

I Knew The Porridge Was Trying To Tell Me Something

Some collected writings of Ang Rosin (for GUFF)

Published in March 2007 – Year of the Quokka

Claire Brialey writes:

This is a fanzine edited by Mark Plummer and me in order to showcase **Ang Rosin**, who is standing for GUFF in the hope of attending some conventions and meeting some fans in New Zealand and Australia in June this year.

It aims to introduce Ang to some more people on the other side of the world, both to encourage them to vote for her and to help to break the ice if enough of them do; and it also aims to remind fans in Europe why they, too, should both want to send Ang to foreign parts to represent us *and to bring her back again*.

The fanzine mostly comprises Ang's own writing, corralled from other fanzines and from LiveJournal over the past five years; but it also includes pieces from her initial supporters in the sending continent about why we think she'd be a great GUFF delegate and administrator. Everything here that isn't directly attributed to someone else is written by Ang herself.

Alongside this you may well be receiving a copy of the fanzine Ang edited with Max in 2002, *Gnat's Testicles* – because it seemed better to leave it in its original format than to try to replicate part of it here, and because we wanted to reprint the whole thing anyway – of which we think the content as well as the title speaks for itself.

Over the years we've had a great time with Australian SF fans, who have proved to be friendly, fun, intelligent, helpful, hospitable, and great company. One of the reasons we think that Ang would enjoy Australian fandom, and vice versa, is that all these things can also be said of her. We're not aware that antipodean fandom is especially fond of potatoes, but that's a new experience to which Ang could introduce you.

We also commend the other candidates in the GUFF race to you, and in turn hope that their supporters will be moved to give Ang their second-place votes. Above all, we urge you to *vote* – the deadline is midnight (British time) on Monday 16 April; you should find a ballot form enclosed with paper copies of this fanzine, although you can also vote online at <http://www.users.on.net/juliettedwoods/guff.html> – and thus support the fund.

I knew the porridge was trying to tell me something

(from LiveJournal, 1 February 2007)

One of Terry Pratchett's books – *Reaper Man*, I think – deals with inanimate objects suddenly springing to life. The message being conveyed is that there is something seriously wrong with the Discworld universe¹. This week so far:

My porridge exploded on Monday, on Tuesday my body puff unravelled in the shower, yesterday my bin bag split as I picked it up, and this morning my TV switched itself back off while I was in the shower. It seems there is something seriously wrong with the Rosin universe².

I'm keeping panic levels to the minimum unless I see my clothing taking a stroll, but I think I need a week's holiday. Probably somewhere sunny. And lacking in porridge.

¹ Obviously, by this, I mean more seriously wrong than usual.

² See 1.

Max writes:

I wanted to do Ang justice in an article about why you ought to vote for her in GUFF. I've been sitting here for an hour or so and as I write I've deleted several paragraphs about potatoes, *Red Dwarf* and Liverpool. I tried to do a funny riff on being a Brownie leader, looked up ancient posts to alt.tv.red-dwarf, and tried to summarise her down-to-earth approach to life. I wanted to be entertainingly wry in a summary of how we came to meet, and find a clever literary device to guide you through an introduction to Ang. And I've failed because what it comes down to is: 'She's my friend; I want her to win the race.'

So, instead I'll simply present you with an introduction and tell you *why* Ang is one of my oldest friends. We met via alt.tv.red-dwarf somewhere around 1995. Ang was one of the stalwart members of the newsgroup when I first stumbled onto usenet and she was a prolific poster. For a good while it was a group with a strong community feel. Anyone who has moved around usenet or web forums will be aware that such communities grow out of an anarchic state where leaders can only take charge by proving themselves. It doesn't take a lot to prove oneself for the most part: take charge of a little bit of admin, make some firm decisions and tell people what to do, and suddenly you're in charge. I organised IRC sessions and Ang took charge of the FAQ. Together, with input from others, we started a tradition of group members meeting in person; we probably met for the first time over a burger at a meeting place at some station somewhere. We used to go to Tamworth to play the arcade games and the bowling alley, and Liverpool for the wonders of Quasar, bowling, and giant climbing frames at Pleasure Island.

I'd hesitate to say that Ang enjoys organising things – I wouldn't like to be accused of it myself – but she has a knack for taking charge and getting things done. She once went along to help out a Brownie leader who promptly quit, leaving her in charge. Years later she's slowly extracting herself from all her responsibilities to the district and high-ups in the Guiding world.

It's this kind of thing that makes me sure that Ang would be a great delegate in terms of handling admin after a GUFF trip. When things need doing, she gets them done, and she's way better than I'll ever be on the self-discipline front.

The problem here is that I'm painting a picture of a rather serious character, which isn't the case at all. Ang introduced British fandom to the concept of description in the form of interpretative dance, talked me into co-creating a fanzine named *Gnat's Testicles*, and wrote entertainingly on the subject of fish euthanasia. She's well read and more than willing to lend a hand. She was a part of James Bacon's YAFA (Young Adult Fun Activities) team, running programming for kids at the 2005 Worldcon, and is helping with promotional work for this year's small fun convention, Year of the Teledu. Suddenly I find that I've seamlessly segued back into 'Isn't she good at organising?'. And she is, but she's also keen on growing her own veg, cooking, reading, theatre, cats, jumping around on dancemats, and potatoes.

She's the sociable type who arrives at a convention and gets chatting to the next person in the check-in queue. She's generous with her time and effort but won't be taken

advantage of, and she's a great traveller who will just as happily visit the local historical landmarks as sit around nattering at a pub meet.

Having visited Australia in the dim and distant, I think that Ang would love the laid-back atmosphere I experienced, and I'm sure that the antipodeans will find her a most congenial candidate for the role of European ambassador.

The thing is, Ang is my friend, and she has been for years. I want her to win because she is my friend. But it's a circular argument. If she weren't worthy of winning the race then chances are whatever made her unsuitable for that would have put a dent in our friendship years back. It's easy to drift away from a contact you mainly see online, and I only catch up with Ang in person once or twice a year. But she's my mate – I want her to be yours, too.

A book is for life, not just for Christmas

(from *More Balls 2*, March 2005)

While browsing the 'prepare and bring' section of the Paragon 2 website I find that I could 'find and practise reading your favourite bit of Tolkien'.

I think I have a favourite bit of Tolkien: the Council of Elrond segment in *Fellowship of the Ring*. Unfortunately, as it's about five years since I read the book, my recollection is based on the films, and what makes a good piece of cinema isn't, necessarily, the greatest piece of literature.

I should really know what my favourite part of the novels is, though, because until a few years ago I had a copy of *LoTR* and I would read it through once every couple of years. This copy I'd got for Christmas in 1983 as, being on a child's library ticket, I couldn't read *LoTR*, firmly placed in the adult section¹.

I'd like to say that then, at the age of 12, I romped through *LoTR*. Sadly I'd be lying. I got through *Fellowship* fairly quickly but by the middle of *The Two Towers* I was starting to find the elvish singing a chore and by the dull trudge through Moooooordoooooor I'd given up, skipped to the last few pages and then moved on to an Agatha Christie novel. It was two or three years later before I tried to read it all the way through again. By now I was able to appreciate the power of the Mordor section, tolerate random appearances of elves and just *not read* the poetry.

By my late twenties *LoTR* and I had a relationship. We had bonded beyond the normal bounds of woman and book. Every time I re-read the novel I found something new to enjoy – hell, by now I even took time to try and read the songs. I wouldn't have classified myself as a Tolkien fan – I hadn't reached the heady heights of speaking elvish for example – but the book was resonant with memories. Not least because books are the few birthday and Christmas presents I've kept from my childhood.

When the first film was released and someone I knew asked if I had a copy of the book I'd answered yes before I realised what this answer could potentially mean. The next question was, 'I've never read it; can I borrow it?'

<pause for dramatic effect>

Some people would say 'no' immediately and firmly. Other people would say 'no', but apologetically, maybe explaining that while they trusted their friend the book had so much emotional meaning that they couldn't lend it out. Maybe other cowardly people would say 'yes' when they meant no and then, later, pretend to have lost the book.

¹ I've been meaning to check if this is still the case.

I'm not that quick-witted and, anyway, she was a good friend. Just in case, as I passed her the book, I told her how it was a present to me when I was a teenager and meant a lot to me.

Months came and went. I casually asked if she'd started it. She'd not had time, she told me. A year passed. By now I'd moved desks in work and I was no longer working on this particular project but I still saw my friend occasionally. On one of these occasions I asked if I could have my book back because I wanted to read it again before the release of the next film.

'I gave it back to you, didn't I?'

Oh, how these words drove a stake right through the heart of our friendship. She'd obviously lost the book – she'd certainly never passed it back to me. The fact that someone I thought of as a friend would treat a book so carelessly – a book that I'd already said had been a present from my parents – shocked me. I was doubly upset that she couldn't be honest about it, and it was a blow that our friendship never recovered from.

The saddest thing is that she probably has no idea of how upset I was, and even if she did she'd never be able to understand it. I mean, it was just a book, after all.

Quick questionnaire

(from LiveJournal, 18 January 2003)

What do you do to make money? What I'm told. Write simple webpages, make simple databases, if I'm lucky do some research.

Do you like it? I oscillate.

Look to your left: Cupboard, radio (off), box of tissues, decorated glass, 'to do' letter rack. With fanzines in. And my correspondence. Must do that.

Look to your right: Shelves. Vase with plastic tulips (from Amsterdam), Tetley Tea men, BarbieCam, money box, CDs, videos (including half of *Babylon 5*), printer paper, magazines.

Which book has changed the way you live? In 1989 I read a copy of *The Selfish Gene*. I chose my degree based on that. Also, sadly, I wouldn't be in fandom at all if I hadn't picked up and read *Armageddon: the Musical* by Robert Rankin. In terms of how I do it, rather than what I do, I'm not sure there is just one.

Have you ever left someone you loved? No.

Has someone you loved ever left you? Yes.

The president has asked to see you; what do you say to him?

'I hope you are paying for the flight... Sir.'

A beautiful woman/man is over at your apartment; what music do you put on? Anything they can find that they like. It's never happened so I've not had to think about it.

What is your favourite poster/artwork in your apartment/house? A tapestry my Granddad did when a prisoner of war.

Behind your back people call you: I dread to think. Probably disorganised and bossy.

Had you an army, which country would you invade? I wouldn't. They could stay here and damn well like it.

Unusual stuff I have done

Walked along the Millenium Bridge when it was still wobbly.

Been photographed in the birthplace of Vlad Dracul making comedy pointy vampire teeth.

Fell into a cow while walking down a ski-lift route in Romania.

Worked as a bouncer (yes, really, little me).

Thrown a sheep over a fence in Wales.

Fud

(from LiveJournal, 11 July 2002)

If anyone ever looks at my LJ interest page they will see, as Max pointed out, that I have potatoes listed. In common with Vincent O'Mally I believe that the potato is god's own true chosen food.

Tatties are unrivalled in taste and variety. Not only that, they are at home on every plate. A potato is one of the few vegetables that can be eaten at breakfast, dinner and lunch. The potato is comfortable combined with fish, meat, other veg or cheese to make a complete meal.

If the potato has a fault, it is the fact that it rarely comes pre-packaged in an easy-to-use form. A forgivable sin, as all other starch products suffer from the same fate.

Today I had me a revelation. Rice, in sealed packets, that takes two minutes in the microwave. The potato is going to have to work hard to elevate itself into top spot again.

Things I wish I hadn't said, part 34098755.

(from LiveJournal, 9 September 2003)

'It's embarrassing that my drawers always smell of bananas.'

I seem to have bananas on the brain

(from LiveJournal, 2 June 2003)

Top tip: if particularly fine weather is forecast, and you are taking a long weekend away from work, remove bananas from desk drawers before you leave. The resulting bananary smell, while not offensive to you, may cause a professor who visits your office to back away in horror.

Desk drawers and window now open. Bananas being eaten as rapidly as decency (and digestion) allows.

Bananas featured heavily in my weekend. An unexpected bonus at the Dublin hostel was free breakfast. One coffee/tea, one carton juice, one muffin and a banana! You can't say that we don't live life to the full.

The Fennel Countdown

(from LiveJournal, 21 July 2003)

All I wanted was one measly bulb.

Tesco had no fennel, but did have a maniacal evangelist outside with a megaphone. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but wandering round after young girls shouting that they are goddess sinners because their shoulders are showing counts as harassment. No? The police obviously felt not because when I wandered past an hour later he was still there.

Sainsbury's had no fennel. It had very little else, too, so I wonder about the viability of the store in the future.

Matas had no fennel, but did have some interesting vegetables that I can't even begin to guess at. It also had a long queue so I changed my mind about buying jasmine tea.

The fruit and veg shop on Bold Street *did* have fennel. It also had fantastic looking watermelons which I couldn't buy because I'd never be able to carry them back. Excited, I grabbed a couple of bulbs and skipped to the till. Where, comically and sadly predictably, I found I had no money in my purse.

Shame. Embarrassment. Walk to nearest cashpoint. Return. Shame.

I got myself a garden

(from LiveJournal, 6 April 2003)

Well, three pots and a hanging basket at the front of the terrace.

I'd always been resistant to the idea of pots. While I accept a hanging basket as appropriate adornment for a terraced house, I think that setting out a garden where there is no space to set it is pushing it a bit.

BUT: My neighbours have all placed pansy-stuffed pots outside their houses and so why, goddam, shouldn't I? Especially when I spot a plant I really like. Particularly when that plant needs a good deal of sunshine and I know it won't get it in the yard. Home I trot with my trained Micklemas Daisy and a couple of companion planters. I spent a happy half-hour in the yard arranging my purchases – constantly supervised by Caroline who is trying to shield the blooms from almost certain decapitation.

Eventually I am ready to go public with my display. Within two minutes my next-door-but-two neighbour is complimenting me on the daisy. I start to worry; this is a man who is known to knock on doors asking for money and whose son has stolen my car aerial. Twice. Then, a half-hour later, I spot another neighbour's daughter *picking* the flowers. Luckily her Mum got to her before I got out of the house.

I give my little piece of England a week.

Chat-up lines

(from LiveJournal, 3 April 2002)

Many years ago I was a vivacious and attractive young woman. Being of the curvy type (before putting on three stone) with long and curly dark hair, I was the subject of the attention of many young men.

Those days are over now, although I can still engage a room if I put my mind to it.

Anyway, back in the dim and distant past I used to get a number of chat-up lines. These led me to construct a theory. I believed I was one of the 'beta-testers' for chat-up lines. Organised groups of men would be sent out into the clubs of the world, and see which lines were the most effective. Selected women would be fed a series of lines and see how they would respond. Some of the lines would be expected never to impress. Some of the lines would be expected to always impress. Some lines would simply be uncharacterised. I would be fed the uncharacterisable ones. How else can I explain having the following things said to me...

- During the Gulf War: 'I'm a Scud Missile, baby, and you are Tel Aviv.'
- In a Leeds nightclub: 'I bet I can shove my fist right up your arse.'
- In Liverpool: 'I've heard you are a microbiologist. I have this rash on my penis I would like you to look at.'

I'm not the only person I know who has suffered in this way. My favourite was my friend Helen who was asked, 'Do you know how to roll a toke?' Calculated to impress, that one.

If I look surprised to see you at Eastercon...

(from LiveJournal, 15 April 2003)

...Don't be alarmed. It is the result of a rather harsh eyebrow waxing, and not genuine shock.

Smug, thy name is Rosin

(from LiveJournal, 26 August 2002)

I remember boasting to someone on Saturday that I have no household spider problem. That was until today.

I came home from the weekend away to find that, against explicit instructions, Caroline had closed the cat-flap. Patsy was having none of it, and so I have been wedging it open slightly in the direction she needs to travel hoping to encourage her. Tonight she sat in the kitchen for a while and then disappeared. 'Aha,' thought I, 'she has used the flap.' I stuck my head around the corner.

Patsy was right in the corner of the kitchen, staring intently at the bin. This is not unusual: when it comes to staring my cat is a master. However, it is usually the door, or the window, or me, not the household refuse. I took a closer look and also switched on the light.

It's fair to say that at this point all hell was let loose. A spider that I can only describe as a 'fat bastard' leapt out from behind the bin. I jumped back, the cat jumped back, and the spider ran toward the living room. Caroline is a committed arachnophobe and jumped on top of her chair and screamed. This stopped the spider in its tracks and it headed back for the cooker.

I like spiders, but this was far too big to have in the house. Caroline had broken into a sweat and it was driving the cat to make strange mewling sounds at the oven.

What should I do? It was too big to contain under a glass and I don't think Caroline's nerves could cope. I decided that I would spray insect killer under the cooker but before I could reach for the can the spider reappeared and started, well, sauntering toward the living room.

The cat ran up the stairs. Caroline jumped back onto the chair. I hit the spider with an issue of *Heat*.

If only there had been more celebrity news in the past week. The spider was merely stunned and when I tried to pick it up in some kitchen towel sprang back to life. Madness overtook me, and I hit it again and again with the glossy weekly until the body was completely flat and detached from three of its legs.

I hope that doesn't happen again.

Too dopey to live

(from LiveJournal, 6 January 2005)

SLAM!

And I look down at the keys in my hand to find they open my office, two partition doors and the other biosciences building, but not my front door or my car. Through the window I can see the cat sitting next to the keys and meowing at me. Not for the first time I wish I had a border collie I could train to push the keys through the letterbox to me, instead of a cat whom I can rely on to helpfully lick herself.

I have my mobile phone, however, and so call my keyholder (Dad). First I try the home number which I'm not very hopeful about as Mum is getting a check-up this morning and Dad is with her.

No answer.

I try Dad's mobile phone. It's switched off, which comes as no surprise as it's *always* switched off (or in the boot of the car).

I try Mum's mobile phone which I bought for Dad to buy for her for Christmas. Bear in mind that she mentioned to me she wanted one. It's switched off.

I call work and tell them I'll be late. I wouldn't normally bother but I've no idea how long it will take me to track down my parents. I start walking to their house.

On the way the Pads pass me in the car and in conversation I establish that Dad hasn't got his phone with him (because it's a short journey and he's with Mum) and Mum hasn't got her phone with her (because it's a short journey and she's with Dad). Now I know how people feel when they try and contact me and I haven't got my phone with me. I'm only a half-hour late. It could have been worse.

Just one drink

(from LiveJournal, 12 September 2002)

So, out we went for just one drink.

The Three Sisters on Cowgate seems to be the only pub in Edinburgh that I can find, although on this occasion the taxi driver found it. So named because it is three pubs in one (or so I have been told; our native Lilian Edwards could tell me otherwise, I suppose) it was, we thought, quiet for a Monday night. It was also the pub quiz night, and, even better, two for the price of one. So one drink became two, and a quiet drink became a competition.

I can't explain what happened next. Maybe it was the lack of sleep. Maybe it was the couple of swiftly consumed drinks. Whatever it was, when the DJ asked for volunteers Pauline and Anthea jumped up. We won our first two bottles of Bud. Which we drank. Then we got another round in. Then another pause in the quiz, another volunteer wanted. Anthea got up again. We won another bottle of Bud.

Can anyone see the pattern here? DJ asks people to do something stupid and then someone from my team does it. I wonder if it continues.

It is now 12. The pub quiz has finished, and the marks are collated. What is the worst thing that can happen if you go to a quiz in a pub in a strange town? Yup, winning it. Except that isn't the worst thing. The worst thing is drawing with someone else and then having to do a tie-breaker.

So, as the one person left who hadn't done anything I was sent up to represent the pride of our team.

The challenge? 23 pence in small change from my ass to a glass. The person with the highest value in the receptacle walks away with pride, and with 24 bottles of Bud.

Round one. My opponent shoots. He misses. I walk to the glass with apprehension. Clenching, I lower myself to the glass. The crowd is hushed. Anthea holds her head in her hands. I release.

It's a total miss. Both competitors must shoot again.

The enemy tries a new position. This time he attempts a hand-aided shot; it fails. Coins all over the floor... and the pride of Liverpool University relies on me and my ass dexterity. The crowd is now so silent you can hear a pony drop. Pauline and Anthea clutch at each other as we see 24 bottles of Bud disappearing. All I can think is: 'I don't want to have to do this again.'

The atmosphere is stifling. Even the bar-junkies have stopped to watch me squat.

I limber up slowly, re-position my feet, and bend slowly. At what I judge to be a good distance (i.e close enough so that I have a chance to be over the glass but not so far that I fall down and have to visit Accident and Emergency), I unclench.

One by one the coins fall. One by one the coins land in the glass. VICTORY! The crowd erupts; Anthea screams. I throw

my fists into the air and drink the adulation of the crowd. The quiz master shakes my hand: 'No one has ever done that before!'

We walk home happy, singing as we go, '24 bottles of Bud on the wall, 24 bottles of Bud.'

On Opera

(from LiveJournal, 24 July 2002)

I was called uncouth today, which isn't really fair. I am fairly couth, yet make an effort to seem uncouth as it saves disappointment in the long term.

'What has this to do with Opera?' I hear the last person still reading cry. Well, my little bored companion, I shall now elucidate.

I don't 'like' Opera. I say this in much the way that I say I don't 'like' children¹. In my experience (and I freely admit it is a limited one) Opera, like Shakespeare, is best approached with some idea of the back plot. Maybe I am a hideous philistine but sometimes, just sometimes, I need to be told where the jokes are. This is not – never, *no* – an invitation for the whole show to be translated word for word. Most Opera, when you take it to minutiae, is incredibly boring². I remember going to see a performance of *Yolande* and being completely bored by it once I heard the English translation. Now there was something that was obviously uncouth.

So a friend of mine is appearing in a 'little-performed Opera'.

Does this ring alarm bells with you? Does it say 'don't go and see this, it is a pile of Don Giovanni'? It certainly does with me. Here is a summary of the plot:

Emilia di Liverpool (Emilia of Liverpool)

Gaetano Donizetti. *Dramma semiseria* in two acts. 1824. Revised in 1828.

Anonymous libretto based on Vittorio Trento's *Emilia di Laverpaut*, after a play by Stefano Scatizzi.

First performance at the Teatro Nuovo, Naples, on 28 July 1824.

The opera, with the alternative title of *L'eremitaggio di Liverpool* (The Hermitage of Liverpool), set in the entirely fictional Lancashire mountains abutting on Liverpool, allows Emilia, seduced and now penitently working in a hermitage, to marry her lover Federico, after the harsh intervention of her father, Claudio di Liverpool, and consequent violence have been avoided.

So there you see. All of the essential ingredients of Opera but set in Liverpool. Any idea *now* of why it is little performed? I am all in favour of raising the profile of the provinces (apparently in the original score of the Opera Liverpool is described as 'outside London') and it is refreshing to see a reference to Liverpool from so long ago (but let us remember that in the late 17th century/early 18th Liverpool was an international port) but don't let it be through something that is so crap it is rarely staged!

I don't think that I will go to the show.

¹ People will now shout at me: 'But you do like children; you do Brownies.' Yes, I enjoy the company of most children as individuals but I find some children highly amusing, some highly irritating, some invigorating and some drive me crazy. I don't, however, like 'children' as a group. I don't automatically take, for instance, to children I don't really know. The same is applied to Opera.

² Although I think this idea is based on reading Terry Pratchett's *Maskerade*.

A short and probably nonsensical album review

(from LiveJournal, 30 July 2004)

The current 6Music trailer on Radio 2 involves naming the albums that you'd replace first if your collection was stolen or destroyed:

Tango In The Night – Fleetwood Mac: Probably the album I've already shown the most dedication to, in terms of buying copies. My first copy was in vinyl but was scratched within a year of purchase. Then I bought a copy on tape which sat in my car for the next ten or so years. About four years ago I finally picked up a copy on CD. I love the cover.

Welcome To... – The Beautiful South: The first CD I ever bought. 'Song For Whoever' had shot up the charts; I'd found I'd identified with the poppy sarcasm of the hit, so I made a purchase on faith, hoping the rest of the album was as good. I need not have worried: the album was fantastic and, even better, 'Song..' paled placed next to 'Woman In The Wall'.

Kite – Kirsty MacColl: I bought this as a tape in Woolies' bargain bin. I think it cost me 99p. When I think about why I love this album I guess I could talk about the politics of the lyrics, or the diversity of style and rhythm, but really it's because I know all the words and can sing along and dance. This is another album I eventually bought as a CD. Kirsty – so much talent lost.

Workers' Playtime – Billy Bragg: By the early '90s I'd joined Britannia and *Don't Try This At Home* had arrived in my mailbox one week. A few months later I found *Workers' Playtime* in HMV in town and brought it home. Of my selections this is the only one that makes me want to point it at people, shout, 'Do you own this? If not, why not?' and march them out to buy a copy. This album makes me happy, angry and sad, sometimes all at the same time. I may not always agree with what Billy says but, bigod, I like the way he says it.

Different Class – Pulp: It's out of the late '80s and smack bang into the middle of the '90s. At the time I was slightly depressed over the state of music – I was never a big 'britpop' fan – plus it looked like my favourite band at the time was going to break down³. What on earth was I going to do? Hooray for Pulp and the bouncy *Different Class*. Bounce bounce bounce and bounce. Oh, and as amusing as it may be, the Shatner cover of *Different Class* isn't a patch on the original.

Near misses: *Bookends* by Simon and Garfunkel; *Wild!* by Erasure; Queen, *The Platinum Collection* – as I deliberately excused 'best ofs'; and *Tropical Brainstorm* by Kirsty MacColl.

NB: I have 'better' stuff in my collection, things that received greater critical acclaim or that I appreciate as a better assembled LP; it's just that these are my *favourites*.

Note to self:

(from LiveJournal, 2 June 2004)

Next time you lay your head on the desk in a fit of work-related despair, try not to hit the keyboard with your nose.

³ Instead they got a new singer and we got a succession of 'OK' albums by The Beautiful South after that. In my opinion it's only with *Gaze* they return to the early form.

Hair affair

(from LiveJournal, 28 October 2002)

Anyone walking into the bathroom now would think that *Psycho* had been recreated. There is dark red hair dye on my pyjama top, on the towel that I wore over the top to 'protect' it, on the sink, on the bath, on the shower curtain and on the tiles.

This is because I decided that I didn't want to pay to have my hair coloured. It costs four times as much to have the same thing done in the salon that you can do at home with a handy kit. Simple vanity. It can't be hard; you just put the chemicals on your hair. I've worked with chemicals, I've had hair for thirty years. I should be able to do this with my eyes shut.

I'd forgotten why I'd started having colours done in a salon.

The first problem is choosing your hair colour. Do you want wash-in, semi-permanent or permanent? Being blessed with richly brown, almost black hair that decision is already made for me. I can't colour my hair with anything else but a permanent dye. Then you have to decide on the colour – remembering that it will be permanent. This was a very long process. Vibrant red or copper? Light brown or plum? I remembered back to the last days of home hair dye – blackcurrant, was it? I decided that I would be cautious and go for a darker colour; I'll save copper for another day, preferably one when I haven't work to go to 12 hours after I dye my hair.

I bought a bottle of Gordon's Edge to fortify myself and then a Terry Pratchett book to comfort myself, placed them in the lounge and took my life-changing hair product into the bathroom, confident that a mere 20 minutes later I would appear radiantly glowing with hair health.

Ten minutes later I got the gloves on.

Working out how to deploy the developer and colour was a treat, as was squirting it at my hair, missing and hitting the inside of my ear. At this point I gave up on the 'slowly section' hair advice (lest I be too) and squirted all of the bottle on the top of my head.

Don't do this. Purple streaks down the face are never attractive.

A good evenly distributing later I got to watch ten minutes of Adam Hart-Davis before the rinsing began. I managed to miss my head with the shower and soak one side of my streaked top. This was how the bath tiles got covered in dye. I rinsed until the water ran clear, was about to run off and then remembered I had to condition my hair.

The most gloriously comical point was when I got the 'ultra intensive' conditioner in my eye and groped around like one of the undead looking for the scarred towel. Thereby proving that I *can't* dye my hair with my eyes shut, after all. Caroline then insisted that she wanted to see the colour before she went to bed, so I dried it quickly, not even bothering to smooth it with my fingers.

I have a big purple bog brush on the top of my head.

Hairy stuff

(from LiveJournal, 8 May 2004)

Anyone who has seen me lately will have noticed, I imagine, the unruly mop of curly hair on my head. After a few years of short hair I had decided to grow it again: I was tired of hairdressers cutting it just not right.

I haven't seen the inside of a salon since the beginning of February and today I reached a goal, of sorts. I can now pull the top of my hair back into a 'council-house facelift'. Go me. I'm off down to the shops in my pyjamas.

Drawbacks of drawn-back hair

(from LiveJournal, 8 May 2004)

'What are you doing, Amelia?'

'I like these shoes.'

'Do you want me to take your trainers off so you can wear them?'

She nods and I bend down; then she says, 'Are you Angela?'

'Yes I am, sweetie. Is it my hair that confused you?'

(quietly) 'Yes.'

Well, she's only two.

Miss Malta

(from LiveJournal, 14 June 2002)

Sometimes strange things just happen to me.

The first week of the holiday was relatively incident-free; however, on the Monday of the second week a whiteboard appeared in the hotel lobby: 'Hotel Topaz welcomes Miss Italy – Malta'. Yes, our holiday hotel was base camp for a Miss World preliminary. On Tuesday morning we had our first sighting of these 'beauties'.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the first human clones are alive and walking among us. In black stilettos. And tiny tiny shorts that barely cover their arse cheeks. The process seems to be lacking in a number of areas. Although physically perfect the proportions are smaller than normal, and the brain size severely depleted. In fact, the brain is so small that these doll-like waifs thought it was amusing to set the hotel fire alarm off on Wednesday evening.

I'll never forget the sight of the security guards 'keeping an eye on them' the following evening. It needed two of them to check that the china figures didn't do it again.

On reflection...

(from LiveJournal, 13 July 2003)

Trying to disentangle the washing line at 10 PM on a Sunday in a nightshirt was not my best idea.

PS: a stepladder was involved.

Roundabouts and me

(from *More Balls*, December 2004)

I consider myself a pretty good driver as does, I suppose, every other driver on the road until they find themselves with a 12 month ban. Supporting my conceit is a clean driving license, car insurance I've not made a claim on since established 12 years ago¹ and the fact that my Dad will let me drive his new car.

I have made mistakes. Who hasn't driven the wrong way up a one-way street? Or realised after a half-hour of driving you've no lights on? Or forgotten to put the car into gear when parked on a hill? These, however, are isolated incidents where I didn't get caught and (more importantly) nobody got hurt.

¹ Sod's law. Within a few weeks of writing this my car was broken into and the stereo stolen.

Not so isolated, sadly, are my encounters with roundabouts¹. For some reason I can get onto a roundabout with no problem at all but feel disinclined to leave by the correct exit. This is a slightly different situation to that experienced by my friend Brendan who has a problem accepting he is faced with a circular junction. One particularly foggy night Bren drove right over the middle of a roundabout, and not one of those wishy-washy painted on the road things, either. This had a kerb around it, a flower bed in the middle, and handy pointing signs around it explaining the direction you should go. Never before, nor since, have I been in a car when the passengers screamed in such perfect union. To the man's credit he did miraculously exit at the correct place.

Back to my problem of over-attachment. Missing one's exit isn't really that much of a problem on a normal roundabout – you just drive around in circles until the correct exit reappears. Taking the *wrong* exit isn't that horrific either; you just have to find a side road to turn around in and head back the way you came. Difficulties occur, however, when the roundabout has a more specialised approach to traffic management...

The One-Way System: The entrances and exits to the roundabout are one-way only: the most common example of this being the motorway junction. Taking the wrong exit here leads to a long journey either back in the direction you originally came, or through unknown countryside. Eventually you find somewhere to turn but, inevitably, it's Crewe, or in a field outside a farmhouse with an unappreciative bovine audience.

The Hidden One-Way System: It looks like a normal two-way road when you leave then WHAM! You are entering a bus lane and are about to commit a serious traffic violation. The example that immediately springs to mind is junction 10 of the M6, the road junction outside The Quality Hotel in Walsall. What should have been a ten minute drive to a local Travel Inn turned into a 20 minute whirl of death. I think I entered and exited at least five roundabouts but at least one of those was the same junction twice.

The Roundabout That Is Actually A Sophisticated Mantrap: The late '90s. A young woman is travelling on the A19 to a party in the outskirts of Newcastle. To reach her destination she is obliged to use the Tyne Tunnel. To her horror, after paying to exit the tunnel she is immediately faced with a roundabout and, predictably, misses her exit. Luckily for her missing the exit means she can drive right round and... DISASTER! This is a roundabout with rigid directionality, more a spiral than a circle, if you will. At *this* roundabout you are fed down a 'last chance' exit and right back into the tunnel.

Heep!

I had two choices. I could drive back through the tunnel, turn round at the other end and come back through, paying again for using it, *or* I could stop a handy tunnel patrol person and ask if there was any other way of getting out without, well, paying another pound. Oh, how I wish I'd chosen the first option!

It turns out that the way to get back out of the Tyne Tunnel traffic if you enter it in error is for lights to flash, barriers to drop, and you to drive red-faced past the halted cars, mouthing sorry and trying to make your pink Punto as small as possible.

Then you very, *very* carefully select the right exit.

On the bright side, the telling of the tale, complete with cutlery and cruet accompaniment, did provide entertainment for my friends over dinner. It also amused the waiting staff and other customers in the restaurant.

Cars and screaming are never a good combination

(from LiveJournal, 3 August 2004)

Last night a bus nearly hit me on the driver's side. It was not at all my fault; I was driving at 32 MPH on a main road when the bus pulled out from the side road without looking in my direction. Now, I'm not used to cars nearly hitting me, and so I swerved (thankfully. If I'd braked he would have hit me) and screamed quite loudly. This didn't do Caroline's eardrums much good and she pointed out the horn is thought to be much more effective in those situations.

Tonight a thunderstorm started just as I was driving home. WHOOSH! A fork of lightning right in front of the car. I screamed again. Caroline was a passenger, again, and made the observation featured on the subject line. She claimed my in-car screaming was becoming habitual.

I forced her to buy a house. I can force her to buy a car too. MUHAHAHAHAHA.

LARD!

(from LiveJournal, 22 November 2004)

I have a sudden craving for a fried egg butty. It's probably the smell of lard wafting up the stairs.

Lard. Did you know that there is a Europe-wide lard shortage? I didn't, until my trip to Sainsbury's on Saturday when I found the lard shelves empty and a sign a) outlining the lard shortage and b) extolling the virtues of vegetable shortening (or whatever the alternative to lard is. I'm never sure).

I buy about one block of lard a year, about now normally, to make shortcrust pastry for mince pies. I never even knew it was gone. *sniff* I'll have to keep a watch on the lard shelf and get a block when I can.

I also didn't realise how bad the Branston Pickle situation was until Saturday, when one could buy Branston brand pickled onion, beetroot and cabbage but not the signature pickle. Not small jars, not large jars, not even the tiny chunked version ideal for sarnies. You could buy just the sauce, which I suppose would do if I was desperate. I estimate I've about three sarnies' worth of pickle in the fridge – maybe four if I use it sparingly. Branston claim that things will be back to normal before Christmas but perhaps I'll buy some piccalilli to go with my Cheshire cheese and keep my last few drops of Branston for an emergency.

What next? A flood in the Paxo factory? A mystery virus deadly to turkey? The sudden destruction of all the tapes of *It's a Wonderful Life*? Sir Cliff not releasing a single in the next few weeks? Can we cope with any further blows to our traditional consumer Christmas!

(from LiveJournal, 23 November 2004)

I was talking to Phil this morning about the lard, pickle and bovril crisis and Greg came back from town at lunch time with a block of lard for me.

Other women get flowers...

¹ I believe these are called traffic circles in other countries.

Slug Attack!

(from LiveJournal, 31 July 2002)

A few weeks ago I opened my kitchen drawer and pulled out a wooden spoon. This action was pretty unremarkable and happens almost weekly. What doesn't happen with the same regularity is finding a line of dried slime on the spoon.

'Uck!' I thought and rinsed the spoon. The rest of the drawer was investigated and the utensils washed, but an inspection the next day found no further evidence and I suspected it was a result of the washing up being left out¹.

On Sunday a wooden spoon was necessary for the stirring of my risotto. Dismay! Sid the Slug had been back and left another tell-tale sign of hot mollusc action. Steps would need to be taken and my first action was to inform Caroline of my suspicions.

'Uck,' she said, peering closely at the spoon she had just used to stir her casserole. I fought to keep a straight face and wondered momentarily if I should have told her earlier.

Nah.

Being such a woman of action it has taken me until today to research the issue and take steps. Salt and beer are the favourites, but I'd like to avoid putting anything down that the cat might eat/drink (also, I worry for myself with a saucer of beer on the kitchen floor. Caroline might come down in the morning and find me face down in it. God knows what would happen if she then poured salt on me). As the slugs getting into the kitchen drawer is the most upsetting part, I've taken the drawers and the bottom of the units off and poured salt down the back. If anyone else has any ideas then I'll be happy to hear them.

More true tales of slugs

(from LiveJournal, 1 August 2002)

Slug crime seems to be rife in the North West of England. Jean came into the coffee room today and told us a tale of property violation that beggars belief.

The (now) deceased was found *in* Jean's handbag, *eating* her satsuma, *just* this morning.

Be warned. Lock up your fruit. The slugs are coming

Christmas party

(from LiveJournal, 18 December 2004)

Favourite conversation of the night. Caroline and I are picking on David for unimportant reasons (that I can't really remember. I'm sure it was something to do with his boss wanting to kiss him).

David: Well, which one of us has had the most sex this year? Eh?

Caroline and I look bemused.

Me: Well, considering that you have a fiancée and Caroline and I both live at home with just our cats then that would be you, David.

David pumps the air in victory.

Caroline: It doesn't change the fact that I earn more money than you and she's smarter than you.

Me: I can't believe that your only comeback was 'I have more sex than you.' I'm not even convinced you mean with other people.

20 favourite films

(from LiveJournal, 1 August 2004)

I had to be quite strict with myself and only choose one film from some directors or with a particular leading man (James Stewart, actually). In chronological order:

Casablanca (1942): It's almost embarrassing to put this film in a list; it's such an old chestnut as a favourite film, but it is just perfect. A solid, believable story with a reluctant hero, villainous villains, a beautiful heroine 'with a past', and set against the backdrop of a world gone mad. Add the fantastic performances of the main players and it deserves to consistently hit the top ten of any film list.

Meet Me in St Louis (1944): Music! Dancing! Big Frocks! The Trolley Song! Those who think that *Love Actually* is sickly sweet should take a big dose of *Meet Me in St Louis* and know sickly sweet when they see it. I think it's fantastic but then I'm a sucker for a musical.

Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949): It was hard to choose my favourite Ealing Comedy but I finally plumped for this, not because of famous performance from Alec Guinness, but simply because of the rich dark humour of the script. You have to hang on every word delivered by Dennis Price (as Louis Mazzini, the would-be Lord D'Ascovne) as he slaughters his way through the family line.

Harvey (1950): Darn my self-imposed rules! In the attempt to not fill the list with little Jimmy Stewart, *Harvey* and *It's a Wonderful Life* couldn't both stay. I've gone with the rabbit. Simply as it's funnier than *IAWL* and I can get through it without drowning in my own tears.

Rear Window (1954): Another Stewart vehicle but cut me a little slack. The first Hitchcock film I ever saw and by far my favourite. A reminder that there is a little bit of the voyeur in all of us. It was a hard choice between this and *Vertigo*.

12 Angry Men (1957): About two years ago my brother saw this for the first time. 'Why haven't I seen this before?' he asked. 'It's brilliant.' The claustrophobic setting of the jury room, with the isolation of each juror enhanced by each having no name, gives this story such power. Every time Fonda convinces the first juror to change his mind I gasp. OK, I want to watch this right now.

Inherit The Wind (1960): I'm allowed another courtroom drama! This one is science, laddo! Based on the Scopes trial from the 1920s it's a pocket guide to evolution against creationism which could be dry to some, I suppose, except the performances of Spencer Tracy and Frederick March sizzle. Even Gene Kelly (who sounds terribly miscast as a school teacher) manages to pull up his socks.

To Kill A Mockingbird (1962): I'll stop with the lawyers after this. What do you want me to do? It's my favourite book and Gregory Peck is Atticus Finch. I dare you to watch the trial and not have the hairs on the back of your neck rise. Another box of hankies film.

The Jungle Book (1967): Remember when Disney made good movies all on their own? This is the *Shrek* of the '60s. Has a damn fine soundtrack too.

The Blues Brothers (1980): I've probably grown out of this a bit now but I have to be faithful to teenage Ang and remember this as the first film I ever saw that poked fun at Catholicism. I wouldn't like to completely blame my lapse of faith on Dan Ackroyd but I think it might have been related.

The Empire Strikes Back (1980): I had to choose one and so I chose this. 1) It has no Ewoks, 2) it has no scary black-clad dwarf things, and 3) we've decided just where the sexual tension is and damn it's good. Oh Harrison, Harrison, Harrison. What has happened to you?

¹ Yes, I am the sort of person who finds slugs on my kitchen units less disgusting than slugs *in* them.

Dead Poets Society (1989): There might be people out there who think I'm not very sensitive. Who maybe think I'm a bit cruel, possibly evil incarnate. If you ever watch this film with me you'd realise how close I am to dissolving completely into mush. Just typing the name made me choke slightly...

Mission Impossible (1996): Tom Cruise wearing tight black trousers and top dangling from the ceiling. I have nothing else to add. Oh, OK: Vanessa Redgrave as a supervillain.

Grosse Pointe Blank (1997): You're never alone with a John Cusack movie, particularly this one. I just love black comedy, particularly if it involves Hank Azaria. And Minnie Driver. And Dan Ackroyd.

Galaxy Quest (1999): This is just the greatest spoof movie I've ever seen. Again, it's a great ensemble cast and a perfect script. I think I'm particularly impressed with the casting of Sigourney Weaver, although Alan Rickman is perfect as the embittered thesp. It was released at just the right time, unlike the similar *Mystery Men* which I think would have got greater coverage if it had been released after the next film...

X-Men (2000): Hugh Jackman in very little dangling from anything.

O Brother Where Art Thou? (2000): Before Brad strapped on his thongs (sandals!) and walked us vaguely through the *Iliad*, George stuck on his false moustache and guided us through the *Odyssey*. Personally I prefer my Homeric epics to be all singing and dancing with a hint of Southern hospitality.

Miss Congeniality (2000): Look, it doesn't do anybody any harm and as rom coms go it's really quite funny.

The Others (2001): This is as close as I get to horror movies. It amazes me that this is rated a 12 in the UK. Yes, there is no actual violence, swearing or nudity, but it's fucking terrifying. It's on my list of films that I never want to watch on my own, even during daylight. Plus it's got a real plot twist, not like that silly *Sixth Sense*.

LOTR: Return of The King (2003): The one of the three I chose, simply as it is the last one I'd seen of the three. At some point in the future when I've sat and watched them all at once I may change my mind.

Wandering

(from LiveJournal, 19 May 2004)

I walked to the library this morning. It's only a 5-10 minute trip by the most direct route – over the field and through the cemetery – but one that I haven't taken regularly for years. When I was a kid I'd often walk there after school to swap my books but now my trips to the library are taken by car, on my way to, or from, somewhere else.

But the weather was pleasant this morning, I had nowhere else to be, I fancied the exercise, and I had the excuse of a book to return¹, so I walked to the library.

It's actually a quiet and pretty little walk during the day, if all the kids are in school. In the field I passed a pensioner walking her dog and the council groundsman preparing to cut the grass. I also, unthinkingly, walked right through a group of fledgling blackbirds, much to the dismay of Mum: she chirruped and strutted until I passed.

In the cemetery there was what looked like 100 young starlings hopping awkwardly in the longer grass. I imagine the groundsman would arrive as soon as the playing field was finished and their rich pickings would be destroyed. There

¹ *Quicksilver*, which I have now finished, and grudgingly admit is worth the struggle. I have now ordered *The Confusion*, much to the amusement of the librarian.

was also a Nissan Micra parked on the path by the derelict chapel, seemingly packed tight with pensioners. They'd gone by the time I walked past again; I wonder if they ever managed to extract themselves from the car.

When I was a teenager I'd run through the cemetery, or avoid it completely and walk along the main road. The rows of gravestones, the decaying flowers, the abandoned buildings – all these echoes of death creating a gothic symphony of horror in my imagination. I even thought there were bats. Bats! In the middle of Bootle!² Now if I feel anything at all as I pass the gravestones, it's a sort of peaceful sadness. Quite often I'll wander off the main path and read the inscriptions on the stones, particularly the older (and grander) ones from the late 19th and early 20th century, as I doubt they get any visitors now. Many of the older gravestones have been cracked and broken by passing bored youths, similar vandals to those who took out the clock faces with stones, I imagine, or carved their names in the wooden doors of the chapel.

One part of the cemetery that appears to remain vandalism-free – though whether this is through respect, vigilance, or constant clearing up I don't know – is the Baby Garden. This is a small, gated enclosure containing some benches and a memorial plaque for those children who have been lost before, during, or just after birth. I always feel cheered by the sight of this garden: it's a relatively new addition to the cemetery and a reminder of the progress that has been made in obstetrics. It's also, very obviously, a place designed as a celebration of life, rather than a morbid reminder of death.

January – official month of the leftover

(from LiveJournal, 18 January 2005)

I'm eating from the freezer for reasons of economy (I'm skint), good sense (if I eat all the manky leftovers from the freezer I can buy some nice stuff) and time (I keep forgetting to shop). Yesterday I had sausage (nyum), mash (nyum nyum) and onion and mushroom gravy. Tonight I had chicken and mushroom in peppercorn sauce (yuk) with rice and peas (nyum-ish). Tomorrow I'll probably have mackerel with the other bit of rice and peas and I predict it will be a 2 nyum meal.

The whole point of this roll call, apart from making a number of people on my friends list recoil in horror, is to tell you what Sue was cooking the kids for tea. She's also clearing out her freezer, for much the same reasons as me. As a result she was having frozen mixed veg with beef hotpot, Ian was having smoked haddock and a baked potato with homeopathic side order of veg³. Alex was having Southern fried chicken drumsticks with tomato sauce and poor Tasha got three vegetable fingers, veg and a bun. Amelia was having tea at my cousin's which just confirms my suspicion that she's inherited Mother's good sense.

There is no truth in the rumour I am engineering a flock of flying killer potatoes.

(from LiveJournal, 1 March 2005)

² A few years later I saw my first local bats. They lived in sea defences on the beach at Seaforth Docks.

³ Mum used to make Ian eat a certain amount of veg at every meal. He'd throw a tantrum if he got more than six peas, say, or three carrots. Looking at his plate tonight the trend continues.

Camping – one of my least favourite things

(from LiveJournal, 26 July 2004)

When I was younger I went camping twice. As an adult I've camped once.

The first time was a holiday with my parents in Wales. We met my Aunt there, who had a nine-man tent that was more a mobile home. This was fine except for the smelly toilet facilities (yuk!), the wasps (argh!) and the mole problem (huh?). I don't think I'll ever fully erase the sight of my Auntie flattening the floor with a mallet only for her to wake the next morning with a lumpy dining room again. It was like *Groundhog Day* combined with *Looney Tunes*.

My second camping experience was as a Guide at Scaresbrick, near Ormskirk. This was horrible. It rained and rained on the poor trapped Guides, squatting in our mouldy hard-to-assemble tents, in our wellies, and with our fat traps and raw sausage, showering with our puppy fat bodies hideously on display. I left Guides soon after that.

My most recent experience was as a Brownie leader, at Scaresbrick again (you'd think I'd learn). It was raining, unsurprisingly. I was cold and wet but this time I had to keep a stiff upper lip because I was in charge. I remember going home with jeans mud-stained above the knees and a vow to never camp with the Guides again.

I'm writing this here to remind myself that I do not like camping and camping does not like me.

Even though there are many places in the UK you would like to visit and it would be easier (and cheaper) to manage if you camped overnight, this is not a good idea. At the very least it would spoil everyone else's holiday as the inevitable downpour hit. So stop looking at places in Northumbria, Ang, and limit yourself to the North West, North Wales and Derbyshire.

There. Now don't make me have to talk like this to myself again.

More questions

(from LiveJournal, 30 January 2004)

Name five uses for a banana other than eating. Why would I want to do anything other than eat them! OK... flotation device for very small people, ineffective doorstep, fake vomit for grossing out friends, conversation piece, stand-in telephone receiver in emergency prop situations.

What's worse: people who think the Harry Potter books are the greatest pieces of literature of all time or people who think they can decide what others should be allowed to read?

I love the Harry Potter books but I wouldn't call them great literature. I agree with whoever said 'Even bad books are books and therefore sacred', so I don't think anyone has the right to tell other people what they read, write, watch or think.

Who would win in a fight between Kryten and Marvin (the paranoid android)? I can't imagine the situation where this would happen. Kryten, I think. He has a lot of anger to give.

What's the funniest thing that's happened at Brownies? Oh, a lot of funny stuff is comments by the kids or the adults making fools of themselves. Two things I remember that had me doubled over: we ran a fancy-dress competition and one of the girls padded out her chest and bum and came as me, and when we visited the aquarium a ray jumped out of the water in front of three of the girls and scared them to tears. I spent a lot

of time with my face hidden and my shoulders shaking that day.

If you were an animal what would you be? I would be a lemming and lead the revolution. Comrades! You don't *have* to jump.

Liverpudlian roots. What does this mean to you? Do you think it affects how others see you significantly? Now this is a question and a half and I sat and thought about it last night (while watching my *Buffy* DVD which may influence my answer a bit). My answer takes two parts, I think. Liverpool roots, firstly, to me means my family and I am very proud and very devoted to them, both my immediate family and the extended Catholic sprawl that comes from having parents with five siblings each. Secondly, it is the city that I choose to live in and I love it here. There are fantastic museums, galleries and architecture. We have a wealth of cinemas and theatres, restaurants and shops and fantastic variety of pubs and clubs.

I know that as a city we have problems, and I know that there are facts that can't be disputed, but for the most part they are the same problems that every large urban area suffers. I feel that the situation has improved significantly since the 1970s-'80s, the decade that spawned the 'car on bricks' jokes.

I don't think it affects how others see me; I know it does, from the 'jokes' I get (from friends and strangers alike) and the thoughtless comments I've had in work, at Guiding events, etc. Fortunately these aren't as many as they could or used to be, but they annoy me because they represent such lazy thinking. Sometimes they've made me feel physically sick because I am *not* a thief, neither are members of my family, and yet comments such as 'Well, 95% of you (scousers) are mostly honest' casually label me as such. Plus I'd never think that talking about stereotypes associated with other parts of the country is appropriate dinner conversation. Well, yes, some bloke who ripped you off about your building work had a scouse accent but *that wasn't me*.

I do realise I have a chip on my shoulder about it but I choose to growl instead of cower.

It's so unfair

(from LiveJournal, 28 January 2004)

Phil tells me that 'hunting them down and slaughtering them' is not an appropriate response to the question 'What should we do about the staff member who opened the latest virus attachment and had all the school mailing lists in their addressbook?'

Adventures in air conditioning

(from LiveJournal, 2 February 2005)

Air conditioning engineer has now been joined by electrician.

Circuit has been isolated.

Aircon system has been switched on.

Further investigation reveals that aircon system is linked to fire alarm system.

Electrician and aircon blow a fuse.

A few minutes later fire alarm goes off.

I know it's our regular test.

Aircon engineer doesn't.

Hilarity ensues.

S'evening...

(from LiveJournal, 11 February 2005)

...was John Hegley.

Now, I'm not what you would call a major Hegley fan as I'm not one for owning his books or tapes, but I do like to see him perform live, particularly in a nice small venue like The Everyman where he can belittle those who eat, talk or walk around during his show.

One of his 'things' is to ask people to write a short poem, joke or acrostic to win some paraphernalia. Today it was a CD. The question was...

What is the difference between God and a potato?

Some answers...

'I believe in potatoes.'

'3 cm.'

'Your daughter would be disappointed if you cut God in half for her to print with, plus it would be a bit messy.'

'Nobody has ever had their insurance claim denied due to Act of Spud.'

'God has eyes and is all-seeing while a potato has eyes and can see bugger all.'

'Mashed God, sausage and beans doesn't sound very appetising.'

'Nobody has ever fought a war over potatoes' (although that just shows someone who hasn't had dinner at Auntie Marie's when the roasties have been in short supply).

The winner picked by John was 'Nobody has ever burnt down the house after getting home from a club at 3 AM and trying to deep-fry God', although my personal favourite was 'One is the good shepherd while the other makes a good shepherd's pie.'

OK, I've just started giggling as I typed that. Time for me to polish off my hot toddie and go to bed.

Although this is as good a place as any to mention that I saw a sausage product called 'Wee Willie Winkies' in Iceland yesterday. I'm tempted to bring some with me to Eastercon to offer to the masses.

When everything just seems to go wrong

(from LiveJournal, 7 October 2002)

It should have been fun. Tonight was the (rearranged) trip to see *Lilo and Stitch* – an everyday tale of a young Hawaiian girl and her pet alien dog-thing – with the Brownies. Not just my Brownies, though: every other Brownie in the whole of Bootle and Litherland.

First problem. Actually a problem that had happened before the Brownie trip. The Division Commissioner had first announced the date a month ago, and then changed it a week and a half ago. Not a lot of time for everyone to decide if they would be there or not. I thought I would have 12. I might have 8, or I might have 15. I wouldn't know until the day.

Second problem. My young leader had 'forgotten'. And not forgotten in the 'oh, I'll get ready in a minute' way but in the 'Sorry, Claire isn't at home' way.

Three minutes later a text message came in from Caroline. Her terrible wisdom tooth infection¹, coupled with the poor

¹ When I came home on Sunday I discovered I was sharing a house with a hamster². This was amusing until I realised it could have a devastating effect on the efficient deployment of my plans for the Brownie week.

state of the rail network, meant that she wouldn't make it to the cinema. I was *on my own*. This was problem number three and it was a doozy.

It was *really* bad news. Cinemas are dark. Cinemas have toilets that are a fair way away from the screen. This cinema is going to have 150 Brownies other than my own all dressed the same. However, I was meeting the first girls in 20 minutes and the day had already been cancelled once. I gritted my teeth, hoped that something would happen to help me out, and drove to collect Brownie number one.

We had a chat in the car, mostly about how she was looking forward to going on holiday with the school³ and that the Brownies had been on *Blue Peter*, and she retuned my car radio to 'bad pop FM' or some such rubbish. After arriving we were soon joined by Brownie number two, who told me that the Brownies had been on *Blue Peter*.

Do you notice the theme? The Brownies had been on *Blue Peter*. I'll not repeat it after this, as it will be boring listening to every single girl telling me the same thing. It was nice that they had noticed though. Oh, and I saw it too.

Most of the kids' parents remembered that we were meeting over the road from the cinema, and after crossing the road (remember, I can take on even motorway traffic if the safety of the kids is at stake) we got them in. To discover that the film was about to start.

Problem four. I was told the film was starting 15 minutes later than that. I had parents who would turn up to collect their kids 25 minutes later than the film finished. Eeek!

We will now fast forward through the constant trips to the toilet (and that's just the leader), the noise, the shouting at people to sit still, the noise, the discovery part-way through that the drinks hadn't been handed out, the noise, the heat and the noise. Instead we will fast forward to the end because once again I was reminded why I find this so rewarding. Why you should embrace the unpredictability of change. If I hadn't been quite so crazy from sugar poisoning and worry I wouldn't have tried to cram 11 Brownies into my car. If I hadn't stuffed 11 Brownies into the Punto I wouldn't have enjoyed one of the greatest belly-laughs of my life. I also wouldn't have discovered that the suspension can actually handle 11 kids bouncing up and down and dancing to Darius and just how loud the radio will go.

Chasing paper

(from LiveJournal, 26 October 2004)

There is a one-day course at the university I would like to take.

The last personal development course I attended was a while ago and required me to write a short application involving my name, department, and date and name of the course, plus my boss's signature and a tenner returnable deposit.

The form I have to fill in now has me completing my objectives, how they relate to my work, and how my boss will know how I have met them; then my immediate boss has to write why they think I should go on the course and sign it, and then the head of department has to add comments and sign it.

It's a course in Time Management.

² I've just asked Caroline if what she has is a wisdom tooth infection. Even in her semi-conscious state she realised I am using her dental health to pad out my LiveJournal. She's not happy, but I say tough, she should have moved out quicker.

³ Apparently Brownie Holiday is better because there are no boys. She has a point, I feel.

My own special tardis?

(from LiveJournal, 19 March 2005)

The new cooker and new fridge freezer (now with added broccoli!) are doing very nicely, thank you, but the additions to the kitchen demanded an amount of reorganisation. Specifically the cupboard above the old fridge freezer needed to move walls, and space was needed in the cupboards for baking trays that used to live on top of the other cooker.

Real life has meant that I could only start this process today. Dad had put the single cupboard on the wall above the sink. I decided that this could now be the cupboard for my crockery and glasses, with little-used stuff going right at the top. Cereals can live on top of the fridge; flour, sugar and other baking stuff can go where the cereals used to be, and pasta and stuff where the *crockery* used to be, leaving a cupboard under the worktop that can be filled with the baking trays and potatoes which is the only veg I won't be storing in the new super-sized fridge.

Except when I came to move the plates into their new home I found they didn't fit. They are just a bit too big and the cupboard door sticks open. This is weird as the other cupboard was next to the one I'd just moved and they fitted in there. I opened and closed the door a few times just to make sure I wasn't imagining it but, yes, the cupboard door doesn't shut.

Being a born researcher I put the plates *back* in the original cupboard. What do you know? They don't fit there now, either. The door doesn't shut properly any more. Either the plates have grown (unlikely) or moving one of my cupboards has upset the fabric of space and time, at least on a local level. I can't believe it's a coincidence that we have had sun and warmth since the freezer was moved in on Wednesday.

Anyway, if you are experiencing freak weather conditions, the unexplained disappearance of trees or attacks of shop mannequins, I'm very sorry. Hopefully conditions will normalise if I can find a plate rack.

Gathering rain

(from *They Made Us Do It*, edited by Max, autumn 2002)

The fluffy white clouds that I woke up with this morning have gone. They have been replaced by a flat bank of grey wool; it's almost like a giant toddler has gathered all the clouds together and rolled them out for pastry. A slight purple tinge seems to promise rain – maybe not right now but soon. The trees outside are moving in time with a welcome breeze that is releasing some of the pressure of the heat and I find myself already missing the sun.

I've been bemused by talk of cold baths, electric fans and begging for rain. I enjoyed the sunshine this weekend and the gift it gave of leisure. Conversation at work focused on what people did at the weekend. No one was expected to say that they came to work and, of course, no one did. People tended to their gardens, walked out along the coast, visited relations or made lazy attempts at shopping. I started and finished a *Babylon 5* novel, painted a door and had a competition with my nephew over who could blow the most bubbles. I met friends, watched films and listened to concerts, but with none of my normal rush and bother. I sat in a circus tent at 10 PM in only a small denim dress and cursed the lady sat behind who couldn't survive without the aid of an hand-held electric fan. She seemed oblivious to the noise as she created her own private and pointless breeze.

Today, of course, it wasn't as pleasant while I was inside working – dreaming of icecream, and reading books in the

sun. The members of the lab had just melted away and I was alone in the heat for most of the day. I didn't achieve much until a lot later on, actually staying late after enjoying the onset of industry. At one point an impromptu water fight broke out outside the window between two youngish lads, each armed with a bottle of water. The normal contingent of sallow-eyed prostitutes had disappeared – I imagine the lethargic weather is bad for business. Even the traffic seemed slower, more calm (although I think that had more to do with the whores going AWOL than the weather calming tempers).

I will feel cheated if the storm breaks in the night. I've worked for it and I deserve to see it in all its glory, not curse it as I try to sleep through the drumming rain and rolling thunder. Worse than that. Maybe we won't have a storm at all? Maybe it will break out at sea, or in the hills, and miss completely the pancake-flats of Liverpool. We will watch the storm and floods that slash at the rest of the country and wonder what makes us so safe.

I last stood out in a thunderstorm when I was 15. I stood within running distance of shelter and felt the rain pound through my clothes. Rachel and Chris shouted at me from the subway but still I stood outside, not really caring how wet I got. I remember laughing as I felt the pressure release, smelt the tin in the air and tasted the sand whipped up from the coast. I enjoyed the laugh that I got from my friends – my curly hair plastered around my face and water dripping from the cuffs of my coat. 'You dickhead; c'mon, let's get home.'

My parents laughed less.

Theatre: *A Winter's Tale*

(from LiveJournal, 6 May 2005)

Normally I cut these reviews for the comfort of my readership but tonight I'm not going to. I didn't really enjoy the play – it's a pretty cheerless tale anyway and an all-male cast made it doubly dreary¹ – but I did enjoy my night out.

I am absolutely knackered and so I'm not going to be able to convey how funny tonight was, but please write your own script around this series of events:

- Arrive at Caesar's Palace just before 47 people.
- Who are German.
- Apparently out for a good night.
- And evidently members of a choir.
- Arrive at Playhouse for *A Winter's Tale*.
- Sit through tedious first half, occasionally gagging at spitting.
- And jumping at players running in from the back shouting.
- Beg companion to be allowed to go home.
- Refused.
- Hatch plot with woman sitting in front to leave husband with companion until realise we are both the drivers.
- Briefly amused by Autolycus.
- Cast member dressed as sheep enters from rear of the auditorium.
- Nicks woman's bag as he crawls past.

¹ From the icLiverpool site: 'All-male, because as Hall the younger points out: "That's how Shakespeare's plays were written. To have a man, not trying to ape the tone or physicality of a female, declare lines such as 'I have shown too much the rashness of a woman' creates a unique experience for the audience.'" All well and good but I venture, prithee, that in Shakespearian times the boys made sure they at least looked like women, and not some bloke who'd gone a bit crackers at Oxfam. Plus Hermione was plain beyond belief.'

- Clown then has to get bag from sheep – while remaining in character – and pass back to woman while muttering that they'd behaved all week.
- In related confusion another sheep falls off the stage.
- Rest of sheep are now hysterically laughing, as are audience who appear to have penetrated the glamour.
- Clown completely forgets his lines and is eventually prompted by audience member. Turns to sheep and says, 'At least *somebody* is paying attention.'
- At end of play realise that 'rarely performed' is theatre-speak for 'Not really that good'.

Last time this month – Theatre: *Jamaica Inn*
(from LiveJournal, 14 May 2005)

I love this book. I loved the play. Nothing more to say really.

After seeing umpteen plays in the past few months I think I have identified some current trends in theatre:

- 1) Puppets.
- 2) Random singing.
- 3) Sheep.

The woman I tried to leave with last week was there again with her husband, but this time left half-way through. Nobody fell off the stage.

Live8

(from LiveJournal, 3 July 2005)

Oooh. It doesn't half ache standing for 12 hours at my age.

I really enjoyed my time at Live 8. I was, I imagine, right in their target demographic so I guess I would. There were a lot of people I'm a fan of on the bill so of course they impressed, plus I was smart enough to realise before I got there that I was unlikely to see the stage so wasn't disappointed with my position in the park. The packed lunch was a good idea, too. I've just remembered I was really proud that we stayed right to the end.

Reading through comments here and talking to my parents I get the impression we had a better experience of Live 8 than the BBC ~~victims~~ viewers. For a start we only suffered a short bout of Fearné Cotton. We saw a lot of supplementary video and highlights from other concerts that I think home viewers missed (the crowd *rocked* to Bon Jovi from Philadelphia) and we couldn't see Jonathan Ross's suit.

Good stuff:

- Our choices. Our train got us there for 11.30, just right for getting in the queue early. Our hotel was right by the park so we could stay to the end without worrying about transport. Taking a packed lunch – it was murder getting around the park. Going first class on the train.
- Being sober. It was great watching other attendees get slowly drunk: particularly bad dancing and the guy who decided to shower the park with Quaker Oats.
- Lots of the acts. REM: I'm a fan but I was a bit worried about what I would get next week in Cardiff. Their performance yesterday reassured. Pink Floyd and The Who. Everyone, really, apart from those going to get slated below.

Bad stuff:

- The arsewipe on the train trying to tout tickets. He was wearing a Make Poverty History wristband, too, which just made it worse.
- The synching. Did the BBC bleep f-words?

- The Dido-exodus. This can be partially explained by people who'd been saving their space for three hours finally having to go for a piss, but not all. I took the opportunity to go and buy some merchandise, which was a shame because I missed the start of Youssou N'Dour.
- Completely fucked acts on stage. We all know who that is.
- Velvet ~~Goldmine~~ Revolver. Much of the crowd went 'huh?'
- The over-run. The crowd seriously thinned past 10.
- Mariah Fucking Carey. I almost feel I should write a separate entry devoted to the incredible irritation I feel at having to be exposed to this. From the 'sip of water' to the demanding of a mike stand. The crowd around me was not impressed. As Caroline said, 'There's never a sniper when you need one.'
- Macca and pals only doing the end of 'Hey Jude'. I *suspect* this is because of wrangling over who wanted to sing which bits, but I may just be being kind.

I know that most people would say Pink Floyd was the defining moment of the concert but I'm sad to say that George Michael walking on was mine. What can I say? I'm unashamedly a fan.

Oh, and looking at the other shows Germany and J'Burg looked like they were a *hoot*.

Bizarro World

(from LiveJournal, 14 February 2002)

Well, OK, not really.

8 PM: Return from Brownies. Caroline gets microwave (don't ask) from car.

9.40 PM: Knock on door. Next-door neighbour tells me that the boot is open. I close boot.

10.20-ish PM: I go to bed.

10.50 PM: Phone call. It is my other neighbour ringing to tell me I've locked her cat in my car.

10.51 PM: Stand outside the house pissing myself laughing at stupid cat pressed up against inside of car.

10.55 PM. Go back to bed.

No wonder I never sleep.

Oh yes, I did release the cat...

Back from Blackpool

(from LiveJournal, 9 May 2005)

Just eaten three apples. Hopefully this will reactivate my digestive system after two days of eating deep-fried simple carbohydrates. I *knew* I should have taken some vegetables with me.

Conversation overheard in the city centre

(from LiveJournal, 15 September 2005)

...as I passed one of the fruit sellers.

Young girl of 6 or 7: Mum, can I have some grapes?

Mum: No, you've had some fruit today. I'll get you a packet of crisps.

BOGGLE

Unexpected experiences of fusion food

(from LiveJournal, 6 September 2005)

If I hadn't decided to have some bisto gravy with my chops I wouldn't have opened the cupboard. If I hadn't opened the cupboard the hot chocolate wouldn't have dropped out and shed its contents onto the worktop, half of my dinner and the floor I washed on Sunday. Chops, mash and garden peas with a light chocolate dusting. It's a strange taste experience and one I wouldn't recommend.

I think I'll have a little lie down before I start to clean the floor again.

Bootle dawn chorus

(from LiveJournal, 2 May 2005)

tweet *tweet* *tweet*

pwit *pwit* *pwit*

caw *caw* *caw*

pwee *pwee* *pwee*

QUACK QUACK QUACK QUACK QUACK

I think it's definite that the ducks are nesting on the field. It's original, I grant you.

The Room 101 meme

(from LiveJournal, 31 July 2003)

And my office is room 101! And I've just read *1984*!! And I seem to have lost all control of exclamation marks!!!

So, what am I going to dump?

Place. Tamworth Rail Station. There is no contest. Don't try and get out of Tamworth via rail after 6 PM. The town locks down.

Person. It's hard to pick just one. Thatcher is in the running but I don't see her so often lately, so she doesn't make me grind my teeth so much. George Bush I see far too much of lately. Bush, I think. The risk is, of course, that someone worse takes over.

Band. If it has to be a band then Oasis. If I can choose any artist I'd go for Brian Adams. My theory is that after 'Summer of '69' was completed he was kidnapped by aliens and replaced by a talentless doppelganger. Has bad hair. Sang with Sporty Spice. His crimes increase.

TV Show. *Brookside*. Although that is pretty redundant now as it seems to have written itself into oblivion, so I'm having another choice. *Tellytubbies*. Believe me, toddlers get a hell of a lot more out of shows with language – we can't drag Amelia away from *Jamie and the Magic Torch*. Thank god for retro-TV videos.

Film. It's a hard choice. *Thelma and Louise* or *Postcards from the Edge*. I fell asleep in both. I think I'll go for *Postcards* and the 'Streep factor'.

Food item. Peppers. Colourful, long-lasting, easily hydrated. These little bundles of hate can make it into almost any dish, from salad, to pizza, to soup. Particularly numerous in ready-prepared stir-fry. I blame them for the bags of beansprouts that lie rotting in the fridge. I just can't get through a pack of them before they go out of date!

Clothing item. Jodhpurs on anyone not in physical contact with a horse.

Activity. DOOR-TO-DOOR ELECTRICITY SALES.

And I'm adding two to take it to ten.

Radio. *The Archers*. Actually, not *The Archers*, but the kind of *Archers* fan who listens to *The Archers* and then talks about it at full volume over coffee while, at the same time, making sure that everyone in the room knows that they don't own a TV and even if they did they'd only use it for videos. It's a Soap. OK, it's a very good one but ultimately it leads to *Hollyoaks*, and no one should be proud of that.

Drink. Advocaat. No explanation necessary.

Thwap

(from LiveJournal, 2 September 2005)

Earlier today I fell in lust with John Barrowman.

This surprised me as I'd managed to watch *Doctor Who* without noticing him much more than 'less annoying than Mickey' until the whole kiss stuff, and *that* left me hiding behind the settee and feeling slightly nauseous. At which point I have to point out that any outward shows of emotion make me ill, not just hot man-on-man action. I'm sure I missed him because I was concentrating all my mental energy on wishing Chris Eccleston to be semi-naked and oiled. Or at least caught in a sudden rain storm.

I'm drifting away from the point, aren't I?

So, anyway, John Barrowman was interviewed on Breakfast News and I stopped what I was doing to watch. Then I was late for work because I'd stopped what I was doing to watch. Then when I got into work I had to ring Caroline (who was on the train to London) to tell her I had to go to London to see *A Few Good Men* because only then I'd see him in the flesh.

I've spent most of tonight trying to find the cheapest ways to a) see John Barrowman and b) get as close as I possibly can to him. I've got it to under sixty quid if I sleep on a bench in Victoria (National Express is running fares at £1 each way).

More worrying, as if you are not already petrified by the thought of my libido suddenly erupting, is that Caroline bought a ticket to go to the matinee to 'check it out'. Based on *my* obsession. Is my desperation so strong that other unmarried women in their 30s are being caught up in the field? Is London going to be moist with ladies of a certain age looking for men who can do a passable Scottish accent and sing?

No photos exist

(from LiveJournal, 13 November 2005)

While at the wedding I managed to get stuck in a grid. To step on a grid in one kitten heel is unfortunate, to step on one in two is bloody stupid.

I ended up in my stockinged feet on the wet floor, bent over in a low-cut top and push-up bra, tugging at my shoes outside a patio door. Fortunately no photographs exist.

Just an ordinary day

(from LiveJournal, 5 November 2002)

Get up.

Get dressed.

Go into work.

Kill laboratory pet fish.

Have coffee.

OK, I'll clarify: why the fish got it

(from LiveJournal, 5 November 2002)

For anyone who isn't aware, I work in an Animal Genomics Laboratory. We have a fish tank in the centre of the research lab in an attempt to give us a homely 'we love animals' feel. Of course, we do love animals and that is why a lot of the work that is done is in conservation, ecology and population dynamics.

The fish are not part of any experiment; they are just there. When the tank was first installed there was a variety of fish, selected to give a well-balanced ecosystem and because they would be pretty.

Then someone put some African Cichlids into the tank. We started off with quite a lot of these particular fish – a good thing, as when Cichlid numbers are limited they become aggressive and territorial. However, something happened that meant that a number of the Cichlids died. The remaining Cichlids became larger (about the size of my hand) and more aggressive, and bullied the smaller fish to death. By the time I joined the lab last year there were two very fat Cichlids in the tank, as well as two bottom-creeping fish. All the pretty neons and catfish had died of fright.

Earlier in the year one of the Cichlids was seen to be suffering from a cancerous growth and was removed from the tank by Sarah and hit over the head with a spanner. Several times. This turned out to be the highlight of the visit for a work-experience student who not only witnessed the execution, but also the autopsy.

This morning the remaining Cichlid was lying on the bottom of the tank, obviously in distress. There were no men in the lab so Pauline suggested looking around the department to find one prepared to dispatch the fish. This was too much for my feminist sensibilities. If there was a fish that needed killin' then I could do it as well as any man.

Pauline flipped the fish out of the tank and into an autoclave bag. I wrapped the bag around the fish and then hit it over the head with a baseball bat. It seemed to be dead, but I hit it again to make sure (I really didn't want the fish to suffer for too long). The second blow was too much for the bag and it burst open, sending the fish head flying across the room. I screamed, 'DON'T COME IN,' and tried to get the head back into the bag before Anthea opened the door.

There was fish blood on the bench and the floor, right up the side of the cupboard and on the back of the chair. One of the eyes had flown out onto the side of Pauline's bag which caused a bit of distress.

I took the fish for incineration and by the time I came back a miracle had occurred. Three small fish had appeared from under the pond grass in the tank. They must have been the strongest of the original population and had decided to hide out until the big fish was gone. I swear I heard them singing, 'Ding Dong, the witch is dead!'

The cycle of life

(from LiveJournal, 17 January 2003)

Remember the fish?

Well, a few days ago the survivor fish were moved to their new home in the new lab. The tank had been cleaned, and new pebbles and plants bought. They have a new light and a new pump. We even have a book of fish to browse and choose our favourite fish. This may no longer be required.

This morning we got in and the fish have laid eggs on the side of the tank!

They obviously feel this is now a world they can raise children in.

James Bacon writes:

I first met Ang at Aliens Stole My Handbag six or seven years ago, which to be honest was a rather mad convention and not at all where one would expect to meet a person who would turn out both to have great skills at the old fanzine writing and be a dab hand at helping with conrunning.

I've been a fan fund delegate myself and I suppose that gives me some sort of an idea what makes a good fan fund persona; to be honest, I think Ang embodies a lot more of what I consider to be the best of British Fandom than a first glance may show. She's the sort of person who just gets on with the task in hand and helps to make it happen, which over the years has been some sort of requirement for the great fans of the UK and Ireland. We need doers.

Ang isn't all talk and no trousers – that's for people like me – no, Ang does the work. Sometimes this happens to be mollifying or motivating; she can do both types of talking, but she is also very amiable in a social setting and much more diplomatic than I could ever muster. That's her deal: she gets the sleeves rolled up and helps make whatever is on the agenda happen, no matter what the scenario – a very able young lady.

That's really important. Somehow she has gotten roped into all types of things, from running children's programme at the last British Worldcon to producing some excellent fan writing and the odd gem of a fanzine too. Her sense of humour is rather wicked – I remember all too well being shown a fanzine she had done which had a picture parody of myself and some others on the cover; it made my guts burst with laughter, but I think she was apprehensive about showing it to me. Brave, that's what the girl is; she has the balls to get up there and do stuff. (I am sure the Aussies will like that; they love someone who is up for it – sure, look at their football.)

Ang is that all-round type of character that fandom seems to do so well – not very often, mind, but when it's there it's really there – not an expert at any one area, but definitely a jack of all trades and the sort of person that I imagine would get stuck in at any convention she were to attend. This to me is an important part of any fan fund delegate.

I always hear her voice when I think of Ang: she has that strange voice of reason that a number of fan girls use when I come up with something a bit mad or wonky and at first they're not sure at all about what we are about to do. But once decided, and when there is a clear understanding, Ang is very committed indeed to whatever is at hand; then she has this amazing 'Let's Do It' voice that always tickles me somehow – nearly as much as the look that says it's still barmy.

You see, I think that down in Australia Ang would not only show them antipodeans that we are made of good stuff, but I imagine she will find a way to shine, and that's important to me as a nominator. I don't want to support some sort of damp squib; that's not the deal here at all. We need to build strong relationships and contacts; it's a fair old way over there. To be honest, I have a real sense of faith and belief that Ang would make a bloody good job of it.

She's quite nice too, over a pint, and good to talk to – and not at all afraid of going up to people and starting a conversation; all good traits.

What more do you really want?

Mark Plummer writes:

Ang Rosin makes me think of J G Ballard. Not because I associate her particularly with tower blocks or motorways or drained swimming pools – or even with floods or droughts – but because we first met in Shepperton, Ang and I.

A number of us were having a First Fandom moment at one of those oddly-named James Bacon conventions – Otters Steamed My Pelmet, something like that – because we had returned for the first time in a decade-and-a-half to the scene of some of our earliest convention experiences from the mid-1980s, the Shepperton Moat House hotel. And we were sitting around noticing how they'd redecorated and thinking back to those old conventions, and – for the most part – unconsciously echoing that old Terry Carr piece in which the First Fandomites gather at a Worldcon and all *remember*. They remember the likes of Ed Earl Repp whereas we were remembering Jonathan Brewis, but aside from that...

But it shouldn't really be all about past time, and it wasn't, because sometime around about then Max introduced me to her old pal Ang, and I learned that we shared a bond which within the last few days I have also learned connects us to Australia in a way which may not actually be all that significant in fannish terms but which surely counts as a Sign.

My former flat-mate is a chap called John, and John had a friend called Dave who John assured us wasn't his friend really and who everybody else called Boring Dave. And it turned out that Ang knew Boring Dave too and well, bloody hell, *Wot A Coincidence* and everything. We got to hang with Ang and Max quite a bit that weekend, and I got used to Ang's funny accent which should go down a storm in Australia because they all have funny accents too – we of course remain entirely accent-free, *don'tcha know* – and one convention at Shepperton Resurgent blurred into the next (*Damnedifino*, wasn't it?) where Ang was wrapped in plastic sheeting for wholly explicable reasons which I could go into were it not for the fact that I've left my notes on the bus, and I think I may have inadvertently contributed to her and a similarly attired Max and Julie Rigby invading one of James's serious programme items about chess; and the following day Ang was wrapped in a sheet (hmm, note recurring theme of wrapping – is this significant?) and helping Tony Keen to explain LiveJournal through the medium of interpretative dance, and then there were fanzines called *Gnat's Testicles* and *More Balls* and *Even More Balls*, and more conventions in England and Scotland and Ireland, including last year's Novacon where Ang just dropped in for half an hour as she happened to be passing and then did it again the following day on the way back, although that time she wasn't wrapped in anything in particular except clothes and...

And just the other day John dropped round – hadn't seen him in ages, him being a respectable hard-working father of twins now – and he mentioned 'my friend Dave who's not my friend really'... and apparently Dave now lives in Australia. It's highly unlikely that anybody who's likely to vote for GUFF in Australia actually knows him, 'cos it is a big country and he *is* a bit boring, but I can't help thinking that the fact that the person who first linked Ang to my old flat mate John, and John being the person who introduced me to fandom... well, the fact that this bloke now lives in Australia just seems to me to be a Cosmically Significant Sign that you should all vote Ang for GUFF.

And if you don't think that's a good enough reason, then you should probably vote for her because she's fun and lively and we won't necessarily wrap her up in anything unusual before we send her over but *You Never Know*, and she's an entertaining writer who really needs an incentive to write

more, and I think the Australians will like her and they can all swap funny accents together – but if you happen to live in Australia and you do know a chap called Dave who works in computing and used to live in England and who's a bit boring (I realise this may not narrow the field all that much), don't mention that we call him Boring Dave, OK?

Obviously the last word belongs to Ang herself:

'Who am I? What am I? Where am I going?' I whined on LiveJournal.

'Maybe you should stand for GUFF' was the response, and here I am a month later facing the reality that I could be packing for New Zealand in a few months' time.

Making such a spontaneous decision will come as a shock to those who know me and my need to talk things through and plan to great lengths. It will maybe come as less of a surprise if I confess that I've been thinking about GUFF for a good few years. I've a number of Australian fannish friends, contacts made through the usenet in the '90s. I've also met a number of other Australian fans on their trips to the UK and I *like* them, and would like to get to know them a bit better. So standing for GUFF has always sat at the back of my mind, but as something I'd like to do in maybe five or ten years' time, perhaps after I'd served some more fannish time.

So why have I stood now? The past couple of years have taught me that sometimes we can't plan for everything, that life really is too short to put everything off for ever, and maybe you should stop worrying about what other people think and do what you want instead. So here I am. Standing. Even though I know I could fall spectacularly flat on my face.

Why should you vote for me (apart from the opportunity to give me something to write about apart from my ironing or the state of my health)? I'm friendly, I'm helpful, I muck in with things if asked and I keep out of the way if not. I'm quite small and self-contained and I've travelled by myself before so am capable of getting myself from one place to the next without too much fuss. I'm also tediously traditional so the whole 'handing on of the baton' aspect of GUFF appeals to me, and although I realise the enormity of the job I'm not afraid of it. I've got a bit of experience handling accounts for my Brownie unit and Guiding district and I know the problems associated with chasing money. Raising money for GUFF also gives me a perfect excuse to go to various conventions in the UK in the next few years: I've missed various Novacons/Eastercons recently and what better excuse to go than 'I need to raise the profile of GUFF'?

And finally, a promise. If I win GUFF I will deliver my first trip report through the medium of interpretative dance at Year of the Teledu in July.

I Knew The Porridge Was Trying To Tell Me Something was produced in March 2007 by Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer (Fishlifter Press) to support
ANG ROSIN for GUFF.

It is therefore technically a Croydon fanzine but is temporarily twinned with *Bootle*. Contact 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, UK (fishlifter@goolemail.com).

Voting in this GUFF race closes at midnight (British time) on Monday 16 April 2007. Online voting is available at <http://www.users.on.net/juliettewoods/guff.html>