

THE WOLLONGONG PIG-BREEDERS' GAZETTE 3

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July 24, 1993 Do you ever get the feeling that there's someone out there hovering around the edges of your existence, going to the same places you go to, working in the same industry, having the same friends as you, who you never actually get to meet? No, neither did I, until recently. Then I met someone at work who changed my whole perceptions about paranoia.

It started innocently enough at a discussion at work between three of us who have travelled and worked in the United Kingdom. Neil was actually born there and still has relatives in Kent who he visits from time to time, and Andrew worked in and around London for a year or so in 1990 or 1991. We got to talking about people we knew at work and how we knew them when Andrew mentioned that he had met Roy Stare (a long-term friend of mine who got me my present job, who was on the floor somewhere but who wasn't involved in the discussion) on a ski slope in Canada. Neither knew that the other worked in computing and they didn't see each other again for six months or so when they found themselves working alongside each other.

"I can top that," I said.

I was living in London in 1991 and had just returned from a short visit back to Australia for Christmas and New Year. One night after it had started snowing for the first time in years I was walking back from the local shops with a bottle of wine under one arm and a video under the other when I looked up at a woman walking towards me. I thought I recognised her for a moment and then thought better of it. I mean, how much chance is there of meeting someone you know in the depths of London suburbia. But it was someone I knew, and someone from Melbourne who I hadn't seen in about 18 months. She had been my agent back in Melbourne for a year or so but had left about six months before I did to return to Dublin. I spoke to her for a couple of minutes that night, took her address (just around the corner as it happened) and went home to get in out of the cold. I dropped a note into her letter-box a couple of days later and never heard from her again. I guess I made a lasting impression.

Then I went on to tell a story a friend of mine told me about he and his travelling mate sitting on the steps of the Venice railway station having a nice quiet smoke, watching the vaporetti storming up and down the canals, talking of absent friends. Their conversation turned to a particular female friend of theirs who neither had seen for some years when she just happened to walk around the corner. "I've never been too sure of the truth of that story," I

said. "That sort of thing never happened to me." The other two blokes just looked at me thinking I was probably a little cracked. "But I did see something like that happen to a friend of mine." When I get going on a set of stories I have this tendency to not notice the glazing over of my listeners' eyes, the nodding of the heads and the gentle slide of bodies to the floor. Having a beer in hand I find helps the flow, and the lubrication, and generally allows my listeners freedom to do something other than actually pay attention to me. But in this instance I was in sole charge and wasn't about to let the opportunity slip by.

The story I began to tell concerned Roger Holberton, a bloke from Melbourne I had met in London via mutual friends, and Bernadette Hickey, a friend of Robyn's on a flying visit to the UK for a medical conference and a bit of relaxation. As was my wont when I was in London I organised a few drinks with a few friends on a Wednesday night in a pub none of us had ever visited before. We all rolled up at various times and ended up sitting round a long table with Roger down one end and Bernadette down the other. For the first hour or so I thought I caught Roger glancing at Bernadette and Bernadette doing the same to Roger. When it was my turn to get to the drinks I came back to find the two of them sitting together talking rather animatedly. "Must know each other," I thought and went back to the serious business of contemplating the brewer's skill in the glass in front of me. And it transpired that they did actually know each other. Well, barely. They had met for the first and only time about two years before on the hills above Gallipoli in Turkey. Apparently they had walked up the hills together from the beach and had spoken on that occasion for no more than about 15 minutes. "That calls for a drink," I said and everyone laughed.

Back in Melbourne in 1993 Neil Ruffles also laughed, but Andrew O'Rorke looked curious. "What was the name of this bloke again?" I told him. "What sort of work did he do?" I told him that also. "Where did he live?" "In Wimbledon," I said. "I thought the story sounded familiar," Andrew said. "I used to share a house with Roger." "So you'd know Deb then?" "Oh, yes, and her sister and cousins." "What about Morag?" "She shared the same house with Roger and me." "And Malcolm?" I was rapidly running out of people I knew. "I met him once I think. Tall bloke wasn't he?" Of course he was. "It's amazing that you didn't ever come to any of the Wednesday night drinks," I said. "Oh, so you're the one who organised those. I never seemed to make it." It might have been easier if he had.

A couple of weeks later we were heading towards the middle of town for our Melbourne based Wednesday night drinks when I got to talking about the people we knew in London again. "I just got a letter from Roger," I said. "And he mentions that he's just had a bloke staying with him who went to a wedding in Rutherglen in May, another wedding we missed." "Who was the bloke?" Andrew asked. "Funny about that, it's a bloke from Melbourne whose job I took in the Department of Health in London called Paul Tehan." "Paul? Oh yes, I know him," Andrew replied. "Cut it out," I said. "You can't know everyone I know." "Well, sorry to have to tell you this but you know that story you told about Gallipoli? Well, I was there with Roger." "So you know Bernadette too. It was her wedding Robyn and I couldn't get to. How did Paul know her?" "Might have been the husband," Andrew said. "What's his name?" "Ian Farquhar or Farrier or something," I guessed. "Doctor? Lived in London for a while?" "I think so." "He used to hang around the Wimbledon house a bit a few years ago." "This is ridiculous", I said. "I need a drink".

We made it to Dickens on Collins and I spied Andrew Brown at a table making one of his infrequent visits. "I'll get the Guinness in," I said, heading for the bar, and, in doing so, overheard Andrew O'Rorke say, "Hello, Andrew, long time no see." I didn't look back.

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"When the child outgrows the popular idyll of the mother breast and turns to face the world of specialized adult action, it passes, spiritually, into the sphere of the father - who becomes, for his son, the sign of the future task, and for his daughter, of the future husband. Whether he knows it or not, and no matter what his position in society, the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world."

from **THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES** by Joseph Campbell

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August 30, 1993 Robyn and I bought a house on the weekend. It's something I've never done before and, for quite a few months of this year as we looked around at all the houses on offer, it was something I began to believe I might never do. It's a strange feeling being a home-owner (well, not quite a owner, but I guess you know what I mean) for the first time in my life. The prospect of actually being responsible for such a large investment is more than a trifle daunting. But the main emotion I feel at the moment is one of great relief. The whole process of house-hunting, inspecting, re-inspecting, discussing, worrying and finally buying has been draining both physically and mentally. I'm just glad it's all over.

The quest for a new house started just after we got back to Melbourne from London last September. We were idly looking around at house prices trying to get a feel for the type of thing we could afford if I ever got a job, occasionally dropping in to open days trying to look like the young affluent parents we weren't, discussing what we would need and how we would go about the whole process. But nothing really got under way until mid-May this year when I started to go around to various financial institutions checking out the possibilities of getting a home loan. I had just been extended on my contract for another three months and was beginning to feel a little more comfortable about the idea of selling my soul to a bank for the next 25 years. Unfortunately, the banks didn't appear to feel the same way. St. George Building Society just shook its corporate head, the Challenge Bank felt we hadn't been banking with them long enough or some such crap, and Westpac, after seeming initially receptive, clammed up when I informed them I was a contractor. "We might take you on if you had a twelve month contract," I was told. "But no-one in my industry gets twelve month contracts," I explained. "Yes, I know," was the reply. That one left a severely bad taste in my mouth. Then I went round to the local Commonwealth Bank - not a bank I have had much joy with over the years - and the tone was completely different. I got all the details of mortgage rates, loan periods and the general bank publications dealing with matters relating to home loans and made an appointment for Robyn and me to see the manager. Contrary to all popular myths the bloke was pretty good. We explained our requirements, outlined our income and detailed where all the money was going to come from. After we gave him the amount we wanted to borrow, he worked out a few figures and asked "Sure you don't want any more?" Things were starting to look good.

But all such good beginnings to long-running enterprises normally presage some form of disaster. And while our search for a suitable house in which to live didn't actually plumb the depths of unmitigated catastrophe it did appear from time to time that we would still be looking when Catherine was going to school. We started in mid-May and over the next four and half months lost count of the number of houses we inspected. Saturdays disappeared as our routine became one of getting the paper from the front yard (delivered, occasionally, by the incompetent newsagent in the nearby shops), bypassing the sports pages and front page news with barely a glance, and going straight for the real estate jugular, red-pen in

hand, street directory at the ready, emerging half-an-hour later with four or five broadsheet newspaper pages covered in circles, underlinings and crosses. Lots of crosses.

The difficulty any prospective house-buyer finds in utilising *The Age* as a classified advertisement index to properties is that houses listed under the "Houses for Sale" section generally aren't. Nine times out of ten they're for auction - which is a different kettle of fish entirely. In the main, houses intended for auction appear in slightly larger ads, sometimes are accompanied by miniature pen and ink line drawings of the house's facade, and always feature exceptionally florid prose masquerading as a property description. They do not include a price - even as a guide.

It didn't take us long to get a feel for the prices involved, however - a four-bedroomed, solid brick house with all original features intact on a quarter-acre block was not going to be in our price range, no matter how old it was. The difficulty came in guesstimating the expected auction price of a three-bedroomed weatherboard with open fireplaces, leadlighting and ceiling roses in Richmond. Robyn's approach was direct and to the point. Immediately upon entering the property to be inspected she button-holed the person representing the real estate agents, provided them with our name and number, obtained a copy of the house plan and demanded the asking price. Most of the agents took it pretty well though one or two balked a little. If the three of us entered together I was generally carrying Catherine while Robyn went for the documentation. If Catherine was asleep in the car I stayed back to check the street directory for the next port of call as Robyn reconnoitred the situation. In either case we were able to upset the agent's expectations that the male of the couple would ask all the questions while the female would look at the wallpaper. We simply swapped roles. It amused us anyway. And, from time to time, we got different answers to very similar questions, particularly regarding the expected sale price.

In the early months of our searching we found ourselves with anything up to 8 or 9 houses every Saturday worthy of a look. Starting with the first inspection around 11:00 am we jumped around from Richmond to Hawthorn to Kew and back again attempting to finish up somewhere around 4:00 to 4:30 pm with a quiet drink in The Geebung Polo Club - a renovated public house rather than a sporting club as named - to review the day's events. After that we were stuffed, Catherine was getting ratty and it was time to head home and prepare dinner. Anything other than a quiet night in front of the telly was totally out of the question.

It was late June before we were able to attend an auction for a property we were interested in. We'd been to one or two others but never with the express desire to put in a bid. The property was in Elphin Grove in Hawthorn. A wide tree-lined street in the area we preferred. We checked out the house - a three-bedroomed, part renovated, full brick, single fronted, single storey Victorian (as in the queen rather than the state) terrace - a couple of times before the auction, and we had a few other people look it over for us as well. It looked good, the price being quoted was about right and it was capable of being worked on in the future but still being livable in the interim. On the morning of the auction we had a final inspection and started to get cold feet. There was evidence of rising damp in the middle of the house and the back wooden addition looked decidedly shaky. The auction started casually enough but it soon became obvious that there were a couple of people very interested in the property. Needless to say, the bidding went past our top price like we were standing still. I didn't even get a chance to bid.

A bit of explanation might be necessary here to describe the way auctions work in Victoria. After the vendor decides to auction their property rather than to sell it at a fixed price they set

a reserve figure with the real estate agents, the property is made ready for open inspections at advertised times and prospective buyers are contacted. At the open inspections the agent's representative makes a point of informing those who ask that the expected selling price will be a certain figure. You have to take it for granted that this amount will be anything from 10 to 15 per cent below the actual reserve price. The agents do this in order to lull you into a false sense of security about the property, to get you to come along to the auction, to entice you to put in a bid and to keep putting in bids in the heat of the action until you either find yourself out of your depth and staring at a mortgage you can't afford or have pushed the price way up past the reserve - more money for the vendors and more money for the agents. Once you figure out this trap you then have to come to grips with the auction procedure itself. At the start of the auction the auctioneer will lay down a spiel regarding the property, its high points (never its lows of course), its position in the market and on the map, and details regarding its legal standing. Most, if not all of which the dedicated purchaser will have researched previously. Maybe the auctioneer just needs something to get the whole process rolling. The auction itself consists of three separate stages: the first, which runs until the initial bidding stops, gives the auctioneer an idea of how far prospective bidders will go; the second involves the auctioneer passing this information on to the vendor away from the eyes and ears of the milling throng and deciding on a course of action; the third, last and most important stage, involves the auctioneer opening the bidding for a second time and allowing it to run to completion. There are a lot of tactics that people use in order to put the auctioneer off their guard but, basically, it all comes down to knowing how much the property is worth, how much you can afford to pay, and whether or not you get the final bid.

The Elphin Grove auction involved some of the most complicated bidding tactics I've seen. They even seemed to amuse the auctioneer, which must have taken some doing. In the end though, the house went for about thirty thousand more than the real estate agent had quoted during the open inspections and about ten thousand more than either Robyn or I thought it was worth. A result that left us happy we hadn't bid at all but anxious that it seemed to indicate a trend towards higher prices amongst those houses we were looking at.

The next couple of weeks didn't bring much joy except for an old age-worn house in dire need of some work which looked interesting. We stood around at the auction in the rain with the faint hope of being lucky. We weren't. A middle-aged woman started the bidding and finished it, killing off a couple of other bidders in the process. It was pretty obvious that she was determined to buy the place no matter what. I left a little relieved we hadn't become involved in it all, Robyn was a little depressed.

A few weeks later we were at another auction for a house we really wanted but didn't think we would be able to afford. It didn't have much of a backyard but was in a very quiet street a stone's throw from the Yarra River and right across the road from a large park. It seemed ideal. But it became clear that we weren't the only ones who thought so and we didn't get a look in again. This time it was either a mother and daughter buying together or the mother buying for the daughter. It didn't matter; we still missed out and this time we both came away depressed.

By the time August came around the winter downturn in real estate properties coming on to the market was having a marked effect. The number of houses we wanted to look at had been steadily dropping over the previous month from an high of 9 down to 3. We decided it was time to take a weekend off, and prayed nothing of importance would show up. We were lucky; the first weekend in August was the bottom of the trough with only one house looking like it was moderately approachable. The next weekend wasn't much better in terms of numbers but it did produce another house in Elphin Grove, in fact right next door to the

house we'd seen only two months back. It appeared that the price obtained at auction by the first property propelled the owners of the second to enter the market. We checked out the place on the Saturday not expecting anything much better than we had already seen and were mildly surprised. The house was basically renovated with exposed polished Baltic pine floorboards through most of the house, three bedrooms, four open fireplaces, a generous backyard for the area and, most importantly, no evidence of cracking or rising damp. We came to realise that it was a complete mirror image of the house next door but without its structural problems. The real estate agent quoted a figure we thought was reasonable, and, even adding on the 15 percent markup, appeared to be just on the edge of our upper limit. We talked it over in the car that day, and over dinner later that night and decided that if we stretched the mortgage a bit we might be able to make it. In other words the die was cast.

Over the next three weeks of open inspections we went back twice, had Robyn's brother look over the place with his other half Sonya, and had a few other people check out the house as well. We tried our best not to give the real estate agent the impression we were too interested - we didn't succeed. He seemed to have us pegged right from the start and we kept running into him every Saturday during August as we inspected other properties in Hawthorn. He kept on urging us to concentrate on Elphin Grove. It was getting to the point that anything else was impossible.

The auction was set for Saturday 28th August at 12:00 noon. I woke that morning with a hangover and not in the best of moods. Work had been fairly hectic for eight weeks or so and the stress levels had built up to the point where I was having trouble sleeping, and drinking too much to relieve the stress, and not sleeping because I was drinking too much and... and so on. Even though we intended to go to the auction neither of us expected to be in with a chance of buying the house. It stood to reason that there would be lots of other people interested in the house as well, it was just too good for us to contemplate any alternative.

So we went through with our standard Saturday morning procedure and found about six places to inspect with the first due at 11:30 am. It would be tight but we thought we could get through that property and off to the auction with just enough time for a final look-round. We made it to the first house at 11:25 am, waited for the agent to arrive for ten minutes and then left. My mood was not improved by all this. We arrived in Elphin Grove about ten minutes later and there appeared to be cars everywhere, one of which belonged to a couple of friends of ours. Kerrie and John were on the way out as we were getting Catherine's pusher ready. We only had time for the basic pleasantries and to be informed that the real estate agent thought Kerrie was a prospective buyer as well. It appeared that she had been through the house more often than we thought.

Kerrie and John left, we had a rapid look over the house for the last time and joined the throng in the sunshine outside. Twenty minutes later I was standing on the footpath with the auctioneer saying to me "I'll take 100 dollars. For 100 dollars more you can have the final bid." I looked at Robyn who nodded to me, I turned and nodded to the auctioneer and three slaps of his papers later the house was passed in to me as the highest bidder. I was stunned. We were in a position we never expected to be in, with the right of negotiation with the vendor. Kerrie came back just as the auctioneer was shaking my hand and inviting us inside to discuss the matter; she thought it was the funniest thing she'd heard in ages. "I only put in a bid to get some practice at it," I said. She thought that was even funnier.

Inside the auctioneer left us in the front bedroom, discussed things with the vendors for a few minutes and returned to tell us our final bid hadn't been accepted. We hadn't expected it to

be. He wanted us to put in a higher bid, we didn't want to. He told us we were still fourteen thousand dollars below the reserve - about the figure we thought it would be and set a thousand dollars more than the auction price of the house next door. He asked us again for a higher bid. Robyn and I discussed it and refused to budge. "We have to go over our finances" I said being as obstinate as my combined state of anxiety and hangover would allow. "Haven't you got your finances organised yet?" he asked, seemingly rather shocked at the mere thought. "Yes," I said, "but we want to go through them again to check it all." He pushed and I stalled. We left it at that with the comment that we would contact him later in the day if we changed our minds. He didn't seem in the least impressed. "It may be gone by the time you call," he said. "Well, that's just a chance we will have to take," by now feeling that I wanted to be away from the whole thing. He showed us outside and we passed another man standing in the front yard - the man I had outbid half an hour before. He looked too patient for my liking and I had this feeling as I walked away that I wouldn't be seeing that house ever again.

Robyn and I carried on as before, dropping a couple of properties off the list as their inspection times had come and gone. We only made through one further house before we both decided to give it away for the day - there was too much on our minds to concentrate on the pros and cons of anything we saw. We settled in to a discussion of our finances and dragged out the calculator and notepad when we got back home. About half an hour later we decided that if we upped our bid by five thousand we were going to finish up short. "I'll try Mum," Robyn said. "She'll lend us a bit and we can pay her back if we're careful." "Holidays are out," I said. Robyn ignored me and headed for the phone.

So we had the money and the inclination to buy. Now it was just a matter of figuring out how much we could offer without breaking our bank but which might just be tempting enough for them to accept. We rang the agent and offered the extra five thousand. He turned us down flat. "No, I'm sorry but an offer of that amount has already been refused by the vendors." "Okay we'll get back to you," I said. "Before you go I should say that an offer of a couple of thousand more will probably get it for you." In fact, he probably shouldn't have said it at all, but I started to get the hint that we were close. "I'll think about it," I said. I rang off and Robyn and I discussed it some more. "We're not far off the mark," I said. "But I'm not sure if we can afford it." "How much more?" she asked. "About two," I said. We looked at each other and knew there really wasn't anything to discuss. "We can't let it go for the sake of two thousand dollars," one of us said, I don't remember who but it didn't matter; we were both of the same mind now. A short time later Robyn rang the agent and put in the new bid. There seemed to be a bit of discussion with Robyn sounding dubious. "He wants a bit more," she said. "Of course he would. Offer him five hundred extra but say that's it. We can't go any further." She put it to the agent and all I heard was her saying "No, no, that's it. We honestly can't go any higher." She hung up. "He's going to put it to the vendors and wants us to put the offer in writing tomorrow," she said.

Sunday was bright and sunny again and we sat outside and waited for the agent to arrive with the papers. There wasn't much to it really, signing the documents and writing the largest cheque of my life. "I think they'll accept this," he said, looking at my cheque. We talked a bit about house prices and why unrenovated houses appeared to be attracting higher prices than fully renovated ones. "Because people don't want to pay for renovations they might not like," he said. "But they'll only have to spend another twenty to thirty thousand to get a place up to livable standard," I replied. "Yes, strange isn't it?"

Three hours later he rang back. "Congratulations, you're a home owner." I didn't know whether to feel relieved or petrified.

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It knocks me can in, this 'ere game uv life,
A bloke gets born, grows up, looks round fer fun,
Dreams dilly dreams, then wakes to find a wife
An' fambly round 'im - all 'is young days done.
An', gazin' back, sees in 'is youth a man
Scarce reckernised. It fair knocks in me can!

from ROSE OF SPADGERS by C. J. Dennis

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November 16, 1993 It's been quite some years since I last bought a car - about 10 to be exact. So when Robyn and I decided recently that her return to full-time employment would allow us to replace her ageing Datsun Sunny with something a lot closer to "new" and something a bit bigger I wasn't exactly expecting the bullshit run around I was in for. I really should have been prepared for it all but with packing up ready for the big move, rushing to get all the writing finished in time for the next ANZAPA mailing and hoping that Catherine wouldn't decide to walk before we moved I was a little bit distracted.

We originally intended to buy something brand new; something in the way of a station wagon, and something at the smaller end of the size range rather than of the starship variety. There aren't many models in those categories in Australia that are any good, which is a help, and after we had eliminated the Subaru Liberty as being too expensive (pushing \$30K) we opted for a Mitsubishi Lancer. It's size seemed right, it had a good reputation, and, more importantly, we thought we could probably afford it.

Kew Mitsubishi was the closest car dealer specialising in the model and make and seemed the logical place to start. But I should have realised straight away that dealing with a bloke in a purple shirt with a purple tie was going to lead to some level of unpleasantness. It started well enough - he was helpful in a sort of uninformed sycophantic sort of way - but it soon became obvious that we had left our run a little late. The previous year's models had all been sold and, as is the usual way of things, the current models were going to be much more expensive. In fact, a few thousand more than we wanted to pay. I got the chance to test-drive one on the newer models but only in a sedan as they didn't keep station wagons on site. "I keep telling them to have at least one station wagon around" the purpled Paul Daniels said. "But they never listen." With a shirt like that I could see why. We left the whole thing up in the air with the promise that I would call back sometime during the week (this was Saturday afternoon) with further details after I had spoken to my accountant. We had already put off one statement of "I can give you a good price if you commit to buying today" which seems to be the mantra for salesmen of all kinds, from cars to Egyptian papyrus. "No, I said I'll call later in the week, and I will," I said.

Monday morning 9:30 am and Paul Daniels is already on the phone: "Have you talked to your wife and made up your mind yet?" He gave him an answer firmly in the negative, reiterated my previous statement and told him not to call me again. I was mightily pissed-off. Robyn just felt that it reinforced her view of the place. "There was just something sleazy about him," she said. Not one to beat around the bush my wife.

The next day was a public holiday (Melbourne Cup) so I wasn't able to talk to my accountant until the Wednesday. He seemed busy and gave me a few details about what I was after but not the whole story. I sat around at work and tried to work out the finances. Would the accountant think it was a good deal? Could I find a bank to give me the money? Would I be able to convince Robyn not to go into convulsions when I told her how much it would finally cost? I was still pondering these questions on the Friday when Robyn rang to say that she might just have found our car. It was a second-hand Lancer station wagon only five months old, sitting there in Essendon waiting for someone like us to buy it. I rang the car yard at Essendon Mitsubishi and said I wanted to look at it. The price seemed right, and they were throwing in free air-conditioning - a prerequisite with a young child in Australia. I arranged for a Saturday viewing. I rang Paul Daniels and put him off - bye Paul.

Saturday and the car looked okay. It was silver in colour when I really wanted white but I wasn't going to complain if all was well. I looked it over with an air of studied interest hoping that I didn't look like the totally ignorant punter that I actually was. I took it for a test-drive and it seemed fine. What are you supposed to do with five-month old cars anyway? Kick the tyres? Run your finger around the inside of the exhaust pipe? Tap along the underside of the car with a metal pen to check for rust? Not likely. The bloody thing was still under new-car warrantee. So why did the previous owners sell I asked? "It's a bit of a funny story really," Jim Lallo, the used car manager said, flashing his teeth and sun tan. "The previous owners bought the car from here with three kids, went home and a month later she found out she was pregnant again." Laughter all round - this is used car salesman humour you must understand. "Well I hope it doesn't have the same effect on us," said Robyn. Smiles from Rob and I, rolling in the aisles from the salesman - your basic all-round good-guys with the sense of humour of a five-year-old.

We discussed finance: "we can do you a better deal than the bank because the only security on the car is the car itself". And we discussed decision-making: "we need a decision by Monday or it's sold." "So you have another buyer?" "Oh yes." The other standard line. We left and promised a decision by the end of the day. But we really didn't have a decision to make. The offer was too good to refuse, so we rang an hour or so later and indicated a willingness to buy. We looked at each other and wondered whether our luck had changed for the better or whether we had decided to purchase a lemon. My history in buying cars indicated the latter.

On Monday I started doing the rounds of the finance organisations. I checked out a broker my accountant put me on to, and my company's bank. Comparing the figures with the car dealer's I came to the odd conclusion that my bank had the best rates. I stressed to the bank that I only had about a week in which to arrange the finances. There didn't seem to be a problem and a couple of days later I had signed the forms with the bank and could just sit back and wait for the final okay. The next day Collin Marchianno, the finance adviser from Essendon Mitsubishi called. "Have you made a decision on your finances?" he asked. "Yes," I said, "we've decided to go with the bank." He obviously took this badly and started on a five-minute rave about how the bank would put a caveat on our house, our finances, our children, anything. Within 30 seconds I was so annoyed with him that I had decided that I wouldn't have dealt with him even if he had been cheaper. His attitude only vindicated my feeling that I was doing the right thing. "As I said," he continued, "we have to sign up a million dollars worth of finance to stay in business." I let that one slide. I wasn't going to get into any arguments that one might lead to. "I decided, in consultation with my accountant, that it would be best if I got a credit rating for my company through my bank." "But you could have a rating with Barclays," he said. "But I don't want one with Barclays," I said. He stared to go

back to his original arguments about caveats etc. He was starting to take it personally so I cut short the conversation as quickly as I could.

Friday morning and the bank was ready to go but required an order form from the car dealers - just to make sure I wasn't pulling a shonky I suspect. Anyway they contacted the dealers at about 11:30 am Friday and requested the form, and were told it would be with them very soon. A couple of hours later there had been no response. The bank manager rang the finance bloke at the car dealers and was told in no uncertain terms that he (from the car dealer) would get to when he had the time and then slammed down the phone. The bank manager wasn't too impressed with this as you can imagine. Neither was I when he told me. So I rang the Jim Lallo and told all about the call and said I wasn't too happy. He assured me that he would get on to it straight away. Two hours later I rang again as nothing had happened. Again I was assured the matter would be fixed: "It seems we have a problem in the office I wasn't told about," Jim informed me. Half an hour later (we are after 4:00 pm now) I was told that the office manager was typing it "right now" and that it would be faxed immediately. At 4:50 pm I rang the bank manager and told him that nothing looked likely to be happening that day. I rang the car yard again: "I'm not very happy," I said. "Yes, I'm sorry," he said. "Now I can't find the office manager." "So what are we going to do?" I asked. "We'll have to leave it until Monday," he said. "Oh" was all I could say. "Is there anything wrong with that?" he asked. "Only that it completely stuffs up my weekend," I said. "My wife and I have to go to Bendigo to visit her parents on Saturday." I must have sounded rather angry - which wasn't very hard given that I was furious - as he became rather contrite and offered the car to me anyway. "Come and pick it up now," he said. "It is insured, isn't it?" Of course it was. And there was no way I was going to turn down his offer as I had been angling for it anyway. So I picked up the car on Friday at about 5:30 pm. Jim Lallo was still very apologetic and said that the order form had been faxed - "the office manager had typed it but hadn't faxed it" - and Collin Marchianno tried to be friendly. I wasn't very interested. I was only there for the car. Anything else was just a flapping of gums.

I spoke to the Jim Lallo at Essendon Mitsubishi on Monday morning to discuss the delivery of the cheque. His solution was to put it in an envelope addressed to him, stick it in a cab and he would pay for the fare at his end. Strange, but fair enough I thought. Robyn was in court until after lunch so we couldn't sign the leasing contract with the bank until about 2:00 pm. "I'm sorry about the unprofessional way they've handled this," I told the manager. "Don't worry about it," he said. "It happens all the time." Great way to run a business, I thought, mentally planning the letter of complaint I felt like writing.

I rang up the car dealers when I got back to work only to find that Jim Lallo was away from the office and probably wouldn't be back that day. So I spoke to Collin Marchianno - the infamous finance bloke - and told him I had the cheque and that I had been instructed to put it in a cab and send it out. "Might be cheaper for you to send it via a courier," he said. "I was told the fare would be paid for at your end," I said. Stunned silence on the phone. "Maybe it would be best if I sent it tomorrow", I offered. He grabbed at it with glee. So I sat there at my desk at work, with the car in a carpark a block away and a banker's cheque in my hand. Rio suddenly seemed rather tempting and used car salesmen totally stupid.

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"The paradox of creation, the coming of the forms of time out of eternity, is the germinal secret of the father. It can never be quite explained. Therefore, in every system of theology there is an umbilical point, an Achilles tendon which the finger of mother life has touched, and where the possibility of perfect knowledge has been impaired. The problem of the hero

is to pierce himself (and therewith his world) precisely through that point; to shatter and annihilate that key knot of his limited existence.

"The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being. The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands - and the two are atoned."

from **THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES** by Joseph Campbell

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The Mailbag

I like to think that the birth of my daughter Catherine in December last year has made a difference to the way I view life. And I guess it's something that most parents go through, that realisation that most of the things you thought were so important when you were single or a non-parent are suddenly rendered rather meaningless. Being worried whether or not Australia wins the cricket or whether the State Government is going to stick to its election promises loses quite a lot of immediacy when your child is crying in the next room. Catherine's birth has also made me take more of a longer view of life rather than the simplistic one-month-at-a-time approach. I must have put these points across somehow in the last issue because Renee Sieber came to the conclusion that:

You said you were worried how you might change with the birth of a child. Well, you've already changed. You talk about it a lot; you marvel about it. Okay, so it's impossible not to be affected by this life-altering event. But since you can never be prepared for all the things you witness and because you are part of a huge experiment in the molding (or obstinence to molding) of a human being - you can't help but marvel at it. This changes you and gives you instant membership to the "parents" club. This is a club we non-parents can never join. The gulf, perhaps small but still profound, has opened. I choose to witness it as an outsider; this creates a palpable distance between them and me - oh well.

I understand the differences it has made to me personally but also I have observed the changes it brings about in any social situation I happen to find myself in when Catherine is present. Children dominate attention and conversation. Which, in small doses, I don't mind. It's when they become the only topic of conversation I find myself becoming more than a little annoyed. This applies to both my own child and the children of others, by the way. Back in the early eighties, when personal computers were starting to make an impression on Australian fandom, I made a decision not to talk about them if I could possibly avoid it. I've been working with computers almost non-stop every day for the past twelve years and to carry on interminable conversations about them outside of working hours would just tend to bore me shitless. The same applies to some degree to children. Those parents whose only topic of conversation revolves around their children, their speech patterns and their bowel movements won't find me a very receptive audience. If we're going to talk shit let's talk politics:

Canada now has a women P.M. hooray! Even if she is a monetarist. Well, I'll enjoy it for a few months. If we're lucky, she'll get booted out in the November General Elections by some left group. In the meantime, I'll enjoy her outspoken feminism.

Which just goes to show that a few months is a short time in politics. Kim Campbell - Canada's first woman PM - called an election after only about four months in office and, to put it mildly, got totally hammered. From being the leader of a party with around 150 seats she found herself after the election out of office, out of a seat and associated with a party that had been reduced to rubble; a total of 2 seats. And, from what I hear, they were lucky to win those. I'm not sure of the political leanings of the party that has replaced the Conservatives in Canada but I doubt whether they fit the "left group" definition of Renee's. It seems, unfortunately, that electorates only elect left-leaning parties when economic times are good, or seemingly so. Witness the move to the centre ground of the Australian Labor Party (which some people I'm related to still refer to as being communist), the change of direction by the Swedish Government, and the rise of the right-wing in France. What I found interesting in the recent Canadian experience was the way in which it reflected what has happened here in Australia over the past couple of years. The only women who have been leaders of State Governments in Australia were both thrown out by the voters at their first elections. I haven't heard a bad thing said about Joan Kirner here in Victoria or Carmen Lawrence in Western Australia by either major party. But they were used as scapegoats for the excesses and bad management of their predecessors. And now the only woman in Australian Federal politics with a recognisable identity is Bronwyn Bishop (leadership aspirant for the Liberal Party) who reminds me of none other than Margaret Thatcher in both her manner and personal determination. Luckily enough I only lived in Britain under Thatcher for about a year, and that was bad enough.

Joseph Nicholas had the misfortune of being a citizen of Thatcher's Britain for the entire period of her premiership. I don't envy him. Nor do I envy his recent problems in house-buying, but I can certainly sympathise.

Just recently, after viewing a great number of rather unsuitable properties in this area -- too small, too far from BR and Underground stations, insufficient number of rooms, facing the wrong compass aspect, inconsequential garden, etc. etc. -- we found a very suitable place only a few streets away from here. Two reception rooms and a large and airy L-shaped kitchen-diner on the ground floor, two-and-a-half (described by the agent as "three") bedrooms on the first floor; enough, in other words, to provide us each with an office, and leave a room over for a combination living room and library. Considering the sums being asked for houses of a similar size, the original asking price of £68,000 was quite cheap (between £80,000 and £85,000 is about the norm for this part of Haringey) -- a price which was reduced to £65,000 between our first viewing and our asking to see it again. Of course, this reflected its condition -- it was in poor decorative order throughout, several of the window frames appeared to be rotting and would need to be replaced, the kitchen cupboards were badly-assembled and amateurishly painted, the bathroom was a bilous concoction of pink unit and black tiles....but the potential was definitely there. So we offered £63,000, waited a week while the vendor ummed and aahed -- and then started eagerly planning the internal layout of each room when the offer was accepted. An office each! A library! Another garden for Judith to play with! Solicitors were contacted, a mortgage application form acquired....

Then we went to the Beijing Jin Ju Opera at the South Bank on Thursday with Geoff Ryman, and in the interval Judith said that just before leaving work she'd had a phone call from the estate agent to say that we'd been gazumped by someone who'd offered £65,000 *in cash*. And wasn't waiting for a structural survey, either.... There's no way we can compete with cash, so it's back to traipsing around properties which are too small, too far from BR and Underground stations, have an insufficient number of rooms, face the wrong way, etc. bloody etc..

Bastards. Just as we were beginning to think of it as our house, too. I hope the window frames leak when it rains, the roof joists give way under the first snows of winter, and the trees at the bottom of the garden dry out the soil and cause the foundations to subside. And a van packed with high explosive on an IRA bombing mission crashes through the front door and blows them clean away.

After all, there must be doubts about the legality of anyone who just happens to have £65,000 in cash lying about the place. Perhaps they're buying the house to launder the proceeds from their drug smuggling or gun running activities. Perhaps we should report them to the police, and claim the house as a reward....

The disgusting practice of gazumping is illegal here in Victoria, as, I believe, it is in Scotland, but not England. Which makes me again wonder if the English legal system is biased towards property rather than people.

Where you live can be a pretty important thing as far as **Mark Loney** is concerned. After my previous remarks regarding his current abode Mark saw fit to cut out a few pieces featuring his town from *The Washington Post* and send them along. I have this feeling he might have been trying to convince me of the virtues of Hyattsville, but as the articles had subtitles such as "Young Professionals Like Its Charm, Reasonably Priced Houses" and "Quiet and Relaxed, Six Miles From Downtown" I don't think he's succeeded. But it was a good try.

We did actually spend a few weeks looking in the Annapolis area (a lot of Australians have chosen to live out that way) but, eventually, we decided that Annapolis was just too far from the Embassy of Australia.

So we settled on Hyattsville, an area that I describe (in Melbournian terms) as a run-down but relatively intact Kew that is in the throes of being discovered and renovated. Nearly a year later it was good to see that judgement confirmed by *The Washington Post*. Locality names around here are definitely eye openers. You seem to have picked some of the better older names but the real screamers are the names for the newer suburbs: Village of Kings Contrivance, Chatham Gardens, Village of Long Reach, Village of Owen Brown, Rockburn, Thompsons Purchase... and so on.

Someone in ANZAPA (I forget who and I don't have the time nor the inclination to look it up) took me to task a little for making fun of the placenames in the area around where Mark now lives. This person (I can't even remember if they were male or female) said that I shouldn't laugh at town names in other countries as Australia has some pretty funny names of its own; the last part of which I heartily agree with. Which goes to show that some people just don't get the point. I like to think of the style of humour as gently mocking. Taking offence on someone else's behalf on such occasions is, frankly, ridiculous.

I Also Heard From: **Lucy Huntzinger, Diane Beck** (phone call of comment), **Judith Hanna**, who in June outlined her summer holidays as "a few days in Istanbul" and "a week or so in Ireland with Maureen Gell from Perth. Though Joseph is coming along, he has been told very firmly, that it is a Judith-and-Maureen style relaxed meander through the scenery, and not an Attila the Guidebook marathon. So there." Joseph obviously works along the Robyn Mills style of travelling - "what're you sitting there for? There's 15 minutes of daylight left." And just when I've found an interesting pub too. **Malcolm Holt** and **Morag** with details of their wedding on the Isle of Skye that Robyn and I missed by only 9 months and the comment that my story last issue couldn't have been accurate as it gave no details of Robyn returning home three times to check whether or not she had left the iron on. An astute point but one I might just let slide. **Judith Morgan, Mark Ritchie, Cath Charnock, John Basevi** and **Brian Middlemiss** who all mentioned issue 2 during telephone conversations - appreciated but such comments are immediately forgotten, sorry. My sister **Gina Cox** who seemed a little bemused by some of the fannish references, and **Roger Holberton** and **Deb Seaton** currently residing on Rue Voltaire in Geneva and having a great time by all accounts. Half their luck.

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THE WOLLONGONG PIG-BREEDERS' GAZETTE 3

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