

THE WOLLONGONG PIG-BREEDERS' GAZETTE 1

FEBRUARY 1993. The Wollongong Pig-Breeders' Gazette is published every now and then by Perry Middlemiss of GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne 3001, [phone (H) (03) 429 5507, (W) (03) 634 2857], firstly for members of ANZAPA and then for others as requested or desired.

December 2, 1992 "It was twenty years ago today..." Gough Whitlam's Labor Party was elected as the first non-Conservative Federal Government of Australia for 23 years. I was 17 at the time and not old enough to vote. If I had it would probably have been the only time in my life that I voted against the Labor Party.

I was brought up in the mid-North of South Australia in a small country town called Laura some 220 kilometres north of Adelaide. It was a totally unremarkable place owing its existence to the farms in the area and little else. To state that its political viewpoint was conservative would be to state the obvious. The farmers in the district had lived under the Federal Government's protective umbrella for longer than most of them could remember and it didn't take much insight amongst the rest of the community to realise that what was good for the farmers was vital to them. I only knew of one person in the town who voted Labor (he handed out the how-to-vote cards outside the Town Hall on voting day) and he was looked upon as something of a ratbag. The overriding political view in the town was conservative and impressionable seventeen-year-olds from the country tend to stick with the consensus - not knowing enough and not having the will to rock the boat just yet. So I would have voted Conservative (probably Country Party to my horror) and looked on the Labor Party as representing the Communist hordes. Being naive is okay, but being totally stupid takes either a lot of work or a lot of inattention.

I first heard about the Labor Party victory about 10.30 pm on the Saturday night of the election. I was sitting in a car at the local drive-in with a couple of other people when someone came around and told us the election result. I remember a feeling of dismay at the news. A feeling that I next felt with such vigour almost three years later when I heard on the 11th of November 1975 that Whitlam had been sacked as Prime Minister by the Governor-General.

That election of a Labor Government literally changed my life. On Tuesday December 5th 1972 Lance Barnard (Whitlam's Deputy and, for some time, sole colleague in Labor's first Cabinet) abolished the national service call-up. I can't remember now whether the age at which Australian males had to register for the draft was 18 or 20. I have a feeling that it was 18. In that case I was within six months of having to register. Failure to register meant automatic call-up for duty in the war in Vietnam. Registering meant entering the draft lottery in which a certain number of birthdays covering a six month period were drawn at random with the results read out on the evening television news. It was a terrible time. My birthday was chosen twice in a row and I had determined that I was, firstly, not going to register, and, secondly, if called up was not going to serve. Labor's abolition of the draft removed the decision to take that course of action and probably saved me from a criminal record that would have stuck with me for the rest of my life. God knows what effect that would have had on me over the years.

Whitlam and Barnard dragged Australia kicking and screaming into the twentieth century - in much the same way that Don Dunstan had done in South Australia in the late sixties. They made 40 decisions within 12 days of being elected, ranging from the removal of sales tax on the contraceptive pill to commencing diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China. They were heady days indeed, but I have a feeling that the initial burst of energy may have been partially responsible for the Labor government's fall in 1975. A pity. But that couple of weeks changed my life and provided me with my first taste of the possibilities of politics, rather than the limitations.

December 9, 1992 If ever there was going to be a day which illustrated the highs and lows of everyday existence this is it. Yesterday I attended the funeral of Roger Weddall, today I attended the birth of Catherine Gabrielle LeGarey Middlemiss, my first child. It's still too early to explain fully how I feel about this matter as there seems to be too much going on in my head for that. As any new parent will probably tell you, a new child evokes a mixture of feelings ranging from exhilaration to one of impending doom. All you can really come away with is a sense that a certain part of your life has ended and another has begun. That early part of my life took 37 years to complete, much longer than the rest of my family, but the fact that it has happened at all should give them something to think about.

I was going to write a few things about Catherine's birth here but have decided to write about it in greater detail for another place and time so I will just go on about inane things like names.

It appears that my father was the one who came up with the names of the children in my family: Brenton, Perry and Gina. It took quite some time to get it out of him but I believe (notice that I'm still not entirely sure) that I was named after Perry Mason from the Erle Stanley Gardner novels - it seems that Dad was reading a lot of them at the time - and Gina was named after Gina Lollobrigida who was pretty popular at the end of the fifties. Robyn and I decided fairly easily on "Catherine" for a girl as we both liked it and it seemed to run well with the rest of the name we had decided upon. "Gabrielle" was Robyn's grandmother's first name, and "LeGarey" was my father's original surname - his mother and father divorced when he was only a few years old and he was then adopted by his mother's second husband, giving him a birth certificate dated when he was 13 years old strangely enough. We toyed with the idea of giving Catherine a double-barrelled surname, but only for about 15 seconds when we realised that Mills-Middlemiss or Middlemiss-Mills was going to come across as either pretentious or ridiculous, or both. So we left it at mine and Robyn was checked into the Maternity hospital under the name of Middlemiss. Knowing what medical bureaucracies are like we thought it would solve a lot of potential misunderstandings. Thankfully we were right.

Sitting here thinking about it I can say that I am quite happy with the name we've chosen. At least Catherine won't have to live with the name she was referred to throughout the pregnancy - Mungo. A quite reasonable name on the face of it, but not when you add a second name of Urquhart.

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January 4, 1993 This is the time of year when those of us who keep lists have the opportunity to bore the hell out of all those people who don't. I used to keep lists of everything a few years ago but now restrict myself to just listing the films I've seen and the books I've read. It's a decidedly anal past-time, but so what, I enjoy it.

Thomas Kenelly	<i>Gossip From the Forest</i>
Nina Bawden	<i>Circles of Deceit</i>
Clive James	<i>May Week Was in June</i>
James Joyce	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
Alice Thomas Ellis	<i>The Fly in the Ointment</i>
Larry Niven, et al	<i>The Man-Kzin Wars</i>
P.H. Newby	<i>Something to Answer For</i>
Peter Mayle	<i>Toujours Provence</i>
Terry Pratchett	<i>The Light Fantastic</i>
C.P. Snow	<i>Time of Hope</i>
Howard Waldrop	<i>Them Bones</i>
Mike Phillips	<i>Blood Rites</i>
John Fuller	<i>Flying to Nowhere</i>
Christopher Priest	<i>The Quiet Woman</i>

Penelope Lively	<i>City of the Mind</i>
John Steinbeck	<i>Cannery Row</i>
Terry Pratchett	<i>Equal Rites</i>
Peter Carey	<i>Ilywacker</i>
Mervyn Peake	<i>Titus Groan</i>
Nicholson Baker	<i>Room Temperature</i>
Graham Swift	<i>Waterland</i>
Joseph Conrad	<i>Heart of Darkness</i>
Mike Phillips	<i>The Late Candidate</i>
Paul Bailey	<i>Gabriel's Lament</i>
Iain Banks	<i>Canal Dreams</i>
Peter Carey	<i>The Tax Inspector</i>
Adam Hall	<i>Quiller Barracuda</i>
David Lodge	<i>Paradise News</i>
Malcolm Bradbury	<i>Cuts</i>
Henry James	<i>Daisy Miller</i>
William Goldman	<i>Hype and Glory</i>
Robert Louis Stevenson	<i>Kidnapped</i>
John Braine	<i>Room at the Top</i>
Adam Hall	<i>Quiller Bamboo</i>
David Storey	<i>Saville</i>
Evelyn Waugh	<i>Brideshead Revisited</i>
Elizabeth Smart	<i>By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept</i>
Collete	<i>Ripening Seed</i>
Mervyn Peake	<i>Gormenghast</i>
Evelyn Waugh	<i>The Loved One</i>
Ian McEwan	<i>The Innocent</i>
J.G. Ballard	<i>The Kindness of Women</i>
Nicholson Baker	<i>U and I</i>
Peter Mathiessen	<i>Nine-Headed Dragon River</i>
Roddy Doyle	<i>The Snapper</i>
C.P. Snow	<i>Conscience of the Rich</i>
Lucy Sussex	<i>Peace Garden</i>
Clifford Simak	<i>Way Station</i>
Stephen King	<i>Gerald's Game</i>
Gregory Benford	<i>Across the Sea of Suns</i>
Adam Hall	<i>Quiller KGB</i>
Jessica Anderson	<i>Tirra Lirra by the River</i>
Larry Niven	<i>N-Space</i>
Herman Hesse	<i>Strange News from Another Star</i>
William Gibson & Bruce Sterling	<i>The Difference Engine</i>
Greg Bear	<i>Heads</i>
Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle	<i>Inferno</i>
Stephen King	<i>Needful Things</i>

A total of 58 for the year. More than the target of 50 I set myself each New Year, though down on the 109 of the previous year. The 1991 figure is something of an aberration as I was unemployed for eight months. When you're living in London and it's snowing outside the library with all its new and unread books becomes rather inviting. But getting back to the year in question, I'm happy enough with the result given the upheavals Robyn and I experienced. I find it rather amusing, looking back on the list above, that I could jump from Adam Hall to Jessica Anderson to Larry Niven to Herman Hesse. That either says something about my literary taste, or lack of it. I'm not sure what and, to be frank, I don't really care.

My favourites of the year:

1. *Gabriel's Lament* by Paul Bailey. Nominated for a Booker prize in 1986 it was beaten out by *The Old Devils* by Kingsley Amis. Probably more than any other 1986 stands out for me as the year when the Booker judges got the result totally wrong. Apart from these two books already mentioned, the following were also nominated:

An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro;

An Insular Possession by Timothy Mo;

What's Bred in the Bone by Robertson Davies; and

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood.

I have yet to read the Mo or the Davies but I can tell you quite easily that the Amis is the worst of the lot. I have no doubt that Amis picked up the gong due to the "we'd better give him this one because he'll probably be dead next week" syndrome; the most obvious example of which was the Academy Award for Best Actor given to Henry Fonda (for *On Golden Pond*) instead of Burt Lancaster (for *Atlantic City*). At least Fonda had the good grace to kick the bucket soon afterwards. If Amis did the same I might feel slightly differently about him. I hope not. His book is just plain tedious. I'm not at all interested in reading about a group of people, whether old and infirm or young and sprightly, who seem intent on drinking themselves into a stupor of such improbable proportions. I can only imagine that Amis was trying to give the impression that he still has what it takes in the drinking and bonking departments. He only succeeded in convincing me never again to read anything he puts his hand to.

Bailey's book reads like an autobiography. I only know a little about Bailey and his sexual inclinations, and that I came across after I had finished the book so I don't count that knowledge as affecting the way I view it. The main character, Gabriel, is drawn as something less than a physical whole: in stature, sexual activity, and as a reflection of his father. Gabriel's father dominates this book the way he dominates his family, but it is Gabriel's mother who forges the boy's life. For the bulk of the book she is off-stage, having left home, presumably to escape her dictatorial husband, leaving Gabriel to live in continual hope of her return and his father's demise. I'm not sure how old Gabriel is when his mother takes her leave (let's say twelve) but he's forty by the time he comes to terms with it all. This twenty-eight year adolescence is an agonising experience and shapes Gabriel's character slowly but surely. This is a beautiful book. I'm already looking forward to re-reading it.

2. *Tirra Lirra by the River* by Jessica Anderson. Winner of the Miles Franklin Award (Australia's premier literature prize) in 1978 and I guess I picked it up because of that fact. I was a bit put off by the title though. Sounds like the book is going to be a bit on the twee side if you ask me. I seem to remember starting the book a couple of years ago but didn't finish it. I don't know why. Probably had no appreciation for well-written novels back then I guess. I place this novel firmly in the "old codger looks back on their life" genre - typified by such books as *Moon Tiger* by Penelope Lively and *Illywacker* by Peter Carey. Both of which are Booker winners I now realise. With this novel making a trifecta of literary award winners maybe there's something in this genre. Or maybe it's just that the awards' judges are also old codgers who like this type of thing.

My copy of the book seems to have gone West at the moment so you've have to forgive me as I try to remember its details. The main character of the book relates the story from her old family home in a large town in the country of New South Wales. She grew up in a fairly non-descript sort of way with a mother who was a bit of a tyrant. Which is probably why she married the first bloke who came along. She moves to Sydney and starts to expand her intellectual and social boundaries, much to her husband's displeasure. I'm not exactly sure of the time here but it is probably pre-war. To cut a long story short, she starts to earn some money working for a dressmaker, her husband takes ultimate exception to this and gives her the boot - he also blames her for their childless marriage to add a bit more insult. With her allowance from the marriage she skips off to Britain, gets caught up in an ship-board affair with a married man, gets pregnant, and arrives in London with little or no idea what she is going to do with herself. She

aborts the child and spends the next thirty years or so working in the London theatre as a dressmaker having a great time.

Looking at the plot blandly like that makes me wonder how I ever got through the book after all. Luckily enough there is no feeling of melodrama or maudlin self-introspection - just an interesting story about an interesting character. Then again I might just have liked the book because she spent most of her time in London living in Maida Vale near Little Venice, a few blocks away from the flat Robyn and I rented for over two years. Doesn't matter really. In any event I went up in the estimation of one of Robyn's friends when I mentioned this book at a dinner party over Christmas. She thought no-one had ever heard of it.

3. *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh. Not much needs to be said about this one. The major TV series based on the book colours all responses to it. Thankfully, John Mortimer's script is remarkably faithful. Though I couldn't help hearing Jeremy Irons's voice as I read Charles's narration, and seeing Castle Howard as Brideshead. Minor quibbles.

4. *Saville* by David Storey. The author is probably better known for his first novel *This Sporting Life* though this one did win the Booker in 1976. Are you starting to see a pattern yet? The other part of the pattern is that this book also appears to be a fictionalised biography. My copy of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature (Fifth Edition)* describes it as an "epic set in a South Yorkshire mining village". At least they got the setting right, and it is a long novel. But "epic"? They've obviously got a strange view of the meaning of the word. How you could so describe anything this bleak (or anything set in Yorkshire other than Geoff Boycott's jackets) is beyond me.

5. *Time Of Hope* by C.P. Snow. Part of Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* sequence with this one dealing almost exclusively with the main character Lewis Eliot. I'm setting myself the target of reading two or three novels from this *roman fleuve* each year, and as there are 11 of them, I have a few years to go yet. Oddly enough, Snow's *Conscience of the Rich* reads like a Jewish version of *Brideshead Revisited*.

Best Non-Fiction: *U and I* by Nicholson Baker. This category was fairly easy to decide on given that I only read 5 non-fiction works in 1992. But I may have made a terrible blue here as Baker is reputed to only write novels. Doesn't matter, I reckon this book is non-fiction and that's what counts I guess. The book concerns Baker's relationship with the author John Updike - with the major concern being that there isn't one: Baker has met Updike approximately twice, has finished maybe two novels and half the short stories. The book is as much about Baker as it is about Updike which probably explains its appeal to me. Baker is about my age and looks something like me with less hair. There's just no accounting for taste I guess. Baker was my discovery of the year.

Best Science Fiction: *Way Station* by Clifford Simak. Again an easy category to decide upon. Not, this time, because of the numbers read but because of the quality. I come back to this book about every three to four years. The style is beautifully simple and the overall effect of the novel can only be described as pastoral. Even though it is set in the Mid-West of the USA it always reminds me of where I grew up. Lovely stuff.

Best Fantasy: *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* by Mervyn Peake. You might think it a bit of a cheat putting two books here but I consider them to be essentially the one novel. You could probably add in the third of these books, *Titus Alone*, as well but I would be rather loathe to do that. From what I have read about this third book it appears that Peake didn't finish it before his death, and I haven't read it anyway. So that sort of solves that problem. A mate of mine has been giving me a hard time for years because I haven't read these books, so I'm waiting for the time somewhere about the middle of the year, sitting in the Great Southern Stand at the MCG, with the Adelaide Crows giving his beloved Melbourne Demons a mighty flogging, and I'll

casually drop the line: "Oh, by the way, you know those Gormenghast books? Yeah, not bad." I hope he drops his pie.

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January 25, 1993 Mark Twain is reported to have once said: "Giving up smoking's easy; I've done it hundreds of times". Yeah, so have I Mark; every time I went to sleep at night I gave up for eight hours at a stretch. But now I'm trying it for real.

I guess I started smoking somewhere around my seventeenth year. It was the done thing in the country area where I was living. All the blokes my age were doing it and given that I was a late maturer on the assertive side, I took it up as well. And kept it up for the next 20 years. A lot of non-smokers will tell you that, given all the evidence of smoking-related cancers and illnesses, they just can't see how anyone can start smoking, let alone continue with it after the dangers have been pointed out. And I see their point. The trouble is that smoking hurts other people, never you. I don't remember ever meeting anyone during my twenties who had any illness or disease directly connected with smoking worse than a smoker's cough. And even they were pretty rare. So where was the incentive? In the seventies smoking advertisements were legal everywhere, cigarettes were relatively cheap, and nobody seemed to worry too much about the possible effects. Anyway it was rather enjoyable. Waking up on the odd morning after a heavy night's bingeing with a mouth like a well-trodden carpet was a small price to pay, and a price soon forgotten.

Then, in the early eighties, I made my first serious stab at giving up. It didn't last very long. I gave up while at work (even though this was well before the work-place smoking bans came into effect) but had trouble at home where I was living with someone who was also trying to give up, and was failing at a greater rate even than me. I gave up giving up after a while and settled into only smoking after work or down the pub. It seemed the best compromise at the time. I ended up on about 8 to 10 a day. "If you smoke that few", people said, "why don't you just give up?" "Because I enjoy it", I used to reply. Even I realised that sounded a bit on the defensive side. Over the years attitudes changed and it came to the point where John McPharlin and I were about the only ones I knew in Australia that still smoked.

There was still the feeling in the back of my head all through this that I would definitely give up if I ever became a father and, when Robyn told me early in 1992 that she was pregnant, my mind was made up for me. I set the date for September 9th, 1992, the day we were due to fly out of London back to Australia, and so far I have stuck to it. I was helped by the fact that we returned to Melbourne via Bangkok and Hong Kong, both of which were very hot and humid at the time, thereby giving me an extra incentive not to inhale hot smoke into my lungs. In fact, Bangkok was so polluted that it felt like I was on 40 a day just walking down the street.

Quitting smoking is not the easiest thing in the world to do. The first couple of days are pretty bad as you have to fight through the nicotine withdrawal, and then the next few weeks are spent fighting the psychological withdrawal - that urge to smoke purely because you're in a situation where you used to smoke previously, such as with a beer in hand. But you force yourself through the initial urges, hang around with a lot of people who don't smoke and you know you are starting to succeed when you get home after a night out with friends, eating and drinking as usual, and you realise that you haven't had a cigarette all evening and that you didn't ever feel like having one. It seems a minor victory but it is significant. They all are. But don't let anyone tell you that you feel a lot better - you don't. For the first month or so you feel bloody awful and after that you settle down to the realisation that maybe, just maybe, you've stopped in time.

I was a smoker for twenty years. That's long enough.