past the point of the question. He did acknowledge the under-representation in the past but said the situation was changing. He said "Men and women should be equal partners in their families, in homemaking and bringing up children, and also in politics." This got him a round of applause, but after the event was over, Jury told reporters "I didn't feel he answered it directly.". Other questions were about a nuclear-arms control treaty for the C.I.S. and the role of the United Nations. Gorbachev was relaxed and quite enjoyed meeting with the Bowness students, who presented him with a variety of gifts including a get-well card for Raisa.

Later in the day, Gorbachev accepted an honorary degree from the University of Calgary. He told the audience "It is time for us to put an end to the traditional Russian confrontational political mentality.". He finished up the evening at a fund-raising dinner at the downtown Convention Centre. And so to bed. He flies to Vancouver tomorrow.

THE TROUBLE WITH OUTLANDERS

1993-4-1

Alberta's Minister of Multiculturalism is Dianne Mirosh, appointed by Premier Ralph Klein mainly as a payback for helping him get elected as party leader last year.

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Klein is basically a small-l liberal who only went into the Progressive Conservative party because he saw opportunity to get ahead. It does mean, however, that he is stuck with the rural Tory faction who helped him become party leader because the alternative would have been Nancy Betkowski, a Red Tory. Now Klein's chickens are coming home to roost. Yesterday Mirosh made a remark that only anglophone immigrants should be allowed into Alberta.

The results were predictable. The lumpens began phoning in their support for her stance, while the lefties began screaming she was racist. The lumpens are all descended from immigrants, so their vocal support to keep furriners out is a bit hypocritical. And Mirosh was not racist in her remarks; English is not confined to white folk, and her proposal would not restrict Jamaicans, to name one group.

Today Mirosh apologized. Not because of the public outcry but because of a direct order from Klein. As Klein made it clear, he was quite offended since his grandfather was a German immigrant who spoke little English. Mirosh is also getting heat from some of the powerful Tories such as Horst Schmid and Peter Savaryn, who would have been excluded because they too were non-anglophones when they first arrived in Canada.

TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON

1993-4-12

The farmers are beginning a new crop year, and we begin a new cycle of parks maintenance. The fire department is called out daily for grass fires on the hills and freeway boulevards of the city. Once again we see the annual sight of black patches amidst the tan of unburned grass. The fires are quite beneficial to the growth of new grass.

The first hire of seasonal labourers is today and I will start them off the traditional way by having the crews

go quickly through all the parks and freeways to pick up the winter's accumulation of litter. A week from now we have a second hire, and so on through the spring as the workload builds up. The water tankers come on next week, first to water the new-planted trees and wash off dust and road salt on roadside spruces, then to water trees planted in the last few years in a continuous cycle all summer. In late May, the mowing machines start up and we will be well and truly underway with another maintenance season.

AND THEY'RE OFF AND RUNNING!

The federal Tory leadership race proves once more that truth is stranger than fiction. The two front-runners are Avril Phaedra (Kim) Campbell and Jean Charest. The rest of the candidates are backbenchers and obscure politicians who are hoping that Campbell and Charest split the vote and allow one of them to sneak up the middle. Doubtful though, as all the opinion polls show that the Tories would lose the next election with anyone but Campbell as party leader. If she wins the leadership race, the Tories would win.

Campbell is currently Minister of Defence. Her popularity is based entirely on the fact that a while back when she was Minister of Justice she posed semi-nude for a photo that instantly made her the Madonna of the House of Commons. Her past history is glossed over by the news media, who have already crowned her as the next Prime Minister. She started as a Social Credit in provincial politics, jumped to the federal Tories, and had a mixed record in her various portfolios. She has been divorced twice, admitted to smoking marijuana (but so did her opponents, which defuses that issue) and had an affair with one of her deputy ministers.

Jean Charest is a nice young man in his 30s, the youngest cabinet minister in history, but it is unlikely

that Canadians will accept two Québécois in a row for Prime Minister. Maybe next time. But a lot can happen over the next two months. The leadership convention is in June.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN ALBERTA

1993-4-21

There are billboards along the roadsides, advertising a particular brand of automobile with the slogan "Progressive, not conservative".

Premier Klein, not to be outdone by the federal Tories, told the news media that he had smoked marijuana but gave it up because it made him paranoid. Klein has been feuding with everybody in sight over pensions granted to retiring politicians (excessive), the provincial debt (not as bad as some say but a good excuse to cut spending) and settling old scores with those who opposed him in the provincial Tory leadership last year.

THERE IS NO GOD BUT MY BACKYARD FENCE

1993-4-23

As I came out of my house this morning, I noticed a Yellow Cab parked along the side fence of my house. The driver was standing in my yard, apparently looking at the fence. He was an Arabic type, probably Lebanese, the most common in Calgary. He suddenly kneeled down and prostrated himself before the fence. It was then I noticed that he was in his stocking feet, his shoes beside him on the grass. I myself would hesitate to walk through my yard in socks nevermind kneeling down, what with the habit of neighbourhood dogs of defecating there.

I waited in respectful silence until he had finished his prayers. A pedestrian walked by, also in silence; he looked at me in curiosity and I shrugged my shoulders. I could see the cab driver was praying to Mecca, but what baffled me was that he was facing north. After he was

done and returned to his cab, I went over and asked why he hadn't prayed facing southeast, which seemed to be the more logical direction to Mecca. He told me that Calgary Muslims prayed to Mecca over the north pole. Well, I learned something today.

Normally I am not at home at this time of day but it was my day off work. It makes me wonder what else goes on in my yard while I'm at work.

MAYBE HITCHCOCK WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE BIRDS 1993-4-26

Second hire of seasonals today, five new people. The spring cleanup continues. I was driving down a street that goes along the edge of an escarpment overlooking Fish Creek Provincial Park. Houses on the east side of the road, and the escarpment on the west side. Fish Creek Park was originally past the southern boundary of Calgary. Now it is completely surrounded by residential subdivisions. We look after a narrow strip of boulevard along the top of the escarpment, between the road and the Park. The cleanup crew was working there and I was going to check up on them. As I drove slowly along the road, a white-tailed deer suddenly bolted out of a house yard, where it had been nibbling a fine paper birch tree. The doe galumphed across the road in front of me, then halted along the edge of the escarpment. She began grazing, lifting her head every few seconds to watch me and/or the traffic. Gradually she worked her way down the escarpment into the Park as she moved forward, and soon vanished from sight.

I drove on, checking various parks and crews. Came to one park below the Lake Sylvan slope (there is no Lake Sylvan, just another developer's name for what used to be cow pasture). I noticed two ravens idly standing in the park, but what made me pull over and stop was the sight of robins everywhere. Normally one only sees them hopping about a lawn in solitary or perhaps a

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pair. But here I counted seventeen robins, all equidistantly spaced from each other, the ravens in the middle, and all just standing quietly about as if waiting for something to happen. Occasionally a robin would scurry a foot or two at random, but they didn't seem to be grubbing out insects in the turf or fighting territorial battles. A silent army, arrayed and quietly waiting for the command to move out.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

1993-5-4

An early warm spring, and a dry one. The crew was out in a natural area that officially is not yet ours but is on the list anyway. It used to be a ranch about sixty years ago, but has long since reverted to poplars and tall grass. The crew had heavy work, particularly in some of the swales that run through the area. Out of one, they roped and dragged out the box off a Model T truck. From another was removed a feeding trough about the same age.

Mowing has started two weeks early than usual. Normally the first cut is made about May 15, but south-facing parks are already lush and green. Elsewhere the tree planting is underway. Some are handplanted trees done by Parks staff; others are tree-spaded by contractors. I visited one location where giant machines were rumbling about a site. One tree spade cut 2 m diameter plugs out of the ground and dumped them into a semitrailer truck. Another truck brought in loads of loam to fill the holes, into which will be handplanted small trees for Arbour Day on May 15. (A good turnout is expected since the Mayor and hockey player Theon Fleury will be there.) Like all modern suburbs, the subsoil is either hardpacked clay or gravel, so we dig the holes and backfill to give young trees something to grow on. A big Caterpillar 988 front-end loader sat nearby from a different construction project, and the local skateboarders were using its massive bucket for some loop-the-looping.

RALPHING ABOUT TOWN

1993-5-19

Yesterday Premier Klein called a provincial election for June 15. It will be a close race between the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals, with the New Democratic Party a distant third. The Tories are not using their party name on campaign signs. Instead, each candidate is identified as part of "Ralph's Team" since his popularity is 70% and the party popularity is about 40%. Ralph Klein has been bringing the party out of its slump, but peculiarly his support is greatest in the countryside despite him being former mayor of Calgary. The Grits are giving the Tories a close run; their leader is the former mayor of Edmonton, the capital of Alberta and the province's other large city. The NDP (social democrat) haven't got a hope; they'll be lucky to get a handful of seats. The other parties out on the fringe will be lucky to get their deposits back, nevermind win a seat.

It will be a long campaign, especially for Parks workers, who are not allowed to move the election signs from the boulevards. Since this is the height of the growing season, it makes mowing difficult.

POLLS AND DUCKS

1993-5-23

To the University of Calgary Library this morning to catch up on the current periodicals. As I drove into the parking lot, I had to stop for a mallard duck and her brood, who were waddling down the roadway. What is baffling is that the university campus is nowhere near a water body where the ducklings could have been born.

Opinion polls say Kim Campbell is losing momentum in the federal Tory leadership race, while Jean Charest's coming up fast. Another poll says the provincial Tory party has a comfortable lead over the Liberals, whose leader made a gaffe about abolishing abortion clinics.

CURRIE-ING FAVOUR WITH THE VOTERS

The newspaper published a supplement showing the ridings and listing the candidates for the provincial election. I wasn't sure if I still lived in the same riding because they have been revised. Premier Klein lives about twelve blocks south of my house. In the last election, when he was a backbencher, he won his riding of Calgary Elbow by a narrow margin. This time the Tories gerrymandered his riding to improve his chances, which in turn affected my riding of Calgary Currie, which shares a common boundary. Since both Klein and I live near the edges of the two constituencies, I could have found myself in a different riding without moving house.

Calgary Currie has four candidates, representing the New Democratic Party, Liberal, Progressive Conservative, and Alliance. The incumbent was a Tory who declined to stand for re-election because while the gerrymandering improved Klein's chances, they reduced his. The four candidates all declare different issues to be the key. I will probably end up voting for the Alliance candidate, Mark Waters, as a protest vote. I don't vote socialist, Grit, or Tory, so that leaves Alliance by default. Alliance is informally allied with the Reform party, which is strictly federal. Mark Waters is the son of Stan Waters, the only elected senator in Canadian history. Senators are normally appointed by the Prime Minister, but during the Meech Lake Accord's brief lifespan, Alberta was allowed to elect a senator to fill a vacancy in exchange for the then-Premier Don Getty supporting Prime Minister Mulroney on the Meech Lake constitutional reform. That Accord was killed by Manitoba and Newfoundland, so subsequent senators have been appointed. Stan Waters was Reform, but since died of cancer.

Alliance/Reform is big in my part of Calgary. When the next federal election is called, Reform party leader Preston Manning will be one of the candidates I could vote for.

Klein, in his riding of Calgary Elbow, is opposed by candidates from the usual mainstream parties, Liberal and NDP. Also running against him are members of the Social Credit, Natural Law, and Canada In A New Century parties. The Socreds held power in Alberta for about four decades, finally dying of old age in the early 1970s. They've not had a seat in the House for more than a decade. Originally a monetary reformist party, Social Credit evicted its revolutionaries in favour of pragmatists. Natural Law is basically a party of New Age yuppies too mellow to belong to the Greens. Canada In A New Century is a nationalist group that opposed the Charlottetown Accord and wants legislators to sign contracts agreeing to reduced salaries and pensions or else face the threat of recall.

There are 83 ridings in Alberta. Here's who's running.

Progressive Conservative	83
Liberal	83
New Democrat	83
Social Credit	39
Natural Law	45
Canada In A New Century	1
Independent	20
Confederation of Regions	12
Green	11
Alliance	4
Communist	1

STARTING EARLY

1993-6-2

To the monthly meeting tonight of the Calgary Philatelic Society. Also our annual elections. The new Secretary is a young man named Jason Ness, a first-year archaeology student. He is also the New Democrat candidate in the Calgary Shaw riding, the youngest candidate in the election. The riding association has seven paidup members, so Ness has no illusions about winning or even getting his deposit back.

Bad enough that Parks Dept. maintenance is disrupted by political signs on parks and boulevards (we can still remove commercial signs but the politicians exempted themselves from the sign law) but in this election a new trend has developed. Traditionally one only sees "Vote For Me" signs. Now non-candidates are adding their own signs next to candidate signs, making editorial remarks. Along freeways lined with Tory signs are interspersed others reminding voters of Tory scandals. As an example, one sign shouts "Remember Novatel Fiasco!", a reference to a Crown corporation that lost 641 million tax dollars.

A rather boring and seemingly endless election campaign. The provincial Tories are expected to get back in for lack of any exciting opposition. Meanwhile, in the federal Tory leadership race, Kim Campbell has lost steam, while Jean Charest rapidly closes in. The time-honoured practice of name calling has started in earnest. Charest is accused of swinging government contracts to his sister while Campbell's unstable personal life is contrasted with Charest, a family man with a beautiful wife. Too bad Shakespeare was only talking about lawyers when he said "The first thing we do ...".

One amusing note of irony. The Greens are just as bad as other political parties when it comes to plastering the roadsides with signs. As I drove up Crowchild Trail, I saw a spray truck (a private contractor working for Parks Dept.) wetting down the boulevard with herbicide, working carefully around the Greens posters.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

1993-6-13

... Ms. Kim Campbell, who won the second ballot over Charest by a landslide margin of 53% to 47%. Canada thus becomes the first country to have a pin-up as head of government.

The weekly newspaper STAMPS has an editorial in the May 15, 1993, issue by Denise M. Axtell calling for Isaac Asimov to be honoured on a postage stamp in 2002. The current regulations specify that no living person can be specifically honoured on a USPS stamp, and that a dead person must normally molder in the grave for ten years before being eligible. (There are some exceptions.) Asimov departed this vale of tears 1992, so he could appear on a stamp in 2002. If it seems premature to start campaigning for him, it should be noted that some stamp subjects were the result of decades of pressure. So you American SFers can start writing to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, c/o Stamp Management, USPS, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 5301, Washington, D.C. 20260-2420. Something for you to do between bidding for Worldcons.

WHO'LL STOP THE ~~TORIES~~ RAIN?

1993-6-15

Heavy rainfall this afternoon. On the way home from work I stopped off at my polling place to vote in the provincial election. Since the enumerator missed me in the census, I was not on the voters list and had to be sworn in before I could vote. Nothing dramatic like putting my hand on a Bible and assuring Her Majesty I wasn't double-dipping in the ballot box. Just a matter of showing two pieces of identification and signing a declaration that I hadn't already voted. In and out in fifteen minutes.

Final score: Progressive Conservative 51, Liberal 32, NDP 0. All sides agree Ralph Klein was the man who saved the Tories. His aw-shucks downhome image contrasted with the cold fish image projected by Liberal leader Laurence Decore. The NDP went from Official Opposition in the last legislature to zero. They went down to defeat still blindly preaching doctrines of

olden days. Reporters babbled on about the NDP being decimated, as if the word was synonymous with annihilated.

What is worrisome about the results is that Alberta, like Gaul, is now divided in three parts. Traditionally, the north of the province tended to be leftist, while south Alberta was right-wing. Most Albertans live in Calgary or Edmonton (the capital of the province), and the rural areas are thinly populated with a few medium-size cities. In this election, Calgary went Tory and Edmonton went Liberal. The two cities cancelled each other out, which allowed the rural areas to decide the matter by going Tory.

The polls closed at 20h00 and within minutes the Tories were declared winners by the broadcast media. That didn't stop them from spending the rest of the evening reporting the election like a horse race. "Smith is moving up on Jones, with polls #32 and #61 swinging toward him." The polls stopped swinging at 20h00 and the candidates won or lost at that instant. Because it takes time to count the ballots, the results trickled in poll by poll in random order. One gets the impression that racehorse #32 is moving up in the backstretch, closely followed by #61 as they go into the third turn, but this is an artifact of being unable to report all polls instantaneously at close of voting.

The Tories are down seven seats from the last election but still have a comfortable majority. They had been headed to certain defeat under previous party leader Don Getty, so Klein has staged a remarkable comeback. Jason Ness, the young NDPer, pulled in 500 votes. Diane "Thank You For Speaking English" Mirosh was re-elected but with a small margin. My riding went Tory; Alliance got about 1000 votes. Klein won his riding by a wide margin.

Next up: Prime Minister Kim Campbell is required to call a federal election by the end of this year. Once more with feeling.

Half of Alberta's annual precipitation comes in May and June, and the grass can grow 20 cm a week in some of our parks. The mowing machines cut six days a week but we are still behind. There is a triple-flail, two hired single-flails, four ride-on mowers, and a walk-behind mower (for slopes). Between them they cut 2.5 hectares an hour.

A few weeks from now, the Calgary Stampede starts up, the world's largest rodeo, with 1.3 million visitors expected. To commemorate this, the Streets Dept. has reduced northbound Crowchild Trail, a major freeway, down to one lane for roadworks. This will allow tourists more time to admire our beautiful scenery while sitting in the traffic jams. Not to be outdone, Sewers Dept. will dig up two freeways for installation of a sewer main.

The dandelions have finished blooming, which means the poplar fluff season is starting. Female cottonwood poplars produce seeds attached to a cotton-like material known as fluff. The fluff is released and carries the seeds about on the wind. Cottonwoods, like most trees such as apples, are alternate bearing, which means they have a heavy crop one year and a light crop the following. This year is a heavy fluff year. At times it seems like a blizzard is here. Driving down certain streets during fluff season is like driving through a snowstorm. On a hot day, this can be annoying in a car without air conditioning; one has either to sweat it out with the windows rolled up or open the windows and have to vacuum out the fluff at a later time. It is hard on cars too, when the fluff plugs a radiator or air filter. Nowadays the City of Calgary has regulations prohibiting the planting of female trees by developers, but that doesn't help for the old trees. Parks Dept. doesn't take out healthy trees because of fluff since it is in the business of growing, not killing.

AND THE WIND NEVER STOPS BUT IT ALWAYS COMPLAINS

All the political campaign signs left over from the election ten days ago have now vanished, picked up by the candidates' staffs. They were briefly replaced with a thick white layer of fluff on all the boulevards and lawns. In turn, a windstorm today has deposited a layer of leaves and fallen branches on top of the fluff. Landscape maintenance companies are doing good business in the well-to-do neighbourhoods where a lawn is expected to look like a golf putting green.

As soon as the Parks office opened this morning, the phone line was continuously ringing as homeowners called in reports of broken branches and downed trees. The Urban Forestry crew has been going flat out all day, and we in Parks Maintenance have been helping out by cleaning up some of the debris. Just as well, for it is difficult to mow turf covered by branches.

Most of the trees in my district are poplars, which tend to shed branches in gusty weather but seldom topple completely unless rotten inside. Elms and green ash are the worst for bad splits and tears because they have narrow angled branches. Poplar branches usually snap off and leave a stub which can be pruned back to the trunk. Elms and ashes usually tear into the trunk; when the branch is removed, a hollow scar is left that weakens the tree and results in a lopsided crown. For a small tree, damage like this is not fatal, but a large tree becomes a hazard and must be cut down completely, even though only one branch was actually torn off by the wind. We had to call the aerial-bucket truck out to one large tree where this happened. A single branch tore loose, and in doing so, took about a third of the trunk's diameter with it. The tree still had two-thirds but so weakened that it could never be trusted. So down it came.

In cutting down a tree, we try to cut the stump so that it is just below ground level. It is then buried by loam

and left to rot in peace. If it tries to sprout, the turf mowing machines will cut off the sprouts. Eventually the roots use up food reserves trying to regrow and nothing more is seen. On a large stump, or one that could not be cut below ground level because of rocky soil or topography, a stumpgrinder is brought in. This is a revolving wheel with strong blades. One problem is that many trees root-graft with their neighbours of the same species. Two adjoining trees send out their roots. Contact is made and the roots graft onto each other. Each tree will feed the other, or, in the negative, contaminate each other with diseases. A whole row of trees can be a single organism via the roots.

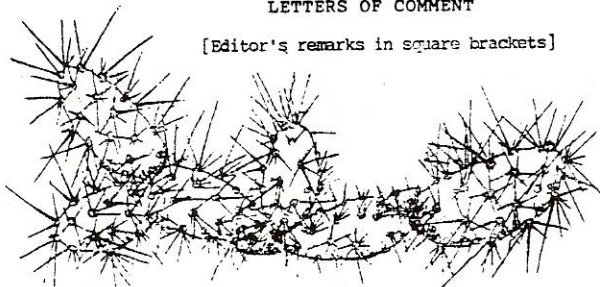
A strong wind is not in itself the enemy of trees. If the wind is constant, the tree will simply lean over. What snaps off branches or entire trees is a gusty wind that starts the tree whipping back and forth. When the wind is gusting at a certain frequency, the stress of the whiplashing exceeds the mechanical strength of the tree and something breaks.

Cone-shaped trees such as spruce almost never blow down in a wind; I have never dealt with one in 13 years as a professional gardener. Trees with highly leveraged branches such as elm or green ash often lose branches. Poplars are intermediate. (There are no other tall-growing tree species in Calgary; other trees are medium or small.)

Trees do not have immune systems like animals and can only stop disease pathogens by compartmentalization, a process that walls off infected areas. The tree secretes internal walls to stop or slow down the rot. If a vigorous tree, only small portions of the trunk are rotted. If a stressed tree, the rot cannot be held, and while the outside looks healthy, it may only be a thin cylinder of good wood wrapped around rotted punky wood. Comes the wind and sic transit gloria.

LETTERS OF COMMENT

[Editor's remarks in square brackets]



FROM: Steve George
642 Ingersoll Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 2J4

1993-2-13

WordPerfect 5.1 with a US lexicon offers 'appointee' as a probable replacement for Opuntia.

Good openings in both DR. STRANGELOVE and BANANAS. One of the most memorable openings I've ever seen, albeit in a film I didn't particularly like, was in Brian De Palma's DRESSED TO KILL. It has no dialogue for the first twenty odd minutes but is, nonetheless, quite effective.

FROM: Robert Runté
53 Mohawk Road West
Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 5J5

1993-2-11

My free time has been so constrained the last eighteen months that it has been very difficult to do any fanac. I must confess that it is more than a little embarrassing

that no sooner is it announced that I am to be the Fan Guest of Honour at Worldcon '94 than I am forced away from it all by the demands of finishing my dissertation while simultaneously starting a new job. This is the hardest I have ever worked in my life, and I am frankly amazed that I was able to keep it up so long. Since finishing my thesis in November, I have been able to cut back to twelve hours on weekdays and eight on weekends, but my energy reserves are still pretty low. By the end of April I hope to be able to cut back to a normal fifty-hour work week, and so have some time available for fandom again.

I teach a unit on television as part of my course on popular culture, and we analyse the impact TV has on children. It is pretty scary stuff. For one class, I taped all the commercials (but not the programs) in in four hours of evening viewing (Monday, January 11, 1993) on YTV, since YTV is specifically targeted to kids. I asked the students to watch for:

- depiction of gender, relationship norms
- depiction of adult/authority figures
- depiction of schools, libraries, culture
- what kinds of products targeted to kids
- how are products promoted (ex., sell cars by showing empty road, talking about 'freedom'; what are equivalent images, slogans for kids?)

For example, we discussed the long-running ad on YTV which has two young males discussing dating, how second male has suddenly noticed how beautiful girl is, then we find out girl has been using Noxema skin cream. The moral: she only became attractive to male once she started using this product.

[continued next page]

Everyone in ads is depicted as attractive, no handicaps, males are athletic, etc.. There are no adults or responsibilities in kids ads. Emphasis is on getting date, not working relationship through.

[Robert goes on to list 39 different commercials shown in the four hours a total of 101 times, including 23 station ads. I only list a few random selections as below.]

1. Cheerios - changes child's desire to help environment into purchase of three Cheerio packages.

15. Rock and Talk Crayola contest - slogan "There are no rules when you've got Crayola" is kid version of freedom transference.

21. Fruit Loops - more cereal (sugar high). Ad shows real fruit floating into box, but I strongly suspect no real fruit in there.

Here's a quote from a handout I distributed for the same lesson: "I think we live in the most powerful and most effective propaganda system in history. I've never met anyone who thought that advertising influenced them. Especially in the United States, people really believe that the media are free. A propaganda system only works if people think that they're in a free system."

And that's just what the commercials are telling kids! Once you start analyzing the programs, it gets very depressing.

On the other hand, I must confess that I still own and use a TV. After working a sixteen-hour day, I often am too tired to read anything, and yet need some kind of break before going directly to bed. By watching the ST episode the video recorder taped for me while I was at work, I get to have dreams about adventures in an SF world rather than nightmares in which the Dean tells me if I can't meet the next deadline I'm out. In other words, the main attract-

ion of TV is that it turns my brain OFF.

The story of 'Ima and Yura Hogg' strikes me as rather suspicious, since these were people applying for social security, not someone who lived next door. When Edmonton SFCAS was trying to get a post office box and found it would have to sit on the waiting list for a couple of years, one of our less-reputable members volunteered to turn his box number over to us, as he was moving on. For months after I would find his mail mixed in with ours and forward it. Or I should say I found mail addressed to 'S. Claus' or 'I.M. Phake'. He subsequently explained that he regularly filled in every "subscribe now, pay later" offer he came across. He would simply ignore the bills as copies of PLAYBOY or SPORTS ILLUSTRATED continued to roll in. After about six months of the bills going unpaid, a human operator would eventually check the computer, get the joke, and cancel the subscription. But in the meantime, he had started a second subscription under 'F. Off', so he always had the current issue. Eventually they wrote in a subroutine to catch the box number, at which time he'd get a new box.

FROM: C.F. Kennedy
Box 40, 90 Shuter Street
Toronto, Ontario M5B 2K6

1993-3-3

There are, by the way, more than one person with the name 'Mary Christmas'. Where I'm from, Cape Breton Island, 'Christmas' is not an uncommon name among the Micmac natives.

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

1993-2-26

The Springsteen song you quote in "Opening Sequences" is called "57 Channels and Nothing On". CITY-TV, Channel 57 in Toronto, was a little upset with this song, with people chanting "Channel 57's Got Nothing On". They've tried to do their own minivideo to claim the opposite but it hasn't worked ... hee, hee ...

The original constitution of Czechoslovakia was based on the constitution of Texas? Well, they certainly read the part of the Texas constitution about subdividing. What is the reaction of philatelists in your area about all these new countries in Europe?

[The collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact created a miniboom in philately as collectors scramble to locate all those new stamps, especially properly used on envelopes. LINN'S, a weekly stamp newspaper with 72,000 subscribers, has a columnist who reports on the independent republics. Locally, the greatest interest in Calgary is in Ukraine and Lithuania since those are large ethnic groups here. The Germans are a bigger group but in their case the changes deleted a country's stamps rather than adding them. I follow Estonian philately a bit since my mother is of Finnish descent, but my collecting is mainly Ukraine.]

FROM: Alexander Slate
8603 Shallow Ridge
San Antonio, Texas 78239

1993-2-21

Just a little note regarding the Hogg sisters. There were two sisters Ima and Ura (I think this is the proper spelling) Hogg. They were the daughters of Governor James Hogg, and I think both names were family names. Ima from

Imagene and Ura short for Urydicea. Ima never married and she was wealthy in her own right, a great patron of the arts and a respected name in Texas.

I WAS JUST TESTING YOU TO SEE IF YOU WOULD NOTICE

Paula Johanson mentions that I kept referring to Innu when I was writing about the Arctic territory of Nunavut. The Innu live in Labrador; I should have said Inuit. Although the two have similar names, they are separate peoples.

The cover of OPUNTIA #11.5 had an incorrect Morse Code as Ned Brooks points out. 'O' = ---, not --.-, which is the letter 'Q'. If I ever do hoax issues, I'll now know what title to use: QPUNTIA.

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Alexander Vasilkovsky, Tom Fulopp, Chester Cuthbert, Harry Andruschak, Brian Earl Brown, Harry Warner Jr., Buck Coulson, Joseph Major, Walter Willis

XENOFILES AVAILABLE

XENOFIL, a Calgary clubzine published by local con-coms, has restarted publication, and two new issues are out. If any OPUNTIA reader would like to see a copy, just mention it in a loc and I'll send one with the next OPUNTIA. I should emphasize that I am not involved with XENOFIL, or active on Calgary con-coms or clubs; I'm just picking up extra copies and distributing them.