

# OPUNTIA

## 68.5B

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**OPUNTIA** is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines. A cumulative subject index for all issues is available on request.

### AN OLYMPIC VIGNETTE

by Dale Speirs

#### Prelude.

The Olympic torch was wending its way across Canada en route to the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games. It was announced that the torch relay would pass through Calgary on January 18, but I paid little attention. That changed when a shopkeeper friend told me that the relay was due to pass in front of his store at the Condon Building, circa 17h00 to 19h00, and I was invited to the party. His landlords are a Greek family who were not about to let the Olympic torch go past with little notice. Ethnic pride required something better, so they booked a caterer, the Pegasus restaurant down the street, to supply a buffet. The Condon family (original name Yorkondondis) invited the tenants and sundry others to celebrate with them, and I was one of the sundry others.

The Olympic spirit was starting to appear and I was reminded of what happened two decades earlier. When Calgary hosted the 1988 Winter Olympics, there was a continual farrago of news articles in the two years prior about political squabbling and special-interest groups protesting this or that. About two weeks before the Games started, the mood suddenly changed as foreign athletes and news media began arriving, and the mayor spent much of his time at YYC greeting arriving guests. Calgarians

suddenly realized they were at the centre of the world's attention. I was a volunteer for the Games, and when I and my ilk began wearing our uniforms on the streets and enjoying the perks, people who hadn't volunteered began to wish they had. The critics and the protest marchers were quickly ignored, and found they got a cold shoulder from the general public who wanted to celebrate.

The 1980s were a bad decade for Alberta, and construction for the Olympics were the only thing that kept Calgary's economy from imploding like Detroit in 2008. Oil prices at the start of the 1988 Winter Olympics were down to US\$17 a barrel. The National Energy Policy instituted by the federal Liberals in 1979 had looted \$50 billion from Alberta in order to subsidize Ontario and Québec. We needed a ray of sunshine, and the Games were it, where the emphasis was on being and doing the best.

### **All On That Day.**

2010-01-18

The torch relay entered Cowtown from the south end, proceeding north up Macleod Trail, the main drag into Calgary. The relay then made a left turn at 17th Avenue SW in front of the Saddledome arena, and proceeded west along what is known as the Red Mile. This is the eastern section of 17th Avenue, lined with sports bars. Anyone who can't get a ticket to the hockey game congregates here and watches it on large screens. If the Calgary Flames win, the police will be on patrol until the early

morning hours. If, as is too often the case lately, the Flames lose, the Red Mile is quiet as the graveyard, and the extra constables who were called out on overtime are sent home by 21h00.

At 14 Street SW, the relay turned north and went past the Condon Building, which is on that intersection. From there they worked their way downtown to the Olympic Plaza before calling it a day. The entire route was lined with crowds. It's been 22 years since Calgary last saw an Olympic torch, and it will probably be the same again before Canada hosts another Olympics.

### **Wasn't That A Party?**

22 years ago, after the Calgary Games had concluded, I took my uniform to the dry cleaners, then hung it in a closet where it had been undisturbed ever since. Today I put it on again. It was more snug than it used to be, but it fit. The material must have shrunk. I can't think of any other reason why it would have become such a tight fit. With my camera slung around my neck, I went off to the bus stop and took the #7, which stops directly in front of the Condon Building.

The party room was packed, and there was souvlaki as far as the human eye could see. One of the Condon granddaughters passed out small paper Canadian flags to us.



*Flags, flags! Get  
your flags!  
You're not a true  
patriot unless  
you wave a flag!*







*Inside the Condon Building lobby as we finish off the souvlaki.*



*A Torch Relay  
support vehicle  
says it all.*







*One of the commemorative coins issued by the Royal Canadian Mint to honour the Vancouver Games.*

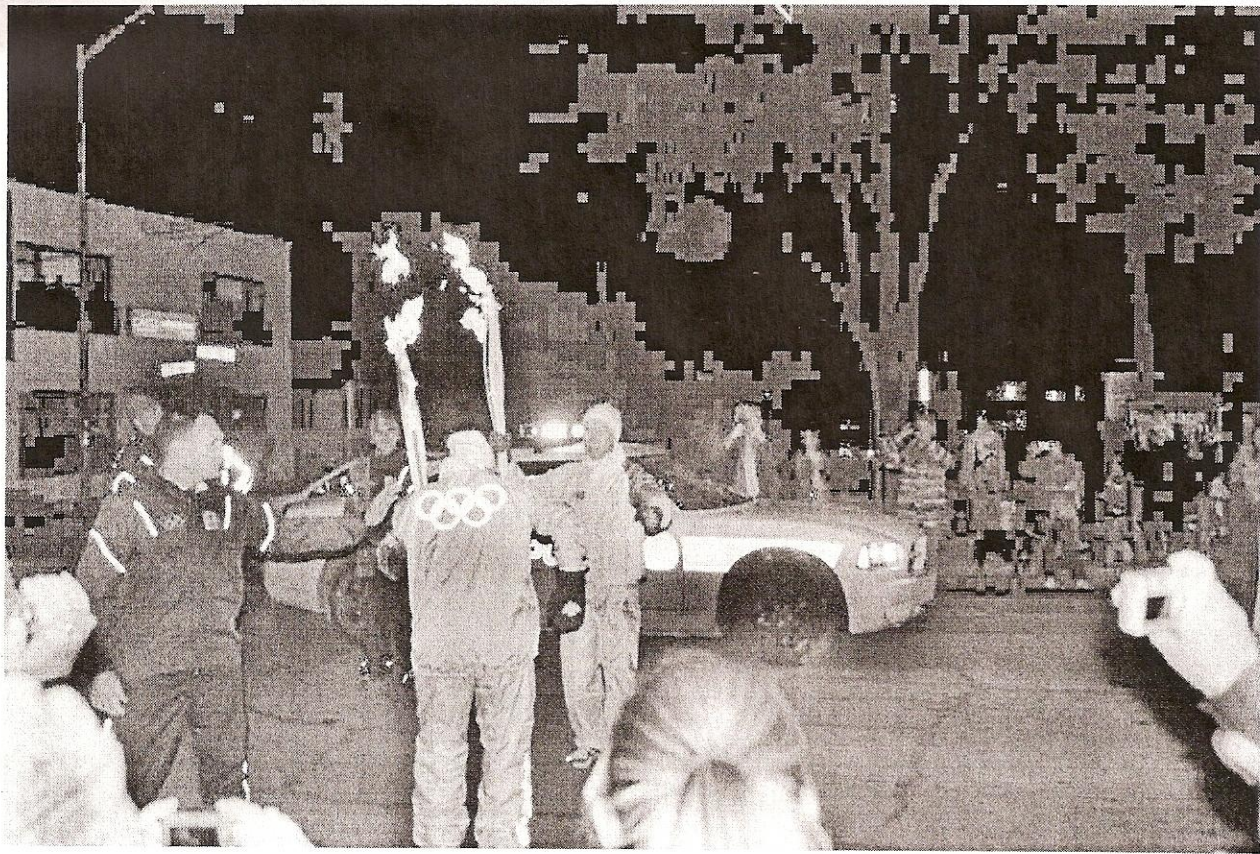
The torch was predicted to pass the building about 18h30. The party began about 16h30, the souvlaki was gone by 17h30, and at 18h00 we began drifting out onto the sidewalk. The crowds were starting to form and it wasn't long before the flashing lights of police cruisers heralded the torch bearers.

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Since the sun went down at 17h00, I was using flash. With a digital camera one can usually brighten up the picture on the computer into something legible, and I got some good shots. The spectators were waving flags and there was a constant strobing of camera flashes. I couldn't wave a flag and take pictures at the same time, so I wedged my flag in my jacket pocket. I was surprised the police and parade drivers could steer with all those flashes going off in their eyes.

There was a mini-parade of vehicles ahead of the runner, who turned out to be none other than Bearcat Murray, a much-beloved figure in Calgary public life. He was the trainer for the Calgary Flames hockey team from their beginning in 1980 until his retirement in 1996. I got lucky. The relay of torches happened directly in front of me, as Murray stopped to greet the next runner, and touched his torch to the next man's torch to ignite it. The torches are stainless steel and burn propane. The runners have the option to buy them and most do.





*The Olympic flame is passed from one torch bearer to another.*



The relay continued on down the street past me.

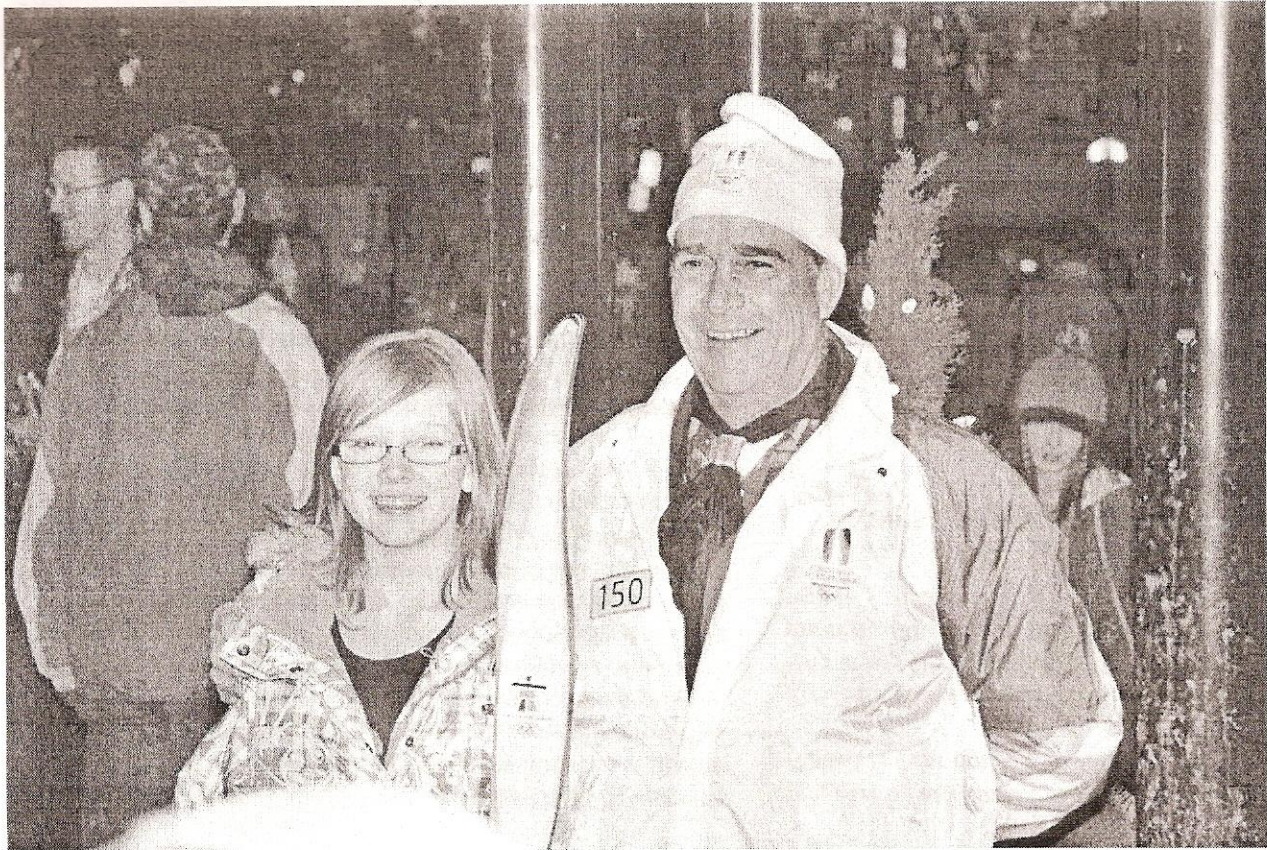
I began walking downtown to the Olympic Plaza. I passed others with flags and we would gaily wave them at each other as we went by. It was a bit of a hike downtown but I made it in about twenty minutes. There was no point in trying to take a bus for such a short distance as the streets were plugged with traffic and it was faster to walk. The 8th Avenue pedestrian mall was packed as expected, and became more dense with humanity as I approached its eastern end where it terminated at the Olympic Plaza. There were times when I came to a dead stop and simply couldn't move because of the press of humanity.

The ceremonies were already in progress but I didn't pay too much attention. The mayor was speechifying and it was like any speech you've ever heard your local politicians make at any festive gathering. There were a couple of female stilt-walkers dressed as snow angels on the mall, and volunteer torch relayers were posing for photos with kids who wanted to hold a genuine Olympic torch. Off in one corner was a pathetic band of protestors squawking about seal hunting, but no one paid any attention to them. Seal hunting is not an issue in Alberta for the obvious reason that there are no seals here except in zoos.

*At left is a snow angel on the 8th Avenue pedestrian mall.*







*A young girl on the 8th Avenue mall proudly poses with one of the torch relay runners.*



The cauldron on top of the Calgary Tower had been lit when the Torch Relay had crossed into Calgary, and would remain lit until it left. On the Olympic Plaza stage was another cauldron, which was lit by the last relay runner, Robin Ainsworth. As 12-year-old Robin Perry in 1988, she had been chosen to light the cauldron at the Calgary Games opening ceremony. She was watched by hundreds of millions of television viewers around the world as she ran up the steps of McMahon Stadium and carefully touched her torch into the cauldron to officially start the 1988 Games.

### And So To Bed.

I walked westwards back down the mall, thinking to wander about and then eventually catch a bus home. Just as I crossed an intersection, the #13 bus pulled into its stop. It goes within a block of my house so I hopped on. The bus was packed and most of the passengers were holding flags like mine. After dropping my ticket into the fare box, I waved my flags going down the aisle and everyone waved theirs back. Normally bus riders avoid eye contact and talking to strangers but we were all celebrating tonight, and there was a steady hum of conversation.

I had a pleasant chat with a lady in the seat next to me. She said she had been a few months pregnant with her daughter when she last saw the torch relay in 1988, and now her daughter got to see the relay herself. I made bold to quip "And is your daughter

pregnant by any chance?", to which she emphatically replied "I hope not!".

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The Torch Relay stayed overnight in Calgary, then made a brief stop at the Olympic Oval at the University of Calgary the next morning. From there, onward and westward, as it headed on its way to Vancouver.





I work the Friday to Sunday 12-hour shift as the Parks Dept. Trouble Call Supervisor. Today, Sunday, is the last day of the Olympics, and Canadians are glued to the television screen watching the gold medal final between the Canadian and American hockey teams. Earlier in the weekend, the Canadian women's hockey team had won gold so the pressure on the men's team was immense.

I got an afternoon call from the police about a boulevard tree run over in the far south. I took Deerfoot Trail, an 8-lane freeway. I drove steadily at 100 klicks, and for at least ten minutes I was the only driver on the freeway. Nothing in my rearview mirror and no traffic coming the other way. I arrived at the defunct tree and spent about an hour cutting it up and loading it on my truck. By then the game was over, Canada having won. On my way back up north, Deerfoot Trail had returned to its usual solid traffic, with a steady flow of vehicles. The only difference was that about every tenth car had a intoxicated young buck hanging out the window waving a flag and whooping with joy.

According to the news, 16.6 million Canadians watched the hockey game, the largest television audience ever in this country for a single show. To put that into perspective, Canada's population is 30 million.

All told, Canada won 14 gold medals in Vancouver, more than any other country, although it finished third overall because the USA and Germany won more silvers and bronzes.





## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Dubreuil, B. (2010) **Paleolithic public goods games: why human culture and cooperation did not evolve in one step.** BIOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY 25:53-73

*"It is widely agreed that humans have specific abilities for cooperation and culture that evolved since their split with their last common ancestor with chimpanzees. Many uncertainties remain, however, about the exact moment in the human lineage when these abilities evolved. This article argues that cooperation and culture did not evolve in one step in the human lineage and that the capacity to stick to long-term and risky cooperative arrangements evolved before properly modern culture. I present evidence that Homo heidelbergensis became increasingly able to secure contributions from others in two demanding Paleolithic public good games (PPGGs): cooperative feeding and cooperative breeding. I argue that the temptation to defect is high in these PPGGs and that the evolution of human cooperation in Homo heidelbergensis is best explained by the emergence of modern-like abilities for inhibitory control and goal maintenance. These executive functions are localized in the prefrontal cortex and allow humans to stick to social norms in the face of competing motivations. This scenario is consistent with data on brain evolution that indicate that the largest growth of the prefrontal*

*cortex in human evolution occurred in Homo heidelbergensis and was followed by relative stasis in this part of the brain. One implication of this argument is that subsequent behavioral innovations, including the evolution of symbolism, art, and properly cumulative culture in modern Homo sapiens, are unlikely to be related to a reorganization of the prefrontal cortex, despite frequent claims to the contrary in the literature on the evolution of human culture and cognition."*

Speirs: Unfortunately it appears that our ability for goal maintenance and inhibitory control is decaying.

Freya, B.S., D.A. Savage, and B. Torgler (2010) **Interaction of natural survival instincts and internalized social norms exploring the Titanic and Lusitania disasters.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 107:4862-4865

*"This study explores the interaction of natural survival instincts and internalized social norms using data on the sinking of the Titanic and the Lusitania. We show that time pressure appears to be crucial when explaining behavior under extreme conditions of life and death. Even though the two vessels and the composition of their passengers were quite similar, the behavior of the individuals on board was dramatically different."*

*On the Lusitania, selfish behavior dominated (which corresponds to the classical homo economicus); on the Titanic, social norms and social status (class) dominated, which contradicts standard economics. This difference could be attributed to the fact that the Lusitania sank in 18 min, creating a situation in which the short-run flight impulse dominated behavior. On the slowly sinking Titanic (2 h, 40 min), there was time for socially determined behavioral patterns to re-emerge."*

De Martinoa, B., C.F. Camerera, and R. Adolphs (2010) **Amygdala damage eliminates monetary loss aversion.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 107:3788-3792

*"Losses are a possibility in many risky decisions, and organisms have evolved mechanisms to evaluate and avoid them. Laboratory and field evidence suggests that people often avoid risks with losses even when they might earn a substantially larger gain, a behavioral preference termed "loss aversion." The cautionary brake on behavior known to rely on the amygdala is a plausible candidate mechanism for loss aversion, yet evidence for this idea has so far not been found. We studied two rare individuals with focal bilateral amygdala lesions using a series of experimental economics tasks. To measure individual sensitivity to financial losses we asked participants to play a variety of monetary gambles*

*with possible gains and losses. Although both participants retained a normal ability to respond to changes in the gamblers' expected value and risk, they showed a dramatic reduction in loss aversion compared to matched controls. The findings suggest that the amygdala plays a key role in generating loss aversion by inhibiting actions with potentially deleterious outcomes."*

Speirs: The amygdalae perform a primary role in the processing and memory of emotional reactions. It would be interesting to extend this study to day traders.

Sulak, R.M., and J. Danielsen (1989) **Reservoir aspects of Ekofisk subsidence.** JOURNAL OF PETROLEUM TECHNOLOGY 41:709-716

*"In November 1984, Phillips Petroleum Co. discovered subsidence of the seabed overlying the Ekofisk oil reservoirs offshore Norway. This phenomenon is the result of the compaction of the porous chalk reservoirs and the transmission of this compaction through the overburden to the seafloor. ... The compaction of the Ekofisk reservoirs is shown to be a result of pore-pressure depletion. Although some of the compaction is elastic, the bulk results from plastic deformation (pore collapse) of high-porosity chalk. ... To ensure continuous safe operation during severe weather conditions,*



*it became necessary to modify the platforms on the Ekofisk complex. Most of the planned modifications were implemented in summer 1987, when seven platform decks were elevated 6 metres."*

Speirs: This paper is an old one but interesting. So much oil was pumped out of the North Sea fields that the seabed sank 6 metres.

Chiaroni, J., et al (2009) **Y chromosome diversity, human expansion, drift, and cultural evolution.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 106:20174-20179

*"Earlier quantitative studies on a variety of data have shown that the amount of genetic differentiation in living human populations indicates that the role of positive (or directional) selection is modest. We observe geographic peculiarities with some Y chromosome mutants, most probably due to a drift-related phenomenon called the surfing effect. We also compare the overall genetic diversity in Y chromosome DNA data with that of other chromosomes and their expectations under drift and natural selection, as well as the rate of fall of diversity within populations known as the serial founder effect during the recent "Out of Africa" expansion of modern humans to the whole world. All these observations are difficult to explain without accepting a major relative role for drift in the course of human expansions. The*

*increasing role of human creativity and the fast diffusion of inventions seem to have favored cultural solutions for many of the problems encountered in the expansion. We suggest that cultural evolution has been subrogating biologic evolution in providing natural selection advantages and reducing our dependence on genetic mutations, especially in the last phase of transition from food collection to food production."*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney  
1706 - 24 Eva Road  
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

2010-02-23

I never thought I'd see a picture of the Grey Cup in a fanzine, but there it is. I was asked by a young relative why they call these big trophies like the Grey Cup and the Stanley Cup cups. I said the Cup part is the silver bowl at the top, and the rest of the trophy holds the plaques detailing the members of the teams that won it in previous years. More blank looks.

**I Also Heard From:** Anna Banana, Franz Zrilich, John Held Jr

## WORLD WIDE PARTY #17

**Date/Time Properties** [?] [X]

Date & Time | Time Zone

Date

June 2010

	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29
30					

Time

21:00:00

Current time zone: Mountain Daylight Time

OK Cancel Apply

2010 will have the 17th annual World Wide Party on June 21st at 21h00 your local time. Invented by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the idea is to get a wave circulating the

world of zinesters, mail artists, and SF fans toasting the Papernet. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to your fellow denizens of zinedom. Face to the east and toast those who have already celebrated the WWP. Then toast to the north and south for those in your time zone. Finally, face to the west and toast those yet to celebrate.

Write up your celebration for a zine or do some mail art. Have a party, or devise your own method of celebrating. The World Wide Party is a celebration of the Papernet and its many correspondents. It is designed to make you conscious of the fact that you are not alone as a zinester or mail artist. Unlike the cacophony of the Internet, the Papernet is a better community, one where people realize the fastest post is not the best, that emotion should be recollected in tranquility and not as flaming, and that content matters more than style.

Zinedom as we understand it today began in the 1860s or so, became self-aware in 1876 with the founding of the first apa, looked up to the skies with the rise of science fiction fandom in the 1930s, and re-invented itself with punks in the 1970s. Mail art as a self-aware field dates back to the post-WW2 era, although there were precursors circa the WW1 era. Both sections of the Papernet have a longer history than many people realize.



## THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY

by Dale Speirs

*Just after entering Banff National Park through its eastern gates, the Trans-Canada Highway runs up to the base of Mount Cascade before veering around its southern base.*

*I took this photo in late May 2003. Snowmelt is usually done by late June.*

