



Peter—

Please renew subscriptions for the following:

Omni	Life
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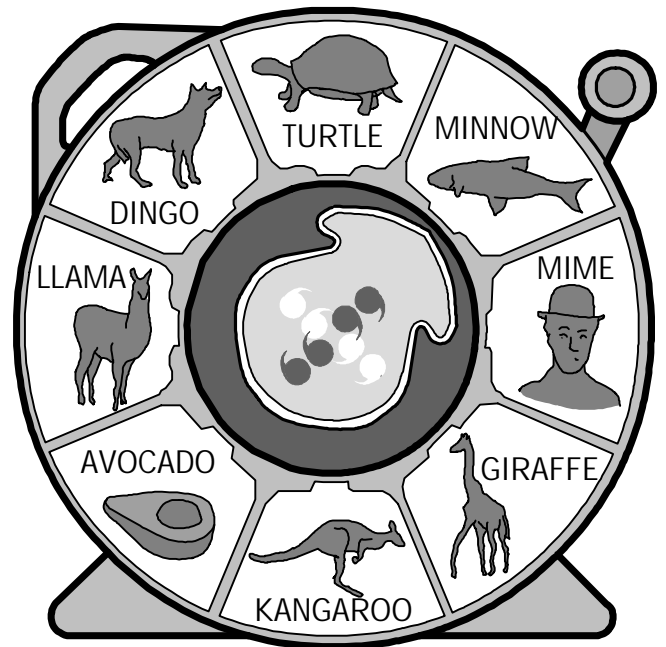
and add:

Martha Stewart's Living
(how does she do it!)

In my name, of course—

G.

Bento 8



A zine by Kate Yule and David Levine
For LoneStarCon 2 — August 1997

Welcome to Bento 8!

Welcome to *Bento*, the fanzine that dares to ask the musical question “can a boy from a small chair in a big room find happiness as a shortstop on the long haul?” *Bento 8* is a Bento Press production from

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It is available for The Usual (Letters of Comment, tradezines, editorial whim, or \$2).

David drew the Picasso-meets-Tony-Lama illo, the hom bao, and the cover, “Sounds of Silence.” (Yes, llamas and giraffes—hell, for all I know, avocados—do occasionally make a little noise. Deal with it.) All the rest is by the ever-so-imitable Arthur Clipp. Thanks to Donna Barr for the avocado.

Claimer

All of the stuff in this issue really happened. No shit.

The Las Vegas Shuffle

We should have known what to expect when they tore down the convention hotel.

Imploded, actually. They're very big on implusions in Las Vegas. They imploded the Landmark Hotel—that's the spacey tower you saw go down in *Mars Attacks*—and last year they imploded the Hacienda at midnight on December 31 to mark the new year. And, between Las Vegas winning the bid to host the 1997 International Gay Square Dance Convention and when the event was held, they imploded the Sands, which was supposed to be our convention hotel. They left the adjacent Sands Convention Center standing, though, and that's where all the function space was anyway, so the convention went on... but the nearest available sleeping rooms were in Harrah's, a twenty-minute walk away. (Hey, but it's a *dry* heat....)

If that wasn't hint enough, we started catching on when the riverboat vanished. We'd never been to Vegas before, but familiarized ourselves with the city through coffee-table picture books, so coming into town from the airport Kate could tell me “OK, turn right on the Strip, we want the giant riverboat just past the

Magician
waving hanky

Flamingo on the right, you *can't* miss the Flamingo.” There was no riverboat.

Since the publication of *Above Las Vegas* (© 1996), Harrah's had transformed itself, deciding that what the Las Vegas gambling public really wanted was a Mardi Gras atmosphere. But the sign said Harrah's Guest Parking, so in we went.

Inside we found that, like each Dr. Who in the first episode after regenerating, the hotel was not completely integrated in its new form. There were still bits and pieces of the Mississippi here and there, being absorbed as we watched. The front desk where we checked in Tuesday at midnight was *gone* by Wednesday breakfast—vanished behind a wall and a rank of slot machines—and replaced by a new and gleaming Carnival-themed front desk at the other end of the hotel. Hotel employees trundled past wheeling handcarts of 3x5 reservation cards to their new home. Our room had a sign on the door with “Room 1651, Riverboat Wing”; room 1653 already read “Mardi Gras Wing” and the phone numbers had changed from 6xxx to 8xxx, though the documentation in the room had not.

Harrah's turned even the chaos to its benefit: the sidewalk in front of the hotel was under construction, barricaded off, and the substantial pedestrian traffic along the Strip was officially diverted *through the hotel* instead! All through the casino were orange signs with black arrows and the words “Pedestrian Detour”. I sus-

pect many folks never found their way back out to the street and are still to be found at the blackjack tables today.

As we explored the rest of Las Vegas, we found that this aggressive self-transformation was universal. Treasure Island was just finishing a remodel, and the valet parking desk was temporarily outside the hotel—looking as though it had been chainsawed from its original location and dragged there by teams of sweating natives. Half of the Forum, the indoor shopping “street” inside Caesars Palace, was under scaffolding; that's OK, the real streets in the real Rome look just like that! The interior of the Luxor pyramid resembled an archaeology dig in progress, with plaster dust everywhere; the Nile was gone without a trace and half the rides were shut down and being replaced by something else (a good thing too, judging by the quality of the one ride we went on). The giant lion at the main entrance of the MGM Grand, just four years old, was gone—no sign yet what was being built in its place. A giant windblown-skirted Marilyn Monroe? Even the Amber Unicorn, a nice little used-book shop that had been recommended by friends, had become the Book Magician: same location, same

Magician glaring

stock, but the former owner had been bought out by the employees. (“Yeah, he's off doing Amway now. We got rid of his Garfield collection too.”)

Amazingly, the New York New York casino was *not* under construction. It was a great simulation of New York City in every other way: noisy, crowded, chaotic, expensive, and a hell of a lot of fun! I enjoyed myself tremendously just wandering around admiring the details: graffiti-covered newspaper boxes stood on corners, manhole covers emitted wisps of steam, and the elevators in the “Chrysler Building” and “Empire State Building” wings were beautiful replicas of the real thing. A few sawhorses with blinking orange lights and “Dig We Must” signs would have fit right in.

We had fun in Las Vegas—a lot more fun than we expected. We'll probably go back some day. God knows what it'll have transformed itself into by then.... — DDL

Trick Cards

M [x] F [x]

I've just been reading *Gender Outlaw* by Kate Bornstein, a male-to-female transsexual who is no longer a man and doesn't particularly consider herself a woman either. She speaks out against the insistence that there are precisely 2 mutually exclusive genders and that everyone has to belong to one of them—a position held tenaciously by both Christian fundamentalists and lesbian separatists, and ain't that a rare bird. (I think bisexuals are the only ones who wouldn't be threatened by this and even then I may be missing something.)

Apparently far more newborns than you would expect come into this world with less-than-explicit gender differentiation. But don't worry; a nip here and a tuck there and a few white lies later, and this worrisome confusion is dealt with before the kid gets its first color-coded pacifier.

It makes me wonder. We have a lot of medical things that are specified as being one way for men, one way for women. Different hormonal cycles, different manifestations of AIDS symptoms, different patterns of body hair, need for calcium, risk of heart attack etc. Yet for any one of these “criteria”, one finds examples of both men and women on each side of the borderline.

So: if we divided the whole world into people above 5'6" and people below it, or people with blue eyes and those with brown (hazel? no, doesn't exist, sorry, you're a freak, get surgery), would

we find that the two “genders” thus established had other characteristics in common? Would we find that Blues are stronger, taller, more prone to kidney infection, resistant to breast cancer? Because if we did, you know that each such statistical discovery would add a brick to the wall on which was blazoned, “They are Not Us; it is the Natural Way of Things.” —KY

You Try, You Still Not Know

An excerpt from Kate’s diary, telling of Sunday morning dim sum in Vancouver, BC with half a dozen assorted friends and multiple Davids. The title refers to a sign at our favorite Vietnamese restaurant: “You never try, never know.” (Favorite until it was fire-bombed, anyway; turns out Asian youth gangs used to hang out there, drinking beer from a steady supply of those stainless-steel teapots. But I digress.)

We went somewhere new, VERY new, a huge place just open a few weeks. Clues indicate they do mondo-extravagant Hong-Kong style wedding banquets there. Size is a real asset in dim sum: we had a dizzying variety of things offered in a constant stream. The carts were fascinating, purpose-built, different kinds. One had half a dozen little lids that could be tipped open to get at soup or congee; another was a portable griddle, with two or three shelves above one end stacked with what the waitress would fry up on demand.

steamer with a white cloth mounded around the lid like a blanc-mange. The food was a bowl of irregular, smooth bits of tofu in a clear, slightly thick liquid. We gazed at it with a fascination not unlike our view of the Klingon okonomiyaki at Koji...they made me go first.

Note: next time we go to dim sum, somebody else sits on the aisle. — KY

How Brightly Shines the Moon

Regular readers of *Bento* know that Kate and I square-dance with gay men and lesbians. But most of you don’t know that, once a year, we take off all our clothes and square-dance *naked* with gay men and lesbians.

Naked do-si-do’s are not unique to the gay square dance community; they have been repeatedly invented wherever either square dancers or nudists want to try something new and different. The “Moonshine Tip” has been a fixture at the annual gay square dance convention for years, though, and gets bigger every time—except in those years when there are problems with the hotel. (And you thought hotels got upset about costumers at SF cons!) At the convention in Washington DC the nude tip was held clandestinely in someone’s sleeping room, one square at a time. In Chicago it ended early, and abruptly, when the hotel manager found out what

I looked at that, at what was sizzling, and said “YES.” “What, what, what?” came the queries from the rest of the table, especially Michael, furthest away from the aisle and most insistent on being in on the action. “It’s blocks of quivery gelatinous stuff, with little flecks of, like, bacon.” This information was not well-received; in fact they were equal parts laughing hysterically/incredulously appalled. “You ordered quivery gelatinous stuff?!” “FRIED quivery gelatinous stuff,” I said, as she splatted the glistening rectangles onto the table. Then we got caught up in learning what the other fryables on the cart were, and getting her to cut up one of the shrimp-and-veggie balls so there would be more than four pieces. (Note: next time we go to dim sum, take a fork and sharp serrated knife.)



When the dust cleared, I turned to Dave, who was staring at the bacon thing on his plate, and said “OK, how would YOU have described it?” “Quivery,” he said, conceding the accuracy of my description, though whether or not this was really a point in my *favor* was another question....

I got grief for my synopsis of one dish as “slithery tofu stuff with sauce,” too. Philistines.

Oh god, and then there was the “bean curd dessert”. That one was a complete crap shoot. I just liked the look of the cart: a giant

we were doing in that sealed room (we *are* discreet) by skulking in the hall’s projection booth. In Vegas it wasn’t held at all; they said it’s illegal to dance naked in Clark County, Nevada, even for free.

I didn’t do the Moonshine Tip at my first convention, but kicked myself afterwards for being a scaredycat. The next year I angsted about it for weeks beforehand: excited at the thought of seeing and dancing with all that bare skin; afraid I’d be embarrassed by my body, or chicken out at the last minute. But at midnight Friday, when at a science fiction convention I would have been schmoozing at yet another bid party, I found myself in a huge crowd of about-to-be-naked square dancers.

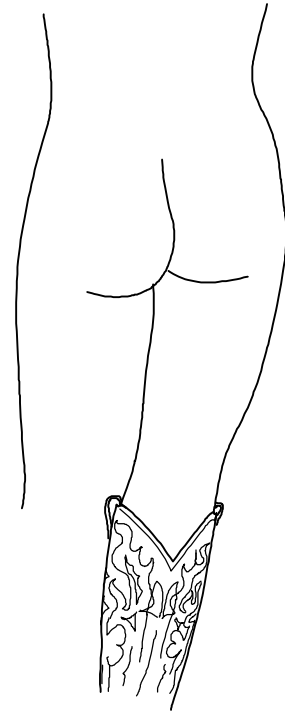
After an agony of waiting, and talking with passersby who said “oh, no, you won’t get *me* in there”, the doors were opened and we filtered in, past door guards who kept out any bag large enough to contain a camera. Then we all stripped down and squared up. Kate noted that everyone faced the wall while taking off their clothes; personally, I just did that because I needed something to lean on while removing my socks. I soon learned that this was a mistake: vigorous square-dancing in bare feet is sufficiently uncomfortable that the dorkiness factor of wearing shoes and socks while otherwise naked vanishes by comparison. One guy appeared wearing hot pink satin pumps: “I’d feel naked without them,” he declared. “Jimmy Sue, you’re pretty damn naked with them,” said Kate.

This was the first time I'd seen a naked man in the flesh since high school, and here I was with 180 of them. I mention the men in particular because men far outnumber women at Convention; there couldn't have been more than 20 or 30 women in the room. I must also confess a certain theoretical interest in the male body as an object of desire, but my own body did not react to this display in an obvious and embarrassing fashion. Nor was I disappointed to compare my body with the others on display; the range and variety of human body types was truly amazing, and I realized I had nothing to be ashamed of in my own.

Of course, naked need not mean unadorned. Many people enjoy the Moonshine Tip as a chance to show off tattoos and jewelry not normally in evidence—I discovered that a good friend has a Prince Albert—and a couple of guys were wearing harnesses that made their genitals stick out and look *really* silly. I was actually rather glad for these decorations; when your square is surrounded by naked people, anything that helps you pick out your partner from the surging pink background is a big help!

I came away totally jazzed that first year, and I haven't passed up an opportunity to dance naked since. It was fun, educational, and reassuring: by giving me a large sample of ordinary real people naked (instead of the kind of bodies that get *paid* to be photographed that way) it helped me come to a more realistic assessment of the state of my own body.

Gay naked square dancing improved my self-image, self-confidence, and self-esteem—not bad for just another goddam hobby.
— DDL



Book Review

A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper
John Allen Paulos, 1995.

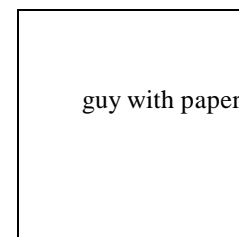
Paulos discusses a wide array of mathematical principles that underlie accurate understanding of everyday things. Randomness and the stock market, demographic patterns and vote fraud, coincidence and health risks, racism and bell curves—it's all here. What's the point of precise calorie measurements for imprecise recipes? When is "one person, one vote" a misrepresentation of the people's will? How could five candidates all claim to have won the same election? He addresses it.

Sometimes he skims over all these things too briskly—the point of a story can be obscured by irony, or by stopping one step short of my ability to see the connection—but the important thing this book gives you is *questions* to ask as you read the news, not necessarily answers.

I'm still chewing over his discussion of "conditional probability". Even if most bankers are rich—knowing that someone is wealthy doesn't tell you whether or not they're a banker. Obvious, right? A can imply B without B implying A.

OK, let's say that one out of every thousand people has pernicious dyscalculia. There's a test for it, and we know that it's 99% accurate—if you're sick, the test will be positive 99% of the time,

and if you're healthy, it will be negative 99% of the time. Your doctor has solemnly advised you that you've tested positive. How despondent should you be?



Answer: Out of 100,000 tests, on average, 100 people have it—99 diagnosed correctly, 1 false negative—and 99,900 do not have it—98,901 correct diagnoses and 999 false positives. Far more false positives than real ones! The probability that someone *with a positive result* actually has pernicious dyscalculia is only $99/(99+999)$, or about 9%! Ooof! Did you see that coming? I didn't!

Great pithy quote: "If the headline reads that unemployment has declined from 7.3% to 7.2% and doesn't say that the confidence interval is plus or minus .5%, one might get the mistaken impression that something good has happened."

If you like this, see also: *Full House*, Stephen Jay Gould.

—KY

One in a Million

We've talked about interesting conversion rates before (one arnaz = 10 Cuban bandleaders). Here are rules of thumb for understanding Really Small Numbers, ~~filed from~~ courtesy of the Tualatin River Watershed Hydrologic Unit Area Newsletter.

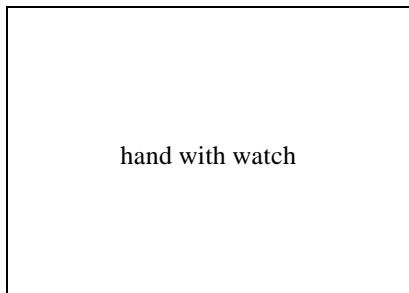
One part per million is:

- 1 inch in 16 miles
- 1 minute in 2 years
- 1 bad apple in 2,000 barrels

One part per billion (thousand million) is:

- 1 second in 32 years
- 1 pinch of salt in 10 tons of potato chips

— KY



relevant information like the name of the UN Secretary General or the appropriate equation to use for a particular story problem. I've never had any difficulty with story problems. Perhaps I have my little voice—constant companion, winner of input and sifter through memory—to thank for this. I'm also never at a loss for a relevant joke at parties. (Why is it that no matter where a joke sequence starts, it always leads to the old mohel joke: "What would *you* put in the window?" And why are there so many jokes about Jesus on the golf course?)

But when I'm not concentrating on some particular topic area, the voice freewheels—calling up a dozen variants on the parachute/backpack joke whenever I spot a picture of Kissinger; bringing back twenty-year-old advertising jingles for each product on every supermarket shelf; running a slide show of Far Side cartoons at the zoo; and always, *always* there with an apropos Monty Python quote for any conceivable circumstance.

The really distracting thing is when it starts triggering off itself: generating a chain of associations, each semi-relevant to the one before, that can take me from something in the real world to a seemingly random utterance in less than a second of real time. It can be very disconcerting to those around me. For example, I might see an apple. Starting from that, my little voice would go from Sir Isaac Newton to musing about buying a Newton, to the difficulties of handwriting recognition, to shopping lists, to St.

"Save France from the English, and Put the Dauphin Back on the Throne"

When we were visiting with my folks before Wisconsin earlier this year, my father said something about the little voice in the back of his head that provides a constant commentary on life. I have this voice too, although I never thought about it in quite that way. We talked about it a while.

It's not really a "voice," exactly—that implies a separateness that doesn't exist. It's definitely a subprocess of our own minds, under some conscious control but usually left to run freely. Call it a "color man"—a commentator offering continuous insights, statistics, and free associations on every word and image around us. It pulls up relevant jokes and anecdotes and quotes and songs from memory, and also runs variations: puns, spoonerisms, Pig Latin versions, banana-fana-fo-fanas, what have you. Some of the things produced by the voice are apropos, some are funny, some are even original; we choose the best and most relevant to share with those around us.

It's reassuring to know that my father and I share this internal voice. I gather that other people don't have it, because it's the things produced by the voice that sometimes make people look at me like I've got five heads.

I wouldn't want to be without my little voice. It's very useful; in a more structured mode, the same mental subprocess provides

Liebowitz's "can kraut, pound pastrami, bring home to Emma," to the realization that "can kraut" and "pound pastrami" could both be interpreted as imperatives, to the statement "Hey, Kate, how do you half-pound butter?" And she just *looks* at me.... —DDL

Why I Burned a Flag on the 4th of July

Because I could.

Because burning Republicans is illegal.

Because one is *supposed* to burn the American flag when it has been damaged and abused.

Because it matters.

Because burning it with respect has more integrity than waving it with venom.

Because proposed Amendments to ban flag-burning symbolize for me the many areas where politicians and citizenry are in a froth of egregiously mis-applied Patriotic Fervor—proclaiming the Drug Menace more important than the Constitution, Children more important than the adults they become, and Marriage something that must be defended against those who would celebrate it.

I pledge allegiance, not to the flag of the United States of America, but to the Republic for which it stands—one nation, all too divisible if we do not secure liberty and justice for all.

—KY

Shared LoCs

Luke McGuff

Seattle, Washington

Fri, 29 Nov 1996

Hey! Thanks for mailing us B-7, which I just read and greatly enjoyed. I agree that the format makes it brief, punchy, and adds to the fun, but I'd beg to point out to Ms. Strecker that I've used it before in the Minifictions series. Well, that's not a zine, even though it's a series, and it's been quite a while since I've done one. Okay!

But I think the two highlights for me were Kate's food piece, and David's piece on Immigrants (parts of which I read out loud to Jane. Yeah!). Both were as long as they needed to be, without what we call "Saturday Night Live" disease, which means stretching out a moderately funny comedic idea to fill a lonnnnnnnnnnggggggg time slot. Oh well.

Actually, that whole "... for Dummies" line has branched out; now there's *Wine for Dummies*, *Personal Finance for Dummies*, and *Sex for Dummies*. Hah! Coming soon, I hear, is *Polyamory for Dummies*.

I also heard that the same company is coming out with a more technical line; since the technical information is increasing, they

There's one piece of cultural imperialism I'll never be happy with; that's when Mars had to change the title of their peanut bar, known over here for a generation as their Marathon bar with its imagery of energy and athleticism. Then, to apparently ensure it was the same throughout the world, they had to adopt the American name, the Snickers bar; but who thought up that name? According to the Oxford dictionary, 'snicker' is the whinny or neigh of a horse, with no other meaning; it doesn't even merit an entry in my English/American-American/English dictionary, so what does it mean over there? Truly, two nations divided by a common language....

[Yes, it's a silly name, but since when do brand names have to make sense, or even have meanings? Does Bovril? Altoids? Ovaltine? By the way, our concise OED (6th ed.) shows

snɪŋɡer *v.i., & n.* (Utter) half-suppressed secretive laugh.
[var. of SNICKER]

The big OED has more to say but it's 0.75-point type and the magnifying glass has gone walkies.]

"We will shortly begin post-boarding."

"—Take-off?"

"No, standing in the gate saying 'Shit! Shit! Shit!'"

thought they'd increase the ironic self-deprecation of the title also; so the first in the series is *Visual C++ for Worthless Shits*.

That's my joke and what it is too, and that's why I inflict it on everyone I can. Sorry. But what are friends for?

And of course they had to search the audience for macaroni and cheese on the way in.

Roger Waddington

North Yorkshire, England

17th January, 1997

I can't help responding to one of your lines, "So when is it time to gather stones together?" Going back to Ecclesiastes and the days of the Bible, surely the best reason to gather stones together would be to build a cairn, a memorial to someone famous, respected, or deeply loved. In our day we can use the medium of paper and print, as you've done in these pages; but back then, stones were all they had. (And perhaps more lasting.) And a time to cast away stones, that's surely preparing your field for ploughing with the ox, that first you have to go over it, picking up all the stones that come to the surface, and throwing them to one side. Not forgetting the fact of life that the more you throw away, there's more that come to the surface; there's been a recent scientific paper written on this effect.

Tracy Benton

Madison, Wisconsin

postmark illegible

I have those "do you remember that recipe?" conversations with my Mom all the time and once foolishly accepted her old church cookbooks (scary boo). Liked the logpile story too, tho it brings back nightmares of my homeowning days. But "Immigrants" was a masterpiece. And so unusually optimistic; the Mac devotees at work with PC's spend all their time bitching about Win95 (not that I blame them).

About the applicability of fannish rules to "interesting" parties: what about "no costume is no costume"? or "All weapons must be peacebonded"? Or best of all, "3 bids needed to go to auction"?

[I don't know how we missed that one!]

William A. Yule

Seattle, Washington

22 November 1996

Read with interest your latest lunchbox. Poor babies, having to join Leviathan—imagine how much fun it is trying to get a 10+ year-old Amiga 500 connected to the Internet. Needless to say I have been ignoring all those offers to download Netscape. I did spend most of my recent 3-week vacation lost in the web. Any advice you might have on where I could find 1950s Nebraska

history resources (don't ask) would be appreciated. My other big achievement over vacation was taping all 32 hours of Twin Peaks, no commercials, just the maddening Bravo promos separating episodes. I managed the first 18 hours straight before collapsing. Scariest thing was the final episode starting to actually make sense.

Karen Anderson Stephenson

Corvallis, Oregon

27 March 1997

I suppose I should start by confessing that I totally believed "The Worldcon that Wasn't" for several weeks until Mara told me that so-and-so had "actually believed it was a true story." (And don't tell me that the world "gullible" isn't in the dictionary—I've already looked it up.)

With regard to "Just Like Mom Used to Make," I have always thought that one of the big advantages of housemates was the opportunity to learn new recipes. And yes, sometimes it has been the only advantage.

I received a letter from some friends who have been topping their macaroni & cheese with breadcrumbs for years. One day Anne confessed that she didn't like breadcrumbs on her macaroni & cheese and Ethan admitted that he didn't either. They eventually traced the origin of the breadcrumbs to one evening when the three of us had been cooking together and I INSISTED that macaroni &

suburbs, and this building itself is full of little software houses. But my employer is a prepress shop. (The area where I live is usually much less interesting, except for the time the Armenian terrorists assassinated the Turkish consul.)

I take lots of pills, but I don't think any of them are trendy.

"Why is there a Talosian in your fridge?"

"To keep Tigger company."

Anne Marie Merrit

Portland, Oregon

11 September 1996

Your 'zine is cool! Sorry it took me so long. I've finally finished unpacking and reorganizing my life. I get lots of "kitten help". It took a week for my Siamese mix cat to stop hissing at me, but once the cans opened (I had to feed her for 3-4 days before she got the clue) all was forgiven.

I really enjoyed the "Immigrants" article. Is it based on a true story? ; -)

"Kitten help" is a reference to some net humor, Jacques Marshall's "Weasel Help". Loading the dishwasher with weasel help, for example, starts with the following steps:

1. Open the dishwasher.
2. Take the weasel out.

cheese MUST be topped with breadcrumbs. They decided that since we now live 3000 miles apart it would be OK to omit them.

"Immigrants" reminded me of an old farm museum I went to once. It was filled with old farm implements that people had donated while cleaning out their barns. I figure that there's a whole computer museum just waiting for people to clean out their attics & garages.

"Hey, there's a Commodore 64 next to that TRS-80. I had one of those when I was a kid."

"Oooh look—a LISA!"

"Hey, there's Kate & David's trusty old MacIIcx right next to that antique 166-MHz Pentium with 16 MB RAM and a 2.1 GB hard disk..."

"Mom, Dad, what's Pong?"

George Flynn

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Sept. 9, 1996

"Immigrants" is hilarious. But I expect to stay in the Old Country, at least as long as there's a Power Mac on my desk at work (on which I am writing this very letter). [*ah yes, our employers, who contribute more to fandom than they will ever know.*] Like Vicki, I work in an archetypal area: MIT's right down the street, Lotus a block away, Thinking Machines was across the street 'til they went broke and moved to cheaper quarters in the

3. Put away clean dishes.

4. Take the other weasel out.

5. Rinse pots, and place in bottom rack.

6. Reach WAAAAAY in, pluck the first weasel out of the standing water in back.

7. Load the plates.

8. Take both weasels out.

Personally, I THINK I prefer the hamsters....

Today's forecast:

slightly groggy, with no chance of afternoon nap.

Exclusive LoCs

We also heard from: Teddy Harvia, Pamela Boal, Mark Plummer (who has stray copies of Bento following him home, apparently to get away from Greg Pickersgill), Janice Gelb, Steve Stiles, Kris Jensen ("the hamsters have become part of our vocabulary"), Cheryl Morgan, Wendy Wilhelm, Nancy Wirsig McClure, and Peter Larsen, who said "When's Bento coming out? Here, you need to buy this book." It was *Weetzie Bat* by Francesca Lia Block, and he was right. Thanks, Peter!