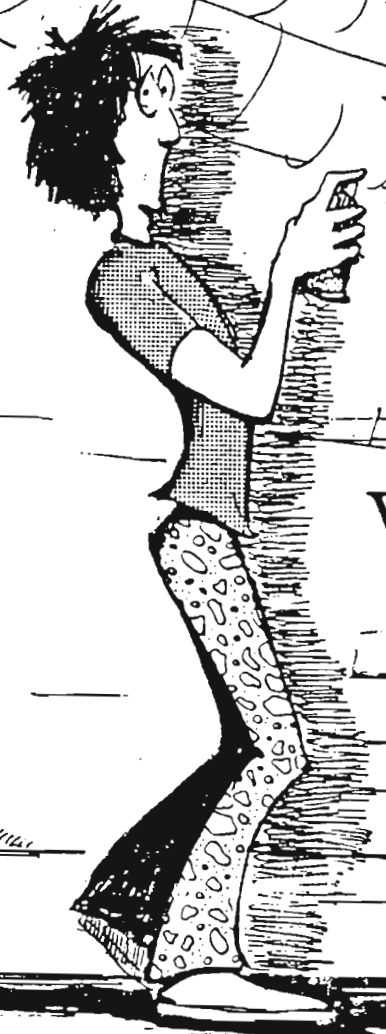


Wolfram's Wire's



Volume 5, Number 4
May 1987

mel. white

WEBERWOMAN'S WREVENGE TWENTY-SIX

(Volume 5, Number 4, May 1987)

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GUFF - Get Up and Over Fan Fund

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THE RUBBISH BIN

an editorial by Jean Weber

Cigarette smoke makes me sick.

My eyes itch and my eyelids swell up so it's difficult for me to see.

My throat itches and swells up. I sneeze and cough.

Eventually I have difficulty breathing.

At this point it's no longer a matter of 'inconvenience', 'annoyance', or 'dislike'. It's serious.

I don't want to tell my friends they can't do something they enjoy. Especially I don't want laws to tell anybody not to do things they enjoy.

Wouldn't it be nice if I didn't have to?

If cigarette smoke didn't make me sick, there wouldn't be a problem.

If cigarette smokers were considerate, there shouldn't be a problem.

Most cigarette smokers I know are very considerate, so much so that I'd hardly know about their habit if they didn't either tell me or slip outside for a few minutes every now and then.

A few inconsiderate smokers make life difficult for everyone.

They certainly did at CapCon. It took only a few hours for the air in most of the convention rooms to become, by my standards, unbreathable.

When I confronted a few smokers, they replied, "this isn't a non-smoking area." Technically, they were right. But the air conditioning or something effectively made all of the con area "smoking". The problem wasn't helped by the concom's forgetting to tell people which areas were supposed to be non-smoking (it was in the program book, but few people (including myself) read the program book at the con, do they?).

If everyone were a bit more considerate, perhaps something could have been done. Ideally, once the air-conditioning is seen to be a problem, as evidenced by people like myself saying that it's causing them breathing difficulties, then the whole area would be declared non-smoking by common consent. (Ideally, the air conditioning wouldn't be a problem in the first place, but that's a separate problem.)

Please, people, won't you respect my right to breathe? I want to attend cons; I want to enjoy myself too; I don't want to have to take drugs to survive the smoke.

I'm working on my end of it: I'm trying to learn how to overcome my allergy without resorting to drugs. (Valma Brown says she's had some success with this, and if anything she has suffered more than I do from cigarette smoke.)

But I'm not willing to suffer in silence.

And you should know that it's the inconsiderate few who are causing the backlash of decades of long suffering silence, which is leading to proposed laws restricting smoking very severely in public.

I'm not in favour of laws, but that seems to be what is required. I wish it were not so... but I must admit to looking forward to the shoe being on the other foot for a change.

I respect your right to smoke, but not in the air we share. Your freedom ends where my nose and eyes begin.

Okay, let's change the subject. You can read about some of my recent adventures in my "Diary Notes", starting on the next page.

I must apologise for the several pages of this zine which are typed, not typeset. Rather detracts from the presentation, doesn't it? But it was a matter of getting it done, or getting it done right, and if anyone (Joseph Nicholas et al) is offended by that, tough. What use are standards if you can't break them whenever you want to? (I speak here of my own personal standards, not anyone else's; I am, after all, a professional writer/editor who prepares camera-ready copy of technical manuals for publication. But we end up faking a bit at the last minute too, in order to meet our deadlines. It's the name of the game, at least if you want to make sales.)

I do hope that, now that I've moved and more-or-less settled in, I'll be able to publish a bit more frequently. I'm looking at three times a year, rather than the twice I've managed recently. But we'll see... My paid publishing efforts take rather a long time, and pay rather better. On the other hand, the feedback is almost non-existent.

This issue of Wrevenge is a bit heavy on the letters, as usual. I'm also continuing the recent run of medical stories, though the one this time is a lot happier than some of the recent ones have been, I'm happy to say!

I'd like to move on to some other topic in future, however. One that's been interesting me for some time is the debate over whether characteristics such as mathematical ability, Despite its trivialisation in much of the popular press, this is a serious question. (might be sex-linked.)

If anyone has any references to the studies that have been done (as flawed and contradictory as most of them are), I'd like to hear from you. I have a few reports in Science News and the like, but could use more information.

The subject interests me for several reasons, not the least ^{of which} is the way it points out the bias with which so many people (including a lot of research people, who really ought to know better) approach both research and the results of research. I'm sure you all remember the reaction to suggestions that there might be IQ differences between the races; this is a similar topic.

(No, none of those reactions surprise me. I'm too old and cynical to be surprised by the stupidity and hypocrisy of so much human behaviour.)

Diary Notes

When I published the last issue of this fanzine, I was in the midst of a major argument with my employer (CSIRONET). As you may recall, I had been passed over for an appointment to a management job, and the person who had got the job was someone I and my co-worker Joanne consider rather less qualified for the position than I was.

LET'S NOT BE PARANOID

Things got worse. The new manager made a lot of mistakes in the first few weeks and managed to insult and alienate both Joanne and me, by seeking advice from everyone except us regarding matters on which we were clearly the most knowledgeable. We both became quite angry and upset, and eventually told him precisely why we felt the way we did. We were not particularly surprised to learn that he had no idea he'd been so insulting; it was evidence for our contention that he knew nothing about managing people. To give him his due, however, he learned fast and did his best to make up for such a poor start.

Others, higher up the hierarchy, seemed less able to learn. They continued to treat me, in particular, as if I were a replaceable cog in their machine. I called in the union and negotiations continued for several months. Meanwhile Joanne announced her resignation (having found a good job elsewhere), and I did three things: I took a week's holiday in Queensland with Eric, attended the second course offered by the Self Transformation Centre, and applied for every job somewhere else that seemed even remotely suitable.

DECISION TIME

After awhile, I realised that it was time to move to Sydney, and to market myself as a software documentation specialist rather than an editor. There was/is a great lack of skilled technical writers/editors in Australia at the moment, as readable, well-written documentation is suddenly a high priority in many companies. After a great deal of soul-searching, I decided I was ready to give up the security of a 'permanent' job for the flexibility of contract work (the highly-paid upmarket end of 'temporary'). I contacted a dozen agencies and several small documentation firms, and my prospects looked good.



So in mid-December I took the plunge and put my house in Canberra up for sale. Within two weeks I had a buyer. Meanwhile I'd found a suitable apartment near Sydney's Kings Cross, and had started all the various legal machinery in motion to buy it. Eric and I were about to put 'Contingency Plan 4' into action. We'd live in my place in the city during the week while both of us were at work, and at his place in the mountains on weekends. Exactly what we'd do with the cat was unclear, but I assumed that problem would take care of itself, just as everything else would.

POSITIVE THINKING

There are those who laugh at the notion of 'creating your own reality', but sometimes the power of positive thinking is clearly demonstrated. Once I'd made up my mind what to do, all else was easy. Everyone else I know who's trying to sell a house in Canberra has either been unsuccessful or has had to lower their price dramatically and wait months for a buyer to come along. Numerous people, including my solicitor (lawyer to your North Americans), told me I wouldn't be able to finalise my purchase of the flat when I wanted to, but I moved in only one week later than would have been ideal. Minou adapted immediately to Eric's house and Alex Ozanne was happy to come by and feed her when neither Eric nor I would be home. And... I found a good job at the last minute.

On 23 December I flew to Sydney for four interviews with agencies and prospective employers, and in early January three of them rang with job offers. (Talk about egoboo!) I took the one that sounded the most interesting, despite its distance from the place I'd decided to live. So I now have a 'permanent' job after all. I am a Technical Writer for Impact Systems Ltd, an Australian company which manufactures laser printers, among other things. Which is why this zine is typeset! My job is to write and edit user and technical manuals for laser printers, printer interfaces, and whatever else they may decide to make.

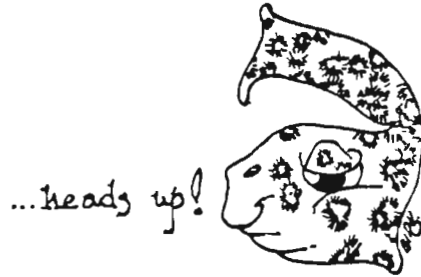
FAREWELL TO CSIRONET

My last day of work at CSIRONET was Thursday, 22 January. I had finished all my projects by Tuesday, so showed up only for the farewells. In my farewell speech I allowed myself only one snarky remark: I acknowledged the assistance of CSIRONET's management in helping me decide where my future lies... That received some gratifying responses from the audience.

Settlement on the sale of my Canberra house was to occur the following day. Eric and I finished moving all my furniture out of the house into the garage, said hello to the about-to-be new owner as she and a convoy of friends rolled up with some of her possessions, and retired to Leigh and Valma's house for the night. The next day I finalised all the paperwork (quite an interesting procedure; the things one misses by paying a solicitor to do the work), took a cheque for a rather large sum of money to the bank (where I had to nag them for awhile to get them to agree to clear it immediately rather than next week), and set off for Eric with car and trailer loaded with gear.

Over the next few days we made several trips between Canberra and Faulconbridge. On the final trip we collected Minou, who had spend the week in the cattery. She hid under the passenger seat for most of the trip, not even crying (most unusual; I think she was really worried about what was happening). However, when she arrived at Eric's, she seemed very excited, rushing around discovering 'her' couch, 'her' chair, 'her' table, and so on, and settled in within a few hours.

On Friday, 30 January I took possession of the apartment (this time a solicitor took care of the legal details, which are more complicated in NSW than in the ACT) and a furniture removalist lugged my possessions up the stairs. Some furniture had been left by the previous owner, so a lot of sorting and tossing out had to be done. The weekend was fairly exhausting.



LIVING IN A CITY AGAIN

I've been very spoiled these last 12 years, living no more than a 10-minute drive away from work, and with very little traffic to contend with. Readjusting to living in a city hasn't been easy.

Commuting is the pits. It takes me about an hour door-to-door, though nearly half of that is walking (and I need the exercise, I keep reminding myself). I take two trains and a bus and walk at each end of the journey. However, I'm looking forward to working at home part of the time, as soon as I get a compatible computer; the management has agreed to that.

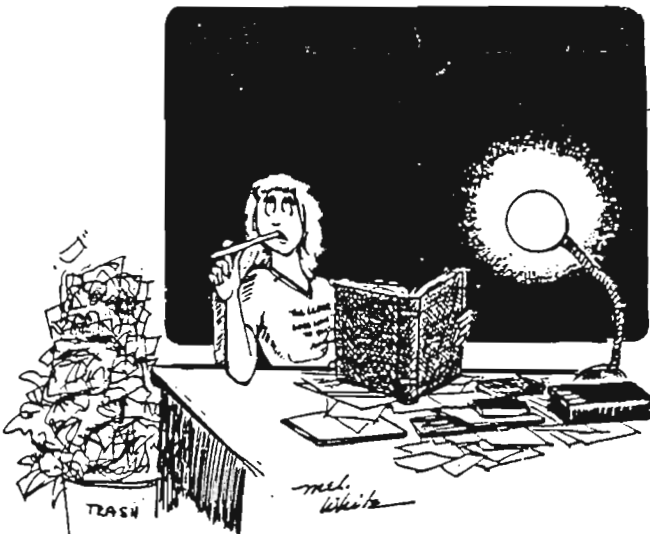
Commuting does occasionally have its amusing moments. For example, there was the day the bus driver insisted that my travel pass was last week's, ripped it in two, and threatened me with a \$200 fine for fare evasion. I realised that I'd been given the wrong pass when I bought it (no, I wasn't using last week's by mistake), but he clearly didn't believe me. I paid the fare, retrieved the ripped ticket, and grumped all the way back to King's Cross.

I fronted up at the ticket counter, ready to argue grimly and long for a new ticket at no cost. The ticket seller didn't seem to grasp what I was trying to tell him, insisting that the ticket I had was valid, but he was very concerned about the fact that it was torn -- and insisted upon giving me a new one!

One of the positive sides to living in the city, especially in a late-night areas such as King's Cross, is the variety of shops and restaurants that are open at hours most Americans are used to, but Australians aren't. What a delight after all these years!

Eric and I have been eating our way through the take-away food places and the inexpensive restaurants, and have found several we really like. Pity we don't want to spend the time to eat out every night (spending the money is only occasionally an issue). We've been having fun asking for the non-smoking section in each place: this is a concept that hasn't become very widespread in Australia yet. We're doing our part...

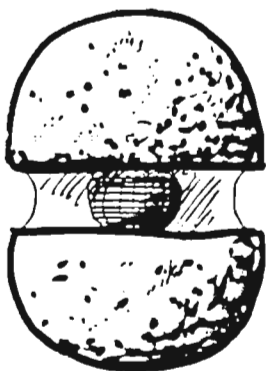
We're also pleased to find that the local laundromat's 'bag wash' price (where they do the work) is only trivially more than the cost of doing it ourselves, so they now get all our business. Unfortunately the proprietor smokes, so sometimes the laundry is a bit smelly when we get it back, but a bit of airing out takes care of that.



MY NEW JOB

My new job is quite enjoyable, and I'm learning a lot. Working conditions were terrible at first: too much cigarette smoke and severe overcrowding. Fortunately my supervisor is as sensitive to smoke as I am. We were soon moved to another floor of the building, where smoking is banned. Mind you, we are in a partitioned off corner of the lunchroom!

In a few weeks all of the R&D Department should be moving to a new building. It remains to be seen whether this will be an improvement or not. But as I mentioned above, I expect to be working from home part-time within the next few months.



BIRTHDAYS

On 14 February a group of fans congregated in a restaurant to celebrate a lot of decade birthdays: Eric Lindsay's and Bruce Gillespie's 40th, Gordon Lingard's and Gerald Smith's 30th, and Lee Harding's 50th, among others. A pleasant evening, though not as spectacular as my 40th birthday party.

Finding our way to the restaurant on public transport gave me the chance to tease Eric a bit. He wanted to get off the train at Newtown Station, and I insisted that we alight one stop earlier, as it would be a shorter walk. He reckoned we'd get lost. I prevailed, and we set off walking through back alleys toward the main street of Newtown. I knew where I was going, though it had been several years since I'd taken this route, because the restaurant is near Gordon Lingard's place, and Gordon's is not far from Peter Toluzzi's former residence. As we walked along, however, Eric kept muttering 'we're lost' and 'I hope you know where you're going'. Actually, I was only partially sure: I knew where Gordon's place was, but I wasn't quite sure where the restaurant was in relation to Gordon's. Finally we reached the main street and -- there it was, directly opposite us!

A couple weeks later the R&D group presented me with a birthday cake, with my age in candles arranged in binary. After several minutes' argument over whether the candle arranger had got it right (he did), the staff allowed me to cut the cake and we all enjoyed ourselves.

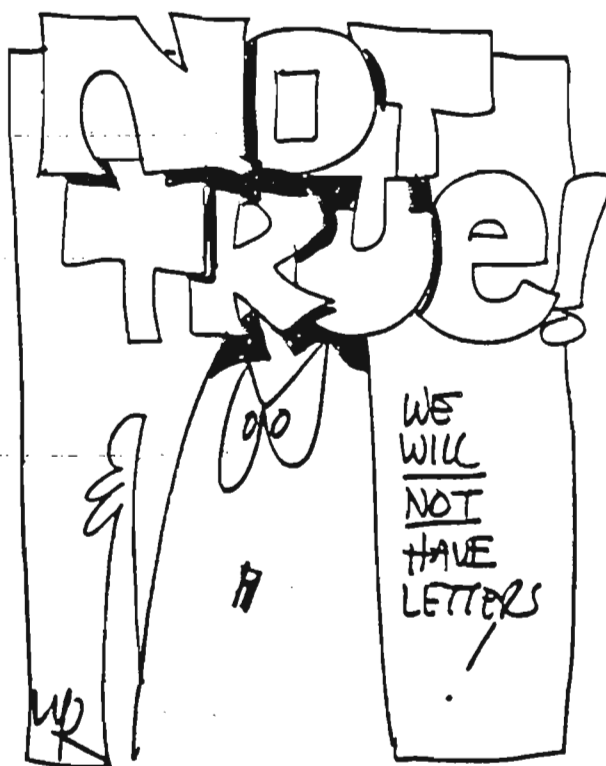
CONVENTIONS

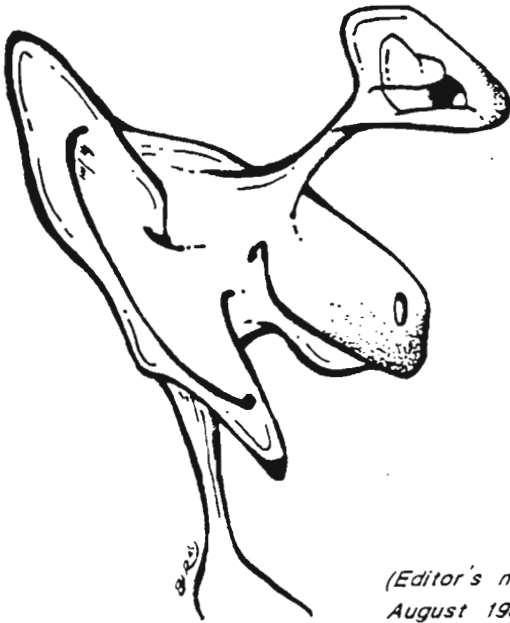
I've attended only one convention so far this year: the Australian NatCon, known as CapCon, held in Canberra the last weekend in April. Lyn McConchie had won FFANZ (the Fan Fund of Australia and New Zealand), and spent about half of her three-week stay in Australia with me. My apartment is rather small: put an air bed in the living room and you don't have a lot of space to move around. Other than that, it was a pleasant visit. She had been first to Eastercon in Melbourne (so had Eric), and we both went down to CapCon, giving Jack Herman a lift.

The con itself I didn't enjoy very much, for a variety of reasons, mostly the high level of cigarette smoke in the air (see elsewhere in this zine for further comments on this topic). However, I did get to see a lot of people I enjoy, and I also took the opportunity to attend a happy hour at CSIRONET (where I learned that things have not improved), sell a computer, and run some other errands. The weather was magnificent for the time of year (usually it's cold and often wet). Thus the weekend was, overall, enjoyable. Eric, Lyn and I drove back to his place on Monday, and made our ways separately into the city on Tuesday.

Saturday after Lyn got on the plane to return to New Zealand, I took the train to Eric's and soon after, Nick Stathopoulos and Lucy Huntzinger (this year's DUFF winner) showed up after a day of sightseeing in the mountains. It was pleasant to have a chance to talk to Lucy without a dozen other people in the conversation as well.

So here we are, in early May, working on a fanzine again. The photocopier has been fixed, the laser printer's waiting...





(Editor's note: This was written in August 1986.)

Another Medical Story From Canada

(This time a happy one)

Bernie Klassen

The twins are now 18 months old, and doing tremendously well. Paula is still rather traumatised by their birth, succumbing to fits of depression during which she would dearly love to kill the doctor, but thankfully these are passing. She has severed connections with the GP we were seeing, and has found a woman doctor she is much more pleased with...

Two experiences in the last week have left me feeling a lot more positive about the medical profession. The more minor one was today when I saw a dermatological specialist.

Just a minor problem, you understand. Had it for a decade, and finally thought to ask my GP about it. He was quite frank. He had just read an article on it in some magazine and knew it was minor. But he couldn't remember the name, nor the mag, nor the treatment. He'd try to find out. A couple of weeks later... I (reminded) him... he admitted that he'd had no luck... So he set up an appointment with a specialist.

The specialist took one look, said 'wait a minute. I'll try and find you a picture...' Colour photo, short blurb, and caption... I asked him about a Latin word. That set him off.

'Meaningless, really. Just jargon, and bloody awful at that...' He ranted for awhile about intentional obscurity and then told me about an experience he'd had at a conference on psoriasis.

'Three types of people. The clinicians I understood. They spoke my jargon, after all. The clinicians-cum-microbiologists were a trifle jargon-happy. The microbiologists couldn't be understood. All

they knew was monoclonal antibodies, and very little of how they relate to a clinician's problems with psoriasis. I made my complaints known; after all, this was a conference for clinicians.'

We then discussed the current rage for over-specialisation in all fields... along the way, he enlightened me about my complaint (and its) treatment... we talked of Sagan and Asimov as communicators to non-specialists, and generally had a good chat. Now *that* is a doctor! Almost makes me wish I had something more serious, so we would have the chance to sit about and bullshit again.

The other incident was more serious... One evening, the kids were winding down towards bedtime... Ben, who is a very large child, was busy shovelling bits of pear into his mouth... Suddenly he gagged, choked, and couldn't breathe. I reacted, I think, very calmly. I picked him up, turned him over my knee, hooked a finger into his mouth, and pulled all I could out. He gagged harder and threw up a trifle. By this time his lips and cheeks had gone (very quickly) very blue. I gave him a whump on the back, and he started breathing again. He coughed, sputtered, coughed, tears ran down his face...

Suddenly he was wheezing. Badly. Not what happens when a child has cried too much or too hard; not from a cold. Just a very obvious wheezing. He calmed down and took his bottle happily. I called the doctor. Fifteen minutes later, the doctor on call from the clinic called back. I explained what happened. I said that I thought perhaps Ben had inhaled a piece of fruit.

W

all,' replied the doc, '...you must take him to the emergency ward.' Twenty minutes after arriving, a doctor saw him. Ben was lower priority. He was breathing, and in no obvious pain. He agreed, sounds bad. Let's get chest X-rays. Another 20 minutes passed. We went down to radiological services.

The X-rays went very well. A piece of background. About four months ago, Ben had chest X-rays. He was quite upset by the routine. When I tried to calm him, the technician said, 'No, he has to cry so we can get a picture of his lungs while they're fully inflated.' Now any procedure that *has* to have a child screaming is immediately suspect to me.

Thankfully there was none of that this time. I had a moment to show Ben the room before the X-rays were taken, and that helped. The tech (very nice lady) took her time, talked to Ben, sat him on a gurney in front of a box. She got a gown on me, and then told Ben that she had something for him, giving him a lead sheet to lay on his lap. A necessary thing, yes, but done with respect for Ben's individuality. She then centered the emitter, turned on a light, and asked Ben to tell her when the light went out. She slipped into the control room and *waited* until he took a breath, then snapped the shot. Same for the side shot. Together we convinced him to put his hands on his head, and the tech gave him his soother when he did so, telling him that this was in fact what we wanted. No pain, no stress. Ben left feeling very positive about the experience. So did I.

Another half hour, and the doctor came in to tell me that the films showed nothing... He was trying to get in touch with an ear/nose/throat specialist. More waiting.

By this time Ben had been up 2-1/2 hours past his bedtime and was still being good. A touch frantically energetic, but still terrific. Paula was at home with Lila and rather frantic herself. She calmed down after a call. More waiting.

Suddenly a nurse with clipboard was talking to me. 'When did he last eat? Drink? The anesthesiologist needs to know.'

It was late. I was getting slow. It took a moment for the title to sink in. 'Who? Why? etc.'

A little fudging when she realised I hadn't been told anything. Then the attending physician saw me. It was now confirmed. Ben was to stay the night. The E/N/T man was coming in, and felt it best to do an immediate brachioscopy (?). They were going to put Ben out and slide a scope down his trachea to see if they could find anything.



I resigned myself to spending the night in a chair next to his bed. Again, one terrific nurse. She chatted casually to the both of us (the fact that her own child had been in hospital a couple of months previously may have helped).

She got some pickups onto Ben's chest (monitoring of heartbeat and respiration) and said that he could lie down while we did the paperwork. Ben promptly did so, and I stroked his back for about five minutes to let him know that I was still there, and he quite calmly fell asleep. The nurse was impressed. Most kids get frightened by their surroundings and end up screaming. But Ben was tired, and when I told him that it was all right, I'd still be here, he believed me, and dropped off. Pretty heavy responsibility.

Of course the IV tech arrived twenty minutes later. No way out. This was going to hurt.

About ten minutes was spent trying to get a vein up on either one of Ben's hands. No go. Then they moved to his feet. They had offered to do the deed without me (some parents get more hysterical than the child, you see). Nope, I was staying. Had to. The same reason that Ben went to sleep when I told him he could. And a line from Ellison's Deathbird kept running through my mind: 'Don't leave me with strangers'. You bet, kid. Whenever you need me, I'm here. I was there when you got started, I was there when you

stuck your head out into this madhouse, I told you your name, and by all I hold dear, I'll be there when you need me to be.

It probably was harder on me than him. I knew it hurt. And I also knew that there was fuck all I could do about it. And he was not happy... The thing that almost broke me was when he looked at me and clearly pointed at his foot. 'It hurts, dad! Right down there! Can't you do something about it?' No, I couldn't.

And when they finally got the needle into the vein, the vein wouldn't take the drip, and blew out. They had to start again on the other foot.

This had to be worse. Thankfully it didn't take as long. I was hugging him and telling him that it would be okay in a minute, tears pouring down my face. And he's pointing at his left foot and crying... and we both felt terrible

Then the needle was in. Ben stopped crying almost immediately. Pain he can handle. It was the rapidly changing levels of pain that distressed him. He lay still while his foot was wrapped to prevent his pulling the needle out. Less than ten minutes, and he was asleep again. That kind of trust is a frightening thing.



Turns out I didn't have to sleep in a chair after all. The hospital is very nicely set up: the nurse took me about ten feet down the hall into the parents' lounge. This had a room with a window, couches, TV, and the like. There was a washroom with shower, and a bedroom complete with bureau and full-length mirror. The bunk bed was fitted with full twin-sized mattresses. All designed to make parents relax as much as possible.

The nurse told me that if Ben fussed, she'd come and get me. If he woke up when she was transferring him to the OR, she'd come and get me. / was considered the primary care-giver, she was just the one who was going to sit up with him.

It's a hell of a thing, you know. I am a very politicized person, from the school that claims every action to be political. My hair is bleached, and I often wear it in spikes. My preferred form of dress is studiously alternative. I'm unashamedly intellectual, and have a deep interest in modern art, literature, design, and the like. My personal life is marked by experimentation, alternatives, and quest. I suppose that one might say, 'when I grow up I want to be Ted Sturgeon,' which I think would be a Very Good Thing. It's never easy, and often infuriating when I have to deal with those who become frightened by alternatives.

But it is all suddenly very meaningless when the kids are in trouble. A sick child knows nothing of politics, cares nothing for personal belief. Danger to my child's life (and this certainly was) cuts through everything to a basic demand that one makes of the universe, of God, of nothing. 'This child must not die!' It is a human thing, a thing tying every parent together. A child in trouble cuts across every boundary we erect between ourselves. A parent who cannot feel that link with others is one who has failed the test of being human. It is something I share with my parents, though we share little else. It is, and it is inescapable. I felt very small, and very alone.

I eventually fell asleep about 1 am, and was awakened about 2:30.

'Mr Klassen? The surgeon's here and he'd like to talk to you. Everything went fine.'

'We had no problems. Your son is fine. He didn't even wake up until we were in the OR. He looked around at all these strange people, and promptly went under. I found a piece of pear - abit green, was it? - and got it out in two passes. It was about a centimeter and a half long and about 3 millimeters wide. He would never have coughed it out. (Something they kept hoping he would do, so they wouldn't have to go in.) You can see him now, though he is still out.'

Thank you thank you thank you. I hurried down the hall, buttoning my shirt as I went. Ben lay on his back, a bit cold, but looking none the worse for wear. The nurse and I got a smock on him, re-attached the talltales, rolled him on his tummy, and I stood there stroking his back and talking to him. He started to come out of the anesthetic, coughed a couple of times, and drifted into normal sleep without ever really waking. That's my kid.

I went back to bed about three. My subconscious was more at ease than I. I slept until eight-thirty.

When I came in to see how Ben was doing, he was sitting at a small table, having finished an egg and some toast, and was working on a glass of juice. He smiled 'good morning', sort of gestured around as if to say, 'hey, check all this out, eh? Not bad!' and re-applied himself to his juice, quite content. After a couple of minutes, I realised that he was fine. He was looking forward to his milk, and basically was pleased to see me, but wasn't in the least worried. Bright, inquisitive, happy to be gaining new experiences, he let me leave for a cup of coffee and a quick shower.

I got back about twenty minutes later. We played for about an hour, and they we could go home. Ben was in great shape. No trauma, no worry. We got home, he hugged his mom, grabbed his bottle, and took a nap. You'd think he did it every day.

BOOKS

(Commentary by Jean Weber)

One side-effect of publishing at six month intervals is the number of books which won't be 'reviewed' in this fanzine. There simply isn't space even for all of those I particularly enjoyed, must less those I didn't.

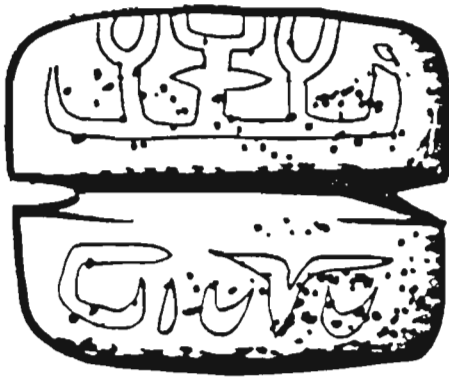
The following list is some of the high spots of my reading over the past six months. You've probably heard of most of them, which is why I won't take the space to comment on them at greater length.

- * George RR Martin, Armageddon Rag
- * Spider Robinson, Night of Power
- * Carl Sagan, Contact
- * Greg Bear, Eon
- * Robert Heinlein, The Cat Who Walks Through Walls
- * C J Cherryh, Chanur's Homecoming, Visible Light, Angel with the Sword
- * Jo Clayton, Changer's Moon, Quester's Endgame, Skeen's Leap, Drinker of Souls

Jo Clayton is an author whose work I thoughly enjoy, although it's mostly adventure-series writing (a sub-genre I generally find tedious). Something about her characters and their adventures just grab me.

With that as a preliminary, I'd like to discuss a few books in more detail.





Pat Murphy, The Falling Woman, Tor, 1986

This is one of the most enjoyable fantasies I've read in many months. Any book that presents me with a strong middle-aged woman character (Elizabeth), who describes herself as 'a troublesome old woman... a field archaeologist... a garbage collector... (with) a reputation for asking too many embarrassing questions at conferences, endears itself to me immediately. After the first chapter, I thought, 'I do hope this book fulfils its promise'. It certainly did.

Set in the Yucutan Peninsula, Mexica, amid the ruins of a major Mayan city, the book gives a good feeling for field work and the pros and cons of living closely with a small group of people: the heat, the humidity, the dirt, the boredom, the arguments, the excitement and exhilaration of discovery, the sexual undertones, and so on. I've been there and done that: it felt real to me.

The fantasy aspect comes from Elizabeth's ability to 'see' the past. She can write marvelous popular books about Mayan civilization because she sees the ancient people going about their daily lives. Many years ago she learnt never to mention this talent to anyone else (people get locked up for less), but she's well known for her 'luck' in knowing just where to dig to find the best artifacts.

The action begins when one of the shadows of the past notices her and speaks to her. Zuhuy-kak was a powerful priestess during the collapse of Mayan civilization, and she tells Elizabeth that the cycle of time is turning again to a major upheaval and change. Meanwhile Elizabeth's daughter Diane shows up, and stirs up deeply disturbing memories of Diane's early childhood days.

The various threads of the story weave together at an ever-increasing pace, carrying the reader along what appears to be a steep rocky path to chaos and destruction. I thoroughly enjoyed the blend of Mayan culture and religions, modern Mexican life, the group dynamics of a field expedition, popular psychology, and mysterious events (as 'bad luck' stalks the expedition). Keep an eye out for this book in paperback and snatch it up - it's a delight.

Pamela Sargent, Venus of Dreams, Bantam Spectra, 1986

Pamela Sargent's novels have varies from adequate to excellent; for my taste they are more interesting, and her characterisations are better, than those of many better-known authors.

Venus of Dreams is an ambitious book, tackling the complicated politics of space exploration and colonisation versus 'improving the quality of life on Earth'. Sargent clearly sees that there are no easy answers, especially of the either/or variety, and that people's motives are complex and often contradictory and even self-defeating.

This book focusses on one person, Iris Angharads. We first meet Iris as an 8-year-old girl, gazing wistfully into space on a clear night and dreaming of working and living on the Venus Project, an attempt to colonise Venus.

Iris lives in a communal farming community in the Plains area of what was once the USA; her destiny is to inherit a farm and run it efficiently. Her mother and other relatives find unacceptable Iris' interest in learning to read, and to study subjects not directly related to agriculture.

Of course, in the utopia of Iris' day, no one is forced to do anything they don't want to do; no laws govern one's actions. But peer pressure is heavy: the cost of social stability and lack of poverty in the Plains is conformity. When first Iris' grandmother, and later a woman of the administrative class, encourage her and pay for her lessons, the pressures against her peculiar hobby intensify.

Iris perseveres, however, and indulges in various schemes (including marriage, a custom not accepted in the Plains) to ensure her escape from the cocoon of her family. She eventually wins a place at a sort of university, and later a posting to her long-cherished dream, the Venus Project, along with her husband and child.

As Iris struggles to succeed, we learn quite a lot about the governments of Earth, the breakaway cultures that live on hollowed-out asteroids, and the enmity between the two groups. The Venus Project is run by Earth, but for complicated reasons often not associated with the project itself.

There are some great scenes of the wheeling and dealing of Earth-bound bureaucrats and on-the-spot Project officials. The whole political scenario depicted in this novel I found quite believable, which added greatly to the appeal of the story for me.

Peer pressure is at least as important on Sargent's Venus as it is on her Earth, and the usual human emotions of love, ambition, jealousy, greed, envy, and so on are far from absent.

One focus of the middle part of the book is on Iris' son Benzi, who does not share his parents' dream of colonising Venus. Benzi wants to be a pilot (of shuttles or starships). Iris reacts to Benzi just as her mother reacted to her: how could her child not share her life, her dreams? A rejection of her life was seen as a rejection of herself.

Like so many rebellious children in our own society, who grow up to expect conformity (or at least agreement) from their children and meet rebelliousness in turn, Iris simply cannot see what she's doing. I found this aspect of the book particularly believable, having personally known many people like Iris.

This mixture of the very human, very complex, very non-rational side of life, with the details of a demanding research and engineering project, is to me some of the finest storytelling that science fiction has to offer. Too many 'hard sf' stories ignore the human side, or trivialise it, while people-oriented sf stories are often weak on the science. Sargent embraces both, and quite successfully in my opinion. Now and then she descends into melodrama, but even 'real life' has its melodramatic moments, so I don't consider this a serious weakness.



Pamela Sargent, The Shore of Women, 1987

I was quite disappointed in this book, especially after enjoying Venus of Dreams so much. I didn't find the book's premises at all believable, though some of the individual characters were quite well done.

The basic plot involves a post-holocaust Earth, where a few cities preserve much of the technology of the past (but are otherwise stagnant), and the countryside is wild. Women inhabit the cities, having cast out the men generations ago. Men are invited to the wall for sperm donations, and all boys are sent outside at about age 4 or 5 to live with the men.

Life on the outside is brief and brutal. Hunting is the major activity. The women have fostered a 'Goddess religion' with shrines where they can communicate with the men in the guise of 'aspects of the Goddess'. Good (that is, obedient) men are summoned to the city wall to donate their sperm and receive boys. Needless to say, no one (male or female) is encouraged to question their way of life.

The plot revolves around three people. The first is a young woman who is expelled from the city. She is not expected to live, but does - first by acting as 'the Goddess' to a group of men who find her, and later by changing their habits and beliefs by her presence and actions.

The second is a young man who becomes involved with this woman, and falls in love with her once he gets over being totally awed by her.

The third is the young man's twin sister, a rebellious and questioning woman who lives in the city and takes up the study of history (a quick way to get ostracised by all one's friends, who study 'appropriate' topics like physics and mathematics).

There were many good points to be made in this book, but the basic framework of a totally non-believable society left me quite unimpressed.

WRITERS OF THE FUTURE, Volumes 1 and 2, Bridge Publications, 1985, 1986.

Most of you have probably at least heard of the "Writers of the Future" contest sponsored by the late L. Ron Hubbard, which has been running for several years now. I was very dubious about the whole thing at first, but having now read a selection of winners' and high-placers' stories, I think the contest is doing a fine job of encouraging talented newer writers.

Many of you probably also know, or know of, at least one of the several fans who have won or placed highly in the contest. I was delighted to recognise several names myself.

Any collection of stories is likely to have some which are better than others, or some more to any one reader's taste than others. This collection seems to me overall of a typical quality in this respect. In fact, I'd almost say it was better than the average collection in the quality of its stories, but that may simply be because I enjoyed so many of them. I wasn't nearly as impressed with the illustrations accompanying the stories, but then I'm rarely very interested in sf art.

One of my favourite stories was in Volume One. It's "Tiger Hunt" by Jor Jennings, and won a first place one quarter. The Earth is suffering a severe food shortage (even in America), so zoo animals are not popular for "taking food from people's mouths". They are also potential people-food themselves. So what sort of justice would you envisage for poachers of zoo animals? Yes....

I was also very impressed with Camilla (Mog) Decarnin's first-prize-winning story, "The Book of Time", in Volume Two. This fantasy revolves around a young thief, looking to steal something rare and valuable, who gets caught up with forces well beyond her understanding. She takes up with a collection of odd characters, but no one and no events is really quite what it seems. Fascinating.

These are only two of 30 stories in these volumes, which range over fantasy and sf and those grey areas in between. I thoroughly enjoyed them, and look forward to the next volume.



Josephine Saxton, THE POWER OF TIME, Chatto & Windus (The Hogarth Press), 1985.

A collection of short stories, most of which combine science fiction with "surrealist fiction" in a style which reminds me of some of Kate Wilhelm's recent works. Most are written in the first person, so the main character's interpretation of events, however bizarre, seems plausible to the reader.

In each case, the main character is a woman. Often she seems weak, but when you look more closely you discover her secret strength in the face of whatever problems life has dealt her.

For example, how would you react if you woke up one dark and stormy night to find all the metal in your house had disappeared? Would you panic or cope (or both)?

Suppose you were the only healthy person on an overcrowded planet? How would you react in the face of others' hatred?

Could the techniques of biotechnology be used to turn your co-workers into animals? Would you use them to get even with sexist, patriarchal men in your life?

Are you insane if you think a demon from the dawn of time is visiting you in your flat and making love to you?

Ever wonder what living in a surrealist utopia might be like?

This book has stories about all the these questions and more. I enjoyed it thoroughly - a delightful evening's reading.



Josephine Saxton, *QUEEN OF THE STATES*, The Women's Press, 1986.

Although I enjoyed this book thoroughly and found it delightful, I felt it did not quite work.

It explores one woman's insanity, which manifests itself in her belief that she's been kidnapped by aliens. But I got the distinct impression, bolstered by the back cover blurb (a notoriously unreliable source, I agree), that we readers are expected to question whether Magdalen is really insane, or whether the aliens really have kidnapped her. In that respect the book failed for me: I never had any doubt that she was mad.

Magdalen's madness is captivating, however. Through the aliens' mysterious powers, she can transport herself (in her own mind at least) into any situation she can imagine. Often these are scenes from her past, which she reinvents to have a different outcome -- and how often have each of us done that in our own minds! Possibly we haven't achieved our fantasies in quite as much sensuous detail as Magdalen does, but we definitely know what it's all about. (The good scenes are quite overwhelming, as are similar scenes in Saxton's short story collection, *THE POWER OF TIME*.)

After awhile, other people start participating in Magdalen's "fantasies" -- people such as one of the psychiatrists at the mental hospital she's in. This is where the boundaries between "reality" and "fantasy" definitely fade, and I'll confess that by the end of the book I wasn't quite sure whether Magdalen was still in the hospital or not. And I'm quite sure the author wanted me to have this uncertainty.

Lisa Goldstein, *THE DREAM YEARS*, Orion (Unwin), 1986.

Last year there was a rash of novels about the interaction of multiple time lines. Some tried to explain quantum physics, uncertainty principles, and the theory of parallel universes, as well as telling a story. This short novel assumes the reader knows enough about the theory and just gets on with the story.

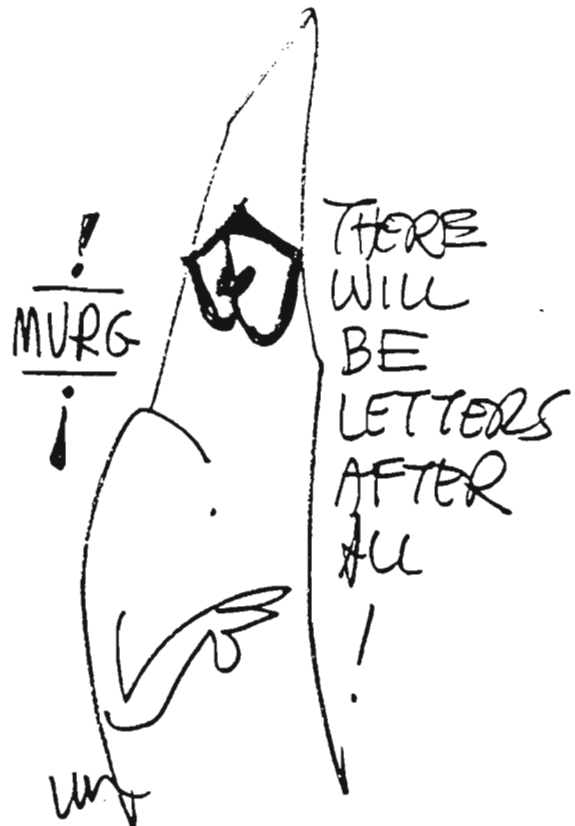
It involves Paris in three eras: the 1928 surrealist movement, the 1968 student uprising, and 2008 when the revolution begun with the surrealists reaches its climax.

It's mostly the story of Robert, a disillusioned young man of the 20s, who is seeking some meaning in his life. He meets and falls in love with Solange, a student of the 60s. Visits to her time bring confrontation with surrealistic values in a revolutionary setting, and a chance to DO something rather than merely theorise.

Contributing to the tension is a strange (evil?) masked presence that's broken into the timelines and is threatening them all with their own worst nightmares.

Some of the dozen or so characters are historical figures. I enjoyed the speculative approach of the book: what if surrealism were a more widespread attitude? What if people LIVED their theories instead of merely propounding them? Would/could they change the world? Would they like the new world once they got there, and would it be anything like what they expected?

I really enjoy this sort of what-if sociological sf and wish there were more of it around.





It's been such a long time since I published this fanzine, I've nearly forgotten what we were talking about. To try to overcome this problem, I'll provide more background for the letters than I usually do. My comments will be in italics. - JHW

PRINCIPLES & PREJUDICE

Several issues back I published an article by Charlotte Proctor in which she described what she did about a problem person in her local SF club. This article sparked a lot of letters, about evenly divided between people supporting her, and people who disagreed rather strongly - also a few fence sitters such as myself! Then the letter-writers began arguing with each other...

Jessica Amanda Salmonson
P O Box 20610
Seattle, WA 98102, USA
December 1986

(In) vol. 5-no. 2... you made a side-comment about a couple specific folks (the quintessential cyberpunk, and a widely loved S&M leather dyke) saying you wouldn't want them around you. Now in my own prejudices I expected that kind of comment/attitude from an Alabaman... but I'd gotten the impression that you were a liberal sort... If some of those archly conservative nurd-fans came into my house, I'd be polite, and might even find some positive things about them to admire. But given my druthers, I'd be more apt to be found in the company of a... cyberpunk or a... S&M leather dyke. I can't understand why anyone of intellect, with any sense of irony, of the beauty and pathos of life, would think otherwise. And I'd like to think your own prejudicial slip-up would, in the person of such extraordinary people, turn out not to be all that true, and you'd ultimately consider yourself privileged to know such people, and find the quaintness of the archly ordinary a bit less rewarding thereafter.

But let me add that since Wendy and I broke up, after nearly seven years together... I've lately come to appreciate the attentiveness of 'mere' fans, and have greater and greater empathy for the sadnesses in their lives, am more capable of appreciating their trivial joys, and am more and more pleased that ... some book of mine has enriched their lives in some manner. I am no more capable of appreciating the surfacing and resurfacing of their pettinesses and prejudices, their cheap and slimy gossipiness, their terrific weaknesses; but I see also their ability to love, occasionally to learn, and perhaps most surprising of all, their unintentional ability to teach.

Quite recently I got a mad crush on a woman whose background was privileged, whose attitudes were somewhat suburban and ordinary, whose level of creativity was minimal, who in many ways stood for the things I don't care for. To the plus side, she was physically beautiful..., a stunning athlete..., and had a streak of wicked cynicism that outdid anything of my own. Now nothing romantic came of my infatuation, but a strong friendship has resulted... She repeatedly takes me to task for my negative sentiments about the suburbs..., tells me bad things about the provincial nature of urbanity..., and otherwise shows me, by the excellence of her example, that the best people are not inevitably those of extraordinary temperament who live on the edge financially, emotionally, creatively.

I make a clear distinction between a prejudice against someone as a person, and a preference for who I personally associate with, especially in my own home, as I described last issue. If you or anyone else chooses to interpret my preferences as prejudice, I'd say we have a semantic difference of opinion.

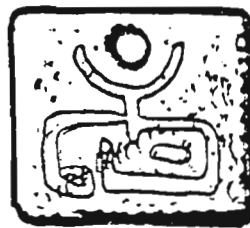
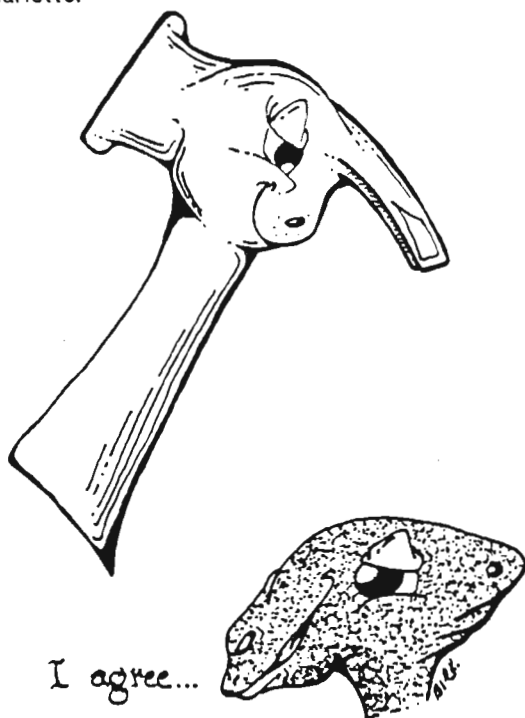
Diane Fox
 P O Box 1194
 North Sydney, NSW 2060
 Australia
 17 December 1986

If the person whom Charlotte describes had been wearing extremely conventional clothes, she would probably have still had exactly the same reaction to him, but might have tried to reason herself out of it. I get the feeling that the eccentric garb simply ... gave her a kind of 'handle' on why/how she disliked him.

Eccentric clothing certainly isn't menacing in itself. I'm fairly conservative, but don't usually feel threatened by people in punk or other odd clothes. In fact it usually seems either delightful or funny.

I don't think the clerical garb, cross etc Charlotte describes is really in this category. There's a certain historical weight behind the wearing of clerical garb by a non-cleric who isn't doing it as a disguise, joke, or act of protest. Maybe I've seen too many Hammer films, but I consider the effect slightly menacing. Religion is slightly frightening/creepy in itself, as it arouses strong and often extremely violent emotions. When combined with sexual menace, the unpleasant undertones of sniggering hypocrisy and subtle sadism are difficult to avoid. One need not be a Christian (or for that matter approve of religion at all) to react in exactly the way Charlotte did.

I may be quite mistaken here, but I have met enough people who projects this aura of queasy irrationality to sympathise strongly with Charlotte.



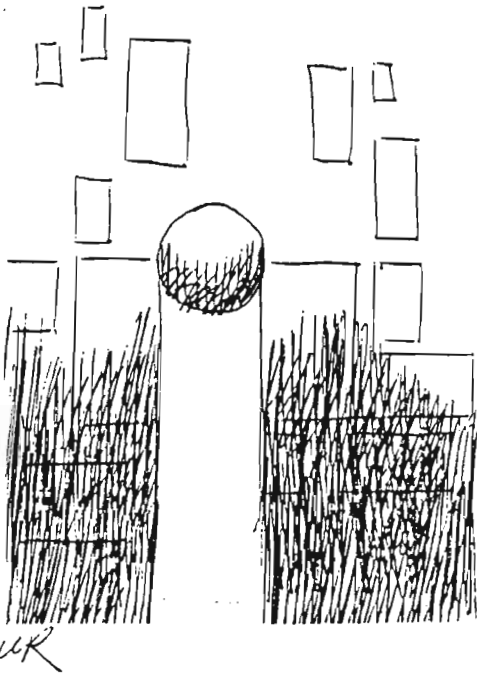
E.B. Klassen
 582 John St.
 Victoria, B.C. V8T 1T6
 CANADA
 12 August 1986

The Birmingham Incident puts me in mind of a marginally similar incident I was tangentially involved in a few years back. My first exposure to fandom was through a local ST group... one week a couple of young guys (about 15 or so) showed up. A week or two later I was busy tryin to get submissions for the clubzine... and one of the two approached Paula (*his wife - Ed*) and mentioned that they had been doing a little writing, and maybe she would like to read it? She said certainly, and they dropped off about fifty handwritten pages, bound in groups of five or ten pages, spottily illustrated, and hand coloured. Very fanzine-like in an amateur fashion (they had had no exposure to our particular subculture, you understand). Paula thanked them and brought the stuff home to read.

About an hour later, I asked about it. 'Bernie, you have *really* got to read this stuff! / certainly can't describe it!' Sex-fantasy, of course. Very hard-core. Elaborate almost to the point of becoming baroque. Very close to the sexual scenes in De Sade's The Bedroom Philosophers... and not, if I remember aright, strictly confined to male adolescent heterosexual fantasies, but the two central characters (obviously modelled on the two writers) also indulged in homosex and, I believe, bestiality. All carefully written up and bound into magazines. Not even badly written, though obviously written by someone still unskilled in the use of words on paper.

Paula returned it the next week, saying 'not really oriented to the clubzine, guys'. When they asked what she thought, she mentioned that they did still need to work on their writing skills. No mention of content. After a week or so, they drifted away. Ultimately, very low-key.

There are times when, looking back, I wish I *had* printed it up. Would have messed a few people over, shaken a few walls. Probably would have gotten me ostracised. But I didn't, and there was the end to it.



Actually, Bernie Klassen and his family live in Victoria, CANADA, not in Australia. Unfortunately, depending on where one lives and (in some cases) how much money one has, one has little choice but to 'put up with' what is available in the way of medical care. By now you will have seen Lyn McConchie's article on New Zealand medicine. Note also the following letter.

Dave Collins
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England

The trouble, in this country at least, is that if you leave the surgery of a doctor because you feel he or she has not been doing their job properly, then you have a difficult task trying to find another one who will take you on. Doctors more often than not stick together so use the excuse that their books are full.

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

In the past few issues I've published several medically-related articles, notably Bernie Klassen's account of his twins' birth (in Canada), and Lyn McConchie's expose of medical malpractice in New Zealand. Most of the letters reveal a strong cultural difference in approach to dealing with the medical community: the Americans tend to say 'I wouldn't put up with that', while Australian, New Zealander and British readers - used to a different system - sigh with sympathy and understanding.

For the benefit of American readers, I must point out that in Australia and New Zealand (and probably in Britain), it is difficult if not impossible to see a specialist without a referral from a GP; and in Australia, if you do get in without a referral, medical insurance will not pay for the visit. I found this system very hard to get used to, and still don't like it.

R Lorraine Tutihasi
5876 Bowcroft Street #4
Los Angeles, CA 90016, USA
30 December 1986

I found E B Klassen's article... rather upsetting. It makes the Australian medical profession sound positively medieval. I find it difficult to believe. I certainly wouldn't put up with that kind of behaviour from doctors.

Bev Clark
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USA
April 12, 1987

Lyn McConchie's article disturbed me for a couple of reasons. One is personal: I've never had any doctor treat me or my complaints anything less than seriously... so reading of medical horror stories is somewhat distant...

The other thing... is the story of the first patient, Lyn's mother, but for a different reason. One of my friends was in an auto accident about a year ago in which she banged her head rather strongly into the windshield. Fortunately the glass didn't break, but she suffered a concussion. A couple of months ago, she began to suffer migraine headaches for the first time in her life, and they are, according to her husband, getting worse. My friend's problem is that she won't see a doctor. She insists there's nothing really wrong, just stress (she's working on a PhD while holding a full-time job) - but she also didn't see a doctor about what turned out to be a serious case of hyperthyroidism (requiring lifelong medication) until she collapsed in the street. Having known another woman who died of a ruptured brain aneurysm as a consequence of a head injury, I'm worried, as are all this woman's other friends, not to mention her husband. Reading about Lyn's mother didn't help at all.

Craig Hilton
28 Success Crescent
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Australia
3 December 1986

Look, I promised myself I wasn't going to jump on the bandwagon and give my Official Doctor's comment on every article appearing in WWW with a vaguely medical theme. Then I read Lyn McConchie's Hazardous to Your Health and decided I couldn't allow her absorbing work to go unpraised or uncommented upon.

Lyn's bevy of cautionary tales was riveting reading, objective and illuminating. It might have stepped straight out of one of the annual reports of the Medical Defence insurance companies send me. Such (ahem) 'horror stories' abound on both sides of the doctor-patient fence... As expected, the truth of the matter lies usually (not always) in the middle ground, with the real villain being communication.

Some specific comments: Cases A and C (*concussion leading to death and anemia mistaken for sanity, respectively*) would seem to be medically indefensible. E demonstrated the low priority which has been given to exploring the management of premenstrual syndrome.

I must take issue with B (*broken ankle*) though. After years of exposing people to what have probably been unnecessary X-rays for their injured ankles, I am now swinging back to a more conservative approach. The degree of swelling, bruising and pain, and even the feeling that 'something broke' all have fairly low predictive values as to whether or not there is actually a fracture present. Furthermore, nothing is lost by seeing how it goes with time over a few days and re-Xraying then. The most important thing here is to tell the patient what to expect in either case, and to ensure follow-up is carried through if needed.

I must admit that on reading the clinical presentation of D (Lyn), I had to place depression at the top of my diagnostic list, rather than the very rare pernicious anaemia. Many women (and men) continue to suffer as this major problem goes inappropriately diagnosed and treated. Like her doctor, I'd have been tempted to give the most likely shot a go first, through after some initial baseline tests (which I admit would not include a Vitamin B12 assay; remember that the rarer a condition, the more normal people will be subjected to unnecessary investigations).

Lyn put the answer more succinctly than I ever could - if you don't think your doctors are right, get a second opinion. I'll try and tell that to the doctors, too.

Finally, as a reference text, I highly recommend Women's Problems in General Practice, edited by Ann McPherson and Anne Anderson, Oxford University Press, 1983.

Sue Thomason
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England
10 January 1987

Lyn McConchie's very well-written and frightening article left me with a deep feeling of unease. To me, the medical professions are 'us' rather than 'them'; my father is a physiotherapist, my mother was a medical secretary and is now a day care worker in a hostel for mentally handicapped adults, two of my closest friends are a GP and a nurse. Nearly all of the medical workers I've met are people with a deep and genuine concern for their clients... but. Of course mistakes do happen; mistakes will always happen. Nobody's perfect, not even doctors.

The two things that really worry me are:

1. The image of the doctor as infallible. This has a whole series of nasty consequences. People who are intimidated by doctors. People who expect doctors to do telepathic diagnosis because they're too scared to talk about what's really worrying them. People who expect doctors to take major moral/ethical decisions for them. People who put down the other medical professions (especially nursing) because they're not doctors. Eventually some of the doctors themselves start believing in the myth, and think of themselves as infallible, superior beings.

2. The National Health Service was designed as a service, on the basis that everyone, regardless of income, had a right to state-of-the-art medical care. Successive governments and administrators have undermined this stance almost completely. Hence the near collapse. State medical care is becoming a favour, something charitably provided by a 'caring' government for those poor incompetents who can't afford the private treatment favoured by all successful and right-thinking (political pun intended) individuals...

This makes for an overworked, understaffed, underpaid, underfunded health service staffed by harassed professionals who aren't allowed to get on with their real vocations because they're either too busy filling in forms, or being asked to demonstrate their commitment to Health Service ideals by working ridiculously long shifts at antisocial hours for a pittance. The idea that the NHS is second-best also makes for resentful patients. And so on and so on.

3. I'm not sure that Lyn is right in drawing the inference that 'the doctor' is male unless otherwise specified, and that women in particular are put down by doctors. Female doctors aren't too thin on the ground in Britain (though there are many more male than female doctors), nor is a female doctor a guarantee of sympathetic understanding, particularly with 'female complaints' like PMT. A good many female doctors in Britain have become what I think the women's movement calls 'pseudo-men', i.e. they've risen to a position of privilege and authority in the patriarchy by internalising the patriarchy's values, becoming 'as good as a man' by being 'one of the boys'. This sort of woman doctor is likely to tell you to 'pull yourself together' when consulted by a woman with post-natal depression or period problems, on the grounds that it's never happened to her, so it's your own stupid and inferior fault if it's happened to you.

Also I suspect that the sort of doctor Lyn describes, with an infallibility complex, will put down any and all of the groups that the patriarchy sees as inferior: women, children, non-Caucasians, the 'uneducated', the 'working class'.

I agree with you on that point, and also that a woman doctor isn't a guarantee of more sympathetic treatment; but in my fairly extensive experience, the probability of sympathetic treatment is much higher with women doctors. The ones I've consulted have been far more likely to admit they haven't a clue what's wrong with me, or to ask if I have any theories about the problem, for example. On the other hand, one of the most sympathetic female doctors I've known was also not very good at asking what seemed to me (in retrospect) to be some very obvious questions. Perhaps she thought such an assertive person as myself would (a) think of and (b) volunteer the relevant information. As it happened, I didn't think of the question, so didn't volunteer the answer.

NO!
SHE WROTE
A LOC!

Joy Hibbert
11 Rutland Street
Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent
Staffs, ST1 5JG, U.K.

It was a female doctor who refused to treat my sister for a disease that could have been sexually transmitted and could have been simply a side effect of the pill, until her boyfriend had been brought in for treatment (despite the fact that he lived at the other end of the country). It was the same doctor who illtreated a much more serious complaint - bad pains in the back and joints - by continuing to prescribe painkillers that would eventually have damaged her stomach, instead of listening to her theory that she was suffering from a calcium deficiency (she'd got a history of inability to metabolise calcium, and she was a vegan - who is more likely to have such a deficiency?). Now she's under her boyfriend's care and he's making her eat properly (still vegan, but a healthy diet), and the pains have gone away.

I think Dave Collins has a point, that a man in control of his anger might have actually managed to improve the experience for his wife, while someone who lets his anger control him, as EB seemed to be doing, will surely make her feel pressured. Women do feel responsible for their husbands' behaviour, in my experience, and his emphasis on having the baby and getting out of there would surely make her feel rushed?

Thank you for bringing up a point of view which hadn't occurred to me. I guess it depends, as so many things do, on the personalities of the people involved. My reaction in EB's wife's place, would be to feel supported by someone expressing the anger and frustration I would be feeling in the situation. I can see that another woman might well feel pressured by that behaviour.

Harry Andruschak
 P O Box 1422
 Arcadia, CA 91006, USA
 27 December 1986

Lyn McConchie's article was the one that interested me the most. I have a somewhat different problem, but only in kind. I am a recovering alcoholic, and this means that I have to be extra careful about medications.

Many of my friends in AA have horror stories of doctors who have not got the word that tranquilizers are invariably addictive to the recovering alcoholic. Any use of any kind of drug that affects the central nervous system is likely to lead to addiction, larger doses, and a relapse into drinking. It happens all the time.

Part of the problem is that most doctors still have no real concept of alcoholism. Much of this problem is the fault of Alcoholics Anonymous itself. AA still cannot shake off the idea that alcoholism is the symptom of deeper psychological problems, instead of being a born genetic defect. And most doctors, in their 8 years of college study, get only 8 hours on alcoholism.

This also leads to horror stories about alcoholics who spend a small fortune on psychiatrists, psychologists, and other therapists to learn how to stop drinking, and never once have been told that first you must stop drinking. In other words, no therapy is any damn use if the patient is fogging his or her mind with alcohol.

By the way, I am now sober over 2-1/2 years, and look fairly well to making it to 3. The main reason has been my 'We Agnostics' meetings, where I can admit to being a hard core atheist, to taking antabuse, and not really caring much if I have a 'spiritual experience' or 'spiritual awakening'.

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 15 February 1987

I found Lyn McConchie's article on misdiagnosis horrifying... but was slightly pissed off with the concluding statement: 'if you are a female, watch out for...' It's nice to know, in Lyn's world, that since I'm a man I don't have to worry about half-assed doctors...

I am in no way trying to detract from the seriousness of what Lyn was saying, nor am I saying she should have written an article on male medical problems. I was honestly angry at all the doctors she depicted, but it bothered me that Lyn would suggest only females face such dangers.

I don't think Lyn was making any such suggestion, nor does she think any such thing. She was merely stating a conclusion based on the evidence presented. As no evidence was presented on how men fare (good, bad or indifferent), why should she include them in her summing up?

I ALSO HEARD FROM: Sheryl Birkhead, Pamela Boal, Brian E Brown, Buck Coulson, Lea Day, Kevin Dillon, Cathy Doyle, Jan Howard Finder, Leanne Frahm, Adrienne Losin, Frank Macskasy Jnr, Lyn McConchie, Yvonne Rousseau, Sarah Prince, Julie Vaux.





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