

# THE WOLLONGONG PIG-BREEDERS' GAZETTE 2

JUNE 1993. The Wollongong Pig-Breeders' Gazette, of which this is issue 2, is published occasionally - when the longing overcomes him, when he gets an attack of the guilts or when the ANZAPA deadline beckons - by Perry Middlemiss of GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3001, [phone (H) (03) 429 5507, (W) (03) 634 2988], firstly for members of ANZAPA, and then for others as requested or desired. Just ask.

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February 17, 1993 I've just received a letter from Mark Loney which is useful as I now know where he lives. You see, Mark got married in October last year and left Australia almost immediately thereafter for the wilds of Washington, DC, USA. Mark has been transferred to the Australian Embassy there by way of being associated in some manner with the spook business. I have not the faintest idea what he will be doing over there as I thought the Americans were supposed to be on our side, but at least he was able to get to Washington in time for Bill Clinton's inauguration and the massive changes that must be going on. It would be a pretty interesting place to be just now I reckon.

But as I said above I was interested to get Mark's letter (just a thank-you note for the wedding present actually) as it gave me his address as Hyattsville, Maryland. Not knowing a lot about that part of the USA - or most other parts for that matter, but better than the Texan I once met who had to be assured that London really was somewhere in Europe - I thought I'd look him up. I dragged out the trusty old Times Concise Atlas of the World (totally out of date now but I suspect still okay for his neck of the woods) and looked him up. And there he was. Or so the index said. I spent a few minutes looking all around Washington and then found him in the small print somewhere near Anapolis. Do they really have names like that? And look at all the others there: Damascus, Upper Marlboro, Brandywine (yeah, I could live there), Dahlgren (what? I've heard of that one before), Falls Church... Hang on, this is getting decidedly science fictional, I thought. Didn't Terry Hughes live there once? Or was it Avedon Carol? Upperville, The Plains (I bet those two took a lot of thinking up), Westminster, New Windsor, Onancock (you have *got* to be joking, even Dave Langford or John McPharlin wouldn't dare produce that one) and Hagerstown. I knew he was living a science fictional existence when I saw that. So I wrote and asked: "... tell me, are you going to drive past 423 Summit Avenue and get a photo or what? I reckon I couldn't resist it. Not that I would knock on the door you understand, just have a look, take a photo and beat a hasty retreat. That would do. And you never know, good old Harry Warner might even stick his head out on the porch and shoo you off. The fannish myths you could start." But I don't reckon Mark will do any such thing. I know he can drive, and I'm certain he knows that the legendary Harry Warner, Jr lives in Hagerstown and probably even remembers his address. But I just can't see him doing it. The headlines would be too much: "Aussie Spook Spooked by Hagerstown Hermit." He'd be drummed out of the service.

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March 14, 1993 I've got a new job. God, what a struggle. Robyn and I left London on September 9th last year and it's taken all this time to find any work at all. When we left Britain I knew that the economy was pretty bad here in Victoria but I doubt whether anyone could have anticipated it being this woeful. Robyn and I both gave up work about a month earlier than our departure date so we could do a bit of travelling before returning home. In total, then, I was out of work for close to seven months. Very definitely a record, and one I hope never to break.

Now that I am back in employment life feels a little strange. If you slot into a routine while being unemployed the sudden jolt of having to get up early every morning and head off to work takes

some getting used to. Gone are the days of the long read of the paper over copious cups of coffee, no more draining yesterday's nappies and putting them into the washing machine for the rinse cycle, and I could forget the return to bed for a gentle snooze after Catherine had been fed, changed and had dozed off herself. Now it's the daily grind of fighting the alarm, a quick coffee and slice of toast, and then braving the commuting masses on their way into the city. It's a tough life I tell you.

I can't say that I had given up hope of ever getting work again during the time I was unemployed but it certainly started to feel that Melbourne wasn't the place for me. This was only my second interview since my return from overseas and, in the meantime, I was practically being guaranteed work in Canberra for extended periods at good rates. I was definitely tempted but I had a wife and young daughter who I wanted to be around and the prospect of running two houses - one in Melbourne and one in Canberra - with me only seeing my family every second weekend didn't appeal in the slightest. We hadn't got desperate up till the start of March, though we were starting to get close.

And then, out of the blue, I got a phone call from a friend of mine telling me to get my resume in to the Corporate Marketing branch of Telecom Australia as soon as possible, namely the next morning, a Thursday. I contacted my contracting agency first thing, they faxed off a copy of curriculum vitae, and half an hour later I had an interview arranged for two in the afternoon. Two and a half hours after that I had a job starting the next Monday. This is the way things are supposed to work, I thought. None of this hanging around - after being told of a vacancy - waiting for the prospective employer to make up their minds about whether to interview me or not, then being on tenterhooks for a month or so while they decided if I had the job or not. This was a much better way to do business - just cut out the bullshit and get on with it. During the period of the last few years of the eighties there was far more work around than there was people to do it. If you found yourself out of a contract it was because you actually wanted to be. Employers were poaching contractors from other sites, offering larger and larger rates, and generally getting on with the job of employing contractors in a speedy and efficient manner. Now that the economy is in recession and the number of contractors looking for work vastly outnumbers the number of positions available employers are dragging their feet. Rates are down, contract periods have been reduced, and the good days are over. Okay, I can understand that. We contractors had it pretty good for a long time in the last decade and now that times are tough we have to be willing to compromise. I have no objections to that. I just don't understand why it has suddenly become acceptable for employers to feel that they can treat workers like so many pieces of shit. I would have thought that it was just common good courtesy to acknowledge applications even if the applicant has absolutely no chance of getting the job, and then to send out the "Dear John" letter later. I'm still waiting on replies to my applications for jobs that were advertised a couple of months back. I don't mind if I don't get the job but I do mind being treated badly.

Anyway, I now have a contract for three months working as an Analyst/Programmer in a completely new area of computing in a good working environment with a reasonable bunch of people. And the strangest thing of all, I actually like the work. That's it as far as Robyn is concerned. Since she has known me this is the first job I've actually liked. She reckons it can't last and that there won't be any possibility of any extensions after the initial three months is up. But, then, all the way through her pregnancy she was convinced Catherine was going to be a boy. After nine months of that a poor lad has to worry about her judgement levels.

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March 26, 1993      Mark Loney has replied to the letter I mentioned above. Only a postcard. No long tome of chatty news or deep insight into the workings of the new Washington administration, just a postcard showing a view looking north from the Washington Monument in bright sunshine and a couple of very science-fictional stamps that my stamp-collecting nephew will end up with. But nothing of Harry Warner, Jr. or Dahlgren or

Onancock. Just the following: "I had been planning on writing back and saying 'What cold weather?' but after the blizzard of '93 I can no longer be quite so blasé. It is now two days without snow and the Dodge is still trapped in the driveway by the snow piled up by the snow plough on Saturday - and getting the Pontiac out of the other driveway took a good hour of shovelling on Sunday." One can only wonder where his sensibilities have gone. A Pontiac? What's the world coming to?

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April 7, 1993                      Nursery rhymes are a strange business. I've thought for a long time that "Mary, Mary, quite contrary..." referred to Mary Queen of Scots, that "Georgey Porgie, Pudding and Pie..." made fun of the podgy George IV, and even that "Ring-a-ring o' roses..." dated from the time of the Black Death, but I didn't know that "Humpty Dumpty" was anything other than an egg. In fact, Humpty Dumpty was a massive siege tower built by the Royalists (which explains "all the king's horses and all the king's men") near the end of the English Civil War. As befits their nature, siege towers were big, clumsy and very top-heavy - especially when full of troops aiming to get to the top of the opposing castle walls - and had to be pushed into place across heavily defended ground that probably had little resemblance to a level playing field. It is hardly surprising then that Humpty "had a great fall" and that it would have been impossible to "put him together again", but it is interesting that such a minor event could have such a lasting impact as to become the stuff of playground games, and remain so for hundreds of years.

For this piece of rather amusing but totally useless information I am indebted to the "Notes and Queries" column of **The Guardian Weekly** - a collection of the best pieces from the previous week's **The Guardian** newspaper from Britain; it also includes articles from **Le Monde** and **The Washington Post** for the benefit of completists. Readers of **The Guardian** write in with questions about anything, the questions are published and other readers send in possible answers. **The Advertiser** of Adelaide used to run something similar some years ago but that column had a tendency to be rather serious. "Notes and Queries" can range from the informative - like the answer to the question "Where are the seeds in bananas?" - to the downright irreverent. In the same issue as the last two questions came: "What would be the prospects for a legal action which argued that, in raising taxes, the Government is in breach of a verbal contract (well-recorded), made with the electorate at the time of the last election, to reduce taxation?", with the answer: "No one in his or her right mind would believe a Tory, especially at election time. Contracts made by mentally disordered people are voidable, but at their option." I like this newspaper and especially this column. I'm sorry, though, that I missed the answer to the question: "How can I determine the weight of my own head?" (Responses sought. The closest I've got so far is to stick your head in a bucket of water to obtain the volume, and then to drill a hole through from one ear to the other in order to determine the density. Which doesn't strike me as being at all helpful.)

I didn't, however, miss the correspondence that related to the following: "It is a much quoted maxim that there are only seven stories in fiction and that all others are based on them. Is it true and what might these stories be?"

A reader, Rory Johnston, replied a week or so later:

"I'm not sure about plots for stories, but plots for plays is something my father, the Irish playwright Denis Johnston, had a lot to say about. Originally he thought there were seven, but then he realised there are in fact eight:

"1. Cinderella - or unrecognised virtue at last recognised. It's the same story as the Tortoise and the Hare. Cinderella doesn't have to be a girl, nor does it even have to be a love story. What is essential is that the Good is despised, but is recognised in the end, something that we all want to believe.

"2. Achilles - the Fatal Flaw that is the groundwork for practically all classical tragedy, although it can be made comedy too, as in the old standard Aldwych farce. Lennox Robinson's *The Whiteheaded Boy* is the Fatal Flaw in reverse.

"3. Faust - the Debt that Must be Paid, the fate that catches up with all of us sooner or later. This is found in all its purity as the chase in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. And in a completely different mood, what else is *The Cherry Orchard*?

"4. Tristan - the standard triangular plot of two women and one man, or two men and one woman. *The Constant Nymph* or almost any French farce.

"5. Circe - the Spider and the Fly. *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* if you want to change the sex. And if you don't believe me about *Othello* (the real plot of which is not the triangle and only incidentally jealousy) try casting it with a good Desdemona but a poor Iago.

"6. Romeo and Juliet - Boy meets Girl, Boy loses Girl, Boy either finds or does not find Girl - it doesn't matter which.

"7. Orpheus - the Gift taken Away. This may take two forms: either the tragedy of the loss itself, as in *Juno and the Paycock*, or it may be about the search that follows the loss, as in *Jason and the Golden Fleece*.

"8. The Hero Who Cannot Be Kept Down - the best example of this is that splendid play *Harvey*, made into a film with James Stewart.

"These plots can be presented in so many different forms - tragedy, comedy, farce, whodunit - and they can be inverted, but they still form the basis of all good writing. The fault of many contemporary plays is simply that they do not have a plot."

Leaving aside Mr Johnston's sideswipe at modern theatre he might just have something here. Every time I thought he'd missed out a basic plot I realised he'd covered it somewhere along the line - and I also quickly realised that I knew nothing about most of the plays he mentioned. Nevertheless, a couple of days later someone wrote in with "To Denis Johnston's eight plots for plays you can add David and Goliath, the individual against the repressive/corrupt powers of the state or community, or their rival claims. As in *Enemy of the People*, *The Visit* and, of course, *Antigone*." And that seemed to be about that. For a time I thought there was going to be an endless succession of people writing in with a new plot so far undiscovered, but no such luck. Maybe they did. I only got to read about one and he (Robin Blake) added the plot of *The Wandering Jew*. Unfortunately he added this plotline at the end of a long disposition about all Denis Johnston's eight plots, applying them with some alacrity and wit to one storyline, and coming finally to the conclusion that there is really only one story, and it is called *Casablanca*.

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April 25, 1993      My wife, Robyn, and I are ardent travellers. We were a bit worried that the birth of our daughter just before Christmas would have an adverse effect on our wanderlust. At first we were okay because Catherine slept all the time and didn't worry too much about sleeping in the baby capsule in the back of the car for a couple of hours at a stretch. Then as she got a little older and a little more alert it came as a bit of a shock to us to find that she had the attention-span rather like that of a dead frog - almost non-existent. Her patience to withstand annoying external stimuli was of a similar extent and while she isn't what you could call a screamer she is quite capable of expressing her level of discomfort to leave you in no doubt as to the breadth of her feelings.

So it was with a fair degree of fear and loathing that we decided to book airfares for the three of us to visit my family in Adelaide over Easter. We weren't looking forward to the flight at all. We had heard enough horror stories about screaming and vomiting to wonder whether or not we had an innate death-wish. But, we reasoned, if Catherine was going to travel with us in future we had to be sure what her true tolerance levels actually were. Consequently, an hour's flight to Adelaide from Melbourne was preferable to anything overseas. If she turned out to be a closet screecher we only had to put up with her for an hour and then she'd be fine - the prospect of eight hours was too much to bear.

The boot was packed to overflowing with Catherine's toys, clothes, nappies, baby formula, bottles and general paraphernalia. Robyn and I shared a small suitcase that we managed to squeeze onto the back seat. After packing it was all a matter of timing, traffic and waiting around.

It is said that Easter Thursday is the busiest day for Australian airports so, knowing this, we decided to arrive there in plenty of time for the flight. The problem with travelling with a child in tow is that we would have to take our own car to the airport and leave it there for the whole weekend. That meant utilising the long-term carpark well away from the main terminal. So our first problem involved parking the car and checking in. Not usually a matter of great import but with a child who is liable to demand a feed at a moment's notice - and demand it NOW - our scheduling had to be spot on. Robyn picked me up from work and I drove out to the airport through surprisingly little traffic. "They probably all left work early," said Robyn. "Yeah, as we intended to," I replied; just a slight dig at her attempt at punctuality.

I am certain that airport departure areas are designed to be used solely for taxis. The cab pulls up, the cabbie sits in the front seat while the passengers get the luggage out of the boot, pay the fare and the taxi drives off - a minimum of fuss and bother. With wife and child I had to park the car in a no-parking zone, scramble through the crowds of departing passengers, part with two bucks for the use of a luggage trolley, charge back to the car, load the luggage quickly, lock the car, steer Robyn and Catherine back into the terminus, knock over the odd child or two in the confrontation over the only spare chair, leave my nearest and dearest to their own devices, charge back to the car (again), and head off for the long-term carpark before the parking officer has time to extract his pencil. That part of the critical time-path was carried off rather easily. "Something has to go wrong", I thought. "The carpark will be shut." No, I got through the entrance gate with ease and even found a park by the exit nearest the terminal. "I've left the shifting spanner home." No, there it was under the seat. "The car seat bolt will have seized and I'll have to tear the back parcel shelf out of the car with my bare hands." No again, it all went well and I was able to remove the bolt and restraining strap with no difficulty. "This is too easy", I thought. "The plane has to be delayed. It's a busy day and I haven't even raised a sweat. Bloody hell, I haven't even abused anyone yet." Five minutes later I was back in the terminus at the check-in desk. Bit of a queue but not a lot. "Can we have a window seat", my wife asked. She always asks. I don't care, having one is what counts. "I'm sorry", the check-in lady said. "Your seats have been pre-allocated because of the infant. You do have the infant don't you?" I looked down; Catherine was in her carry-cot smiling up at me. I resisted the urge to ask my wife if this baby was really ours. "Yes," I said; it seemed appropriate. "Do you want the basinet you ordered?" the check-in lady asked. The standard interrogation later we had determined that we didn't need the airline basinet as it was pretty much identical to the one I was currently carrying, the luggage had departed down the conveyor belt on a probable trip to Sydney and we were headed for the departure lounge. A feeling of impending doom overcame me. "Come on let's get down there," I said. My job in these situations is to be completely and utterly paranoid about being late; Robyn's job is to act nonchalant and cure me of my character flaws. "No, we've got plenty of time. Anyway I want to look in that Baby Shop over there." I didn't even look where she was pointing convinced that we would need to catch a bus to get there. "I think it's down this way," I said, moving off towards the nearest escalator.

We had a ten-minute wait in the departure lounge before the flight as due to board. "Should be boarding soon", I said. Robyn always ignores these sorts of statements, arguing, probably, that at best they are just plain stupid, or pander to my feelings of paranoia at missing the flight. I'm sitting in the departure lounge attached to our plane by a corridor-sized umbilical cord. I can see the bloody thing if I stand up and look out the window, and I'm still worried about missing it. Robyn was bouncing Catherine on her knee getting her to smile at the woman sitting opposite. The bloke sitting next to her looked at Catherine, looked at Robyn, then at me, and then looked at his companion smiling back at Catherine. I could tell he was worried. I just didn't know if it was about flights or possible paternity problems. I opted for the first.

The doors to the plane opened and Robyn, Catherine and I made our way on board. We had pushed on pretty quickly as that would give us time to get our hand luggage stowed - we had quite a lot: a bag of video and camera equipment, a bag of Catherine's clothes and toys and stuff, a smaller bag for nappies, baby food and assorted bottles and teats, Catherine's carry-cot, and Robyn's handbag. Once I actually make it on to the plane my nervous energy turns from churning my stomach to feral assertiveness as I stake my claim on the allocated seats and surrounding luggage space. Family and luggage stowed I seated myself next to the aisle and checked out the exits. The seats in front of us were occupied by an old couple, the row behind by a bloke and two kids. "Were these seats pre-allocated?" I asked. "Yes. Why?" Robyn said. "Because we're smack in the middle of the plane and we couldn't be further away from any of the exits. The airline probably treats children like the disabled and doesn't expect any of them to get out in a crash." "Oh, well next time I want a window seat."

The plane gradually filled up in the normal spits and spats manner. The time for take-off came and went and I kept checking my watch. I knew it. "We're going to be delayed", I said. "Maybe we'll have a spare seat," Robyn said, eyeing the empty one next to the window. She held Catherine up to the window. "See, Catherine, that's Melbourne. Wave bye-bye now." Little hand going up and down, aided by a much larger one. I looked down the aisle. Someone was putting luggage up in the overhead locker. That was all. I turned back to Robyn, "We might be lucky", I said. I turned back, and there was the fat kid. And I could tell he was ours.

I watched him all the way along the aisle heading in our direction. No hand luggage, just fat. And the complimentary audio headset. He stopped next to me, looked up and read the seat number overhead. "I think that's mine" he said, pointing to the empty seat, and, in the same motion, stared to push past me to get at it. "Fat and stupid", I thought. "Hang on, we'll get out of your way," I said. I stood up, took Catherine from Robyn, and the fat kid squeezed past, barely.

A few minutes later we were all seated and waiting expectantly. "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the captain speaking." I knew it. "I must apologise for this delay to our take-off. We expect to depart shortly." Robyn looked at me as if to say "I missed the Baby Shop for this." I looked at her as if to say "See, I told you so." The fat kid looked glazed over. The sounds of Guns 'N' Roses leaking out around the edges of his ears.

By this time Catherine was getting a touch agitated. She was being passed back and forth between the two of us as we exchanged light banter: "It would be better if..." and "I know what I'm doing..." and "Here, give her to me...". I ended up with her, bouncing her up and down as she stood up on my legs. "I think she's a bit bored", I said. "Maybe she needs her dummy." Three attempts at that, and three scrambles around the floor trying to find the thing after Catherine had spat it out, we gave up. "Maybe she's hungry," I said. Parents have this procedure that when their baby cries they work their way down a checklist of possible problems trying various attempts at placation until something succeeds. The bottle had no effect and all we got for our trouble was a trickle of milky dribble down the chin, a red face and a slightly louder cry. I stood her up on her legs again and she turned to face Robyn and then the fat kid. And stopped crying. And stared. "Ah, success," I thought. And almost on cue the fat kid looked up and saw Catherine staring at him. He wasn't a happy boy. He starting scowling at Catherine

when Robyn chipped in "Now Catherine, it's rude to stare." Whether he heard this or not I don't know; the plane started to move and he turned to look out the window. And no sense of humour.

The stewardesses took up their places long the aisle as the plane started to taxi away from the terminal and Catherine started to cry. I lifted her up to my shoulder which seemed to do the trick for a while as she stared at the people in the row behind us. It must have been a strange sight - this small, very round white face staring intently over the top of the seat - all eyes and gaping mouth slowly turning into a gummy smile. But after a very short time she started to get agitated again and I had to turn her around to face me. No good. Robyn. No. Even the fat kid didn't help. I lifted her up over the seat in front and she suddenly became fixated with the stewardess only two rows in front beginning her safety demonstration. For some reason I figured she couldn't see all that well, so, balancing her on one hand and using the other to steady her from in front, I hung her out into the middle of the aisle. Her face started to beam and she showed all her gums back to her tonsils. The stewardess didn't know what to do. I jiggled Catherine up and down a little to give my arms a bit of relief and she started to giggle and laugh, and the stewardess cracked up. The more Catherine laughed the more the stewardess messed up her demonstration and the more Catherine laughed.

At the end of the most muddled demonstration I have ever seen, the stewardess came to our seat and said; "That's the first time anyone's ever paid any attention." Catherine gurgled, and the fat kid was completely forgotten.

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May 10, 1993                      Back in the late eighties, when Irwin Hirsh and I were publishing the late-lamented **Larrikin**, Bruce Gillespie asked me why I didn't join ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Press Association), and I replied that the type of writing I would like to publish in an apa was the type of writing I was publishing already. It didn't make sense to print something in two separate places and I didn't have the energy or time to publish **Larrikin** and an apazine. So I let the prospect of membership of the apa slide as I attempted to explore the realms of publishing a frequent, light-hearted fanzine. Irwin and I carried on that experiment for a touch over three years and decided on mutually agreeable as well as individually distinct reasons for ending it. I reckon we did a pretty good job overall. There are some things I look back on and cringe about, but there is also a lot I can re-read with a lot of enjoyment.

When I started this fanzine at the end of last year my first thought was to use it as my membership requirement for ANZAPA, to produce something that was different from the **Larrikin** days and which could contain pieces I would have published in that earlier fanzine as well as just about anything I felt like. In other words a classic personal-zine, dependent on no-one other than myself. It would be circulated in ANZAPA and to a number of other people whom I considered friends. A lot of those people are non-fans which leaves me in a bit of a bind. There is a lot of jargon in the fandom and a lot of assumed knowledge about such things as apas, fanzines, conventions and such like. The people who receive this fanzine who aren't members of the wider fannish community are going to be a little lost if I don't attempt to make some form of explanation every now and then. Sometimes the explanation will be contained in an accompanying letter, and sometimes in the fanzine itself. If anyone finds these explanations tedious and boring I can only ask that you bear in mind the other people reading it who don't understand, but who will if given a reasonable amount of information to go on with.

It wasn't just the contents that bothered me a little when I started this thing it was also the way I would lay it all out. I'm still not sure if I like the current method - what has been referred to in the past as a "diary format", and referred to in rather disparaging terms as well. That's fair enough. A number of these diary-style fanzines have been pretty boring. They attempt to have

something to say every day no matter how tedious and inane. I don't intend to do that; have something for every day that is - you'll have to work out the pieces' boredom quotient.

It should also be noted that just because a piece appears alongside a date it does not mean that it was written then. It may have been started or even finished on that date; nothing else should be inferred. The article above regarding our recent trip to Adelaide over Easter is a good example. I may be able to throw a number of words together rather quickly when I get going but there is no way I would have finished that piece in a day. It was originally written as an entry for a travel-writing competition in **The Weekend Australian** newspaper and was only supposed to be 500 words. When I hit 2,200 I knew I was in strife and it took me most of a Sunday and a few other nights after work to finish it off. Then Robyn and I hacked into it and finally got it down to the word limit a week or so after starting. I don't reckon I won the first prize of a trip to Singapore as I think I would have heard by now. So, if you think the long version is bad you should read the super-condensed one. It's bloody awful.

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## THE MAILBAG

I'm in trouble now. After a long boring account of my views about this fanzine and how I intended to lay it out I find myself having to incorporate another format in order to fit in any letters I get. Just goes to show you can take nothing for granted.

Now that I had decided to have a separate section for letters (or not if I don't get any) I had to come up with a name for it. And couldn't. All the obvious possibilities were just cheap jokes having to do with pigs'-swill which I didn't think were all that funny. So I left it simple. Names are important though, which is probably why I felt it necessary to explain Catherine's full name in the last issue. **Irwin Hirsh** apparently thinks in a similar vein:

I'd hardly call names inane things. Nor would I call discussion about names inane. Ursula Le Guin said, in the Earthsea series, that names are powerful things, and I'd reckon she's spot on. A story of how the name on my birth certificate (Braham Irwin Herszkowicz) became Irwin Braham Hirsh is a long story taking in various amounts of Jewish tradition, personal preferences and the expectations of mis-spellings. But however long it took for my name to settle down at least I had a basis from which to begin and it settled down to what I want. However all that is insignificant compared to the process of choosing a name for someone else. Giving Jarryd and Adrian their names was important stuff. Apart from the individual names being to our liking, Wendy made sure that first name/surname and first name/middle name/surname sounded right, that we weren't inflicting an unfortunate set of initials onto our child (I'd hate to be a Barry Smith, for instance), etc etc. We know a couple who named their first child (a daughter) Jordan and the second child (a son) Harrison. Non-standard names, for sure, but hardly in the Tristan class. When pregnant with their third child they found themselves in a very difficult position. Having two children with non-standard names, they felt they were duty bound to give the third child a non-standard name. The problem was that everything they came across was a bit too pompous or outrageous or attention seeking.

I guess every parent goes through the same anguish - those that think about the effect names have on children that is. I had a lot of trouble when I was younger due to the propensity of other children (and on one occasion a teacher) who thought that the re-spelling of my surname into "Piddlepiss" was somehow amusing. After the very first hearing this so-called joke becomes incredibly boring. I lashed out a few times as all kids are wont to do, and then discovered that totally ignoring the person speaking had a greater impact. Picture the scene, you're talking to someone and from behind you hear "hey, Piddlepiss", and a series of giggles. You ignore it and continue on with your conversation. You hear it again, and the amount of laughter is down a little. By the third time the laughter is very sparse and by the fourth the speaker has become



very embarrassed - the focus of the group being turned on him rather than you. He speaks your name properly at last and you acknowledge his existence: "Oh hello, I didn't notice you there." "Didn't you hear me call out to you?" "No. Hear what?" And his humiliation is complete. That sort of attitude lasted for a while and then spoonerisms were discovered so I was greeted with "Merry Piddlemiss". Hilarious. I don't blame anyone for the name I've got though. There is nothing to be done about my surname - except to try to figure out where it came from - and I'm quite happy with my unusual first name. So I don't have a lot to complain about.

Not long after I got into fandom in the mid to late seventies I realised that there was major difference between Melbourne and Adelaide fans which had nothing to do with geography. Simply put, Adelaide fans smoked and Melbourne fans didn't. It seemed that everyone I knew in fandom in Adelaide was a smoker and yet John Bangsund was the only fan from Melbourne who partook, even if he was living in Canberra at the time. Then he moved to Adelaide and all was right with the world. Maybe there is something quintessentially different between the two cities which created this situation. Or maybe it was just that I was perceiving things in a different way. I have a friend who says he has never had so much as a single drag on a cigarette, which I have always found quite peculiar. **Irwin Hirsh** doesn't say if that is the case with him but he does say:

As someone who once realised that tobacco is nothing but a 100% marketable commodity I'm pleased to see that you've given up smoking. You are also one of the many people who gave up because you were becoming a parent. My favourite Giving Up story belongs to our friend Denice. She used to say that we'd know when she and Walter were pregnant because she'd have given up smoking. As it turned out she gave up smoking long before becoming pregnant. One evening D & W invited her boss and his wife over for dinner, and during the conversation she mentioned that she'd given up smoking. Denice then turned to her boss and said, "Don't worry, I'm not pregnant." At that point Mrs Boss's face dropped, and Denice realised that here was a situation where a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing. Quickly she explained it all to the wife and that all she was saying was that she wouldn't be going on maternity leave in the foreseeable future...

Irwin did well, commenting on all the major sections of the first issue and giving me enough to quote and respond to. But then he went and spoilt it by referring to this as a "mere apazine". It's comments like that that make you wonder where you left the rusty razor blades.

#### **I ALSO HEARD FROM**

**Malcolm Holt**, living in the wilds of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, who will probably be getting into full gloat-mode about now as the Australian cricketers hit their straps in the lead-up to the coming Ashes series. Malcolm didn't so much reply as ask a couple of telling questions: "1. Was it really wise to talk about the birth of your daughter in a publication so titled? 2. What are you going to do with the rest of your life now that the major event is over (ie giving up smoking)?" In reply to the first I will have to hold my own counsel as I have a feeling that anything I might say will be used in evidence against me some twenty or so years hence. Marrying a solicitor makes you look at the world in a whole new light. As for the second, I could always take it up again to experience the anguish of giving up once more but I have this feeling that I might get myself in buckets of trouble if I even let the thought cross my mind. Robyn and I are in the house-buying market at the moment (more next issue) and went in to look at one particular house yesterday. "Oh, poo, smokers!" was Rob's first reaction. It's subtle hints like that that get the point across in a marriage. Malcolm also pointed out that he thought the age of the Vietnam draft was about 20; a fact confirmed by a mate of mine who says that the only thing he has ever won in his life was the National Lottery with first prize of an all-expenses paid trip to Vietnam. And then Whitlam came along and took it off him. A situation also experienced by **Marc Ortlieb**. Some people just don't have any luck.

**Michael Clark**, in a phone call, asked whether I had made it along to the Adelaide - Melbourne game at the MCG. No is the only answer I could come up with, happily. Adelaide got done and

Melbourne won its first game of the season. The Great Southern Stand would have been a cold and lonely place that day. I saw my mate, who supports Melbourne, on the following Wednesday for a few drinks after work. "I thought I was going to hear from you," he said. I ignored him and went and got another beer. It was the least I could do. And Mervyn Peake didn't get mentioned all evening.

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